

# Primary Schooling and Children's Social Emotional Wellbeing: A Teacher's Perspective

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## Abstract

The social emotional wellbeing of children has often been placed at the opposite end of the educational continuum to academic achievement thus creating a binary debate. As research has demonstrated how social emotional wellbeing both facilitates and predicts academic achievement it would appear there is no longer a need for such a debate. Attention should now focus on how schools may most effectively support social emotional wellbeing. Research has suggested that this requires whole school reform addressing curriculum, pedagogy and management. While Australia has placed social emotional wellbeing within the goals of schooling, educational policy continues to relegate social emotional wellbeing to pockets of curriculum, social skills training and character education approaches. A "wide awakening" is needed for schools to open the discussion on social emotional wellbeing. This paper outlines a small pilot study which utilised the methodology of portraiture to explore one teacher's perspective on social emotional wellbeing. The use of portraiture aims to draw both the participant and the reader into a process of reflection to prompt further development of primary schooling's role in children's social emotional wellbeing.

The following paper provides a rationale and overview of a small pilot study. The basis of this research rests on the premise that school reform is needed and that reform requires the active involvement of teachers. As such this paper considers the position of social emotional wellbeing in schooling and evidence for teachers' existing beliefs on social emotional wellbeing, before presenting extracts from the current research into one teacher's perspective on the social emotional wellbeing of children.

## DEBATING THE AIMS OF SCHOOLING

The Australian Primary Principal's Association (APPA) recently called on the Australian Federal Government to renew the charter of primary schooling (Robson, 2007). This call was based on specific "pressure points" identified within primary schooling. One of these is the apparent growing pressure placed on primary schools to address social emotional issues experienced by children, with schools seen as "the key to overcoming the problems" (Robson, 2007, p 2). The APPA went further to suggest that "(T)he curriculum has become too cluttered and primary schools are being forced to take the responsibility for issues that should really be the domain of parents" (APPA, 2007). The place of social emotional wellbeing in schools is not a new concern. Issues of social emotional wellbeing have been raised by philosophers and theorists since Aristotle, and seen more recently in the writings of Rousseau, Froebel, Pestalozzi, Dewey and movements such as progressive, humanistic and holistic education. In addition, teachers and schools have long served an 'in loco parentis' role which has reflected the needs of society.

The aims of education have been a source for debate throughout the history of education. Within the formal schooling debate social emotional wellbeing has often been placed on the opposite end of the continuum to academic achievement (Shriver & Weissberg, 2005). This has frequently resulted in debates of 'either/or'. Such contention over the goals of schooling may hold back the existing knowledge for school improvement (Labaree, 1997) from impacting on practice. Research over the past decade suggests that the debate over educational aims no longer need follow this binary path, since social emotional wellbeing is an effective predictor and facilitator of academic achievement (Caprara, Barbaranelli, Pastorelli, Bandura, & Zimbardo, 2000; Catalano, Haggarty, Oesterle, Fleming, & Hawkins, 2004; Malecki & Elliott, 2002; Flook, Repetti, & Ullman, 2005). Rather than forcing educational administration into a choice, social emotional wellbeing, as well as, academic achievement needs to be prioritised.

## **DEFINING SOCIAL EMOTIONAL WELLBEING**

Social emotional wellbeing is referred to by a variety of terms. Many of these terms utilise the language of academic discourse, such as emotional intelligence (Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Goleman, 1996), emotional literacy (Steiner & Perry, 1997; Weare, 2004), and social competence (Elias et al. 1997), suggesting a desire to demonstrate parity with academic development. Each term covers a wide range of skills which crossover and demonstrate that when the umbrella terms are unpacked they simply mean the same thing (Claxton, 2005). I have chosen the term social emotional wellbeing to emphasise the positive and simultaneously present and evolving context. As such social emotional wellbeing represents the development of social emotional skills as well as the use of such skills.

