This timely resource for teachers, leaders, and policymakers provides breakthrough insights into how to improve students’ well-being in schools.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, students’ well-being was an increasingly prominent concern among educators, as issues related to mental health, global crises, and social media became impossible to ignore. But what, exactly, is well-being? What does it look like, why is it so important, and what can school systems do to promote it? How does it relate to student achievement and social and emotional learning?

World-renowned education experts Andy Hargreaves and Dennis Shirley answer these questions and more in this in-depth exploration of the underlying ideas and research findings related to well-being, coupled with examples of policies and implementations from around the globe. The authors make the case for putting well-being ahead of other priorities, such as scores on high-stakes assessments, and explain the three powerful forces that educators can leverage to set up effective well-being policy and practice: prosperity for all, ethical technology use, and restorative nature.

Inspiring, thoughtful, and provocative, Well-Being in Schools: Three Forces That Will Uplift Your Students in a Volatile World offers hope in a time of unprecedented challenges. Looking within and beyond the classroom, it charts a path toward a lofty but achievable goal: improved well-being not only for students but also for society as a whole.

Andy Hargreaves
Dennis Shirley

Well-Being in Schools
Three Forces That Will Uplift Your Students in a Volatile World

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Preface: Live Long and Prosper

If you had a choice to be healthy or successful, which would you choose? Of course, most of us wouldn’t want to choose at all. Who wouldn’t prefer to be healthy and successful? But what if you were really forced to pick one over the other?

Well, if you look at most educational policies since the 1990s, you might imagine that success is what really matters and sometimes practically all that matters. Test scores, examination results, and international comparisons of educational performance have all exalted literacy, mathematics, and science scores as the be-all and end-all of education. There have been some attempts to update these metrics with 21st century skills or global competencies, but even these have been primarily driven by economic and modern workforce needs.

The focus on achievement, success, and high performance in education and the economy has been like a never-ending story about what’s most important in education and in life. Health and well-being have seemed like an afterthought—a luxury that our scarce attention and resources can’t always afford.

The early years of the 2020s changed all that. They will be etched indelibly in our memories for the rest of our lives. These were the years the COVID-19 pandemic took millions of lives, disrupted economies, robbed young people of more than a year of regular learning, and plunged families and communities into depression, anxiety, poverty, and isolation.

COVID-19 turned our assumptions about what matters in schools and society upside down. The fantasy that learning could be accessed
on devices anytime, anywhere, and that the walls of schools in the 21st century should come down, was confounded by having to face the simple fact that children need to be looked after for numerous reasons, including so that their parents can go to work. The poverty that the pandemic exposed and exacerbated made many children vulnerable to sleeplessness, stress, violence, and abuse. One poll conducted in the United Kingdom, for example, reported a rise in issues related to mental health and well-being for at least one in three of the 4,000 children and young people who responded.¹

Not everyone suffered from being at home. Peace and contentment came to children who were no longer targets of teasing and bullying. Those who found it hard to sit still and concentrate for hours on end in a regular classroom environment could now fidget and wander around at will. Nobody missed the dreary rituals of test preparation. Although many students closing in on the end of high school worried about how they would be graded and how this would affect their futures, there were no reports that they hankered after high-stress examinations.

Well-being was no longer at the back of the school bus. It was in the driver’s seat. How could teachers get food to children in poverty when meals at school were no longer available? What could schools do to keep an eye on the most vulnerable children and their families, who might be struggling, squabbling, or getting caught up in intensifying custody battles, for example? More and more school and system leaders began to realize that when children and families were figuring out how to learn on devices (or in other ways) at home, it was time to put aside worksheets and to give up worrying about kids falling behind in their measured achievement. It was better instead to ensure that children were at least learning something, that they were enjoying what they were doing, and that they were productively occupied, whether by chatting with their parents, participating in family activities, or just playing together.

It took all of this to get policymakers and the public to pull up short and appreciate what famed psychologist Abraham Maslow had pointed out in 1943—that before people could engage with the possibilities for personal growth and “self-actualization,” as he called
it, they needed to be safe and physically well.\textsuperscript{2} As our own parents often reminded us, health is everything.

In truth, in the five years or so before the pandemic, most educational systems had already started to pay a lot more attention to their students’ well-being. A look at Google’s N-Gram viewer makes it clear that although the term \textit{well-being} has a 70-year history, its frequency of use shot up after 2010 (see Figure P.1).

The growing attraction of well-being and wellness is evident in everyday life. We see it in the opening of spas and wellness centers on high streets and in shopping malls; in smartwatches that count our calories and our steps; in apps that display our sleep patterns and heart rate; in obsessions with diet and nutrition; in celebrity websites that provide wellness advice and market well-being products;\textsuperscript{3} and in the boom in self-help books on subjects such as how to master emotions, change tiny habits, and even how to breathe!\textsuperscript{4}

In a different way, the rising prominence and provenance of well-being have also been apparent in schools. In research we present in this book, educators reported that children were starting school less prepared to learn compared to earlier generations.

