Component 1: Positive school community

Summary of the literature

KidsMatter Primary utilises three key models in supporting children's mental health and wellbeing: a risk and protective factors model (Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care, 2000); a socio-ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1977); and a mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention model (World Health Organization [WHO], 1994). These three models sit within a whole school approach framework for school culture change (World Health Organization [WHO], 1994). It prioritises those areas where schools can make a difference to student mental health and wellbeing. The KidsMatter Primary journey begins with a focus on the school community as a whole.

Children who are mentally healthy have the capacity to enjoy and benefit from family life, relationships and educational opportunities and to contribute to society in a number of age appropriate ways (Raphael, 2000). Mentally healthy students arrive at school ready to learn and are more likely to achieve success.

Positive school communities

The socio-ecological model of development recognises that there are multiple influences on mental health and wellbeing during childhood. The child is at the centre of this model, and grows and develops in the context of relationships with family, school and the broader community (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). After family, school is recognised as the most significant developmental context for primary school aged children. School is a particular kind of learning community which is influenced by, and interacts with, the surrounding community. Students, families and school staff from many different backgrounds come together within this space. Such diversity (including factors such as ethnicity, socioeconomic status, family structure and ability) necessitates recognition of the important role that the sociocultural context plays in the needs of community members, their expectations and understandings of the school and broader education system. Accordingly, the concept of "community" holds various meanings with considerable diversity within Australia (Bauch, 2001; Dobia & O'Rourke, 2011).

Understanding the influence of settings on life experiences has been explored through Psychological Sense of Community (PSOC) theory, beginning with the seminal work undertaken by McMillan and Chavis (1986). The authors defined PSOC as "a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together" (McMillan & Chavis, 1986, p. 9).

School can be considered a place of socialisation for students, where social and emotional needs, including the need for belonging and connectedness can be met (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Osterman, 2000). The importance of relationships in the emotional and neurophysiological development of children (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004) is now well recognised. A fundamental need of children is to experience the adults in their lives as sensitive and emotionally responsive to their social and emotional needs (Moore, 2009). Primary school aged children who have emotionally supportive teachers are more likely to engage in academic activities, have positive relationships with peers and avoid negative behaviours (Bergin & Bergin, 2009).

The important role that adults play in schools has been identified in the literature as related to children's views of safety within the school environment. Langhout and Annear (2011) found in their United States' research that young children identified safe places within schools as those areas more likely to have an adult present.

Primary schools are also key places for parents and carers to establish supportive relationships with others, which in turn builds a sense of social connectedness (Witten, McCreanor, & Kearns, 2007). They are also places where relationships between teachers and parents are characterised by a sense of affiliation, support, dependability, availability, shared expectations and beliefs (Vickers, 1995)

A school community that promotes mental health and wellbeing

In recent decades, there have been increasing calls for schools to focus less on targeting individual students, and instead adopt a universal approach within a whole school model to understand and promote student mental health and wellbeing (World Health Organization, 2000). Such an approach addresses child mental health and wellbeing more broadly at the environmental level (Graetz et al., 2008) by focusing on schools, families, and neighbourhoods or communities (Battistich, Solomon, Watson, & Schaps, 1997; Battistich, Watson, Solomon, Lewis, & Schaps, 1999; Earls & Carlson, 2001; Taylor & Biglan, 1998).

There are a number of risk and protective factors, at the individual, family, school and community levels, which are potential contributors to the mental health and wellbeing of children and conversely the development of mental health difficulties and disorders. These factors include: child temperament, social and emotional skills, level of family harmony, family norms and values, parental involvement,

school norms, student-staff relationships, peer relationships, school discipline policies and practices, abuse, trauma and level of socioeconomic advantage (Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care, 2000; Spence, 1996).

Schools are recognised as places which can play an active role in supporting children and families to mediate or reduce the risk factors and promote protective factors for children's mental health. Schools, through their processes and practices, can proactively promote a positive sense of community through their awareness of and positive action in meeting community member's needs.

Relationships and a sense of belonging

A need to belong has been defined as a pervasive drive to form and maintain lasting, positive and significant interpersonal relationships (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). When this need is met, positive emotional, psychological, social and cognitive outcomes are evident. Children can develop a sense of belonging at school when staff take an active interest in each of their students, recognise their contributions, celebrate their achievements, promote a sense of safety and care, and provide structure and support for social, emotional and intellectual learning needs (Sun & Stewart, 2007; Waters & Cross, 2010). Feeling cared for by the teacher and listened to, as well as having their absence noticed, are also factors related to students' sense of connection to their teacher (Waters & Cross, 2010).