Social emotional wellbeing has been suggested to be a “good thing” in itself and needs no further justification (Weare, 2000, p 9). The continued debate over the role of social emotional wellbeing in schools suggests that there is a need to explore the full range of benefits. In a society that is increasingly aware of the need for mental health awareness and support (DETTWA, 2001; Sawyer et al. 2001), social emotional wellbeing is an imperative (Wells, Barlow and Stewart-Brown, 2003, Weare, 2004) as skills such as communication, collaboration, empathy and resilience are essential in order to learn, form relationships and carry out our day to day lives (Elias et al. 1997; Weare, 2000, 2004). Social emotional wellbeing also impacts on every aspect of society: work, relationships, parenting, the economy and political structures (Weare, 2000, 2004). Psychohistorians have made links between the extremes of poor social emotional wellbeing of communities and societal groups, to war, terrorism, political turmoil and environmental degradation, as well as between the ideals of social emotional wellbeing and the prevention of atrocities and the positive progression of society (De Mause, 1999, Ihanus, 1996, Miller, 1998, Oliner & Oliner, 1988, Pulnar, 1994). Of particular resonance to schools is the evidence to support the positive impact of strong social emotional wellbeing on academic achievement.

### **SOCIAL EMOTIONAL WELLBEING AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT**

Almost four decades ago Maslow (1970) concluded that academic learning cannot occur unless social and emotional needs have been met. Since then research has further demonstrated that positive social emotional wellbeing increases academic success. An ability to understand, access and utilise our emotions has been shown to be essential to thinking processes, that is, emotions support our ability to select, plan, make decisions, and prepare (Mayer & Salovey, 1993). Prosocial behaviour has been found to be a stronger predictor of future academic achievement than current academic achievement suggesting that “(C)hildren’s intellectual development is strongly influenced by the social relations in which it is embedded and its interpersonal effects” (Caprara et al. 2002, p 305). Further research has suggested that “classroom social skills may act as academic enablers” (Malecki & Elliott, 2002, p 22). The positive link between peer relationships and academic achievement has led to calls for the promotion of social emotional wellbeing in schools in order to improve academic achievement (Flook et al., 2005). In addition, pedagogy engaging social emotional wellbeing has been highlighted as “critical to achieving academic success” (Catalano et al., 2004, p 259). It is now time to recognise the symbiotic relationship between social emotional wellbeing and academic achievement rather than maintain the binary debate.

### **SCHOOLING’S ROLE IN SOCIAL EMOTIONAL WELLBEING**

School context and climate affects social emotional wellbeing explicitly and implicitly (Battistitch, Watson, Solomon, Lewis & Schaps, 1999; Husu & Tirri, 2007, Rasmussen, 2004). It is crucial that everyone connected to schools recognise this role in order to ensure that both their explicit and implicit behaviours enable children to develop and experience positive social emotional wellbeing. Schools access almost the entire child population (Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg & Walberg, 2004) and thus serve an important link between families and the community (Battistitch, et al., 1999). In addition, research into the way the human brain works and thus how learning occurs supports the need for social emotional wellbeing to be approached in an environment which allows for the practice of skills (Brandt, 2003). As a result, school is the ideal context to support children’s social emotional wellbeing (Zins et al., 2004).

Social emotional wellbeing is not a new consideration for schooling. The past two decades alone have seen concerns for children's social and emotional needs incorporated in Character (or Values) Education, Moral Education, Social Skills Training for Specific Problems and Social Emotional Education (McKenzie, 2004). The various school based approaches to social emotional wellbeing may be categorised in three ways: approaches to address emotional and behavioural problems, teaching competencies through the curriculum, and whole school approaches (Weare, 2004).

