

Understanding Students' Experiences of Well-Being in Learning Environments

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Abstract

With the recent release of a new international charter on health promoting universities and institutions of higher education, universities and colleges are increasingly interested in providing learning experiences that enhance and support student well-being. Despite the recognition of learning environments as a potential setting for creating and enhancing well-being, limited research has explored students' own perceptions of well-being in learning environments. This article provides a qualitative exploration of students' lived experiences of well-being in learning environments within a Canadian post-secondary context. A semi-structured focus group and interview protocol was used to explore students' own definitions and experiences of well-being in learning environments. The findings illuminate several pathways through which learning experiences contribute to student well-being, and offer insight into how courses may be designed and delivered in ways that enhance student well-being, learning and engagement. The findings also explore the interconnected nature of well-being, satisfaction and deep learning. The relevance for the design and delivery of higher education learning experiences are discussed, and the significance of the findings for university advancement decisions are considered.

Keywords: learning environments, well-being, healthy settings, healthy universities, student retention, higher education

1. Introduction

You spend a lot of time [learning]. It's a big part of your life ... costs you money, time and effort... so it's obviously very important to have an environment to thrive in (Student A-3, 4th year).

Learning environments are a central component of students' overall experience in higher education, and the experiences that students have within their learning environments can impact not only their learning, but also their personal well-being and their ability to develop as resilient and engaged citizens (Hammond, 2004; Okanagan Charter, 2015).

With the recent release of a new international charter on health promoting universities and colleges (Okanagan Charter, 2015), institutions of higher education are increasingly interested in providing learning experiences that enhance and support student well-being. The Charter emphasizes the importance of incorporating well-being within the core mandate of higher education, and suggests that learning environments are an important setting for creating health. Although there are many studies exploring how health interventions can be embedded within educational settings (Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich, & Linkins, 2009; Conley, Durlak, & Kirsch, 2015), there is very little research on how higher education class structure and curriculum can be intentionally designed to create conditions for well-being. This study uses a qualitative methodology to explore students' own experiences of well-being in learning environments, and provides insight into how future learning experiences in higher education may be designed to enhance well-being and learning. The study helps to illuminate some of the aspects of learning experiences that can be mediated in order to create and enhance well-being and student satisfaction. This research will be useful to higher education practitioners, faculty members and instructors who are interested in creating conditions for well-being in learning environments, and offers insight for health promotion practitioners working within higher education settings.

2. Literature Review

Our research journey began with an exploration of literature on conditions for well-being in higher education. We were interested in exploring both published literature, and practice based examples of what other institutions were doing to support well-being in learning environments. Our review indicated that very little previous research has explored students' own perceptions and experiences of well-being in higher education learning environments. In 2004, Cathie Hammond used a qualitative approach to explore adult students' perceptions of the impacts of learning experiences across their lifetime, and found that well-being emerged as an important long term outcome of education. In addition, she found that the long term impacts on well-being were mediated by relatively short term impacts on psychosocial qualities such as self-esteem, a sense of purpose and hope, competences, and social integration.

There have been a multitude of articles exploring the impacts of interventions which embed mental health and well-being topics or skills training within curriculum (Conley et al., 2015; Seligman et al., 2009), but fewer articles have explored how the design and delivery of learning experiences themselves can support well-being. Some articles have outlined the impacts of learning experiences on particular aspects of well-being such as social connection or resilience (Ewert & Yoshino, 2011; Rowe & Stewart, 2011), while others have explored the benefits of specific teaching practices such as facilitation techniques, on student well-being (Adriansen & Madsen, 2013). Building upon these, and other promising examples, there is an opportunity to explore how course design and delivery can enhance student well-being and learning. Within a higher education context, several authors have emphasized the importance of exploring the impacts of institutional factors, such as learning environments, on student well-being (Byrd & Mckinney, 2012; Dooris & Doherty, 2010; Okanagan Charter, 2015), however we did not find any articles that explicitly aimed to explore students' own definitions of and experiences with well-being in higher education learning environments. Given ongoing debates about how well-being should be defined and enacted within various contexts (Dodge, Daly, Huyton, & Sanders, 2012; Soutter, O'Steen, & Gilmore, 2012), it is relevant and important to ground an understanding of well-being in learning environments in students' own experiences and interpretations through a grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1994).

