

UNLOCKING WELLBEING: INVESTIGATING LGBTIQ+ INCLUSION THROUGH THE LENS OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY THEORIES

Abstract

This study delves into the intersection of well-being and educational psychology theories within the context of the LGBTIQ+ community, emphasizing the importance of inclusive practices in educational settings. Drawing upon theoretical frameworks such as welfarism, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Self-Determination Theory (SDT), Social Cognitive Theory, and positive psychology, the research explores how these theories inform our understanding of student well-being and offer guidance for fostering inclusive environments. The study highlights the unique challenges faced by LGBTIQ+ students, including mental health struggles, lack of acceptance, and experiences of discrimination, and examines the role of educators in promoting their overall well-being and academic success. By implementing evidence-based strategies, such as inclusive policies, support networks, and positive psychology interventions, educators can create environments where all students feel respected, valued, and empowered to thrive. Through collaborative efforts and a commitment to ongoing learning and growth, this study aims to contribute to the creation of educational environments that celebrate diversity and promote the well-being of all students, regardless of their SOGIESC.

Keywords: *Wellbeing, LGBTIQ+ Inclusion*

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I. INTRODUCTION

A fundamental tenet of inclusion lies in welfarism, which asserts that the sole determinant of the goodness of every person in the world. While educators argue that inclusive actions taken in the field of education aim to maximize overall good, welfarists specifically define this good as synonymous with the well-being of every student in the classroom. In philosophical discourse, the concept of well-being encompasses all that is inherently beneficial to an individual—referred to as intrinsic or fundamental welfare goods—rather than merely instrumental goods. For instance, happiness directly contributes to one's well-being, serving as an intrinsic welfare good. Conversely, while money may facilitate the acquisition of various necessities and comforts, it remains merely instrumental in nature and does not inherently enhance one's well-being. Similarly, we can identify elements such as misery as intrinsic welfare bads, representing aspects detrimental to an individual's well-being (*Theories of Well-Being*, 2023).

Recognizing the importance of fostering an inclusive school climate for LGBTIQ+ students has gained traction globally, aiming to mitigate the risks of violence and discrimination while enhancing their well-being. However, the bulk of quantitative studies in this domain have primarily focused on North America, particularly the United States, leaving a notable gap in understanding LGBTIQ+ students' well-being in developing countries (Chan et al., 2022). Moreover, while existing research suggests that policies, Gender-Sexuality Alliances (GSAs), educator interventions, and LGBTIQ+-inclusive curricula may improve school climate, there is a dearth of experimental studies providing concrete evidence and specific strategies to guide schools effectively. Furthermore, the diversity within the LGBTIQ+ student population underscores the inadequacy of a 'one size fits all' approach to school policies. In light of these pressing issues and research gaps, this paper aims to undertake a conceptual investigation into the theoretical foundations of LGBTIQ+ well-being. By exploring existing literature and theoretical frameworks, this study seeks to shed light on the multifaceted nature of mental health challenges faced by LGBTIQ+ individuals and offer insights into tailored interventions and policies to promote their psychological well-being in diverse educational settings.

Well-being encompasses a spectrum of dimensions crucial for a fulfilled and enriching life. These facets include emotional well-being, entailing adept stress management, resilience building, and nurturing positive emotions. Physical wellness emphasizes the maintenance of a healthy lifestyle and regular exercise to optimize bodily function. Social well-being underscores the significance of cultivating meaningful relationships, effective communication, and a support network to counter feelings of isolation. Workplace well-being involves deriving purpose and satisfaction from professional endeavors, aligning with personal values and life aspirations. Lastly, societal well-being involves active engagement and contribution to a thriving community and environment, fostering a sense of identity and interconnectedness.

To foster overall well-being, it's essential to understand and address various aspects of life that contribute to our sense of fulfillment and happiness. Let's delve deeper into each dimension:

- **Emotional Well-Being:** This pertains to our ability to manage our emotions effectively and cope with life's challenges in a healthy manner. Developing skills such as positivity, emotion regulation, and mindfulness can significantly enhance emotional well-being. By cultivating a positive outlook, regulating our emotions in stressful situations, and practicing mindfulness to stay present, we can navigate life's ups and downs with greater resilience and optimism.
- **Physical Well-Being:** Physical well-being encompasses our physical health and vitality, which play a significant role in influencing our overall well-being. It involves adopting habits that promote a healthy lifestyle, including nutritious eating, regular exercise, and detoxification. Prioritizing a balanced diet, engaging in physical activity, and detoxing our bodies from harmful substances can not only improve our physical health but also boost our emotional well-being, as our physical and mental health are closely interconnected (Davis et al., 2013).
- **Social Well-Being:** Our social connections and relationships contribute significantly to our sense of well-being. Building social skills such as gratitude, kindness, and effective communication can enhance our social well-being by fostering meaningful connections with others. Practicing gratitude, expressing kindness towards others, and maintaining open and honest communication can help reduce feelings of loneliness and isolation, leading to greater overall happiness and satisfaction in our relationships.
- **Workplace Well-Being:** Since we spend a significant portion of our lives at work, our workplace environment plays a crucial role in our overall well-being. Developing skills that allow us to pursue our goals, maintain work-life balance, and align our work with our values can enhance workplace well-being. By striving for a balance between professional and personal life, finding purpose in our work, and living our values in the workplace, we can experience greater fulfillment and satisfaction in our careers.
- **Societal Well-Being:** Societal well-being refers to our sense of belonging and contribution to the broader community and society. Building skills that promote interconnectedness, environmental stewardship, and compassion can contribute to societal well-being. By living in alignment with our values, minimizing our environmental impact, and making positive contributions to the lives of others, we can foster a sense of purpose and interconnectedness, leading to greater well-being for ourselves and others (Tamir et al., 2007).