The experience of not belonging and/or social isolation, can lead to a range of negative, and under some circumstances, long term consequences, including physical health impairment (Leary, 2010) and psychological consequences. Schools can be experienced as 'alienating institutions' (Osterman, 2000), where a student's social and emotional needs for belonging are left unmet, impacting negatively on their mental health and wellbeing (Hall-Lande, Eisenberg, Christenson, & Neumark-Sztainer, 2007; Jones, Schinka, van Dulmen, Bossarte, & Swahn, 2011). Children who have their social and emotional needs met by those who care for and teach them are more likely to manage their own emotions well, relate well to others, maintain motivation, and perform better at school (Diamond & Aspinwall, 2003; Martin & Dowson, 2009; Roorda, Koomen, Spilt, & Oort, 2011). Recent research undertaken in the United Kingdom to explore experiences of loneliness used interviews with children aged between 5 and 10 years old. This research found a willingness and ability to discuss and describe "loneliness as a negative experience and a multidimensional phenomenon, experienced in a range of locations including school" (Liepins & Cline, 2011, p. 397).

In a school setting, caring and supportive relationships are considered to be at the core of creating a sense of belonging (Keiser & Schulte, 2009). The quality of relationships between students and teachers has been identified as one of the strongest predictors (along with school security) of physical and verbal/relational bullying in schools in a study conducted in France including 18,000 students (median age 15 years) (Richard, Schneider, & Mallet, 2011). Further, a climate of safety is generated when values opposing bullying are explicit, and policies and practices are developed. This ensures adults will effectively intervene so that students are protected, kept safe and actions seen to promote school as a safe place (Cohen, 2009).

Inclusive practices

Being mindful and inclusive of all students, and catering to their diverse individual needs, be they cultural, socioeconomic or academic, is a vital part of ensuring all students feel a sense of belonging to their school (Carrington & Robinson, 2006). A lack of understanding of the needs of students and appreciation of their experience of adversity when present may lead otherwise supportive staff to contribute to the 'disablement' of students, rather than 'enablement' and impede students' sense of belonging to school (MacArthur, Sharp, Kelly, & Gaffney, 2007). To facilitate shared values and expected behaviours, school policies which reflect and promote values of participation and inclusiveness can also contribute to a sense of belonging for students (Rowe, Stewart, & Patterson, 2007).

Much of the literature in relation to inclusive practices within a school setting refers to children with disabilities. Inclusive, learning-friendly classrooms have been defined much more broadly as those which welcome, nurture and educate "all children regardless of their gender, physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other characteristics" (UNESCO, 2006, p. 2). Promoting inclusion and celebrating diversity in a school community involves developing values that are aligned with Human Rights to education which promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1989). Specifically to children, the Convention on the Rights of the Child states that children are not to be discriminated against for their individual differences such as ethnicity, gender, religion and personal views.

Schools can develop inclusive practices through the identification, and removal, of physical and socio-cultural barriers, the presence and participation of all students, and paying special attention to those

groups of students who may be at risk of exclusion from learning (UNESCO, 2005). The 'hidden curriculum' (described as the values, norms and beliefs transmitted via the structure of schooling) has been identified in a United States' study as one factor which impacts on school engagement with students from a range of diverse cultural backgrounds (R. D. Langhout & Mitchell, 2008).

Involvement of students, staff, families and wider community in activities and contributions to school planning

A school which promotes active involvement and contribution from its community members encourages effective communication amongst the most important people in the lives of students – family members, school staff and the broader community (Lechtenberger, Mullins, & Greenwood, 2008). Good communication and collaborative decision making between parents and carers and school staff in relation to a child's social, emotional and learning needs improves school attendance, academic performance and overall behaviour (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Sheldon & Epstein, 2004).

Research focusing on school leadership and decision making has shown that when collective leadership is used and decisions are made collaboratively, improvements in teacher motivation and work setting are observed (Leithwood & Mascall, 2008). The researchers also attributed higher student achievement to such improvements in teacher motivation and found that "the influence of parents and students [in decision making] is significantly related to student achievement" (Leithwood & Mascall, 2008, p. 550). Similarly, in their review of relevant school leadership literature, York-Barr and Duke (2004) found that school staff participation and motivation, as well as outcomes for students, will be enhanced through respectful relationships, collaborative decision making and ensuring consistency between goals and teaching principles of the school.