3. Methods

3.1 Research Design & Context

The focus of inquiry for this research project was to understand students' experiences of well-being in learning environments. A qualitative design was chosen because qualitative approaches are grounded in an interpretivist research paradigm and aim to "interpret and to render understandable the experiences of individuals as those individuals perceive them and as they express them in their own words" (Tinsley McGill, 2012, p. 492). Because very little previous research has explored students' own perceptions and experiences of well-being in higher education learning environments, it was deemed important to explore students' own definitions of well-being in learning environments, and their own interpretations of how learning experiences could impact well-being. This approach helps to ground the work within students' own context, experiences, words and interpretations, and provides a more contextual and nuanced lens through which to understand students' experiences of well-being in learning environments. This aligns with a grounded theory approach, which emphasizes the importance of allowing themes and insights to emerge through the systematic gathering and analyzing of experiences (Strauss & Corbin, 1994).

This research was conducted by members of SFU's Healthy Campus Community initiative, in partnership with Dr. David Zandvliet, a learning environments researcher in the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University. This paper shares the qualitative findings of a project that explored students' perspectives of well-being in learning environments, and the potential pathways through which learning experiences contribute to student well-being.

The authors of this study value action research, and aim to undertake research that will help to advance knowledge, while also effecting tangible change through the mobilization and engagement of community action. This reflects the participatory values of health promotion and participatory action research (Baum, MacDougall, & Smith, 2006; Okanagan Charter, 2015). Although this study does not fully apply a participatory action research methodology, attempts have been made to ensure that the results can be embedded within practice and will be used to advance tangible change within our university context. Through the ongoing implementation of the Healthy Campus Community initiative, research from this study will contribute to the ongoing mobilization of a network of faculty members engaged and interested in improving their teaching practices with respect to creating conditions for well-being in learning environments. SFU has a total enrollment of 29,000 students, with

25,000 of those students pursuing an undergraduate degree. Approximately 54% of students are female, and close to 20% are international students. To date, over 100 faculty members have been engaged in the well-being in Learning Environments network led by the Health Promotion unit in partnership with the Teaching and Learning Centre. Faculty members involved in the network come from a range of different academic disciplines, and have been engaged in sharing ideas with one another related to creating conditions for well-being in learning environments (Mroz, Black, Stanton, Dhaliwal, & Hutchison, 2016).

3.2 Data Collection

Between November 2013 and February 2016, five focus groups and three interviews were held with a total of twenty five undergraduate students and four graduate students at Simon Fraser University. Students were from the Faculties of Health Sciences, Science, Education and Arts and Social Sciences, and a combination of purposeful and convenience sampling was used (Creswell, 1998), in alignment with the research goals. Consent was obtained from all participants prior to participation. The focus groups and interviews were semi-structured in design, and provided an opportunity for open ended discussion about students' perceptions of well-being in relation to their learning experiences. Broad, open-ended questions were used to give students the opportunity to share their own perceptions, interpretations and understanding of well-being and how they experience it within their learning environments. Questions included:

- What does well-being mean to you?
- What comes to mind when you think of well-being in relation to your learning experiences?
- Do you have a story to tell related to this?
- Do you think it's important to consider well-being in relation to your learning experiences?

Throughout the interviews and focus groups, clarifying questions were asked to provide participants an opportunity to confirm initial interpretations and add new perspectives and insights.

3.3 Data Analysis

The data was analyzed using the constant comparative method outlined by Maykut and Morehouse (1994). This method utilizes an inductive approach allowing themes to emerge from the data itself through a process of constant comparison across units of meaning and initial categories. The interviews and focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Two separate readers coded the data into units of meaning that were then grouped together based on the "looks like/feels like" criteria developed by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Units of meaning are small sections of the transcripts that contain a distinguishable and coherent meaning. These groupings were then named as categories using words expressed by participants themselves. During the final stage of analysis, themes were developed based on emergent categories that were consistent across both readers' initial analysis. During this phase of the analysis, notes were made about how the emergent themes related to one another, and to existing theoretical frameworks.

4. Results

4.1 Understanding Well-Being in Learning Environments

This study provides insight into students' lived experiences of well-being in learning environments and helps to illuminate some of the pathways through which well-being can be created within learning experiences. The following sections outline how students themselves defined well-being in learning environments, and describe three pathways through which learning experiences may contribute to student well-being.

At the start of each focus group and interview, students were given an opportunity to define well-being for themselves and they shared their own perceptions of how well-being might relate to their learning experiences. Students consistently used a broad and holistic definition of well-being that included social, physical and mental dimensions. They often referred to the importance of finding and maintaining "balance" between various aspects of their lives, and described the sense of "happiness" and fulfillment that resulted from positive and balanced life experiences.