While the Australian National Goals for Education (MCEETYA, 1999) clearly recognise social emotional wellbeing as a fundamental role of education, this has been absent from crucial educational initiatives. The NSW Department of Education and Training Quality Teaching Model (NSWDET, 2003) is a pedagogical framework designed to address the improvement of student academic outcomes, yet does not include specific elements to support social emotional wellbeing. While the Quality Teaching model incorporates elements such as social support, students' self regulation and connectedness (NSWDET, 2003), these elements are addressed from the perspective of academic achievement not social and emotional wellbeing. The NSW Professional Standards (NSW Institute of Teachers, 2005), which address the core elements of all teachers' work, also does not include teaching skills to support the social emotional wellbeing of children. The federal and state Governments' support of the school's role in social emotional wellbeing has been relegated to aspects of curriculum (eg. NSWBOS, 1999), character education programs (DEST, 2005; Refshauge, 2004), and the support of social skills training programs.

Character education which generally relates to teaching students a specific set of values (Howard, Berkowitz & Schaffer, 2004), as seen in the Australian Values Education programs (DEST, 2005; Refshauge, 2004), has attracted criticism for its emphasis on 'indoctrination' aimed at making children do what they are told (Kohn, 1997; McKenzie, 2004; Neilsen, 2005). Social skills training, which refers to programs designed to combat specific problems, such as bullying, has been criticised for its piecemeal nature (Elias et al., 1997; Zins et al., 2004). The sheer number of social skills programs has raised the question of how well they could be implemented (Gottfredson & Gottfredson, 2001). Furthermore these programs have been criticised for attempting to shift issues out of the way to get on with the 'real business' of school, that is academic learning (Kohn, 1991). Both approaches have been criticised for the add-on approach taken to address issues in society (Noddings, 1992) which promote the development of add-on knowledge rather than form the basis of all learning. Too often education is conceptualised as preparing children and young people for life rather than acknowledging existing engagement in life and society (Dewey, 1916). In order to address the fundamental role of social emotional wellbeing in education, researchers have called for whole school reform (Greenberg, 2003; Kohn, 1991, 1997; Noddings, 1992; Roeser et al., 2000; Weare, 2000, 2004; Wells, Barlow & Stewart-Brown, 2003).

### **WHOLE SCHOOL REFORM**

Improved social emotional wellbeing is reliant on the restructuring of schools (Weare, 2004, Wells et. al, 2003). A whole school approach would involve reforming "the school's ethos, organisation, management structures, relationships, the physical environment, as well as the taught curriculum, so that the experience of school life is conducive to the health of all who learn and work there" (Weare, 2000, p 21). At the heart of such reform is the aim to involve students in the determination of learning including opportunities for student self-direction and other decision making within the school, the development of closer student relationships with teachers, peers and the wider community, co-operative learning, active learning techniques, and learning as problem solving (Battistitch et al., 1999; Elias et al. 1997; Greenberg, et al. 2003; Noddings, 1992; Roeser, Eccles & Sameroff, 2000; Weare, 2000, 2004). This would enable social emotional wellbeing to form the foundation of all school activities and thus negate the need for adding on specific programs.

Whole school reform is necessary for the positioning of social emotional wellbeing as fundamental to all schooling practice. A top down approach to educational reform and change may impact on teacher practice (Forrester, 2005), and change in practice may impact on beliefs (Guskey, 1986). Reform directed from the outside, however, is considered futile without the engagement of teachers in reflection in order to impact on beliefs (Fullan, 1991; Sarason, 1996; Ryan, 2005).

Research varies on the direction of relationship between beliefs and practice to create change. In reviewing the research Richardson (2004) identified three possibilities. The first, as acknowledged by Guskey (1986) and Fullan (1985), claims that “teachers change their beliefs after they change their practices and are able to see that these new practices positively affect their classroom and students” (Richardson, 1994, p 90). The second, as recognised by Richardson, Anders, Tidwell and Lloyd (1991) declared “changes in beliefs precede changes in practice” (Richardson, 1994, p 90). While Richardson’s (1994, pg 90) later research suggested “the process of changing beliefs and practices is interactive; that is, depending on the types of changes and the teachers themselves, the change process may begin either with changes in beliefs or changes in practice” (p 90). Furthermore, Richardson (1994) found suggestions that some beliefs are stronger than others and may “drive classroom practices”, such as beliefs relating to behaviour management overriding beliefs about reading (p 90). Richardson’s (1994) continued research led to the conclusion that “(G)enuine changes will come about when teachers think very differently about what is going on in their classrooms, and are provided with the practices to match their different ways of thinking” (p 102).

