Wellbeing in schools: research project: improving approaches to wellbeing in schools: what role does recognition play? Final report: volume two

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RESEARCH PROJECT

IMPROVING APPROACHES TO WELLBEING IN SCHOOLS: WHAT ROLE DOES RECOGNITION PLAY?

volume two
This report is Volume Two of the Final Report for the Australian Research Council Linkage Project 'Improving approaches to wellbeing in schools: What role does recognition play?' (LP110200656). This Volume is to be read in conjunction with Volumes One, Three and Four of the Final Report. The four Volumes of the Final Report are:

**Final Report: Volume One** – Overview, Methodology, Research Design, Phase 1 Policy Analysis Results

**Final Report: Volume Two** – Phase 2 Qualitative Interviews and Focus Groups Results

**Final Report: Volume Three** – Phase 3 Quantitative Survey Results

**Final Report: Volume Four** – Discussion of Findings, Recommendations, References and Appendices

Additionally, the **Executive Summary Report** is available online.

Additional copies of all Volumes of the Final Report can be accessed at:

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Wellbeing in Schools FINAL REPORT: VOLUME TWO

Contents
1 Introduction .............................................................................................................................................. 1
  1.1 Project Aim and Objectives ........................................................................................................... 1
  1.2 Methodological Approach ............................................................................................................ 2
  1.3 Phase 2 Recruitment, Data Collection and Analysis ................................................................. 3
2 Results: Student Views ....................................................................................................................... 5
  2.1 How do students conceptualise wellbeing? ................................................................................. 5
    2.1.1 Wellbeing as ‘being’ ............................................................................................................... 6
    2.1.2 Wellbeing as ‘having’ ............................................................................................................. 9
    2.1.3 Wellbeing as ‘doing’ ............................................................................................................. 13
    2.1.4 Conceptualising Wellbeing as Absence ................................................................................ 14
  2.2 How is the wellbeing of students facilitated/impeded, by whom and in what contexts? ........... 15
    2.2.1 Self and individual activities as a facilitator of wellbeing .................................................... 16
    2.2.2 School as a facilitator of wellbeing ...................................................................................... 16
    2.2.3 Significant relationships inside school ................................................................................. 18
    2.2.4 Significant relationships outside of school .......................................................................... 30
    2.2.5 Outside institutions .............................................................................................................. 32
  2.3 Recognition theory ......................................................................................................................... 34
    2.3.1 Cared for .............................................................................................................................. 34
    2.3.2 Respected ............................................................................................................................. 40
    2.3.3 Valued .................................................................................................................................. 48
  2.4 How do students envisage a school that facilitates their wellbeing? ......................................... 52
    2.4.1 Improved pedagogy ............................................................................................................. 52
    2.4.2 Improved school environment – socio-emotional and physical .......................................... 53
    2.4.3 Improved relationships ........................................................................................................ 54
    2.4.4 Improved opportunities to ‘have a say’ ............................................................................... 56
  2.5 Summary of student findings ....................................................................................................... 56
  2.6 Discussion of student findings .................................................................................................... 57
    2.6.1 Student conceptualisation of ‘wellbeing’ ............................................................................ 58
    2.6.2 Relationships and facilitating wellbeing .............................................................................. 66
    2.6.3 Wellbeing and recognition theory ....................................................................................... 72
2.6.4 Principles of recognition theory evident in student understanding and practice of wellbeing ................................................................. 82
2.6.5 Summary of discussion of student findings .................................................................................................................................... 85
3 Results: Principal and Teacher Views .................................................................................................................................................. 87
3.1 Wellbeing as multi-dimensional .............................................................................................................................................. 89
3.2 Wellbeing as relational ................................................................................................................................................................. 92
  3.2.1 Teacher-Student Relationships ........................................................................................................................................... 92
  3.2.2 Parent partnership ..................................................................................................................................................................... 97
  3.2.3 Leadership .................................................................................................................................................................................. 102
  3.2.4 Counsellors ................................................................................................................................................................................ 104
  3.2.5 Pastoral Care .......................................................................................................................................................................... 107
  3.2.6 Pedagogy .................................................................................................................................................................................. 108
3.3 Wellbeing as environmental ............................................................................................................................................................. 110
  3.3.1 School Culture ........................................................................................................................................................................... 110
  3.3.2 Role of Programs ....................................................................................................................................................................... 113
  3.3.3 Policy Environment .................................................................................................................................................................. 116
3.4 Wellbeing as personal ......................................................................................................................................................................... 119
  3.4.1 Teacher Wellbeing ..................................................................................................................................................................... 119
3.5 Linking ‘wellbeing’ to ‘recognition’ ............................................................................................................................................... 125
4 Conclusion ............................................................................................................................................................................................ 131

List of Figures
Figure 1 Student participation ladder (Holdsworth, 2000, p. 358) ............................................................................................................ 62
Figure 2 Teacher and principal perceptions of spheres of influence on student wellbeing in schools 88
1 Introduction

This document is Volume 2 of a major research report for an Australian Research Council (ARC) funded project titled, Improving Approaches to Wellbeing in Schools: What Role Does Recognition Play? It is recommended that Volume 2 be read in conjunction with Volumes 1, 3 and 4.

Volume 1 provides an overview of the research and details the background, significance, research design and methodology for each of the four phases of the study. Volume 1 also includes the findings from Phase 1 of the research, which is an analysis of relevant national, state and system level policy pertaining to wellbeing in schools (N=80). Volume 2 (the current volume) reports the findings from Phase 2 of the research, which is an analysis of qualitative data from in-depth semi-structured interviews with teachers and principals (N=89) and focus group interviews with students (N=606). Volume 3 reports the findings from Phase 3 of the research, which is an analysis of the quantitative data from on-line surveys with principals and teachers (N=707), primary school students (N=3906) and secondary school students (N=5362). Volume 4 provides a synthesised discussion of the findings across all four phases of the research and outlines a number of recommendations arising from these findings. Importantly, Volume 4 also includes a number of resources to assist schools and other project partners in providing professional development for staff in relation to the research findings. A separate Executive Summary Report is also available.

To assist reader engagement with this current volume of the research report (Volume 2), the key elements of the overall study are briefly recapped below before detailing the findings from the Phase 2 interviews with principals and teachers, and the focus group interviews with primary and secondary students.

1.1 Project Aim and Objectives

The aim of this research is to generate new knowledge about ‘wellbeing’ in schools that will result in improved outcomes for children and young people. The project has produced systematic policy and practice-relevant evidence to advance the way children’s ‘wellbeing’ is understood and approached in schools.

Drawing upon insights from principals, teachers, students and existing policies, together with key ideas offered through recognition theory and Childhood Studies, the research:

1. Develops a detailed understanding of how ‘wellbeing’ in schools is currently understood by students, teachers and educational policy makers;
2. Investigates the potential of recognition theory for advancing understanding and improvements in relation to student wellbeing;
3. Generates new knowledge about how educational policy, programs and practices in schools could more positively impact on student wellbeing.

This study is the largest in Australia to date to invite students’ views about wellbeing in schools and, importantly, to identify similarities and differences between teacher and student views, and how these broadly align with current policy perspectives. Including student perspectives is especially significant given evidence that they are rarely consulted about their wellbeing or other key issues at school (Redmond, Skattebol, & Saunders, 2013). Accessing the views of teachers remains important because teachers are integral to children’s lives (Bingham, 2001) and they often feel poorly equipped to engage in matters concerning student wellbeing, particularly social and emotional wellbeing.
(Graham, Phelps, Maddison, & Fitzgerald, 2010; Koller & Bertel, 2006; Walter, Gouze, & Lim, 2006; Williams, Horvath, Wei, Van Dorn, & Jonson-Reid, 2007). Incorporating an exhaustive review of current system, state and national policy linked with wellbeing in schools adds a further critically important perspective in identifying current and possible future emphases in policy designed to support the wellbeing of children and young people. Hence, underpinning this research is the assumption that educational policy and practice around wellbeing in schools will be significantly more responsive if it reflects the views and perspectives of principals, teachers and students,\(^1\) while taking account of the strengths and limitations of the current policy environment.

To help facilitate a deeper understanding of different stakeholder views about wellbeing in schools, this research integrates two distinctive theoretical interests. The first relates to the way in which children and childhood are theorized and draws on understandings from the field of Childhood Studies. The interdisciplinary approach of Childhood Studies (James & James, 2008) is important for this research because it provokes a conceptual shift from seeing children as the passive victims of harmful experiences to social actors with their own views and strategies for actively coping with challenges in their lives. The emphasis in Childhood Studies on notions of ‘child-centred’ scholarship accords well with research that locates children and young people’s agency, including the way this takes shape in and through their relationships, as central to their wellbeing.

The second distinctive element of this research is the use of recognition theory, as this potentially offers an alternative framework for conceptualising how wellbeing is understood and practiced in schools. Grounded in critical theory, the work of recognition scholars is largely interested in self-actualisation, social inequality and social justice. This research draws particularly on the work of Axel Honneth (1995, 2001, 2004) who focused especially on the role and importance of human interaction in the formation of individual and social identity. Honneth proposes three patterns of intersubjective recognition – love, which refers to the emotional concern for the wellbeing and needs of an actual person; rights, which refers to respect for the equal moral accountability of the legal person; and solidarity, which is the evaluation of particular traits and abilities against the background of ‘norms’ (Honneth, 1995). For this study, the language of the three dimensions has been adapted in ways that are consistent with the theoretical underpinnings of Honneth’s work but also intelligible in school settings (‘cared for’; ‘respected’; ‘valued’).

To date there has been no research undertaken in Australia that empirically tests recognition theory nor that investigates its potential in the context of wellbeing. When combined with key understandings about children and childhood offered through Childhood Studies, the theoretical (as well as applied) contribution of this research is highly significant.

1.2 Methodological Approach

A mixed methods approach has been utilised, generating important descriptive and thematically coded qualitative and quantitative data. The views and perspectives of students, principals and teachers, which are central to the research, have been sought through in-depth, semi-structured interviews, focus groups and an interactive, on-line survey instrument. An extensive analysis of policy laid firm foundations for identifying current policy emphases related to wellbeing in schools. Key understandings from Childhood Studies and recognition theory guided the analysis of data.

\(^1\) We acknowledge the key role that parents play in children’s wellbeing in the context of schools but project funding constraints precluded involving them in this research.
The research was conducted in four phases – with each phase informed by findings from the previous:

**Phase 1 – Policy Analysis:** Analysis of key relevant local (system), state and Commonwealth policy regarding wellbeing \((N=80)\)

**Phase 2 - Qualitative:** Semi-structured interviews with teachers and principals \((N=89)\); focus group interviews with primary and secondary students \((N= 606)\)

**Phase 3 - Quantitative:** Interactive on-line survey with primary students \((N=3906)\) and secondary students \((N=5362)\) and staff \((N=707\) comprised of principals, teachers and non-teaching staff) across three Catholic school regions

**Phase 4:** Synthesis of findings and professional development for schools

Interview, focus group and survey data were collected across three Catholic school regions, across three Australian states (New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria), selected on the basis that each of the three regions offered contrasting approaches to the implementation of wellbeing policy and programs in schools. Participation of students and staff was voluntary and anonymous. An expert Wellbeing Advisory Group (WAG), comprised of key stakeholders including students, worked collaboratively with researchers throughout each of the above phases.

The policy data collected in Phase 1 was analysed using critical discourse analysis (CDA) principles. The interview and focus group discussion data collected in Phase 2 were transcribed, coded and analysed for re-occurring themes to look for patterns in the data using the NVivo software program. The students’ drawings and/or lists of school improvements gathered in the Phase 2 focus groups were analysed manually for repeated images or words and cross-checked with related transcribed discussions. The data collected in Phase 3 were cleaned and analysed using IBM-SPSS quantitative analysis software.

While the methodology for the research is detailed in full in Volume 1, the main elements of Phase 2 data collection and analysis are briefly recapped below to provide a ready context for the detailed student and teacher findings that follow.

**1.3 Phase 2 Recruitment, Data Collection and Analysis**

Phase 2 of the research involved a combination of in-depth, semi-structured individual interviews with teachers and principals, and focus group interviews with students. The interviews and focus groups were conducted across the three participating Catholic school regions (A, B & C) in June and July, 2012 and the data were transcribed and analysed using NVivo software.

Phase Two schools were identified in consultation with the research partners and with regional Directors of Education (or their delegates) from each of the three regions. Schools were selected to provide a breadth of insights from both primary and secondary schools with a diverse range of sizes, socioeconomic, geographic and cultural characteristics. Once schools were identified and invited to participate in the research, and subsequently consented \((N=18)\), students and teachers were invited to be involved by the school principals or their delegates (such as wellbeing co-ordinators, assistant principals or lead teachers), in close consultation with the researchers. Letters of invitation
(including consent forms) outlining the research aim, process, methods and ethical considerations were sent to teachers, students and parents/carers (see Appendix B).

From each of the 18 schools, the researchers requested interviews with the principal and four teachers about their perspectives on wellbeing in schools and the best approaches to facilitating and supporting this. Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted with 89 staff consisting of 18 principals and 71 teachers (four teachers from 17 schools, and three teachers from one school). These interviews were conducted in June and July 2012, and took, on average, 45 minutes each.

Interviews with principals and teachers sought their perspectives on a range of issues including: how they would generally describe or define ‘wellbeing’; whether and to what extent policy shaped their understandings and approach; how they perceived ‘wellbeing’ was facilitated and supported in their schools (‘what helps and hinders’); the impact of leadership on wellbeing in schools; the relationship between teacher and student wellbeing; and how the concept of ‘recognition’ was perceived in relation to wellbeing (see Appendix C for full interview schedule).

Students recruited for the study were from Years 1/2 (aged 6-7), Years 5/6 (aged 11-12), Year 8 (aged 14) and Year 11 (aged 17) in schools across the 3 regions. Focus groups consisted of: 2 groups of Year 8 students and 2 groups of Year 11 students in each of the secondary schools; and 2 groups of Year 1 and 2 students (combined) and 2 groups of Year 5 and 6 students (combined) in the primary schools.

In total, there were 67 focus groups from 18 schools; 13 schools held four focus groups, two schools held three focus groups, two schools held two focus groups and one school held five focus groups. Focus group sizes ranged from one (n = 1) to 16 (n = 1), with a mode of ten (n = 28). In total, 606 students participated in the focus groups: Year 1-2, n = 139; Year 5-6, n = 150, Year 8, n = 160, Year 11, n = 157.

The focus group discussions took approximately 30 minutes for Year 1-2, and 60 minutes for Years 5-6, Year 8 and Year 11. Focus groups with students followed a semi-structured interview schedule (see Appendix D) and consisted of ‘brainstorming’ around four key areas: the students’ individual definitions of wellbeing; who in their lives influenced their wellbeing; what it felt like to be cared for, respected and valued (categories linked to recognition theory); and finally, the students were asked to imagine an ideal school that supported their wellbeing. Open-ended questions were used to help facilitate the discussion and develop students’ ideas.

All individual teacher interviews and student focus group interviews were audio recorded and transcribed, with additional written notes and drawings (by students) collected to augment this. The ‘NVivo’ software package for qualitative data analysis was used to code the interview and focus group data (QSR International, 2012) and assist with analysis. Categories and themes were inductively developed from the coded data and critically analysed in relation to the research questions and theoretical interests of the study.

The very extensive data generated from the large numbers of interviews and focus groups provided rich insights into how students, principals and teachers perceive wellbeing in schools, how this is currently facilitated and potentially best supported. These findings are now presented in the following sections of this volume.
2 Results: Student Views

2.1 How do students conceptualise wellbeing?

This section outlines the various meanings students attached to the word wellbeing in the focus groups. The data reported in this first section draws upon the initial brainstorming session of the focus groups with the students. Data collected at this stage reflects the ‘brainstorming’ methodology and as such is not in-depth data so much as descriptive.

The question ‘What does wellbeing mean?’ formed the starting point for the focus groups and consequently, the discussions about the word itself often preceded exploration of its meaning. Before turning to report the student data on the meaning of wellbeing, we therefore begin by identifying a number of features, identified by students, about the word ‘wellbeing’.

Firstly, students identified the word ‘wellbeing’ as both familiar and strange. Despite reporting they had heard the word used many times, in particular at school, students found it difficult to define:

- I am not good. I don’t know how to put it into words. (A311B)
- How you….I know what I am thinking but I don’t know how to explain it. (C31B)

Students also engaged in some humour as they tried to articulate the meaning of wellbeing:

- That’s actually a really hard question! (A111A)
- It’s big…I walked in here, saw it and just like….whoopsies. (A111A)
- Give us a hint. I’m thinking. It’s blowing my mind. (A111A)

Secondly, students observed that the word ‘wellbeing’ at times can be ambiguous. For every definition or idea offered by students about wellbeing, an inconsistency or contradiction was almost as readily identified. For example, defining wellbeing as happiness, whilst initially met with agreement and positive affirmation, would often be subject to a deeper inquiry about whether wellbeing could not exist at times of unhappiness. As one student commented, you could be “sad happy” (A28B) and still have wellbeing. At the same time, as the data below reports, wellbeing is consistently described as happiness.

Such ambiguity was further evident in the many discussions around bullying. For example, while it was commonly agreed that bullying is a negative experience, some students also saw it as an opportunity to develop skills and resources for coping, as the following discussion from a Year 8 students reveals:

[Bullies] teach you to become stronger in yourself - to get over it sort of thing - not bitter. They might toughen you up - you are learning to stand up for yourself, and they give you good techniques. They get you stronger for knowing what they’re going to do. (A18A)

The students’ ambivalence around the meaning of wellbeing, evident in the early part of most of the focus group discussions, signalled the challenge ahead in analysing the narratives of over 600 students without losing the rich nuance woven throughout their descriptions.

With this in mind, we now turn to explore the concept of wellbeing that emerged from the student data.
Students’ descriptions of wellbeing were primarily prefaced by three key words: ‘being’, ‘having’ and ‘doing’. For example, wellbeing is ‘being’ happy, ‘having’ someone to trust or ‘doing’ kind things for oneself and others. We have therefore appropriated these three words as the starting point for thematising the data in order to develop a conceptual framework of wellbeing as expressed by the students. Student descriptions of wellbeing are also conceptualised as absence of wellbeing.

2.1.1 Wellbeing as ‘being’

The following words and key ideas were identified by students in brainstorming sessions in relation to wellbeing as ‘being’:

Wellbeing is being…happy, loved, cared for, thoughtful, wanted, safe, brave, able to trust, free, joyful, encouraged, active, fit, healthy, energetic, courageous, hopeful, connected, visible, empathetic.

For some students, wellbeing was identified as a state of being, one that existed when they felt their needs were being positively met and when they experienced a sense of satisfaction, for instance:

‘Being’ satisfied with where you are and what you achieve. (B511A)

Wellbeing is being as ‘being’. I’m a human ‘being’ and …’well’ is ‘good’ as in good-being. You could take this as [being] … positive people, they’re polite, someone who’s nice or your health might have healthy intestines…. (C38C)

Students identified this state of being across different, albeit interrelated, dimensions of: wellbeing, as shown in the following excerpts:

Wellbeing is a state of satisfaction felt when needs are met – so social, political, emotional, cultural and spiritual. (A311B)

Wellbeing is kind of like three aspects: if physically you’re unwell socially it’s going to affect you and then mentally. (B511B)

Student understandings of wellbeing as a state of being are reported separately below in relation to three dimensions: physical, social and emotional, and spiritual. However, two aspects of wellbeing were identified by students which were relevant to all three dimensions: being safe and being visible. For instance, being physically safe travels across all three dimensions: being physically safe and social (rules so you do not get hurt, safe from danger) and being respected and safe from bullying (social and emotional, and mental constructs).

An important aspect of safety identified by students related to the extent to which being safe impacts directly on which students feel able to communicate their needs:

Well, if you don’t feel safe, you’re not going to be comfortable or communicate with someone. (A211B)

Not being in any danger of anyone hurting you or anything. If you’re at school, you’ve got good wellbeing, then anyone respects you, everyone doesn’t hurt you or anything like that. (B18A)

These quotes demonstrate the importance of safety and being safe as an integral dimension of wellbeing and highly important for student needs to be met.
Students identified that wellbeing provides a person with a sense of feeling and being visible, which crosses all three dimensions of being. For example:

- Visible. Like everyone knows you’re there and they just don’t forget about you. (A43B)
- You feel like you are visible to people; people know you. (B33B)

Next, we report student understandings of wellbeing as a state of being separately in relation to these three dimensions identified above.

**Physical wellbeing**

Physical wellbeing was not extensively discussed, however it was consistently identified and acknowledged by students as something that must be in place in order for the other social and emotional, and spiritual dimensions to be satisfied. In other words, physical wellbeing is fundamental to students’ whole wellbeing. As one student in Year 1/2 observed:

Wellbeing means people have to be strong and being healthy (B31A)

Words and definitions of physical wellbeing entailed healthy lifestyle habits: “eating well, getting enough sleep, good hygiene, exercise and choosing to be active”. Younger students noted the importance of being playful - playing with friends, family, playing in the playground, singing and “going crazy” as integral to their physical wellbeing:

- You get to play with everything; you play with friends, you play fun games and everything. (B21B)
- School cares for you by letting you play and sorting out stuff. (A41A)

Older students commented on the importance of sleeping well and often, especially during the school term.

While the importance of physical health was acknowledged continually as contributing to student wellbeing, it was the social and emotional dimension of wellbeing that formed the basis of most of the discussions in the focus groups, as the following section reveals.

**Social and emotional wellbeing**

The students frequently identified a range of feelings and emotions for wellbeing that accompanied a positive state of ‘being’ (see the list above). Of these, being ‘happy’, ‘loved’ and ‘trusted’ were most commonly discussed, and were frequently contextualised by students as existing within relationship with others and with oneself.

Happiness and being happy were the most frequently cited emotions students identified in response to the question ‘What is wellbeing?’ This is evident in the following short descriptions of wellbeing offered in the brainstorming session: “happy in yourself”, “happy and positive”, “feel good inside and happy”, “love and happy”. The following quote provides further insight into the ideas students put forward about happiness:

Wellbeing means you’re happy where you are and that your understanding is good during school. (A53A)

Being loved was a constant and important theme alongside being happy, with students describing wellbeing as “you feel loved and that you know you are being loved by having people tell you they love you”, “loving yourself”, and “loving others”, as the following comments further show:
Students identified being trusted and trusting relationships as being core to their social and emotional wellbeing. For example, students described how they wanted to be in trusting relationships in order to feel like they were being truly listened to and not judged in the conversation:

Wellbeing is having someone to trust. Just to feel comfortable.... if something’s gone wrong in your family you can always go to someone and have someone there. (A63B)

We have to feel as if we can be comfortable enough to speak your mind and be comfortable with the people you’re surrounded with. (B511A)

[Wellbeing is...] Can I trust you and can I talk to you? (C211B)

Trust in oneself was also identified by students as important to their wellbeing:

Trust yourself. Trust your judgement of yourself. (A211B)

Being trustworthy. (B23A)

Culture was typically raised as a dimension of social and emotional wellbeing. However, this was rarely explored in terms of culture or ethnicity but rather on the experience and the ‘culture’ of belonging, specifically how intricately wellbeing was understood in relation to a sense of belonging and connectedness with others:

Like you belong...[the a group of friends]...because if they say you’re not welcome, then you don’t feel like you’re meant to be there. (A63B)

Like you’re being welcomed into a part of someone else or who we are. (A53A)

Being connected to people. Not being isolated. Having that line of communication open between your peers and your elders as well. (B511A)

Furthermore, beyond noting the importance of respecting racial identity for wellbeing, there was little consideration of different cultures in relation to this construct. Rather, discussions focussed on noting the complexities of the culture of respect, which was broadly understood in terms of friendship and peer-to-peer identities:

F: So respect is something that really has to be as a group – is that what you’re saying in terms of students being treated individually?

S: No, it’s just like race – the culture of racism as well. Like maybe the skaters or the surfers or there’s the really nerdy kids.

S: I reckon the nerdy kids get more respect by teachers. (A211A)
Wellbeing in Schools

FINAL REPORT: VOLUME TWO

Spiritual Wellbeing

Being spiritual was nominated as one of the dimensions of wellbeing in five focus groups. Spirituality was also referred to in connection to religion and God; however it was not explored in-depth. For one student, wellbeing was prayer, however, none of the students were drawn to talk more in focus groups about this aspect of wellbeing.

2.1.2 Wellbeing as ‘having’

The following keywords in relation to ‘having’ were introduced in brainstorming sessions:

Wellbeing is having...rights, equality, justice, fairness, good friendships, family, help with school work, life experiences, good diet, lots of sleep, having fun, communication, morals.

Of these, having equality, voice, confidence, respect, support from significant others, privacy and rights were the source of most discussion.

Having equality

Students identified that a positive state of wellbeing consisted of having a strong foundational sense of equality, whereby “everyone is equal....everyone is seen as the same.....there’s no one who is higher up than others.” (A211B) Such equality was further identified by students as relevant to their opportunity to succeed at school:

Wellbeing...is to be accepted and given equal opportunities to excel and exceed. (C211A)

It was particularly important for students to see that all their peers in the school environment were treated equally. Inconsistencies and unequal treatment in the way teachers handled students doing the same activities was discussed as a key causal factor for diminishing the respect between students and teachers:

When you do stuff with people you want it to be fair on each of you in group things and in class. When it is not fair, you feel as though there’s no good that’s going to be you; there’s no good in you that can do it. (A31A)

Students also noted early in focus groups that the equal treatment of students for different breaches of school rules could be unjust which in turn, negatively impacted on their wellbeing:

The consequences thing. Especially in our school. The consequences are too strong for something like forgetting your hat whereas consequences where someone’s being bullied continuously....wellbeing isn’t as equal as everyone else’s: it’s not balanced. (A111B)

Having voice

Having voice was a key theme that emerged in the data around the meaning of wellbeing. This was particularly so for students from Year 5/6 and upward. Having voice was also described by the students as “having a say” and “being heard”:

Having a say. Having a say so people actually listen to you. (B18A)

Being able to communicate and share your ideas. Having your say. (B18A)

I think having things forced upon you can make you feel that your decisions don’t matter. (B58A)
We should get more of a say like with the way rules are made it’s meant to be that people it affects get a say but then again when it’s just made by teachers or the principal that doesn’t feel like we get a say and so no-one likes it. (B11A)

Students were keen to emphasise that a significant part of having voice for wellbeing was that their views were not just heard but also taken into account. The following discussion about a particular process in place in a school to report bullying provides an example of the importance of students’ views being heard:

It’s confidential and gives kids a say but what happens to the report?
It gets read over. I am not quite sure what happens after that.
No-one takes it seriously though...
Yes, that’s what I as saying. No one would take it seriously, no-one would write it down.
I don’t know: it’s like leaving it up to the kid to...
Plus I don’t think they realise if someone gets bullied and they go and dob on that person for bullying them, the teachers talk to that person and the person knows exactly who dobbed on them – you know what I mean? (A111B)

This focus group discussion reveals how, over time, students developed doubts about authenticity of the decision making processes in school that sought their views about their experience of bullying. Primarily, this was because they did not receive information about the nature of the decision making process, including its purpose and anticipated outcomes and actions. Other students in the study were similarly unsure as to the importance placed by the school on their views, or about actions that might proceed as a consequence, and saw the process as tokenistic.

Secondly, the excerpt shows that students do not speak with ‘one voice’; rather there are a diversity of perspectives and that consulting them will not necessarily result in clarity. For some students, the process around the Bullying Report in the school had merit in that it invited those unable to speak up to have their views heard in confidence, while for others the process did not offer what it purported to offer, which was confidentiality, due to the nature of bullying itself.

Third, despite the differences of opinion about the effectiveness of the process in place which had been developed to address bullying, there was consensus that ‘nothing would come of it’. Subsequently, students conveyed the disappointment and frustration of this experience, of essentially not having meaningful voice that ultimately diminished their sense of wellbeing.

Students in a Year 11 focus group expressed similar frustrations about the lack of action and change following their involvement in participatory processes:

S: Communication
F: Yes, OK. Why did communication come to mind for you?
S: Because people never ask us. No-one ever asks us
F: About?
S: Anything! I don’t know – for them to actually to do something based on what we say. (A211B)
Finally, students identified that a lack of effective voice has further negative impacts on wellbeing for students, in particular a disengagement and reluctance to be involved in decision making in the future:

S: Because if you’re being ignored you don’t get to have your say.
S: It makes you feel lazier as well because...
F: It makes you feel lazier?
S: If you get involved once [and nothing happens] you might not bother next time. (B611B)

**Having confidence**

Having confidence to express oneself around friends and companions was a core feature of wellbeing. Confidence was seen as resulting in feeling able to ‘stand up’ and to speak, to express personal views and further, to resist negative influences that students felt diminished their wellbeing, such as bullying. The following exchange from a Year 5/6 focus group provides an example of the importance of confidence in oneself for wellbeing and the additional benefits that flow on from this:

F: What’s wellbeing? Have you any other words?
S: Confident
F: Confident? Do you want to tell me a little more about that?
S: Standing up to things; what you can do – being confident about yourself
F: Fantastic. So standing up. “Standing up” is a lovely image of confidence isn’t it?
S: Yes. It feels like nothing can bring you down. (A43A)

**Having respect**

The notion of ‘having’ respect was defined as integral for wellbeing and was introduced by the students in focus groups well before it was asked specifically by the researchers in the discussions related to the recognition theory (being respected, valued and cared for). Having and giving respect were identified as two sides of the one coin of wellbeing, as evident in the quotes below:

Having rules that everyone respects. (B18A)
Just treat everyone with respect and be the person you want to be. (C211B)

Along with notions of trust, students identified that the presence of respect was also an important characteristic of relationships that contributed to positive social wellbeing:

How people treat you, treat you with respect. (A18A)

**Support from significant others**

Another feature of ‘having’ wellbeing emphasised by students was the importance of having support from a significant person at school, that is, a person who is known well enough by students who they felt comfortable to approach and ask for help:

People to care for you. (A311B)
Knowing you can get help easily. (A28A)
Talking to someone – helps you when you are down – you know you have someone there to look after you. (B38B)

Because sometimes you might need someone to listen; it might help you. (B23B)

Along similar lines, students identified the importance of adult support and encouragement for student wellbeing. Students described a range of ways that being supported by adults could enable wellbeing:

[Adult] help – to create new stuff, to read, with art when you are stuck, with what you need to learn. (A41A)

I believe every teacher should still have hope that a student can do something. (A311B)

They [adults] help you learn and to be healthy. They make us believe in our self...help you to forgive. (B31A)

**Having privacy**

Privacy was another prominent theme around ‘having’ wellbeing. In some schools, students raised concerns about the use of computer software to monitor student use of the internet, and explained how they felt this was an invasion of privacy and consequent betrayal of trust:

They [teachers] watch when you [are on the internet] so it’s sort of like an invasion of privacy. (A18B)

There was also uncertainty as to the extent to which such monitoring was taking place, adding to their sense that their privacy was being breached, for example:

I’ve heard they’re spying on the laptop when it’s at home. (A18B)

Sometimes the privacy can be confusing. (A28A)

There was a teacher using their kid’s Facebook to look. I was like “Who would do that?” (A28A)

Concerns about privacy were also expressed in relation to the accessing of private information from students’ phones if they were confiscated:

One time, this girl was in trouble and her phone got taken off her and the teachers were actually going through her phone. So when your phone gets taken off you, you’re not sure if the teachers are going through your phone... (A28A)

Finally, in line with privacy, having private time was also identified as intimately related to student wellbeing. Some students discussed that this need for privacy and private time could be met through having access to a space in the school environment where you could spend time alone, removed from the day to day busy-ness of school demands.

**Having rights**

A final feature of ‘having’ wellbeing is evident in the framing of the features of wellbeing identified above – equality, voice, respect and supportive adults – as having rights. Again the students’ discussions of rights were raised before the researchers introduced key ideas from recognition theory. Wellbeing as framed in rights is captured by the following quotes:

F: So what is wellbeing?
S: Having your rights.
F: Having rights. Okay, tell me more about that.
S: Having a say. (B611B)
S: I think wellbeing is the rights of the people (A53A)

2.1.3 Wellbeing as ‘doing’

Wellbeing is...active, fit, energetic, how you act, good diet, lots of sleep, laughing, challenged, achievement, faith, being nice, seeing friends, being good, playful, helpful, who you surround yourself with, outlook, state of mind, yourself, conscious, accepting challenges, making good decisions, how you treat yourself, how you look after yourself, responsibility, accepting yourself, loving yourself...

The third dimension of wellbeing, defined as ‘doing’, was evident in the emphasis students placed on their own actions in constituting their wellbeing. The following doing themes were most commonly identified:

*Doing as looking after yourself*

Looking after yourself was identified by students as an important aspect of student wellbeing:

> Caring about how you feel and caring about what you look like and about the way you feel, the way you dress. (A43B)

Furthermore, taking the necessary actions to protect oneself was identified as part of such self-care, as these students identified:

> S: Don’t listen to what people say if it’s mean to you
> F: Not listening to people being mean to you. Yes?
> S: Protecting yourself and if you’re in danger don’t just talk to them – protect yourself
> F: So protecting yourself?
> S: When someone is threatening you, you walk away (C13A)

*Doing as self-acceptance*

Self-acceptance and acceptance of others was also identified by students, whereby students saw themselves as actively involved in their own wellbeing:

> Acceptance – sort of like you’re accepting others and yourself for who you are so the wellbeing of yourself and the people around you. (B58B)
> To accept everyone no matter what or who they are. (A311A)

*Doing as making good decisions*

The process of decision-making and the importance of making good decisions were identified as an important feature of doing wellbeing:

> Decision-making and how you make decisions and decide what’s right and wrong. (A311A)
> Being an active decision maker. (A18B)
Like decision-making and how you make decisions and decide what is right and wrong (B23A)

Intentionally choosing your friends was one facet of this active decision-making that students felt were conducive to wellbeing:

Who you surround yourself with. (A111A)

Another feature of good decision making was accepting challenges and creating achievable goals:

S: like setting goals for yourself
S: Achievable goals.
F: What do you mean by that?
S: Realistic.
S: Yes, “realistic” ones like I’m not going to get 100% in every single subject – I mean that’s going to be like if you don’t get it your mental wellbeing goes down because it’s like “Oh I can’t keep up with my actual goal”. (B511B)

Doing as acts of generosity

Wellbeing was also conceptualised by students as enacting kindness for and to others. Students identified acts of generosity and kindness to others as important for their own wellbeing:

Looking out for others around you. (C38A)
See a need, fill a need. (A53B)
Helpful and being nice and helping people when they hurt themselves. (A51B)
Reaching out to people ... when their wellbeing is bad. (A53B)
There’s another saying – “Don’t ask can it be done; ask how can it be done”. (A53B)
Being yourself by knowing others. (B33B)
You listen to people when they’re speaking and stuff. You listen to people’s instructions and you listen to what people are saying. (A53B)

2.1.4 Conceptualising Wellbeing as Absence

Having discussed the three conceptualisations of wellbeing as having, being and doing, we now discuss the conceptualisation of the absence of wellbeing. Negative emotions formed a significant part of the focus group discussions as students sought to articulate what wellbeing is not, that is, the state of the absence of wellbeing. The following words the students stated demonstrate this absence of wellbeing:

Sad, unhappy, cranky, fearing everything, cautious, depressed, anxious, inability to love, judging, putting others down, not being nice, stressed, lonely, paralysed, like a puppet, bored

Interestingly, students were tentative to discuss these negative aspects of wellbeing in the early part of the sessions, presumably because they sought to first please the facilitators, and ‘test the waters’ and boundaries of discussion.

Depression was introduced into the discussions as an antecedent of other negative concepts of wellbeing. Here students distinguished between depression as a feeling or emotion (“feeling
depressed” and “feeling down”) and depression as being a mental illness arising from negative wellbeing, for instance:

> I guess being cared for makes you feel like you’re worthwhile, there is a reason for being here but I guess if you’re not cared for, it feels like a continuum and that’s when you start to go down the depression path. (A28B)

Overall, the concept of wellbeing was understood as existing largely free from such negative feelings and emotions that attached to their description of depression. However, there were exceptions, which reflected the ambiguity of the concept, discussed earlier. For example, students often noted that negative feelings and emotions were not necessarily reflective of an absence of wellbeing and, in fact, could play a formative role in creating positive feelings or a sense of improved wellbeing – so long as they did not continue for too long. The following exchange between two students is illustrative of this idea:

> S: The influences apply to all of them because they kind of nurture those things.
> F: Yes. Do they always nurture though?
> S: No, not always. When I say “nurture” I don’t necessarily mean for the better, it shapes who you are”. (A311A)

A second negative emotion identified by students was stress, for example, “stress is not good!” (A11B). Stress as a negative aspect of wellbeing was consistently expressed by the older students in the study in relation to their substantial school work loads and the pressures of balancing these with other commitments, including sporting, charitable, work and family.

Furthermore, anxiety was identified as a powerful emotion that impacted negatively on student wellbeing. Such anxiety was associated with loneliness and vulnerability:

> Sometimes you might feel that you’ve got no-one around you to support you...
> You feel vulnerable like anything can harm you. (BS8B)

Having explored the meaning of wellbeing, students in focus groups turned to explore the framework of wellbeing, including how wellbeing is facilitated and impeded, and by whom, which is the focus of the next section.

### 2.2 How is the wellbeing of students facilitated/impeded, by whom and in what contexts?

Students identified a range of relationships with family and community and other connections to institutions as being important for facilitating and/or impeding their wellbeing. These were:

**Self and self-work:** self, role models, spirituality, music and singing

**Outside (of school) institutions:** society, environment, religion, employers, government and the media

**Outside (of school) significant people:** parents and family, pets, community, neighbours, coaches, bus drivers and strangers

**Significant adults inside school:** principals, teachers and counsellor

**Peers/children’s culture inside school:** friends, peers, bullies and year group

**Inside institution:** school communication, curricula, rules
These relationships are discussed below around four subheadings: self and individual activities; school as a facilitator of wellbeing; significant relationships inside school; significant relationships outside of school.

2.2.1 Self and individual activities as a facilitator of wellbeing

Students described a number of actions which they took on themselves to support their own wellbeing, such as: setting goals, taking care of yourself, being confident and being positive, choosing to do things that make you feel good and choosing not to do things that make you feel cranky, choosing who you will allow to influence you, choosing who you will spend time with, being organised, making responsible decisions and good choices, being yourself and being independent. Central to all of these ideas was ‘choice’:

*You can choose….sometimes you make your life what you want to do. Sometimes you make your life harder.* (C211A)

Likewise, students identified a number of ways in which they hindered their own wellbeing: giving into peer pressure, negative self-talk, being judgemental of yourself and others, choosing the wrong friends, overthinking, changing yourself to fit in and doubting yourself. Such self-hindrance of wellbeing is captured in the following observation from a Year 11 Student:

*Self-sabotage kind of allowing all of this [discussion about negative things we do to hinder our own wellbeing] to interfere.* (C511A)

Spirituality was discussed generally in one focus group as related to self-work and wellbeing by offering the students “something to believe in”. The importance of prayer, guidance and forgiveness were discussed as important elements in students’ lives as well as “private time and someone you can trust” which were components identified by two students as connecting spirituality and faith to their wellbeing.

Students identified the importance of role models for wellbeing, stating that they offer students “possible positive ways to live your life”, “a public image to strive for” and “guidelines to follow”. These types of comments demonstrate the importance of role models and students choices in developing their own sense of self and for facilitating positive ways of being for improved wellbeing both within and outside schools settings.

Students identified music as playing an important role in helping their wellbeing. Students described how music helped them to feel happy, with such happiness often derived from being able to relate to the lyrics:

*If you’re in a bad mood and you go and listen to a song and it could relate to you and...* (A18B)

*Music is the friend you never have.* (C28A)

Students also noted that music helped them to “calm down”, to “open up the imagination” and to think, all of which are important time-out opportunities for personal emotional development. Students in the Year 1/2 focus groups also identified the importance of singing for their wellbeing.