\textbf{FIGURE P.1}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Well-Being-in-Schools.png}
\caption{Changing Frequencies in the Use of the Term \textit{Well-Being}, 1950–2019}
\end{figure}

Children found it hard to listen, line up, and take turns when they had to. Biting, kicking, and other antisocial behaviors appeared to be increasing. Many young learners seemed to be exhibiting early signs of restlessness, inability to concentrate, and overall attention deficits. Levels of anxiety and depression were rising in all age groups, from small children to young adults.

Teachers sensed the origins of these changes. More children were living on the edge of poverty or in families where the necessity to work two or three jobs in the modern economy meant that children were left on their own a lot more. Kids were more connected to technology, but not always in a good way. Video games and social media were consuming many children's lives with excessive hours of screen time. Overworked and overscheduled parents had little or no time to organize or oversee alternatives. Some parents occupied their children with digital devices rather than converse with them. A surge in refugees from countries at war or in conflict also brought growing numbers of children with little or no experience of schooling into the classrooms of receiving countries. Teachers had to learn how to cope with the emotional and behavioral manifestations of students who were traumatized as a result of violence, bereavement, homelessness, fear, and chaos they had experienced in their former countries.

Children were suffering, and their teachers were struggling. Schools, policy systems, and foundations started to respond, leading to an explosion of initiatives, programs, and publications in social and emotional learning (SEL). Teachers’ professional vocabulary expanded to include terms such as growth mindset, emotional regulation, and mindfulness. Educational policies started to assign high priority to well-being. Political leaders and their economic advisers began to insist that society had more important goals than economic growth. Quality of life—and the policies that supported it—should be the chief priorities, they said. This view was what the original Star Trek’s Mr. Spock meant when he urged people to “live long and prosper”—not to get rich, but to flourish as human beings.5

After 40 years of chasing bigger numbers in everything from economic productivity to student test scores, we are now witnessing the emergence of a new way of thinking about what is most
important in our lives. This is a kind of *Prosperity Doctrine*—a belief in the value of thriving in all aspects of life, not just economic ones. Prosperity in this sense is about the development of the whole child rather than just the parts of the child that can remember bits of knowledge, pass tests, and eventually get jobs. Prosperity is about having a sense of purpose and meaning in life, about feeling fulfilled and being a positive force for good in the lives of others too.

The Case for Well-Being

Given these developments, this book about well-being is fortuitously timely, because we didn’t set out to write about well-being—or even to research the subject. Instead, in the early stages of a project with 10 of the 72 school districts in Ontario, Canada, the provincial government released a report that identified four policy pillars as its priorities. One of these was improving students’ well-being. As part of our collaborative relationship, the districts then asked us to examine their efforts to promote student well-being in response to the new policy direction.

This book draws on what we discovered to set out arguments, evidence, examples, and implications concerning how we can and should address issues of children’s well-being in schools. Our intention is not to add to the many how-to books on well-being with specific ideas and strategies about what teachers can do in their classrooms right now. Rather, we want to provide a deeper yet accessible understanding of the subject of well-being and SEL, and the main ideas behind them. To do this, we draw not only on our own evidence but also on research and writing on well-being across a number of disciplines.

Using this interdisciplinary approach, our book sets out to stimulate new thinking and to challenge existing ideas about well-being and SEL. It presents inspiring examples of well-being initiatives in action. It examines the relationship between well-being and student success. It defines bold new directions for well-being. Our book also raises critical questions about the well-being agenda—not to undermine it, but to put it on a firmer footing. Throughout our book, we show that well-being and SEL are not just psychological
matters but also relate to how our institutions and societies enhance or impede everyone’s well-being.

The book is organized in eight chapters. The opening chapter explores and explains what most people mean when they talk about well-being. It connects psychological interpretations of well-being to understanding the role that it plays in the world. The chapter closes by describing three programs and policies that address these micro and macro aspects of well-being together. These show the relationships between interpersonal processes, such as bullying and empathy inside schools, and big-picture issues in society, such as conflict, genocide, and peace.

Chapter 2 introduces six of the most widely used and psychologically based theories of well-being and SEL that have influenced the work of teachers worldwide in their attempts to address young people’s development.

Chapter 3 then asks readers to inspect some of their most fundamental beliefs about the value of well-being and to examine what may be wrong with the concept. The more we are attached to something in education—a curriculum, a program, or a strategy—the more we should examine it for any flaws. As in romantic or business partnerships, when we embrace something or someone, we should do so in full knowledge of the drawbacks and limitations. In our quest to improve well-being, we must not shrink from acknowledging some of the more difficult issues that the well-being agenda has raised. This effort can actually temper commitment with realism and help avoid disappointment later on.

Chapter 4 examines what it is that has led to the eruption of interest in well-being in education during the second decade of the 21st century. The need for educators to pay more attention to well-being, we argue, has resulted from the combined pressure of two great movements in education and society—a chaotic and uncertain one emerging from the imminent future, and a controlling and restricting one of testing and standardization derived from an outworn past. Together, these pressing movements are thrusting well-being issues up in front of us, where they can’t be missed. The COVID-19 pandemic, we note, has added to these pressures and
uncertainties. It has ensured that well-being will remain at the top of our educational priorities for years to come.

