The University Of Sheffield.

Centre for Wellbeing in Public Policy.

CWiPP Working Paper Series

No.9

THE IMPLICATIONS OF 'THERAPEUTIC ENTREPRENEURIALISM' FOR EVIDENCE AND EXPERTISE IN THE EDUCATION POLITICS OF WELLBEING

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ABSTRACT

Enthusiastic policy rhetoric and academic activity around ‘wellbeing’ obscure the ways in which particular meanings gain traction in a particular political and socio-cultural context. Focusing on three educational policy texts, this paper explores the ways in which the policy trajectory from text to practice is dominated by a narrow interpretation of wellbeing-as-mental health/character that generates ‘therapeutic entrepreneurialism’. I argue that these developments produce, and are fuelled by, dubious claims makers, evidence and expertise and generate a powerful, self-referential consensus for a psycho-emotional, skills-based approach that marginalises richer philosophical, sociological and historical understandings of wellbeing. I conclude with some thoughts on what educationally-meaningful approaches to developing wellbeing might comprise.

This paper is an early version of a chapter forthcoming in Bache, I. and Scott, K. (eds.) *The Politics of Wellbeing: Theory, Policy and Practice*, Palgrave Macmillan

INTRODUCTION

Encompassing very diverse interests and goals in areas such as economics, the environment, welfare and education, a view that citizens' social and economic wellbeing should be a prominent political aspiration has gained strong traction amongst policy makers, academics, the public and the media in Britain and other countries (Bache and Scott, forthcoming). There have been corresponding studies of the relationship between contemporary policy applications of wellbeing and earlier philosophical traditions and the social, psychological and economic complexities that make wellbeing a 'wicked' problem (e.g. Bache, Reardon and Anand, 2016; Ecclestone, 2013). Of course, enthusiastic policy rhetoric and academic activity do not necessarily signify that wellbeing has actually become a major tenet in different political arenas (Bache and Reardon, 2016). It is also important to recognize that wellbeing gains traction as a policy problem in a particular political and socio-cultural context that, simultaneously, sidelines, marginalizes and privileges certain interpretations, types of claims makers, evidence and expertise.

This paper explores these dimensions in the rise of wellbeing as a policy problem in British educational settings between 1997 and 2015. Drawing on Stephen Ball's critical approach to analysing education policy as 'text', 'discourse' and 'trajectory' (Ball, 1994), I explore the ways in which the trajectory of wellbeing from policy discourse to practice has become embedded in an intensification of popular crisis discourses about childhood and, more recently and specifically, about mental health. Recognising the danger of over-attributing influence to particular texts or to individual actors involved in their production and promotion, and acknowledging limits to analytical space in a single paper, I focus on three policy texts; two produced during the 1997-2010 Labour governments and one produced during the 2010 – 2015 Conservative-led Coalition, to make three arguments. First, the education policy trajectory of wellbeing has become embedded in a circular, self-referential consensus amongst influential claims-makers that elides wellbeing with mental health, mental capital and character, thereby narrowing wider understandings of wellbeing, and then asserts that an associated, lengthening list of psycho-emotional 'skills' can and must be taught in order to prevent lifelong problems. Second, this narrow understanding of wellbeing-as-mental health/character has created a policy and practice market of

therapeutic entrepreneurs competing to promote their favoured universal or generic interventions. Third, these developments both generate and arise from dubious claims to expertise and evidence and the sidelining or marginalising of richer philosophical, sociological and historical understandings of wellbeing that might offer more educationally-meaningful approaches to developing it. I conclude with some brief thoughts on what these more meaningful approaches might be.

1. APOCALYPTIC DISCOURSES OF CHILDHOOD CRISIS

Mental health

A steady stream of policy reports since the late 1990s has responded to, and fuelled, political and public discourses of childhood and youth crisis, generating a strong consensus across the political spectrum that contemporary experience of childhood is qualitatively different from other historical eras, marked by the decline of wellbeing with myriad damaging social and individual effects (e.g. Sharples, 2007; Layard & Dunn, 2012; O'Donnell et al., 2014). Associated calls for preventative and ameliorative state action in schools have drawn in related calls for early psycho-emotional intervention in families (e.g. Allen, 2011; Field, 2010). Ideas about dysfunctional families and the increasingly 'toxic' nature of childhood (Palmer, 2006) have been taken up extensively in the popular press, lifestyle magazines and internet groups such as Mumsnet over the past ten years or so. A striking feature of these developments is a series of '*relentlessly repetitive problematisations*' about a growing array of children's and young people's experiences (Isin, 2004, p228).

In historical terms, an alarmist youth in crisis thesis is far from new (e.g. Myers, 2012). For example, earlier periods have seen profound political and public concern about behaviour, parenting, disaffection and disengagement and corresponding concerns about children and young people who do not fit into education, welfare and guidance systems (e.g. Thompson, 2006; Stewart, 2011; Myers, 2011). A particular concern over the past 40 years or so has been the transition from school to the labour market, unemployment or further education (e.g. Valentine and Skelton, 2003; Lumby, 2011). Here a youth in crisis discourse is not confined to the UK: academic,

public and political concerns about young people's wellbeing in the face of increasingly difficult life, education and work transitions have also become prominent in countries such as Finland and Australia (e.g. Wright and McLeod, 2014; Brunila and Silvonen, 2014). Education is seen as both a source of profound pressure and an essential remedy. According to Jacky Lumby:

> ....*From Willis's (1977) seminal study of the educational roots of inequality to more recent explorations of the burgeoning mental health and behavioural issues among adolescents, or the effects of globalisation on at-risk youth... their fragility and degree of exposure has made many apprehensive. Education is depicted as a structural aspect of a risky environment, presenting perils which some young people fail to navigate successfully, with lasting detriment to their lives* (Lumby 2011, 261).