2.2.2 School as a facilitator of wellbeing

School is a major socialisation institution in children’s lives. Yet children are rarely asked whether school meets their needs and, importantly, whether what goes on in school supports their wellbeing. When discussing the aspects of school that support wellbeing, students focused their discussions on...
Wellbeing in Schools FINAL REPORT: VOLUME TWO

the support schools provide to enable and facilitate important relationships between close friends, between year groups, and with other students and teachers:

Yes, and learning how to socialise; just learning how to make friends and... (A111B)

To learn and to make new friends and all that and so we can be a better person. (B31A)

As a consequence, students appealed for schools to create more specific opportunities for such relationship-building amongst other cohorts and between adults. The students stated that providing opportunities, such as the focus groups sessions conducted for the research, was an important and much needed avenue for communication, as the students could openly connect with others and explore matters that affect their lives, such as wellbeing:

We need to have communication. With the group discussions I don’t reckon your teacher would really have time to do it like so there’s better to have group discussions...

But then it would be so much in a big group and then everybody just starts getting rowdy and all over the top...

I reckon it should be like this but sometimes if you aren’t able to do it, it should be a counselor like every month or something. (A43B)

Other students stated that certain aspects of curricula supported their wellbeing. For instance, the Year 8 students in one focus group emphasised how their knowledge of a special peer to peer based curricula implemented in Year 9 was an important aspect of their upcoming school life. In this way, having knowledge of this transitional curriculum consequently helped their wellbeing. The following discussion reveals the students’ enthusiasm for the upcoming changes and the related benefits they were anticipating:

S: Once you get past Year 9....it is a pretty well everyone together; it doesn’t matter about anything else. It just matters about your mates in the school and after you get past Year 9 nobody has any dispute. We do a completely different after Year 9 –

S: Chickens and alpacas and stuff...

S: And it’s a different...

F: Really?

S: It’s more.....It’s all going outside the....it’s more community-based as a year level and you get to know each other rather than academic stuff.

F: So is that good for your wellbeing?

S: Yes, it’s great, because Year 9 apparently is the year where everyone goes off the rails and (putting it out there) it’s good because it’s together. (B111A)

The rules in school were also seen, at times, as hindering student wellbeing, for example when they do not allow flexibility or sensitivity to the personal situations and different contexts of students:

Yes, the school rules don’t cater for everyone’s wellbeing; it’s just like the general. (A11B)

Students also reported that school rules which impose similar sanctions for a range of breaches of rules (for example, breaches of uniform attract the same punishment as ongoing bullying) could be very detrimental to their wellbeing, as reported above.
In regards to other ‘hindering’ aspects of school, some students stated that when schools seemed more concerned with the ‘image of the school’ rather than education or administration, this was a significant issue that impacted negatively on their wellbeing:

They concentrate too much on the way the school looks; not the way it operates. (A11B)

At our school they’re too worried about our uniform than actually teaching us stuff. (A18A)

### 2.2.3 Significant relationships inside school

As identified above, the students emphasised the importance of school in providing important relationships and communication. The students identified the impact of diverse relationships inside of school that either facilitated or hindered their wellbeing. The following considers students’ relationships inside of school, with the principal, with teachers, friends and peers.

**Principal**

Students were ambivalent about the role of principals in supporting student wellbeing. While students were very clear that the principal was an influential figure in their wellbeing, the examples they discussed tended to be in relation to trivial behavioural incidents, with most discussion about the principal being about discipline, such as uniform breaches and confiscation of mobile phones:

S: …gets angry if your shirt is not tucked in.

F: So how does that affect your wellbeing?

S: Doesn’t it just make you angry at him?

S: …makes you angry...

F: Because why?

S: Because it’s just annoying...

S: Because he’s telling you to tuck your shirt in and that doesn’t have anything to do with your education.

F: So he’s picking on little things?

S: No, no, but he’s teaching you to be smart though. He’s teaching you to dress smart and grow up respectful. (A28B)

This example further demonstrates the students’ ambivalent understanding of how the principal helps or hinders their wellbeing. There were some students, however, who commented positively on the role of the principal on their wellbeing:

The principal….makes us happy….she’s kind….she helps us to have a good school…and a safe one. Sometimes she teaches us to behave well like when we….she teaches us how to be well. (B31A)

**Teachers**

Students pointed out the important influence of teachers, particularly because of the significant amount of time spent together. Relationships with teachers and the influence of teachers were therefore perceived to be critical to their wellbeing. As one student noted:
Yes, and schooling takes up like 90% of your life kind of thing – you’re there the majority of the time so you’re surrounded by the teachers so they need to have a good influence on you. (A211A)

Six key themes emerged in focus groups in relation to how teachers help and facilitate wellbeing: caring for students; supporting and encouraging students; having someone to talk to; treating students as individuals, mentoring students, and; teaching well.

First, **caring for students** was seen as a key action teachers take to facilitate student wellbeing. For some students care was something teachers have to do as part of their position at school. While caring for students was an accepted part of teachers’ roles, discussions commonly moved beyond the ‘job description’ to emphasising the importance of teachers communicating their concern of students and, further, acting on concern in order for students to know they were being cared for. For example, one student described teacher care as worrying for their students:

*Sometimes they’re actually worried about your wellbeing.* (A18A)

For other students, care involved teachers noticing that things were not going too well for them:

*Let’s say you’re having a bad time at home and you get emotional in class, they’ll pull you out and ask what’s going on and they’ll work it all out or they’ll say “I need you to do a job” so no-one will see you so emotional.* (A63B)

One of my teachers sat down with me when I was crying one time and basically helped me, listened to me, gave me advice. (C511B)

Students identified their appreciation of additional ‘caring’ strategies that teachers use as part of the religion curricula that facilitated student wellbeing. One example included enabling students to provide each other with positive feedback and compliments in a note book:

*In religion, you have a little book. You write little comments. You pass all your books around and someone writes something nice about you. It is lovely.* (C38C)

Second, students reported that their wellbeing is facilitated and helped when teachers are **supportive and encouraging** of students, “encouraging you to do your best” and “taking time to help you and assist you”, in addition, when:

*They’re happy and they’re very enthusiastic about the way that they’re teaching.* (B33B)

*They take time after class and after school to help you.* (C211A)

The importance of teachers providing students with “healthy reinforcement” (A18B) and “appreciating your work” (A18B) indicated a certain demeanour of teachers that express their friendliness and consideration of student abilities. This was an important aspect of encouragement, for instance:

*Constructive criticism*

*And they can help you be realistic about what you personally can achieve – especially since you’re in senior years now, it’s like “Oh”, they might pull you back if you’re not doing so well and say “look maybe that’s not reachable” but in a nice way* (A311A)
Third, and related to the previous two themes, students identified the importance of teachers having conversations with students about things happening in their lives or checking up on students in a friendly way as being central to their wellbeing:

> There was this girl that was standing by herself and [our pastoral care coordinator for Year 8] said. “Well I just go and check on her and see if she’s OK” because no one was with her and she looked quite sad. (C58A)

> You can just have a normal conversation with them which I think is important. You sometimes need to refresh your brain like after you’ve been sitting in maths for half an hour just staring at one particular question you can’t get, it’s always good to go up to a teacher and start talking to them about your weekend or something that you both enjoy. (B58A)

> They’re also there for someone to talk to. (A28B)

> Also they’re serious about their teaching and they want us to do well but you can talk to them just like “Oh, how was your weekend?” Not on a personal level but just a normal conversation structure. (B58A)

Older students, in particular, reported that teachers had “more experience” with teenagers than parents and other adults. This meant that teachers were more dependable to discuss issues with, as some students stated: “sometimes you feel more comfortable going to them, talking to them” and that “having someone to talk to” was beneficial for their wellbeing.

Students also reported that in listening to students, teachers are able to comfort them, make sure they are feeling fine and to look more deeply into problems with them. For some students, the relationship with their teacher could sometimes feel like a friendship:

> S: I have one. They connect with you.

> F: They “connect” with you. Tell me a little bit more about that.

> S: They’re like some teachers become your friends if they’re in your class.

> S: You can develop a relationship with them and then it sort of become like they’re one of your friends. (C28A)

Further, students mentioned the importance having trusted teachers with whom they could share confidential information:

> Like a teacher…. I go to her because I know she won’t go and tell other teachers...(C211A)

> Some of them you can actually build a personal relationship, and they understand you. (C211A)

> They’re there so you can trust them and talk to them about things. (C311A)

In another focus group with Year 5/6, students reported at length the benefits of ‘circle time’ for strengthening their relationship with their teacher:

> Circle time is how your class gathers up in a circle and your teacher does activities, like every week you learn a different subject like friendship, caring, loving...(C13A)

Fourth, students identified the importance of teachers treating students as individuals and as people, which was a theme directly linked to being treated equitably, both in and outside the classroom:
You expect teachers to treat everyone equally and everything so you don’t really think about it. (A211A)

People that understand and help us to learn and equality between everyone. (B611B)

Fifth, students identified the importance of teachers mentoring students in helping student wellbeing. Such mentoring took the form of helping students with issues arising with friends, meeting new friends, helping with family issues, helping them to make good and right decisions and helping them to learn from their mistakes:

My teacher helps me with my future because I want to be an artist so she helps me with art. (C13A)

They can give you tips on how to make friends – if you have a good crack at that and it doesn’t work, they can do it again. (C13A)

Help you and prepare you for life and for the future (A211A)

They teach you how to respect others…to control our tempers. (B34B)

The following excerpt from a Year 8 focus group was typical of discussions about teachers supporting and mentoring students for their wellbeing:

S: They help you with life; help you do the right thing.
S: They help you get through...help you know what to do.
S: They help you with stuff. No, they help you...Life issues.
S: They’re also there for someone to talk to.
F: Someone to talk to? Yes.
S: They’ll keep you motivated
S: They help you get through.....
S: Help you know what to do. (A8B)

Young students also talked directly about the importance of teachers as mentors and positive influences on their wellbeing:

They help you shine your light. (B31A)

They help you forgive. (B31A)

Because when you want to get bigger you can learn from what we’re doing in the school when you get bigger you can learn like if you want to be a teacher then they teach you how to be like a teacher. (B41A)

As part of mentoring, students identified the importance of teachers giving them boundaries and direction so as to help prepare them for adulthood and for the workforce:

It gives you boundaries and then you’ve got...discipline;

Yes, you’ve been previously disciplined before you go out into the workforce (A111A)

Help you with your goals (A28B)
For a number of Year 11 students, mentoring also included ‘being treated as seniors’ in school, such as teachers making time to meet their needs and these being prioritised, which helped their wellbeing:

We take precedence over a lot of other people.....because the younger grades have still got heaps of time left in school now – because we’re at the business end of schooling it’s more important than if we were in Grade 8. (C311)

The teachers treat you differently now because they know that you’re in senior school and that’s important time so they pay more attention to the school and they give you the time that they need. (C511A)

The sixth and final aspect students identified in regards to teachers helping their wellbeing was teachers making learning fun through the use of humour, imagination and creative teaching approaches and by inviting students into imaginative learning:

S: Well there’s only kind of teacher that gives you the happiness you need for the day.
F: What kind of teacher is it?
S: It’s one that tries to make learning fun, not boring. (A18B)
He makes jokes with us and stuff...he is not always serious (B18B)
I guess they try to help you to understand something so they’ll try a different way to teach you if you’re not getting something. (B58A)
Yes, but other teachers are like “No, you can’t write that”. (A63A)

These positive aspects of teachers demonstrate six areas that students see the positive behaviours of teachers’ relationships as vitally important and supportive for their wellbeing.

Students further identified a range of actions by teachers that hinder student wellbeing. Key amongst these were “not listening”, “yelling at students”, “treating students unequally”, “not respecting students”, “delivery of negative feedback”, “approach to enforcement of school rules”, “not ‘liking’ students” and “lack of creative teaching”.

Students described how teachers not listening to students often would begin with incorrect assumptions held by teachers about the individual student or their personal circumstances:

Teachers and principals also don’t ever listen to reason; they see you do something wrong... the second they see someone do something wrong they just assume “They’re in the wrong and they can’t be doing that”. They never listen to reason, no matter what. (A28B)
They misunderstand...but they don’t actually let you explain like if you go to explain it they’ll just but in and yell at you. (A43A)
They don’t give you a say and they think they’re always right. (B611B)
Accusations. They accuse you of not doing your homework but you have and just forgotten it at home. (C38C)

Furthermore, incorrect assumptions about a student’s certain friendship group were also identified as preventing teachers from listening and understanding a student’s personal situation:

I think they target you for who you hang out with, like your friends.
And they make assumptions about the friendship groups and...

If someone else is hanging out with that person, they actually go up to them and be like you’re going to start doing the wrong thing because you’re hanging out with those people being influenced. (A211B)

Students having a ‘prior reputation’ for getting in trouble often meant that teachers had already judged students and confounded these assumptions. Some students felt this ill-represented reputation contributed to them being more likely to get in trouble:

And also if you’re known to do bad things they pick on you for littler things, for doing nothing they get you in trouble and more. (A28A)

Other instances of teachers not listening to students related to their limited time, large student numbers and miscommunication about a situation, for example:

Sometimes they don’t listen because there are so many of us. (C211B)

I think a lot of the time it gets to the point where the person who’s being bullied gets to a point where they snap and then they’re the one who gets in trouble, not the other person. [Schools] don’t put enough effort into finding out what happens. They don’t look into it enough. (C511A)

Miscommunication; sometimes I’ve had experiences of this before where you’ve had two teachers and one teacher tells you to do this but you come into class the next day and it’s completely wrong and then you get in trouble for doing the wrong thing. You try to explain but they don’t understand it. (B58A)

Regardless of the circumstances, however, the end result was identified by students to be the same: not listening to students prevented teachers from understanding either the student or the situation/issue. The following examples exemplify this process:

At the same time they don’t – this is generalised – some don’t consider your situation as well; they just think you’re being dramatic but they don’t take into account the fact that you are actually in a teenage year. (A311B)

Can I just say like with the teacher’s attitude if they’re having a bad day and let’s say they sort of take it out on us, we’re going to have a bad day. Like everyone has their bad day. (B511A)

We’re only teenagers and we forget things – they’re very strict on hats and diaries – you forget it one day but there will be a punishment for that. I just don’t think they see it from our point of view. (C58A)

Second, teachers “yelling” at students was a significant hindrance to student wellbeing. Students mentioned being yelled at by teachers in every focus group, and as being a significant detriment to their wellbeing, as one of the primary school aged students so succinctly stated:

Yell. They yell. (B33B)

Students in the secondary school focus groups in particular identified “yelling” as having a major negative impact on their wellbeing. We have included a number of quotes in light of the emphasis students placed on the relationship between being yelled at and student wellbeing:

S: They get really angry for accidents and you don’t mean to do something intentionally and they still get angry at you...
F: So angry...?

S: Yes, like the pastoral days. They get angry for no reason. He was full on in my face. He was like up at my nose, I was like “dude”...

S: They yell.

F: And why is being yelled at bad for your wellbeing?

S: Because you feel small.

F: You feel small?

S: You feel so small and it puts you...

S: It scares you.

S: They put you down.

S: Or you feel like you’re going to cry.

S: Or you feel embarrassed because everybody’s there watching you, staring at you. (A28A)

Teachers – they get really verbally abusive and loud. They actually get right up in your face. (A211B)

Yes, like when teacher yells at you for no apparent reasons; it might just be one person in the class talking and they yell at the whole class for it. (C58A)

You could be doing your work and then you just ask your friend “Do you know this” and they yell at you for asking. (C58A)

They shouldn’t be angry for no reason. One time I asked a teacher a question and she answered she said it rudely and I kind of felt that I was stupid because of the way she answered [me]. And that affected me. (C38C)

Third, teachers treating students unequally was identified by students as hindering student wellbeing:

I think that all students have the right to feel equal in a class and not having the feeling of being equal sort of puts you down and you don’t really want to be in that class any more really. (B58B)

This ‘inequality’ theme was most commonly experienced through teachers favouring some students over others:

Have favourites and not favourites. (A43A)

Favouritism – like sometimes teachers choose someone in the class that they absolutely love, and if they say for example, they don’t hand their assignment in on time, no worries but if someone else. (B58A)

[Favouritism] can make it uncomfortable for both sides. For example the favourite ones could feel like, “I don’t want to get this advantage over these people. It’s not fair” but then for other people it’s like, “That’s horrible, I don’t agree with this” and get angry with it. (B58B)
A lot of teachers; they’ll hold a grudge against you but some teachers when you come to a new day they kind of start afresh with you. They don’t worry about what you’ve done in the past. (C28B)

Conversely, teachers treating all students equally when such an approach is seen as unfair, was identified as having negative consequences for student wellbeing:

I think it’s also threatening; they’re threatening everyone – not just the students that are doing something wrong. Last year they were threatening the whole year level to bring their PE uniform to school even though it was just a tiny amount of girls that were not wearing the uniform properly. (B511A)

Inequality between students and teachers was identified as having significant negative consequences for student wellbeing:

I don’t like how teachers think that they are superior to you just because they’ve got a higher degree of education. (A311A)

They set an example. Like all adults make mistakes and everything but if they do something bad when they’ve told you not to do it it’s kind of like. (A63B)

A fourth issue concerned teachers not respecting students. Students identified a range of ways in which a lack of respect from teachers hindered their experience of wellbeing. Most evident in the data was that students perceived respect as a ‘one-way street’ whereby teachers demanded respect from students but did not return such respect, for instance:

I think sometimes teachers want you to have respect for them but then they don’t have respect for you; there are some teachers you can tell they care about you and want to talk to you and just generally see how you’re going and then there are other teachers that don’t care and if they have something wrong with you, they’re happy to scream in your face kind of thing instead of just talk to you about it and fix it – they’re happy just to belittle you in front of everyone and that kind of thing. (A211B)

Yes. They want us to treat them with respect and then they kind of don’t show it back. (A211B)

Like some teachers you walk in there and they automatically think “I’m the teacher, you have to respect me, do what I say, I don’t really care about you personally”. (A311A)

For one student, criticism of her parents was experienced as a form of lack of respect for the student herself:

Sometimes they can be really rude and don’t respect you and they criticise your parents. (A28A)

In another focus group, students discussed the ways in which a lack of respect for a student’s ethnicity hindered the wellbeing not just of the student themselves but of all the students in the class:

Some teachers are racist but they don’t realise it.

Sometimes it can be like funny racist jokes between all of them...

It’s annoying......teachers are supposed to be the ones who help you and keep you happy and stuff; they’re not supposed to be the ones that make you sad and all that. (A28B)
A fifth issue identified by students related to teachers’ *delivery of negative feedback*, to such an extent that students experienced the feedback as hindering their wellbeing:

*They put more of their emotion into the negative feedback.* (A18B)

*Sometimes you get negatives that much that you just don’t even pay attention to it.* (A18B)

*S: Most of the time they just focus on negative things.*

*F: The teachers focus on negative things?*

*S: Yes. I guess it’s good in classroom things but when they’re talking about how we’re doing bad things on the playground and that sort of thing, most of the time 99% of people are doing the right thing and they’re just pointing out that 1% who aren’t.* (A28B)

*If you are compared to someone who’s really, really smart, you feel damaged or something; you’re not good enough for it. If you’re compared to someone you don’t feel special, you don’t feel that you are one of a kind.* (A63B)

A sixth issue concerned student experience of teachers’ *approach to the enforcement of school rules*, more specifically where teachers appear to students as placing more importance on the school rules, for example, the correct wearing of school uniform rather than focussing on teaching:

*At our school they’re too worried about our uniform than actually teaching us stuff.* (A18A)

*In class they take more prioritisation over checking laptops than teaching.* (A311A)

*S: They don’t do anything to stop it happening again, it’s just like if you forget your hat it’s a detention; if you forget it again, it’s a detention – that’s what I’m thinking of.*“ (A111B)

*The key to learning isn’t punishment.* (A3A)

*I think punishment; I know that sounds kind of like “Oh yes, gosh, we should get punished” but I think that at the moment it’s something that’s been really heavily enforced this year. If you come to school in the wrong uniform you get sent home and you have to change it. I think that defeats the purpose. People who are repeat offenders, they’re not learning from their mistakes. At the end of the day, no matter what uniform they’re in, they need to be at school.* (B511A)

A seventh issue identified by students regarding the ways in which teachers can hinder wellbeing, was related to the experience of teachers’ *not ‘liking’ students:*

*Sometimes they just don’t like you; they have something against a certain student.*

*That can affect you; it affects your learning and everything.* (B611A)

Finally, students reported that a *lack of creative teaching* and of engaging with the subject matter, including when students were struggling with understanding, was yet another area in which teachers impacted negatively on their wellbeing:

*Sometimes the way teachers explain it doesn’t actually make that much sense and they just keep explaining it the same way over and over and we just don’t get it that way.* (B58A)
**Counsellor**

School counsellors were identified in focus groups as helping student wellbeing in situations where students had no one else to turn to:

*They can listen when you have no-one else.* (C38C)

At the same time, students also exercised some caution about counsellors:

*Sometimes their advice isn’t what you want to hear. They give you the wrong advice.* (C38C)

*They could accidentally spill out your things [to others].* (C38C)

*S: If you have got a problem that is not school related but is affecting your school work or whatever you can go and talk to them about it....

F: Someone to talk to?

S: Yes, because they’ve got that confidentiality kind of thing. They don’t say anything

S: I’ve never been to a counsellor so I wouldn’t know

F: But if you felt you wanted to?

S: I think I’d have to sit there for one session and be like “can I trust you and can I talk with you?”

S: I would be more worried about how people would judge me for going to the counsellor I guess (C38A)

**Friends**

Friends were identified as a major source of support of student wellbeing. For the children in the Year 1/2 focus groups, wellbeing and playing with friends formed the foundations of how wellbeing is supported. Friends perform the key role of “someone to play with” and “to play with you when you are left out”. Younger students also identified the importance of having someone to “laugh with” and to “have fun with”. In addition, the role of friends for protecting each other and “standing up for you” was also important for the youngest children. The following quotes exemplify this importance on friends:

*Wellbeing is looking after your friends, even if they are not your friends.* (C13B)

*It makes me feel really happy – surrounded by loads of friends.* (A41B)

Less difference was observed in the role of friends in supporting wellbeing between the two older focus groups. Friends’ facilitation of wellbeing centred around five key themes: support and encouragement, constancy, guidance, be understanding and humour. Of all the data collected, friends or peers both facilitating and hindering student wellbeing most closely mirrored each other. First, students identified **supportive and encouraging** behaviours that friends exhibit to help student wellbeing, when they: care for you, love you, support you, compliment, you, listen to you, encourage you to do your best and help and comfort you when you are down:

*They understand you. They understand the problems you might be having in life or something and they’ll help you out, they’ll give you moral support I guess.* (B18A)
They love you. (B43B)

Love you for who you are. (C211A)

Friends make you happy when you do not feel good. They help you if you are in a fight with someone. (A41A)

In contrast, certain acts by friends were identified by students as hindering wellbeing: lack of support through being laughed at, put down, degraded, excluded, rejected, distracted, being encouraged to do ‘wrong’ acts and not being encouraged to be themselves. The following quote encapsulates the impact of these behaviours on one student’s self-esteem:

I think they make you believe things about yourself that aren’t true like they keep telling you you’re ugly or you’re fat and you’re not actually but you start believing that you are which is kind of to do with self-esteem. (B611A)

Second, students emphasised the importance of constancy in friendship as a central feature of wellbeing. The kind of actions that characterise such constancy included: always being there for you, someone to talk to when you don’t feel like you can talk to anyone else, trust you and you can trust them, ‘stand by you’ and ‘keep by your side’:

And you can tell your real friends because no matter how much you fight you’re still friends. M and I fight all the time...Yes, M is like a sister. We actually have the most hectic fights and then the next day we’re friends again. (A311A)

Because they understand you better than other people do, they have a way of calming you down. (C211B)

On the other hand, the breaching of such constancy in friendship, for example, through starting rumours, gossip, betrayal, dishonesty and not keeping confidence were all features of friendships hindering student wellbeing.

Third, friends facilitate wellbeing in a number of ways in relation to guidance: for example, students stated friends “help you make the right decisions”, “tell you what is right and wrong”, “work as a team”, provide “guidance, I guess, for you to make the right decisions”, and “set directions”:

They encourage you. You may be good at something that they’re not and they’ll encourage you to do it or they’ll tell you maybe it’s not the best idea. (B58A)

Even when you don’t really trust yourself your friend trusts you. (B58B)

Students reported that their wellbeing is hindered by friends’ guidance primarily when their friends guide them in a negative way, such as placing pressure on students to behave in ways that they are not comfortable with:

They pressure you into things you may not want to do. (B18A)

They force you to take the drug and you’re like “No, I’m all right”. (B43B)

Fourth, understanding friendships were identified as key to student wellbeing. For example, “sometimes [friends] understand when you wouldn’t talk to any of the adults”, with such understanding experienced as given without judgement:
You know that they’re not going to judge you like if you tell a teacher kind of thing – you don’t know what they’re going to say but with friends, you know they’re going to be there for you. (A211B)

On the other hand, being judged by friends and being critical of others had a negative impact on wellbeing.

Fifth, students identified humour in friendship as an important source of wellbeing: they “make you laugh”, “make it fun”, and “have fun times”. However, when humour is turned on the student in a diminishing way, such as when students were being laughed at, and positioned as the brunt of jokes, this was identified as a source of embarrassment and shame, which impacted negatively on student wellbeing.

**Peers**

Like friends, peers were identified by students as helping wellbeing in a number of ways, including by setting good examples, “inspiring you” and generally checking up on students’ wellbeing:

> They can actually stand up for people they don’t know or something like that. (B18A)

> “It’s fine. I’ll be safe”. Sometimes it’s nice just to know a familiar face like in a crowd, even on [transport] – you don’t know them but you know their face and you’re like “Oh yes, I’m comfortable now”. (B18A)

Peers were also identified as hindering student wellbeing through unfairly judging students and making assumptions, being overly critical of you; bullying; gossiping; breaching trust; breaking the law and rules; when they tease or “pass notes about you”.

Students identified one aspect of the ‘year group’ as relevant to their wellbeing, that is, that students in the same year group are more likely to understand you because they are “in the same situation as you”.

Despite the negative context of peer bullying, students also identified how bullies can support wellbeing by teaching them to “toughen up”, “get stronger” and to “stand up for yourself”:

> Well resilience – it’s just when you know something bad happens but you’re strong enough to push through that and come out better in the end and it makes you a stronger person. (B611A)

> Well like if you get bullied and then you deal with it properly it can give you confidence like if it was to ever happen again you’d be confident in the situation – not doubting yourself or be upset.

> Learn how to deal with it.

> Help you in the future. (B68A)

> They help you to toughen up, they help you stand up for yourself. They raise your confidence. (C13B)

At the same time, the language used by students to describe the impact of bullies on their wellbeing was very powerful: “they kill you”; “they make you feel bad”; “cranky”; “make you want to do stuff” and behaving in ways that “…you don’t tell anyone because you know they’ll do worse” and “don’t care about your feelings”.

29
2.2.4 Significant relationships outside of school

Parents and family

Students discussed briefly the ways parents and family contributed to students’ wellbeing. These discussions appeared to make a number of assumptions about how parents and family help and support their wellbeing in three primary ways. These assumptions were that parents and family: provide students with the essential needs of their children (i.e. providing you with food, shelter, a roof over your head etc.); are loving, encouraging and make children feel special by knowing them well, listening to them and being there for them; and teach children and provide skills:

They kind of know you like more than you know yourself...

Even when you leave school you’re still learning things from them I think.

I think that they’re the first role models you get about who to become. (B511B)

Well they accept you for who you are – not that friends don’t but I don’t know if they understand more because there’s this saying that my mum tells me like “Your mum knows you better than yourself” and I feel that’s (0:13:23.4) because I can share anything with my parents. (B58B)

They love you. (C13A)

They give you their experience to help you with what you’re going through (C211A)

With like everything that we’ve said I feel like that should be in “family”. I have an older sister who’s 18 and she kind of like tells me what to do when I’m in trouble or how to deal with things but then I have my dad who’s always there for friendship problems and my mum guides me through a lot of it. (B58A)

Students also identified several ways parents and family behaviour impacts negatively on their wellbeing, these were: comparing students to their siblings; having too high expectations; being overprotective; and having too much influence on student values:

Sometimes they compare you to other siblings or cousins. That’s annoying. (B511B)

I feel sad and angry when my family compares me to my family members. I feel angry, it makes me feel like they don’t care about anything about you and/or what happens to you – good or bad – achievements or hurts. (C28A)

Your parents may have an expectation of you or have an image of you that they would like you to be but you’re nothing like that. With some families you could be completely different from what your parents want you to be or expect you to be; you might not be a bad person but you just might not be what they want. (A311A)

Sometimes they might put too much pressure on or they have high expectations. (B511B)

If you get a bad grade...sometimes they don’t take into account that you did try your hardest. (C58A)

They expect us to act like adults but they treat us like children. (C511B)

Yes and they’re just too over-protective and you’re just like “I can try and deal with this” but we’ve got to make our own mistakes. (B511B)
S: You get what your parents think...
F: How about we just go right across like this... So you’re saying morals can be positive or negative?
S: Yes because usually what your parents believe you end up believing whether you’re going to like it or not. (A311A)

For some students, high expectations and an excessive focus on their achievement at school led them to feel that some parents were overlooking the identity and experiences of the student themself:

You come back from school and when we get home they say: “do your homework now” instead of saying “How was your day at school?”
They don’t know if we have had a rough day or a good day at school. (C58A)

**Coaches**

Some students identified how coaches help wellbeing: encouraging you, providing you with discipline, establishing boundaries, providing positive criticism, building your capacity and skills, keeping you safe, and teaching you.

Some students stated that coaches who have favourites, pick on you and are too serious were seen as hindering wellbeing.

**Pets**

Pets were identified as important for wellbeing, particularly for students in primary school and Year 8, because they: “listen to you”, “understand you”, “always have energy”, “can’t tell your secrets”, “are always there for you” and “cheer you up”. Other quotes about the importance of pets for comfort and companionship include:

Sometimes when you’re down and you don’t know what to do and you can’t tell anyone they sort of tell you the right thing somehow. (A43B)

They’re just another symbol of happiness. I know from my sister, she’s just got fish and fish you can’t really touch or play with them but I don’t know why but she’s always happy around them. (B58B)

I always think of pets as the siblings God forgot to give us. (B58B)
When I am sad, my dog will come up and he will scratch at the door because he can hear me crying. (C13A)

They love you and comfort you when you are feeling sad. (C38A)

Pets were identified as hindering student wellbeing in relation to one aspect of their behaviour, that is, that they can “bite you and they make you feel hurt and you don’t want to go near them” (A43B).

**Neighbours and community**

Neighbours were briefly discussed as having a positive influence on student wellbeing when they acknowledged students and talked with them. On the other hand, feelings such as discomfort, being left out, and feeling unimportant and unsafe were descriptions of how neighbours negatively could impact on student wellbeing.
The role of community in supporting wellbeing was identified primarily in relation to supporting charity initiatives the students were involved in – for example, the ‘World’s Greatest Shave’, raising money for local sporting clubs. As well as providing essential services, students noted how being listened to by the community was an important aspect of wellbeing.

However, some students felt that young people in local communities were not always welcomed or accepted, for example:

F: What does the community do that diminishes your wellbeing?
S: A lot
F: A Lot?
S: They don’t like youth
S: The so don’t like young people
S: They’re so angry. People just get so angry here.
S: [older people] and everyone else. Like young people in the community. It’s horrible. (C511B)

In relation to bus drivers, a Year 8 group of students mentioned how it is not good for their wellbeing when bus drivers “swear at everyone” and “rage”.

And finally, students commented briefly on the positive effects strangers can have on their everyday wellbeing, such as a smile or acknowledgement from a stranger can ‘make you feel happy’.

2.2.5 Outside institutions

Some students noted the importance of society for the provision of social rules, regulations and standards of ethical conduct which helped students to feel safe. These themes emerged again in the imaginary school data (refer Section 2.4).

Students in two focus groups identified the environment as impacting on their wellbeing. They appeared to be referring specifically to the social environment in which they lived – their family, community as well as physical environment:

...your morals and values that you’ve grown up with can influence in some way that you’ll not hang out with those people in that environment. (A211A)

Students in one school identified religion as offering “a guide” and a “belief system” and standards for society to live by. For another student, religion was important for student wellbeing as it provided “hope to the hopeless”. Furthermore, one Year 11 student identified the Church as helping her wellbeing by providing a sense of belonging and inclusion:

The Church....they’re there as a group and they’re nice and you have stuff to do with them. (C511B)

However, one Year 8 student stated that the church “does not connect with young people” (B68A). Students in one Year 11 group also discussed the negative impact of their wellbeing of teachers not being open to discussing non-Catholic beliefs:

They bring up the teachings of Jesus and we start questioning it, the teacher just shuts us down. (B58A)
The lack of influence by young people on government decision-making was identified as the primary way government impacts negatively on student wellbeing:

> No, I hate it. I think they’re making decisions that affect us more than anybody else in Australia and they ask everybody else in Australia except for us. You could choose to vote between 16 and 18 and then the government would have to introduce policies or try, I don’t know, get us to agree with them. (A211B)

> Don’t ask us still – even though we’re the ones who are going to have to live with whatever environmental situation they decide. (A211B)

> S: They have empty promises. They don’t really help rural areas

> F: How do you see this happening?

> S: Well, they say that they’re going to make all these jobs and stuff and a while ago, you know the mining tax? That wasn’t really helping here. (C411)

Students in Year 11 identified having a job as a positive influence on wellbeing, by providing opportunities for improving confidence, and supporting students to learn to work with people in public places:

> They show you a different world outside of the school and home and you know you get treated like an adult instead of just being treated as a kid. (B511B)

However, employers who ridicule or are unsupportive of the needs of students to balance their school and life commitments were identified as having a negative impact on student wellbeing:

> Yes, “intimidate” but also scare you in the way that you don’t want to grow up because they say “Oh, no this happened to me in the workforce” and you’re just like “What?”

> And they sort of make you want to just stay at school forever. (B511B)

The role of the media in promoting overall wellbeing was noted as an important influence on student wellbeing. In particular healthy eating campaigns, including the focus on the dangers of smoking, and other mental health initiatives, facilitated wellbeing. In one discussion it was suggested that one celebrity could be influential in encouraging students to take action:

> I watched one of her documentaries on War Lords and the sex trade in Ethiopia and that made me want to do that sort of thing, like...take action sort of thing. (A311A)

At the same time, there was much discussion as to whether the negative influence of the media on student wellbeing actually outweighed its positives. Students focused on three specific areas: body image, stereotyping young people, and media bias:

> Models, like what you’re meant to look like and how your body image is meant to be. (A211B)

> You know how they put an image in a magazine and completely air-brush it so it looks perfect. (A28B)

> Because like the news is all about how teenagers are so bad...

> Yes, it’s so stereotypical

> It’s stereotypical – it’s like all kids want to go out and...
Do drugs and get drunk even though that’s not really how it works (A28A)

S: [media] makes you feel like you’re not feeling well, the world is going bad and everything.

F: Yes, can you write something about that on there – “focuses on the bad things in the world” or something like that.

S: Negative...

S: And they always show famous people doing bad things and doesn’t show them doing good things. (A28B)

S: Like media has a big influence on racism I think. (A28B)

Following the whole group discussion on the meaning of wellbeing, students formed small groups in order to explore recognition theory and how it might be relevant to their experience of school. The following section reports the findings from these discussions.

2.3 Recognition theory

Students explored the following four questions regarding the three dimensions of recognition theory:

1. How do you feel when you are cared for/respected/valued?
2. How do you feel when you are not cared for/respected/valued?
3. How are you cared for/respected/valued at school?
4. How are you not cared for/respected/valued at school?

It is important to recall that until this point in the focus groups, that the word or concept of recognition had not been introduced by the researchers. The following section therefore represents the first known data collected from students about the meaning and practice of recognition and its theoretical foundations in school settings. The following section reports the student discussion in relation to these questions.

2.3.1 Cared for

How do you feel when you are cared for?

In response to the question ‘How do you feel when you are cared for?’ students identified the following feelings and emotions:

Loved, safe, great, amazing, happy, loved, wanted, people have faith in you, nice, valued, respected, good inside, safe happy, part of something, caring for yourself; warmth within, visible, brave, “sitting on top of the world”, confident, special, “king of the world”, “like an angel”, refreshed, supported, accepted, belong and beautiful.

A number of features about being cared for were emphasised by students. First, students defined being cared for as being unconditional and as influencing them positively even when they were experiencing difficult times:

Generally this feeling… like you feel good about yourself, you know that someone loves you even though… I think sometimes if you have low self-esteem like if you’re cared for you can
sort of even though you don’t like yourself you know someone else has belief in you to do. (B511A)

All your needs are all being satisfied so you won’t need anything. (B18B)

Every human being has the right to be cared for. (C28A)

Feeling cared for provided students with a sense of self-worth and belonging:

I guess being cared for makes you feel like you’re worthwhile, there is a reason being here. (A28B)

If you’re cared for you don’t feel alone; you feel like you belong, you’re healthy, you feel noticed, you feel visible. (A43B)

You get a sense of belonging. Where you are (cared for) you’ve got a voice... (B11A)

Well we wrote quite a few words (about being cared for). The biggest one we think was being loved by others especially and you feel relaxed when you’re in that kind of environment and you feel very safe and you feel confident within yourself and like you belong and you feel like you have worth as a person because other people obviously care about you as a person and you can work with other people socially. (B58A)

Students described how feeling cared for gave them purpose and energy for trying to do well at school and to seek satisfaction in their endeavours at school:

It’s such an important time in our lives like. If you feel like you’re getting looked after then it sort of increases your will to try in school and do things that you should be doing. (B611B)

S: Well I very dodgily wrote “satisfied” and “complete” because I was writing upside down.

F: It’s not so dodgy. Complete. What do you mean by “complete”?

S: Like you feel fulfilled. I guess it’s just using the same thing a different way but you feel like you accomplish something like fulfilment, satisfaction in what you’ve done and I feel like then the opposite of that is maybe if you don’t think you’re going to get that recognition you don’t try as hard.

S: You don’t get stressed out when you have someone caring for you, you’re at ease, you feel like you have the capability to succeed, you just feel supported I guess basically and that leads you to being happy and that sort of thing. (B511A)

How do you feel when you are not cared for?

Pretty crap, not good, worthless, left out, lost, discriminated, you feel not a part of something, bullied, not fitting in, enraged, small, disappointed, unimportant, stereotyped, sad, irritated, confused, distant, alienated, invisible, vulnerable, alone, anxious, depressed, unsafe, excluded, not wanted, trapped, invisible, fending for yourself, like a hobo

The language utilised to express the experience of feeling ‘not cared for’ was intense and powerful. Students described how feeling ‘not cared for’ was isolating and left them questioning their sense of self-worth:

Excluded, useless, unimportant, worthless (A111B)
Not worthy, dumb, you feel like you’ve been cut off from the rest of the world, not important. That’s it. (A18B)

No-one’s looking out for you, you’re not valued, you don’t feel nice, you feel rejected, sad, lonely, not loved, not accepted and worthless. (A11A)

Lonely, make you feel like an idiot, left out, don’t feel like you’re a part of something, frustrated, angry, sad. (A18A)

Un-liked, angered, sad, not trusted that you’re believed. (A18A)

Sad, disrespected, excluded, disappointed, put down, not loved, not respected, neglected, shit-house, now worth anything, heavy, lack of confidence and poo. (A11A)

Disrespected, left out, invisible, treated like garbage, invisible, let down, angry, not wanted, trapped, unhealthy, un-special. (A43B)

Of particular note in the above data is the way in which the students link how not being cared for also feels like not being valued and not being respected. Further, the experience of being not cared for was directly linked to students not wanting to care for themselves:

Also if no-one cares for you, you can feel like you shouldn’t for yourself (A111A)

It has a follow-on effect. (A11A)

You kind of cut yourself away from everyone else because you think that no-one’s going to like you. (C28B)

If you’re not cared for it feels like you don’t really have to be like...you don’t have to be in the world...to commit suicide or kill yourself or something. (A43B)

When you’re not cared for you feel “helpless”, you feel like “depressed”, you feel “lonely”, you are “upset”, you feel “horrible” inside, you feel very “unmotivated” and you start hating yourself. (B18A)

How are students cared for at school?

