

Wellbeing in the Teaching and Learning Environment – An Interdisciplinary Opportunity

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Improving students' wellbeing in the teaching and learning environment

Aims:

Study and understand Warwick students' and staff members' perceptions and experiences of wellbeing in the teaching and learning environment through a number of diverse focus groups with undergraduates, postgraduates, and staff that will reflect and work on the matter. ([Report 1](#))

The results of these focus groups and additional Warwick consultation will guide our subsequent 'ad-hoc' scholarly research that will give us the opportunity to **explore and identify possible pedagogic practices able to respond to these issues and to constitute possible solutions.**

The identified practices will be subsequently embedded for the 2018/2019 academic year in two existing IATL modules, 'Genetics: Science and Society' (UG) and 'Thinking Water' (PG), and in the new IATL UG module '**Understanding Wellbeing Theory and Practice**', that will constitute a benchmark for practically evaluating the effectiveness of our pedagogical proposals. Our intention is then to extend these practices to all the IATL modules (c.a. 25 modules that enroll around 500 cross-faculty students) and to evaluate and disseminate the further findings.



'Understanding Wellbeing - Theory and Practice'

As reported in several national studies, we are observing a crisis, which is growing each year, in student mental health and wellbeing in the UK universities, including the University of Warwick.

The main aim of this module is therefore to engage students to look at a global, timely and relevant topic such as wellbeing in its complexity, discovering the potential of an interdisciplinary approach.

The module analyses the concept of wellbeing from the perspective of several disciplines (Biomedical disciplines, Sociology, Economics and Arts & Humanities) and helps students to understand the complexity of this crucial topic and the relevance of a holistic approach in order to solve the issues related to it.

Active, student-driven learning methods (e.g. Group Based Learning; Practice Based Learning) to heighten student engagement and understanding of the week's topic.

"I learned a lot from other students from different disciplines and the way it was quite relaxed really helped.

Student devised assessment

Educational intervention for improving students and staff wellbeing..?



'Understanding Wellbeing - Theory and Practice'

THEORY:

Students become familiar with the different perspectives on wellbeing favoured by the different disciplines (Medical Sciences, Psychology, Biology, Economics, etc.) and discuss the way these influence the measurement of wellbeing, research methodologies and approaches to improving wellbeing at the personal and population levels.

- 5 sessions

The Biology of Wellbeing: Students to explore how individual genetic differences may impact on wellbeing and how an understanding of these differences may provide the blueprint for ensuring optimal wellbeing. Students to consider what we can each do as individuals to enrich the environment and thus maximise our own wellbeing and maximise our capacity to fulfil our own innate potential.

Economics of wellbeing: Students to explore whether money buys happiness (and if not, why not?). Students to also explore what matters more to our wellbeing between economics and non-economics factors, and how we could spend our money wisely to boost wellbeing.

Students Testimonials on Interdisciplinarity:

"This module showed me the value of interdisciplinary work, as well as changed my outlook on wellbeing on a personal and social level. Thank you so much."

"I loved being able to work differently to my discipline, it challenged me to think about how my subject's approach fell short, and embracing other disciplines to strengthen my understanding of topics."

"It was very interesting to hear different academic perspectives on topics I would usually only consider from my own department's perspective, and have my eyes opened to ways of looking at things I usually would not consider."



'Understanding Wellbeing - Theory and Practice'

PRACTICE:

Wellbeing and Failure: Students to reflect upon issues of mental and physical health in relation to the interdisciplinary subject of failure. Students to consider critiques of the wellbeing agenda and to challenge conventional narratives of success and wellness. Case studies are drawn upon the creative arts as well as medical and social models of disability in order to consider 'failing better' as a strategy for wellbeing.

Self-Maintenance: Students to explore some of the challenges of maintaining wellbeing in modern westernised society and consider some of the evidence based strategies for optimal wellbeing. In the second half of the session, students will be involved in 'out of the classroom' activities that will allow them to discover and reflect on the relationships between the theories learned in the previous weeks and the daily life on campus (i.e. visit to a campus canteen/café).

Mindfulness: Following an initial experiential practice, the theoretical underpinnings of modern mindfulness is introduced. This will then lead to a deeper exploration of how mindfulness can support and cultivate wellbeing and the different meditative and "in-the-moment" practices available. Students reflection and personal application is encouraged throughout the session.

Students Testimonials on in-classroom Practice:

"Involving practice in the module rather than simply speaking about theories is the module's aspect that had most impact on my learning."

"The alternating between lecture style academic content and more practical and involved participation in sessions really helped me engage with the content even more fully."