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 paint a big-picture perspective of well-being and SEL in society. They describe three powerful forces that are changing well-being policy and practice: The first is a quest for personal and social prosperity, the second is a drive toward more ethical uses of digital learning technologies, and the third is a call to renew our relationship with nature. Chapter 5 describes the goal of *prosperity for all*, which abandons economic obsessions with growth and austerity and educational preoccupations with achievement targets in favor of creating a better quality of life for everyone. Chapter 6 takes an approach to *ethical technology use* that sets aside overly exuberant commitments to hybrid and blended forms of digital technology in order to make way for digital learning strategies that have a uniquely valuable impact and that take full account of all associated dangers and risks. Chapter 7 then argues for the power of *restorative nature*. It proposes increasing the amount of time devoted to learning outdoors to reconnect people with Indigenous heritages, strengthen young people’s physical and mental health, and establish early relationships with nature that build a foundation for environmental sustainability.

In Chapter 8, using evidence from the 10 school districts we studied in Ontario, we examine the relationship between students’ well-being and their academic success. This is a topic where strong opinions abound. Is well-being essential as a basis for academic success? Or is it peripheral to—or even a distraction from—the serious study of academics? And what about the reverse relationship? Does well-being result from success, or can too much stress about being academically successful actually undermine students’ well-being? This chapter invites readers to examine their own assumptions about well-being and achievement, and to rethink how to create the most productive relationship between these things.

The Epilogue considers the future of well-being in the work of teaching and the world beyond it. How can we get better at helping our students and societies get better? What do we now know that can help us improve everyone’s quality of life? How can we attend

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to our own well-being so that we will be fully equipped to help all our young people be healthy, prosperous, and successful? How can all of us see and strengthen the connection between well-being in ourselves, our schools, and the world? After the greatest pandemic in a century, how can we build everyone back to be better-educated people who know *how to live together*?

**Our Evidence and Research**

Our ideas and the evidence in this book draw on a range of sources. These include existing research literature on well-being in schools and society; and our research, advisory, and evaluative work with policy reforms in Canadian provinces and US states, as well as in other countries. The prime source, though, is a four-year study of educational change in Ontario, Canada, in relation to a 2014 government policy titled *Achieving Excellence*.

With a population closing in on 15 million, Ontario is the most populous of Canada’s 10 provinces. It has nearly 5,000 schools. The province’s public schools have been the envy of the world. Apart from Ireland and the city-state of Singapore, Canada is the highest performer among all English- and French-speaking nations, and Ontario is one of the top four performing provinces in that country. Especially considering Ontario’s high levels of immigration, the province’s performance remains exceptional. Test results on OECD’s Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) show Ontario consistently ranking in the top dozen school systems. On the 2018 PISA results, Ontario tied for 5th in the world in reading, marginally behind Alberta, among other Canadian provinces. International visitors have flocked to see a diverse public system that serves almost 94 percent of the province’s students and that enjoys strong public confidence in its schools and teachers.

Between 2002 and 2013, Ontario’s drive to raise achievement and narrow achievement gaps concentrated on students’ performance in literacy and mathematics, especially in the elementary grades. In 2013, although Ontario’s government continued to be led by the Liberal Party, a new premier—Kathleen Wynne, the
former education minister—assumed office. Wynne’s education policy, *Achieving Excellence*, took the province in new directions.\textsuperscript{15}

*Achieving Excellence* set out four priorities. One was to maintain public confidence in a system that had raised student performance on test results by 17 percentage points over the previous decade. Second, although excellence was still a clear priority, other academic areas, such as the arts and STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics), were now added to literacy and mathematics as priorities. Equity was a third priority, but it was no longer interpreted just as narrowing achievement gaps; it now encompassed inclusion of diverse and vulnerable groups and their identities, such as Indigenous, refugee, and LGBTQ students, so they could see themselves, their communities, and their needs reflected in the life and learning of their schools. The fourth pillar of Ontario education reform was that “Ontario is committed to the success and well-being of every student and child” (emphasis added).\textsuperscript{16}

Before the release of the policy report, we were approached by a consortium of 10 of Ontario’s 72 school districts. The Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE) created the consortium. We were asked to collaborate with the consortium in documenting projects that they also wished to share with one another to advance their learning through regular meetings that we facilitated. After the release of *Achieving Excellence*, most of these projects focused on aspects of students’ well-being.

Our research team used semi-structured interviews to elicit information about the improvement initiatives in the 10 school districts and to gauge how they were learning from one another in the consortium. We visited each district over one or two days in the spring of 2016. Teams of two or three were mixed and rotated to enhance cross-validation of interpretation. We conducted in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with more than 220 teachers, principals, central office staff, affiliated school-based personnel, project leaders, and civil servants from the Ministry of Education. We visited classrooms to observe, firsthand, how projects were being implemented and with what consequences. We also gathered documents such as district-level and ministerial reports to supplement our research.
findings. More details of our methodology are described in our technical research report.17

Building Everyone Back Better

Even before US President Joe Biden was elected in 2020, he pledged that his administration would “build back better” after a raging pandemic that claimed more than half a million US lives and led to unemployment and poverty levels that were unprecedented in modern times.18 The phrase getting better, of course, has a double meaning. It refers to recovery of health after being sick and to improving over time. Building back better has to mean more than mere recovery, important as that is. All was far from well beforehand. Building back better, in the United States and everywhere else, must therefore also see a determination to improve people’s health and well-being compared to how it was before the pandemic.