Students readily identified the ways in which they feel cared for in school. The following discussion reveals that students placed much emphasis on relationships with teachers as well as when schools place care for students as its highest priority. These aspects of care are discussed below.

(i) Students are cared for at school when teachers know their students

One of the most significant reasons students identified feeling cared for in school was the experience of care from teachers:

Teachers. They’ve got to take the time out to care for you, to look after you (A11A)

Being ‘known’ enabled students to feel safe and comfortable to approach teachers for help and support, both factors identified as core to student wellbeing:

The teachers make it known that they’re there if you need help with something or if you need to talk about something, whether it be school work or anything like that. I think it helps that every teacher – every single teacher – knows your name. (A311B)
Sometimes the teachers make you feel safe like when you walk through the gate you feel safe and welcome, yes welcomed, and the teachers make you feel at home, protected. (A43B)

The following excerpt describes a teacher who cares deeply for her students and notices positive qualities about the student that are overlooked by other teachers and students:

S: There’s this teacher at our school – well she’s an assistant teacher...
S: Oh she loves everybody.
S: Everybody.
S: She comes into our classroom and there’s this...there’s this kid that always get bullied and stuff and his name is Ben and he’s her teacher’s......pet.
S: Yes, teacher’s pet. Whenever she comes in Mark’s like “Yes, I can be the best...”
F: So she just really notices him?
S: Yes.
F: Is this good for his wellbeing?
S: Yes. She sees him in a different way I guess other students do...
S: It feels good. Like he’s actually being noticed for once. (A63A)

Older students described how being known by teachers extended beyond supporting student learning to knowing students well enough that they could provide good advice and care to the student about issues of great importance to students, for example relationships and life:

It’s like kind of about learning who you are and how you should treat people and how you should go about your life and if something goes wrong, what you do and if you don’t get something that you want, how you keep going so it’s not just learning academic stuff and getting good marks. (B511A)

When you come to school it’s not just so you learn, it’s so you get ready for when you leave school and you have friends and people to talk to and stuff and your teachers – if they’re not caring for you, then you’ve got no-one to really go to at school who’s older and that can help you. (B68B)

Teachers knowing students’ individual learning styles was also experienced by students as being cared for:

After all these years now it kind of like makes sense like when you go into the classroom and the teacher goes “Okay, now you can do revision for the test” – we all go off and do our own separate things, we know what we’re good at, we know what works for us and I think some schools they might go “Hey do this, do this now, you have to write notes like this” but because we all know what we’re good at and how we can learn best, that will be used for the rest of your life. (B511A)

(ii) Students are cared for at school when teachers support students with their school work

Students explained how diligence by teachers in supporting them in their schoolwork helped the student to feel cared for:
They actually make sure you do the work. Certain teachers actually give the time of day to try and help us. (A211A)

Well like obviously it’s their job but they actually try and teach us; they put the effort in. (A211A)

F: “When you’re cared for you do better anyway” – can you talk a little bit more about that?
S: Yes, if you’re cared for your marks go up and the student will put more effort into it because you know they’re cared for. (B111A)

(iii) Students are cared for at school when schools place a priority on caring for students

While students acknowledged the importance and central role of learning, they were clear that school is first and foremost a place where students should be cared for:

Caring for students should be the school’s main priority – no matter what. The marks obviously reflect on the school so that’s why they want them so high. That should matter but the care for students and how the students feel at school should be the main priority no matter what. (B111A)

You spend most of your life at school so you want school to be a good place to go to because otherwise you just look forward to the weekend and the weekend’s not very long so when you come to school you want to feel good about it and stuff. (B68B)

Students in one focus group clearly distinguished “being cared for” as an authentic and meaningful ‘practice’ of care, and as something very different to schools exercising their ‘duty of care’, that is, their legal responsibilities towards students:

Being ‘cared for’ is actually them (schools) meaning it; ‘duty of care’ is just them doing the basics of what they have to. (B111A)

(iv) Students are cared for at school when schools help students feel part of a community

A sense of belonging to a school community was a core element in students feeling cared for at school:

F: Tell me why you all feel so strongly cared for here?
S: Because everyone’s included.
F: So everyone is included? Do you all feel included?
S: Yes (chorus of agreement).
S: Because also when the teachers… also help you with some stuff like when you’re getting bullied you can just tell them and they’ll help you out. (B33B)

They’re [teachers] always free and they always tell you “If you have any problems that’s why the school community is there”. If you have any problems you can always go to them and ask and if you have no-one else to go to. (B33B)

I think that because our school has such a strong connection…like our school is based around the Good Samaritan teachings and the Benedict I think that kind of yes, it’s like affected… it’s brought onto us in a positive way like we’re careful because that’s what the Benedict’s rule was about – helping others and things like that. (B58A)
If you’re part of [school] - even social justice - they do a lot of stuff as well so I think if you’re part of different things you get a say but...

S: Everyone has the opportunity...

S: it’s just...to get involved. (BS8A)

(v) Students are cared for at school when schools provide Catholic values

For students in one school the Catholic values of the school were important in helping them feel cared for, even though they felt tension in that the values of their school were in conflict with wider social values:

S: I think it [care] depends on the morals of the school.

F: How do the morals of a school shape how you’re cared for?

S: For example we’re a Catholic school – sometimes big families they really do care for you and then you go to other schools and they just don’t care.

S: Yes but with being Catholic and everything you’re taught the Catholic ways and then it’s not actually what society hears; it’s a bit opposite. (A211B)

(vi) Students are cared for at school when schools provide rules and boundaries

Students acknowledged the importance and connection between schools providing boundaries and rules for students and student wellbeing:

S: I think rules, to be honest.


S: If they just let you run free and wreak havoc well they’re not really caring for you; it’s like “Do whatever you want” you know. (A11A)

How are you not cared for at school?

(i) Students are not cared for in school when they are not noticed or acknowledged

Students described how feeling unnoticed by the school, teachers and their peers resulted in them feeling uncared for at school, which also ultimately impacted on the respect between student and teacher:

If the teacher keeps on shutting them down, they’re going to rebel more and it’s just going to have a negative [impact] on the student. (BS11B)

Sometimes if a teacher is just pushing you aside and focusing on other people. (A43A)

S: I think that it’s not just the school itself but the people in the school – and not teachers; students as well. If your peers don’t care about you in the hall or if they don’t respect your stuff, like your space....

F: Your space?

S: Yes, especially when they are really close together – people pushing and shoving and they don’t care about each other and they don’t care which way you’re going. (BS11B)
Teachers [say] like “hurry up, get in and shut up, don’t talk” and it puts you off your learning because you don’t respect the teacher (B611B)

(ii) Students are not cared for in school when schools focus unequally on students

A theme emphasised by some students as illustrating ways in which schools do not care for students related to the unequal treatment of students. Inequality was experienced in two ways, in particular. First, in relation to specific opportunities for encouraging students to undertake extra-curricular or specialist interests:

*S: Sometimes you feel uncared for because you feel that they provide a lot for the drama students and the math academic students and the people who like debating but then you know, being somebody who’s introvert and shy and doesn’t like public speaking or performing or doing sports and likes writing and stuff – there’s not a lot of opportunities for me to excel in the area I feel comfortable in so I feel not cared for in that way that they should have more opportunities. (B511B)

Second, as has already been discussed above in relation to school rules, the harsh ways in which school rules are implemented:

*By the school rules...like the way they implement it...yes, they punish you for it. (A211A)

(iii) Students are not cared for in school when schools exclude students or see them as replaceable

Finally, for some students being excluded or made to feel as though they are not part of the school community as an example of not being cared for at school:

*When you have an idea and they shut it down negatively – negatives, whatever. (C211B)

*Saying – you don’t have to be here so don’t muck up. It’s kind of gay. They are always saying to go to the public school, that you don’t have a right to be here. (A211A)

And they just... yes that we’re really replaceable; easily replaceable. (A211A)

2.3.2 Respected

How do you feel when you are respected?

Amazing, self-worth, safe, tough, equal, important, loved, satisfied, content, cared for, worthy, secure, useful, beautiful, accepted, acknowledged, happy, nice, special, understood, awesome, self-control, a place in the world, confident, higher, superior, happy, being valued, sense of authority, good.

While there is some overlap with cared for and valued in the language students use to describe the experience of respect, it is evident that discussion constellated around several key themes: feeling like an equal, having your opinion valued and empowerment.

Students consistently referred to feeling like an equal as being a key feature of the experience of feeling respected:

*S: An equal.

*S: Yes, well it depends who it is that’s respecting you; if it’s an adult around the school or a teacher around the school who’s respecting you then it makes you feel a lot older.

F: What if it’s another peer?
Wellbeing in Schools FINAL REPORT: VOLUME TWO

S: Yes, a friend then you feel a lot more equal.

S: You feel cared for, it makes you feel like an adult and that your choice is important. It feels like you’re equal, like you’re part of the group, it gives you… it’s special, it makes you feel special just like you’re loved. (A211B)

The experience of respect was also characterised by students as knowing you have a say and that your opinion is valued:

If you’re respected you feel like your opinion is valued. (A211B)
You feel seen, like you feel you’re known around other people. (A311)
S: You feel like you’re visible to people; people know you...
S: Who you are.
F: So “respect” and “visibility” – that’s really interesting. Can you talk a bit more about how when I respect you that you feel visible?
S: Because when you’re not respected you feel like no-one really cares about you and you’re invisible, but when you’re cared for it’s like people are waiting for your opinion and stuff. (B33B)

Being respected led students to feel empowered and strong:

S: Respect: It makes you feel strong.
I. You feel strong. How does being respected make you feel strong?
S: Because if you’re respected then you feel like you can do a lot of other things.
S: You get more willpower...
F: Okay. More willpower, you can do more, more confidence...
S: Appreciated.
F: You feel appreciated.
S: You feel important...respected you have pride in yourself and you’re proud of yourself. (B23B)
You feel protected because you know that if someone respects you they care about you and if you have a problem they’re not just going to tell you to “get over it” – they’re going to try and help you through it. (B68A)

Finally, being respected was described by students as facilitating a sense of belonging in the school community:

F: Why do we need respect?
S: Because it makes you feel good.
S: And it keeps the community close.
F: “Keeps the community close”? That’s interesting. Can you talk a little bit more about that?
S: If people respect each other it’s going to be a good community. In a community if no-on likes you it’s not going to be really that tight a community is it?
F Yes. And what about “forgotten”? Why does “not being respected” make you feel “forgotten”?
S: Because there’s no-one listening to you.
S: You’re insignificant.
F: You feel “insignificant”? 
S: You feel a bit careless if you’re not respected because what’s the point of you putting in effort or caring if you’re not respected by anyone else? (B111A)

How do you feel when you are not respected?

Unwanted, crap, depressed, like a nobody, unwanted, weak, angry, guilty, sad, upset, ignored, not important, bashed, left out, no-one cares, guarded, not known, painful, low self-esteem, disheartened, badness, neglected, lonely, paranoid, unwanted, scared, not good enough, hated, disrespected, annoyed, criminal wanted, pissed off, bad, not liked, insulted, disowned

Students reported that the experience of being not respected made them feel as though they had no autonomy or sense of agency:

If you didn’t have respect in your life, really you’re not going to have confidence; you’re going to lose everything because you’ll just feel like you’re not wanted anywhere or for anything. (B611A)

If you’re not respected you feel powerless.

You feel unworthy.

Yes, not like you have a say in anything or like you’re being treated bad. (A211B)

You feel like no-one cares and everyone hates you, you feel like you’re always being judged, you feel like you’re alone, there’s no-one to talk to, you don’t feel yourself and always feel put down, you feel like you’re not worth being here and no-one wants you. (A18A)

Students further identified a sense of loneliness and disconnection when experiencing a lack of respect:

S...you feel like you’re no-one; you feel like you’re a little hollow tree.
F: A hollow tree? If you’ve got stuff happening at home and then the same stuff just happens at school?
S: That can lead to not wanting to be on the world and committing suicide.
S: It can make you feel really bad about yourself and feel like you don’t belong. (B68A)

Relatedly, the feeling of not being respected was accompanied by a sense of either not being allowed to speak, or that what is said is not taken seriously:

So there’s like a difference in “respected” – you feel like opening up and in “not respected” you just...

You’re not allowed to speak. (B18A)
If you’re not respected you don’t develop your sense... you can’t develop your opinions, you can’t develop your own thinking, you’re dependent on other people’s thinking and their ideas whereas you don’t get that... you don’t form that ability to actually form your own thinking, your own kind of thing. (B511A)

Finally, students reported that when others do not respect them, then they begin to stop respecting themselves, or seeing themselves as worthy of respect:

And if people don’t respect you, you won’t respect yourself. (B511A)

Humiliated. You start to doubt your own abilities and potential. (B511B)

Well they just aren’t respecting us ultimately. Like we are not worth it. (A211A)

How are you respected at school?

The concept of respect in school was contested in focus groups with much discussion taking place as to the meaning of the word respect itself. For example, for some students, respect was conditional on the behaviour of individuals and only to be given when deserved:

You should expect if you don’t give people respect then they’re not going to give you respect. (A18B)

[Respect] is something like a trade. If you give some respect they’ll [teachers] respect you back. (A18B)

A predominant theme in focus groups was that it was perceived that many teachers held a ‘conditional’ understanding of respect whereby students felt that they were expected to respect teachers but that this respect was not necessarily returned:

Yes, like the teacher; you have to show them respect because the school’s always like “You have to show everyone respect especially your teacher” but if the teacher’s not showing you respect, you still have to show respect. (A18B)

Like with me with a certain teacher that we have, she hasn’t shown me respect; she doesn’t respect anyone from day one so everyone’s just like you have to earn it. (A18B)

You should expect if you don’t give people respect then they’re not going to give you respect. (A18B)

If you’re respecting someone then they should show respect back. If you respect a teacher and they give you respect back then it would influence you to do your work for them. (A18B)

...innocent until proven guilty; respected until... (A28B)

If they don’t respect us why should we respect them? (B611B)

There’s no way known that the teachers would start respecting you if you don’t respect them. (B111A)

Yes, I was saying it hurts a lot when a teacher doesn’t respect you – I guess the most out of anyone that doesn’t respect you – because you feel like... well we have to sit there and we have to respect them every day and why are there sometimes when they don’t show it back? So not all the time but some of the times you find that teachers don’t respect some students - they just always have a thing against that person or... (B511B)
It’s important for you to have respect for people and in return you’ve got to feel like you’ve got to know what it feels like so you can give it on to other people. (B11B)

A less well-supported view of respect, although one still commonly expressed, was that respect was something that all people deserve:

Teachers should treat kids all with respect. (A43B)

To everyone I think it should happen because it makes you feel like you’re a part of something. (A53B)

F: Yes, so being respected – you think it should happen all the time to every person?
S: Yes.

F: Because it makes you feel like you’re part of something?
S: Yes, no matter what you do. (A43B)

Students also identified several forms of respect. For example, respect of one’s abilities might be differentiated from respect for the opinions of others:

I guess one of the aspects of being ‘respected’ is in like specific groups if you’re respected as a sports person or respected as a musician or something it means that you’re kind of one of the best but then there’s another respect which is just like respecting others’ ideas and respecting their point of view and stuff. (B511A)

One student described how respect may be expressed formally, but that this does not mean respect is actually being given:

S: With the ‘respect’ – there are two different types of respect but the teachers... sometimes the teachers make you respect them which isn’t actually giving your respect...

F: What do you mean by “there are two different types”? So you’re saying there’s “real” respect...

S: And there’s ‘forced’ respect.

F: But you’re saying that’s not actually ‘respect’?

S: No, that’s not actually respect. It’s called ‘acting’. (B68A)

We are the best actors in the world...because we are forced to respect and like someone that we actually don’t... (B68A)

While diverse opinions existed on the meaning of respect, there was unanimous agreement that respect was experienced in school when students are listened to, that their views were heard and taken into account and that students were treated with equality. These three features of respect are reported below:

(i) Students are respected at school when they are listened to

Students explained that they felt respected at school when both the school and teachers in the school listen to them:

Schools show respect by listening. (A18A)

Teachers. I care if they respect me. (A28B)
One student explained that as a special needs student he experienced being listened to in ways that made him feel cared for and that he would like to see such respectful listening extended to all students:

Well with special needs, I love how people talk to me. Sometimes like trained people because I feel like everyone cares about me and it would be nice if they talked to other people like that, instead of saying “Oh he’s got Down Syndrome; you’d better listen to him and be nice to him” or “He’s just normal, he won’t care”. (A63B)

(ii) Students are respected at school when they are given a say

Students explained that they felt respected at school when they are given a say:

Personally, for me, I think so because I feel respected and I think I can put in my opinion... like right now, I feel very safe – that’s why I’m putting my opinion in and everyone else should feel respected and that’s why everyone is actually forming their own opinions and is honest and can actually say what they want because you’re respected and you know what you say will be respected. (B511A)

As part of being given a say, students emphasised that this included tolerance of differing opinions to those expressed by their teachers:

S: You have freedom of speech.
F: Freedom of speech? So where would you want to have more freedom of speech than you currently have?
S: Well because we do heaps of stuff and then we don’t do group activities that much...
S: And if a teacher does something... like if a teacher gets a question wrong or something wrong, they won’t let you correct them; they always say “No, this is the way you do it”– even though you know it’s not correct.
S: “This is the way you do it” and it’s not.
F: Yes, okay, so school’s a place where you’re supposed to have fun and learn. I’m interested in this “having a say”. What do you mean by “having a say”?
S: If the teachers have a discussion and they have an agreement on something but you disagree and you can’t talk they should have a say on why they disagree or if they disagree or agree. (A43A)

The issue of school councils (SRCs) was also raised by students as one form of having a say, although opinions differed as to the effectiveness of these for ensuring the views of all students were heard. This exchange in one focus group is illustrative:

Well getting back to student council, I actually don’t like it because student council. His name is .....who’s on the student council, I told him all my problems and he said “Why are you telling me” and I said “You’re in student council” and he said “So?”(A63B)

We should have one [Student council] for the school leaders and then have one for students who do stuff with the students...who are not school leaders because it’s kind of hard to tell a school leader “Oh this is happening in my situation”
Because we’ve got student council and they’re all the leaders and they’re like another one ………they get to do it but we miss out.

I reckon student council should be like students don’t talk to other students; they should talk to an older person that can actually understand us.

This is what I think of student council – they are fake councils, they don’t do anything. (A63B)

While having a say was important to students, they also were clear that their views needed to be acted upon. Such actions were not envisaged as teachers acting in accordance with students’ wishes so much as teachers acknowledging the view of the student and taking it into account:

Sometimes I don’t feel like our opinions are always respected – not by our peers – but sometimes by our teachers...

Yes, like when they’re not…we’re allowed to speak them but they’re kind of not given the same respect as their opinions. (B58A)

It’s pretty hard to come across a teacher that really respects and values your opinion; a lot of them they listen to you and they ask your opinion but they don’t do anything about it – they just leave it. (B611B)

(iii) Students are respected at school when they are treated equally

Students also noted, albeit to a lesser extent than having a say, that being respected in school involved treating all students equally:

Treating students equally. (A211A)

They say that like “You respect us and respect you” but if there’s only a few people doing the wrong thing they keep the whole class in so technically they’re not respecting. (A18A)

(iv) Students feel respected at school when they are treating teachers with respect

Despite differing understandings of the meaning of respect, some students considered that respect for teachers was important to their own wellbeing:

You see how much they enjoy something and you want to be able to enjoy it as much as they do and that’s not something that a lot of teachers have after such a long time doing the same job. They’re still just as good a teacher but it’s just that small thing that makes the difference – they’re still learning so they want to learn and they want us to learn. (B511A)

How are you not respected at school?

Students identified three main areas in school life where they did not feel respected:

(i) Students are not respected at school when schools do not respect or value students’ opinions

Given the strong emphasis of students on the importance of having a say and being heard, many students identified that not having their views respected or valued resulted in them feeling as though they are not respected in school:

At school there’s all these “You do this, do this, do this” and there’s not “We want to do this and do it in a different way”…
They don’t value the children’s opinion.

Yes, like suggestions….Like they keep on pushing you back down (A43A)

When the teachers… if they don’t listen to what you have to say so you feel like you get in trouble for something that you didn’t do and you say “No, I didn’t do that, I was just doing this” and then they just give you a yellow slip anyway or something.

Yes, and then they don’t even value what you have to say. (B68A)

(ii) Students are not respected at school when teachers yell at or insult students

The experience of being yelled at by teachers was the most tangible response from students linked to not being respected. In addition to this extensive data, students also reported that being inappropriately and/or publically disciplined was sometimes experienced as a form of disrespect:

I felt disrespected because even if she did have a problem maybe it wasn’t an appropriate time. (C38C)

I feel like Miss Smith abuses her power…Like with me she kind of bullies (C311A)

At the sports carnival the teacher insulted me and said my shirt was “ugly”. (C311A)

(iii) Students are not respected at school when teachers do not use diverse methods and approaches to teaching

For students in secondary school, there was a sense of feeling disrespected when teachers did not make an effort to use diverse and creative approaches to teaching. For example, in discussing the issue of respect, one Year 8 said, routine teaching practices were one form of not respecting students:

Of the teaching so they’re not doing...

The routine.

...yes, so we’re not doing everything exactly the same...

Be different and original. (A28B)

Students in a Year 11 focus group noted a similar issue:

There’s one teacher – I’m not going to say – but you’ll walk into class and you sit down and you expect them to teach you because it’s what you go to class for and they’ll just walk in and say “This is what you’ve got to do; do it” and they won’t help you...

They won’t give you any demonstrations...

And we’ll sit there and wait for them to teach us and we’re willing to learn and we’re respecting them in that way that we’re willing to listen to them but then they won’t teach us that or if they won’t teach us in that way they’re not respecting us when we’re respecting them. (BS11B)
2.3.3 Valued

How do you feel when you are valued?

Self confident, good, not crap, very accepted, smart, included, respected, loved, special, appreciated, worthy, loved, important, “top of the world”, “even inside”, joyful, visible, part of something, kindness, part of something, happy, have power, wanted, “you have purpose.”

The experience of being valued was expressed in terms of feeling a sense of belonging, feeling recognised and feeling as though one was making a contribution.

Students identified a sense of belonging as one of the key experiences of feeling valued:

You feel needed.

You feel like you’re contributing to something; like you’re a part of something, you’re doing something with your life I guess.

Well there’s a sense of pride about it if you’re being rewarded for something that you’re doing actively; it encourages you.

Yes, it makes you feel like you’ve got reason to do stuff. (A111B)

It’s important yes because ‘valued’ – if you’re valued it means that you feel like a part of society… (A28B)

Students further defined feeling valued when something special about you is noticed by another person:

When someone realises something special about you. (A18B)

Valued is being appreciated for who you are. When you’re valued your self-worth is better because you feel more loved and confident, you feel like you have a purpose so your self-concept – how you think others see you – is a lot better because if you’re valued then you think that those people value you and so your self-concept is better. You feel like your goals are achievable – so your value, you feel confident and that kind of thing. (A311B)

Because it gives you some sense of worth like you want to try and you want to do something if someone else values you. (B611A)

It’s kind of like having something that’s expensive and you care for it a lot. (B33B)

If you feel ‘valued’ if someone shows that they think highly of you, you feel important and loved; just like the other ones, you feel like you’re worth something and useful, like you are someone. (B511A)

Finally, students identified being valued as being acknowledged as being able to make a contribution and that other people wanted you to make that contribution:

Well you feel needed and wanted and you feel valued. (B68A)

You actually feel like you’re contributing to society and if you’re ‘not valued’ it feels like “Oh, no-one needs me here, I’m not doing anything for anyone”… (A28B)

It makes you feel needed, it makes you feel like you are contributing to something, you’re not talking to yourself; you’re having people listen to you. (C211A)
How do you feel when you are not valued?

Stupid, worthless, unwanted, unaccepted, depressed, disapproved, angry, sad, upset, “don’t exist”, suicidal, embarrassed, excluded, a loner, “uneven inside”, unappreciated, miserable, hopeless, apathetic, invisible, “not worth having a say”, “discarded”“not welcome”, “ice cold”, betrayed, unloved.

As the list above reveals, students utilised powerful language to describe the experience of not being valued. Of all the three dimensions, however, it is evident that the data collected in relation to not being valued was most commonly linked to the experience of depression and mental health:

But it’s a bit like if you’re not valued, then all those things will run through your head and mental health or mental illnesses come into play and it just gets all out of hand. (B511B)

It affects your self esteem and you get down on yourself. (A111B)
If you’re continually not valued then you’d probably get depressed. (A18B)
When you’re not valued and you don’t feel mentally fit so to speak. (A111A)
And you feel helpless and you don’t contribute to society. (A28B)
If you’re ‘not valued’, you’d feel suicidal. (A28B)
If no-one thinks you have any good things that you...... have no point in life. (B18B)

As well, students identified how not feeling valued led students to feeling apathetic, negative and worthless:

‘Not wellbeing’ space. You see other people continuously being valued over yourself but you’re still putting in effort and everything. Everyone puts in effort but some people don’t get rewarded for it and acknowledged for it so that you don’t put in effort anymore because they don’t really see where it’s taking them....it’s like they don’t value my effort so why bother? (A111B)

When you feel ‘not valued’ you feel worthless and you can’t offer anything; you know how you offer your talents, you can’t do anything because you’re just bad at everything. (A63B)
Okay so how is feeling invisible when you’re not... or is being ‘not valued’ the invisibility that comes with that – different to not being respected? Like when you’re not ‘valued’ it’s like you’re not supposed to be here; you’re not supposed to be where you are now and it’s like nobody cares and nobody cares about what you think or your opinion or anything. (B33B)
You don’t feel as strong and you feel unwanted; like people don’t want to be near you and you feel negative. It just doesn’t feel right. (B58B)

Finally, one student noted that the experience of not being valued could lead to an individual feeling as though they could not ‘be themselves’ but rather needed to act like others in the school who are valued:

Like when you’re not valued and you see someone else who’s valued you kind of wonder why they are and then you try and be like that and then it kind of makes you change yourself because you’re not really being true to yourself; you’re trying to be somebody else and that’s somebody that you’re not. (B58B)
How are you valued at school?

(i) Students are valued at school when teachers notice the abilities and gifts of students and support them to offer them to the school community

Students reported that teachers noticing their abilities and gifts and encouraging them to use them in school was one way in which schools helped students feel valued:

> Yes, I think the teachers need to take advantage of everyone’s gifts and everyone’s… what they’re good at…. because everyone is different and so they need to be able to use the resources that everyone has to offer. (A311B)

> S: Because someone’s saying “You’re really good at that” and you’re like “Thanks” – that’s your own…

> F: Oh it’s your own skill.

> S: Yes, if you’re in a group and they value the group you also feel as an individual as well.

> S: Individuality should possibly be valued a bit more because not everybody likes this or not everybody likes that I suppose. (B511B)

(ii) Students are valued at school when teachers put in extra effort for students

Students further emphasized how teachers who put in ‘extra’ effort for their students facilitated student experience of feeling valued:

> I think sometimes when a teacher puts extra effort in like with the individual you feel valued. (A211B)

> When teachers really put in the work to help you out like they go out of their way just to help you when you need it like you don’t even ask for it but they know they have to do something. (B611B)

(iii) Students are valued at school when students have opportunities to be listened to and heard

The experience of teachers listening to students and inviting students to express their opinions was identified as an important aspect of students feeling valued in schools:

> Like with the teacher, when you feel valued, you feel like if you were to tell them something they would actually listen. If you were to say “I can see that you’re treating me different than others” and they really take that in then you feel ‘valued’ because they actually listened and they’re trying to… (B58B)

> And the teachers ask you – like you have every right… like what you don’t like and then they help you so you like it more and make it more…(B33B)

> When teachers connect with students, involve you, understand you. (B68A)

(iv) Students are valued at school when schools adopt a holistic approach to teaching

Students in one focus group raised the idea that students feel valued when teachers are interested in the whole student and as educating the whole child:
Yes, this school particularly has a very holistic approach to its teaching staff; they look for the more whole, well-rounded student. I think that creates an environment where you’re more valued and more noticed and cared for rather than just an academic marks orientated approach to teaching. (A311B)

**How are you not valued at school?**

(i) **Students are not valued at school when teachers do not know their students**

The experience of being unnoticed was a central feature of a school that made students feel not valued, with the experience of teachers not knowing the names of their students commonly identified as a key contributing factor:

S: Well you need to feel that you are of some kind of value to someone.

F: And this is the role of schools is it?

S: Yes, you have to feel valued in school; if you don’t feel valued then the school is not doing their job...because there are so many students in one school it’s hard to feel personally valued; it’s like you’re all as one but not you personally. Do you know what I mean? (A211A)

So when teachers have lots and lots of classes it’s really devaluing when like at the first. I remember in Year 8 I had the teacher who didn’t know my name by third term. (B511A)

I’d had the same teacher for Year 7, 8 and 9 and she was still calling me... I don’t even know what she was calling me...I know that they have lots and lots of classes but it’s still almost like “You don’t know who I am?” (B511A)

(ii) **Students are not valued at school when teachers focus on the abilities of only those who excel**

Students described that the experience of being valued was diminished when teachers noticed and/or focused on the abilities and gifts of those students were excelling in one particular field:

...if you don’t feel valued you don’t try anymore because you think “It doesn’t matter; nobody cares”. Like last year in my English class, the teacher would focus only on the smart... the ones that would get really...she’d only focus on somebody and make people like... individuals sit there and do nothing and learn nothing. (A18B)

(iii) **Students are not valued at school when teachers speak to students in a degrading way**

A final form of feeling unvalued by students was in the experience of not being valued as a group of students. This was especially so for older students, as the following data from two Year 11 focus groups reveals:

Sometimes, when teachers speak to you like you are a child it’s really degrading and it’s almost like “oh, I’m so old now please don’t talk to me like that”. (B511A)

Sometimes they have really low expectations they think you are going to be the same as all the other students (C311A)

Following on from the brainstorming questions on the students’ conceptualisation of wellbeing and the break out group discussion on recognition theory, students were then asked to imagine a school that supported, promoted and excelled their wellbeing (see Volume 1 for more information on this method). In the following section we report this data.
2.4 How do students envisage a school that facilitates their wellbeing?

The culminating activity of the focus groups was the ‘imagining great schools’ activity, where students were invited to draw or write about ‘what an ideal wellbeing school might look like?’ on a shared or individual poster. Further prompt questions included ‘if schools were to take notice of what you have to say, how would they be different to now?’ The primary school cohorts were asked slightly different questions, for instance the younger students were prompted with, ‘what do you think is the most important thing schools can do to help students to be happy here?’ and ‘what would you like in school that makes you happy, safe and cared for?’ Older students usually opted to write about their imaginary school, while the younger students (Years 1-2) preferred to draw.

The starting point for students in conceptualising an ideal school for wellbeing was understandably grounded in their current experience of school. With further prompts, an eclectic ‘wellbeing school’ began to emerge, some often with rather somewhat utopian features. These imaginary schools had a strong grounding in communal values, such as sharing, respect, cooperation, participation and equality, as well as identifying resources to support the students’ wellbeing needs. Such values were reflected within and across the four major themes that emerged in the data from both primary and secondary students, specifically concerning improvements to 1) pedagogy; 2) school environment; 3) relationships; and 4) opportunities to have a say. While these four themes were evident in the images and written accounts across all cohorts, the following discussion highlights some of the nuances and difference in emphasis, depending on the ages of the students.

2.4.1 Improved pedagogy

For students in Years 1-2 (6-8 year olds) improvements to pedagogy were mostly represented in their images as resources to support their learning. For example, they wrote and talked about: a “tick” room (where efforts are graded), books, a library, lounge areas in the classroom as a place “to work and read”, classrooms, desks “to work on”, and “words you can learn”. The students discussed wanting practical ways to learn, such as learning about safety through caring for dangerous animals, and learning from doing and watching. As one student stated, “making movies at our school for watching things to help you learn”.

The students in Years 5-6 (10-12 year olds) discussed similar ideas but emphasised features such as “outside learning”, “individual help on certain subjects”, “different ways to do a subject”, “hands-on work”, “fun learning activities”, “different activities to find out what learner you are” and “students should write down what they want to learn about and why”. These students also put a strong emphasis on the role of their teacher in facilitating their learning. For instance, one suggestion was “teachers that are taught from the highest universities… so they know good teaching skills and a good way to teach”. Other students mentioned how these teaching skills went hand in hand with the teachers’ attitude toward the class, such as “very open-minded teachers who don’t always put grades before fun”, "honest teachers", teachers who are “able to mingle with the students” and teachers who are not “airy-fairy”.

As signalled earlier, the secondary school aged students in Year 8 (13-14 year olds) preferred to discuss the imaginary schools topic and then write on their posters rather than engage in drawing. The students in this age cohort also discussed the need for more skilled teachers, and practical, fun lessons to enhance for learning experiences. However, they were more direct and critical about issues such as the need for “a new curriculum”, “more electives”, “learning things we actually need”
and “organised teachers”. Most of the students wanted to tailor their learning experiences through “lifelong lessons”, “interactive lessons”, “no writing lines”, “less focus on school rules and more focus on education”, “young teachers” and “practical lessons”. The students also wrote about learning outside and in different spaces, for instance “once a week go outside”, “classrooms outside”, and “new environments occasionally”. Similar to the Year 5-6 students, this older age cohort often put emphasis on the teacher’s responsibilities for improving these learning experiences, such as ‘teachers who know their subjects’. Students in this age cohort also desired more elective choices, particularly “more sport”.

The Year 11 students (16-17 year olds) were more orientated towards their future with a stronger emphasis on fairness and equality in pedagogical practices, such as with assessment marking and the way lessons are currently approached. For example, they indicated on their posters the “need to learn in different ways to build our range of knowledge” and “lessons for the future” and “all exams corrected fairly and with care”. Others wrote “more feedback on assignments”, “constructive feedback given by teachers”, “more time for homework”, and students “encouraged to put in more effort [and] not disciplined for not doing it”.

Overall, these nuanced responses across all age groups concerning pedagogy suggest that students were making a direct link between their wellbeing and the kind of teaching and learning processes they were engaged in or exposed to. Both the visual and textual data suggested that the students did not perceive they had much influence over these processes even though they could articulate well the pedagogical improvements they felt needed to be made to improve wellbeing.

2.4.2 Improved school environment – socio-emotional and physical

An improved school environment that engendered feelings of happiness, fun and safety emerged across all cohorts but was especially evident in the drawings and discussions of the younger cohorts. For instance, many of the drawings from the Year 1-2 group and some of the Year 5-6 group included rainbows to symbolise happiness. Another Year 1-2 student talked about their wellbeing school as having “love ...in the air”. Similarly, the Year 5-6 students’ posters often included lists of positive affective language to describe their ideal words for their schools, like “happy”, “fun”, and “peaceful”. One student suggested that there needed to be a “happy rule” that the principal had to enact if people were sad. Here positive feelings in school are perceived as being led by adults. The older students similarly discussed having a school that has these ‘positive’ attributes, as one Year 11 student stated, “Well I think it needs to be an architecturally designed school for happiness so everything is bright...and lots of grass and stuff like that and trees to makes us feel happy”. Another wrote “you feel good and great and happy and loving and joyful”. Such perspectives reveal the importance students place on school being a socially and emotionally supportive place through how it feels and looks.

The younger cohorts placed a strong emphasis on the existing physical structures in the school environment as being important for their wellbeing, such as offices, classrooms, the principal’s office, sick bays and churches. The Year 1-2 students’ drawings also pointed to the importance of the school environment being safe. For example, some depicted being safe from fire, while others pointed to issues of security. A few students discussed having “police” at their school and others stated that they wanted to have “security guards”. These desires for safety extended to emotional as well as physical security. For instance, “it [school] should be a place where you feel safe, a haven”; “the teacher makes sure you don’t get hurt...there is a gate to protect and everyone gets the same
amount of respect - everyone is safe and happy”; “there is a secret [security key] card to keep us safe from robbers”. Here, school is positioned as a sanctuary where students feel protected.

The desire for natural space was also evident across all participants, and especially for the Year 1-2 cohort, who viewed nature as integral to having fun in their wellbeing school. Their drawings incorporated “shady trees”, sunshine, flowers, beaches and animals. The students also conveyed the desire for further facilities to be added to the natural environment, such as “play swings”, “a jumping castle” and outdoor swimming pools and water slides. These were used to further convey the importance students placed on having fun and being happy at school.

Similarly, the Year 5-6 participants also highlighted their desire for more carefree fun-like leisure experiences at school, in particular sport and alternative learning spaces. In their drawings, these ‘sport’ spaces were often depicted as larger than learning spaces - large swimming pools, tennis courts, entertainment areas, aquatic centres, soccer/football fields. The students also drew utility rooms that would provide them with fun learning experiences and, further, to relax and express themselves in school away from the classroom. For example, an “Apple tech room”, “music vocal room”, “meditation rooms”, “boxing bag room”, “counselling room”, “no gravity rooms” (to learn about space), “drama room”, “movie rooms” and “art rooms”. Some students also wrote about and/or drew having bright, cheerful colourful classrooms, such as different coloured desks and/or coloured walls. Other resources for school work were discussed, mainly iPads and laptops, as well as interactive white boards. These ideas suggest that having fun alongside learning, as well and further, alternative spaces for leisure, that provide are both emotional and physical support is significant for the younger students’ sense of wellbeing.

The Year 8 and Year 11 students also perceived the school environment to be important for their wellbeing but they tended to emphasise the physical more than the emotional environment. For instance, infrastructure featured regularly for both the Year 8 and Year 11 students: “swimming pools”, “play equipment”, “sports ovals”, “air conditioning”, “heating” and “clean toilets/classrooms”.

The range of ideas and concepts that emerged from the students across all cohorts highlights the importance of space and the nuanced ways they link the aesthetic and physical environment with their social and emotional needs at school.

2.4.3 Improved relationships

Relationships featured strongly across all cohorts. The Year 1-2 students imagined improved, caring, dispute-free relationships with teachers, the principal and friends, as well as competent teachers who could mediate conflict. For example, these teacher-student and student-student relationships were depicted in a cartoon-like drawing from one student with an over-seeing teacher looking at disputes between students. In the interaction, the teacher is admiring and valuing the student’s comradeship after some incidents have occurred:

Two students look towards each other:

Student 1: “OK lets sort out this fight”, Student 2: “OK”.

Two students sit in a circle space that looks like seats.

Student 3: “say sorry”, Student 4: “sorry”.

54
Teacher stands in centre of these scenarios, and is drawn taller with big hair and with red writing: Teacher response: "That’s good!"

Here students depict themselves as being able to sort out their own incidents, resulting in the teacher’s admiration and approval.

In addition, to the importance placed on attending to conflict in positive, proactive ways, there was a strong focus on the emotional support provided through relationships at school, such as feeling loved, safe, happy and cared for. For example, when asked by the interviewer why people looked so happy in their drawing, the student responded, with “because they’re caring for other people” and “[caring for] the other kids in the school”. Others drew students holding hands, principals, and teachers smiling in the drawings, discussing ideas such as “everyone is friendly”, “everyone being friendly to each other”, and “a friendly school”. Another talked about the principal in their drawing in terms of “he’s just supervising, going around and see that the kids are safe”.