I think well-being for me means, kind of like all aspects of yourself are balanced and working in harmony. For me I would think of my mental health, I would think of my physical health. My social health, so my relationships and things like that. (Student H-1, graduate level)

I think of like social, mental, and physical well-being. I guess [well-being] encompasses those things. It encompasses, or puts everything together. Kind of linking everything, so yeah, having a good balance for everything, having a good well-being. (Student F-2, 4th year)

These interpretations of well-being point to the importance of adopting a holistic understanding of well-being in learning environments that considers how multiple aspects of students' experiences can contribute to their overall sense of well-being. Students described the importance of considering well-being in relation to their learning experiences, and in particular, they emphasized the bidirectional relationship between learning and well-being.

Because we spend so much time learning... if you're not happy at school then it kind of overflows into the rest of your life. I would definitely say that the more healthier [you are], the more you get out of your learning experience. (Student B-1, 3rd year)

I guess having a good well-being, like being mentally fit, like I guess happy or well is going to make your learning also increase. But then negatively, if you're not in a good place or doing good then that affects your learning. So it's very like, correlated together. (Student G-1, 4th year)

These quotes highlight that learning experiences were perceived to play an important role in students' experiences of well-being, and the effects of these experiences rippled out into their broader lives. In addition, students recognized that being well within their broader lives, had a positive impact on their ability to learn and succeed within the learning environment. Given this mutually reinforcing relationship between well-being and learning, it is important and relevant to find opportunities to enhance well-being through course planning and design features. This could create a positive feedback loop that would ultimately be beneficial to both well-being and learning.

4.2 Pathways to Well-Being in Learning Environments

As students described their experiences of well-being in learning environments, several key aspects of their learning experiences emerged as being important to consider in relation to their well-being. We have referred to these as pathways to well-being in learning environments, because students discussed these as aspects of their learning experiences that both contributed to their well-being and could also be created through various unique teaching practices or learning environment design features.

Although many different pathways to well-being in learning environments were expressed by participants, several prominent themes emerged across participants. These were: experiences of social connection and learning in "relation"; experiences of participation and flexibility; and experiences of making a real and valued contribution. We will address and describe each of these below.

4.3 The Importance of Social Connection and Learning in "Relation"

Students described the importance of a strong sense of cohesion, connection and support within their learning experiences. This was discussed as opportunities for peer support, discussion and connection as well as a strong supportive and relational rapport with the course instructor or teaching assistant. Students described the importance of instructors relating to them "as people" and being "human", "welcoming" and "approachable".

[A positive experience] does happen with professors who are... really um, welcoming. You know, reaching out to your students as people, instead of like... a little group of numbers, it's important. Education is about people making. You want your students to feel like people, and professors dismiss it because... that's like, you know, um, that's not what we do in university, but it should be. I would like it to be. (Student E-1, 2nd year)

When I think of my well-being, especially in a classroom setting, I want to feel open to express myself, and be comfortable asking questions or discussing things with my peers or the instructor... I think having that relationship with your peers and your professor is really important in managing your well-being. (Student C-3, graduate level)

One of the very important aspects... was actually the support of your classmates or colleagues. So there was this collegiality between us... it like encompassed who we are—and the learning environments meant something to us and we were kind of like this really cohesive group for an entire semester. We were friends, like you know...it really influenced how we learned together. (Student H-1, graduate level)

In speaking about social connection and a positive relational rapport within the learning environment, students described the importance of these factors to their happiness, personal development, well-being and confidence. They described how experiences of feeling connected with both classmates and instructors could help them overcome fears and insecurities, allowing them to participate more fully in their learning experiences.

It took me a while, but I now have a big group of about eight friends, and I am way more confident in saying something in class because I have these people over there that will back me up, that will go "yeah you go... you say what you want to say". So I became more confident speaking my opinion in class. (Student D-1, 2nd year)

I think by doing those small group [activities] and hearing my peers talk about it and feeling comfortable talking with them I have now gained that confidence in the larger setting. (Student C-2, graduate level)

Students also described how a positive relational rapport with the instructor and their peers could enhance their engagement, satisfaction and deep learning in class.

Knowing her that way, I guess it sort of helped me learn math because, I don't know how to explain it, but just being closer to her made it easier to learn from her. (Student D-1, 2nd year)

That also contributes to making it a more welcoming place to be... A place where students want to go, and they want to attend that class, and they want to learn, and they want to actually do the work for it. (Student E-1, 2nd year)

These quotes highlight how creating a positive relational rapport within the learning environment, can not only enhance students' confidence and well-being but can also have benefits on students' learning and satisfaction. This is relevant to note, as student satisfaction and learning are important factors, considered by administrators in university advancement decisions. Creating learning environments that create a sense of social connection and a positive relational rapport may therefore be a strategic decision in terms of enhancing student satisfaction and retention, thus contributing to university reputation and success.