In essence, each dimension of well-being is interconnected and plays a vital role in shaping our overall quality of life. By nurturing these dimensions through intentional practice and personal growth, we can cultivate a more fulfilling and meaningful life for ourselves and those around us.

The interplay between well-being and educational psychology theories is intricate and multifaceted. Educational psychology delves into how individuals learn and evolve within educational environments. One prominent theory, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, posits that meeting fundamental physiological and safety needs is pivotal for mental health and well-

being (Pichère & Cadiat, 2015). For instance, neglect and lack of security faced by LGBTIQ+ students not only impact their physical and emotional well-being but also hinder their social and societal integration. Understanding and addressing these challenges are essential for fostering a conducive learning environment that nurtures students' holistic well-being.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) suggests that individuals thrive when these needs are satisfied, emphasizing intrinsic motivation and the role of emotions in guiding behavior (Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. 2000). Well-being flourishes when individuals feel a sense of autonomy, competence, and connection within educational environments. For instance, LGBTIQ+ students who are allowed to express their identities freely (autonomy), have opportunities to excel academically and socially (competence), and feel supported by peers and educators (relatedness) are more likely to experience positive well-being. Conversely, when these needs are not met, such as when LGBTIQ+ students face discrimination, lack of acceptance, or isolation, their well-being may suffer. Therefore, fostering an inclusive and supportive educational environment that respects and affirms the identities and experiences of LGBTIQ+ students is essential for promoting their overall well-being. Implementing policies and practices that recognize and accommodate their needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness can contribute significantly to enhancing their psychological and emotional welfare.

Social Cognitive Theory illuminates the profound impact of observational learning, self-efficacy beliefs, and interpersonal determination on shaping behavior. It underscores how social factors, individual cognition, and environmental contexts intertwine to mold learning and development. Crucially, well-being is intimately intertwined with individuals' self-efficacy beliefs and their observations of others' experiences (Bandura, 1986). In educational settings, the well-being of LGBTIQ+ students hinges on their perceptions of their own capabilities and the experiences of their peers. Witnessing inclusive practices and positive interactions among peers fosters a sense of self-efficacy and promotes positive well-being. Conversely, experiences of discrimination or exclusion can undermine their well-being and academic motivation. Hence, fostering LGBTIQ+ inclusion in schools is paramount, not only for cultivating a supportive environment but also for nurturing the well-being and academic drive of all students. Through the implementation of inclusive policies, the provision of robust support networks, and the cultivation of positive peer interactions, educational institutions can foster an environment where every student feels valued, respected, and empowered to thrive.

Positive psychology, with its emphasis on human strengths and optimal functioning, is particularly pertinent in addressing the well-being of students within educational contexts, including those in the LGBTIQ+ community. By focusing on strengths, virtues, and positive emotions, positive psychology interventions offer a proactive approach to enhancing student well-being, rather than solely reacting to challenges or pathology (Snyder et al., 2011).

For instance, in the case of LGBTIQ+ students who may face unique challenges related to identity acceptance and social inclusion, positive psychology interventions can provide vital support. By incorporating practices such as gratitude exercises or mindfulness into the curriculum, educators can empower these students to cultivate resilience, positive

emotions, and a sense of purpose. This approach not only fosters well-being but also equips students with valuable coping skills to navigate the complexities of their educational journey. Furthermore, positive psychology aligns closely with the principles of inclusivity and acceptance. By embracing educational psychology theories through the lens of positive psychology, educators can create supportive environments that celebrate diversity and promote a sense of belonging for all students, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. This inclusive approach is essential for fostering a safe and affirming educational atmosphere where every student feels valued, respected, and empowered to thrive. Therefore, the integration of positive psychology principles into educational practices holds immense promise for promoting the holistic well-being of all students, with particular significance for those in the LGBTIQA+ community.

II. CONCLUSION

The exploration of well-being and educational psychology theories highlights the critical importance of fostering inclusive and supportive environments within educational settings. By understanding and addressing the unique challenges faced by LGBTIQA+ students, educators can play a vital role in promoting their overall well-being and academic success. From recognizing the intrinsic value of every individual to understanding the impact of social factors and personal beliefs on behavior and well-being, the theories discussed in this paper underscore the importance of fostering a sense of belonging, autonomy, competence, and connection among LGBTIQA+ students. By implementing evidence-based strategies, such as inclusive policies, support networks, and positive psychology interventions, educators can create environments where all students feel respected, valued, and empowered to thrive. By embracing the principles of inclusivity, acceptance, and positive psychology, educators can contribute to the creation of educational environments that celebrate diversity and promote the well-being of all students, including those in the LGBTIQA+ community. Through collaborative efforts and a commitment to ongoing learning and growth, we can work towards creating a future where every student has the opportunity to reach their full potential and lead fulfilling lives.

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