The Year 5-6 students imagined their wellbeing school as having relationships based on equality and respect - both with their friends and teachers. For instance, one student wrote on their poster “no put downs, no excluding and no being rough”. These types of words were regularly used in their posters, with a particular emphasis on “no bullying”, and the need for inclusion. In contrast to the Year 1-2 students, these older students were better able to articulate their desire for teachers and principals who listened, were fun, showed understanding and noticed their students. For example, one student drew electronic “tell-a-teacher” communication portals around a playground, stating that these portals were places where students could confide in a teacher if they were being bullied. This student wrote on their poster “if you are bullied go to the ‘tell-a-teacher’”. Having trust in teachers was a recurring theme for the primary school cohorts, whether this pertained to issues of safety, conflict or fun. Such trust appeared to be critical for the primary school students in imagining schools as places where they felt known and cared for.

While the issue of respect was certainly implicit in the Year 1-2 and Year 5-6 drawings and narratives, the Year 8 students explicitly identified their desire for relationships with teachers and other students to be understanding and respectful. This older age cohort focused on the support schools could provide to facilitate respectful relationships and communication, evident in comments like, “I want teachers to be more interested in us as people rather than just ‘well you have to do the work’”. Good relationships with peers also featured strongly, signalling a strong desire for inclusion as evidenced in “no bullying/no peer group pressure”, “no racism”, and, “no bracism” (i.e., not being ostracised for wearing braces).

The Year 11 participants placed even more emphasis on the importance of consultation at school and more understanding and equality in their relationships with their teachers. Issues pertaining to equality and respect were mentioned often: “respect for students, more choice, friendship among all peers, equality, respect between teacher AND students” (student’s emphasis). This cohort were more attuned to issues of power and authority and explored ways that an ideal wellbeing school might find a better balance in the power relationships between teachers and students: “teachers take the time to ask how you are personally so you are not always treated like a student”; “…the rules that are made give teachers too much power [to] ‘discipline’ against students”. Students sought more understanding from teachers about their lives, such as increased “check ups”, and more personalised learning experiences: “more awareness of efforts” and “teachers more aware of [students] current issues in home life”. Overall, the Year 11 participants imagined the optimal
Wellbeing in Schools FINAL REPORT: VOLUME TWO

wellbeing environment at school as one that is highly dependent on trust, warm, positive relationships, good communication and more respect and equality between teachers and students.

2.4.4 Improved opportunities to ‘have a say’

Given this research was designed to provide students (and teachers) with the opportunity to express their views, it is not altogether unexpected to find a strong theme in the data around the importance of ‘opportunities to have a say’ for student wellbeing. While this theme was not as evident in data from the Year 1-2 students, the Year 5-6 students emphasised the importance of ‘voice’ in having a say regarding school procedures, such as “being allowed to sit with friends”, “you’re allowed to be in the same class as your friend”, “allowed to choose your teacher”, and “students get asked on how the school should be run”.

The Year 8 students also explicitly highlighted their desire for a school where their voice is heard, to have more of a say in decision making, and to help ensure their needs are known and supported. Some stated that they wanted opportunities for students to “say what’s on their mind” and have more “freedom of speech”, particularly in relation to matters like detentions, opportunities to “explain yourself”, canteen food and uniform choice - “no uniform”, “lighter clothes”, “cool uniforms” and “neat and smart uniform”.

As signalled earlier in relation to issues of power and authority in school, Year 11 students placed the notion of having a say much more centrally in their imagined wellbeing school. They asked for more voice in relation to issues such as uniform requirements, school rules (and how these rules are constructed), and more consistency with punishments. There appeared to be a stronger more of a call for school to be a more democratic environment that prepares them for life: “school rules that match society’s rules”. The agency of the students was very evident in their desire to be able to influence change in schools.

2.5 Summary of student findings

The qualitative data from students collected in Phase 2 of the research reveals they have rich insights into the conceptualisation and practice of wellbeing in schools. Firstly, we reveal students’ initial understandings of wellbeing, which clustered around notions of being, having, and doing:

- **Wellbeing as Being** - was identified as being physical, social and emotional (described as being happy, loved and trusted), and spiritual, all of which were perceived as integral to wellbeing;
- **Wellbeing as Having** - related to notions of having equality, voice, respect, support from adults, privacy and rights as important for wellbeing; and finally,
- **Wellbeing as Doing** – related to students’ own actions as also constituting wellbeing. These included being active in seeking out personal wellbeing through: looking after and caring for oneself, self-acceptance, making good decisions, acts of kindness and generosity for others.

Overall, students conceptualised wellbeing through positive relationships, defined as trust, care, equality and respect across the three dimensions of life: physical, social and emotional, and spiritual.

Furthermore, students described the ‘absence of wellbeing’, which they defined in terms of a prolonged state of negative emotions, with the language of *depression* used most commonly by students to capture this absence of wellbeing. In this sense, depression was a catch phrase to
describe many of the emotions and feelings that can be attached to wellbeing, as well as the acknowledgement by students of depression as a mental illness. In addition to depression, stress and anxiety were identified as the most common experiences accompanying the absence of student wellbeing.

Wellbeing, then, is a social construct that can only be fully understood through its practice and its effects. Secondly, the data was reported in relation to students’ exploration of the ‘practice’ of wellbeing. Here students identified a diverse range of relationships with family, school and the community as key sites of wellbeing. These included self and self-work, outside (of school) institutions, outside (of school) significant people, significant people inside school, peers/children’s culture inside school and school itself. Here relationships with self, friends, teachers, parents and school were identified as the most influential in facilitating and impeding student wellbeing. These findings point to some of the subtle and explicit ways in which core relationship dynamics impact on student wellbeing, including at school. Further, the data suggests that while there is a significant focus already on wellbeing in schools, there are some key areas still requiring attention.

Thirdly, the data from students’ engagement with ideas associated with recognition theory is reported. This data progress insights into how wellbeing is understood and practiced in schools. As discussed in Volume 1, recognition theory acknowledges the highly relational nature of humans and the importance of the ‘other’ for an individual’s wellbeing. The data here clearly reveals that the three dimensions of recognition – cared for, respected and valued – resonate with students’ understandings and experience of wellbeing, and further allowed students to deepen and differentiate various aspects of the relational dimensions of wellbeing highlighted earlier in the focus group discussions. Essentially, this data points to how the experience of being cared for, respected and valued enables students to feel more self-confident, worthy and connected at school. Inversely, students were also able to articulate the effects of not feeling cared for, respected and valued, thereby drawing attention to obvious areas for improvement in schools, particularly by way of relationships.

Finally, we reported on the data generated in the last part of focus group discussions where students imagined an ideal school for wellbeing. Here, the students reflected on their earlier insights and further refined, developed and/or elaborated upon elements they perceived as optimum for wellbeing in schools. In this way, students described various improvements related to pedagogy, school environment (socio-emotional and physical), relationships and opportunities to have a say.

2.6 Discussion of student findings

The findings reported above underline the critical importance of asking children directly about their wellbeing in order to improve knowledge and understandings of this, along with developing more appropriate policy and program responses (Ben-Arieh, 2010; McAuley, Morgan, & Rose, 2010). Our approach in this research is part of the “growing movement that recognises children are able to provide both a competent commentary on their own experiences and the lives of children in general” (Aldgate, 2010, p. 28). Gaining the subjective perspectives of children about their lives, Ben-Arieh (2010) argues, is a relatively new approach in research which, until recently, focussed on objective descriptions and measures, treating children as passive objects. Moreover, (Soutter, 2011, p. 2) noted “a gap in the literature addressing what it means to be well in contemporary schooling contexts, particularly from the perspectives of those intimately involved with the practices of teaching and learning” and that “students, particularly senior secondary students in their last two
years of schooling, have been an untapped resource in contemporary wellbeing research” (p.3). Furthermore, as Aldgate (2010, p. 29) asserts, “…unless adults are willing to try to understand how children themselves see their daily lives, there will be shortcomings in any attempts to promote a child-centred approach to children’s wellbeing”. The very act of asking students in the focus groups, ‘What does wellbeing mean?’, acknowledges their competence and agency to engage with notions of their own wellbeing. Moreover, students’ constructions and conceptualisations of wellbeing can be taken up in various school improvement endeavours.

2.6.1 Student conceptualisation of ‘wellbeing’

Students found the term ‘wellbeing’ to be at once familiar and foreign and as such, difficult to define. In this endeavour they are not alone, as Watson et al (2012, p. 18) observe:

Wellbeing is...contextually located in family, school and societal circumstances. As all these concepts and contexts change and evolve, so does wellbeing. This fluidity and relationality has tasked philosophers for centuries.

In addition, students reported the concept ‘wellbeing’ can be ambiguous, which reflects the contradictions and differences found in academic literature on the meaning and dimensions of the term (see for example Eckersley, 2005; Pollard & Lee, 2003; Urbis, 2011; Webster, 2013). The data also highlights the capacity of students to sit comfortably (and sometimes not so comfortably!) with the paradox of wellbeing, for example, that one can feel “sad and happy” and still have wellbeing.

‘Being’, ‘having’ and ‘doing’ were adopted as the conceptual framework for understanding wellbeing as expressed by the students. This framework arose directly out of the data in that the three words being, having, doing were the most common ways students framed their response to the question ‘What is wellbeing?’

There is strong support in the international literature for framing wellbeing this way. For example, Bradshaw, Hoelscher, and Richardson (2006) compared wellbeing of children and young people in the European Union by focussing on the ‘having’ aspect of wellbeing. They used what is described as a multi-dimensional approach to their analysis, yet their child wellbeing index addressed eight clusters (children’s material situation, housing, health, subjective well-being, education, children’s relationships, civic participation and risk and safety) which all appear to fall predominantly in the dimension of ‘having’, with the exception of civic participation which could be classed as ‘doing’. However, this may be due to the researchers use of existing databases, which would limit the data available to ‘traditional’ indicators of wellbeing, as Ben-Arieh (2010) argues was the case in another meta-analysis, conducted by Land, Lamb and Mustillo in the USA in 2001.

In the United Kingdom, the Children’s Rights Director for England, Roger Morgan (2005), reports that after consulting children under 12 regarding the five most important outcomes for children described in ‘Every Child Matters’ (UK), the children suggested adding more outcomes that they thought were important for all children. The top seven extra outcomes, in order, are: family, friends, enough food and drink, fun, love, respect, and being happy.

These outcomes address the dimensions of having but also suggest being and doing in regards to fun (doing as well as having), love (being loved and loving others) and respect (being respected and respecting others). These were in addition to the five outcomes the government had provided to the children (which do engage the domains of being, having and doing), and the children confirmed...
these outcomes as important. In order of importance to the children, these were: staying safe; being healthy; enjoying life and learning; helping others; and having enough money.

More recently, (Morgan, 2010) reports the top ten components of wellbeing for children and young people, according to 1193 children and young people. The researchers told the children and young people that “the dictionary says that well-being means being ‘comfortable, healthy and happy’” (p.28). They asked children and young people what they thought was important for them to feel like that and did not suggest any answers themselves (Morgan, 2010). The top ten mainly fall into the domains of having and being: being healthy (44%); feeling loved (24%); having a home (23%); enjoying activities and having fun (21%); feeling happy (19%); being cared for (17%); being safe (17%); having a family (14%); having friends (13%); being supported (11%).

Soutter, Gilmore and O’Steen (2011) developed a conceptual framework of wellbeing based on a cross-disciplinary review of the wellbeing literature. In the model, they conceptualised wellbeing in terms of seven broad domains: having, being, relating, thinking, feeling, functioning and striving. In addition to Soutter et al’s domains of having and being, the remaining five domains, ‘relating’, ‘thinking’, ‘feeling’, ‘functioning’ and ‘striving’ can all be categorised as ‘doing’ in relation to the findings of the current study.

In her study of New Zealand students, Soutter (2011) asked focus groups, ‘What is your definition of wellbeing?’ Their list of responses follows, which placed their responses in Soutter, Gilmore and O’Steen’s (2011) conceptual framework for wellbeing:

- things that make you happy (having, feeling)
- good life e.g. healthy, wealthy (being, having)
- having friends and family with you no matter what you are going through (relating)
- being well, happy, body image, the way someone lives and feels; sexually active (being, feeling, thinking, functioning, feeling, relating)
- career, what you are doing; the environment around you; wealthy, poor, crowd – hanging out with the wrong crowd; who you’re with: supportive people, non-supportive (functioning, having, relating)
- hauora – different aspects of your life – family, social, etc. ... and how you feel about them. What’s the best things for you to get on with family, friends (relating, feeling, having)
- makes you think; friendship; knowledge (thinking, relating, thinking)
- being pleased and happy with all aspects and dimensions of your life (thinking, feeling).

It can be seen from the predominantly discrete work of the above mentioned authors, that children and young people’s conceptualisations of wellbeing have been grouped in various ways in terms of ‘having’, ‘being’ and ‘doing’. The current study identified these conceptualisations in isolation to the above mentioned studies, however confirm that the essence of students’ conceptualisation of wellbeing in this study are valuable in that they offer new insights into existing literature, despite the complexity and uncertainty of the concept itself. These three domains are now explored further.

**Wellbeing as being**

As reported earlier, for some students, wellbeing was identified as a state of ‘being’, one that existed when they felt their needs and aspirations were being positively met and when they experienced a
sense of satisfaction. Students identified this ‘state’ of being to exist across different, albeit interrelated, dimensions of: physical, social and emotional, and spiritual wellbeing.

These three dimensions differ slightly to a list of five that Soutter (2011) presented to students in New Zealand students, which were: social, spiritual, physical, cognitive/academic, and emotional. Soutter (2011) asked students to define wellbeing in terms of these five domains. While the New Zealand students did not create the list of domains, they were able to add their own definitions in terms of the domain, including the domain that is not represented in the current study: cognitive/academic. This domain was described by the students in Soutter’s study as “How well you do at school with your academic progress; How a person thinks and how they use there [sic] cleverness in school; Your intelligence in school and class work; Personal best and nothing else matters; What you know about things; personal best nothing less” (2011, p.13). This domain was not identified by the students in the current study, however we must be mindful that the students in Soutter’s study also did not identify the domain, rather they were asked to define it. This perhaps reflects more a difference in methodological approaches than a difference in students’ conceptualisations of wellbeing.

The three domains of ‘being’ in terms of wellbeing identified in the current study are now discussed.

**Physical wellbeing** was consistently identified and acknowledged by students as something that must be in place in order for the other social and emotional, and spiritual dimensions to be satisfied. This notion of physical wellbeing as a prerequisite to other dimensions is reflected in the literature. For example, Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy of needs places the physiological as the base of the hierarchy pyramid, followed by safety, love/belonging, esteem, and finally self-actualization. There are multiple dimensions to physical wellbeing evident in the student data, including having one’s material needs met such as food, personal safety, and physical activity. Research thus supports the students’ view that physical activity is a means of improving children’s sense of wellbeing. For example Moriarty’s (2013) study of Victorian children found that they experienced heightened sensory awareness, robust sense of personal identity and enriched relationships arising from participation in sport. In New Zealand, Wright and Burrow’s (2004) study of year 4 and year 8 students’ discourses on health, when asked about health framed in terms of ‘total wellbeing’, the students responses focussed almost entirely around physical health, with the researchers stating “it was very rare to find no mention of diet and exercise (or being fit) in one form or another” in students’ responses (p.220).

There is much attention to safety in terms of student wellbeing in the school setting, in policies, and in the literature. Much of this is directed to the issue of bullying. In the UK, children and young people “regularly mention relationships within the peer group as the major factor that causes them to feel unsafe at school” with the Children’s Commissioner citing bullying “as an issue that attracted a bigger response from children and young people than any other aspect of his work” (Cowie & Oztug, 2008, p. 59). Others have found a strong association between perceptions of safety and emotional wellbeing for adolescents at school (Horstmanhof, Punch, & Creed, 2008).

The domain of **social and emotional wellbeing (SEWB)** dominated most of the discussions in the focus groups, and was expressed as a range of emotions and feelings such as being happy, loved and in trusting relationships. These were frequently contextualised by students as existing within relationships: with others and with oneself. Of significance and interest for this study is the emphasis
students placed on the experience of being loved, able to love, and knowing they are loved. So while happiness was the most frequently cited emotion associated with wellbeing, it was conflated with the experience of love.

This finding is unsurprising given the importance of relationships to wellbeing that is expressed in the academic literature. Indeed, some authors couch wellbeing entirely in the domain of relationships. For example, Eckersley (2005, p. 1) contends that wellbeing comes from:

...being connected and engaged, from being enmeshed in a web of relationships and interests. These give meaning to our lives. We are deeply social beings. The intimacy, belonging and support provided by close personal relationships seem to matter most; and isolation exacts the highest price.

The students’ attention to trusting relationships (i.e. trusting someone, being trusted and having trust in oneself) offers particular insights into the relational nature of wellbeing. It has been stated that trust is “the mutual ‘faithfulness’ on which all relationships ultimately depend” (Lewis and Weigert, 1985 p. 968, cited in Mitchell & Forsyth, 2004, p. 13). The explicit linking of wellbeing with trusting relationships, and the observation that all relationships depend on trust provides an important insight into student wellbeing in schools.

Spiritual wellbeing was nominated as one of the dimensions of wellbeing in five focus groups. Spirituality was also referred to in connection to religion and God; however this was not in-depth and none of the students were drawn to talk more about this aspect of wellbeing. There has been a significant change in spirituality of many of the children and young people in Australian Catholic schools “over the last 50 years, from a more traditional religious spirituality to something that is more secular, eclectic and individualistic” (Rossiter, 2010, p. 129). Rossiter (2010) developed an interpretation of change in spirituality in terms of change in cultural meanings for the purpose of understanding contemporary spirituality in something other than a deficit model. Rossiter (2010) argues that a relatively secular spirituality is normal for most young people in Australia. Further, Bouma (2006, p. 2) suggests that there is a “profound shyness” in Australian spirituality and religion of which Australians speak only tentatively. These factors are supported by the inclusion of a spiritual dimension of wellbeing in five of the focus groups, and the subsequent lack of attention in the data to traditional religious spirituality.

Wellbeing as having

As reported earlier in the chapter, the key elements of ‘having’ identified by students in brainstorming sessions in relation to wellbeing were having equality, voice, confidence, respect, support from significant others, privacy and rights. Each of these elements of wellbeing is now discussed.

Having equality was identified by students as key to wellbeing. This was in the context of having equality themselves, but also for their peers at school. Inconsistencies in the way students were handled by teachers for doing the same activities were discussed as a key causal factor for diminishing the respect between students and teachers. Similarly, it was found that the equal treatment of students for different breaches of school rules could result in an injustice, which in turn, negatively impacted on their wellbeing. This finding resounds with findings from a study by the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic) reported by Randall, Morstyn, and Walsh (2012, p. 14), where:
Inconsistent or inexplicable punishment was raised by many interviewees as ‘unfair’ and appeared to contribute to their negative feelings about school. Participants also expressed frustration at not feeling listened to when they tried to tell their side of the story to principals, teachers or other staff at schools. They were upset about what they perceived to be inequitable approaches to discipline and where teachers determined punishments based on preconceived notions of previous poor behaviour. Uniform policies that were seen as being overly strict were a particular source of frustration. (Randall et al., 2012, p. 14)

Having voice was a key theme that emerged in the data around the meaning of wellbeing. Students’ emphasis on the importance of authenticity of student voice structures in schools and that student views are not just heard but also taken into account, including in relation to the nature of issues opened up for conversation between students and schools, is reflected in Holdsworth’s student participation ladder. Holdsworth (2000, p. 358) posits that it is “possible to distinguish between views of ‘youth/student voice’ and characterize the stages on the way to the real inclusion of young people in their communities.” He presents a ‘ladder of participation’ that can be readily adapted for the school context (refer Figure 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>youth/student voice: ‘speaking out’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>being heard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>being listened to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>being listened to seriously and with respect (including a willingness to argue with students with logic and evidence)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>incorporating youth/student views into action taken by others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sharing decision-making, implementation of action and reflection on the action with young people</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1 Student participation ladder (Holdsworth, 2000, p. 358)

Students in the current study made it clear that their voice is not homogenous but rather should be understood as the voices of individuals with a diversity of perspectives. Again, this is addressed in the literature, for example by Barrow (2010) who has observed that if children represent diverse groups then the process of selecting only some voices means that others are silenced. Similarly, Holdsworth (2000, p. 359) acknowledges inherent problems where the election of student representatives reward the already articulate and ‘in the know’ students, and that this form of participation hides a commitment to the selection of the few for continued success. This observation is reinforced by research at the Youth Research Centre (at the University of Melbourne), in which many young people alienated from schooling were highly disparaging of student organizations, seeing them neither as effective nor as representing them (Dwyer et al., 1998 cited in Holdsworth, 2000, p. 359).
Having confidence to express oneself around friends and companions was a core feature of wellbeing and was seen as resulting in feeling able to ‘stand up’, to express personal views and resist negative influences. Rutter (1985) cites confidence as one of three factors associated with resilience: a sense of self-esteem and confidence; a belief in own self-efficacy and ability to deal with change and adaptation; a repertoire of problem solving approaches.

Resilience is not a term used often by children and young people, however it resounds with the descriptors of having confidence, expressed by the students in the focus groups. Students associated wellbeing with strength of self and asserting and believing in their own self-efficacy. This self-efficacy has not been overlooked in the literature, as Aldgate (2010) has noted, there has been a growing recognition that children can influence their own wellbeing through their participation and input into factors that affect their childhood. The positivity associated with having confidence reflects an optimism in oneself, and as (Eckersley, 2005, p. 1) has observed “optimism, trust, self-respect and autonomy make us happier”. Being ‘happy’ was identified by the students in the focus groups as one important dimension of wellbeing. This finding is also significant in that the idea of having confidence to speak was also aligned closely with students conceptualisation of wellbeing as ‘being’ loved and happy in particular to the extent that students felt they trusted significant people in their lives enough to have the confidence to speak about their needs and aspirations.

The themes of having respect and trust, both defined as integral for wellbeing, were introduced by the students in focus groups before discussions relating to recognition theory were introduced. The mutuality of having and giving respect were identified as two sides of the same coin of wellbeing, which places respect in the domains of both ‘having’ (being respected) and ‘doing’ (respecting others). Students identified respect and trust as important characteristics of relationships that contributed to positive social wellbeing. As mentioned previously, trust is the mutual “faithfulness on which all relationships ultimately depend” (Lewis and Weigert, 1985 p. 968, cited in Mitchell & Forsyth, 2004, p. 13). Trust exists in a social system as it is a collective attribute, which is applicable to the relations among people rather than to their psychological states taken individually. One of the three major categories of trust theory is social-psychological theories, which have focused on interpersonal relationships that either diminish or foster trust (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996 cited in Mitchell & Forsyth, 2004).

Other authors have also linked trust, respect and relationships. Bryk and Schneider (2002, cited in Mitchell & Forsyth, 2004) used the term relational trust to refer to trust in educational settings which involves the fulfilment of specific reciprocal expectations regarding role relationships within schools. They argue that this trust is based on expectations regarding respect, competence, personal regard for others, and integrity and assert that trust is vital and fundamental to the operation of schools. Thus it can be seen that, as the students themselves identified, the literature supports the notion that trust and respect are interlinked and are key to relationships that support wellbeing. To explain further Bryk and Schneider (1996, p. 6) define relational trust as trust that “is formed through the mutual understandings that arise out of the sustained associations among individuals and institutions, each of which is expected to behave in a normative appropriate manner.” Mitchell and Forsyth (2004, p. 17) add that relational trust involves personal judgments about individuals’ intentions and behaviour “relative to normative expectations of what should take place within schools”.

63
Having support from a significant person at school was important for students’ wellbeing. Along similar lines, students identified the importance of adult support and encouragement for student wellbeing. Patton et al. (2000) report that studies of social influences on mental health problems in young people reiterate the importance of support from significant others, particularly adults. They note that a “sense of security and trust in others appears fundamental…. A sense of connectedness, good communication and perceptions of adult caring have emerged in studies of schools and families as being related to a wide range of behavioural and mental health outcomes” (Patton et al., 2000, p. 587). Students’ discussions in the focus groups around relationships allude to who the significant person at school might be – this is discussed later in this chapter under the ‘relationships’ heading.

Having privacy was a prominent theme around ‘having’ wellbeing. As described earlier in the chapter, this was closely linked with trust where, in some schools, computer software was used to monitor student use of the internet or private information was accessed from students’ phones if they were confiscated, with students explaining that they felt that this was an invasion of privacy and consequent betrayal of trust. Some students discussed a need for private time, which they suggested could be met through having access to a space in the school environment where one could spend time alone. The relationship between privacy and wellbeing remains largely unexplored in the research and literature on student wellbeing.

Having rights was also considered an important aspect of wellbeing that was often talked about by students in terms of freedom and voice. This conceptualisation of rights as voice in relation to wellbeing is captured by Camfield, Streuli and Woodhead (2010, p. 410) who, in relation to child rights, assert that wellbeing is seen to be something that can provide “a shared set of minimum standards, which acknowledge that detailed specification of well-being is negotiable and ideally participatory”. In other words, the student findings direct us to the context of the negotiation of rights in schools, that is, to conversation and dialogue with students in relation to the acknowledgment, identification and implementation of their rights, and of their needs, in school settings.

Wellbeing as doing

Four ‘doing’ themes were most commonly identified in the current study described earlier in the chapter.

Doing as acceptance: self-acceptance and acceptance of others: accept everyone no matter what or who they are, accepting self for who you are

Doing as making good decisions: the process of decision-making and the importance of making good decisions, decide what is right and wrong, intentionally choosing your friends and who you surround yourself with, accepting challenges and creating achievable, realistic goals

Doing as acts of generosity: enacting generosity and kindness for and to others, being kind, good, helpful, nice, listening to and knowing others

Doing as acts of self-care: self-care in terms of “what you look like”, “the way you dress”, “taking the necessary actions to protect oneself”
In attempting to ascertain how these findings are alike or different from those of similar research, it is illuminating to consult the work of Hamilton and Redmond (2010). In their review of literature around SEWB, Hamilton and Redmond (2010) have observed that most applied research categorises SEWB “into individual and environmental or social domains that are usually seen as interdependent. Within the individual domains, internal (or personal) and relational (or social) components are engaged in a dynamic relationship” (p.19). They suggest that ‘internal’ individual characteristics include the ability to experience, manage, and appropriately express emotions, to regulate one’s behaviour, and to possess resilience and coping skills, alongside confidence and persistence in learning. This notion of internal individual characteristics is illuminated in the responses given by the students in the current study, reported earlier in the chapter as ‘self and individual activities as a facilitator of wellbeing’, where students described a number of actions which they took on themselves to support their own wellbeing, such as: setting goals, taking care of oneself, being confident and positive, being organised, making responsible decisions, being yourself, making good choices, being independent and choosing to do things that make you feel good not to do things that make you feel cranky.

Hamilton and Redmond (2010) also describe how individual characteristics have relational contexts, including comprehending emotions in others, developing social skills and empathy, and the capacity to form and maintain relationships with others. Again this is illuminated by the students’ responses reported earlier in the chapter, of actions which they took to support their own wellbeing, including choosing who you allow to influence you and who you will spend time with. Similarly students’ identification of the importance of role models for wellbeing supports this notion of the relational context of individual characteristics that develop students’ own sense of self and consequent positive ways of being for improved SEWB. The importance of relationships for student wellbeing will be discussed further in following sections of this chapter.

The students’ identification of their agency and capacity to ‘choose’ how these individual characteristics are actualised leads to understandings of when students choose to (or choose not to) facilitate their own wellbeing. Students identified ways where their choices did not facilitate/hindered their own wellbeing, as reported earlier in the chapter, succumbing to peer pressure, negative self-talk, being judgemental of yourself and others, choosing the wrong friends, overthinking, changing yourself to fit in and doubting yourself.

The four acts of ‘doing’ however do not align well with those identified in the study undertaken by Aldgate and McIntosh (2006), who adapted Ben-Arie’s (2002) preliminary scheme for classifying children’s activities as:

- sleep
- productive activities: schoolwork, personal creative work, paid work, care of others and domestic/household work
- other activities that contribute to the community
- spiritual activities
- travel time
- personal care: eating, getting ready
• social interaction: interacting socially with others not for explicitly productive purposes (such as hanging out, listening to music and talking)

• leisure/recreation: such as play, sports, reading, watching television, arts and crafts

Indeed, the three ‘doing’ themes identified by students go beyond the boundaries of the (Aldgate & McIntosh, 2006) schema, which indicates either that these activities that support wellbeing are outside of the realm of children and young people’s normal activities, or that the scheme is too simple to capture the nuances of what children ‘do’ for wellbeing. Indeed there is a void in the literature altogether around the themes of ‘doing as acceptance’ and ‘doing as making good decisions’ in the context of wellbeing of children and young people. However, in relation to the final theme, (Eckersley, 2005) recognises acts of generosity as important for wellbeing:

Gratitude and kindness lift our spirits; indeed, giving support can be at least as beneficial as receiving it. Having clear goals that we can work towards, a ‘sense of place’ and belonging, a coherent and positive view of the world, and the belief that we are part of something bigger than ourselves foster wellbeing (p.1).

The discussion moves now from students’ conceptualisations of wellbeing, to relationships and facilitating student wellbeing.

2.6.2 Relationships and facilitating wellbeing

Earlier in the chapter, the wide-ranging relationships that students identified as important in facilitating, and/or impeding student wellbeing were reported. The self and individual activities that facilitate wellbeing were discussed earlier in this chapter. Relationships with the school and within the school are the focus of the following sections.

The support that schools provide to enable and facilitate important relationships – amongst students’ close friends, between year groups, other students and teachers - was seen as an important facilitator of wellbeing. Students appealed for more specific opportunities for such relationship-building amongst other cohorts and between adults in the school setting. Fielding (2007) highlights the centrality of the social in school environments and insists upon a person-centred approach to reclaim the human in schools. Fielding suggests the development of spaces, whether they be collective pedagogical spaces or physical spaces, that further the development of a ‘communally situated individuality’ “through publicly shared, common spaces that are brave, exploratory, vibrant in their willingness to challenge, to listen, to laugh, to risk adventure and to do so together in ways which affirm a shared humanity” (Fielding, 2007, p. 403).

Relationships with teachers

The important role of teachers in supporting student wellbeing is evident in this study, in particular in the six key themes reported earlier in the chapter regarding student-teacher relationships. This finding is consistent with literature pertaining to relationships in the school setting, where relationships between students and teachers receive most attention. Fumoto (2011, p. 19) asserts that the quality of student-teacher relationships has “taken on a new significance as a growing number of studies suggest their link with children’s short- and long-term wellbeing”. Children are influenced by relationships with significant adults, including teachers (Aldgate, 2010). “Children’s attachments to adults and other children are significant in building the social and emotional aspects of children’s well-being” (Aldgate, 2010, p. 24). Attachment theory, which grew out of the work of
John Bowlby in the 1950s, is a “significant contributor to understanding children’s wellbeing and development” (Aldgate, 2010, p. 24). The focus on student-teacher interpersonal relationships uses an attachment theory framework, which focuses on the development of a close emotional bond between the child and the primary caregiver and the impact the quality of this relationship has on the child’s development. “Trusting, consistent and warm relationships mirror early positive attachment relationships” (Woolf, 2011, p. 179). The theory “posits that in addition to their parents, children form close attachments to other significant adults in their lives, and that these relationships may also influence their development. Perhaps there is no other nonfamilial adult that is more significant in a child’s life than his or her teacher” (Kesner, 2005, pp. 218-219).

One of the themes most emphasised by students was the importance of teachers communicating their care and concern for students and acting on such concern to the extent that students know they are being cared for. For some students, care involved teachers noticing that things were not going too well for them and acting on this insight. Such attentiveness and care has been found in other studies as important factors in students’ engagement with school. For example, in a study of 30,000 young people in 1,105 US schools comparing the experiences of students who dropped out, Wehlage and Rutter (1986) found those youth who graduated but did not immediately pursue further formal education perceived teachers to be less interested in them than those who were college bound.

The role of teachers supporting and encouraging students was also seen as an important element of student/teacher relationships for facilitating student wellbeing. Patton et al. (2000) argue that supportive relationships with teachers reduce alienation and poor mental health outcomes for children and young people. Gray and Hackling (2009) also argue that in senior school settings, support, especially teacher support is highly valued, both professionally and personally. Mitchell and Forsyth (2004, p. 10) also observe that:

\[\text{the strength of the bonds that the student develops with school personnel is dependent upon the extent to which the student feels supported and able to experience positive interactions and to establish on-going positive relationships with key significant others in the school environment.}\]

In terms of students who have experienced adversity Gilligan (1998) further asserts that a relationship between the student and a supportive teacher may be the catalyst for that student’s recovery from adversity, particularly through daily contact. A 2012 study by the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic) provides direct insights into the lived experiences of young people to inform a greater understanding of engagement. The study included in-depth qualitative interviews with 78 young people who were facing, or had in the past faced, significant barriers to engagement with education, and an online survey of a more general sample of 228 young people (Randall et al., 2012). Survey respondents were asked questions about their school as a whole, their teachers, the curriculum, and discipline and punishment. In each area, they were asked to select the three most important things to them from a list of themes. Participants’ priorities with respect to teachers were:

1. Teachers that are passionate and knowledgeable about the subjects they teach (103)
2. Teachers who are friendly and approachable (92)
3. Teachers who believe in my ability to achieve and encourage me to do my best (89)
4. Teachers who care about my wellbeing and are willing to listen and offer help where necessary (e.g. if there are things going on in my personal life) (80)

5. Teachers who explain school work in different ways if someone in the class doesn’t understand (78)

6. Teachers who allow students to share their opinions and ideas (76)

7. Being treated with respect (53)

8. Getting help with school work when I need it (48)

9. Teachers who are well prepared for classes (38) (Randall et al., 2012, p. 31)

Students in the current study also identified these nine elements of relationships with teachers as important for their wellbeing. Older students in particular reported that teachers often had “more experience” with teenagers than parents and other adults. This meant that teachers were more dependable to discuss issues with, as some students stated: “sometimes you feel more comfortable going to them, talking to them”. Additionally, students mentioned the importance of having trusted teachers with whom they could share confidential information. However, in a study of students at an isolated rural secondary school in the UK, Gristy (2012) found that poor relationships between students and teachers meant that teachers would be the last option for students to talk to in a school if the student had a problem, “Students saw teachers as the last place to go for help” (p.235). This indicates that there are contextual variabilities in this student’s understanding and experience of the significance of relationships with teachers for facilitating student wellbeing, and that there are likely to be unique attributes of individuals and schools that either facilitate or hinder meaningful conversations between students and teachers.

Treating students as individuals and mentoring students to develop their unique gifts and capabilities were also identified as key elements that support wellbeing in teacher/student relationships. Genuine relationships develop when individuality and uniqueness are recognised. In such relationships a favourite teacher may become not just an academic instructor but also a confidant and a role model. In this way Gilligan (1998) observes that school can be an ‘ally’ for children. Relational trust is evident in such relationships, where “personal judgements about individuals’ intentions and behaviour relative to normative expectations of what should take place within schools” occur (Mitchell & Forsyth, 2004, p. 17).

Students identified that teachers making learning “fun” through the use of humour, imagination and creative teaching approaches, helped their wellbeing. A similar finding, if only for boys, was identified in Palsdottir, Asgeirsdottir, and Sigfusdottir’s (2012) study of 11,387 students aged 10–12 in Iceland. In this study boys reported significantly lower levels of wellbeing during school lessons than girls and it was found that not finding the subjects taught at school fun fully mediated the relationship between gender and self-reported wellbeing during school lessons.

The results reported earlier in the chapter include eight teacher actions that hinder student wellbeing: not listening, yelling at students, treating students unequally, teachers not respecting students, teachers’ delivery of negative feedback, teachers’ approach to the enforcement of school rules, teachers not ‘liking’ students, and lack of creative teaching.

Many of these actions by teachers towards students are the opposite of the positive behaviours that are detailed above (listening, respecting, equality, ‘liking’ students, creative teaching). Yelling, inappropriate delivery of negative feedback, and approaches to rule enforcement require further
attention in light of research revealing that teachers who use aggressive techniques such as yelling, promote misbehaviour and less responsibility in their students (Hyman & Snook, 2000; Lewis, 2004).

Moreover, students’ peer relations can be impacted by interactions involving negative teacher behaviour, as research suggests that children who have more supportive and less conflictual relationships with their teachers tend to have higher rates of peer acceptance (McAuliffe, Hubbard, & Romano, 2009). For example, results of a series of analogue studies about disruptive behaviour by first and second graders revealed that positive teacher feedback predicted increased peer liking, whereas negative feedback decreased peer liking (White & Kistner, 1992; White & Jones, 2000; White, Sherman, & Jones, 1996). The study by McAuliffe et al. (2009) in part investigated the mediating affect that teacher behaviour toward children had on peer relations. In their study, negative teacher behaviour was defined as any verbalisation that “came across as angry, derogatory, sarcastic, or condescending, based on words, intonation, facial expressions or gestures” (McAuliffe et al., 2009, p. 668). The results suggest that “decreasing teachers’ overt corrective/negative behaviour towards students may be another important avenue by which to help aggressive children experience less peer rejection” (McAuliffe et al., 2009, p. 674). Their findings indicate that classroom teachers are powerful models and influential referents for students in their class. The authors also note that some teachers, who they class as the most competent, are particularly adept at correcting students’ behaviour in private ways, using nonverbal cues and other less public and harsh means of correction instead of yelling. They also found that the way teachers think about their students may affect their behaviour towards these children and argue that changing teachers’ cognitions about children may be important when working with them to change the corrective techniques they employ:

*If teachers could learn to think in more compassionate ways about their “problem students”, they might be more amenable to using corrective techniques that would support more positive peer relations for these children* (McAuliffe et al., 2009, p. 675)

Shouting or yelling at students is a form of verbal assault which in itself is a form of emotional abuse (Shumba, 2002). Emotional abuse is defined as the “production of psychological and social deficits in the growth of a child as a result of erroneous behaviour such as for example loud yelling, coarse and rude attitude” (Theoklitou, Kabitsis, & Kabitsi, 2012, p. 65). A number of international studies have investigated the abuse of children by teachers in the classroom environment (see for example Hyman & Perone, 1998; Krugman & Krugman, 1984; Olweus, 1996, 1999; Theoklitou et al., 2012) with the prevalence of emotional abuse being alarmingly high in many of them. For example, in Theoklitou et al.’s (2012) study of 1339 pupils in the Republic of Cyprus, almost one third of students surveyed reported emotional abuse by teachers. The items pertaining to emotional abuse on the questionnaire included questions such as “My teacher is sarcastic toward me when I make mistakes,” “My teacher embarrasses me in front of my classmates” (Theoklitou et al., 2012, p. 66).

While the prevalence of negative behaviour and emotional abuse by teachers in classrooms found in these studies is alarming, the research findings are consistent with the student data and it is therefore unsurprising that students in the current study experienced these negative teacher behaviours and that they reported the negative effect of such behaviour on their wellbeing.
**Wellbeing in Schools FINAL REPORT: VOLUME TWO**

### Relationships with counsellors

School counsellors were largely overlooked by students as playing a role in facilitating wellbeing, with the exception that they were identified in focus groups as helping student wellbeing in situations where students had no one else to turn to. At the same time, students also exercised some caution about counsellors, for example around issues of confidentiality or receiving poor advice. There is little literature about effective relationships between students and counsellors in Australia. However, Aldgate and McIntosh (2006) argue that “where children have experienced separation, loss and rejection it is argued that it is even more important to have one-to-one relationships with adults who can help them come to terms with their situations” (p.27).