4.4 Social Connections Are Created through Learning Experiences

Students described how social connections and friendships do not necessarily happen easily in all learning environments, but are rather created through the incorporation of certain learning activities, practices and design features.

There seems to be this general sense that "oh well, you know, they'll make friends" but it's harder than you think because you're, it's not like you're just all best friends because you're all in the same class. It takes something in addition to being in the same class... I think having those activities to get to know who your students... [and] for your students to get to know each other in the beginning of class is important. (Student E-1, 2nd year)

Smaller classes and group discussions... kind of create that social communication... I mean if you have a friend that will be with you for your whole academic career that is definitely something great to take away. (Student A-2, 4th year)

This is a very important insight, because it emphasizes that creating a sense of connection and community on campus cannot happen exclusively outside of the classroom. Instead, students learning experiences themselves are important opportunities for creating social connection and cohesion, but in order to do so, there must be thought and consideration to the way course structure and design can enhance social connection and belonging. Students described many examples of how specific course activities could contribute to a sense of connection and cohesion. These included opportunities for group work and peer collaboration; marking students on the quality of team work as opposed to marking them solely on the end product of a team project; facilitating a class check in activity where students could connect with one another and share experiences; explicitly encouraging students to talk with one another at breaks or exchange contact information at the start of the semester; and generally setting a welcoming tone and giving students permission and opportunities to talk and connect with one another throughout the semester.

4.5 The Role of Participation and Flexibility in Well-Being and Learning

In describing their experiences of well-being in learning environments, students talked about the importance of participation and flexibility. Students described how when professors ask for and receive feedback from students throughout the semester, students feel their experiences matter to the professor, and this contributes to their sense of support, happiness and satisfaction with the learning environment.

Our professor, she's really open to listening to what we have to say... she asked what she could do to improve for next semester. We gave her our input, and even throughout, like halfway through the class... we suggested small group work and then she did implement that. So that was really good with flexibility. (Student F-11, 4th year)

So getting accurate feedback from your students is a big deal. Um, being open to feedback. That's a huge thing. (Student E-1, 2nd year)

One thing I really liked is [in this one class, the prof] lets us choose how much... our papers are worth. So we had two papers and a final paper and she gave us a range... and you actually got to pick on which day it would be due. And that was really nice because you could balance it with like all the other courses you had and um, so I was able to pick days that actually gave me enough time to actually work on the paper. (Student G-1, 4th year)

Flexibility was also described as being related to students' experiences of stress and optimal challenge. Students gave numerous examples of how their professor's willingness to adapt and be flexible to their needs and challenges, could minimize their experience of stress and make it easier for them to focus on learning the class material in a deep and meaningful way.

I think that's key for every student. Because we all have, just different things going on so if there is flexibility with your course, then it makes it more like manageable, less stressful, and just being able to have that control, it just feels better, rather than being like, "oh, there's nothing I can do, I've got to stay up all night". (Student B-1, 3rd year)

In terms of like, optimal challenges and flexibility... It's that as students we enjoy having a challenge but should be able to have the adequate resources to do that challenge. (Student F-9, 4th year)

[The instructor's approach] takes the stress away from the learning part of it, and then you have the opportunity to learn, as opposed to just memorize and cram. (Student F-13, 4th year)

*I always have 4 or 5 classes, and then [I'm] like working and volunteering so it's a lot to do. But I think when a professor's understanding, or when we can pick our dates when things are due, like within obviously a **range**... I think it allows us to balance our schedules... When things are like crazy [and] you have a paper every week or like professors are like very inflexible with things, it can be more stressful. (Student G-2, 4th year)*

Students described how an "open-ended" challenge, such as a discussion topic that did not have a clear right or wrong answer, coupled with a sense of support and care from the instructor could deeply engage them to do their best, and integrate learning into their sense of self.

Similar to positive relational experiences in the learning environment, students in this study described how a sense of flexibility can be created through the way a course is structured and delivered. For example, students described how certain instructors had structured their courses to receive feedback throughout the semester. They also described the importance of giving students some degree of choice in determining exam questions or assignment deadlines, and being flexible to the needs of diverse students by trying to learn who students are, and giving them opportunities to participate and share their own perspectives in class discussions.

