<u>Notes on the Round Table held in Shymkent at school #89 on 10th April 2016</u>

Those present:

Seven stakeholders from the region including: two school principals; a deputy principal; a school psychologist; a methodologist of upbringing; a university lecturer and member of a regional association of psychologists; and a representative from the city education department. Dr Daniel Torrano of the Graduate School of Education at Nazarbayev University (NUGSE)and Dr Liz Winter of the Faculty of Education at University of Cambridge (FoEUCam) conducted the session which was kindly hosted by School #89 at the request of the Shymkent City educational authority. Zhuldyz and Aizhan, PhD students at Nazarbayev University also attended and provided translation.

Introduction and presentation:

The meeting started with Daniel Torrano thanking the participants for coming and an explanation of the purpose of the round table as a forum for discussion and local networking. It was not seen as outsiders attempting to dictate or advise on students' wellbeing but to present preliminary results of findings and constructs of wellbeing as seen in the research NUGSE and FoEUCam were currently conducting around Kazakhstan. This was followed by a short PowerPoint presentation of the research process and findings to date by Liz Winter. It was agreed that it would be helpful to circulate a Kazakh copy of the presentation to all participants.

Questions in response to the presentation:

One question, reflecting on the novel nature of the project in bringing together wider aspects of wellbeing outside those found only in schools, led onto another on as to when school by school results of those involved in the research will be available. Daniel Torrano and Liz Winter responded to this by explaining further as to the aims of the research in creating validated models of wellbeing and school engagement. It was emphasised that the work was to develop culturally sensitive tools that were related to and worked in line with various extant or new theories of the two phenomena. To do this conceptual representations of wellbeing and school engagement would be tested in terms of various conceptual models to find the one that gave best fit to the collected data. Once assured of the model's performance; further work by others would allow some of the validated survey items to be used to seek out comparisons. However this was not the aim of this particular project which required patience to end up with a meaningful mechanisms to represent and then assess students' overall wellbeing and its interaction, if any, with school engagement.

Open discussions by topic:

Local groups and organisations that discuss wellbeing

Once participants had explained a little about their own roles and personal perceptions of wellbeing, Daniel Torrano asked if the group knew each other and what other fora were available locally were they aware of to discuss broad matters such as students' wellbeing. Participants responded that the local educational organisation called meetings of school representatives to discuss specific topics such as how to deliver sex education classes etc. Therefore, most meetings were in response to central initiatives on certain topics as they emerged. It was very unusual to go beyond single topics and look at an overall model.

Participants views on the overall models of wellbeing and school engagement emerging from the research project to date

It appeared that the current theoretical framing of wellbeing in Kazakhstan comprises four factors that do not interact. These are factors based on socialisation; educational performance; self education and health.

One participant thought it was striking and odd to see students in isolation without the wider community to which they belonged. Adolescents were rarely perceived of on their own but rather as mixed in with parents, teachers and others. In terms of looking at students' welfare, sociological factors rather than using the term wellbeing would more commonly be used to work across agencies with parents, teacher, the judiciary and others.

Rarely was a feature such as socio-economic status included in any way. Coupled to this, the law prohibits any child from employment so special centres exist whereby some teenagers can supplement their family's income with limited work under strictly controlled circumstances but little to no independence or fiscal autonomy is seen for adolescents. This leads onto close control by parents and others in the community. In summary, it is very unusual to investigate how all these parts to overall wellbeing fit together. Wellbeing is a very unfamiliar word and concept. Several participants endorsed this novel aspect of the model presented.

The first question put to the table was: How do schools currently deal with students problems?

Engaging with parents and agencies:
It appears there is no single model but generally things such as crime and difficulties with parents are addressed through consultations so a child can overcome their problems and concentrate on their school results.