The global pandemic didn’t just make people sick. It exposed how sick so many aspects of modern society were already. Think of the underresourced, for-profit care homes, or nursing homes, as they are variously called, that placed seniors in thinly disguised waiting rooms for their final journey to the funeral home. Consider the care staff in these homes, living a gig-economy existence that require them to move from home to home, picking up and carrying infection with them, as they try to hold down multiple jobs to make ends meet. What about the migrant farm laborers, huddled together in little more than shacks, with no rights or protections, earning pitifully low wages, just so the rest of us could get our fresh fruits and vegetables? What about all the essential workers on zero-hours contracts, who, we have learned, are often living in a world with no security, just one paycheck away from destitution?

The world has reached a parlous state when starving children tear open deliveries from the local food bank because school closures mean that their schools can no longer feed them. At the same time, it is outrageous to hear that some children have actually been relieved to be learning at home because they no longer have to endure taunts and bullying at school. It is shocking to discover that schools and school districts in the United States and the UK were
threatened with fines or withdrawal of funding if they didn’t open up their schools again—even when infection rates that governments were failing to control remained perilously high.¹⁹

Let’s hope that after the pandemic the predictions of epidemiologist Nicholas Christakis, in *Apollo’s Arrow*—that we will relive the Roaring 20s that followed the 1918 pandemic—will turn out to be wrong.²⁰ Let’s extend the inspiring spirit of community that arose at times during the pandemic to offer one another help and solidarity. Let’s not forget that one of our prime directives in schools is to help young people feel safe, cared for, fulfilled, and thriving, so that they prosper within the school and beyond it. Let’s bring the public good, in equitable schools for all, back to the fore. Let’s not go back to the worst of what we had before, but instead *build back better* for all young people’s well-being for the future. As a start, in this book, we now turn to what the best of well-being can look like and to how we can set about developing it.
Before 2020, if you’d asked people what first came to mind if you mentioned “the Who,” they likely would have thought of the aging British rock band of that name. But another WHO—the World Health Organization—became a household name when it responded to the COVID-19 pandemic. Created by the United Nations in 1947 as an organization responsible for global health issues, the WHO’s constitution defined health as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (emphasis added). The WHO established new professions such as psychiatric social work and school counseling. Following World War II, it brought well-being onto the world stage alongside economic performance, peace, and global security.

Well-being is important in all areas of life, but especially in young people’s development. We know that young people feel well when they enjoy their learning, look forward to coming to school, and feel valued by their families and friends. We all want them to experience joy, to thrive physically and emotionally, and to have a voice in their learning and their future.

It’s not always immediately obvious when young people feel well, though. This is why well-being can be hard to measure sometimes. Well-being can be effervescent and expressive, but not all of us wear our heart on our sleeve. Well-being can just as easily be calm, reflective, and understated. Well-being might be manifested in a bursting sense of pride that accompanies an athletic accomplishment or a
successful dramatic performance. But it can also be expressed in the quiet contentment found in reading an engrossing book or just playing quietly with a friend.

We’re most likely to grasp the value of well-being when it’s not there, when we witness all the signs of being ill instead. We notice when children are hungry or haven’t slept. We are alert to young people being isolated, left out, or bullied. We have become increasingly vigilant about vulnerable children who are at risk of neglect or abuse at home. We provide specific help for young people with diagnosed conditions such as autism spectrum disorder, ADHD, anxiety, or fetal alcohol spectrum disorder. More and more schools and school systems have developed policies and strategies to deal with racism, homophobia, and other prejudices. And one of the basic competencies of teaching is to be able to be empathetic toward and supportive of children who have more transient experiences of ill-being such as losing a family member, experiencing the death of a pet, worrying about a parental breakup, or falling out with a best friend.

Well-being, happiness, and fulfillment are not just the icing on the cake of learning and achievement. As we will see in Chapter 8, they are essential to meeting academic goals. It’s hard to be successful when you’re tired, worried, hungry, fearful, or depressed. Conversely, breakthroughs in accomplishment and mastery can lead to surges in self-confidence and satisfaction.

In addition to their contribution to learning, well-being and fulfillment also have immense value in their own right. Mental health data collected during the COVID-19 pandemic revealed that the group whose well-being often suffered the most was teenagers. At a time in their lives when an important part of growing up is about being with friends and developing a sense of identity and hope for the future, teenagers were cut off from their peers in the neighborhood and from their teachers, mentors, and friends at school. For all the talk about online learning being able to be organized anywhere, anytime after the pandemic, the undeniable truth is that if physical schools are taken away, children and teenagers may become disconnected from many of the people who are important to them and their development. Well-being is an essential part of education and an invaluable part of growing up. We ignore it at our peril.
Learning to Be

Officially, and obviously, the prime purpose of education is not well-being, but learning. Understanding an intriguing idea, learning something new, developing a difficult skill, mastering a challenging concept—this seems to be the essence of education. It’s what attracts many teachers into the profession—to switch on light bulbs for children, enable them to grasp or do something they thought was beyond them, help them progress, or introduce them to interests that can turn into lifelong passions.