4.6 Learning for Purpose: Making a Real and Valued Contribution

The final theme that emerged as a potential pathway to well-being in learning environments is that of learning for purpose. Students described the importance of making a real and valued contribution within the learning environment, and discussed how this contributed to their sense of worth and well-being. When asked about their experiences of well-being in learning environments, students spoke about their experiences with what we have called real life learning. Students used terms like "hands on" learning, "real life learning" and "learning where you actually apply what you've learned to some relevant project". They described that this kind of learning was beneficial and engaging because it made their learning experiences rewarding, enjoyable and worthwhile.

Actually implementing something... is really rewarding. Like you know, it's a lot of work but it's... worth it in the end... Really adding in these real world issues... helps me to be like—okay, this is why I am here. I am going to university because I want to learn how to apply what I've learned to the real world setting. (Student G-2, 4th year)

There was a learning experience that was designed as an... experiential... interdisciplinary project... In that environment, I felt that my contributions were worth something, and it was not just my contributions, but it was everyone's in that class and that's how I valued self-worth. And the self-worth contributed to my well-being and my state of mind. I've never talked about this actually, it's very interesting. (Student H-1, graduate level)

It gives you a sense of well-being too ...it gives you that sense of like... I guess enjoyment because you're actually enjoying your learning when you're applying these things in the real world. (Student G-1, 4th year)

When speaking about real life learning experiences, students described that these experiences had purpose for them and this helped to create deeper, more meaningful and more lasting learning outcomes.

I think that type of learning makes you realize you're actually learning. It's for a purpose. (Student G-2, 4th year)

If every class had a little aspect of it that required that [real life learning], that would make a big difference... As one school, we could make a huge difference in the world if every class had something like that. And I just feel like it would be much more beneficial. And also, once you graduate, when you're like interviewing for job positions, you aren't going to talk about the paper you wrote, you are going to talk about the classes... where you were volunteering. Like those are the kinds of things new employers want to hear, like "what did you do that was

outside of your textbook?" not just how well did you study and memorize the slides. You know? (Student B-2, 3rd year)

I think there was only one class where I did any form of hands on learning and it was probably the thing I remembered the most. When you just like.... read about something you don't really learn it. You just...learn it for that class and you learn it for the final exam but... if you actually implement these things you really learn. (Student G-1, 4th year)

This is again important to note, given that student learning is one of the core purposes of higher education. If providing real life learning experiences can enhance both deep learning and well-being, this could be a key opportunity to consider in university advancement decisions. Students described various opportunities to enhance real life learning including bringing in guest lecturers who are practitioners within their field of interest, using real world examples to demonstrate theories in class, taking students out of the classroom to real world settings, and incorporating service learning, experiential learning or volunteer work in the course syllabus.

4.7 Deep Learning Is Connected to Happiness

Within each of the above described themes, there is evidence of strong interrelationships between teaching practices, learning environment design features, deep learning and happiness. In reviewing the various pathways to well-being in learning environments described by students, it appears that in all cases there is a connection between deep learning and happiness. This relationship seems to be bidirectional, meaning that happiness was deemed to support deep learning, and at the same time, deep learning created happiness and enjoyment.

I guess it makes me happier knowing that, like taking these classes, that I'm actually getting something out of them, even if it's a topic I don't really like. At least I have learned something in the class, so yeah, I think it promotes like um, I guess a sense of empowerment almost, in a sense of like I can actually take something from the class and apply it and continue using it. You really need to be able to enjoy the class to be really able to... gain as much as you can from that class. (Student G-1, 4th year)

If you are happy in your learning environment, and you're not feeling overly stressed or overly pressured and you feel like you are getting what you are supposed to be getting... I think you are also generally better overall mentally. Likewise, if your outside of school health is not well supported you are probably not going to do well in the learning environment, so I guess, I don't think you can separate them. (Student C-2, graduate level)

In addition, students gave examples of how this relationship between happiness and deep learning can be mutually supported through classroom practices, and teaching techniques that support students to develop as whole people, reflecting their personal, intellectual and social needs in a way that creates a sense of balance and fulfillment within the learning environment. This aligns with the holistic description of well-being in learning environments that students shared and emphasizes the opportunity that exists to positively impact both well-being and student success through course planning and design features.