### TEACHERS AND THE SOCIAL EMOTIONAL WELLBEING OF CHILDREN

There is an extensive amount already written on children’s social emotional wellbeing and schooling, yet we know little about how teachers, and others within schools, view the full picture of social emotional wellbeing and “the extent to which these views are linked to their teaching practice” (Sanger, 2001, p 700). The notion of ‘care’ dominates the literature that explores insights into teachers’ beliefs on social emotional wellbeing. Social emotional wellbeing is recognised by teachers as a crucial aspect of education as evidenced by the ‘culture of care’ (Nias, 1999) witnessed in primary schools. Caring is frequently cited by prospective teachers in their reasoning for choosing the profession (Weinstein, 1998; Goldstein & Lake, 2000; Manuel & Brindley, 2005; Manuel & Hughes, 2006) and regularly underpins the metaphors both prospective and practicing teachers draw on to explain their role, such as ‘parent’ and ‘nurturer’ (Weinstein, 1998).

While care is not synonymous with schools’ support of social emotional wellbeing (Puurula et al., 2001) it is a major feature. Care may be defined as the conscious development of warm, trusting and supportive relationships with students (Hargreaves & Tucker, 1991, Cohn & Kottkamp, 1993) and separated out into various dimensions which highlight its behaviours, intentions and underlying beliefs (Nias, 1999). Care in this sense has been viewed as an optional extra to the work of teachers, which teachers may choose to engage in (O’Connor, 2007), but is not encouraged by educational policy (Jeffrey, 2002, O’Connor, 2007), and is devalued to a position of ‘non-work’ (Acker, 1999).

When care is placed in such a tenuous position, external pressures on teachers may outweigh the need to care, as witnessed in the drive for task orientation and performativity (Forrester, 2005, Nias, 1999). Teachers may oversimplify care to a choice between caring for and controlling students (Weinstein, 1998, Goldstein & Lake, 2000) which may be compounded by external pressures for achievement and performance. Care may also be viewed from an essentialist perspective whereby care of students is considered natural, thus easy and not requiring hard work or training. This is ultimately a defeatist viewpoint which teachers may quickly fail to meet due to unrealistic expectations to ‘know’ and thus not seek support (Goldstein & Lake, 2000). Such an arduous approach to care is recognised by the ‘emotional labour’ (Acker, 1999, Isenberger & Zembylas, 2006) called on by teachers to care. This labour may have a negative dimension closely connected to burnout (Isenberger & Zembylas, 2006).

Caring has been shown to contribute to a teacher’s job satisfaction. Teachers who do ‘care’ for their students in their teaching cite factors such as affection and regard from the students as contributing to teacher satisfaction (Hargreaves, 2000; Nias, 1999). This raises issues of how well students’ needs are met if care is driven by the teacher’s needs. Further issues may arise when students do not return affection and regard for the teacher. Teachers have linked the forging of interpersonal relationships with their students to their own ‘psychic rewards’ (Hargreaves, 2000; Lortie, 1975). In turn, these teachers’ classrooms have not necessarily been “characterised by care, hope, attentiveness and other positive qualities” (Hargreaves, 2000, p 818) essential for social emotional

wellbeing. In addition, children need not only be cared for, but also to be caring of others (Nias, 1999; Noddings, 1984, 1994). If the teacher gains satisfaction through caring, opportunities may not be provided for students to develop and utilise their skills for caring. Furthermore, when students are not supported to develop skills of caring, the teacher must maintain the role of primary carer as children will not engage in caring of self, other students or the teacher, thus increasing 'emotional labour' (Acker, 1999) and the potential for teacher burnout.