Students who experience a sense of belonging and supportive relationships with teachers and classmates are more motivated to participate actively in the life of the classroom than those students who do not have such experiences (Anderman & Midgley, 1999; Hughes & Kwok, 2007). It has only recently been acknowledged in the literature that children are often not consulted or asked to be part of research or decision making within schools or communities. Langhout and Thomas (2010) outline some of the important considerations when engaging children in discussions and planning, including conceptual and methodological issues.

Similarly, Rudduck and Fielding (2006) outline the need for reflective review of *why* student consultation and participation is being considered, rather than a quick response of *how* to do it. They identify three factors that underlie the credible development of student voice: power relations between teachers and students; the commitment to authenticity; and the principle of inclusiveness. They also reflect on organisational implications of developing student voice such as finding time and building a whole school culture in which student voice has a place.

There are positive outcomes for both staff and students when the school community is one that respects and values staff and fosters participation and where staff members feel satisfied with the leadership provided in the school. At the same being able to contribute to aspects of leadership and decision making, investing in shared goals and values of the school community will also promote positive results (Silins & Mulford, 2004).

Research indicates that for families, a positive school community is one where parents feel welcomed (Green, Furrer, & McAllister, 2007; Padak & Rasinski, 2010), invited, and included in the educational life of their child and the educational practices of the school (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Cohen, 2009; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Parental involvement, ranging from home-based behaviour towards a child's learning to involvement in school activities, is associated with student achievement, teacher perception of student competence and higher rates of school attendance (Hoover-Dempsey, et al., 2005; Jeynes, 2005). Parental involvement is also seen to influence their children's current attitudes, beliefs, and motivation around school, and the child's later relationship with learning and education (Hoover-Dempsey, et al., 2005).

Schools can also undertake a range of strategies to foster successful relationships between schools and the broader community (Mastro and Grenz Jalloh, 2005). This can begin with getting to know the organisations and services that exist in the local community, including activities offered as well as the ways in which such groups could assist the school. Emphasising shared responsibility for the wellbeing of school community members can foster long term relationships between community services and schools. Schools can invite community groups to take part in a range of school events which can include providing necessary training to school staff which in turn enhances the development opportunities of school personnel.

Summary

The literature confirms that the school community plays an important role in promoting mental health and wellbeing in children and it is one of the key environments in which their development occurs. A school community where children, their parents and carers and school staff experience a sense of belonging promotes positive mental health for all community members. Effective relationships underpin the development of a sense of belonging, enable inclusive practices to occur, promote involvement in school activities and contribution to school planning by community members. Ongoing efforts at a whole school level are required to ensure that all community members feel included and able to participate actively in day to day school life.

REFERENCES

Anderman, L. H., & Midgley, C. (1999). Motivacion y estudiantes de secundaria (Motivation and Middle School Students). ERIC Digest. *Eric Clearinghouse on Elementary Early Childhood Education*. Retrieved from https://ezp.lib.unimelb.edu.au/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=ED432410&site=ehost-live

Anderson, K. J., & Minke, K. M. (2007). Parent involvement in education: Toward an understanding of parents' decision making. *Journal of Educational Research, 100*(5), 311-323.

Battistich, V., Solomon, D., Watson, M., & Schaps, E. (1997). Caring school communities. *Educational Psychologist, 32*(3), 137-151. doi: 10.1207/s15326985ep3203_1

Battistich, V., Watson, M., Solomon, D., Lewis, C., & Schaps, E. (1999). Beyond the three R's: A broader agenda for school reform. *The Elementary School Journal, 99*(5), 415-433.

Bauch, P. A. (2001). School-Community partnerships in rural schools: Leadership, renewal and a sense of place. *Peabody Journal of Education, 76*(2), 204-221.

Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin, 117*(3), 497-529.

Bergin, C., & Bergin, D. (2009). Attachment in the classroom. *Educational Psychology Review, 21*(2), 141-170.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1977). Toward an experimental ecology of human development. *American Psychologist, 32*, 513-531.

Carrington, S., & Robinson, R. (2006). Inclusive school community: Why is it so complex? *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 10*(4/5), 323-334. doi: 10.1080/13603110500256137

Cohen, J. (2009). School climate: Research, policy, practice, and teacher education. *Teachers College Record, 111*(1), 180.

Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care. (2000). *Promotion, prevention and early intervention for mental health - A monograph.* Canberra: Author Retrieved from http://www.health.gov.au/internet/wcms/Publishing.nsf/Content/mental-pubs-p-prommon.

Diamond, L. M., & Aspinwall, L. G. (2003). Emotion regulation across the life span: An integrative perspective emphasizing self-regulation, positive affect, and dyadic processes. *Motivation and Emotion, 27*(2), 125-156. doi: 10.1023/a:1024521920068

Dobia, B., & O'Rourke, V. (2011). Promoting the mental health and wellbeing of Indigenous children in Australian primary schools. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia,.

Earls, F., & Carlson, M. (2001). The social ecology of child health and well-being. *Annual Review of Public Health, 22*(1), 143.

Epstein, J. L., & Sheldon, S. B. (2002). Present and accounted for: Improving student attendance through family and community involvement. *The Journal of Education Research, 95*(5), 308.

Graetz, B., Littlefield, L., Trinder, M., Dobia, B., Souter, M., Champion, C., . . . Cummins, R. (2008). KidsMatter: A population health model to support student mental health and well-being in primary schools. *International Journal of Mental Health Promotion, 10*, 13 - 20.

Green, B., Furrer, C., & McAllister, C. (2007). How do relationships support parenting? Effects of attachment style and social support on parenting behavior in an at-risk population. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 40*(1/2), 96-108. doi: 10.1007/s10464-007-9127-y

Hall-Lande, J. A., Eisenberg, M. E., Christenson, S. L., & Neumark-Sztainer, D. (2007). Social isolation, psychological health, and protective factors in adolescence. *Adolescence, 42*(166), 265-286.

Hoover-Dempsey, K. V., Walker, J. M. T., Sandler, H. M., Whetsel, D., Green, C. L., Wilkins, A. S., & Closson, K. (2005). Why do parents become involved? Research findings and implications. *Elementary School Journal, 106*(2), 105-130.

Hughes, J., & Kwok, O. (2007). Influence of student-teacher and parent-teacher relationships on lower achieving readers' engagement and achievement in the primary grades. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 99*(1), 39-51. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.99.1.39

Jeynes, W. H. (2005). A meta-analysis of the relation of parental involvement to urban elementary school student academic achievement. *Urban Education, 40*(3), 237-269. doi: 10.1177/0042085905274540

Jones, A. C., Schinka, K. C., van Dulmen, M. H. M., Bossarte, R. M., & Swahn, M. H. (2011). Changes in loneliness during middle childhood predict risk for adolescent suicidality indirectly through mental health problems. *Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology, 40*(6), 818-824. doi: 10.1080/15374416.2011.614585

Keiser, K. A., & Schulte, L. E. (2009). Seeking the sense of community: A comparison of two Elementary Schools' ethical climates. *School Community Journal, 19*(2), 45-58.

Langhout, R. D., & Annear, L. (2011). Safe and unsafe school spaces: Comparing elementary school student perceptions to common ecological interventions and operationalizations. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology, 21*(1), 71-86. doi: 10.1002/casp.1062

Langhout, R. D., & Mitchell, C. A. (2008). Engaging contexts: Drawing the link between student and teacher experiences of the hidden curriculum. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology, 18*(6), 593-614. doi: 10.1002/casp.974

Langhout, R. D., & Thomas, E. (2010). Imagining participatory action research in collaboration with children: An introduction. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 46*(1-2), 60-66.

Leary, M. R. (2010). Affiliation, acceptance, and belonging: The pursuit of interpersonal connection. In S. T. Fiske, D. T. Gilbert & G. Lindzey (Eds.), *Handbook of social psychology, Vol 2 (5th ed.).* (pp. 864-897). Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons Inc.

Lechtenberger, D., Mullins, F. E., & Greenwood, D. (2008). Achieving the promise. *Teaching Exceptional Children, 40*(4), 56-64.

Leithwood, K., & Mascall, B. (2008). Collective leadership effects on student achievement. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 44*(4), 529-561. doi: 10.1177/0013161x08321221

Liepins, M., & Cline, T. (2011). The development of concepts of loneliness during the early years in school. *School Psychology International, 32*(4), 397-411.

