Position Paper: Developing Skills for Social and Emotional Wellbeing

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Abstract
Wellbeing can be defined as multidimensional and incredibly complex, affected by many different factors according to an individual’s experience. Understanding the social and emotional wellbeing of adolescents is important to help support their development and transition to adulthood smoothly. Project based learning has the potential to increase social and emotional wellbeing in students and have a positive impact on the wider community, particularly with regards to health education and sharing of knowledge. Positive computing can play an important role in scaffolding the prevention, promotion and maintenance of psychological wellbeing. Further work is needed to explore the perceptions of wellbeing with adolescents before designing and developing effective digital platforms in this area.

Author Keywords
Wellbeing; positive computing; education; adolescents

Introduction
Improving the health and wellbeing of the population is top of the Public Health agenda in the UK [1]. Social and emotional wellbeing has attracted much more focus recently in terms of improving our overall quality of life, particularly in HCI research [2–6]. As more services are becoming primarily digital, e.g. switching services to online only, it is imperative that we design and develop effective digital technologies and platforms that can be used to help promote, measure and maintain positive...
social and emotional wellbeing (SEW) and better quality of life.

However, challenging to this field is the desire to establish a common definition of wellbeing. It is long documented that wellbeing is multidimensional and incredibly complex. There has been considerable debate about what defines optimal experience and what constitutes "the good life". Depending on the definition this influences our practices of teaching, therapy, parenting, and so on, as all such endeavors aim to change humans for the better [7], but what is 'better'? Every individual is affected in different ways depending on their experience with societal norms, relationships, health, personality, environment, and upbringing, to name but a few interactions. It is important to engage with a person's own account of their wellbeing. This brings about its own challenge in that often, people may have become accustomed to a lower quality of life. Therefore, should we trust a person's own judgement of their wellbeing? If not, whose account do we trust? Using an 'objective' account of wellbeing doesn't take into account individual needs and different cultural and societal conditions [8].

Positive social and emotional wellbeing in children and adolescents creates the foundations for educational attainment, healthy behaviours and reduced risk of mental health illness in later life [9].

Social and emotional learning in education

NICE guidelines propose that secondary schools should play an active role in measuring and assessing young people's social and emotional wellbeing [9].

In addition to the way a school can help develop positive SEW in adolescents, factors related to community social capital can also be predictive of SEW. For example, young people who had no involvement in the local community were twice as likely to report poorer health; those who rarely felt safe in the community were almost four times as likely to report being unhappy and twice as likely to feel low at least once a week [10].

Social and emotional learning (SEL) programs in schools have been shown to have a significantly positive effect on overall emotional-social competencies of students, as well as a change in their attitude toward themselves, peers and school [12]. Although largely studied in America, these programs can be easily integrated into UK curricula and a need for additional personnel for delivery isn’t needed. Overall, academic achievement increased by around 11 percentile points in those who has exposure to a SEL program in the US. Recently, work carried out in a local school using the Project Based Learning (PBL) approach to address a societal challenge within the community; diet and health, and reported positive responses in the young adolescents through 'social connectedness' with the community and feeling like they had a 'purpose' [13]. A systematic review of the role social capital plays in supporting health and wellbeing of children and adolescents also highlights the importance of community involvement. PBL enhances psychological wellbeing by improving attitudes to learning, increases motivation, self efficacy, improved critical thinking, improved relationships as well as showing promise for closing the achievement gap by engaging low achievers [14]. SEL can be an integral component of project based learning but further work is needed to establish
the perceptions of positive psychological wellbeing with the students.

Positive Computing
Recently there has been an increased interest in ‘Positive Computing’. It can be defined as ‘the design and development of technology to support wellbeing and human potential’ [9]. There are three main concepts that can be integrated into design and development of digital platforms for promoting psychological wellbeing: preventative, active, and dedicated [10]. This concept and increased interest within the HCI community is exciting for health and wellbeing research and I think it has great potential to support adolescent SEW.

Designing digital technologies to promote and enhance positive SEW can effectively take two approaches: decreasing the bad or enhancing the good. Although both are valid strategies, it is the former that usually attracts most attention, particularly in health related research. As well as the focus on removing the bad, i.e. stress, ill health, etc., wellbeing research tends to focus on the short term, when the focus should be on maintenance and sustainability of positive psychological wellbeing [9], particularly with adolescents and the transition to adulthood.

Future work
My particular interests are around diet, health and wellbeing and supporting education around these topics in schools and the wider community through the use of digital technologies, possibly ‘positive computing’.

Adolescents can be considered a challenging group to work with in design, and are underrepresented in the HCI community [15]. In order for us to understand the perceptions of wellbeing with this group, it is likely that they will need some guidance and inspiration to think about what wellbeing means to them.

The secondary school previously mentioned is running a similar nutrition education project with year 7 (11-12 years) students, lasting around twelve weeks. The students are developing their own digital teaching materials to share with the wider community and will take on the role of delivering lessons on nutrition to younger students using these materials.

The proposed workshops will run concurrently with the nutrition education project. The workshops will take on a mixed methods approach using activities, cultural probes and semi-structured interviews. Cultural probes are used to elicit thought-provoking and creative ideas with participants. Hopefully the tasks will encourage the students to give insight into their thoughts and feelings around their own wellbeing. An example could include a plate with three sections ‘body’, ‘mind’ and ‘soul’ and the question “what did you feed yourself today?” to better understand their perceptions of consumption and what nurtures them [16]. Due to the significance of social relationships with this age group, we will potentially explore this with the use of a ‘social map’, drawing on their feelings on how this is related to their wellbeing. The activities can run in the workshop but also there is scope for the students to document their thoughts and feelings on wellbeing, particularly with regards to their community when outside of school. This could be captured using photographs, or writing notes in a diary. Following on from the activities, a semi-structured interview is proposed to further understand the reasons behind the outcome of the
activities. This would also give the students a chance to disclose thoughts and feelings they might not want to in front of their peers. It is intended that each workshop outcome will inform the next, with the aim of reaching a design recommendation before the end of the nutrition project.

References
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