'Understanding Wellbeing- Theory and Practice'

PRACTICE:

Sport and wellbeing: Students to explore the role of sport and physical activity in relation to wellbeing. Before analysing the theoretical underpinning, students take part in a simple mood rating task before and after participating in an 'out of the classroom' 'mindful' physical activity (i.e. Yoga) and a higher intensity physical activity (i.e. boxercise). Students will use this experience to reflect on the immediate and short-term impact of physical activity on mood and the role of regular physical activity for promoting wellbeing and the relationships between wellbeing and physical activity, exercise and sport.

Practicing Wellbeing: Students to analyse and reflect on the significant role that **arts** (i.e. literature, music, dance and performance) can play in physical and mental wellbeing. At the beginning of the session, students are directly involved in a practical workshop (i.e. creative writing exercise and collage making) that will help them to understand this particular relationship while also reflecting on their personal experience.



'Understanding Wellbeing - Theory and Practice'

AUTHENTIC, INTERDISCIPLINARY ASSESSMENT:

Academic Writing Piece (50%)

"As reported in several national and international studies, we are observing a growing crisis in student mental health and wellbeing in UK and international universities.

You shall describe and analyse this crisis, reflecting on its potential causes, and propose some possible solutions for supporting students' wellbeing in Higher Education, giving detailed reasons for your response."

Student Devised Assessment (50%)

Form of assessment method designed by the student whereby the students create a piece of work (an article, a short film, a talk, a play, a workshop, a painting, a podcast and so on) that offers a solution to a controversial topic or a question that has arisen during the module. The student is free to select their preferred topic/question and subsequently, they undertake their own research utilising the methodologies and the holistic approach presented throughout the course. The student has to demonstrate and communicate the theories presented in the module in their piece.



'Understanding Wellbeing - Theory and Practice'

Can an academic, interdisciplinary intervention help to solve the timely HE Wellbeing issue?

* Gathering of **quantitative data**:

Students (29) invited to undertake the [The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale](#) Test at the beginning and end of the module – Average 4 points increment on the scale.



'Understanding Wellbeing - Theory and Practice'

Can an academic, interdisciplinary intervention help to solve the timely HE Wellbeing issue?

* Gathering of **qualitative data**

"Would you like to see more of this type of "wellbeing teaching and learning experiences" embedded in the curriculum?"

100% Yes

Key Themes

1- Deeper understanding of wellbeing that impacts on personal views:

"Yes, I have a deeper understanding of wellbeing and how to further achieve this and being able to."

"This module was invaluable, and changed my personal outlook on my wellbeing, as well as teaching me about an important social crisis. More please!"

"I have learnt a lot of very important things that I think will be helpful through out my life."

"[...] the practical sessions had relevance to my everyday life."

"[...] within this module, in many lectures, while I was learning in depth about wellbeing, there was always something that I could take away and implement into my daily life."



'Understanding Wellbeing - Theory and Practice'

Key Themes

2- Deeper understanding of wellbeing that directly impacts on personal wellbeing:

"This should be compulsory for everybody - it has so many valuable coping mechanisms that are essential for university and I honestly don't know how I've survived 3 years without it! Talking to other friends not on this module, they can see that I have changed in such a positive way in just 10 weeks that they all wish they could take it."

"This module has honestly been so helpful in regards to my wellbeing and I wish I could do this again next term as it has been extremely helpful through university life, especially being so far away from home."

"It was vital for improving my University experience and my wellbeing. So interesting and challenging. I cannot wait to start my assessment."

"A key starting point is better education with regards to mental health and wellbeing. A way of implementing this could be requiring all first-year students to take part of a module on wellbeing. [...] I believe this would be beneficial, reflecting upon the impact this module has had on me, as it would increase awareness of the topic; allow reflection upon one's own mental wellbeing and provide students with strategies to promote their and others' wellbeing. It is vital students are provided with the tools to identify when their mental wellbeing is suffering and ways they can deal with the inevitable stresses of life."



'Understanding Wellbeing - Theory and Practice'

Key Themes

3- Scale it up – useful for other students:

*"I feel like aspects of this module should be **made compulsory** across all disciplines. Maybe even have an element embedded in freshers?"*

*"Definitely- think it is very important, to promote wellbeing overall in a society I think **the first step is to educate people on how to maintain and promote their own wellbeing as an individual**. Also, mental health is such a massive issue especially in schools/unis etc as it **can be very stressful** with the competitive environment so it's really important."*

"Yes, I believe that especially for students that are studying degrees that don't get any close to this kind of information it would be really useful."

*"**Students are stressed and have no idea how to cope. This bridges the gap nicely.**"*

"This module more than met my expectations. Any improvements would be to make it accessible for more people - whilst remaining the same - a hard challenge."

*"**Open it to more people! It was challenging academically, I have learned beyond all the possible boundaries (disciplines, methodologies, cultures) and we just need it**"*



'Understanding Wellbeing- Theory and Practice'

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