But schools are not only about academic learning. They promote young people’s emotional and moral development too. If we act as if learning and achievement are the only things that matter, we fall into the trap of what Dutch professor Gert Biesta calls learnification.23

Learnification means that anything and everything has to be justified in terms of its impact on learning. Want to secure more time for music in your school? Then point to the evidence that music raises mathematics achievement. Interested in developing meditation and biofeedback among your children? Then demonstrate that the resulting calmness will improve performance on test-taking days. And if you are extending the school day, don’t emphasize the value of being with peers, practicing leadership, or developing new interests. Just set out the evidence that extended learning time can increase measured achievement.

Alongside learning as we usually understand it, though, schools are also about how children develop. They are about how students experience and express awe, wonder, excitement, compassion, empathy, moral outrage at injustice, courage, playfulness, commitment, self-respect, self-confidence, and many other emotional and moral qualities in their education. Young people need to experience these things not just because of who they will become in the future but also because of who they are now.

In 1996, the United Nations established an education commission led by a former president of the European Commission, Jacques Delors. Its report was titled Learning: The Treasure Within.24 It built on a preceding UN report, issued 25 years earlier, called Learning.
to Be. The Delors report made a powerful case for humanistic educational goals and purposes that, it claimed, had been overlooked and left behind.

The commission was concerned about growing unemployment, rising rates of exclusion, increasing inequality, and widespread damage to the natural environment. “All-out economic growth,” it argued, “can no longer be viewed as the ideal way of reconciling material progress with equity, respect for the human condition and respect for the natural assets that we have a duty to hand on in good condition to future generations.” With these concerns uppermost, the Delors report began:

Education has a fundamental role to play in personal and social development. The Commission does not see education as a miracle cure or a magic formula opening the door to a world in which all ideals will be attained, but as one of the principal means available to foster a deeper and more harmonious form of human development and thereby to reduce poverty, exclusion, ignorance, oppression and war.

The commission’s report rested on four pillars of learning. Learning to know involved engaging in a broad education and developing subject-specific knowledge. Learning to do was about acquiring skills and competencies, including modern skills such as teamwork that we now understand as representing global competencies. These two kinds of learning are what schools and universities have emphasized the most and can be easily examined and tested. However, Delors's team stressed, the other two pillars—learning to be and learning to live together—are at least as important in a rapidly changing and increasingly imperiled world. Yet they receive far less attention in formal educational systems.

Learning to be is about unearthing the buried treasure of people’s hidden talents. These include “memory, reasoning power, imagination, physical ability, aesthetic sense, the aptitude to communicate with others.” Learning to be requires the development of essential “self-knowledge” among group leaders.

At a time when the collapse of the Berlin Wall had not put an end to national and international conflicts, the most important yet
most neglected of all the four pillars, Delors argued, was *learning to live together*, to secure “mutual understanding, peaceful interchange and, indeed, harmony.” Learning to live together amounted to developing “an understanding of others and their history, traditions and spiritual values and, on this basis, creating a new spirit which would induce people to implement common projects or to manage the inevitable conflicts in an intelligent and peaceful way.”

On January 6, 2021, an insurrectionist mob stormed the US Capitol, tearing up the already fraying fabric of the nation’s historic democracy. After the initial shock, who asked how Americans had failed to educate their citizens to *learn to live together*? Who regretted the decades-long atrophy of social studies and civics at the expense of more and more testing? Did technology executives in a digital industry dominated by white men accept responsibility for the profit-driven algorithms that divided people, reinforced their preferences and prejudices to communicate only with others like them, and spread sedition and hate?

Can Americans, and others of us in similarly compromised democracies, ask how we have failed to learn to live together? How can we put things right in our schools, technology and media companies, politics, and society? How can these divisions be healed with courage, empathy, truth, knowledge, critical thinking, and common cause? These things should be as much a part of the well-being agenda as mindfulness, self-regulation, positive mindsets, and resilience.

**Learning to Be Well**

The Delors report taught us that well-being is about more than feeling healthy, happy, mindful, or resilient. Nor is well-being only about feeling safe and protected from harm. It is not a purely psychological matter. Well-being is also a social condition that involves inclusion, belonging, peacefulness, and human rights. Strong well-being programs and policies see and secure the connections between the psychological states of children and the eventual state of the world. Well-being is a social as well as a psychological phenomenon. It’s hard to be well if you live in a sick society.
Let’s look at three examples of programs and policies that address both the social and psychological aspects of well-being and their interconnections. They are a high school history program that draws connections between bullying in schools and genocide; an elementary education initiative that develops empathy among young people as a basis for peace in society; and a systemwide policy on child well-being that is a central pillar for also developing excellence, inclusion, and equity.

**Facing History and Ourselves**

If the broader argument about well-being and society feels like something that belongs only in a world history course or in a peace education curriculum, it is important to acknowledge that the capacity for global conflict begins in our families and communities. At times, it has also been exacerbated in the classrooms and hallways of our schools. This is the essential insight of a curriculum initiative developed in Brookline, Massachusetts, that is now recognized and used all over the world. Its name is Facing History and Ourselves (FHAO).