These expanding contemporary concerns have gained particular traction amidst intensifying alarm about mental illness, seen as a worsening global epidemic by the World Health Organisation, UNICEF and the OECD, pharmaceutical companies, psychology professional bodies and global corporations, (e.g. Mills, 2014). For example, the World Health Organisation constructs mental illness (and depression in particular) as a global epidemic and a leading cause of disability worldwide, estimating more than 350 million sufferers (WHO, 2012). A British National Health Service report in 2011 stated that the proportion of 16-64 year-olds with at least one common mental disorder rose from 15.5% in 1993 to 17.5% in 2007 (NHS, 2011). Ubiquitous statistics that '*20% of children have a mental health problem in any given year*' and that, for 50%, problems begin in childhood and increase in adolescence (Mental Health Foundation (MHF), 2015) parallel statements that anxiety and depression are two of the most common mental health problems that people face, with 1 in 5 people feeling anxious '*all of the time or a lot of the time*' and people being '*more anxious now than they were 5 years ago*' (MHF, 2015). Other reports point to a sharp 30-year increase in young people's levels of anxiety, stress and depression (e.g. Collishaw et al, 2010). Concerns are also fuelled by a large expansion in formal diagnoses of mental health problems, psycho-emotional and behavioural disorders

and a corresponding rise in targeted interventions (see Harwood & Allan, 2014).

There are equally alarming claims about the far-reaching effects of such problems. For example, an All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Mental Health states that "*Mental illnesses disable millions, disrupt and destroy lives, cause early deaths, lead to human rights abuses, [and] damage the economy….Mental illnesses are killer diseases. They need to take their place among the other killer diseases for investment and priority*" (Thornicroft cited in APPG, 2014: 5). Other reports suggest that those '*suffering from a condition*' are less likely to find paid employment or be homeowners (NHS, 2011).

A common strand in these claims is a highly generalised construction of mental health, epitomised by one of the architects of the Labour government's Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) strategy, introduced in 2005 and discussed in more detail below:

Mental health as it is now commonly defined includes the ability to grow and develop emotionally, intellectually and spiritually; to make relationships with others, including peers and adults; to participate fully in education and other social activities; to have positive self-esteem; and to cope, adjust and be resilient in the face of difficulties (Weare, 2004, p7).

Such expansive interpretations of what comprises mental health have two interrelated effects: they generate growing numbers of those deemed not to meet their wide-ranging criteria and depict problems in alarming ways. For example, the Department for Education estimates that 1 in 10 pupils are eligible for a diagnosis of a mental disorder (DfE, 2015), leading the Conservative government, elected in 2015, to continue its Coalition predecessors' characterization of children's mental health as a social 'ticking time bomb' that educational institutions are uniquely placed to deal with and prevent (Clark 2015a, b).

Wellbeing-as-mental health

These widely cited claims are rooted both in vague definitions and slippages between mental illness, issues, problems, conditions and disorders. For example,

a 2008 Foresight Report aligned mental capital with wellbeing and mental health with learning difficulties to argue for significant government investment, not merely as a policy aspiration but to '*be considered at the heart of policy development in government*' (Government Office for Science 2008 quoted by Bache and Reardon 2016, p101).

Such elisions became more prominent in educational policy after the election of a Conservative-led Coalition government in 2010, leading to a further blurring of lines between education and health that began in 2003 with the national priorities laid out in the Labour government's landmark welfare legislation, *Every Child Matters* (ECM): be healthy; stay safe; enjoy and achieve; make a positive contribution; achieve economic wellbeing. Notably, while emotional wellbeing and/or mental health were not specified, a widening of the remit for educational institutions from 2000 onwards has continued to be driven by influential claims that an expanding range of weaknesses or difficulties indicates children's actual or potential poor mental health and that there are social and economic benefits in prioritizing this. Here for example, an influential report *Future in Mind: Promoting, protecting and improving our children and young people's mental health and wellbeing* in March 2015 (NHS England, 2015), built upon the *Children and Young People – Improving Access to Psychological Therapies* programme (CYP-IAPT) to recommend psychological services for all young people across England and Wales, operating across education, health and social care and encompassing educationally-based interventions. These were seen as 'essential' for addressing inextricable links between mental health problems, lower educational attainment and behaviours that pose a risk to their health (NHS, 2015). Another report, published in 2014, aligned 'character building' with mental health to call for an expansion of the IAPT programme and other services to address the 'unmet need' for therapy in childhood. The report called for the teaching of life skills, measuring children's wellbeing regularly and training teachers in mental health and child behaviour and endorsed growing cross-party political interest in more intensive and extensive psycho-emotional intervention in families (O'Donnell et al. 2014).

The influence of cultural narratives

It is important to relate the increasingly blurred policy boundaries between health and

education reflected in the reports and claims summarised above to what some sociologists call 'therapeutic culture', where eclectic, popularised vocabularies, assumptions and practices from branches of psychology, therapy, counselling and self-help permeate popular culture, politics, education, legal and welfare systems, institutional and everyday life (e.g. Nolan, 1998; Furedi, 2004; Wright, 2011; McLaughlin, 2011; Ecclestone and Hayes, 2009). Crucially, as I argue below, therapeutic culture goes far beyond the expansion of 'psy-experts' across political, public and private life noted in earlier well-known studies (e.g. Rose, 1999). Through popularised versions of therapeutic interventions in schools and workplaces, lifestyle and popular media, books, articles, self-assessment quizzes and software applications such as *Headspace*, therapeutic culture normalises everyday preoccupation with our own and others' emotional states, our effectiveness in relating to people and the psychological causes of difficulties, and encourages proficiency in using therapeutic ideas and vocabularies.