The most useful reported data in regards to the relationship between students and counsellors was in the aforementioned 2012 YACVic study. Their question did not mention counsellors specifically, rather the question was in relation to school based support services, which arguably includes counsellors. Survey respondents were asked to select the three most important things to them. Participants’ priorities were:

1. That they are approachable and friendly (76)
2. Being able to talk openly without being judged (69)
3. That they don’t talk to others about the things we discuss, unless I say it is okay (42)
4. That support staff have the time to talk when I need them (37)
5. That they have a range of solutions to help (37)
6. Having access to someone who can help me get in contact with other services (31)
7. That they are prepared to persevere if the solution isn’t an easy one (28)
8. That the person I talk to is a good listener (25)
9. That there is someone around who I can talk to (24)
10. Having someone I feel connected to (23)
11. Having someone to talk to that is not a classroom teacher (22) (Randall et al., 2012, p. 35)

Many of these features of a relationship with a counsellor, listed above, were identified by students in the current study as supporting student wellbeing. Providing students with the opportunity to have someone to talk to was the most common feature identified in the data. In the UK, Pattison & Harris (2006) and later Cooper (2009) conducted literature reviews to survey the effectiveness of school counselling services in UK high schools. In Cooper’s (2009) meta-analysis it emerged that around 50% of pupils with clinical distress demonstrated improvement and on average 80% of students rated counselling as helpful. Overall, counselling emerges as positive and helpful for most students who attend.

### Relationships with friends

Friends were identified as a major source of support of student wellbeing. For the children in the Year 1/2 focus groups, wellbeing and playing with friends formed the foundations of how wellbeing is supported, with a focus on being included as well as someone to share good times with. The protective role of friends who “stand up for you” was also important for the youngest children. Less difference was observed in the role of friends in supporting wellbeing between the two older focus groups. Key wellbeing-supporting influences of friends emerging from the focus groups were support and encouragement, constancy, guidance, being understanding and humour. Similarly, in a
study of students at an isolated rural secondary school in the UK, Gristy (2012) found that friends were frequently recorded as the most important thing about school. The students also noted that friends would be the first people they talk to if they had a problem or needed help. In the aforementioned study by the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic) reported by Randall et al. (2012), friendships were repeatedly identified by interview participants as:

... important for a sense of place and belonging, providing support during difficult times and contributing to overall wellbeing and enjoyment at school. Good friendships helped build resilience and, in some instances, were the only identifiable reason to continue to attend school... Young people also spoke about emotional support that they received from friends, which helped them cope with and get through difficult times” (p.14).

The findings from the current study are therefore consistent with the two studies mentioned above, which indicate that relationships with friends are very important for student wellbeing.

Relationships with peers

Like friends, peers were identified by students as helping wellbeing in a number of ways, including by setting good examples, being inspiring and generally checking up on students’ wellbeing. Students also identified schools as playing an important role in providing the context in which children can develop relationships with peers, a finding supported in research by Aldgate and McIntosh (2006). Audas and Williams (2001, p. 21) also contend that peer networks are “one of the most important elements of socialisation and they have a profound effect on the lives of young people”.

In the current study, peers were identified as hindering wellbeing through unfairly judging students and making assumptions, being overly critical; bullying; gossiping; breaching trust; breaking the law and rules; and teasing. A number of other Australian and international studies have looked at the ways in which peers can negatively impact students’ school experience (see for example Cross et al., 2009; Genta, Menesini, Fonzi, Costabile, & Smith, 1996; Gristy, 2012; Kumpulainen et al., 1998; Slee, 1995). When considered alongside the findings of such studies, the powerful language that the students in the current research used to describe the experience of bullying, suggests this has a pervasive and significant impact on wellbeing. Of particular significance for the current study, Rigby’s review of cross-sectional surveys confirms that “being victimized by peers is significantly related to comparatively low levels of psychological well-being and social adjustment and to high levels of psychological distress and adverse physical health symptoms” (Rigby, 2003, p. 589).

Significant relationships outside school

Beyond the school setting itself, students identified relationships and institutions that affect their wellbeing. These were with parents and family, coaches, pets, neighbours, community, bus drivers, strangers, social rules, socialisation/environment, religion, government, work/employers and media.

Many family and community circumstances can affect the wellbeing of children. Lew (2002) acknowledges the sometimes threatening world that children are surrounded by and ways that families can help children cope with fear and challenges. ARACY (2013, p. 1) asserts that the wellbeing of children and young people requires “continued effort across the community”. In their reporting of results from the ‘The Nest’ consultation of over 3700 young people and families, ARACY (2013) flagged five Key Results Areas (KRAs) that are important for children and young people to have a good life. Of these, the KRAs of being ‘loved and safe’ and ‘participating’ both included the
importance of individuals and institutions outside of school: ‘Loved and Safe’ embraces not only positive family relationships but also positive connections with others and community safety; and ‘Participating’ included having opportunities to participate, to have a voice and be involved in the community (ARACY, 2013, pp. 6-8).

The findings of the current study concerning the role of significant relationships outside of school are supported by a number of other studies (see for example Downie, Hay, Horner, Wichmann, & Hislop, 2010; Jekielek, 1998; Sable, 1995; Sanson, 2004). Such research similarly points to the critical role that family relationships and relationships with pets can play in positively influencing the wellbeing of children and young people. Further, children’s relationship with the media was identified in the focus groups as a significant ‘outside’ relationship that affects wellbeing. While a number of authors assert that media have been associated with emotional and behavioural symptoms (see for example Dworak, Schierl, Bruns, & Strüder, 2007; Strasburger, Jordan, & Donnerstein, 2010), the students in the focus groups did not identify this as part of their relationship with the media. Rather, students indicated that the media can have a positive effect on wellbeing, through the promotion and education of wellbeing, such as healthy eating, the dangers of smoking, and other mental health initiatives. This affirms the view of Wright and Burrows (2004, p. 219), who suggest “outside school resources such as advertisements that confirm and support the central messages of school-based resources, informed as they are by discourses that present health as an individual responsibility, and a healthy lifestyle (based on informed health choices related to diet and physical activity) as intimately connected to happiness, attractiveness and moral rectitude”.

We turn now to considering how the findings discussed above link with the theoretical interests of this research.

### 2.6.3 Wellbeing and recognition theory

In the following section we discuss students’ views about key concepts linked to recognition theory and whether, where, when and how they perceive these are present and absent at school. The three dimensions of recognition we explored are (i) being cared for, (ii) being respected and (iii) being valued.

The discussion below is organised around these three dimensions of recognition. We begin by exploring broader questions about the meaning of each dimension for students before turning to the ways in which students experience being cared for, how their rights are respected, and in what ways they are valued as contributing to the general social good in school settings. Weaving through the discussion, we also explore students’ experiences of misrecognition and non-recognition of each dimension, as (i) not being cared for, (ii) not being respected and (iii) not being valued.

#### How do you feel when you are cared for?

A number of features about being cared for were emphasised by students. First, students defined being cared for as being unconditional and as influencing them positively even when they were experiencing difficult times. Students’ understanding of being cared for is consistent with Honneth’s (1995) conceptualisation of love as constituted by strong emotional attachments, which are not able to be chosen so much as revealing themselves where there is an experience of unconditional love. In addition, the centrality of feeling loved and cared for is consistent with Honneth’s expression of this dimension as the most important, without which personalities cannot develop. Feeling cared for
provided students with a sense of self-worth and belonging, feelings which are key indicators of wellbeing (DEEWR, 2009); Eckersley (2005, p. 1).

Students further described how feeling cared for gave them purpose and energy for trying to do well at school and to seek satisfaction in their endeavours. Here we see how, even in the early discussions, students identify how being cared for nourishes their wellbeing in ways that produce a response from them – responses ranging from coping through difficult times to an experience of energy and a sense of purpose. Such responses reflect the essence of recognition, where relationships are intimate and formative to the extent that these arguably enable basic individual self-confidence to participate and achieve in school settings (Honneth, 1995; Thompson, 2006). This is significant since as Thompson (2006, p. 26) suggests, “it is possible to say that if I have such self confidence, I value myself and my life projects”.

Given the research team’s reluctance to use the word ‘love’ as Honneth (1995) describes his first dimension (instead opting for ‘cared for’), it is somewhat paradoxical that one of the most commonly used words from students to describe the experience of being cared for in school was, in fact, love. Students did not perceive that love pertained only to the private sphere of family but instead used it in a way consistent with Honneth’s broad conceptualisation of love as being based in primary relationships.

How do you feel when you are not cared for in your school?

The language utilised to express the experience of feeling ‘not cared for’ was intense and powerful. Students described how feeling not cared for was isolating and left them questioning their sense of self-worth. Such findings are a pertinent example of the affective and emotional role played by love, a role that is always positive in its affect, and the absence of which is negative. As Thompson (2006) reminds us, “it is a matter of love, not hate; care not cruelty; friendship not enmity” (p. 25). The experience of being not cared for was explicitly linked to students not wanting to care for themselves, and unable to ask those around them to help them or to meet their needs. Here, students also express a lack of self-confidence arising from not being cared for which plays such a crucial role in enabling students to express their emotions and needs without shame, embarrassment or fear of punishment (Anderson, 1995; Honneth, 1995). These findings heighten the dynamic nature of recognition, which is never neutral, but always acting on the individual in positive and negative ways. In this data, in addition to the positive impact of being cared for on student wellbeing, we see the extent of the negative impact of misrecognition and non-recognition of students’ needs and desires to be cared for impacts significantly on their wellbeing in manifestly diverse and unsettling ways, as the following discussion reveals.

How are students cared for in this school?

Students readily identified the ways in which they feel cared for in school. Students placed much emphasis on relationships with teachers as well as when schools place care for students as its highest priority. Such signalling of the importance of relationships in schools is central to understanding the wellbeing of children and young people, including the complex and contested issues around identity and status. In turn, the findings direct our attention to controversial questions about what is the proper relationship between children and members of other generations, both at a societal level and at an individual level – with parents, with step parents, with older young people...
or younger children, with teachers, with other adults, with adult institutions and activities of various kinds.

Importantly, the data also reveals some of the mechanisms of how students feel cared for and not cared for in schools. These are crucial insights as they provide the first step to opening up the dialogue between students and teachers as to the practices of recognition which enable and limit students experience of feeling cared for in schools.

**Students are cared for in school when ...**

*...teachers know their students*

One of the most significant ways students identified feeling cared for in school was the experience of care from teachers. From this data, it is possible to describe teachers as constituting ‘primary relationships’ for students and as the source of strong emotional attachments for the students in their care (Honneth, 1995; Thomas, 2012). Being ‘known’ by teachers enabled students to feel safe and comfortable enough to approach teachers for help and support, both factors identified as core to student wellbeing (Gilligan, 1998; Mitchell & Forsyth, 2004; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986), and key factors underpinning the act of recognition. Older students described how being known by teachers extended beyond supporting student learning to knowing students well enough that they could provide good advice and care to the student about issues of great importance to students, for example, regarding relationships, family and life.

Teachers knowing students’ individual learning styles was also experienced by students as an experience of being known and cared for. The centrality of teachers knowing their students is a key finding in light of the insights from recognition theory about the nature of the dimension of love and cared for. The experience of feeling cared for by teachers attains great relevance to the formation of student identify when it is acknowledged that this dimension is the site of the most complex interactions, where many things can go wrong, but where the successful outcome is mutual independence and positive formation of identity (Thomas, 2012; Thompson, 2006).

*...teachers support students with their school work*

Students explained how diligence by teachers in supporting them in their schoolwork helped them to feel cared for. This finding is reflected in one of the priorities identified by students of the most important things to them with respect to teachers in the 2012 YACVic study (Randall et al., 2012, p. 31), outlined above, where a large number of students prioritised “teachers who explain school work in different ways if someone in the class doesn’t understand”. As mentioned earlier, Gray and Hackling (2009) argue that in senior school settings teacher support is highly valued, both on a professional and personal level and Patton et al. (2000) similarly argue that supportive relationships with teachers reduce alienation and poor mental health outcomes for children and young people.

*...schools place a priority on caring for students*

While students acknowledged the importance and central role of schools as centres of learning, they were clear that, for students, school is first and foremost a place where students should be cared for. This finding in itself is consistent with recognition theory in that being loved and cared for are the foundational dimension (as discussed above) upon which the other dimensions of respect and value build upon. Students in one focus group clearly distinguished “being cared for” as an authentic and meaningful ‘practice’ of care, and as something very different to schools exercising their ‘duty of
care’, that is, their legal responsibilities towards students. In distinguishing between a ‘duty of care’ and ‘care’, students are in agreement with Honneth’s (1995) acknowledgment of care as being something that schools offer:

*For it is only this symbiotically nourished bond, which emerges through mutually desired demarcation, that produces the degree of basic individual self-confidence indispensable for autonomous participation in public life* (1995, p. 107).

**...schools help students feel part of a community**

A sense of belonging to a school community was a core element in students feeling cared for at school. This finding is important to consider when applying recognition theory to student wellbeing in schools as it acknowledges the “highly relational nature of humans and the importance of others in an individual’s strive for happiness or wellbeing” (Watson et al., 2012, p. 20).

**...schools provide Catholic values**

For students in one school the Catholic values of the school were important in helping them feel cared for, even though they felt tension in that the values of their school were in conflict with wider social values.

**...schools provide rules and boundaries**

Students acknowledged the importance and connection between schools providing boundaries and rules for students and student wellbeing. Central to this finding, is that students struggle to find a balance between recognition of their longing to act autonomously and to achieve independence while still attached to relationships of love and care which offer security and a sense of belonging (Thompson, 2006). Such a struggle can be understood in recognition theory as an intersubjective struggle between the dimension of being loved and cared for and the dimension of respect. Such struggles are central within recognition theory and invite us to understand rather than resolve such intersubjective tensions for the sake of positive self-development of the individual. As discussed, Hegel, upon whom Honneth builds much of his theory, was convinced that the transitions between the three dimensions (cared for, valued, respected) usually entail a struggle as the individual’s self-knowledge deepens (Honneth, 2007, p. 133). As indicated in the earlier discussion of recognition theory, the idea of struggle is a vitally important part of Honneth’s theory of recognition. In seeking to uncover student experiences of feeling not cared for, the data reveals three particular sites of struggle over students claims for recognition of their needs and desires to be cared for: being noticed by teachers; being treated equally as a student body; and feeling excluded by the school itself:

**Students are not cared for in school when ...**

**...schools exclude students or see them as replaceable**

For some students being excluded or made to feel as though they are not part of the school community exemplifies not being cared for. Exclusion is a significant experience identified by students and aligns as the key indicator of non-recognition and misrecognition in the dimension of being loved and cared for.

In focus groups, it was evident that the experience of exclusion, and the hurt that accompanies it, provoked two responses: to withdraw and give up making an effort at all to be included or to seek to take action based on principles of justice to respond to such exclusion. However, limited data exists
as to the forms of action undertaken in response to the feeling of exclusion, a finding which is consistent with the view in recognition theory that there must be a bridge between an individual’s hurt feelings and the collective imperatives of a social movement (Honneth, 1995). The data therefore highlights the lack of evidence of social or collective movements in schools for students to access and few avenues for students to enable them to articulate and to struggle against injustices experienced by the lack of being cared for in schools, as perceived by them.

...they are not noticed or acknowledged

Students described how feeling unnoticed and unknown by the school, teachers and their peers all were situations that led them to feel uncared for at school.

...schools focus unequally on students

Inequality was experienced in two ways, in particular. First, in relation to specific opportunities for encouraging students to undertake extra-curricular or specialist interests, and second, as has already been discussed above in relation to school rules, the harsh ways in which school rules are implemented.

These three forms of not being cared for experienced by students in schools - in the form of exclusion, feeling unnoticed and unknown, and inequality - can be seen as experiences of injustice arising from hurt feelings. Such feelings point to conflict as sites of struggle for recognition by students in relation to their needs and demands for recognition, and in particular to be loved and cared for (Thompson, 2006).

As with the dimensions of cared for and valued, recognition theory places great emphasis on individual experience of the respect rather than on objective expressions of meaning (Anderson, 1995).

How do you feel when you are respected?

While there is some overlap with cared for and valued in the language students use to describe the experience of respect, it is evident that discussion constellated around several key themes: feeling like an equal, having your opinion valued, and empowerment. Throughout the focus groups, including before the notion of respect was introduced, students consistently referred to the significance for wellbeing of the experience of feeling respected. This finding is closely tied up with Honneth’s conceptualisation of reciprocity of respect, which we have described as simply that respect be shown to others by treating them as bearers of rights (Thompson, 2006; Honneth, 1995). An important aspect of recognition theory relevant to this finding is Honneth’s contention that we can only see ourselves as rights bearers, that is as worthy of respect, once we have understood our obligations of respect towards others (Thompson, 2006, p. 48). However, as the following discussion reveals there was a diverse range of views expressed by students as to whether respect should be given and received unconditionally and reciprocally.

The experience of respect was also characterised by students as knowing you had a say and that your opinion is valued. Being respected was reported by students to be an experience that led students to feel empowered and strong, and thus able to participate in social life. This finding is consistent with Honneth’s explication of the dimension of respect being constituted by full recognition of all of the rights of citizenship. Finally, being respected was described by students as facilitating a sense of belonging in the school community.
How do you feel when you are not respected?

Students reported that the experience of being not respected made them feel as though they had no autonomy or sense of agency. Students further identified a sense of loneliness and disconnection when experiencing a lack of respect. Relatedly, the feeling of not being respected was accompanied by a sense of either not being allowed to speak or that what is said is not taken seriously. Finally, students reported that when others do not respect them, then they begin to stop respecting themselves, or seeing themselves as worthy of respect. These findings would be of no surprise to Honneth (2007) for whom misrecognition is expressed most clearly in the form of insult and which diminishes both the status and personhood of the individual. In these findings we see the act of misrecognition and non-recognition of student’s rights in the form of disrespect “destroys confidence in the value of their needs in others eyes” (Honneth, 2007, p. 136). This experience in turn destroys already established self-respect that students have previously acquired in ways that leads them to feel humiliated and to diminish and degrade themselves (Honneth, 2007).

How are students respected in this school?

The concept of respect in school was contested with much discussion taking place as to the meaning of the word respect itself. For example, for some students, respect was conditional on the behaviour of individuals (both teachers and students) and only to be given when deserved. A predominant theme in focus groups was that many teachers held a conditional understanding of respect whereby students felt that they were expected to respect teachers but that this respect was not necessarily returned. A less well-supported view of respect, although one still commonly expressed, was that respect was something that all people deserve, regardless of age, ability, ethnicity and behaviour. Students also identified several forms of respect. For example, respect of one’s abilities might be differentiated from respect for the opinions of others. One student described how respect may be expressed formally, but that this does not mean respect is actually being given, or ‘forced respect’.

This finding of diverse understandings of respect is a key finding of the study in that it points to disordered understandings of respect, that is, as being conditional on the behaviour of another person. Such understandings are also inconsistent with recognition theory. As Honneth proposes, respect derives from the very condition of being human, and the nature of respect demands that every person requires and deserves equal respect (Honneth, 1995, 2007; Thompson, 2006).

While diverse opinions existed amongst students regarding the meaning of respect, there was unanimous agreement that respect was experienced in school when students are listened to, that their views were heard and taken into account and that students were treated with equality. These three features of respect are reported below, and once again are important for highlighting the nature of what the full and authentic recognition of respect might look like in schools.

Students are respected at school when …

... they are listened to

Students explained that they felt respected at school when both the school and teachers in the school listen to them and act on what they say. Listening formed an important touchstone for students of an example of how they feel respected and thus points to the dialogical nature of recognition emphasised by Honneth (1995) and others (such as Taylor, 1995). For example, one student explained that as a special needs student he experienced being listened to in ways that
made him feel cared for and that he would like to see such respectful listening extended to all students in their everyday interactions in school life.

...when they are given a say

Such listening however was expressed as the first step towards respect. This finding is not surprising in light of the foundational principle of recognition as being relational in its nature and dialogical in its dynamic. As students identified, dialogue is the vehicle of recognition, a vehicle which is set into motion through the dynamic of speaking, listening and acting. While students emphasised the importance of having a say, they also were clear that the views expressed should also be acted upon, even if such actions were to acknowledge that a student had expressed their needs and/or views. Such actions were not envisaged as teachers acting in accordance with students’ wishes, so much as teachers acknowledging the view of the student and taking it in into account. As part of being given a say, students emphasised that this included tolerance of differing opinions to those expressed by their teachers. The issue of student representative councils (SRCs) was also raised by students as one form of having a say, although opinions differed as to the effectiveness of these for ensuring the views of all students were heard. In addition, students pointed to the need to be given a say as something that should not be limited to formal settings such as SRCs.

...when they are treated equally

While equality was not as strongly emphasised as was having a say and being heard in discussions around respect, students did note that being respected in school involved treating all students equally, so as to ensure that all voices of students (rather than those students in privileged positions such as SRC groups) were heard.

...when they are treating teachers with respect

Despite differing understandings of the meaning of respect, some students considered that respect for teachers was important to their own wellbeing. This group of students reveal more sophisticated understandings of respect as mutual and as something practiced in a culture of reciprocity, and are consistent with those proposed by recognition theory as outlined above.

Students are not respected at school when...

...schools do not respect or value students’ opinions

Unsurprisingly, given the strong emphasis placed on the students having a say and being heard, students identified not having their views respected or valued as resulting in them feeling as though they are not respected in school.

...teachers yell at or insult students

As reported above, for students the most tangible example of not being respected arises in the experience of being yelled at by teachers. It is important to note that Honneth (2007) emphasises the significance of abuse, in this situation of verbal emotional abuse, as an act that robs a person of the certainty of being able to enjoy wellbeing in the most elementary of ways, and as destroying an individual’s confidence. This view is also supported by Theoklitou et al. (2012) as asserted earlier. The predominance of student discussion about yelling is therefore a disturbing finding in light of the extent to which yelling must be understood as perpetuating the disrespect of students in everyday school life. This is further conflated by the extent to which this type of verbal abuse of children by
teachers occurs as identified in the international studies mentioned earlier (Hyman & Perone, 1998; Krugman & Krugman, 1984; Olweus, 1996, 1999; Theoklitou et al., 2012).

In addition to this extensive data, students also reported that being inappropriately and/or publically disciplined was sometimes experienced as a form of disrespect. This student concern for the publicness of being disciplined is well founded – as reported earlier students peer relations can be deleteriously impacted by these interactions (McAuliffe et al., 2009; White & Kistner, 1992; White & Jones, 2000; White et al., 1996). Moreover, as McAuliffe et al. (2009) noted, more competent teachers are adept at correcting students behaviour in private ways, using nonverbal cues and other less public and harsh means of correction such as yelling.

...teachers do not use diverse methods and approaches to teaching

For students in secondary school, there was a sense of feeling disrespected when teachers did not make an effort to use diverse and creative approaches to teaching. For example, in discussing the issue of respect, one Year 8 student said routine teaching practices were one form of not respecting students and students in a Year 11 focus group noted a similar issue.

How do you feel when you are valued?

The third dimension, valued, was perhaps the most difficult to explore as it was a word that not all students were familiar with. Students identified a sense of belonging as one of the key experiences of feeling valued. The students further defined feeling valued as something arising from situations when something special about you is noticed by another person. This aligns with the interest of recognition theory in being valued as being specific to the individual, but which is evaluated by others in the light of a shared horizon of values that in themselves make it possible to recognise and appreciate the uniqueness of the individual (van Leeuwen, 2007). Herein lies the experience of solidarity so crucial to the experience of feeling valued as expressed in recognition theory (Honneth, 1995).

Further, students identified being valued as being acknowledged and able to make a contribution, and knowing other people wanted you to make that contribution. This finding aligns with the insight of recognition theory that the enabling sense that flows from feeling valued cannot derive from something merely trivial or negative, but rather must be something valuable (Anderson, 1995, p. xvi). This finding is also consistent with literature reported in relation to student wellbeing. For example, Holdsworth (2000, p. 353) argues that there is an “increasing need for engaging students more directly with the immediate purposes for their learning. The curriculum must include the capacity and willingness of students to act upon their learning - to produce something of value, to be valued and to value one’s self as someone who can ‘make a difference’ that goes beyond the teacher and beyond the classroom.” Pearl, Grant and Wenk have suggested that “If youth are to be valued, they must be of the society - participants, not recipients. That is the crux of any theory of valuing youth” (Pearl, Grant & Wenk, 1978, cited in Holdsworth, 2000, p. 354).

How do you feel when you are not valued?

Students utilized powerful language to describe the experience of not being valued. Of the three dimensions, however, it is evident that the data collected in relation to not being valued was most commonly linked to the experience of depression and mental health. This finding in itself is significant in light of the sensitivity to and dependence on social values which characterizes this dimension of recognition (van Leeuwen, 2007). While the experience of mental health and
depression identified by students in relation to this dimension of valued are not the focus of this study, this finding is significant in that it highlights the dimension of ‘valued’ as a site of struggle and contestation around what contributions a society, including social structures such as schools, considers valuable or not (van Leeuwen, 2007). As well, students identified how not feeling valued led students to feeling apathetic, negative and worthless. Additionally, one student noted that the experience of not being valued could lead to an individual seeking to feel as though they could not ‘be themselves’ but rather needed to act like others in the school who are valued.

How are students valued in this school?

Students are valued at school when …

...teachers notice the abilities and gifts of students and support them to offer these to the school community

Students reported that teachers noticing their particular abilities and gifts and encouraging them to use them in school was one way in which schools helped students feel valued. Recognition theory would suggest that this finding goes to the heart of the experience of recognition for students in that it proposes the litmus test of a society (and therefore of social structures such as schools) is where people experience a sense of opportunity for self realisation.

...teachers put in extra effort for students

Students further emphasized how teachers who put in extra effort for their students facilitated student experience of feeling valued. Here students perceived the value teachers placed on the particular features of a student or class as representing the value of the students and of student contributions. The teachers valuing of students in this way therefore is experienced as conveying shared goals and values of understanding, and thus affirming to students their value as individuals with a contribution to offer.

...schools adopt a holistic approach to teaching

Students in one focus group raised the idea that students feel valued when teachers are interested in the whole student and as educating the whole child. While students acknowledged schools as sites of learning, they were at pains to emphasise that such learning should not come at the expense of the valuing of the whole child, and that such valuing would paradoxically facilitate and improve learning outcomes for students.

In addition to all that has been said about the marginalising experience of misrecognition, it important to recall that in recognition theory, the social conditions for the recognition of one’s value are determined by the prevailing sense of what is to count as a worthwhile contribution to society. In the following findings we are offered an insight into the nature of struggles encountered by students in schools.

Students are not valued at school when...

... teachers do not know their students

The experience of being unnoticed was a central feature of a school that made students feel not valued, particularly when teachers did not know the names of students. Recognition theory foregrounds the significance of this finding in that it draws attention to that sense of what it is that
makes an individual feel special or unique (Honneth, 1995). For students, being known by name is one of the fundamental ways in which their uniqueness in a school setting is experienced.

...teachers focus on the abilities of only those who excel

Students described that the experience of being valued was diminished when teachers noticed and/or focused on the abilities and gifts of only those students were excelling in one particular field. This experience resonates with research undertaken by McCreery & Best (2004):

> For many children school is a place where their interests, concerns and values are not represented. Instead they are told to conform to a given ideal, a particular version of the ‘good life’, and if they do not embrace it they find themselves on the outside. This might then lead to educational failure and/or exclusion. School then becomes unimportant and irrelevant and children must find other routes to success and status. Pupils’ responses to feeling different, undervalued or victimized often appear as a challenge to the school system." (p.7)

Once again, this finding also highlights the sensitivity of this dimension to the social values of a school and of the contested nature of defining contribution and value. For students, there will be a danger in schools when the unique gifts and special qualities of some students are perceived to be more valuable than others.

...teachers speak to students in a degrading way

A final form of feeling unvalued by students was in the experience of being spoken to in a degrading manner. This was especially so for older students who spoke of when teachers ‘speak to you like you are a child’ and ‘have really low expectations’. This finding is consistent with Honneth’s idea that the dimension of value is central in understanding attempts to end social patterns of denigration in order to make possible new forms of distinctive identity (Anderson, 1995, p. xvii). Here we see the experience of denigration and patronizing attitudes to students are the site of struggle as students seek to assert claims to be treated as human beings first and student second, claims which go to the heart of the status of childhood in contemporary educational settings today.

The data exploring recognition theory reveals how student understandings of recognition reflect the intersubjective, reciprocal and dynamic nature of recognition experienced in their everyday lives and in school settings. **Intersubjectivity** is evident in the emphasis students bring to their exploration of recognition as something that always takes place between two or more people, for example, between teachers and students, students and students, teachers and teachers etc. Student narratives reveal relationship with significant individuals is the foundation stone for recognition of their identity through feeling cared for, respected and valued. Misrecognition and non-recognition are evident where students identify hurt feelings arising from experiences of exclusion, insult and degradation experienced in school. Such hurt feelings often are experienced as an injustice and can become the source of a struggle. Such hurt feelings offer important insights for this study in that they reveal student perspectives on the nature of conflict which sits at the threshold of distorted relations of recognition in school settings. **Reciprocity** is evident in the narratives of students where they attach meaning and worth to the value significant others place on themselves as well as on each other. This includes potential understandings of mutuality as underpinning the nature and expression of care, respect and value for others. The **dynamic** nature of recognition is evident in students’ insights into the nature of recognition as a process or series of acts that precede each other rather than as something taking place in atomised moments. Students readily identify that
such acts of recognition take place in conversation and dialogue which, in turn, resonates with the dialogical interests of recognition theory.

Phase 2 identified a number of themes in relation to how wellbeing is understood and practiced in schools. Within this data it is possible to identify key tenets of recognition theory evident in the student data before the word recognition and recognition theory were introduced mid-way into focus groups. In the final part of this chapter we set out to identify these tentative links between wellbeing and recognition.

2.6.4 Principles of recognition theory evident in student understanding and practice of wellbeing

The principle idea of recognition theory, that recognition is a fundamental human need, is evident in the students’ understanding and practice of wellbeing expressed before the introduction of recognition theory to the focus groups. With ‘happiness’ and ‘being happy’ typically the starting point, students explained how their wellbeing, and the happiness they yearn for, is grounded in relationship. Here in relationship, students reveal the link between wellbeing and recognition by describing their needs and desires to be known, to be ‘noticed’, ‘visible’ and their desire for ‘everybody knowing you, ‘everybody knowing you are there’ and ‘people not forgetting about you’. Further, ‘being’, ‘having’ and ‘doing’ relationship - with others and within themselves - all are expressed by students in ways that can be understood as acts of recognition. For example, where students defined wellbeing as ‘trust’, they describe an interrelational and intersubjective experience of recognition: trust as being trusted and trusting others and recognition as an act of trusting self.

Recognition as taking place in conversation and dialogue

The emphasis students placed on the importance of dialogue and conversation for wellbeing also points to the close connections between recognition and wellbeing. This link is evident in a number of ways. First, as section 2.2 reports, students identify conversation and dialogue with significant others – friends and peers, teachers, principals and parents - as foundational to their wellbeing. Students did not just want “one-off” conversations but conversation based in relationships, where they feel known and understood, cared for, respected and valued. As Taylor (1995) says, “dialogue with one’s significant others goes on without end” (cited in Thompson, 2006, p. 22). Recognition theory also draws attention to the importance of dialogue with self. Recognition in relationship with self is evident in students’ emphasise of the importance of ‘looking after yourself’, not being too self-critical and the importance of oneself of making good decisions.

Second, students described the importance of schools facilitating relationships between students and students and students and teachers by creating opportunities for conversation. Third, the emphasis students place on the importance of voice and having a say for their wellbeing attests to the centrality of conversation, which is the vehicle through which student voices are heard and responded to. Fourth, students identified ways in which the lack of opportunity for conversation diminished their wellbeing. For example, the experience of not being given a say, being yelled at, not being treated as an individual and being spoken to disrespectfully by teachers and friends in themselves point to the implicit importance of conversation and dialogue as sites of recognition of students and as significant for the promotion of student wellbeing.
Within the student exploration of wellbeing, prior to the introduction of recognition theory, the three dimensions of recognition can be also identified in the student data as the following examples reveal:

**Cared For**

Along with happiness, the single most constant theme arising in the student conceptualisations of wellbeing as a state of ‘being’ was the experience and importance of being loved. Students attested to love as being foundational to their wellbeing when they described wellbeing as feeling loved, having people tell you they love you and loving others and yourself.

Importantly, students identified the key role of teachers in schools to be to care for students. This expression of care as the role of teachers further distinguished between an instrumentalist understanding of care (i.e. “part of the job description”) to one a more unambiguous expression of care consistent with the meaning of the word “to lament” (i.e. a teacher who “actually worried about your wellbeing”, and as someone who communicates this concern). Key examples of teachers caring for students include: communicating their concerns for students, being worried for student wellbeing, noticing when things are not going well for students, facilitating opportunities for caring between students, supporting and encouraging students and teachers having conversations with students. Friends providing support, encouragement, constancy, guidance and understanding were all experiences of feeling cared for by friends.

Students’ definitions of wellbeing are also consistent with recognition theory in their expression of the centrality of trust in relationships and as having confidence to reach out and express their deepest needs and desires without fear of retribution or abandonment. These are definitions of wellbeing that are consistent with Honneth’s expression of ‘cared for’ as facilitating ‘basic self confidence’ (1995). Here it is important to distinguish in the ‘voice-related data between ‘having confidence’ to speak and ‘having a say’. In this study ‘having confidence’ to express oneself, including the confidence to ask for what one needs to be communicated, falls within the dimension of cared for. ‘Having a say’ however is related to the dimension of being respected, and is explored in greater detail below.

The importance students place on receiving love and care from significant others – having needs met, being cared for, being listened to and having someone to talk to – is consistent with the emphasis recognition theory places on the role of significant others in an individual’s identity formation. While love has many different expressions, recognition theory suggests that common to all forms of love is positive emotional attachment to a restricted number of significant others. While one rarely knows the significance that another places on this mode of recognition, recognition theory emphasizes the centrality of this dimension (being cared for). Applied to this study, it is unlikely students or teachers will ever know for certain their significance of either in their lives. What is clear, however, is that students know and understand clearly their needs and desires to be cared for and to care for others profoundly shapes student wellbeing in school settings.

Finally, bodily integrity and the differentiated expression of physical wellbeing as entailing physical safety highlight the importance of physical bodily integrity for student wellbeing. The “taken for granted” assumptions by students in focus groups that wellbeing necessarily starts with physical needs being met was evident in the explicit recognition of this principle followed largely by silence in relation to physical wellbeing.
Respected

Respect was reported by students to be foundational to their wellbeing. Consistent with Honneth’s (1995) expression of respect as a sense of possessing the universal dignity afforded to all people, students articulated self-respect and respect for others as central to student wellbeing and to their positive formation of their sense of identity and relationships in the school settings.

An important finding in this study was the diverse understandings of respect issued by students. For example, respect for some students was expressed in highly conditional terms (I will not give respect a person who does not respect me) to more mutual expressions of respect (I will respect another person regardless of whether they respect me). This finding provides an important link between student wellbeing and recognition theory in that students directly link wellbeing to respect. Recognition theory deepens the exploration of this relationship by offering an explanation of respect as being something that can only be shown to others by treating them as bearers of rights: where rights do not exist, no respect is possible. In this way those students who identified respect as mutual provided an understanding that goes to the heart of the recognition of human dignity, whereby having and giving respect are ‘two sides to the one coin’.

Students’ emphasis on equality as underpinning wellbeing provides deepening links between recognition theory and wellbeing in that respect is understood by students as something everyone deserves and which should be exercised equally. Students identified inconsistencies in the treatment of students by teachers and schools as a key casual factor for diminishing respect between students and teachers and as impacting negatively on their wellbeing. This issue is examined in greater detail below.

Students’ emphasis on active and informed decision-making as central to their wellbeing is reflective of Charles Taylor’s (1995) expression of recognition as something that is due to all people in light of their potential for autonomy. Here we see young people seeking to exercise control over their lives in ways that are consistent with evolving notions of taking responsibility for self and others. To have self-respect is to have a sense of oneself as a person who is capable of participating in decision-making and in public life. We see this is especially evident in students’ identification of self-acceptance, self care, desires for acting generously in society and desire to be “active” and “good” decision makers. These are consistent with Honneth’s expression of recognition as entailing self-respect.

Valued

Of the three dimensions of recognition, being valued offers the least explicit preliminary links in the student data between recognition theory and student wellbeing. Given the specific understanding of the dimension of valued in recognition theory, it is helpful to recall how, for recognition theory, being valued relates specifically to the experience of self-esteem. In other words, this is not the self-esteem of contemporary culture whereby self-esteem is understood as confidence in one’s abilities. For recognition theory, being valued involved awareness and valuing of that which makes a person feel unique. Further, what distinguishes recognition theory is that to have a sense that one has nothing to offer is to lack the basis for developing a sense of one’s own identity.

This expression of being valued is somewhat evident in the data in relation to wellbeing as ‘self acceptance’. Here we see students emphasising the importance of accepting themselves and others ‘for who they are’. The instrumental role of significant others in facilitating and strengthening
student wellbeing through valuing their particular gifts, strengths and competencies is also an important finding that relates the dimension of being valued to student wellbeing.

For students, the experience of being valued as impacting their wellbeing extends to a collective valuing of students as a whole. The valuing of students as a whole is reflected in the eyes of the students when they experience all students as being treated equally and respectfully. In this data we see students’ desire for solidarity with other young people, a desire reflected most explicitly in wanting to be valued as a collective (i.e. as the student body) as well as individually.

**The experience of misrecognition/non-recognition**

Links between student wellbeing and recognition theory were evident in the early stages of the focus groups in student descriptions of aspects of school life which they identified as having a negative impact on their wellbeing. From the perspective of recognition theory, it is evident that most of this data coalesces around the second dimension, respect, in the form of disrespect.

The most frequently cited negative experience for student wellbeing is that of “being yelled at”. As previous discussions revealed, “being yelled at” was not only the most significant factor hindering student wellbeing but also the most commonly cited factor. This data points to the relationship between recognition and wellbeing in that it provides an explicit example of misrecognition which impacts negatively on student wellbeing. As the key form of violation of respect, insult is a particularly corrosive form of misrecognition in that it acts against the acquisition of the self-respect of students. This negative impact is heightened in that it is received in relationship from significant others, that is, those individuals who play a significant role in the formation of the identity of the student. As reported above, teachers fall within the group of significant others as evident in the data from students. Thus, in light of the findings in the student data of teachers as ‘significant others’, the experience of misrecognition in the form of insult illuminates the depth of hurt and suffering being yelled at imposes on students, an experience students report as being harmful for their wellbeing.

Other forms of disrespect are also evident in the early data, which offer links between recognition theory and diminished wellbeing. These include:

- Not listening
- Making incorrect assumptions about students and their friendship groups
- Unequal treatment
- Disrespectful mode of delivery of negative feedback
- Inconsistent application of rules
- Lack of confidentiality and privacy from adults
- Valuing of some gifts/competencies above others.

**2.6.5 Summary of discussion of student findings**

This section has discussed the various ways students conceptualise wellbeing; the wide range of relationships and actions that facilitate or hinder student wellbeing; students’ views about key concepts linked to recognition theory (cared for, respected and valued) and whether, where, when and how they perceive these are present and absent at school; and how students’ understanding and practice of wellbeing reflects the key idea that recognition is a fundamental human need.