MacArthur, J., Sharp, S., Kelly, B., & Gaffney, M. (2007). Disabled children negotiating school life: Agency, difference and teaching practice. [Article]. *International Journal of Children's Rights, 15*(1), 99-120. doi: 10.1163/092755607x181720

Martin, A. J., & Dowson, M. (2009). Interpersonal relationships, motivation, engagement, and achievement: Yields for theory, current issues, and educational practice. *Review of Educational Research, 79*(1), 327-365. doi: 10.3102/0034654308325583

McMillan, D. W., & Chavis, D. M. (1986). Sense of community: A definition and theory. *Journal of Community Psychology, 14*(1), 6-23.

Moore, T. G. (2009). *The nature and significance of relationships in the lives of children with and without developmental disabilities.* Paper presented at the Keynote presentation at the National Conference of the Early Intervention Association of Aotearoa, New Zealand

Auckland, New Zealand
http://www.rch.org.au/emplibrary/ccch/TM_EIAANZ_Conference_09.pdf

National Scientific Council on the Developing Child. (2004). Young children develop in an environment of relationships: Working paper No.1. Cambridge: The Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University.

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. (1989). Convention on the Rights of the Child. Retrieved from http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm#art2

Osterman, K. F. (2000). Students' need for belonging in the school community. *Review of Educational Research, 70*(3), 323-367.

Padak, N., & Rasinski, T. V. (2010). Welcoming schools: Small changes that can make a big difference. *Reading Teacher, 64*(4), 294-297. doi: 10.1598/rt.64.4.12

Raphael, B. (2000). *Promoting the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people. Discussion paper: Key principles and directions*. Canberra: Department of Health and Aged Care, National Mental Health Working Group Retrieved from http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/48F5C63B02F2CE07CA2572450013F488/$File/promdisc.pdf.

Richard, J. F., Schneider, B. H., & Mallet, P. (2011). Revisiting the whole-school approach to bullying: Really looking at the whole school. *School Psychology International*, 22.

Roorda, D. L., Koomen, H. M. Y., Spilt, J. L., & Oort, F. J. (2011). The Influence of affective teacher–student relationships on students' school engagement and achievement. *Review of Educational Research, 81*(4), 493-529. doi: 10.3102/0034654311421793

Rowe, F., Stewart, D., & Patterson, C. (2007). Promoting school connectedness through whole school approaches. *Health Education, 107*(6), 524-542.

Rudduck, J., & Fielding, M. (2006). Student voice and the perils of popularity. *Educational Review, 58*(2), 219-231. doi: 10.1080/00131910600584207

Sheldon, S. B., & Epstein, J. L. (2004). Getting students to school: Using family and community involvement to reduce chronic absenteeism. *School Community Journal, 14*(2), 39.

Silins, H., & Mulford, B. (2004). Schools as learning organisations - Effects on teacher leadership and student outcomes. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement, 15*(3-4), 43-466. doi: 10.1080/0924345051233138272

Spence, S. H. (1996). A case for prevention. In P. Cotton & H. Jackson (Eds.), *Early Intervention and Prevention in Mental Health* (pp. 1-21). Melbourne: Australian Psychological Society.

Sun, J., & Stewart, D. (2007). How effective is the health-promoting school approach in building social capital in primary schools? *Health Education, 107*(6), 556-574.

Taylor, T. K., & Biglan, A. (1998). Behavioural family interventions for improving child-rearing: a review of the literature for clinicians and policy makers. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology 33*, 723-757.

UNESCO. (2005). Guidelines for inclusion: Ensuring access to education for all (pp. 40). Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation.

UNESCO. (2006). Positive discipline in the inclusive, learning-friendly classroom: A guide for teachers and teacher educators (pp. 119). Bangkok: UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education.

Vickers, H. S. (1995). Exploring parent-teacher relationships: Joining and communication to others. *School Psychology Quarterly, 10*(2), 133.

Waters, S., & Cross, D. (2010). Measuring students' connectedness to school, teachers, and family: Validation of three scales. *School Psychology Quarterly, 25*(3), 164-177. doi: 10.1037/a0020942

Witten, K., McCreanor, T., & Kearns, R. (2007). The place of schools in parents' community belonging. *New Zealand Geographer, 63*, 7.

World Health Organization. (2000). Local action: Creating health promoting schools. Geneva: Author.

World Health Organization [WHO]. (1994). Mental health programmes in schools. Geneva: Author.

York-Barr, J., & Duke, K. (2004). What do we know about teacher leadership? Findings from two decades of scholarship. *Review of Educational Research, 74*(3), 255-316. doi: 10.3102/00346543074003255