The concept of therapeutic culture illuminates a central characteristic of the policy trajectory of wellbeing-as-mental health/character, namely the strong populist resonance of its expanding terminologies, assumptions and claims. Amongst many media examples, a popular musician who uses music to 'break taboos of therapy and mental illness' states: '*I'm 26 and I don't know any of my friends who haven't suffered from some sort of mental illness*' (Woodhall, 2016). Writing in the *Sunday Express* to promote a new royal family campaign for children's mental health, Prince William asserted that '*A fifth of children will have a mental-health issue by their 11th birthday. And, left unresolved, those mental-health issues can alter the course of a child's life forever*' (*Sunday Express*, 2016). Citing the figure that 1 in 4 children have a mental health problem, Natasha Devon, the government's children's mental health 'champion' between 2015-2016, argues that this crisis is '*spiralling out of control*' (Devon, 2016). A survey of 1093 students in 2015 carried out by the National Union of Students made similarly alarmist claims that 85% of had a mental health problem in 2015 (Smith, 2016[1].

[1] Other media reports put the figure at 78% https://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/dec/14/majority-of-students-experience-mental-health-issues-says-nus-survey

These ubiquitous and vague claims encourage policy makers to relay their personal experience as expert knowledge. For example, announcing funding for programmes to tackle the 'stigma of mental health problems', the government's Secretary of State for Education between 2014 -2016 cited her own personal experience in a familiar apocalyptic tone:

As a mum myself, I know growing up today is no easy task. Young people are under more pressure than ever before in ways that are unimaginable to my generation. This is driven home to me every week when I visit schools across the country and talk to pupils about the issues affecting them - and mental health comes up time and time again (Morgan in DfE, 2015).

This personalised example of a government response to a poorly defined problem hints at the types of knowledge and claims-makers that legitimise the education policy trajectory of wellbeing: I turn to explore these next.

2. THE POLICY TRAJECTORY OF WELLBEING IN EDUCATION

A psycho-emotional skills-based approach to wellbeing

There is not space here for a comprehensive review of the various types and respective legislative status of policy texts in the education politics of wellbeing since the late 1990s. It is important, though, to note here that non-statutory guidance and APPG reports have been highly influential as a lobbying space that, simultaneously, reflects and diffuses the popularized representations of crisis outlined above. In this section, I examine guidance for the Labour government's SEAL strategy, produced in 2005 by the then-Department for Education and Skills and reproduced by the Department of Children, Families and Schools between 2007-2010, and two APPG reports, 'wellbeing in the classroom' (Sharples, 2007) and 'character and resilience' (Patterson et al, 2014). Outside a specific focus on education, two other APPG reports have been influential; 'mental health' and 'mindfulness', both produced in

2015. [2] I aim to show that the political and public resonance of these reports is rooted in the 'cannibalised' features that, according to Ball, characterize formal policies:

The policies themselves, the texts, are not necessarily clear or closed or complete. The texts are the product of compromises at various stages (at points of initial influence, in the micro-politics of legislative formation, in the parliamentary process and in the politics and micro-politics of interest group articulation. They are typically the cannibalised products of multiple (but circumscribed) influences and agendas. There is ad hocery, negotiation and serendipity within… the policy formulation process (1994, p16)

Seen in this light, I identify some of the cannibalised influences, key claims-makers and agendas permeating three policy texts.

a) *Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning Strategy for primary and secondary schools* *(SEAL)*

While a policy emphasis on targeted interventions for those with formal diagnoses of various behavioural and emotional disorders continued between 1997 and 2015, the Labour government's enthusiastic introduction of SEAL marked growing political interest in American school-based initiatives that privilege universal, generic and embedded approaches to build psychological, emotional and social attributes, behaviours and dispositions as both an ameliorative and preventative measure (see Humphrey, 2013; Humphrey et al, 2016). Designed by educational psychologists from local authority initiatives in which they had worked, SEAL was sponsored by the Labour government between 2005 and 2010 as the '*operational arm*' of ECM (Watson et al, 2012, p209).

Crucial to its political profile and wider dissemination inside and outside policy circles was the emotional literacy pressure group *Antidote*, founded by then-Secretary of State for Health, Patricia Hewitt and Anthony Giddens, architect of the 1997 Labour government's third way ideology and director of the London School of

[2] APPG reports have no formal legislative status; rather, they enable policy makers at various levels to identify a pressing topic or concern and listen to ideas and representations from various organisations and individuals.

Economics. *Antidote*'s advisory board included other high profile supporters, such as MEP Glenys Kinnock, human rights lawyer Helena Kennedy, film producer David Puttnam, media guru Clive Hollick, and Tom Bentley, Director of the left-of-centre DEMOS think tank between 1999-2006[3] (see Emery, 2016).

According to official guidance at the time of its introduction in 2005, SEAL was a '*comprehensive, whole-school approach to promoting the social and emotional skills that underpin effective learning, positive behaviour, regular attendance, staff effectiveness and the emotional health and wellbeing of all who learn and work in schools*' (DfES, 2005). The initiative drew directly on Daniel Goleman's 1995 best-selling book on why emotional intelligence matters more than cognitive intelligence, translating Goleman's key tenets into the 'skills' of emotional literacy (including empathy and self-esteem), emotional management (including deferred gratification), relationship and decision-making. All are deemed essential for effective learning and life success (DfES, 2005; Sharples, 2007).

In his analysis of SEAL's competing interests, agendas and policy actors, Carl Emery shows that its cannibalised conceptual approach created equally cannibalised pedagogic strategies that combined selected bits of emotional intelligence, Maslow's needs-based humanist psychology, person-centred counselling, cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and positive psychology (see Emery, 2016a, b). Predictably, policy makers could highlight its ambitious and elastic social and educational goals selectively to demonstrate specific commitments, such as eradicating disruptive behaviour in schools (e.g. Balls, 2008).