In 1974, Margot Stern Strom and William Parsons, two secondary school social studies teachers in Brookline, found themselves dissatisfied with how their students were learning about the Holocaust. Try as they might, they felt that their students approached the horrors of genocide almost as if it were any other school subject that needed to be mastered for the college admissions grind. Strom and Parsons acquired a grant to develop a program that would “link a particular history to universal questions, those timely yet timeless questions that resonate with every generation.”

Strom became the founder and executive director of FHAO. She later wrote that she wanted “students to confront not only their own potential for passivity and complicity, but also their courage and resilience. And we must teach them to value their rights as citizens and take responsibility for their actions.”

In April 1978, NBC television released a miniseries, *Holocaust,* that was viewed by more than 120 million people, many of them secondary school students. Strom and her colleagues wanted to respond to the newfound interest in the Nazis’ genocide of
European Jews by helping students to develop their moral reasoning and applying it to how they interacted with others. They developed new lesson plans, swapped them, observed each other's classrooms, and provided each other with critical feedback.

By 1994, FHAO had developed a curriculum and resource book called *Facing History and Ourselves: Holocaust and Human Behavior*. FHAO didn't want students to learn about the Holocaust as just another historical incident. The teachers also wanted students to ask themselves what kinds of people they were, who they wanted to become, and how they would act when confronted with injustices.

A central theme in FHAO is that students have to examine how they themselves treat outsiders in their classrooms and schools. Do they welcome or shun them? Are they passive when they see unpopular students being bullied? Students learn about stage-theory approaches to genocide that begin with what can appear to be relatively minor acts of labeling and ranking others but can escalate into wholesale persecution—and ultimately genocide. In the process, students learn to identify with those who are persecuted, whether in Nazi Germany or in their own schools and communities.

FHAO rapidly gained traction in schools. Curriculum materials expanded to include the Armenian genocide, the US civil rights movement, and topics related to democracy and human rights. What are the results? Teaching about the Holocaust has statistically significant impacts on students' moral reasoning, their abilities to empathize with others, and overall school climate. Even teachers' self-efficacy is enhanced after teaching the FHAO curriculum.

FHAO demonstrates that teaching is about more than getting students to feel good about themselves. It takes students seriously as moral beings and empowers them to look critically at their own lives. It also teaches students that their own well-being is linked with that of others. It urges them to speak up and speak out against injustice, whether in the form of outright bullying or more casual incidents of meanness. It helps young people learn how to be and how to live together.

By 2020, FHAO had become a global network with more than 100,000 teachers in 134 countries. It developed webinars, podcasts, and protocols to help teachers to discuss controversial issues with
their students. Most recently, FHAO created content on the spread of the coronavirus and its disproportionate impact on people of color and the poor.41

FHAO exemplifies two important points about well-being. It demonstrates that intellectually demanding learning and student well-being can and should go together. It also shows that well-being is a social responsibility as well as an individual lifestyle or a positive health choice.

Roots of Empathy

In 1996, social entrepreneur Mary Gordon established a program called Roots of Empathy for elementary school students in Ontario.42 The program is designed to increase empathy, caring, and other prosocial behaviors and to reduce aggression, cruelty, meanness, and bullying. Roots of Empathy is now used in countries around the world. In addition to Canada, these include Costa Rica, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, South Korea, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States.43 For several years running, it has been recognized as one of the 100 leading educational innovations in the world.44

Like most outstanding innovations, Roots of Empathy has a simple but compelling design. Parents of infants between 2 and 4 months old visit a classroom regularly for an entire school year and bring their baby with them. A trained instructor coaches the class to observe the infant and name the baby's feelings.45 This interaction helps children understand their own feelings and the feelings of others around them too. Who could not be charmed, intrigued, and disarmed by a curious, cute, and defenseless infant? Using the knowledge and insight gained through observing and interacting with a tiny human, children learn to master and moderate as well as understand their own and one another's feelings.

Research in several countries, including rigorous blind-control studies, shows that the Roots of Empathy program significantly increases rates of empathy, sharing, helping, and including, and decreases levels of bullying and other kinds of aggression.46 Mary Gordon believes that her program doesn’t just create a safer and more nurturing school environment for all students. In a world that
“is becoming increasingly less democratic and more violent,” where children see how “we are failing to understand and support one another,” Roots of Empathy’s open-ended methods enable children to see the world through the eyes of others, beginning with the baby’s. Even Kids who have picked on other kids and teased them—or worse—for being too fat, too skinny, too smart, too dumb, having an unusual accent, or wetting the bed, learn through their interactions with and around a baby the importance of inclusion and belonging. They come to understand that “making someone feel like they don’t belong is a really cruel thing to do.” In the end, like FHAO, but operating with a very different age group and methodology, Roots of Empathy aspires to connect improved classroom well-being to the creation of a more inclusive and empathetic society. As Scottish philosopher and economist Adam Smith once recognized, sympathy is the emotional foundation of democracy.

Ontario Education Policy, 2014–18

The concerns about young people’s well-being have led to well-being policies and strategies becoming part of system policy frameworks in a number of places. Ontario—the source of much of our evidence—is one of them. Although Canada is a global leader in educational achievement and equity, its record on student well-being is less impressive. For example, in 2020, UNICEF placed Canada 30th out of 38 better-off nations on a table measuring the well-being of 15-year-olds across three indicators of mental well-being, physical health, and skills. On OECD indicators of life satisfaction, Canada’s students are “not significantly different from the OECD average.” As in a number of countries in East Asia, Canada’s record on student achievement is not matched by its performance in student well-being.