A simplistic view of care does not represent what is essential if schools are to develop and support the social emotional wellbeing of students. A single-minded emphasis on the establishment and nurturance of warm relationships with children will result in the exclusion of crucial components to support social emotional wellbeing such as the acknowledgement that "caring may be enacted through teaching well" (Weinstein, 1998, p 155). This requires that teachers extend positive relationships to enact care in "curriculum, pedagogy and classroom (and school) management" (Weinstein, 1998, p 154, citing McLaughlin, 1991). It is this whole school approach that has been recognised as necessary for social emotional wellbeing (Greenberg, 2003; Kohn, 1991, 1997; Noddings, 1992; Roeser et al., 2000; Weare, 2000, 2004; Wells et al., 2003).

It is apparent that while primary teachers do value the care of children, there are pressures placed on them both internally and externally to provide care adequate to the support of social emotional wellbeing. A holistic approach to the support of children's social emotional wellbeing which engages curriculum, pedagogy and management must be supported by teacher belief in the worth and potential of children (Isenberger & Zembylas, 2006). In order to ensure primary schools provide a 'culture of care' that is supportive of students' social emotional wellbeing, there must be "greater clarity in the minds of individual practitioners and of those with an interest in their work about the beliefs which implicitly frame the nature of teachers' tasks and of the values which direct their work" (Nias, 1999, p 81). It is thus essential to gain insight into teachers' beliefs surrounding social emotional wellbeing to provide a basis from which there may be a "wide awakening" (Greene, 1978, p 45) to engage teachers in reflection on their own beliefs and practice that may instigate change.

### **GREATER UNDERSTANDING**

Reflection has been established as a crucial element for the level of change needed for whole school reform, and "(A) divergence in the assumptions...may lead to...an inability to bring teachers into a productive process of critical reflection on their own views ...and their practice" (Sanger, 2001, p 684). Greater understanding of teachers' beliefs and practices may potentially provide avenues into "how researchers might discuss these issues with them (the teachers) so that they can critically assess their own views and practice" (Sanger, 2001, p 683). It is the 'lived meanings' that represent those meanings "committed, engaged, reflective and inextricably tied to personal and professional experiences" (Paris & Combs, 2006, p 574) which "provide entry points and illuminate details of the journey that are often obscured in academic definitions", and supports the pursuit of a concept rather than description and assessment (ibid, pg 590).

The entire school context must be considered in order to gain a greater understanding of teachers' beliefs and practices. It has been suggested that the school context may prevent change occurring despite the recognition of contradictions between beliefs and practice (Karaagac & Threlfall, 2004). It is crucial to recognise that beliefs are "formed and shaped" by our work context (Fenstermacher, 1994, p 27), with the pressures on schools impacting on the ability "to serve the more noble purposes of education", as a result the impact of context on beliefs may result in the teachers "failing to educate the teachers in his or her charge" (ibid, pg 27).

### **CURRENT PROJECT**

The current project involved a small pilot study to guide the development of a broader research project. The study aimed to explore the existing beliefs and practices of a teacher to gain a broader understanding of the teacher's lived meanings within the school context. Recognising that "(O)ne of the most powerful ways to prevent our images of teaching and out teaching practices from being captured by the systems where we work is to stand away from our experiences and reflect on it" (Fenstermacher, 1994, pg 28), a further aim was to provide a new perspective in order

to engage the participating teacher and the readers of the research in a process of reflection that may trigger the conversation needed for development.

The pilot study involved the exploration of one teacher's beliefs and practice in relation to the social emotional wellbeing of children in her class. The guiding research questions for this study were:

- What does this primary school teacher know and believe about the social emotional wellbeing of children?
- How does the teacher translate these beliefs into practice?

### **Methodology: Portraiture**

A central tenet of this study was to engage both the participant and potential readers in reflection on their own practice. That is, to seek "wide-awakeness" (Greene, 1978, p 45) for teachers and researchers in the quest for whole school reform. This led to the selection of Portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann Davis 1997) as the methodology for this project. Portraiture is a blending of qualitative methodologies (Dixson, Chapman & Hill, 2005); including ethnography, phenomenology and arts based inquiry. Both the process and product of portraiture aim to engage the participant and reader in reflection. The final report assumes the metaphor of a painted portrait (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997) whereby the subject is able to recognise aspects of themselves and also see something previously unknown so as to challenge and lead towards new understandings and instigate change. The selection of portraiture was further supported through the social constructivist epistemology of the study which acknowledges the construction of meaning through the interaction of participants in their context and with the researcher, thus enabling participant reflection.