Given that SEAL had no statutory status, its legitimacy was tied closely to *Antidote*'s lobbying and media coverage where, in addition to *Antidote*'s Director James Park, and well-known psycho-therapist Susie Orbach, various celebrities and well-known figures endorsed the Labour government's commitment to emotional literacy. Some political supporters publicly endorsed SEAL's evangelical proseltysing of its far-reaching effects as a uniquely progressive

[3] Since the election of a Labour government in 1997, left-liberal think tanks have been very influential in promoting a more active government role in the psycho-emotional lives of citizens, including *DEMOS*, the *Young Foundation* (e.g. Bacon et al, 2010) and the *Royal Society of Arts* (RSA).

aspect of 'New Labour'. For example, making extensive claims in broadsheet newspapers such as the *Observer*, Tom Bentley claimed that *'emotional literacy is becoming the political issue of our time, but it's emerging quite gradually as something with a hard-edged political dimension'* while Tony Colman, Labour MP and *Antidote* supporter claimed that*: 'this new thinking is part of New Labour, although it's not overtly government policy. It's a thread of sanity and a holistic approach that defines New Labour*' (quoted by Emery, 2016, p118).

SEAL's alignment of behaviours and dispositions associated with emotional literacy with left-liberal ideas about education appealed to large numbers of teachers who might not see themselves as experts in wellbeing interventions yet support traditions of child-centred learning and holistic education and related initiatives such as 'life and social skills', 'entrepreneurial education', 'employability', 'personal, social and health education', 'citizenship', 'personal development', 'reflective practice', 'learning to learn', and 'thinking skills'.

b) *APPG 'wellbeing in the classroom' report* - 2007

The APPG seminar that I attended in 2007 attracted an extremely varied audience of 60, including teachers, headteachers, educational and clinical psychologists, researchers and representatives from diverse government and non-government organisations, including ex-Labour government Secretary of State for Education between 2001 – 2002, Estelle Morris. Epitomising SEAL's eclectic, inclusive approach, the event aimed to respond to SEAL's architects who asserted that better evidence for intervention was needed:

'*it is clear from the research and from practice in the field that, in some cases, claims are made without clear evidence to support them. There is a responsibility to evaluate, to sift the evidence carefully, and distinguish hopes and values from sound demonstrated effect*' (Weare and Gray quoted by Emery, 2016, p116).

In this vein, the seminar's chair, Susan Greenfield, Professor of Neuroscience, stated: '*as wellbeing appears increasingly in public and political discourse, there has also been a growing focus to understand the social and neuroscientific basis of wellbeing through systematic scientific study*'. A key aim was therefore to

'*collectively ensure that policy and practice is informed by the best evidence from this emerging research*' (Sharples, 2007, p2).

The format comprised three keynote presentations and audience discussion. The most well-known speaker was Richard Layard, a Labour peer since 2000 and co-founder of the Action for Happiness (AfH) campaign.[4,] Introduced at the seminar as '*founder –director of the Economic Performance Centre at the London School of Economics [who has written widely] on unemployment, inflation, education, inequality and post-Communist reform*' (Greenfield in Sharples, 2007, p4), he was followed by Felicia Huppert, Professor of Psychology and Director of the Centre for Wellbeing at the University of Cambridge, and Guy Claxton, then-Professor of Learning Sciences at the University of Bristol.

Despite its organisers' espoused aims, the seminar did not attempt to debate the merits of the evidence presented or propose that this should be done but instead endorsed speakers' and audience's contributions enthusiastically and non-judgmentally. Notwithstanding the congenial tone of the event, examination of the transcript reveals strong disagreement about the effectiveness of discrete universal skills-based interventions versus embedding skills and dispositions in mainstream subject teaching and a whole school ethos. Unsurprisingly, this inclusive approach encouraged speakers to contribute their own conceptual elisions and 'essential skills' to SEAL's already extensive list. For example, Layard's '*little list* [includes] *understanding your own emotions and those of other people, developing empathy, love, sex and parenting (yourself as a future parent), healthy living and community engagement'*. He asserted that '*….the search of what are the true sources of satisfaction in life in all these different areas…[is underpinned] by the central discipline [of] psychology*' (Layard in Sharples, 2007, p6-8). He concluded with a call for measurement: '*if we take the emotional side of life as seriously as the cognitive side [we need to consider if] there needs to be some form of national measurement of the emotional wellbeing of children at different stages*' (Sharples, 2007, p9).

[4] AfH is a not-for-profit organization founded in 2010 by Richard Layard, Geoff Mulgan and Anthony Seldon (then head master of Wellington College which pioneered a happiness curriculum (see Morris, 2008; Seldon, 2015). It is part of the *Young Foundation*, a left of centre think tank (see footnote above).

c) *APPG on social mobility 'Character and Resilience Manifesto' - 2014*

While the key premises of the ECM agenda continued to exert an influence in English schools after the election of a Conservative-led coalition government in 2010, the government removed official sponsorship of the SEAL programme in 2011 and resurrected the much older discourse of 'character'. As Humphrey et al observe, some commentators have seen this as a rejection of 'soft skills' associated with wellbeing and the privileging of 'traditional' forms of teaching and curriculum knowledge (Humphrey et al, 2016). Yet I would argue that the language of lifelong character development, mental toughness, resilience and 'grit' that permeates this discourse merely embellishes SEAL's universal skills-based approach with new dispositions and attitudes deemed to be social and emotional competences, including 'hope', 'aspiration', 'community mindedness' and 'dealing with failure' (e.g. Paterson et al., 2014). A powerful political endorsement of the wellbeing-as-mental health/character elision came in 2010 from then-Prime Minister David Cameron's stated commitment to proposals for the Office for National Statistics to measure citizens' wellbeing. In the light of the strong psychological/mental health focus in education policy on wellbeing, it is important to note here the wider scope of the ONS approach to wellbeing.

