

The missing link: Principal well-being literacy and its drivers and outcomes

Principal well-being is critical for individual principals, schools, and society (Collie, Granziera & Martin, 2020; *PI* et al., under review a; Wells & Klocko, 2018). Empirical evidence shows that principals around the world are experiencing professional dilemmas stemming from constant change and unprecedented uncertainties (Pollock & Wang, 2020; *Riley* et al., 2021). In Hong Kong, around 39% of 356 Hong Kong principals reported suffering from depression or exhaustion due to political, social, and academic challenges (*PI, Walker, & Riley*, under review b). However, current research mainly focuses on understanding and promoting principal well-being outcomes rather than well-being processes. Principal well-being literacy, a process-oriented well-being construct, is a ‘missing link’ in the current principal well-being literature (Oades, 2017) both in Hong Kong and internationally. Well-being literacy is defined as ‘the capability of comprehending and composing’ well-being information, knowledge, and skills, ‘sensitive to contexts, used intentionally to maintain or improve the well-being outcomes of oneself and/or others’ (Oades et al., 2021a, p. 327).

School principals are the gatekeepers for all school initiatives. Informed by the contemporary notion of ‘principal first’, principals are encouraged to cultivate their well-being to ‘lead, self-care, and lead to care.’ (Klap et al., 2021; *PI*, 2021). Hence, principals need to be positioned firmly at the center of school well-being promotion research to strengthen their well-being literacy. This would help principals take care of themselves and model this to staff and students. It would also encourage principals to search for and deal with well-being-related information, including its use and decision-making to establish well-being promotion schools, ultimately aiming for a ‘wellness society’ as called for by the OECD 2030 Agenda (OECD, 2019a). There is, therefore, an urgent need to investigate principal well-being literacy to improve the quality of education and the welfare of individual principals, schools, and society as a whole.

Based on a pilot study of principal well-being literacy and the PI’s previous project on principal well-being (GRF18611120), this proposed project will respond to the aforementioned concerns with four main aims. The first aim is to develop and validate a Principal Well-being Literacy Instrument (PWLI). The second aim is to examine the state of principal well-being literacy. The third aim is to identify the influential individual, institutional, and contextual drivers of principal well-being literacy. The fourth aim is to explore the relationships among drivers, principal well-being literacy, and well-being outcomes.

The project will employ an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design with qualitative and quantitative strands. The qualitative strand consists of two studies. Study 1 involves individual semi-structured interviews with 24 principals from Hong Kong to address the four aims qualitatively. Study 2 will use a 3-expert panel interview to develop the content validity of the PWLI. The quantitative strand contains two survey studies to respond to the four aims by triangulating the qualitative findings. Study 3 will establish the structural validity of the instrument with a sample of approximately 100~150 principals. Study 4 will quantitatively address all four aims to extend the generalizability using approximately 350~400 principals.

This project will make four major contributions. *First*, the project will provide empirical insights to advance the theoretical framework on principal well-being by filling in the ‘black box’ (i.e., principal well-being literacy) between drivers and outcomes of principal well-being. This project will enhance the well-being and performance of individual principals and their schools. *Second*, through a robust validation procedure, this project will produce a multidimensional PWLI, that can potentially accelerate a balanced investigation of principal well-being literacy using diverse research methods, including advanced quantitative methods. *Third*, this project will enable policymakers to identify policy priorities to better craft related public policies (i.e., professional standards for principals) for cultivating principal well-being literacy to establish well-being promotion schools in Hong Kong. In the long run, this project will help build well-being promotion education systems by making every school as a well-being promotion school. This will be one step ahead of the OECD’s call for a ‘wellness society’ by enhancing public health in Hong Kong and beyond. *Fourth*, this project will produce a practical blueprint for supporting principal well-being literacy building, particularly as individual, institutional, and contextual drivers identified are malleable to future solution-focused interventions in Hong Kong and beyond.