Portraiture aims to recognise and listen to the voices of people in schools, so as to empower all school people acknowledging them as the "creators of school culture" (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1986, p 15). Awareness of the 'deviant voice' is a critical hinge in the development of portraiture. This relates to the researcher continually reviewing what has been observed against pre-existing knowledge and viewpoints, as well as previous observations, in order to view the divergence. In this way portraiture is always partial, thus acknowledging the presence of the researcher and dismantling the idea of researcher as the "only knower" (Dixson, et. al, 2005, p 3). As such portraiture does not aim to be generalisable or replicable, rather "(I)ts purpose is to communicate a meaning that can have an effect on the understandings, attitudes, and actions of its viewers" (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003, p 877), thus enabling a "wide-awakening" (Greene, 1978, p 45). Prior to gathering data I wrote a self-portrait so as to be aware of my own biases stemming from my experience as student, teacher, teacher educator and researcher.

### ***Research Methods: Gaining One Teacher's Perspective***

The pilot study involved a single teacher sampled by convenience, as only two factors were considered essential: that the teacher be a primary teacher, and that they be an experienced teacher, so as to remove the potential issues experienced during early career. The teacher selected, Natasha (pseudonym), graduated thirteen years earlier and has worked in state primary schools and administration. Natasha was at the time of the pilot study working with a kindergarten class in an inner city state primary school and held the responsibility of Assistant Principal for kindergarten to year three. Natasha had recently held the role of Relieving Principal for a short time.

Crystallisation (Richardson, 2000) of data gathering methods was used not only to increase the authenticity of the project, more importantly to provide a full picture of the teacher and context. This included: observations of the classroom, playground, and other events that occurred during the fieldwork period; informal interviews with the teacher; review of documentation, including school newsletters and website material; and immersion in the school and its wider community.

Interviews were conducted utilising a 'conversational partnership' (Rubin & Rubin, 2005) approach, whereby the first interview transcript and observation notes were given to Natasha for review and comment. A second interview was then held to explore and clarify specific issues raised by Natasha during the first interview. The second transcript



The patchwork consists of simple squares to demonstrate the compartmentalisation of issues raised by Natasha. The centre nine squares represent what is happening for the teacher within her school context. The corner squares consist of mind, body, heart & spirit. The integration of all four components is viewed as crucial by this teacher both for professional development and the development of children:

*...that is what I think is crucial for teachers, to teach all the quadrants the EQ (emotional) and the SQ (spiritual) with the academics and that's the whole person ... so maybe it is called a whole classroom.*

Natasha did not believe, however, that it was possible to bring these factors together for staff or, as a result, children due to constraints experienced within the specific context. The squares in between these corner squares depict these constraints of the curriculum, 'the system' and the Principal and staff, along with the teacher's view of the increasing demands of society to add the responsibility for children's social emotional wellbeing to schools, which this teacher believed restricted the school to adequately support children:

*It is our responsibility as teachers to know our students really, ... and for us to provide a vehicle for them to get to know themselves ... but I also think that the curriculum and the way it is set up, the frameworks, (don't) necessarily support that either. They tell us that we are meant to do this but where in the timetable, where ... do they actually say right this is the time for you to get to know your students now, where is there the social?*

The centre square portrays personal development. As the impetus for this teacher's career choice and evolution as a teacher, personal development was identified as the key to overcoming the contextual constraints and bringing the vital components, of mind, body, heart and spirit, together to enable support of staff and thus children:

*I think teaching needs a certain context and you need to be in a certain emotional place where it really is about service and I think a lot of the people don't really know service...  
...you've got so many teachers who don't have any interpersonal skills so if you actually taught them at university saying this is how we talk to students and we actually have something that's really like a scope and sequence of how you develop that...*

*...if you do a survey with a lot of teachers right now 'why are you here?' 'secure job' will probably be top of the list, 'close to home', 'can't lose my job', 'salary's not too bad' and 'I get school holidays' and that's not a reason to stay.*

The larger squares around the outside of the patchwork illustrate the position of the children. That is, they are the bigger picture and yet they are on the outside. The portrait of this teacher is a picture of children on the periphery of what needs to be addressed for social emotional wellbeing to be better supported in schools. It is not an issue of behaviour, ability or age, rather issues at a much broader level involving curriculum, school organisation and pedagogy. The backing of heavy denim represents the teacher's view that children's resilience may actually mask the need for greater support of social emotional wellbeing:

*I think kids are pretty resilient and I think kids look for the best of everything so I think in those situations kids see something as being a lot better than what they are actually experiencing and that's mainly because there are some real humdingers like at (this school) and yet the children would say 'we're so lucky to come here' 'we're so lucky to have this teacher who gives us great maths work but screams at us all day'. I mean kids are just told 'this is what happens and you have to accept it' so they do and the ones who don't accept it are the ones who are considered problem kids so I think there's somehow this peer pressure that no matter the situation you have to be good and if you don't like it there's something wrong with you and you're a naughty child.*

The teacher is nowhere to be seen within the patchwork, as the teacher's beliefs and the constraints experienced resulting in a feeling of "I didn't fit in" within the school context:

*I didn't fit in ... and you just feel like a loner and there are I know that there are so many children out there that feel that way umm 'how does it feel?' I guess the two words 'soul destroying' because you are trying your best but you don't feel appreciated, you don't feel like your voice is being heard and that leads to two things: bitterness and resentment.*

This small project highlighted the need for greater understanding of the lived meanings of social emotional wellbeing within schools, in order to better address need. This teacher had made use of numerous professional development opportunities and teaching programs designed to support social emotional wellbeing, which had impacted on her classroom in many ways. Despite this, powerful issues within the school context created constraints that restricted her ability to support children's social emotional wellbeing. A broader understanding of the beliefs and practices relating to social emotional wellbeing will provide a view into how best to tackle change within schools. In Natasha's words:

*We assume that everyone (teachers) is at the same level and it (professional development) doesn't take into account people's interests or even their knowledge so I think we almost need to do a needs analysis of the staff before we say right everybody has to do it.*

#### FURTHER RESEARCH

The pilot study has served as evidence of the reflective and dynamic adoption of methodology. As such, this study has acted to clarify the use of portraiture. This paper has provided a glimpse into the dominant issues arising from the portrait. A guiding premise of this research has been to explore greater understanding of the beliefs and practice within a school context, so as to enable a platform for reflection and conversation that may support change. As such, the ability of the audience to "make meaning for his or her own purposes" (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003, p 876) is crucial to the achievement of this goal. The voice of the audience is to be engaged by seeking a range of people within the targeted group of such conversation, that is, student teachers, teachers, researchers, teacher educators and educational administrators, to share their responses to the portrait of Natasha. This audience will be asked to read the portrait and write their responses to the following questions:

- What feelings and thoughts did you have as you read the portrait of Natasha?
- How would you describe Natasha as a teacher?
- How would you describe Natasha's understanding of children's social and emotional wellbeing?

The purpose of this next stage is to gauge the audience response to inform the data gathering, analysis and portrait writing within the broader study.

A larger study of one primary school is being undertaken to explore the beliefs and practices of the teachers, and others within the school context, in regard to social emotional wellbeing. In addition the study is exploring any challenges perceived as obstructing the enactment of beliefs. The study involves administration, teachers, parents, students, and other people within the school community. The aim of this study is to develop greater understanding of the beliefs and practices of this school community, so as to provide a platform for the school, and others, to begin the process of reflection that is needed to initiate relevant professional development and instigate change.

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