By 2014, the Ontario government and many of its educators were realizing that all was not well with the well-being of their students. For a dozen years, Ontario had, with considerable success, focused on increasing achievement and narrowing achievement gaps in literacy and numeracy. Ontario was and is the highest achieving of Canada’s 10 provinces in most areas of education. But by 2013 or so, the decade-long upward curve of improvement was
starting to flatten. There were growing concerns that there was more to students' learning and development than literacy and mathematics and high school graduation rates alone. Something had been missing in Ontario's push to improve its achievement record. A big part of that missing piece was young people's well-being.

Field workers in the Ministry of Children and Youth Services were encountering increasing evidence that young people in Ontario were struggling. In response, they developed a “youth engagement process” that entailed “extensive youth dialogue” in “face-to-face” and “interactive workshops” throughout the province, along with an online survey. A Youth Development Committee of 25 young Ontarians was created from a pool of more than 400 applicants to inform the ministry's findings. The resulting report, Stepping Stones: A Resource on Youth Development, from the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, was published in 2012. It had a large impact on the province's policies on youth well-being.

From February 2013, after Kathleen Wynne became the premier of Ontario, she and her government made well-being one of Ontario's four educational policy pillars. The ministry's Achieving Excellence policy communicated that “students cannot achieve academically if they feel unsafe at school or are bullied online. They cannot be expected to reach their full potential if they have mental health issues and if we do not provide them with the support they need.”

Why did one in eight students in Ontario have serious thoughts about suicide? More than one in five students reported being cyberbullied. One in eight worried about being threatened or harmed at school. These percentages were even greater for vulnerable populations such as LGBTQ students and students from Indigenous communities (known in Canada as FNMI—First Nations, Métis, and Inuit). These unsettling statistics helped to explain “why the well-being of children and students needs to move to the center of the education system's priorities.”

As a result, the ministry encouraged teachers and school administrators to “increase interest among children and youth in being physically active, and to increase their motivation to live healthy, active lives.” Achieving Excellence called on a broad range of
partners to “build safe and accepting schools” and to help students develop as full human beings and contributors to society.59

Well-being in Ontario was now regarded as a foundation for educational achievement and equity. Equity was no longer equated just with narrowing achievement gaps in tested literacy and mathematics. Equity involved inclusion of all young people and their identities as well. If students could not see their cultures and identities in the life and curriculum of the school, the reasoning went, they would find it hard to achieve there. Feeling safe and being included, valued, and respected were inalienable parts of the province’s bold new agenda of educational improvement.

In 2016, the Ontario Ministry of Education adapted a graphic of student well-being from the 2012 Stepping Stones report. The image was based on consultation with children and youth and also developed through discussions with Indigenous elders, to ensure that their culture was visibly represented in the final product (Figure 1.1).

The ministry explained its graphic by observing that “‘Self/Spirit’ is situated at the center of the four interconnected domains”

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**FIGURE 1.1**

Well-Being Graphic

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represented by the cognitive, emotional, social, and physical quadrants. It noted that “concepts of self and spirit have different meanings for different people,” indicating that in some communities, “cultural heritage, language and community are central to identity.”

For instance, the ministry noted, “According to Indigenous ways of knowing, well-being is based on the balance of the mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional aspects of the individual, seen not as separate domains but as elements combined and centered within Spirituality and connected by community.” The spiritual core of well-being was relevant not just for Indigenous communities but for members of other faiths, and even those of no religious faith, who pursue spiritual development through a reverence for humanity or nature, for example.

This multifaceted and multicultural understanding of well-being is missing from the universal and seemingly culture-free definitions expressed in international rankings and indicators of well-being, happiness, and quality of life. Ontario’s ideas about well-being have been rooted in the nature of and vision for the province as a distinctive culture and society. Without this explicit grounding, other schools and school systems may fall into the trap of promoting some norms of well-being that are actually Western and individualistic, for example, compared to other alternatives. We will take up this issue in more detail in Chapter 3.

Conclusion

Well-being is a big deal. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, it was already moving closer to the forefront of policy priorities in education. Then the pandemic cruelly reminded us that health and well-being must come before everything—in society as well as in our schools. But it is not just viruses that threaten our well-being. War, conflict, environmental devastation, intolerance, prejudice, and division also harm our well-being. So do loneliness, isolation, and living in a virtual world at the expense of the physical world.

Learning to be and learning to live together are not just abstract ideals. They are achievable in real programs and policies that help us connect our own health to the health of the world. Yet
opportunities to be healthy and to be well are not distributed evenly. Well-being does not mean the same thing for everyone, in every culture. It may be “loud and proud” in Texas, “as bold as brass” in Northern England, or much more humble and self-effacing in East Asian cultures with Confucian heritages and Buddhist associations. There is a lot to learn about what well-being is, what it looks like, how we can recognize it when we see it, and how it is affected by inequality and diversity. These are some of the big questions we raise in this book.