Claims for the social and economic benefits of government intervention in wellbeing-as-mental health/character expanded when the APPG on social mobility followed its 2012 report with a 'Character and Resilience Manifesto' in 2014. Highlighting '*seven key truths about social mobility*' and concluding that '*personal resilience and emotional wellbeing are the missing link in the chain*', the report reinforced SEAL's earlier calls for policy makers '*to recognise that social and emotional skills underpin academic and other success – and can be taught*' (Paterson et al, 2014, p11).

The manifesto was published with the *CentreForum*, a Liberal Democrat think tank set up by Richard Reeves, Director of *DEMOS* between 2006 -2010, and *Character Counts*, an American not for-profit company specialising in motivational work with young people and organisations, founded and directed by Jen Lexmond who had previously been a researcher at *DEMOS*. Presaging the policy shift to a character discourse after the election of a Conservative-led coalition government in 2010, Lexmond had already co-authored two reports that moved *DEMOS*' earlier

endorsement of SEAL's emotional literacy approach to a broader remit that linked character, social mobility, early intervention and psycho-emotional measurement (Reeves and Lexmond, 2010; Lexmond and Grist, 2011). The character manifesto aligned these interests with cross-party support for more extensive intervention in families by calling for psychometric assessments in early years (Patterson et al, 2014). Although the government's commitment to measuring personal and subjective wellbeing was framed by a broader understanding of societal wellbeing, elisions between wellbeing, character and mental health seen in education reflected a wider emphasis on psycho-emotional measures in other policy areas such as family policy and welfare programmes for the unemployed (e.g. Pykett et al, 2016).

Since 2010, British research into character development has attracted significant funding, including a 5-year (2102 – 2017) £25 million grant from the American John Templeton Foundation at the University of Birmingham. Drawing on positive psychology, this programme promotes a skills-based approach that augments all the notions listed in the APPG report with moral standpoints such as 'virtue', 'humility' and 'gratitude' that transmogrify as teachable skills (see Jubilee Centre, 2015). In July 2015, the Conservative government's Secretary of State for Education earmarked resources to support her '*strong*' view that schools and early years settings are essential sites for '*developing emotional wellbeing, mental health and character*', presenting these as important as educational achievement (Morgan, 2015a, b).

Cannibalised texts and claims makers

The salient point of the brief and selective overview of policy texts above is that shifting but intertwining discourses enable successive governments to respond to rarely-challenged assumptions that children, young people and their parents, lack a lengthening list of interpersonal and intrapersonal skills. Crucially, the espoused privileging of a return to 'traditional' curriculum knowledge by governments since 2010 has not hindered the prevalence or popularity of these ideas and their overwhelmingly psycho-emotional behavioural training focus.

In summary, the policy trajectory of wellbeing-as-mental health-and-character can be characterised as 'cannibalised' in three ways. First, a seemingly amoral skills-based

approach and an eclectic array of activities and techniques encompass dispositions, attitudes, behavioural responses and 'appropriate' mindsets that are actually morally or spiritually rooted, such as empathy, hope, humility and gratitude. Underpinned by equally extensive and ad hoc psychological claims and practices, universal interventions introduced in schools, colleges and universities since 1998 have included positive psychology, person-centred and relationship counselling, mentoring based on life-coaching techniques, self-help, psycho-dynamic therapy, CBT, neuro-linguistic programming (NLP), emotional literacy/emotional intelligence and the increasingly popular trend for mindfulness. Second, international and national reports cited earlier in this paper, as well as the three policy texts singled out for closer examination, reflect extensive circular referencing of each other and certain sources. Here, according to Ashley Frawley, the prevalence of second hand circular citing turns claims and underpinning assumptions into self-evident truths (Frawley, 2015). This promulgates alarming depictions of child and youth crisis and an accompanying consensus that educational settings must build psychological, social and emotional attributes and competences in the present whilst also preventing problems in the future. Third, the three reports examined above reflect the extent to which often incompatible psychological fashions can simultaneously, run alongside each other and compete whilst absorbing or incorporating new ideas and practices as they appear in popular culture.

In this context, policy and research questions and associated evaluation studies are confined to the respective merits and effectiveness of discrete universal interventions or embedded curriculum-based approaches. As I aim to show next, the shifting and inclusive yet confined nature of these questions enable new types of claims-makers to shift navigate formal and informal networks and discourses to affirm perceived problems and promote their particular therapeutic products.

3. THE RISE OF THERAPEUTIC ENTREPRENEURIALISM

Policy entrepreneurs

One understanding of the ways in which particular policies gain traction and influence is that expert knowledge accumulates and then generates policy proposals. Sometimes this is a gradual process leading to the development of new policy proposals, at other times a more faddish and random process where ideas may sweep through policy communities without any obvious movement in the science of knowledge (Kingdon 2011; Bache and Reardon, 2016, p21-2). From either perspective, certain 'policy entrepreneurs' play a key role in defining policy problems, shaping norms and then framing problems in particular ways according to their preferred approach (Bache and Reardon, 2016). For example, as Bache and Reardon note, academics such as David Halpern (ex-Lecturer in Social Psychology and the Head of the government's Behavioural Insight Team since 2010) and Professors Richard Layard (Economics), Andrew Oswald (Economics and Behavioural Sciences) and Paul Dolan (Behavioural Sciences) work at the interface of university-based research and policymaking to bring wellbeing onto government agendas, alongside individuals from left-of-centre think tanks such as DEMOS and the *Young Foundation*. As part of government agendas to shape citizens' behaviours and mindsets across diverse areas of public life, the same individuals and organisations have also been highly influential in behaviour change initiatives (Jones et al, 2014; Pykett et al, 2016).