Significant attention has been given to the views of students given the substantive focus of the research on student wellbeing in schools, together with the underlying theoretical interests of
Childhood Studies and recognition theory. We turn now to considering the findings from the in-depth interviews with teachers and principals.
3 Results: Principal and Teacher Views

As previously outlined, the in-depth semi-structured interviews with the principals and teachers sought their perspectives on a range of issues including how they would generally describe or define ‘wellbeing’; whether and to what extent policy shaped their understandings and approach; how they perceived ‘wellbeing’ was facilitated and supported in their schools (‘what helps and hinders’); the impact of leadership on wellbeing in schools; the relationship between teacher and student wellbeing; and how the concept of ‘recognition’ was perceived in relation to wellbeing.

The interviews generated extensive, rich data across all three regions, with eleven major themes emerging from the detailed NVivo coding of this data. These 11 themes are linked, and weave together to form a narrative, as follows:

Teachers say student ‘wellbeing’ is...

1. Multidimensional
2. Dependent on relationships
3. Embedded in culture, which is shaped by Christian values and Catholic identity.
4. Exemplified in pastoral care.
5. Partly dependent on teacher wellbeing.
6. Impacted by pedagogy.
7. Supplemented by programs.
8. Supported by counsellors.
9. Enhanced by parent partnership, and engagement with the wider community
10. Dependent on leadership.
11. Situated in confused policy environment.

Of these 11 themes, parent partnership and teacher wellbeing featured most prominently in the interviews. These two themes generated almost twice as much data as the next most prominent themes of policy and programs. While some themes, such as leadership, were made up of unequivocal views, others such as culture were considerably more nuanced. Such differences in emphasis are further elucidated in the data reported below.

The eleven themes tend to cluster within and across one or more of three spheres of influence on wellbeing - relational, environmental and personal. While some themes pertain mainly to one particular sphere there is also overlap between the spheres. Some themes are evident in two or more spheres, and issues or concerns in one sphere were seen to exert an influence on another, as depicted in Figure 1 below.
The eleven themes are encompassed within the three spheres as follows:

**Relational:** The vast majority of themes emerging from the Phase 2 teacher and principal data tend to cluster around the relational sphere. A number of important relationships were highlighted in the data, including those between teachers and students, principals and students, counsellors and students, teachers and principals, counsellors and teaching staff, teachers/schools and parents, and schools with the wider community. These relationships all contribute to and influence student wellbeing. In addition, relationships are perceived as a central aspect of pastoral care and of effective pedagogical practice, as well as contributing directly to school culture and to both teacher and student wellbeing.

**Environmental:** A number of themes pertain to notions of ‘environment’. In particular, school culture, understood primarily as ‘the way we do things around here’, has a pervasive influence on wellbeing since it is inextricably bound up with relationships, Catholic and Christian identity, leadership, the policy environment and the kind of support programs being implemented. The approaches to supporting teachers in their own wellbeing and in pedagogical practice also reflect the cultural environment, with relationships again perceived as a critical factor. Hence, the overlap between the relational and environmental spheres becomes evident as each exerts an influence on the other and, in turn, impact on how wellbeing is understood and facilitated in schools.

**Personal:** There are strong links between teacher and student wellbeing, with teacher wellbeing impacted by both relationships and the environment. Individual teacher identity (particularly in respect to role) along with his/her own underlying beliefs, attitudes and values about students and
their wellbeing in schools appear to influence in both tacit and explicit ways their understandings and practice.

Within each of these three spheres of influence on wellbeing – the relational, environmental and personal - there was an evident tension between aspirations around wellbeing and the lived everyday reality of school life.

In the discussion that follows, the eleven themes woven within and across the three spheres are each reported and elaborated upon. At the end of each theme a brief summary emphasises key points, including ‘take home messages’ offered by teachers. At the close of each interview, teachers and principals were asked if they had a particular message they would like to ensure the research adequately captured. This gave participants the opportunity to highlight a particular issue, ensure a key point had been noted, or otherwise revise or refine information provided earlier in the interview. The themes that were most frequently emphasised in the take home messages were those of parent partnership, teacher wellbeing, relationships, school culture, and program, resource and funding issues.

3.1 Wellbeing as multi-dimensional

The principals and teachers across the three regions tended to view wellbeing in a multidimensional light, although there was not always agreement on the specific dimensions and their components (Urbis, 2011). They variously defined wellbeing as having different dimensions in the early part of the interviews, although most tended later in the interviews to place emphasis on one or two particular aspects they perceived as more important.

While the data generally included descriptions of ‘wellbeing’ linked to the emotional, mental, physical, social and spiritual aspects of children’s lives, thus encompassing aspects apparent in some of the literature (for example, Department of Education and Children’s Services, 2005; Eckersley, Wierenga, & Wyn, 2005), the teacher and principal narratives were also woven with considerable reference to the importance of happiness, safety and a holistic approach. Significantly, many of the definitions and descriptions (across all three regions) signaled these different dimensions of wellbeing as related and linked rather than understood or applied in isolation.

The question directly pertaining to teachers’ and principals’ current understandings of wellbeing was the first to be asked in the interviews after the demographic and contextual questions. This may partly explain why some answers were a little tentative and ‘big picture’, with reference to different dimensions of wellbeing, without detailing these or defining wellbeing.

While there is similarity across regions in the way in which principals and teachers pointed to the multi-dimensional and holistic aspects of wellbeing, some differences across the regions were also quite evident. For example, in Region A, where the wellbeing agenda in schools has only recently begun to be systematically planned (partly prompted by involvement in this research), the principals and teachers generally conveyed more global definitions of wellbeing. In Region B, which has had in place for some time a more structured, system-wide approach for supporting wellbeing in schools, both principals and teachers were more confident in defining and describing wellbeing. Region B also generated the only explicit mention of “learning wellbeing” – a state of being ready to learn effectively, although teachers in both Regions A and C also linked wellbeing with learning potential and outcomes. In Region C, where there has been in place in recent years widespread use of explicit wellbeing initiatives (particularly a meditation program) the definitions of wellbeing provided by the
principals and teachers tended to lean towards emotional health, emotional ‘issues’, emotional intelligence and development.

The concept of being happy also featured amidst the definitions of wellbeing, although defining wellbeing as this positive individual characteristic tended to be uncritically engaged with and was more evident in Regions B and C. A number of principals and teachers perceived links between happiness and learning, particularly in Region B where wellbeing is linked to their overall learning framework.

A focus on students’ mental wellbeing was a recurring theme, whether mentioned in response to defining wellbeing or in explaining why and how it needs to be addressed. This interest may partly reflect the increased focus on mental health in schools in recent years as well as in the community more broadly, given a number of teachers in different regions appeared willing and confident to talk about it. Concerns related to student anxiety and depression were frequently mentioned in the interviews, with self-harming behaviours, more relevant to secondary school students, also referred to. These concerns reflect ‘negative approaches’ to social and emotional wellbeing, being those that tend to emphasise poor mental health (Hamilton & Redmond, 2010). Generally, principals and teachers seemed more comfortable discussing the nature of the problem than the ways in which they perceive it being addressed in their schools.

An emphasis on the physical dimension of wellbeing students was also evident in the data, particularly in Regions B and C including sport and healthy eating programs. Whilst not featuring significantly in the literature, major consideration was given to the notion of safety as a key dimension of wellbeing across all three school regions. The data moves between concerns for students’ physical and emotional safety, implying that the experience of ongoing insecurity and threat has a detrimental effect on emotional wellbeing (Patton et al., 2000). The need for emotional safety was also seen as a consequence of difficulties at home as well as at school. Indications from several participants suggest that schools have a direct contribution to make in terms of providing a ‘safe haven’ for students.

In Region A, particular links were drawn between safety and bullying, including the effect of the latter on student learning as well as on wellbeing, and the difficulty in finding effective ways to address this. Teachers in Region A also spoke about strategies that have been implemented to aid in providing a safe environment, partly because schools see it as important but also because parents increasingly require and expect this. Likewise, in Region B teachers spoke about how being safe featured as key to their understandings of wellbeing, and many elaborated on how they were responding by creating and maintaining a safe environment for students while they are at school.

In Region C, a number of similar issues concerning physical and emotional safety were identified by principals and teachers but a distinctive difference was the more explicit emphasis placed on the support provided by teachers or someone special students can confide in or rely upon in regard to their safety. While the finding regarding students and supportive teachers coincides with another major theme on relationships discussed in a later part of this report, it is worth noting here that understandings of wellbeing are imbued with a relational dimension.

The social dimension of wellbeing received attention across the three regions, with comments from teachers and principals indicating the interplay between interdependent individual and environmental/social domains (Hamilton & Redmond, 2010). This was apparent in discussing the
individual characteristics of students in relational contexts with others, for example with regard to social skills. Environmental factors were perceived as contributing to wellbeing, with those in the school and community-based domain including peer relationships, relationships with adults particularly teachers, and the existence of support programs and activities (Hamilton & Redmond, 2010). An emphasis was placed by teachers on improving social skills as well as equipping students to deal with issues like bullying and exclusion, highlighted rather extensively in Region A.

Here, too, the critically important role of teachers in monitoring and supporting students through difficult situations was evident. Region A teachers and principals spoke of students being socially awkward and guiding them through difficult situations. They also acknowledged the difficulties for many students in ‘fitting in’ now and being able to successfully function later in broader society. In Regions B and C similar concerns about supporting the social dimension of wellbeing were extensively reported, with teachers seeing themselves as critically important in this, including in moderating any negative influences or messages from school or home. However, in terms of how parents view the social wellbeing of their children, teachers also revealed that many parents are just as concerned about how their children are fitting in socially as they are about them succeeding academically.

The spiritual dimension of wellbeing also featured in interviews across the three regions, although this tended to be far more muted than the other dimensions reported above. There is little in the literature to help make sense of this. However, it may, in part, reflect responses to changes in cultural meanings intuited by Rossiter (2010), who reports a significant change in spirituality of many students in Australian Catholic schools: “over the last 50 years, from a more traditional religious spirituality to something that is more secular, eclectic and individualistic” (p.129). In Region A spirituality was mentioned in passing in a small number of interviews but not developed in any significant way. Similarly in Region B some principals and teachers referred fleetingly to spirituality as being one dimension that makes up wellbeing, while in Region C, the ‘holistic’ framing of wellbeing (mentioned earlier) gave way to a quite strong and explicit inclusion of spirituality in principals and teachers’ overall understandings.

In summary, there were some important convergences in the definitions and descriptions of ‘wellbeing’ provided by principals and teachers across the three regions. The similarities cluster around data suggesting that wellbeing is understood in terms of a number of different dimensions. Any differences (in terms of nuance or emphasis) can likely be partly attributed to the different educational contexts, stages and approaches to implementing wellbeing across the three regions.

Conceptualising wellbeing in terms of multiple dimensions across contexts concurs with our framing of the themes emerging from the data of three spheres of influence on wellbeing - the personal, relational and environmental. Wellbeing can be conceptualised, for example, as “both a healthy emotional state and an ability to relate and function with others; means different things in different cultures; is influenced by individual, social and environmental factors; and is dynamic and changeable” (Department of Education and Children’s Services, 2005, p. 5).

Teachers and principals in our study made reference to ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ approaches to social and emotional wellbeing (Hamilton & Redmond, 2010), with approaches including capabilities, such as social skills, positive affect and self-concept, happiness, sense of belonging, and enjoyment of school. However, greater emphasis in the interview data tended to be placed on some of the negative approaches, particularly in relation to poor mental health and concerns about student
Wellbeing in Schools FINAL REPORT: VOLUME TWO

safety, for example in relation to bullying and exclusion at school and negative influences at home. This perhaps indicates a greater focus on difficulties and deficiencies, than attributes and strengths (Urbis, 2011).

Irrespective, while the dimensions (mental, physical, social, spiritual and so forth) align with broader literature defining wellbeing, the narratives included in the above discussion also point to further work that could be done with principals and teachers in clearly articulating their understandings of wellbeing and then being able to confidently convey how they ‘do’ this:

“I guess looking at the dimension of the whole person ... I think that phrase, putting all those words together – spiritual, moral, social and emotional – can get bandied about a bit and I think it’s really important to take a good, honest look at it and say “Well, what do we actually mean and how do we actually do this?” Region B (B3TB)

In considering this question of, “Well, what do we actually mean and how do we actually do this?”, the following section reports on the extensive data generated in the interviews concerning the role and importance of relationships in understanding and supporting wellbeing.

3.2 Wellbeing as relational

The relational sphere encompasses the greatest number of themes, highlighting the key role relationships are perceived to play in student wellbeing. The kind of relationships identified by principals and teachers included those within the school context, along with relationships with parents and in the wider community. This Wellbeing as Relational section presents the themes that emerged from the data in accordance with the different relationships outlined – teacher-student relationships; parent partnerships and community engagement; leadership relations; and relationships with counsellors. Another two themes, pastoral care and pedagogy, are also included in this section, given indications from the teachers and principals that relationships are integral to pastoral care and pedagogical practices. Principals and teachers across all three regions placed a strong, explicit emphasis on the role and importance of relationships in supporting wellbeing in schools. This finding accords with evidence identified in the wider literature (see Aldgate, 2010; Aldgate & McIntosh, 2006; Eckersley, 2005; Jordan, 2006).

3.2.1 Teacher-Student Relationships

In the vast majority of the 90 interviews with principals and teachers, both groups underlined the significance of relationships in their initial response to the question: “Thinking about the way in which you’ve described/defined wellbeing, what do you think helps and/or hinders this at school”?:

...if you don’t have a good relationship with the students, you’re not going to know about those wellbeing issues... Region A (A1TB)

Oh absolutely. I think there’s a relationship that the teacher builds with a child and your hope as a teacher, your greatest wish is that you connect with every child. Region B (B2TB)

In all the regions, both teachers and principals focused on the potential of teacher-student relationships for supporting wellbeing across its various dimensions. An emphasis was placed on having rapport and establishing relationships that were going to be effective. A recurring theme was that without relationship, teaching practices were difficult and less likely to be successful. For example, many acknowledged the positive links between teacher-student relationships and student
progress, including students’ social and academic engagement in school and learning (Gray & Hackling, 2009; Randall et al., 2012):

If those relationships aren’t there then look the other stuff, look you’re banging your head against a wall. Region A (A1P)

Means of developing positive relationships

Once the importance of relationships was identified, teachers and principals were asked which relationships were important, with the interviewer often prompting further by asking: “Given this [the importance of relationships] how might I experience these if I were a student in this school?”

Teachers’ responses indicated that dynamics in the teacher-student relationships are at the heart of wellbeing, with the quality of students’ experiences with teachers affecting their emotional wellbeing (Fumoto, 2011; Patton et al., 2000; Soutter et al., 2011). Teachers recognized the importance for students of feeling understood and cared about, with their individual qualities, talents and differences acknowledged and valued. Teachers conveyed the importance of treating all children well - accepting and respecting them. Connell and Wellborn (1991) describe as relatedness, students need to “feel securely connected to the social surround and the need to experience oneself as worthy and capable of love and respect” (p.51).

In addition to the importance of students feeling understood, teachers also spoke of the importance of communication with students, with a particular focus on listening to and hearing students. This was discussed as being a two way process, emphasizing the responsibility teachers have to listen to students. Teachers consider that such communication contributes to students feeling a sense of connection and belonging in the school community, which along with strong relationships has a profound impact on the health and wellbeing of children and young people (Patton et al., 2000; Rowe, Stewart, & Petterson, 2007):

I think if you’re going to look at the wellbeing of the students, the first and foremost thing that needs to be addressed is this; they need to feel understood and therefore you need to communicate with them. Region A (A1TB)

Teachers and principals commonly referred to the tacit and/or explicit ways in which they perceive relationship-building with the students to be a routine part of their work. In our analysis of the data we have referred to this as attentive noticing since this term seemed to capture the breadth of ideas, strategies and actions principals and teachers spoke about. Such teacher and principal perspectives across all three regions on the importance of routine ‘noticing’ underlines the strong, unambiguous emphasis they place on relationships for student wellbeing. In the following discussion, the significance of good relationships between teachers and students and the means of developing these is analysed in more detail.

Attentive Noticing

Teachers in Region A placed a strong emphasis on the significance of getting to know students and showing an interest in their lives. They described the practical ways they do this. It can involve simply talking with students or engaging in activities which help form and strengthen connections. Casually asking questions, listening carefully to what students had to tell them and observing any obvious changes or events in students’ lives (like commenting on a new hairstyle or inquiring about weekend sport) were perceived as vitally important to developing positive, trusting relationships.
with students. Some teachers spoke about students ‘needing’ this kind of personal attention as they
don’t always receive it at home. Relationships with teachers can be helpful in offering positive role
models for children, support and potentially acting as a catalyst for a student’s recovery from
adversity (Gilligan, 1998). Simple gestures were frequently cited as meaning a lot to students, like
saying a student’s name when greeting him/her in the playground. Both principals and teachers
frequently referred to how much students seemed to like it when teachers showed they cared:

You’re aware if somebody’s come in a bit upset or they might tell you that they couldn’t get
their homework done because mum’s not well so you sort of tap into that a bit a few days
later and say “How’s mum” – just on the quiet;... Region A (A2TD)

Overall, the teachers in Region B tended to describe in more depth the kind of ‘noticing’ that helped
develop relationships with their students. They explicitly acknowledged, for example, that
observation and listening are requisite skills that need to be routinely applied on a daily basis. A
significant number of teachers in Region B emphasised knowing the students and acknowledged the
need for good relationships, including showing compassion towards students, as a key way of
identifying difficulties students may be experiencing:

...he has flourished in this new school and he has flourished because his words are “I’m not
invisible; they really know I’m here”. Region B (B5TB)

The data from principals and teachers in Region C reflected much of the same kind of focus on
noticing as the other two regions, with particularly frequent reference to the importance of listening
closely:

I think probably the easiest and the most powerful way to show any individual that you care
about them and you respect them is the listening and not just the listening – the “hearing”. I
know I have to do this sometimes – force myself in class to stop. Region C (C2TD)

Teachers gave concrete examples of ensuring that children feel understood and are listened to. This
includes having students take turns to talk, encouraging students’ questions and showing interest in
what students have to tell them, and treating them respectfully. Some teachers specifically spoke
about children being heard in the classroom context, and ensuring that this was fair and just.
Teachers’ comments indicated the importance of conversation between themselves and students, in
which students know they are heard and that the teacher will respond. This includes students
knowing that things will be acted on if necessary:

I think that they think that you know them. I really do – “She remembers my name” – which
I’m hopeless at but at least I might call them “possum” or something and I can remember
their background – but also that you give them the time. If there’s a fight or something you
don’t just go “blah, blah, blah”, you go “Okay, your turn now” – so you’re fair. I think they
think that’s really important that you listen to them, you know them, you know that they’re
there. Region A (A5TB)

The broader context of a respectful, inclusive school environment (discussed later on in the School
Culture section (3.3.1) of this report) that supports children having a say and contributes to building
connectedness (Rowe et al., 2007) was also identified:

You can go to some schools and a child can be walking down the corridor, you hear a teacher
“What are you doing” – we’re not that way. It would be talking to the child because they
might have a reason why they’re going... so don’t jump to conclusions – it’s the other way of engaging in conversation with them and allowing them and trusting them. Region B (B2P)

Some teachers and principals expressed that it is important to know a student, which includes having an awareness of their usual way of being. At times teachers described knowing the students well enough to be able to recognise when something is not right. Teachers also spoke of the importance of being flexible and creatively adaptive in accordance with students’ situation and needs. A closely related theme is teachers knowing about students’ home lives and events happening outside school, and making allowances or supporting students accordingly:

You can have some other kids and they might just be having an off day and you just go “Hang on, what’s going on? This isn’t normal” and you find out that somebody might have passed away. It’s about observation and then acting on that and not letting it go. Region B (B1TD)

I don’t think we can have any clue about wellbeing if we don’t... if you don’t know a student well enough so that when they walk into your classroom and realise “They’re a bit down today” or “They’re a bit flat” or “They’re a bit...”, “They’re really excited. What’s happened?” If you don’t know them well enough then you don’t even register that. Region C (C2TF)

Teachers generally pointed out that, as well as having conversations with students, the best way to build a relationship is to ask simply ‘how are you going?’ questions and then demonstrate to students that they are listening carefully to the answer. Teachers commented on the importance of remembering this information, and asking follow-up questions about the same topic at a later date. They perceived this as a particularly effective way of showing students that they care about what happens in their lives.

A core feature of attentive noticing, apparent throughout the data, is the proactive nature of teachers’ involvement. Apparent throughout the comments, it was made explicit in teachers’ references to ‘keeping an eye’ on children, initiating conversation or instigating action. It was also evident from teachers’ and principals’ comments that to successfully form effective relationships with students and exercise attentive noticing requires school staff to be genuine as well as proactive:

My experience is that there are some students who all they need to know is that you actually genuinely like them and it may not get them to do their assessment or do their homework but it can make them happier to be here particularly when they know that you’re not going to yell at them every time they haven’t done their homework or when they’re having a bad day write off the relationship entirely. I think they know that if they have a good relationship with you then there is room and scope in there for them to have bad days and to have horrible experiences and to not necessarily meet expectations all the time but the relationship doesn’t end because of that. There’s always the opportunity to come in the next day and for things to be different hopefully. Region C (C3TB)

Relationships between teachers and students can’t be prescribed and are not always formulaic. A number of teachers and principals from Region A also signaled the need for diversity within the staff community so that all students could find a teacher they might identify with. In doing so, they highlighted the importance of students being able to trust and ‘go to’ that person:
You’ve also got a large contingent of students that are socially awkward and so what you need is a complete spread of the community amongst your teachers so that everybody has someone that they can relate to within the school. Region A (A1TB)

Further, there is some suggestion there are ‘unwritten’ rules (for students, their friends and teachers) about how and when to ask if everything is okay. For example, if a teacher notices a student is distressed, but clearly doesn’t want to talk to the teacher about it, the teacher ‘circumvents’ this by going to the student’s friends, and casually inquiring if everything is okay with them. If there is a level of trust between the students and the teacher, most often the student’s friends will disclose at least some aspects of the situation to the teacher, with the expectation that the teacher can help, or sympathise. However, some teachers made it very clear there’s no precise roadmap for how to approach conversations when they notice students who may be experiencing difficulties.

The role of counsellors is discussed later in this report, but it is worth noting here that some teachers pointed out that when students have ‘personal problems’ the student often will not want to talk to the school counsellor as they don’t have the same quality of relationship that the classroom teacher has with the student. The concern and care for students was evident in comments made regarding students talking to teachers about difficult issues, and the importance of students having someone they can trust to go to:

In my experience personally, I suppose I’d say good student/teacher relations is the fundamental thing. Counselling and stuff – obviously we have a counsellor here and those sorts of things – but for many kids, the counselling process as it exists is “Would you like to volunteer and go to talk to a total stranger about your personal problems” which I wouldn’t really volunteer to do. You’d much rather talk to someone you actually feel you have some kind of relationship with who knows who you are and what you deal with on a daily basis...it largely falls to the classroom teachers who see them the most on a daily basis and that have probably the better sort of relationship in that regard. Region A (A3TA)

Teachers in Region B emphasized the importance of being explicitly ‘shown’ in practical ways how to build and develop relationships with their students. They made the point that relationship-building with students is not always a ‘natural’ occurrence, and that they needed specific strategies:

A significant issue is that it’s all very well to say to people “Build relationships with kids” but not everyone knows how to build a relationship and they’ll go “Well what do I do? How do I do it?” There’s a whole series of things that I believe that could be promoted again, across the board, everywhere... Region B (B1TB)

A number of teachers and principals in Region B indicated specific events and programs they utilize to develop relationships, such as the first six weeks of the year or the homeroom every morning. Similarly, the importance of extra-curricular activities featured in Region A, where teachers identified retreats, Church events, sports and informal activities as an opportune way to build relationships.

Across the regions teachers emphasise the importance of realizing that whilst they are a very important part of the students’ lives, they and the school are still only one facet of children’s (often very complex) lives. The relationships students have with students are located within the broader
context of relationships within families and communities. Sometimes teachers perceive that helping children with relationships within communities is part of their role.

**Challenges to developing quality teacher-student relationships**

Teachers identified a number of factors impacting on the teacher-student relationship, including those related to individuals, such as goals, feelings, needs and behavioural styles; experiences and processes by which information is exchanged (discussed throughout this section of the report); and external features such as the climate and physical features of the school (discussed in section 3.3.1, School Culture) (Hamre & Pianta, 2006). A number of teachers in Region A, for example, identified the role of personality styles, protocols and policy with respect to managing the ‘fine line’ between warm, supportive relationships and teachers perceived to be becoming ‘too familiar’ with students (and vice versa).

A number of teachers in Region C also drew attention to how the increased level of ‘busyness’ and consequent time pressures in schools creates barriers in providing the kind of attention to students that helps build quality relationships. Another issue raised by teachers in regard to challenges in building positive relationships between teachers and students was the impact of increasing enrolments.

The findings clearly indicate teachers’ and principals’ key positioning of relationships between teachers and students in facilitating student wellbeing. As described above, they point to ways that these relationships play a key role and outline means by which they can build and consolidate positive, beneficial relationships with students. An important aspect of this, raised in the ‘take home’ messages, is valuing and respecting the individual child. In their final comments (and discussed further in 3.4.1), teachers also connected their own wellbeing and professional support to forming relationships with students, with some emphasising that there is not sufficient time to address wellbeing in the way they might want to. The critical importance of relationships with students and the impingements experienced by teachers in relation to these, in terms of time pressures, workload and balancing role expectations, point to the need for explicitly supporting teachers in developing and sustaining these through training, practice and policy initiatives.

**3.2.2 Parent partnership**

Across all three regions, principals and teachers placed significant emphasis on ‘partnership’ with parents as critical to supporting wellbeing in schools. The importance of developing a relationship with the parents and inviting them into school was acknowledged. Many principals and teachers, particularly in Regions A and C, placed the onus on themselves to explore ways to build and strengthen positive relationships with parents since they perceived this to be key for communication, sharing information and building understanding and support around the children.

In Regions A and B the parent-teacher relationship was viewed as reciprocal, with a sense that teachers and parents were ‘working with’ and mutually supporting each other, to support the children. Teachers and principals in Region B specifically used, and in one case reflected on, the word partnership in relation to working with parents to support children:

*I think it’s around quality of relationships that exist and I also think it’s about if you want to build those relationships you need a culture of conversation where there’s mutual respect and (0:47:49.2) we all have something to contribute and those things need to be nurtured and I think really valuing relationships between school and home and families and*
Some teachers in Regions A and B suggested the supportive, reciprocal relationship should also be inclusive of the children. Additionally, for teachers working in partnership with parents in Region A, this extended to inviting other professionals in to help both teachers and parents:

_There’s professional development for us so that wellbeing meaning not only do we have parents involved in the meeting, we had a child psychologist here to talk to us about why these symptoms are happening and what we can do as a school._ Region A (A4TA)

Teachers and principals in Regions A and B at times contextualized partnerships with parents within the broader community context, with the work of schools resting on a foundation of social relations (Bryk & Schneider, 1996). Emphasis was further placed by some teachers on the specific Catholic community which the school was part of. Teachers spoke about the importance of involving the community in the school and of the school belonging to the community.

Interestingly, the benefits of parental involvement in relation to children’s wellbeing appeared to be taken as a given by teachers and principals. Despite the significant emphasis placed by teachers on parent partnership, there was little discussion of the actual impact or outcomes of such involvement. There is a considerable body of research indicating links between parental involvement and various indicators of students’ academic achievement and school performance (Jacobbe, Ross, & Hensberry, 2012). However, there is less research that focuses upon students’ wellbeing in relation to parental involvement. The small body of literature linking parental partnerships to student wellbeing indicates beneficial consequences of parental involvement on a range of academic, social and emotional outcomes for children (Albright & Weissberg, 2010; Christenson & Havsy, 2004; Powell, Son, File, & San Juan, 2010).

**Means of facilitating relationships with parents**

The means by which relationships with parents can be facilitated by teachers and the school is of key interest. Schools’ role in facilitating parental involvement is manifest in a range of ways (Epstein, 2001; Simon, 2004) and the means of building and strengthening relationships, as described by teachers in all regions, includes parents being invited and welcomed into school in contexts of social engagement, providing information, developing and strengthening home-school relations, and engagement in programs:

_That relationship building is really... you have to start implementing things like camps or extra activities or a day off in the classroom – retreat days – and start inviting parents in in terms of let’s have a parent information night or let’s just have a wine and cheese night for parents to come along and socialise – those sorts of things I think._ Region C (C2TF)

Principals and teachers across all regions spoke about programs and workshops offered by the school, including forums and meetings to provide information, interviews with parents and facilitated discussion groups. An issue spoken extensively about by teachers and principals in Region A was the lack of involvement by parents in many of the initiatives offered by the school. Teachers indicated some empathy for parents, understanding how busy their lives can be and consequently the difficulties in attending for some, given the time and travel involved. The teachers also indicated that it was the same few parents that attended most things and that these were not necessarily the parents that teachers and principals considered needed it the most.
There was a considerable amount of data generated in Region B regarding the programs being implemented to foster stronger partnership with parents, encouraging parents to come into the school and strengthening communication with them. The focus in Region B teachers’ comments was more on building relationships with parents than providing information to parents. Parental involvement that focuses upon shared understanding about processes and support for children’s learning, rather than specifically focusing on direct parental intervention in children’s learning, appears more likely to result in positive learning outcomes (Harris & Goodall, 2008).

Region C teachers identified the importance of having programs that support positive interaction with parents regarding the education and wellbeing of their children. Importantly, some initiatives incorporating social and emotional learning require consistency between home and school and involving parents in programs helps with the need for these to be modelled, observed and practiced across contexts (Albright & Weissberg, 2010; Christenson & Havsy, 2004; Patrikakou & Weissberg, 2007).

Some secondary school teachers and principals also drew attention to the importance of supporting parents as their children transitioned from primary school. It can be more difficult for parents to be involved in secondary school, as there is a shift from there generally being only one teacher in a primary school class, to a potentially confusing range of people and roles in secondary schools (Harris & Goodall, 2008).

Teachers across all the regions spoke of the importance of communicating with parents, and the need to be proactive in this. Principals and teachers in Region B provided a range of ways of communicating effectively with parents, including sending text messages, making phone calls, sending newsletters, special mail outs and offering presentations. At times teachers described ‘going the extra mile’ to ensure that they are in contact with parents:

For that particular lady, she’s a single mum; we’ve made a lot of adjustments for her. She doesn’t read the newsletters and you send them out – you ask everyone to read the newsletters and she doesn’t – and she’ll ring and say “I forgot about... I didn’t...” and we say “It was in the newsletter” but the adjustment is we know that she’s never going to so Maxine will tell her over the phone and she’ll get a phone call every day about something but that’s that tolerance. So that mother is connected, the children are connected – they’re little things; it’s little things... Region B (B2P)

Teachers in all regions also spoke about the school’s engagement with the broader community. This extends to students’ involvement in community-based activities and also the community’s involvement with the school. One aspect, described by some teachers in Region B, was the importance of looking after and supporting families in the community in a variety of ways. They spoke of the school being a social centre for the community and providing opportunities for families to remain connected. Teachers in Region C spoke less about their local community than the other two regions, however one teacher mentioned the importance of ensuring community programs are available to help young people

**Challenges to forming relationships**

Teachers and principals identified a number of challenges and limitations to developing and strengthening relationships with parents. This included some hesitancy about the extent to which particular initiatives would be successful:
There would be certainly be schools that would have a very high level of support but think there would also be many, many schools where there would be almost a culture of – I don’t know whether “fear” is too strong – but not to bring problems from home or inadequacies from home or whatever to the school area. Region A (ASTA)

A further challenge reported is parents’ attitudes to school. In our study we did not find any evidence to support assertions in the literature that teachers views of parents can impact negatively on parental partnerships, or that teachers seek to limit parents’ influence, criticism or interference through emphasising their own professionalism and/or professional superiority (Amatea, Mixon, & McCarthy, 2013; Baeck, 2009; Jacobbe et al., 2012). However, teachers’ spoke of their perceptions of parents’ attitudes toward and, at times unrealistic and inappropriate, expectations of schools.

Some teachers indicated that some parents have attitudes indicative of an erosion of trust in teachers and schools (Adams & Christenson, 2000; Mitchell & Forsyth, 2004, p. 21) that may impact on the relationships they have with teachers. This was expressed directly by a few Region A teachers who had encountered parents with attitudes based on parents’ own experiences at school, leading them to be fearful and aggressive, and parents who viewed teachers as ‘baby-sitters’ and lacked awareness of the demands on them.

Mis-matches between parents’ and teachers’ expectations of teachers and schools also create tension and impact on relationships. Teachers and principals across all the regions expressed concern regarding the expectations that some parents have of teachers, in relation to problems both inside and outside of the school environment. Teachers and principals in all regions spoke about the expectations some parents put on teachers to ‘fix’ problems concerning their children, and their concerns regarding their ability and/or the appropriateness of their role in doing this. Teachers implied that expectations on teachers had increased as, correspondingly, responsibilities of parents diminished, and provided insight into the range of issues they face in getting parents to acknowledge and support their children. While it was not always viewed negatively, teachers’ perceptions were that schools were expected to provide much more than just an education, leading to increased expectations and pressure placed on teachers and schools:

> It’s almost like parents are shirking more and more responsibility which is then having to be picked up by the school. In many cases the schools and the teachers are almost having to do the parenting and again, we’re not really resourced to be doing that; that’s not our core business. Region C (C2P)

> And I think the difficult thing from a school’s point of view is that you have one parent who’ll ring up and say “We need this”, “Oh yes that sounds great” and they’re all on board and they all want to work with you and everything else; you get the next parent and it’s “What do you mean? There’s nothing wrong”. Some parents have a really good understanding. Region B (B1TA)

Alongside unrealistic or inappropriate expectations placed on teachers and schools, teachers are also aware of parents’ need for support in parenting, including issues arising specifically in relation to social media. Across all regions, teachers indicated empathy for parents and a willingness to offer support and work together with them when they perceived a need for parenting support, rather than an abrogation of parental responsibility. Heartache was expressed by some teachers in Region C when they feel parents are not engaged in working together to support their children and they
emphasised the importance of parents taking the lead role in parenting. These findings, indicating some teachers’ empathy and perseverance around engaging parents, are interesting in the light of a number of studies indicating that although schools focus upon ‘hard to reach’ parents, it can in fact be the schools that are ‘hard to reach’ (Crozier & Davies, 2007; Harris & Goodall, 2008; Lareau & Shumar, 1996), with parents experiencing limitations or difficulties when trying to approach school (Baeck, 2009).

Teachers perceived that school and community size can impact relationships with parents. Teachers in all three regions indicated that being located in smaller communities, or having schools with smaller enrolments, meant that there was the possibility for closer relationships and greater community connection. Alongside the benefits of smaller communities, however, teachers in Regions B and C also spoke of the specific difficulties that can arise within small communities and have a negative effect on schools:

_I mentioned before the trouble that we’ve had with suicide in the community and that really has a trickle-on effect. Because we only have two high schools everyone basically knows everyone so when someone’s effected – even if it’s not at our school – it trickles on and affects everyone and then everybody needs support and debriefing and counselling to work through it because it’s such a small community as well._ Region C (C5TD)

Teachers and principals in Region B spoke about the multicultural community within the school and the accompanying complexities in terms of developing parent partnership. Small schools were perceived as having an advantage in terms of getting to know parents and accommodating some of the complexities for children and families of different cultural backgrounds, which is likely to lead to a more collaborative home–school partnership and successful parental involvement (Kim, 2009). Reference was made by Region C teachers to some cultural issues, including with indigenous students and programs.

It is evident from the findings reported here that teachers and principals view partnership and collaboration between the school and parents as integral to student wellbeing. The perceive relationships to be central to such partnership, posing challenges for them in establishing these and ensuring they were sustained and effective. However, the take home messages that centred on teacher and school relationships with parents had several different emphases. Some teachers in Regions A and B focused on the need for stronger relationships to be fostered between school and parents. Others, in those regions, spoke of parents wanting to know that school is a caring place which nurtures children’s wellbeing. Teachers in Region C placed less of an emphasis on parental involvement than the other regions.

Relationships with parents are very much viewed as a partnership offering mutual support in relation to parenting and teaching, although there is also a sense that the boundaries of the teachers’ role can become blurred as increased responsibility is placed on them around out-of-school issues. Some of the take home messages identified pressures facing children and young people, including some perceived as being specific to this generation and related to technology and social media developments. There was a perception evident in some messages that parents were not altogether tuned in to children’s wellbeing needs relating to such new developments.

An ecological approach is also indicated in the findings, with teacher-student and teacher-parent relationships conceptualized within the broader community context. This is an area in which the
relationships sphere overlaps with the environment sphere. The culture of the school contributes to determining the school’s engagement with the broader community. Further environmental factors include programs and workshops offered by the school (or not) to provide information, facilitate discussion or otherwise help get parents engaged and involved with the school, as well as the size of the school and local community. Alongside the ways in which parent partnership is positioned in the spheres of relationships and environment, there is also a thematic link with aspects of the personal sphere, as result of expectations of teacher and parents about their own and each other’s roles.

3.2.3 Leadership

Across all three regions principals and teachers emphasised the role leadership can play within schools in relation to student wellbeing. Principals and teachers stressed the importance of “leading from the top” and that if implemented effectively, leadership could impact the whole school environment in a positive way. Teachers see it as a movement that begins with creating an encouraging atmosphere for staff, which is then reflected within the student community.

Teachers in Region A reflected on the importance of this leading from the top, using their experiences of different leadership styles to inform their thinking:

> It’s vital from the top down and that’s been very pointed this year with the change in leadership and different structures being explored. Even from the top all the way down to the way that student leaders work; you need people to lead by example which I know is a cliché but you really need people to show how things should be done – by them doing it. You need to have that person at the top who is calm, who is reasonable so that other people beneath them with different strengths are able to work to those strengths. Region A (A2P)

Some teachers in Region A particularly emphasized the “flow-on effect” of leadership, where the atmosphere created by the principals permeates down to teachers and year coordinators, and then on to the students. They emphasized the role of leadership in promoting wellbeing of the staff and the potential benefits of that. Reflecting shifts in the role of school principals in Australia (Dinham, Anderson, Caldwell, & Weldon, 2011), teachers across all regions expressed a clear preference for a shared or distributed leadership style (Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Harris, 2012; Townsend, 2011), where they were part of the decision making process around the support they receive. Instructional leadership is clearly vital but, given the large burden of school leadership, success relies on cooperation (Dinham et al., 2011; Hallinger, 2011; Townsend, 2011).

Region B teachers identified how the principal and executive staff sets the tone and direction for the school being. They also highlighted aspects that support positive leadership, such as having a well-defined and team-based structure, and shared leadership. This approach to leadership resonates with ideas of a professional community, with layered leadership, defined responsibilities and collaborative teams (Gurr & Drysdale, 2012). Teachers’ comments implicitly recognised the reciprocal trust required to successfully negotiate more informal leadership practices (Harris, 2012).

Region C teachers also spoke of the tone the principal sets and its effect on the school community and culture. Reference was made to the importance of principals being inclusive and modeling good relationships, with staff and students:

> It’s got to be modelled and it has to be modelled from the top. Staff have to feel comfortable with it, staff have to realise that they’ve got to get to know the child in front of them – as you just said – as a person. Region C (C1P)
Teachers and principals across all regions acknowledge the importance of principals and Executive teams supporting staff and letting them know they are appreciated. In Region A this included the principal being approachable and alert to staff wellbeing. Value was placed on leadership style with an emphasis on consultation and openness, rather than more rigid, imposed styles of leadership. One Region B principal acknowledged the importance of developing relationships with staff, and saw the effects of such positive relationships filtering down to students:

> I think for teaching staff their voice needs to be heard in process, their ability to articulate and to be in power to do things – that’s what gives them excitement about coming to work, that’s what gives them that sense of wanting to be here and I think when they want to be here, when things are positive that automatically moves through to the students. But that relational is really keen; they’ve got to have a great relationship with one another, with me as principal – within a professional context – but then that relationship then moves to students as well. Region B (B5P)

Teachers and principals from all regions mentioned the support they receive from their regional education office in relation to student wellbeing. In Region B this was integrated within the overall, structural approach to wellbeing. In Regions A and C there was more specific mention of system level support.