5. Discussion

This study provides insight into students' lived experiences of well-being in learning environments and helps to illuminate the pathways through which well-being can be created within learning experiences. Although many pathways to well-being in learning environments emerged through the analysis, the most prominent themes centered around experiences of connection, flexibility and learning for purpose. From the above described themes, it seems that experiences of social connection, flexibility and learning for purpose may contribute to happiness, satisfaction, deep learning and engagement among students, and that these relationships are interconnected and multidirectional. In comparing these insights to theoretical models in the literature, there are interesting parallels. In particular, the insights gained through exploring students' experiences of well-being in learning environments align with findings from Ryan and Deci's Self-Determination Theory (2000). This model has been widely used and describes three innate human psychological needs that relate to well-being and motivation. These are relatedness, autonomy and competence. This model provides an important framework through which the insights from this study can be viewed. In light of this model, it is interesting to consider whether students' experiences of social connection, flexibility and learning for purpose may be contributing to their psychological needs of relatedness, autonomy and competence as defined by Ryan and Deci (2000). This would support Cathie Hammond's findings in 2004, which outlined how the conditions created through learning experiences, had lasting impacts on students' psychosocial qualities such as sense of purpose and social integration, which then contributed to their long term experiences of well-being across the lifespan. Ryan and Deci's theory links the three innate psychological needs to both well-being and motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

This model would therefore also help to explain why students experienced positive impacts on their satisfaction and engagement in learning, while experiencing various conditions for well-being in learning environments.

Through this study, students provided many concrete examples of how a sense of connection, flexibility and learning for purpose could be enhanced through course design and delivery, and emphasized the positive benefits these could have on their well-being, satisfaction and ability to learn in a meaningful way. As described previously in this paper, incorporating these features within course design and delivery could contribute to institutional success by supporting student satisfaction and retention. These findings therefore point to the importance of critically and intentionally exploring opportunities to create conditions for well-being through the way higher education courses are designed and delivered. In light of recent literature on the strategic importance of creating community, well-being and an ethic of care within higher education environments (Keeling, 2014; Okanagan Charter, 2015; Harward, 2014), this study provides increased evidence of the importance of further exploring opportunities to embed experiences of well-being within learning environments themselves, and illuminates some of the pathways through which this may be possible.

This study can be seen as an initial exploration of students' experiences of well-being in learning environments and the pathways through which well-being may be enhanced through the design and delivery of learning experiences themselves. Further research should continue to explore additional pathways through which learning experiences might contribute to student well-being, and identify additional teaching practices and course design features that may contribute to these outcomes. In addition, given that instructors and faculty members are the target audience for taking up and implementing these practices, it will be essential to work in partnership with faculty members to understand the barriers and restraints they might face in creating conditions for well-being in learning environments. It will be important to work collectively to engage faculty in creating conditions for well-being in learning environments, while respecting that they will need to balance multiple priorities, and will ultimately have to decide what is best for their students in relation to achieving the learning outcomes of the courses they instruct. This is a challenge that should not be overlooked, and raises the question of how future work in this area might aim to support balance and well-being for both students and faculty. Within our own institution at Simon Fraser University, a network of faculty who are engaged and interested in creating conditions for well-being has already been established, and the results of this study will therefore inform that network and will provide insights for faculty who have expressed interest in working to create conditions for well-being in learning environments.

It is important to note that because this study was exploratory in nature, the findings are not necessarily generalizable to other contexts. They do, however, provide initial insight that may contribute to further research and development related to the creation of learning experiences that enhance well-being. This study is a point in time view of students' experiences of well-being in learning environments and it will be important to further explore how different pathways to well-being in learning environments may exist for different students and in different contexts.

6. Conclusions

This study provides an exploration of students' experiences of well-being in learning environments. Through valuing and hearing students' lived experiences of well-being in learning environments the study helps to illuminate several important pathways through which learning experiences can contribute to well-being. These include the creation of learning experiences that promote connection, flexibility and learning for purpose. Importantly, students emphasized the relationship between well-being and deep learning, and highlighted how learning in ways that enhance well-being can also contribute to their satisfaction and engagement with learning. This is important to note, as student satisfaction and deep learning are core components of university advancement decisions and contribute to institutional success. There is therefore a relevant and timely opportunity to explore how the design and delivery of higher education courses might contribute to both student well-being and institutional success. With the recent release of a new international charter on health promoting universities and institutions of higher education (Okanagan Charter, 2015), and renewed interest in creating community, well-being and an ethic of care within higher education environments (Keeling, 2014; Okanagan Charter, 2015; Harward, 2014), this study provides an important exploration of how students themselves experience well-being in learning environments, and provides insight into the pathways through which course design and delivery may support student well-being, satisfaction and success.

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