A question therefore arises about why particular claims-makers and advocates gain influence at different moments in policy time and across policy agendas and, in the case of wellbeing, why psychological agendas are so appealing to policy makers. From a therapeutic culture perspective, a psycho-emotional understanding of wellbeing was already established by Conservative and Labour governments' increasing receptivity to a more explicitly therapeutic orientation for the state during the 1990s. This orientation had precedents in the late 1970s when a Conservative government supported the idea that lack of psycho-emotional skills and dispositions both caused and was caused by unemployment and other socio-economic problems and provided funding for access to counselling as part of employment preparation schemes (see Furedi, 2004). Psycho-emotional roles for the state were integral to Anthony Giddens' design of the 1997 – 2010 Labour governments' 'third way' between social democracy and neo-liberalism (Giddens, 1998). Drawing on ideas he developed in an earlier sociological study of the changing nature of personal

relationships, Giddens advocated a much stronger 'psychic' role for the welfare state in developing reflexive, self-aware, emotionally-literate citizens who can learn and use psychological techniques for individual and social benefits (Giddens, 1991).

A psycho-emotional understanding of wellbeing was therefore a key strand in New Labour's approach, supported enthusiastically by then-Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair and promoted by numerous individuals moving between policy advisory and think tank roles. Some of these individuals have maintained their influence through successive psychological policy agendas, including Richard Reeves, Director of *CentreForum*, ex-strategic advisor to the Deputy Prime Minister in the 2010-2015 Coalition government and, as Director of DEMOS, co-author of 'Building Character' in 2010; Matthew Taylor, ex-Director of the Institute for Public Policy Research, Director of Tony Blair's Policy Unit, then his strategic adviser, and Director of the RSA since 2006; and Geoff Mulgan, ex-Director of Tony Blair's Strategy Unit, co-founder of DEMOs, and ex-Director of the *Young Foundation* (see footnote above).

In the wider context of a therapeutic culture, all these claims-makers epitomise the extent to which the diffusing of a wellbeing-as-mental health/character discourse is derived from populist adaptions of academic psychology. Here Martin Seligman, Professor of Positive Psychology, former President of the American Psychological Association that created the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, is a high profile advocate of state-sponsored applications of positive psychology in, for example the army and schools, both in the UK and other countries. An important characteristic of the policy popularising of psychological expertise is the prominence of non-psychologists. For example, alongside economist Richard Layard, Anthony Seldon is author of numerous political biographies, including one on ex-Prime Minister David Cameron, and therefore has good insider access to policy makers (see footnote above). Now Vice-Chancellor of Buckingham University, Seldon aims to make Buckingham Britain's first 'health positive university', campaigning 'passionately' for these goals through the media and inside policy circles (e.g. Parker, 2016; Seldon, 2015). With the exception of psychotherapist Susie Orbach, the high profile new Labour luminaries who promoted SEAL, discussed above, also exemplify the crucial policy lobbying role played by lay adapters of psychological expertise.

While particular policy insiders and fashionable interventions come and go,

prominent international public figures and celebrities legitimise the broad trajectory of wellbeing-as-mental health/character. These include the Dalai Lama, patron of the AfH campaign and American celebrities actor Goldie Hawn and comedian Ruby Wax who have both promoted school-based universal mindfulness programmes with British public and policy-maker audiences, including ex-Labour and Conservative Prime Ministers and Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Education between 2010 and 2014.

Alongside lobbyists and luminaries who sustain their influence across shifting discourses and subtle changes to policy agendas, there are more fleeting interfaces between policy sponsorship and intervention entrepreneurialism. For example, in 2012 American army general Rita Cornum promoted the 'resilience fitness training' programme she designed for preventing post-traumatic stress disorder amongst soldiers (based on collaboration with Martin Seligman) to an enthusiastic audience of practitioners and managers from British police youth engagement projects, community out-reach programmes, schools and third sector organisations, think tank researchers and Michael Gove, the then-Secretary of State for Education (Cornum 2012). Cornum also exemplifies another important characteristic of the cannibalised politics of wellbeing, namely the growing involvement of commercial interests. Sponsored by the MacQaurie Foundation, a global provider of financial, advisory, investment and fund management services and a key funder of the *Young Foundation*, her access to British policy makers was facilitated by one of MacQuarie's Directors, Gus O'Donnell, a leading civil servant between 1990 and 2001, with roles that included Permanent Secretary to the UK Treasury, co-author of the Legatum report on wellbeing and policy with Richard Layard and David Halpern, amongst others, cited above and chair of APPG wellbeing and economics meetings.

'Charismatic' entrepreneurs

Legitimised by a therapeutic culture beset by fears about mental health problems, a therapeutic state can expand its legitimacy through a new type of charismatic, entrepreneurial expert. Reflected by popular, academic and political claims-makers identified above, this also exposes the state to new and competing claims to expertise and evidence of effectiveness. Here Max Weber's account of different types of authority in periods of social change is useful (e.g. Kasler 1988, Spencer 1970).

While it is not possible in this chapter to do justice to the nuances of Weber's analysis, his 'ideal types' of traditional, legal and charismatic expert illuminate the rise of therapeutic entrepreneurialism in the policy trajectory of wellbeing in education and the challenge this presents to older types of expertise.