**Means of leadership – directly concerning students**

While the data from our study reported above includes comments from both teachers and principals about the perceived importance of relationships between teachers and students there was also data pointing specifically to the potential of the relationship between principals and students for influencing wellbeing:

> I will walk out into the playground and I will put my hand on a kid’s shoulder and say “How are you going? Are you all right today” and I get that back. I have a couple of Year 12 kids who constantly say “You right today sir” because they’ve been used to me saying it all through the junior school. I’ll walk into a classroom and I’ll say “Hey listen, anything going’s on, you know where my door is. It’s always open.” Region A (A2P)

By way of contrast, some teachers were very pragmatic about why relationships between students and principals may not be possible, including time constraints, competing demands and perceptions of the principal as absent or removed. Several teachers in Region A expressed appreciation for the role principals play in direct relation to supporting them with student wellbeing - in terms of a safeguarding role and supporting in behaviour management. Teachers in Region C spoke of the importance of leaders being involved and engaging with students:

> I think leadership really need to get involved in the relationship with the students and be seen; be seen around the playground, be seen, know the students’ names, greet them – just those little things. Region C (C2TF)

**Challenges in relation to leadership**

Teachers and principals in Region C also discussed the limitations on principal engagement with students encountered in larger secondary schools, with multiple departments and split campuses:

> I think you have to as a principal or as a leader in the school you have to model those good relationships with kids but the sad thing about it is, particularly in a school this size, I think...
Wellbeing in Schools FINAL REPORT: VOLUME TWO

the bigger the school, probably the less time the principal is able to spend with the kids and even with the teachers because you’re just... like here, you’re split between two campuses and my week is divided between two campuses. The school is too big to allow me to have a teaching load so you’re not able to model as well as you could do or would like to, good relationships with kids and you just get bogged down. Region C (C2P)

Other difficulties can arise from a lack of leadership, such as distrust if teachers have little input into decision-making in areas that they consider their primary domain and if principals were perceived as not taking action on issues (Bryk & Schneider, 1996). Teachers in our study spoke about some implications of principals who have not provided support to staff (not necessarily in their current school).

To sum up, leadership clearly has a significant impact on relationships within the school. Key features include a shared or consultative leadership style, and demonstrable support and appreciation for teachers. Teachers in Regions A and C underlined the issue of leadership in take home messages emphasising joint leadership, collegiality and consistent values. Comments made by teachers underline the importance of principals’ values and a sense of mission, personal qualities, motivational factors plus the key social skill of listening (Gurr, Drysdale, & Mulford, 2006). Alongside relationships, leadership is also linked with the environmental sphere impacting on the school culture. Leadership thus impacts on relationships, school culture and, consequently, student wellbeing.

Relationships with counsellors are another important factor in relation to wellbeing raised during the interviews. An aspect of this is the further delineation of teachers’ and others’ roles, as discussed below.

3.2.4 Counsellors

Across the three regions principals and teachers spoke about having counsellors available for children to see, in the context of student wellbeing. Teachers were generally positive about the value of counselling, the counsellor’s role and being able to refer children to a counsellor, particularly if they were on the school campus.

While teachers and principals in our study did not comment specifically on the effectiveness of counselling services, other UK studies indicate that counselling is helpful for most students who attend (Cooper, 2009; Pattison & Harris, 2006), although not all (Lynass, Pykhtina, & Cooper, 2011; McKenzie, Murray, Prior, & Stark, 2010). Further, it may result in improvement in pro-social behaviours and relationships (Cooper et al., 2010; Lynass et al., 2011; McElearney, Adamson, Shevlin, & Bunting, 2012; McKenzie et al., 2010; Segrott, Rothwell, & Thomas, 2013) as well as a positive impact on academic achievement (Rupani, Haughey, & Cooper, 2012).

In Region A teachers and principals were, for the most part, familiar with the counselling options available and tended to express positive views about counsellors being available. While research indicates that students are unaware of counselling services at some schools (Fox & Butler, 2007), teachers in our study spoke positively about students and parents being aware that there were counsellors available to support students. At some schools counsellors were only available on certain days and teachers indicated that the counsellor in this situation was “flat out” and the existing need was greater than the available allocations.
In Region B teachers and principals spoke of having counsellors available for children to see and there appeared to be a greater availability than in Region A. At times counsellors were spoken of in the context of a wider team of helping professionals on site, including medical professionals and nurses. Region C teachers also spoke of counsellors being available for students. Some teachers were very positive and appreciative with regard to this, although there were mixed responses from the teachers in terms of referring children to see the counsellors – some teachers viewed it as ‘passing children on’ and no longer being involved, whereas other teachers described working closely with counsellors. Teachers at one school spoke of having a counsellor available in a limited capacity (as described by some teachers in Region A), available one day per week and expressed a wish for that to be improved on, particularly in response to emergency situations.

Means of supporting effective counselling practice

An important issue that was raised by teachers in all the regions was the relationship between the teacher and counsellor roles. This was raised with regard to several different dimensions, including in relation to children experiencing difficulties, communication between teachers and counsellors (including referral processes), teacher’s capabilities to play a counselling role, and counsellors supporting teachers.

Teachers in Regions A and B acknowledged that while they refer children to counselling, or act as a conduit for this, they are also aware of some of the issues for children and the importance of having children confide in them. Some responses indicate awareness that supporting children is not confined to counsellors and specialists (Gilligan, 1998) and that teachers play a role in this too:

*I suppose this, for me, is the frustrating part; I can’t get through to every child as much as I would like to. If somebody else can it not only helps the child, their family; it helps the whole class, it helps the whole school, it helps me.* Region A (A5TB)

*It’s great to have the support networks in place like for example like I said with the [name of centre] and the counsellors that kind of thing – you need those in place as a basis, as a starting point but I think the teachers… it needs to be recognised I suppose that the teachers do have a major part to play and just solely due to the fact that we’re the ones who generally spend a lot of the time with these kids.* Region B (B1TA)

Teachers in Region C discussed the ‘front–line’ nature of their role dealing with issues arising for children, while simultaneously needing to retain their primary role as educators. Some teachers in Region B indicated that there were clear processes for communication between counsellors and teaching staff at their school, including well-defined referral processes and role definition. There was a sense that these teachers had a key facilitating role, which has been identified as a factor impacting on students’ decision to access school counselling, both practically and psychologically (Prior, 2012).

While there were indications that teachers in Region B had established processes and clarity with regard to their own role in relation to counsellors, teachers in Regions A and C spoke about not being ‘qualified’ or ‘equipped’ to deal with the concerns children presented with. Teachers in Region A talked about the complexities of some of the concerns for children, which require professional involvement from a counsellor. Similarly, Region C teachers spoke about feeling ill-prepared when dealing with counselling issues, with several teachers suggesting that having some training in this regard would be helpful:
The other thing that comes in too then when you get to more complex problems – we’re only trained as teachers; we’re not counsellors, we’re not psychologists so yes, when you get into the more complicated stuff it’s often a lot more comforting to be able to say “You need to see the counsellor about that”… Region A (A2TB)

It is evident from the teachers’ responses that the counsellor’s role is broader than simply providing one-on-one counselling for children who are experiencing difficulties. Counsellors can have a role in the wider activities of the school and school-family-community partnerships (Griffin & Steen, 2010) and are perceived as supporting teachers, providing information regarding topical issues of concern that can inform teachers, and being involved in programs.

Teachers in Region A spoke positively about the role of counsellors in supporting teachers dealing with issues for students:

Well in terms of the child that needs emotional support, they might be seeing the school counsellor but then I can also talk to the school counsellor and ask her to give me some pointers as to how I can best support the child as well as her supporting the child in her role. Region A (A4TD)

Teachers in Region C also spoke about talking with counsellors in relation to individual children. They also spoke of being provided with information from the counsellors about issues of concern for children generally and using that to inform their own class time with students. Teachers in Region A and Region B also raised the issue of counselling in the context of teacher wellbeing, with counsellors being available for staff to see.

**Challenges to counselling**

Teachers in Regions A and C referred to counsellors being “overloaded” with work, particularly if they work part-time. Another issue raised by some teachers in Region A was that some children do not want to speak to school counsellors, although other research indicates that students like the fact that the counsellor is not a teacher at the school (Fox & Butler, 2007). Teachers were a preferred source of support for some students:

I would like to think they have a number of teachers that they could go to but we’re all different, they’re all different but I would be fairly confident they would have at least one, possibly two that they could all go to; some would have more who they would feel that they could confide in or seek out if they wanted something extra – not just to have to rely on seeing the counsellor because some of them don’t want to see the counsellor. Region A (A2TD)

Teachers in Region B also talked about the stigma associated with speaking to school counsellors and kind of reluctance that may be related to student concerns about confidentiality and privacy (Fox & Butler, 2007; McKenzie et al., 2010; Prior, 2012). However, one teacher also noted a shift in perception regarding this:

The counsellor is always surprised at how the boys are open yet when I started eight years ago they weren’t; no-one would see the counsellor – there was only one counsellor. It wasn’t seen as something that you could share stuff with. Also we use the counsellors not only just so the boys can talk about what’s going on and what’s troubling them, we use them for strategies in dealing with anger management. Region B (B1DP)
The above findings were underlined in the take home messages of teachers in Region A, highlighting a perception that counsellors have a vital and effective role to play in addressing student wellbeing. However, the findings also suggest ambivalence on teachers’ part in relation to their own role with students who have emotional, social or mental health issues.

Environmental factors, particularly resource and funding issues, impact on the role counsellors play in student wellbeing. Increased availability of counsellors, clarity around role definition and specific training for teachers in ‘front-line’ responding to students’ emotional needs, would go some way to help alleviating the ambivalence and anxiety associated with this area.

A further finding from the principal and teacher interviews was the way in which understandings and practice concerning wellbeing were inextricably bound up with those of ‘pastoral care’. These links are explored in the following discussion.

### 3.2.5 Pastoral Care

*I think of [wellbeing] mainly as pastoral care – probably because that’s what it’s been called in a lot of the schools where I’ve been; ensuring that students feel happy, safe and staff as well. If you’re content or comfortable then you should be able to learn the best you possibly can; that people feel respected, that they feel that there’s fairness and justice.* Region A (A2TD)

The analysis of data thus far has pointed to important findings about wellbeing as understood by teachers and principals to be multidimensional, with relationships central across all dimensions. These relationships encompass students, teachers, principals, parents and others in the school and wider community. We turn now to examining how pastoral care, which is relational at the core, featured prominently in discussions about wellbeing.

Pastoral care has had a long tradition in Catholic, Christian and some other school systems, and is built around the scriptural/gospel notion of the ‘good shepherd’ who looks after the flock, whereby the holistic care of all individuals within the school community is paramount (Ollerenshaw & McDonald, 2006). Many teachers referred directly or indirectly to this historical familiarity with pastoral care and spoke of wellbeing as a constituent element of this:

*I know that traditionally within Catholic circles we talked about wellbeing as pastoral care.* Region B (BSP)

*What we have here is we do have a very good pastoral care; we have personal development education through our religious education program as well.* Region C (C3P)

#### Means of pastoral care promoting wellbeing

In all three regions teachers frequently mentioned the important role of pastoral programs, pastoral coordinators and home rooms in addressing the pastoral care of students. In this context, it might be assumed that pastoral care was therefore acting as a proxy term for wellbeing:

*You pick that up as a home-room teacher which is where a lot of the pastoral stuff seems to be centered.* Region B (B5TC)

*Then we have them for a class and have them for PC as well – so pastoral care sorry – I think having that core teacher they can go to is really good.* Region C (C2TF)
Pastoral care programs provide an opportunity for students to develop positive relationships with teachers and pastoral coordinators:

*Our structure of home-room teachers and pastoral coordinators means that all students have one or two people who they should have a really good relationship with. My home-room I see twice a day, I also teach them for religion and personal development so most days they’re seeing me for at least 40 minutes. In that home-room time there is space to go and have a chat and show an interest and talk about what’s going on so I think that pastoral system works really well.* Region C (C3TB)

**Challenges in regard to pastoral care and wellbeing**

Well, as a term that’s been used [wellbeing], it’s relatively new. If I take my 30 years involved in education, it’s a relatively new term and when it began cropping up that’s the sort of question that I would ask too – “Well what exactly do we mean here and where does it fit into the overall pastoral care of students and do we make distinctions?” I find it really difficult to make those sorts of clear distinctions between things like pastoral care, wellbeing and even discipline which some people seem to think only deals with the punitive side of educating kids. Region A [A3P]

Further to the very evident conflation of wellbeing with pastoral care many teachers in Regions A and B also invoked the language of welfare, discipline, counselling and behavior management in describing one or other of wellbeing or pastoral care, indicating the malleable nature of the construct (Grove, 2004) and suggesting a somewhat confused understanding of the role, function and relationships between these. The lack of clarity perhaps also contributes to an uncertainty at times as to what is happening within pastoral care programs:

*I think as well... it seems contradictory but it’s a fine line between... you can set up a pastoral care program and not actually have any pastoral care occurring. That’s pretty easy to do; you just put the teacher and the kids in the room for the set amount of time* Region A (A3TA)

Although not specifically raised in our study, other contributing factors to the apparent confusion and lack of clarity may include primary schools having less readily available staff to offer pastoral care and many teachers having no training for a pastoral care role (Grove, 2004).

Given the conflation between notions of pastoral care and wellbeing, possibly as a result of pastoral care being historically embedded in the culture and discourse of Catholic education, there now needs to be more critical engagement around the meaning, practice and relationship between the two terms to address the evident confusion and ambiguity. The term pastoral care is used both in reference to an institutional structure and as action/s or a way of being. Therefore, it is bound up historically with the environmental, although the primary concern in the data was with pastoral care as the relational. Similarly, conceptualisations of wellbeing are strongly framed within relationships. Given the shared relational component and evident ambiguity, it would seem both timely and beneficial to re-examine the location, potential and use of both within Catholic education.

### 3.2.6 Pedagogy

Many teachers perceived wellbeing as an important aspect of their role and placed a major emphasis on the ways relationships within and beyond schools shape the wellbeing of both students and teachers. To some extent, these relationships are perceived as being located in the routine,
everyday practices and activities of schools. Such practices include approaches to pedagogy, where many teachers (particularly throughout Region B) perceived that the quality of the teaching and learning environment can positively and negatively impact the wellbeing of students:

> Teachers have a responsibility to teach well but clearly, if you’re going to be an effective teacher, you have to have really effective relationships with students, you need to respect them, you need to make sure that they’re aware that in the nature of the work that you’re doing that you’re well prepared, that you’re seeking to engage them, that you are involving them in the process of learning and then for wellbeing, you’re looking at their wellbeing. Region B (B6P)

**Means of pedagogy contributing to wellbeing**

As the above data attests, the narratives of the principals and teachers in our study point strongly to links between wellbeing and pedagogy. Such links were also thickly woven with explicit and implicit reference to the important role of relationships, emphasizing the delivery of pedagogical approaches in tandem with modeling a caring, inclusive approach by the teacher/school (McLaughlin, 2008). Less apparent in teachers’ comments were other pedagogical approaches which would help to promote student wellbeing as outlined in the literature, including making social and emotional learning outcomes explicit in the curriculum and for students (Lovat, Clement, Dally, & Toomey, 2010; Tirri, 2011) and offering opportunities for students to collaborate and take responsibility for their own learning, such as including practical and fieldwork, less formal teaching and breaks in the school routine associated with pedagogical wellbeing and increased happiness (Pyhältö, Soini, & Pietarinen, 2010; Scoffham & Barnes, 2011).

In other words, for most of these teachers their approaches to pedagogy were perceived as a major vehicle for building positive relationships and hence supporting student wellbeing. However, with such dual pedagogical intent quite a number of perceived tensions about the role of teachers also surfaced:

> How do you engage them? They’re sitting there, they’re not responsive, ask them a question that you haven’t registered they won’t know the answer to and so you just increase the humiliation. That does come down to pedagogy and teachers being taught how to teach. The teacher has to be able to bring them out of their shell; to bring them into engagement with their learning but if they’ve never been taught to do it... you will find the odd one – or more than the “odd” – you’ll find probably about I’d say maybe 30 or 40% of teachers will do it intuitively; they have a great dramatic flair and an oral ability or an innate compassion towards children and things like that. But for a very large proportion of teachers they don’t have that and they haven’t been taught it; they’ve been taught all of the brilliant theories of education... Region C (C5TD)

Teachers in Region A provided several examples of being flexible and adaptable in responding to individual children’s needs. Similarly, teachers from Regions B and C particularly emphasized that teaching is about more than just academic outcomes:

> In the forefront is always the kids and moving them and helping them; our core business is not just to educate them but to make them a whole person. I think that’s what this school is about ...Region B (B2TD)
Challenges to pedagogy in supporting wellbeing

Teachers’ attitudes to education, teaching and students were identified as an issue that affected relationships between teachers and students, and therefore influenced wellbeing. This was of greatest concern to teachers in Region C. Relationships between teachers and students, as discussed earlier, are an important element in approaches used in classroom management (Wubbels, 2011). Teachers’ comments indicated that some teachers’ attitudes prevented them from perceiving pedagogy as an important means for supporting children’s wellbeing, suggesting support for the notion that the change in the culture of teaching toward greater collaborative relationships among students and teachers is the ‘hardest core to crack’ (Patton et al., 2000):

> For a teacher in the classroom – if they like teaching, if they like teaching that subject, even the level of teaching, whether it be a D or an A class is less important but it does factor in – they have to love teaching and they have to like teenagers. Region C (CSTD)

A number of teachers also explained that there were few opportunities to reflect on the links between pedagogy, relationships and wellbeing, with a view to extending and refining not only their understandings of wellbeing but also their pedagogical practices. Others indicated that teachers’ attitudes (to teaching and to students) affect teaching practice and subsequently impact on student wellbeing. This point was also reflected in the take home message from one teacher who highlighted the need for teachers to be provided with guidance in their pedagogical approach to take account of the interplay between teacher assumptions, attitudes and practice.

3.3 Wellbeing as environmental

The themes included within the environmental sphere include those already signalled in the previous relationships section of school culture and programs. In addition to these, the policy environment plays a key role impacting on schools’ approaches to student wellbeing. Each of these three themes is discussed in the following sub-sections.

3.3.1 School Culture

The culture of the school, including its specific mission and heritage as a Catholic school, was a significant touchstone for teachers as they articulated the ways wellbeing was enacted across the school community. In addition to the major importance placed on the role of relationships (as reported above) teachers and principals also highlighted the critical importance of school culture in fostering these relationships and, in turn, being strengthened by them. This points to the important link between relationships and culture in creating an environment that supports wellbeing (Gray & Hackling, 2009):

> I think that we’ve developed a culture where having good, positive relationships and being genuinely interested in each other is very common and I know that that also happens with a lot of our support staff – our teacher aides, our library staff, our maintenance and cleaning staff all have that ability and the desire to have good relationships with the students. Region C (C3TB)

Means of school culture promoting wellbeing

Teachers spoke of the importance of having a safe, secure environment for students in which they feel supported, happy and comfortable. Various factors were noted as contributing to such an environment, including teacher-student relationships and pastoral care. Relationships with teachers
provide a vehicle for support, assisting children to enjoy school more, work and play independently and get along well with peers (Hamre & Pianta, 2006). While relationships, respect and responsibility have been identified as key dimensions of a supportive senior school culture (Gray & Hackling, 2009), relationships between students did not emerge as a key theme in the teacher and principal data. Instead, teachers tacitly acknowledged the importance of these (Audas & Williams, 2001) and the role of schools in providing the context in which children can develop relationships with peers (Aldgate & McIntosh, 2006).

Within the environmental context, the concept of trust was frequently intimated, both directly and indirectly, by the teachers. An environment that cultivates a sense of trust, support, and comfort, particularly in the context of relationships, helps students have confidence in their teachers, and related self-confidence in managing their school work (Gray & Hackling, 2009, p. 141):

I think having an environment where kids are fairly comfortable — and by “comfortable” I don’t mean it’s just easy but where they feel they can achieve stuff; they can trust other people. Trust is an enormous part of it. Region A (A3P)

We have a school mission statement which outlines what we want to be; we want to be “caring”, “compassionate”, “trusting”, “forgiving” and that’s what we would like all our teachers to be and if we were that everyone would have positive wellbeing. Region C (C5DP)

Some teachers appeared to have a more nuanced engagement concerning school culture, including deeper questions about cultural intangibles (Eckersley, Wierenga, & Wyn, 2006), such as identifying underlying values and beliefs that foster the conditions for wellbeing. There were some important differences across the three regions, too, in respect to whether teachers and principals were able to articulate the distinctive activities or initiatives that build a stronger culture and shared sense of purpose. In Region B, for example, teachers were more articulate in naming both the tacit and explicit ways in which underlying cultural values and beliefs were being fostered and how these potentially impacted understandings and practices around wellbeing:

Yes, and that that goes back to that being one of the challenges — that we can keep nudging teachers to recognise how important [wellbeing] is but I think it’s a long process and again it goes back to that cultural change that we just keep trying to perhaps show teachers a different way of doing things and why it’s important. Instead of yelling at that student, there are other ways to go about getting them back on task. Region B (B3TD)

Teachers emphasised the importance for wellbeing of students of having a sense of belonging and connectedness, and feeling valued as members of the group (Frydenberg, Care, Freeman, & Chan, 2009). While it was not discussed at any length by teachers and principals in our study, a school culture which enhances a sense of belonging, including supportive relationships with teachers, is particularly important for children lacking in confidence or with a negative self-image, and an important component in engagement of students (Aldgate & McIntosh, 2006; Audas & Williams, 2001).

Teachers identified that students having a voice, expressing themselves and actively participating in school was key to developing a sense of belonging in the school community. While knowledge about the capacity of participation to influence wellbeing is limited (Cook-Sather, 2002), research indicates that inclusive participatory experiences result in a sense of belonging and inclusion. Other benefits include social connectedness, mutual respect, feeling valued, having positive self-regard, self-
efficacy, warm relationships, democratic/shared decision-making (Fattore, Mason, & Watson, 2007; Rowe et al., 2007), and young people being more motivated and engaged in both their learning and the community (Aingeal de, Kelly, Molcho, Gavin, & Saoirse Nic, 2012; Fielding, 2006; Lansdown, 2010).

Teachers spoke of recognising and celebrating differences, suggesting that all students have something to offer. Teachers provided examples across a range of contexts in which students were acknowledged, encouraged and supported in relation to their own individual differences, abilities and skills. This included through school activities and ‘house’ systems.

Teachers in one Region B school perceived that the large size of the school influenced the culture, and believed smaller schools with fewer enrolments had an advantage in this respect. This was primarily with respect to knowing everybody and what is going on. In addition, Munn (2010) suggests that the development of shared values and a sense of purpose is more complex in large schools, and that consistency in the application of shared values in daily classroom practices present further challenges. A teacher in Region C speculated that alongside the small size of the school, the rural location impacted on the community nature and the genuine care:

*I think we’ve got… our coordinators, pastoral care coordinators, who facilitate all the programs and stuff like that, we have that genuine care and I don’t know whether it’s a small school mentality, I don’t know whether it’s because unlike other schools we choose to come out here; we’re not obliged to do our four years rural service and when the kids know, when they know that there’s that genuine interest, that genuine care, I think that helps foster it. It’s not like a school here; it’s like an extended community or a little section of … Region C (C5TC)*

The Catholic identity of schools was referred to frequently in the interviews across all regions, particularly in respect to how wellbeing was positioned within the overall culture, mission and priorities of the school.

For some teachers and principals, being in an environment where particular values are explicitly taught was seen as an advantage, as was the perception that Catholic schools model (as well as teach) these since the values are embedded in the culture. The notion of the collective life, and gospel values, are central to Catholic schools (Grove, 2004). The appeal to gospel values as a way of explaining conceptualizations and approaches to wellbeing was also very apparent across the three regions:

*To me, I believe that wellbeing ties on to the back of our whole Catholic ethos and trying to bring that element into all areas of our teaching and our relationships with students. Region A (A5TA)*

*I think generally with students with love and care, there’s something about the Catholic community as well and it’s this… I don’t know, it sounds a bit corny but it’s this “bond”, this Catholic bond that we have. I’m not Catholic but you feel it. Region B (B6TB)*

*I do think so. I don’t think it’s necessarily Catholic faith; I think it’s just gospel values – treating people as you want to be treated. Region C (C5TC)*

In addition to discussing the influence of Catholic and gospel values on practices within the school and in relation to students, some teachers in Region B also talked about these in the context of the
broader community. For schools in Region B whose Catholic heritage was specifically linked to a religious order, the language of ‘charism’ was frequently used to describe values and principles that shape their identity and act as a reference point for approaches to wellbeing.

Whilst it tended to be implied in the discussion of school culture and Catholic values in relation to wellbeing, some teachers in Region C spoke specifically about how Catholic school values fitted their worldview. McCreery and Best (2004) note the importance of this kind of reflection for teachers, on the integration of their lives and values into the school context, and contend that conditions in school often leave little time for this:

*I wouldn’t know how to go about it because having been raised Catholic myself it’s kind of ingrained that this is what we’re taught to do.* Region C (C2TF)

**Challenges and limitations of culture**

While many of the comments from teachers and principals relating to school culture focused on the underlying beliefs, values and practices that were likely to nurture wellbeing, there were some comments pointing to important consequences of not having a healthy school culture:

*If there’s a central message that I want to take home it’s that you can have a toxic school culture, you absolutely can have an environment within a school that is foul for teachers and students alike, that nobody likes turning up to and all that.* Region A (A1TB)

A few of the principals and teachers pointed to the tensions between wellbeing and the ‘Catholic view’ of things:

*To educate those people so they’re not hurting themselves and it’s a juggle between the Catholic view on things and reality really.* Region C (C5DP)

Others subtly questioned whether the rhetoric of ‘because we’re a Catholic school’ was lived out to the extent sometimes claimed in terms of making a distinctive contribution to wellbeing:

*I know we do occasionally get the catchphrase of “This is a Catholic school, this is what we believe in”; without debasing it, it’s a lot of lip.* Region C (C1TC)

The findings reported above in relation to school culture, and emphasised in take home messages from all regions, point to the importance of the environmental context in which student wellbeing is situated. Having a culture that supports relationships and a shared understanding amongst school staff in relation to approaches to wellbeing seems critically important. School culture is shaped by relationships (as discussed in previous sections), Catholic identity, Christian beliefs and the community in which the school is situated. There was recognition in the take home messages of both Catholic and Christian contexts, including links to pastoral care, religious education and an emphasis on care and compassion in contributing to student wellbeing. A specific aspect of the school culture raised by some teachers in their take home message was ensuring that schools were safe environments for students and staff. In addition, the factors discussed above are also influenced by aspects of the personal or self, which interacts with the environment and contributes to the development of the prevailing school culture.

### 3.3.2 Role of Programs

Programs were identified by teachers as a potential source for supporting wellbeing in schools, which was very evident across all three regions. In some instances, most notably Region B, programs
featured as part of the discussion about policy but in other instances teachers and principals pointed
to particular programs during discussion about how wellbeing was facilitated in schools. Across all
department regions, teachers and principals spoke about the value of having various types of wellbeing
related programs available in their schools, including both targeted (withdrawal) and universal
(whole class) interventions:

*I don't think any program that we see as beneficial shouldn't be run. As I said to you, even if
it's only one person that benefits from it, that's better.* Region A (A5TB)

**Programs to facilitate wellbeing**

A large number of programs were identified by both primary and secondary school principals and
teachers across a diverse range of wellbeing related interests including social skills, resilience,
emotional intelligence, mental health, restorative justice, meditation, peer support, values
education, bullying and transition programs. There have been very few research studies on the
countless programs world-wide which aim to target an aspect of children’s well-being through
schools. However, the available literature indicates programs from Australia and Europe are based
upon principles such as empowerment, democracy, and local adaptability and ownership and,
although they do have guidelines and planned materials, these are flexible and non-prescriptive,
whereas those from North America tend to be more rigid and require adherence to script for
program fidelity (Askell-Williams, Dix, Lawson, & Slee, 2012; Bywater & Sharples, 2012; Wigelsworth,
Humphrey, & Lendrum, 2011).

The named programs most frequently mentioned by teachers were programs run in primary schools
– Bounce Back, KidsMatter and the You Can Do It program. Other programs mentioned by more than
one teacher were Kids Go For Your Life, Seasons for Growth and FRIENDS. Very little research has
been done on these programs, although Seasons for Growth has been the focus of a number of
rigorous evaluations (Muller & Saulwick, 1999; Newell & Moss, 2011). Studies have found that
children’s social and emotional competencies improved with the KidsMatter program, although this
was dependent upon the level of implementation of the program at the school (Askell-Williams et
al., 2012). Barrett and colleagues (2006) have shown a range of areas in which FRIENDS is effective,
to varying degrees, in reducing anxiety, depression and diagnoses in children who were considered
‘high risk’.

Primary school teachers also spoke of initiatives that the school offered to meet a particular,
recognized need. Examples of these included groups focused on anti-bullying, making friends and
resolving conflict. Teachers also made reference to extra-curricular activities, such as sports, as being
ways of schools facilitating wellbeing.

Secondary school teachers and principals tended to talk more about initiatives to facilitate wellbeing
in terms of content or theme, rather than naming specific programs. A number of secondary schools
mentioned the importance of reflection and retreat days, as well as school camps. Similar to primary
school teachers, those at secondary schools also made reference to extra-curricular activities, such
as sports, music and Duke of Edinburgh programs, as contributing to student wellbeing. In one
Region (Region B) some schools were conceptualized as social centres and others were the host
location for major initiatives including a Youth and Family Centre and homework centres.

Teachers and principals in Region B, and to a lesser degree Region C, indicated that they attempted
to meet the needs of students in a variety of ways, including but not limited to programs:
We don’t have it program-based; it’s a whole-of-school, whole-of-day approach to student wellbeing. Region B (B4P)

As well as elaborating on the benefit of specific programs, teachers in Region C also offered positive suggestions as to what could be included in programs:

I’ve been thinking a lot about it actually with the sustainable schools initiative I suppose providing more opportunities to feel success would probably be a really, really good thing and I guess that takes the focus off them as anyone who might not necessarily feel a great deal of academic success ever possibly with the whole planting trees, having a vegetable garden, things like that. Region C (C1TB)

Challenges implementing wellbeing programs

Teachers in all three regions spoke of being constrained by a lack of time in utilizing available programs and an already overloaded schedule. While the implementation of programs is viewed as critical in supporting wellbeing, this takes time and resources that not always available to teachers (Bywater & Sharples, 2012), as well as professional development to ensure such programs are implemented with fidelity (Humphrey, Lendrum, & Wigelsworth, 2013).

Teachers queried the value of some programs intended to address wellbeing and speculated the extent to which they met their stated objectives. In doing so, they perceived that addressing wellbeing was more nuanced or multi-layered than some programs might presume. Some teachers also noted the importance of the relationship they have with students and the culture of the school with regard to students’ authentic engagement with the program.

An issue that was raised in Region C was the need for ‘buy in’ from all staff in implementing programs related to wellbeing. Teachers need to see the value of the program and be committed to instigating it. A further challenge to implementing programs raised by teachers, particularly in Region C, is lack of funding and resources. This is particularly an issue for schools in remote areas and when choices are limited.

While a significant amount of data refers to programs in schools aimed at helping students and teachers with wellbeing related issues, some referred also to the role, importance and limitations of programs for parents:

I think if there was a program that ran once a week on a nightly basis for parents we would most probably have quite a few parents show up. Region C (C4TA)

The views reported here suggest there is a range of useful programs available aimed at addressing or enhancing student wellbeing. However, the findings point to a degree of ambivalence. On the one hand, teachers value and express confidence in programs that contribute positively to student wellbeing and want access to such programs. Indeed, as reported earlier under the theme of pedagogy, teachers identified that one of the ways they learned the knowledge and strategies required for effectively teaching and supporting their students, particularly those experiencing certain difficulties, is through the range of specialist wellbeing-related programs available in their schools. This was further reinforced by the considerable number of take home messages regarding the need for programs and resources to address wellbeing in school.
On the other hand, programs were also perceived as yet another burdensome requirement or expectation in an already overloaded schedule. Teachers and principals suggested in their take home messages that while wellbeing programs were important the curriculum is already heavily loaded and there are structural issues with trying to place more material in it. The burden is somewhat alleviated by having suitable resources, allocated time and a perception that the program adequately addresses the targeted need. Resourcing issues are thus a significant factor in considering the environmental dimension of addressing and supporting student wellbeing. Teachers in Region A and C also identified in some take home messages the need for programs to be flexible, and considered there should be more acknowledgement of the work that is currently being done in schools in relation to wellbeing.

### 3.3.3 Policy Environment

Teachers and principals from across all the regions offered opinions and reflections on the policy environment, both in its current form and in terms of what they would potentially find helpful. They identified a range of wellbeing policies and indicated a lack of clarity around these (including, as mentioned previously, citing particular programs when discussing the policy environment). This may, in part, reflect the significant ambiguity around the definition, usage and function of the term wellbeing in the public policy realm, and more widely (Ereaut & Whiting, 2008), as indicated in our policy analysis in Phase 1 of this project.

In Regions A and B teachers commented on the diversity of policy interests connected to wellbeing, with a perception by some that there was not a single standout policy, rather that wellbeing is governed by an amalgam of policies. The lack of clarity around wellbeing policy for teachers in Region C was reflective of the ambiguous conceptualizing of wellbeing. Additionally, the conflation of wellbeing with pastoral care, and the relationship between wellbeing and pastoral care policy as separate entities, was questioned by teachers in Regions A and C.

Teachers and principals across all the regions offered opinions as to the kind of policy that would be helpful for them. Region B and C teachers emphasized the importance of policy playing a guiding role and being flexible. Teachers in Region C, in particular, emphasized that there could not be a “one size fits all” approach and that policy should not be overly prescriptive and compliance driven:

> In terms of policy give us the policy that is specific to unique categories of “wellbeing” for students based on their own social and educational need; it’s not a one-size-fits-all. Region C (CSTD)

The view that policy shouldn’t be too prescriptive is also echoed in Region A, with teachers highlighting the need to “use initiative” in complex situations. Teachers in Region B also advised that policy needs to provide guidance and be adaptable, depending on the circumstances. However, alongside the calls for policy that offers flexible guidelines, teachers in Regions A and C also want clear strategies to support student wellbeing. These differences point to a persistent and important tension between policy that offers flexibility while providing explicit, practical information.

Teachers and principals in all regions raised the important issue of links between policy and the school environment and culture. Region A teachers spoke of the importance of promoting a positive atmosphere within the school community – a culture in which wellbeing is embedded. They emphasized that policy in itself doesn’t achieve this, partly because it is often deployed to meet other ideological or funding requirements. The need for an explicit policy environment, with
common understandings seen in the context of practice, was emphasized by teachers in Regions B and C. Region C teachers also spoke of the importance of ensuring that policies become enacted so that they become culturally embedded in the school.

As well as highlighting the links between policy and culture, teachers in Region A identified the need for structures that facilitate the development and implementation of wellbeing policy. They placed particular emphasis on pastoral care policy, highlighting the tensions in developing written policy in this area that simultaneously considers social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing.

**Means of implementing policy**

Teachers and principals across all the regions are engaged in implementing policy and offered a range of thoughts regarding this and the factors that impact on the policy into practice trajectory. In Region B, for example, teachers spoke of policy that is being put into practice effectively in relation to classroom time, experiences provided and counselling. This involves recognition that policy often needs to be tailored to meet particular school contexts. Region C teachers also indicate that policy is being put into practice effectively across a range of areas in their schools. They spoke of how successful some policies have become in policy-driven practice within the school:

*I think in terms of the health and the safety I think they’re essentially policy-driven and as long as we have our policies right and our practices follow then there’s no reason not to have best practice.* Region C (CSTD)

Region A teachers indicate that they are engaged in implementing policy into practice within the school environment, and are more concerned with making wellbeing policy explicit in what they already do:

*Yes. That’s almost your expectation; that’s almost your – if you like – policy; that’s everything in paper. So “Okay, I understand that these are my set of expectations but how do I live that? How do I actually act that out?” That’s the connection or that’s the leap or difficulty that I think probably a lot of people, including beginning teachers, do have but to actually see someone acting and living those expectations or ways – for want of a better term – I think then you start to make the connection and hopefully start to live it yourself.* Region A (ASTA)

Across all three regions, teachers and principals refer to the importance of teachers’ involvement in developing policy and the ways this is put into practice. Region A teachers emphasise the importance of staff discussion about policies as they are constructed and the effect this can have on the environment within the school. Similarly, Region B teachers mention they are involved in the implementation and revision of policy documentation and the importance of this for successfully putting policy into practice. Teachers and principals in Region C emphasized the importance of being able to practically apply the policy. In doing so, they spoke of the importance of policy being written by the practitioner rather than people outside the profession. One principal noted that policy needs to provide a practical framework in order for it not to be “left on the shelf”. Indications were that teachers being more informed and familiar with the policy environment would aid in their implementation. Teachers and principals in Region A believe policies that have been developed with a whole school approach are much more successful.
Teachers in Region B told of different experiences they had in other schools regarding the interpretation of policy and translation of this into practice. They also spoke of reviewing policy and drawing on other schools’ policies to look for ways of improving their own schools. Importantly, there is much reflection and revision to assess if the policies are effective:

*We would draw on existing policies; there’s no harm in looking at what other schools do.*

Region B (B2TC)

**Challenges with putting policy into practice**

Consistent with discussion in earlier sections, teachers indicated that part of the difficulty with implementing policy is the time involved engaging with these in any kind of meaningful way. Teachers in Region C particularly underlined this issue. While Region A teachers explained how policies can help to resolve problems, they also indicate a need for finding the balance in the number of policies in place.

Teachers and principals in Region C discussed a range of challenges to implementing policy. These included how parts of some policies aren’t practical enough to use and are vague in their instructions. Policies relating to wellbeing are perceived by some teachers to not be clear enough. Teachers and principals spoke of the challenges in trying to apply policy when it doesn’t appear authentic, practical or important. Difficulties are also experienced when changes are continually made to policy. Region C teachers also commented on the lack of follow through on policy intentions, influenced by successive governments and changing policies.

The difficulties of putting policy into practice were identified by teachers and principals across all regions. This included recognizing the importance of the teachers’ role in implementing policy, in terms of the relationships they establish with students and the personal commitment they have to putting the policy into practice. The conflict between policy and practice can result in teachers and wellbeing coordinators putting rules and policies to the side when dealing with some issues:

*I deal with my life every day (it seems? 0:13:55.2) and I’m certainly not going to refer to a policy when I’m dealing with a kid except for things like mandatory reporting. All those strict government policies, no problems but in terms of if there’s a paper written on wellbeing, will I read it? I’ll be honest and say probably not.* Region B (B6TA)

Region A teachers and principals identify policies as something they have to do, although policies do not necessarily help in their job as teachers. This is attributed, at least in part, to the disconnect mentioned above between policy and practice environments, which was highlighted in take home messages from some teachers in Regions A and C. Teachers spoke of practice not being as clear as sometimes depicted in policy and also, conversely, of the ambiguity that can exist in policy documents. There was an emphasis in final messages on policy that recognises current realities in schools, conveys simply and clearly to teachers what is required, and is tailored to meet students’ needs. Teachers also note that wellbeing practices at Catholic schools tend to have their grounding in gospel values and that they make sense of other policies in light of this.