Extra-curricular activities and serving the local community:
One principal reported that extra-curricular opportunities such as sport and team-building exercises also help. Some of these also involve exercises for students with teachers who themselves need to have their wellbeing monitored. She further said that if the children and her staff were happy so was she and it was a good philosophy for the whole school to be seen as a unit. Furthermore, children from high income backgrounds can afford to pay for extra-curricular activities outside school but low income families cannot. Incorporating extra activities and clubs in a school is not only good for its ethos but also overcomes inequalities. As a result, this makes a school very popular and allows it to sit well in its local community. In terms of more general inclusion, disabled children are also welcomed to support everyone in the community. However, a lot of this work by teachers is unpaid. Another unfunded initiative was to support the teaching staff with children by opening a mini centre. This not only improved teacher retention but also allowed the school to offer additional places from a waiting list on an as needs basis where low income and single parenthood were prioritised. As often one school competes against another, parents used to commonly remove their children but now this is no longer the case as children report their enjoyment with school and extra-curricular activities allow parents to work.

Developing independent learning, intrinsic motivation, communication skills and leadership from the outset:
How age affects wellbeing was discussed next. The teacher within Higher Education explained the problems in terms of developing and sustaining intrinsic motivation by having appreciative facilitators senstive to individual children's needs that encourage independent learning. She

thought this was one aspect of pedagogy that needed more prominence to take advantage of well-known theories such as those by Vygotsky and the zone of proximal development so students as young as 7 can become fully engaged with the school process. She felt that children needed more individual attention and individualised tasks alongside the development of communication skills so they can express their ideas and needs to others. All this would form part of a social adaptation process whereby the chance to make friends and build peer relationships would also be forthcoming. Additionally, a school principal commented that developing leadership in children was also helpful as they could then help each other. Again, extra-curricular activities could support this. Seeing other children conquer tasks inspires others to keep trying as summarised in the phrase 'children do not feel in worn shoes' but as they see others succeed, they develop their own confidence.

Collaboration versus cheating:
Abroad the onus in education is on collaboration. Alongside this the respect for those who cheat in qualifications or examinations is low. However, the expectation is to help others in Kazakhstan and sometimes this can compromise the recognition of independent achievements. Therefore, a culture where collaboration is highly prized can cause problems in how children take on board examinations and tests. Cheating in the UNT is often a prime example of collaboration. More emphasis in schools is needed to resolve this dilemma for students.

A second question was put to the table: What are the problems in students' school engagement that deserve most attention?

Improving access for children with health problems:
A representative from the local educational authority commented that one major issue at the moment was how to provide schooling for more than 200 students with the HIV virus. Schools were unwilling to accept such students and the knowledge and fear around the condition was preventing many children from receiving an education. Ways to support these children was extremely difficult and despite training through agencies to school leaders there was no information for parents or teachers.

Improving access and the experiences for children with disabilities:
Not all schools were willing to accept children with physical disabilities and/or learning difficulties although some schools were and this was to be applauded. Some school principals (and others in the school including parents of children without special needs) saw the school's test results as primary.

The role of school psychologists:
Progress has been made in this area recently with at least every school now having a psychologist in place/ However, the professional development of psychologists is under resourced and a lot is put on them as individuals. Many psychologists have a large number of children under their care and a lot of work to do. The status of the profession is low.

The final questions put to the table were: What resources for psychologists are needed? What is already available in Kazakh and Russian? Where do any resources come from? Would an online community to provide this be useful?

There is nothing available and all this would be useful.

Additionally, the local education authority has found training seminars with parents useful. Some parents have no idea of what is worrying their children so there is a need to develop awareness of symptoms to look for that may cause concern.

Very little discussion is had between agencies and even less that involves parents directly. The training in universities for teachers and psychologists does not include a holistic regard for a child's wellbeing.

A lot of problems for children reflect a turbulent society where marriage breakdown and fluid family structures are difficult for a child's adjustment.

Next Steps:

The conversation among participants will continue with all present agreeing to have their email contact details shared. A copy of these notes and the presentation will be circulated in Kazakh to start this process.

For internal use only: Names and contact details of the attendees:	Copy of NU headed thank you letter for attending, translation of presentation slides and these notes in Kazakh and Russian
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Any additional comments:	