The political rise and popular appeal of therapeutic entrepreneurs is linked inextricably to what Ball and Junnerman characterise as the patchwork combinations of third sector and private providers that comprise an education market (Ball and Junnerman, 2012). Bank-rolled by the state, fragmented, outsourced and privatised public education services are fertile ground for a growing market of campaign groups, third sector organisations, charities and profit-making consultancies selling their favoured approach to local authorities, individual schools, colleges and universities. A huge increase in entrepreneurial individuals and organisations includes the relationship counselling service Relate; the charity Family Action (a philanthropic organisation founded in the 19th century to work with the poor) which leads some local authority-funded family welfare and school wellbeing initiatives; the Amy Winehouse Foundation, funded by the Lottery to work in schools and youth clubs to build resilience against risk-taking behaviours; freelance consultants in the AfH campaign and myriad other consultancies and companies. Paralleling their policy counterparts, these therapeutic entrepreneurs offer reductionist, culturally familiar interpretations of psychological ideas and practices, often downplaying formal expertise in favour of empathy that comes from surviving difficult experiences or seeing the light from attending a course. In order to compete, traditional psychological specialists, such as educational and clinical psychologists, especially those outsourced to private companies or working in local authority traded services, offer programmes such as mindfulness, NLP and life coaching.

The growing prominence of these new types of expert in policy and practice raises difficult and contested questions about what counts as legitimate expertise and knowledge. It also highlights the erosion of boundaries between specialist-authoritative and non-specialist, or non-authoritative, claims-makers and also between formal and personal knowledge. For example, Ruby Wax has a Masters in Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy and speaks openly about her personal experience of mental illness. Populist discourses are also integral to the political

rationale for measuring subjective wellbeing promoted by academics such as Richard Layard, Andrew Oswald and Paul Dolan. This rationale is founded in economics as a discipline, increasingly intertwined with behavioural science, as a way of boosting citizens' economic performance, yet draws strongly on and contributes to populist depictions of psycho-emotional wellbeing. Other new claims to expertise might come from a Master's degree in any of the areas listed above, including one in the philosophy and science of happiness arising from the character and virtue research programme, cited earlier, or a short training programme in areas such as mental toughness, life coaching and mindfulness, accredited by some universities or bodies such as the British Association for Counsellors and Psychotherapists. Meanwhile, the Dalai Lama's deeply held Buddhist principles for mindfulness and a lifelong commitment to a spiritual and holistic approach to wellbeing are absorbed easily in a wide spectrum of reductionist, popularised skills-based approaches.

These developments are therefore a powerful challenge to traditional expertise in educational and clinical psychology, psychiatry and counselling. My point here is not to evaluate the respective merits of these claims to authority but to offer a critique of problems arising from therapeutic entrepreneurialism as a foundation for influential claims-making about wellbeing in education and, in turn, as a replacement for or equation with scientific evidence. As I argue next, these developments render espoused commitments for evidence to underpin interventions, and for those with dubious or little evidence not to be used, as mere policy rhetoric. In the final section, I suggest some ways to counter or challenge these worrying trends.

4. ERODING EVIDENCE

There have been numerous meta-reviews of evidence for the effectiveness of diverse approaches that are presented as school-based wellbeing/mental health interventions, including peer mentoring, anti-bullying schemes and nurture groups, amongst others (e.g. Weare and Nind, 2013; Bywater and Sharples, 2013; Wiglesworth et al, 2016). It goes without saying that there is not space here to undertake my own comprehensive meta-evaluation of these studies. Nevertheless, it is important to note some serious drawbacks to the existing

evidence base reflected in the reviews cited above. According to Wigglesworth et al (2016), problems include: inconclusive or contradictory evidence of effects from the intervention itself; not attributing effects to other changes in the school or classroom; design flaws including evaluations carried out by intervention developers, implementers or those already in favour of the intervention; difficulty in transferring or replicating interventions; and evaluations done too soon after implementation. The latter also means that positive effects can arise from the novelty of the intervention, perhaps as a distraction from normal routines, or the well-known 'Hawthorne' effect first noted in industrial psychology experiments, namely the effects of positive attention by observers or experimenters (e.g. Hseuh, 2002).

As well as these important methodological difficulties, formal evaluations of SEAL have shown no conclusive evidence of positive effect and, at the same time, huge variation in practices and some of the methodological problems summarized above (Humphrey et al, 2011). Similarly, the government's own evaluation of the Penn Resilience programme, based on CBT and positive psychology and trialed in three local authorities between 2007 – 2010, showed little long-term impact. This study also found negative effects for some children who tried to transfer the programme's prescriptive thinking strategies to a dangerous situation (Challen et al, 2011).

Analysis in this paper also suggests other conceptual and practical drawbacks in the broader policy trajectory of wellbeing-as-mental health/character. First, the APPG wellbeing seminar's report, discussed earlier, shows how an inclusive, non-judgmental, elastic format for debate and the prominence given to Layard's lay adaptions of psychological ideas and his general lack of educational expertise reflect wider problems with incoherent or vague conceptual definition and measurement. For example, his reliance on the 2007 UNICEF report to claim extensive benefits from resilience-building programmes overlooks the report's sweeping self-report measures. These ranged from trust, availability of a good breakfast and having kind and helpful classmates, to experience of child abuse. Tellingly, in the light of the seminar's espoused commitment to evidence, he claimed dramatic benefits for the Penn Resilience Programme before any evaluation had been done (see above and Challen et al, 2011).

Unsurprisingly, problems highlighted here parallel media oversight of weak measures and conceptual confusions, as well as distortions of both. For example, ten years before the UNICEF report was published, newspaper articles by influential popular psychotherapist Oliver James slipped casually from noting a flat-lining in data about the public's reported happiness to claim not only widespread unhappiness but also that '*we are massively unhappy today compared with 1950*' (Frawley, 2015, p86). While such sweeping historical comparisons are commonplace in media headlines, they are largely spurious. For example, as historian Kevin Myers notes, claims of 'massive' changes in mental health should acknowledge not only different applications of measures, diagnoses and sample populations but, crucially, also changing cultural interpretations of these in different historical periods (Myers, 2011, 2012).