A key theme to emerge from the data in relation to the policy environment is the need for policy makers to consult with and draw on the experience of those ‘at the chalk-face’. Teachers and principals are well aware of the limitations of policy and difficulties in application. They also hold considerable knowledge of what is needed in terms of policy and what the challenges are. By all accounts, wellbeing policy needs to be sufficiently detailed to provide structure, flexible enough to
adapt to local needs, and most of all applicable to practice. Indications are that currently policy is somewhat 'hit and miss' in terms of applicability and would benefit greatly from being informed by dialogue with teachers and principals. Finally, some of the take home messages from teachers and principals in Region B suggested the need for shared understandings of wellbeing as a good starting point for addressing it.

3.4 Wellbeing as personal

It was evident in the interviews that every individual teacher had his/her own particular underlying beliefs, attitudes and values about the issues discussed thus far. These appear to influence in both tacit and explicit ways their understandings and practice about children, childhood, teaching, education, schools and wellbeing. As discussed in thematic sections above, aspects of teachers’ own personal identity or ‘self’ are intertwined with the relational and environmental spheres, shaping and informing their own and students’ experience. While it was not discussed at any great length, for example, teachers and principals inferred that the personality of the teachers and their attitude to teaching and to children and young people impacts on their own and students’ wellbeing.

Hence, many issues associated with wellbeing in schools as identified in the relational and environmental sections (above) appear to rely upon well-resourced and committed teachers who are willing and able to build relationships, notice, contribute to the school culture and so on. Somewhat inevitably, then, a considerable amount of data was generated around teacher wellbeing. So while the main underlying interest of this research is around student wellbeing in schools, the issue of teacher wellbeing featured strongly, including in relation to how the latter potentially impacts on the former.

The same thing applies here I believe is that my role, while it’s largely pedagogical, it also looks at staff wellbeing and how staff are functioning within themselves. One of the things I talk with staff about is “energy – the energy that you bring in to a classroom is the energy that pervades that space so if you’re coming in where you’re mentally and physically down, if you come in where you aren’t “on” in terms of being able to develop a positive energy, the students will absorb that, that’ll impact on them in terms of the atmosphere in the classroom, how they’re going to function”. I’m a very, very big believer that staff actually understand where they’re at, looking at their own personal wellbeing and development is a crucial part of ensuring that two things happen; number one that they deliver curriculum well and that the learning environment is a positive experience for the students so that when they walk into the room, no matter what the students are feeling, they actually get a sense of positive energy. When you walk into a room – we’ve got 28 different feelings that are going on; every student has got a different state that they come into that room with – but the teacher is responsible, I think, for the over-riding energy that operates in that classroom

Region B (B1TB)

3.4.1 Teacher Wellbeing

Teachers in all the regions spoke of links between student and teacher wellbeing. The links were bi-directional, with teachers speaking about how teacher wellbeing was impacted by student wellbeing and conversely how teacher wellbeing affected students. Across all the regions teachers talked about how they are affected by student issues, including the emotional impact of being empathic and supportive when students are going through difficult emotional times. This can result in
teachers feeling overloaded and stressed, particularly since, as one teacher pointed out, they do not have the training to deal with some of these issues. Teachers also spoke of the positive impact it has on them personally and on the students’ learning when students are happy and doing well. Other teachers spoke about their emotional response at the end of the work day in relation to events that have happened with students:

I would call it the “old education view”. I have to be mindful because they’re trying to do a job and I need to respect that and it is frustrating when you’re a teacher and you’ve got one child that’s hijacking your entire class – I’ve been there – so I’ve got to respect how frustrating that is for a teacher because it’s part of their wellbeing too. Region C (C5TA)

The way in which teacher wellbeing impacted on student wellbeing was an issue that generated considerable data. Teachers immediately recognized the connection between their own and their students’ wellbeing, including that their mental health played a role in relational experiences with students (Hamre & Pianta, 2006). These included some teachers seeing it as a ‘given’, others seeing it as an ‘arms-length’ matter of logic, and some engaging in it as a real and tangible concern.

Teachers in our study were aware that their own wellbeing is affected by their physical condition, mental health issues, emotional states and difficulties with home life; and that their own wellbeing can eventually impact upon their students, as well as their teaching. Some teachers’ indicated that students are aware teachers are having a bad day or things are not well for teachers, and acknowledged the impact of this on the students. Some teachers also saw benefits in letting students know that they were not feeling well:

Those things go hand in hand; happy staff, happy students – for me – that’s functioning well. Region B (B1TB)

Oh I think so. If you don’t feel good about yourself, if you don’t think you’re doing a good job I don’t think you could teach very well at all. I know that if I’m feeling unwell – with the bigger kids I used to walk in and go “I have a headache, be aware” – and the children used to respond; I used to find the majority of the kids would respond really well. I think if you’re going through yourself a divorce or problems at home Region A (A5TB)

Means of supporting teacher wellbeing

Teachers and principals emphasized that supporting teachers’ wellbeing was important for them to be effective in their role teaching and supporting student wellbeing. Support structures for teachers consistently emerged as one of the factors associated with promoting student mental health and wellbeing, and with student progress (Patton et al., 2000):

If you’ve got teachers who themselves are not in a good place it makes it difficult then for them to put in place strategies to help students or help promote student wellbeing. Perhaps we do need to have a focus – a very strong focus – on staff wellbeing. Region C (C2P)

Teachers talked extensively about the way in which teachers’ wellbeing is supported (or otherwise) and offered suggestions for improvement. The comments made in relation to their own wellbeing indicated a strong perception that there was not a lot in place currently to support teacher wellbeing.

However, despite this perceived lack of emphasis or concern for teacher wellbeing, they nonetheless identified a number of ways that their wellbeing was, or could be, supported. This included: collegial
support; support and appreciation from leadership; mentoring; health based activities; social (out of school) activities; and resources such as specific programs and accessible counselling for staff. Teachers from all regions (particularly Region B) commented on the importance of collegial and team support, which can promote a more common sense of purpose and understandings (Bryk & Schneider, 1996). This included offering support and advice to first year and student teachers, for example about “drawing the line”, as well as generally noticing and providing support to colleagues who are not well or upset. Teachers also commented on the impact of staff relations on their own wellbeing and the correlation with student wellbeing. How students feel about their school and the relationships they experienced with teachers can mirror how teachers feel about their relationships with colleagues and with management (Roffey, 2012).

Teachers emphasised the importance of members of the leadership team being approachable and available. Supportive leadership, reflecting concern, praise, and respect is important for teacher wellbeing (Hoy, Tarter, & Witkoskie, 1992, cited in Mitchell & Forsyth, 2004):

*Here there is because we have a great principal and XXX as head of wellbeing, there’s always that check in of how you’re going with things – “Is there anything I can do to help”, it’s always constant checking in with how people are going, how they’re travelling, is there anything that they can do – that’s a question that’s often asked. Region B (B4TC)*

*Here we’ve got great leaders, they constantly talk to us, yesterday I had my little meltdown and they made the time to just talk to me about what I needed and what I was feeling; not making judgment but just saying “That’s okay to feel that way. What can I do for you” is more important than anything you can give. Region C (C4TC)*

Comments from teachers in all regions emphasise the importance of teachers feeling appreciated and valued for the contribution they make at school. Members of a school community need to feel that they belong and are valued, for who they are as a person, not just for the role that they play in the school community (Grove, 2004). Teachers in our study indicate that having supportive leadership and mentoring available for new teachers by senior staff members contributes to a school environment in which teachers feel valued and have a sense of efficacy.

Teachers in Regions B and C talked positively about activities with staff members that take place off the school site. These included programs organized by the school, mostly around health and fitness but also social activities like going out for a meal. Teachers also spoke of organizing social events with other staff members outside of school in the context of taking staff wellbeing into their own hands. Alongside social activities, teachers and principals identified the provision of resources and professional development in relation to wellbeing. This included the availability of counselling for staff, and staff spirituality retreats. Principals in Region B spoke of the impact of whole-staff retreats and gatherings on school identity and cohesion and positive staff attitudes to school and students. In Region C specific reference was also made to Staff Matters, a component of the national MindMatters initiative promoting mental health and wellbeing for students, which provides information about how staff can develop mental health and wellbeing in the educational workplace (www.mindmatters.edu.au).

**Challenges to teacher wellbeing**

Expectations about increasing workload and number of activities were identified as an important issue for teachers in Region C. Teachers spoke frankly about feeling overloaded, with many
additional tasks and expectations over and above their actual teaching role. Overwhelming workloads, is often a factor in teacher disillusionment, alongside pressure to ‘teach to test’ and the challenges of managing difficult student behaviour (Roffey, 2012). The added demands of activities taking place outside of the classroom and sometimes out of hours were highlighted. Teachers felt that such expectations were becoming unrealistic as they were often expected to be a ‘jack of all trades’. This included engagement in additional activities and sometimes having to teach outside of their subject area.

Closely related to the sense of being overloaded by too many demands and unrealistic expectations, teachers and principals across all the regions identified multiple ways in which time constrains aspects of their work and impacts on their wellbeing. There appeared to be some regional variations in perceptions of how time affected teachers; however, teachers in all regions indicated they were ‘time poor’, with their teaching commitments not leaving a lot of time for attending to student wellbeing. Teachers spoke of having to decide whether or not to follow up when they noticed that a student might have emotional issues, and weighing up whether or not they had the time available to do so. The lack of available time also means that teachers at times prioritise the available class time in a way that compromises wellbeing-related curriculum.

An alternative view offered by a principal in Region A suggested that it was not lack of time that impacted on teachers’ wellbeing, but how their time was used:

*Most issues around teacher wellbeing issues come from procrastination; disorganisation. That’s from observation and personal experience. Region A (A3P)*

An issue spoken of by teachers in all regions that is related to, and perhaps exacerbated by, being time poor, is the way in which time is allocated or mandated. Teachers believed they had limited choice in the way time is used for teacher ‘training’ (professional development). Also, teachers in Region A and B identified a lack of the unstructured time that is necessary for creativity and innovative thinking. They also spoke of a sense that there was less time to focus on teaching now than in the past.

Teachers in all regions identified the time that was spent in additional roles beyond their actual teaching role. This included roles within the school and doing things such as liaising with other agencies (for example, DOCS, police, counsellors). Spending time in these additional roles, for which they felt ill-equipped, was identified as a staffing resource issue, which contributed to a sense that children were not receiving the attention they deserved. Teachers in Region B also spoke about teachers using their own time, outside of teaching and school time, to meet wellbeing needs of students and families.

Concerns related to a lack of time are linked to similar concerns about a lack of resources. This included lack of human, financial, curriculum, physical and professional development resources. There was a particular emphasis on this in Regions A and C. While some teachers in Region B spoke of not having enough resources, most talked about the resources they do have and the professional development they receive that supports their own and students’ wellbeing.

Teachers in Regions A and C spoke frankly of the lack of resources, calling for additional resources and for the current lack to be addressed in structural ways:
Because it is such a time-poor environment, in order for substantial change to happen there have to be structural things in place at schools that afford the time and the resources to actually addresses the issues of wellbeing in any substantial way. Region A (A3TA)

Well it’s just competing for time and resources in a rapidly changing world. Region C (CSTD)

Teachers in Region C highlighted the difficulties associated with accessing resources in remote locations. This included limited opportunities for sharing resources with other schools, suggesting teachers in rural schools often manage the demands of teaching in a context of professional isolation and social alienation (Tomlinson, 1995).

Teachers in Region B offered a different perspective regarding the availability and accessibility of resources. While one teacher in this region spoke of difficulties with resourcing, in relation to being in a small school, the majority of teachers spoke in terms of the resources that they do have available to them and the sharing of resources. Similarly, in relation to professional development, teachers in Regions A and C emphasised the need for more skills and strategies (in relation to mental health and wellbeing), and more professional development. Teachers in Region A spoke about needing to be aware of, and have strategies and education regarding, mental health issues, including stress, depression and anxiety. Teachers underlined the importance of having staff with skills and abilities to deal with mental issues and student wellbeing.

Teachers across all regions see professional development as an important part of being a successful teacher and without it they feel ill-equipped. In parallel with the situation regarding resources, teachers in Regions A and C appreciated the opportunities they had for professional development, but felt these were limited and wanted more professional development opportunities. Teachers in Region B, however, spoke more of the professional development that was available to them. The overall impression gained was that they had greater access to such opportunities than teachers in other regions, although one teacher acknowledged that there was no mandatory training for wellbeing.

The vast majority of teachers identified lack of time and resources, overloading and with additional roles and work requirements as hindering them in relation to their own and students’ wellbeing. However some teachers and principals in Region B presented alternate views. They queried, for example, whether time was the major hindering factor in relation to wellbeing and argued that notions of wellbeing will impact on how time is spent and how this may save time elsewhere. Some consider wellbeing part of their job and talk, therefore, of ‘making time’ for it:

Lots of teachers might say “Oh, I’m too busy to take anything more on” but your class is going to function so much more easily, more smoothly because you’ve got that pedagogy and you’ve got that wellbeing approach then you’ve spent less time so I’m saving you time; I’m not causing you time – I’m saving you time. That’s I think an interesting... Region B (B6TD)

Teachers also spoke of issues related to the school environment that impacted on their wellbeing. This included issues such as weather, class and school size, the timing of meetings and the administrative structure of the school. In addition, teachers’ own and others’ personalities and views about school impact on their own and others’ wellbeing. In Region C teachers spoke candidly of the impact of work and work-related demands on them personally and on their personal life:
Yes, exactly. It would be nice to be able to leave at 4.30, 5.00 o’clock and know that you don’t have things to do at home; you either stay late and still work late or leave early and work at home anyway – it just clouds your own personal life too. We all know that we should be exercising, we all know we should be eating properly but finding that balance in there – and family too – if you’ve got family and you’ve got kids... Region C (C4TC)

Teachers in Region C pointed out that certain relationships can impact on teacher wellbeing. Examples of this include personality clashes in the classroom, negative colleagues and dealing with some parents:

> It’s all the time pressures, getting the stuff done – that’s what hinders my wellbeing and parents. I have to say – I know it sounds terrible but they are really hindering my wellbeing. Region C (C4TD)

The findings reported above clearly indicate that teachers and principals have a strong sense of the links between teacher wellbeing and student wellbeing, including the ways in which teacher wellbeing impacts on students. This was also emphasised in the take home messages across all regions, particularly in Regions A and C. Teacher wellbeing was the most frequent topic of take home messages, along with the need for programs, resources and funding. The findings indicate heightened awareness of the multiple environmental challenges teachers face, with take home messages inferring that if teachers do not enjoy their teaching role this impacts negatively on their own and students’ wellbeing. The indications (supported by the literature) are that diminished teacher wellbeing impacts negatively on the quality of teaching, the learning environment and ultimately student wellbeing and learning.

Alongside the challenges, teachers and principals are keenly aware of the means by which teacher wellbeing may be supported and promoted in schools. This includes teachers being supported in terms of relational and environmental factors, as well as via good leadership, the support of colleagues and the delivery of appropriate resources and professional development. Take home messages from teachers in all regions, but particularly Regions A and C, highlighted the need for professional development to better equip teachers regarding student wellbeing. While there were also explicit statements from some teachers that they did not see mental health as part of the teachers’ role, in the main they acknowledged the nuances, tensions and complexities involved in addressing student wellbeing, and the need for resources and support.

The differences between regions help identify the kinds of support, integrated at a policy level, that are effective. Some take home comments indicate that teachers’ wellbeing is impacted on by levels of resourcing, funding and professional development, which in turn impacts on relationships and student wellbeing. Teachers in Region A spoke of the way in which funding gets allocated, with there not being enough to cover all that’s needed. Juggling the competing needs for counsellors, programs and professional development, in the context of limited funding, highlights the tensions that emerge from tight resource allocations. Teachers and principals in Region B drew attention to the resources they currently have and value, including arts initiatives from the regional Education Office, such as a wellbeing drama festival. Great emphasis was also placed on human resources in this area and calls were made for dedicated, well-credentialed professionals to be heading schools’ approaches to wellbeing.
3.5 Linking ‘wellbeing’ to ‘recognition’

The preceding discussion has provided an overview and synthesis of the extensive data collected from the in-depth semi-structured interviews with 17 principals and 71 teachers across three school regions, as part of a major research study focused on ‘Improving Approaches to Wellbeing in Schools: What Role Does Recognition Play’?

In all, eleven important interdependent themes were identified, and links between each analysed, such that ‘wellbeing in schools’ is understood to be:

1. **Multidimensional**
2. Dependent on **relationships**
3. Embedded in **culture**, which is shaped by Christian values and Catholic identity
4. Exemplified in **pastoral care**
5. Partly dependent on **teacher wellbeing**
6. Impacted on by **pedagogy**
7. Supplemented by **programs**
8. Supported by **counsellors**
9. Enhanced by **parent partnership**, and engagement with the wider community
10. Dependent on **leadership**
11. Situated in confused **policy environment**

While also endeavouring to avoid a ‘too neat’ analysis of the Phase 2 principal and teacher findings, these eleven themes were shown to cluster within and across three main spheres of influence on wellbeing – **relational**, **environmental** and **personal**. Not only was there considerable synergy between the three spheres and the particular issues/themes that constitute these, there was also evident interdependence. Hence, while the ‘relational’, for example, was articulated as a ‘stand alone’ sphere relationships were also embedded in the environmental and personal spheres. One reason for identifying this layering is to highlight the nuance and complexity involved in understanding wellbeing and hence to foreshadow the likely need for a multi-pronged strategy in improving the way this is approached and supported in schools.

We turn now to further discussion of these findings in terms of a key interest of this research being recognition theory and its relevance for understanding how wellbeing is understood and facilitated in schools.

**Links between wellbeing and recognition in the teacher data**

In Volume One we described the theoretical interests of this study, namely recognition theory and Childhood Studies. In terms of the former, we flagged the work of Axel Honneth (1995, 2001, 2004) whose interests in the notion of recognition foreground the importance of human interaction. For Honneth, social relationships are key in developing and maintaining a person’s identity and in constructing normative criteria for a good society (Turtiainen, 2012). Honneth’s three patterns of intersubjective recognition – **love (being cared for)**, **rights (being respected)** and **solidarity (being**
valued) – link phenomenologically with three important aspects of relations with self - self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem.

Our analysis of the links between wellbeing and recognition centred on data collected prior to and following the concept of recognition being introduced in interviews. To recap, the first half of the teacher and principal interviews centred on unpacking existing understandings of wellbeing and how they perceived this was facilitated at school, by whom, when and why. Midway through the interviews we introduced our interest in recognition and Honneth’s three dimensions and explained that we wished to explore any resonance they perceived between (what they’d already told us about) wellbeing and the explanation we’d given of ‘recognition’.

Overall, teachers indicated a high degree of resonance with the three dimensions of recognition (cared for, respected and valued) and strongly agreed these are central for student wellbeing. Moreover, once recognition was introduced as a concept, many teachers began to substitute the language of recognition in describing actions aimed at facilitating wellbeing. While all three dimensions were seen as relevant, teachers tended to gravitate in their discussion toward the conditions required for students (and themselves) to experience being loved and cared for. This was apparent, for example, in take home messages about building relationships with students, promoting schools as ‘caring places’, engaging with children as unique individuals, listening to, looking out for and caring for children.

While there was strong, unambiguous agreement of teachers and principals with the idea of recognition being relevant to wellbeing (after it was introduced in the interviews), it is the data that was generated prior to introducing the notion of recognition that we now turn to.

The analysis of this ‘prior to recognition’ data revealed that teachers and principals, across all the regions, were ‘gesturing’ to notions of recognition prior to the interviewer raising it. Such gesturing is evident throughout the themes reported above. Further, teachers also pointed to the conditions required for acts of recognition to take effect. This is evident in the aspirations expressed by teachers around wellbeing, which can differ from the lived everyday realities of school life. The findings provide a strong indication that teachers perceive the links between wellbeing and recognition to be worthy of further investigation (Phase 3 of the study). The following discussion describes the gesturing toward recognition woven throughout the 11 themes of the Phase 2 teacher data.

The movement toward recognition is most evident in the teacher-student relationships and school culture themes. Relationships are perceived by teachers as having a key role in supporting wellbeing and are the site for recognition, identified as an “intersubjective, reciprocal, dynamic process” (Thompson, 2006, p. 160). For the most part, the data concerning relationships is aspirational in the sense that it draws on what teachers know and believe should be happening. Teachers also spoke of and alluded to the experiences, conditions and patterns of cultural value which potentially foster misrecognition and subordination of the status of the individual (Kompridis, 2007). Hence these are also likely to be sites of struggles over recognition and non-recognition (Thompson, 2006).

Within the teacher-student relationship data reference was made to aspects relevant to all three patterns of intersubjective recognition proposed by Honneth (1995). As the teachers spoke about interactions with students in relation to student wellbeing, there was a layering at work between these different dimensions of recognition – cared for, respected and valued – such that each merged
with another. The dimension most evident was that of cared for, the most fundamental dimension for children’s development (Honneth, 2003). Teachers referred to a range of relationship-based concepts, which are inherent in cared for. These include support, connectedness or connection, knowing, acknowledging, interest and comfort, which encompass an ‘affectionate attention’ (Honneth, 1995) and emotional concern for the wellbeing and needs of an actual person.

Alongside love, aspects of respect were evident in teachers’ aspirational comments, although this was considerably more muted. Teachers spoke of teachers having fair expectations, being fair and just, ‘following through’ and being consistent. As such, the emphasis was a more monological focus on the teachers’ acts which can be perceived as according respect to the students, rather than respect as an expression of students’ exercising their rights.

Aspects of valued were evident in the context of teachers valuing students’ contributions, and consistently treating them well regardless of their individual differences. Here it is the unique aspects of the child that distinguished them (Thompson, 2006), and it is these that were under consideration by the teachers. As noted above, there was considerable overlap in the three dimensions as expressed by the teachers and hence they might, for example, talk of respecting and valuing students in relation to their individual attributes and achievements, within the social context of the classroom which privileges particular social values.

Acts of recognition are evident in the practices of ‘attentive noticing’, as discussed in the teacher-student relationship data. These are not one-off, monological acts. They involve getting to know students through a range of proactive, intersubjective, dynamic practices (Thompson, 2006). Teachers describe working hard to build rapport and develop effective relationships, at times using specific strategies to help. Examples of how this is achieved include: asking questions, listening carefully, observing changes or events, paying attention, knowing/saying the student’s name, and waving at them when driving past. In describing this, some teachers used the words ‘love’ and ‘caring’ directly. In addition, teachers’ perceptions of students need for further support from counsellors has relevance in the context of attentive noticing. Through the kind of mutual interactions described here, teachers become aware of instances when students might benefit from the kind of assistance provided by counsellors, as well as the limitations of being able to provide adequate support themselves within their teaching role.

While teachers tended to see it as their responsibility to be proactive in relating to students, taking actions such as those described above, they clearly saw these contextualised within an intersubjective and reciprocal process (Thompson, 2006) with students’ responding to, and the relationship contributing to, and building on, those actions. A critical component, expressed by teachers in aspirational terms, is the student ‘knowing’ or ‘feeling’ that they are loved and cared for, implying a sense of mutuality in recognition, as well as enjoyment when the interactions are successful (Thomas, 2012). As Thomas states, there are many things that can go wrong, but the mutuality allows teachers to trust that there is the space to get things wrong, with a sense of potential reparation possible. The sense that teachers have of students being confident to approach them, indicating the self-confidence to express need and desire without fear of abandonment or punishment, is evidence of students feeling loved and cared for (Anderson, 1995; Honneth, 1995). This points to mutuality in recognition and underlines its dynamic, fluid nature. Mutuality is also evident in teachers’ understanding that students are aware of teachers’ affective states.
While the links between recognition and wellbeing are most evident in the teacher-student relationship data, they are also apparent across the other themes. One key area is the conditions for recognition that lie in the broader relational contexts of school, family and community embedded in the parent-partnership and school culture data. Relationships teachers have with parents contribute to supporting student wellbeing in the affective dimension of cared for with communication about ‘things that matter’ increasing understanding about students’ lives and adding to ‘knowing’ them. There is mutuality evident within the parent-teacher relationship being viewed as two-way, with a sense that teachers and parents were ‘working with’ and supporting each other, to support the children. There are also indications of respect for students in teachers’ inclusion of them in the parent teacher partnership, for example, inviting them to participate in parent-teacher interviews. The ‘culture of conversation’ as one teacher described it, can provide a dialogical base for connection extending to teachers, students, parents and the wider community.

Teachers also spoke of community-based interactions and engagements for students, providing a relational context for broader social and political conditions of recognition, emphasising the social and reciprocal dimensions of respect and valued. Community engagement has the scope to provide students with opportunities for participation in others’ lives, personal experience of their dignity and rights as a person (Anderson 1995), in a context of reciprocal respect (Honneth, 1995) and consequent experience of self-respect. Alongside this is the sense of contributing to a shared goal, in a context of shared values, whilst experiencing their own uniqueness (van Leeuwen, 2007).

Conditions for supporting recognition were evident in other structural aspects of school life discussed by teachers, such as within the pastoral care and pedagogy data. Pastoral care programs, and roles such as pastoral care coordinators and home room teachers, provide opportunities for teachers and students to develop positive relationships and engage in conversation. Embedded throughout this data, and within the teacher-student relationships and school culture themes, are references to ensuring that students feel safe, supported and connected. The emphasis is thus primarily placed on affective recognition in the dimension of cared for. However, all three dimensions are signaled in pedagogical approaches incorporating flexibility and adaptation in recognition of the uniqueness of individual children and their needs. The valuing implicit in such recognition contributes to students developing a sense of self-esteem.

Conditions for supporting recognition, and therefore potential sites of struggle over misrecognition and non-recognition, were also particularly evident in the school culture data. The data analysis indicated the critical importance of school culture in fostering relationships and, in turn, being strengthened by them. All three dimensions of recognition were evident in teachers’ discussion of the school culture, again with a particular emphasis on the dimension of cared for. The concept of trust in relation to the school environment, for example, was frequently intimated to be of importance, along with students feeling supported and comfortable in relationships with teachers. Another critically important condition for recognition, apparent in the data, is ensuring that children have a say at school. The importance of students having a voice, expressing themselves and actively participating was a key aspect of a sense of belonging in the school community, spoken about by teachers, with particular relevance to the respect and valuing dimensions of recognition.

A potentially important connection was further suggested in the data specifically between the Catholic ethos, wellbeing and love. One particular aspect raised is the importance of recognition at the individual and the group/social level, with teachers emphasising the importance for wellbeing of
individual students having a sense of belonging and connectedness, as well as feeling valued as members of the group. The emphasis on shared goals and values within the wider social group is a critical backdrop for experiencing one’s own and others’ uniqueness in the dimension of valued or solidarity (van Leeuwen, 2007).

Celebrating differences and what individual students have to offer, by means of school activities and ‘house’ systems, provided another avenue for opportunities for recognition directly relating to the dimensions of valued and respected. Features that distinguish students as unique individuals (Thompson, 2006), as evaluated against a background of ‘norms’, contribute to students’ development of self-esteem (Honneth, 1995). Teachers also described ways in which the school culture may include structures in which students were acknowledged, encouraged and supported in relation to their own individual differences, abilities and skills.

While there was very little in the programs and policy data that specifically spoke to recognition of students, there were occasional comments that implied important connections between them. Programs were recognised, for example, as a potential site for recognition, specifically in providing an opportunity for valuing children’s contribution in non-academic terms. In another example, recognition was perceived as important in making decisions and implementing policy, as teachers spoke of needing to ‘know’ the children in order to initiate appropriate policy.

Elements of recognition were also evident in the leadership and teacher wellbeing data. These were primarily in relation to recognition of teachers by their colleagues and principals. The impact of staff relations on teacher wellbeing and correlation of this with student wellbeing has been discussed in the analysis of teacher wellbeing data. The importance of staff being recognised by others (aside from students) highlights an important aspect of reciprocity in recognition. Recognition is reciprocal and thus, in order to recognise others, one must also have the experience of being recognised. Misrecognition is experienced in damage to the identity of the individual and thus potentially to their wellbeing (Graham & Fitzgerald, 2010; Honneth, 1995; Taylor, 1995). While mutuality implies that recognition occurs within the same relationship dyad, it also has relevance for the dynamic nature of recognition, as the nature of other acts of preceding or simultaneous recognition serve to partly determine and shape the significance and character of other acts of recognition (Thompson, 2006). Collegial support for teachers, and supportive leadership, are important, as evident in comments made in relation to the cared for and respect dimensions of recognition. Equally, comments from teachers in all regions emphasise the importance of teachers feeling appreciated and valued for the contribution they make at school.

The dialogic, or conversational, context is evident within data across all the relational, environmental and personal contexts of the teacher data. It is most readily seen within teacher-student relationships given the particular focus on listening to and hearing students. Conversation is the field of interaction and negotiation for recognition. It acts as a vehicle for all dimensions of recognition, with the dynamic process evident in teachers’ comments relating both to their own and students’ actions and responses. The emphasis placed by teachers on communication with students is underpinned by tacit understandings of the consequences of not listening. However, the conditions for conversation (or recognition via conversation) are not necessarily consistent, or even always evident. While teachers have clear aspirations for recognition of students, opportunities for recognition, misrecognition and non-recognition lie in the conversational space - talking, listening and hearing - which can be compromised. Teachers talk of how they “forget sometimes to listen or
just be” or of having to “force myself” or “make the effort” to listen to students. Teachers also spoke of constraints on the acts which constitute recognition on account of their busy schedules, time pressure and stressful workloads. The demands placed on teachers can contribute to a lack of conversation and more monological approaches to interactions with students.

Wellbeing and misrecognition

There was little data from teachers and principals which directly references misrecognition or struggles over recognition. Our inquiry into misrecognition and non-recognition is grounded in Honneth’s (1995) theoretical understandings whereby ‘hurt feelings’ (arising from an injustice) provide insights into the source of struggles over recognition. Such hurt feelings are more likely to be evident in the student data than the teacher and principal data (although, importantly, they are evident in the teacher wellbeing data in relation to teachers own sense of being recognised, as discussed below).

However, conditions in which misrecognition or non-recognition of students was possible, or even likely, were alluded to in the space between the aspirational and the actual. As described above, teachers spoke in aspirational terms, conveying a tacit understanding of the importance of recognition in relationships with students (across all three dimensions). However, it was also clear from their comments that while this is what they aspired to, and even knew to be best practice, this was not always the actual, everyday lived experience in schools.

Some conditions for misrecognition and non-recognition of students are environmental, related to systems and structure that are in place in schools. The rules can get in the way, for example, when teachers feel compelled to follow regulatory processes rather than gaining a deeper understanding of a given situation. Other environmental factors include teachers not having enough time to be able to stop, take a moment and listen. Across different contexts, teachers spoke of being too busy to take the time necessary for listening and “dealing with things”. Conditions were described which caused them to feel depleted of energy, tired and stressed. Schools may have structures in place that contribute to facilitating relationships and provide opportunities for acts of recognition, for example home room time, vertical forms, or pastoral care time, and teachers are aware of the importance of this. However, in the data there is clearly tension for teachers in using these structures for conversation and relationship-building in the light of the pressures they work under and the time required to attend to other “house-keeping” issues. Again, given that claims for recognition are put forward and negotiated through dialogue, reduced opportunities for conversation significantly increase the potential for misrecognition and non-recognition.

Personal or personality factors can also create opportunities for recognition, misrecognition and non-recognition. Teachers alluded to teachers’ attitudes, including negative ones, to students and forming relationships with them. Conditions for misrecognition can be exacerbated by increased expectations and pressure on teachers from some parents, along with a sense of abrogation of parental responsibility referred to in the data. These factors are particularly important given the indications in the data that particular effort is required from teachers in order to form a relationship which involves recognition of students.

Some conditions may be attributable to factors which are environmental and/or personal. How teachers do things can also be part of a larger school culture. One principal spoke, for example, of teachers at some schools jumping to conclusions and not giving children a chance to explain (which
may be interpreted as a function of the climate and culture of a particular school or a characteristic of individual teachers).

Teachers own experiences of misrecognition from colleagues and leadership, causing ‘hurt feelings’ and impacting on their own sense of wellbeing, provide an “affective source of knowledge” (Honneth, 1995, p. 143) which indicate that the implicit rules of recognition have been violated. Honneth (1995) suggests that struggles over recognition, beginning with hurt feelings arising from an injustice, can motivate collective protest and struggle. Teachers’ struggles over recognition may, in turn, become something of a bridge to understanding students’ experiences of misrecognition and contribute to a collective imperative to approach student wellbeing more effectively through approaches foregrounding recognition.

It is clear from the discussion above that recognition theory offers a useful lens for deepening understanding of the themes that arose in the teacher data. Given that teachers frequently implied (or spoke explicitly about) the role of love/care, respect and being valued in relation to wellbeing (prior to recognition theory being introduced in interviews), there is clear potential in the theory informing understandings of wellbeing. Moreover, closer analysis of this data pointed not only to the significance of relationships (which is critical to Honneth’s theorizing of recognition) but also to the possibilities of struggle, misrecognition and non-recognition that surround these.

**4 Conclusion**

This second volume of the report, ‘Improving Approaches to Wellbeing in School: What Role Does Recognition Play’, has reported findings from Phase 2 of our study, the aim of which was to develop a detailed understanding of how wellbeing in schools is currently understood by students, teachers and principals. A number of similarities and differences have been identified between students’ and teachers’ understandings of wellbeing, and with regard to what supports and hinders the practice of wellbeing in schools. The data indicates that students and teachers are positioned differently in defining the concept of wellbeing. Students focused primarily on affective processes, referring to their experiences, feelings and emotions of wellbeing in order to define wellbeing, whereas teachers described the conditions for facilitating and supporting student wellbeing, through lenses of concept and aspiration.

Similarities in the student and teacher data regarding the concept of wellbeing include its conceptualisation as multidimensional. Students and teachers also both place considerable emphasis on relationships as being central to student wellbeing. However, there were differences between the groups in regard to emphases placed on aspects of the relationships and the role of significant others in relationship. The student-teacher relationship was considered important to student wellbeing by both groups, whereas students placed more emphasis than teachers on friends, and teachers placed more emphasis than students on relationships with principals and counsellors for potentially supporting wellbeing. Both groups placed considerable emphasis on relationships with parents, although the context varied, with students regarding them as significant people outside of school and teachers focusing more on the importance of relationships between teachers and parents in school contexts for supporting student wellbeing.

Pedagogy appears in the student and teacher data as relevant to student wellbeing. For teachers the vehicle for this is primarily positive relationships. For students, the link between pedagogy and wellbeing is evident in their emphasis on the importance of creative and imaginative teaching.
approaches and on teachers who encourage students to learn imaginatively. Both students and teachers reported participation in wellbeing programs as being conducive to supporting student wellbeing.

As well as the different emphases placed on particular relationships, other differences between the student and teacher data regarding wellbeing were also evident in aspects specifically emphasised in one group’s data and only minimally mentioned, if at all, in the other groups’ data. One example of this is the prevalence in the student data of yelling as having a negative impact on student wellbeing, and the absence of this in the teacher data. While the latter does not imply that the teachers condoned yelling or speaking harshly to students (to the contrary there appeared to be a tacit disapproval of such diminishing or degrading approaches), the discrepancy between the groups and the frequent use of the term by students clearly highlights the importance of addressing this particular issue. Other themes identified by students as being central to student wellbeing were given little or no attention by teachers including: good decision making and having the confidence to speak. Likewise, some aspects of student wellbeing identified by teachers to be important received little or no attention from students, including teacher wellbeing, pastoral care, Catholic values, and policy.

Despite these differences, it is notable that the central emphasis related to wellbeing in both the student and teacher data is on relationships, albeit with some variation in the nature and composition of the relationships identified by each group. The importance of this cannot be overstated in the light of one of our key research interests, investigating the potential of recognition theory for advancing understanding and improvements in relation to student wellbeing. Relationships are central to recognition, with acts of recognition and misrecognition occurring in relational spaces. A key finding therefore has been the gesturing towards recognition, in relation to wellbeing, in both the student and teacher data. As mentioned above, there is a high resonance across all three dimensions of recognition evident in the data for both groups, prior to it being raised by the interviewer. Within this data there is frequent overlap between the different dimensions of cared for, respect and valued.

Of particular interest with regard to recognition theory is the key positioning by both groups of relationships between students and teachers as critically important in facilitating student wellbeing. The dimension of cared for was evident as students attested to love as being foundational to their wellbeing, and also the most evident of the three dimensions in the teacher data. Both students and teachers place considerable emphasis on teachers genuinely caring, over and above a sense of role duty and obligation. The concept of trust is perceived as being central to students being cared for, and contributing strongly to students having the confidence to express their needs and desires. The dimension of respect is of core importance for the students, but was more muted for the teachers. Students articulated self-respect and respect for others as central to student wellbeing. For teachers, respect was most evident in understandings of consistently treating students well, regardless of their individual differences. Being valued offers the least explicit links in the student data between wellbeing and recognition. However, students emphasise the importance of acceptance and they identify the role of significant others in facilitating and strengthening student wellbeing through valuing their particular gifts, strengths and competencies. In a similar vein, teachers spoke of valuing students’ contributions, and raised the importance of flexibility and adaptation in recognition of the uniqueness of individual children and their needs.
Conversation is a key vehicle through which recognition can occur, and students and teachers both identify conversation as foundational to student wellbeing. Opportunities for recognition, misrecognition and non-recognition lie in relational and conversational spaces. Both students and teachers indicated that conditions for conversation (and recognition via conversation) are not consistent, or even always evident. Students identified ways in which the lack of opportunity for conversation diminished their wellbeing, such as the experience of not being given a say, being yelled at, not being treated as an individual and being spoken to disrespectfully by teachers and friends in themselves. Similarly, teachers talk of constraints on the acts of conversation in accounts of their busy schedules, time pressure and stressful workloads, despite their awareness of the importance of conversation, especially focusing on ‘listening to’ and ‘hearing’ students.

Both students and teachers identify a number of factors impacting on student-teacher relationships including those related to individuals, school processes, the social climate and physical features of the school. Both groups acknowledge that school culture, and the structures within it, provide conditions for students to be respected, or conversely for non-recognition in regard to respect. Students named direct experiences of misrecognition, whereas teachers named the conditions in which it might occur, related to systems and structures, teachers’ personal issues or personality, the school environment and parent-teacher relationships.

Teachers own experiences of recognition and misrecognition by colleagues and leadership were discussed extensively, and may help provide them with insight into understanding students’ experiences of misrecognition. Students place importance on receiving love and care from significant others; on having needs met, being cared for, being listened to and having someone to talk too. In an almost parallel vein, teachers discussed the importance for themselves of collegial support and supportive leadership, and feeling appreciated and valued for the contribution they make at school.

These findings from Phase 2 of our study point to the critically important role of relationships to student wellbeing. Further, within this relational context, the findings indicate multiple resonances with recognition theory, lending weight to the proposition that it may provide a useful framework for improving approaches to student wellbeing in school. While offering a glimpse of this potential, these resonances clearly require further targeted exploration and interrogation. Phase 3 of our study, explicated in Volume 3, involved gathering large amounts of quantitative data from students and teachers to further expand knowledge regarding conceptualisations of wellbeing and explore more fully the links between wellbeing, relationships and recognition made evident in the Phase 2 findings.
This Volume is to be read in conjunction with Volumes One, Three and Four of the Final Report:

**Final Report: Volume One** – Overview, Methodology, Research Design, Phase 1 Policy Analysis Results

**Final Report: Volume Two** – Phase 2 Qualitative Interviews and Focus Groups Results

**Final Report: Volume Three** – Phase 3 Quantitative Survey Results

**Final Report: Volume Four** – Discussion of Findings, Recommendations, References and Appendices

Additionally, the Executive Summary is available as a separate document.

Additional copies of all Volumes of the Final Report can be accessed at:

[www.ccyp.scu.edu.au](http://www.ccyp.scu.edu.au)