In this vein, some critics argue that impositions of universal psycho-emotional interventions in schools fail to discriminate between normal adolescent emotions and depression or question changing cultural understandings and constructions of mental health problems (e.g., Craig, 2008). In the face of these drawbacks to data gathering and subsequent claims for intervention, the few public challenges that do appear, such as journalist David Aaronovitch's questioning of the categories in the UNICEF report and the conclusions being widely drawn at the time, tend to go unnoticed (see Frawley, 2015).

In a shifting and fragmented organisational context, these conceptual and methodological difficulties inhibit independent evaluation of wellbeing initiatives. For example, a local authority-commissioned evaluation of 'emotional wellbeing and mental health' interventions in what remains of its schools in one of Britain's largest cities underpinned competitive tendering to run the programme with extremely wide-ranging definitions of emotional and mental health and wellbeing and correspondingly slippery estimates of the scale of the city's problems (Billington et al, 2016). As well as predictably diverse claims to expertise and equally diverse practical approaches used by different organisations, short-term funding streams, complex commissioning arrangements, reorganisation of mental health services and consequent changes to organisations running the interventions were further hindrances to proper evaluation of effectiveness and accountability (Billington et al 2016).

CONCLUSIONS

Profound and widespread alarm about young people's mental health is the latest turn in therapeutic culture, encouraging advocates of cannibalised psychological ideas and practices to compete for influence in the policy trajectory of wellbeing in education since 1997. I have argued that the apocalyptic tone in which these developments are couched and justified elides wellbeing with mental health and psychologized, skills-based understandings of character. In its trajectory from cannibalised policy text to shifting and confusing practices in educational settings, wellbeing-as-mental-health/character is promoted through formal and informal networks of celebrities, policy-based advocates and practitioners. All diffuse popularised perceptions of problems through circular citing that create unchallenged truths. Here highly popularized psychological and therapeutic discourses stray into the expertise of economists and education professionals and challenge traditional psychological experts. These developments encourage therapeutic entrepreneurs to sell a contagious view that there are huge problems with people's wellbeing and a subsequent consensus that there is '*an absolutely overwhelming argument for the state taking a major responsibility for the character development of the children of each family*' (Layard, 2007, p24).

It is not therefore surprising that important questions about what comprises wellbeing expertise and acceptable evidence for intervention and how proper evaluations of cannibalised discourses and practices can be carried out in a market of vested interests are marginalised. I am aware that my arguments suggest a dispiriting prognosis, not just for genuine evidence-based policy and practice for wellbeing, but also for possibilities of a more positive educational approach to wellbeing. It is easy for critical policy analysts to highlight tensions, difficulties and contested complexities in a cannibalised policy trajectory and which also arise from the ways in which wellbeing discourses, like all discourses, privilege some voices and ideas whilst silencing or marginalizing others (Ball, 1994). It is therefore important to suggest what practical responses might offer a more holistic, educationally meaningful approach to developing wellbeing. I highlight three areas here.

First, what should be the boundaries of education's legitimate role in developing wellbeing-as-mental health/character? Although elisions of mental health and wellbeing happen, in part at least, because of conceptual incoherence, the lines between them are genuinely blurred. Nevertheless, I would argue that we need to rein in apocalyptic claims about mental health problems and careless erosions of crucial distinctions between emotional wellbeing, mental health, character and wellbeing. A more judicious deployment of terms would, as the Chief Medical Officer argued in her 2013 report on priorities for public health, help in making clearer assessments of the extent of problems with mental illness, establish better evidence for intervention and enable better allocations of scarce specialist resources for genuine need (Davies 2013). There is a related need to consider the legitimate and realistic role of educationalists in preventing mental health problems (Coleman, 2009).

Second, sociological, historical and philosophical understandings of wellbeing are, I would argue, almost entirely absent in the policy trajectory of wellbeing. Here, for example, and in addition to some of the historical challenges to measures and interpretations and criticisms of a circular referencing between economists, psychologists and policy advisers, cited earlier, philosophers of education promote the development of holistic understandings of wellbeing in education. In particular, they make two important arguments that are overlooked or marginalized in the current context. First, to reinstate emotions that, amidst apocalyptic crisis discourses about mental health, are seen routinely as unpleasant or even dangerous (such as anxiety, depression and anger), proposing instead that they are normal life expectations and can be a crucial stimulus for action and transformation (e.g. Suissa, 2008; Cigman, 2012; Clack, 2012).

Third, they make a related proposal to elevate the role of subjects such as literature, history, philosophy and religious education in developing a broader, philosophical and moral sense of wellbeing, the idea of what it means to live a worthwhile life (Suissa, 2008; Cigman, 2012; Pett, 2012). As philosopher Beverly Clack argues, the wellbeing agenda in schools and its alarmist, instrumental skills-based approach erodes an educational commitment to '*developing an enquiring mind, cultivating habits of thought and practice that* encourage the questioning of what lies outside the self' (Clack, 2012 p507, my

emphasis). In this vein, secondary school head teacher, John Tomsett, proposes that schools should prioritise inspired and meaningful subject teaching and much more empathetic and authentic communication with young people that detects problems with wellbeing rather than instead of responding unthinkingly to a self-fulfilling prophecy of a mental health crisis (Tomsett, 2016).

Finally, I have argued that tenuous claims to expertise, together with vested commercial interests, characterize claims-making in the education politics of wellbeing. This necessitates critical challenges to three trends: ubiquitous attributions of mental health problems to a perceived absence of emotional and social skills, evangelical assertions that wellbeing-as-mental-health-and-character comprises a definable, assessable list of attributes, dispositions and behaviours that can be taught and transferred across life experiences and contexts, and the commercial benefits that follow those claims.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am very grateful to Ian Bache and Aki Tsuchiya (University of Sheffield) and Karen Scott (University of Exeter) for helpful feedback and insights about an earlier draft of this paper.

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