Let’s turn first to how mainstream psychological thinking has been approaching well-being. What advice do some of the most popular and well-regarded theories of well-being have to offer? How can they help us? At the same time, what are they missing? We’ll come to grips with these issues in the next chapter by outlining and exploring six of the most widely used theories of well-being.
Notes


3 For example, Gwyneth Paltrow’s website, Goop, was set up in 2008 and can be found at https://goop.com/whats-goop/.


5 In a 2008 YouTube video for EmmyTVLegends.org, actor Leonard Nimoy recalls that this phrase was first inserted into the original Star Trek series by scriptwriter Theodore Sturgeon, in an episode titled “Amok Time.” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jmkDOzjfSSY


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World Health Organization Constitution. https://www.who.int/about/governance/constitution


Strom.


Ibid.


Ibid.


Ibid., p. 12.

Ontario Ministry of Education. (2016). *Well-being in our schools, strength in our society: Deepening our understanding of well-being in Ontario schools and how to support it, in kindergarten to grade 12*. Queen's Printer for Ontario, p. 6.

Ibid., p. 7.

Ibid., p. 7.

Ontario's well-being framework and affiliated documents and reports have been removed from the ensuing Conservative government's Ministry of Education website.


The interaction between Martin Seligman and Prime Minister Cameron, its context and consequences, is reported in C. Cederström & A. Spicer, (2015), *The wellness syndrome*, Polity Press, pp. 75–80. 

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Notes


83 The website for CASEL can be retrieved at https://casel.org/what-is-sel/


85 The core competencies are described on the CASEL website. https://casel.org/what-is-sel/

86 See https://casel.org/what-is-sel/

87 See https://casel.org/impact/

88 See https://casel.org/collaborative-state-initiative/

89 See https://casel.org/what-is-sel/


95 See https://yidanprize.org/the-prize/overview/.


97 Ibid., p. 75.

98 Ibid., p. 75.


101 Ibid., p. ix.

102 Ibid., p. i.

103 Ibid., p. 95.


105 Quoted in Dickens, J. (2015, June 18). Carol Dweck says mindset is not “a tool to make children feel good.” Schools Week. https://schoolsweek.co.uk/why-mindset-is-not-a-tool-to-make-children-feel-good


109 See ramdass.org/about-ram-dass


For more on the World Education Fellowship, go to http://wef-international.org/about.


Mary Hindle, who is now deceased, submitted these quotations to the school in longhand for its centennial in 1999. They are included in a document presented by the school governors to Andy on May 6, 2004, titled Odd Notes from Childhood.

In 2004, Andy was invited to lay the foundation stone for the new building at his old school, Spring Hill Community Primary School, which he suggested should be done with his former teacher, Mary Hindle. As a gift, the governors of the school made a collection for him of old records of the school such as class lists, logbook entries, and excerpts from this inspection report.


Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.


Ibid., p. 12

Ibid., pp. 11–12.

Ibid., pp. 27–41.


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Notes 169

151 Ibid.


167 Ibid.

168 See https://karanga.org/


Notes 171

202 Ibid.


Ibid., p. 25.


Ibid., p. 2.


See, for example, Sahlberg, P. (2021). *Finnish lessons 3.0: What can the world learn from educational change in Finland?* Teachers College Press.


Ibid., p. 69.


See https://www.dictionary.com/browse/prosperity.


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374 See https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2020/05/11/teachers-work-an-hour-less-per-day.html


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These examples come from our research with the NW RISE network in the Pacific Northwest, which we discuss in Shirley, D., & Hargreaves, A. (2021). Five paths of student engagement: Blazing the trail to learning and success. Solution Tree.


Details of the Ottawa Forest School can be retrieved from https://childnature.ca.


The Roots and Shoots website can be retrieved from http://www.rootsandshoots.org.

See https://www.nps.gov/articles/quick-nps-history.htm.


Ibid., p. 23.


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401 Meeting of Pasi Sahlberg, University of New South Wales, and Andy with the mayor of Reykjavik, Dagur Eggertsson, and his team to develop an educational vision for the city, February 5, 2018.
At the time this book went to press, this policy document was available in Icelandic only. It is retrievable at https://www.stjornarradid.is/efst-a-baugi/frettir/stok-frett/2021/03/26/Menntastefna-samtihykkta-a-Althingi/.


Ibid., p. 1.

Ibid., p. 1.


See https://www.lexico.com/definition/dignity


Ibid., p. 147.


Ibid., p. 1.

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Ibid., p. 5.

Ibid., p. 1.

Ibid., p. 1.

Ibid., p. 1.


Ibid., p. 10.

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Andy has consulted with the OECD, the World Bank, governments, universities, and teacher unions worldwide. His more than 30 books have attracted multiple writing awards—including the prestigious 2015 Grawemeyer Award in Education for Professional Capital (with Michael Fullan). He has been honored in the United States, the UK, and Canada for services to public education and educational research. Andy is ranked by Education Week among the top scholars with most influence on US education policy debate. In 2015, Boston College gave him its Excellence in Teaching with Technology Award.
Dennis Shirley is Duganne Faculty Fellow and professor of education at the Lynch School of Education and Human Development at Boston College. Dennis dedicates his life to the improvement of teaching and learning for students so that they may flourish, wherever they may be.

Dennis has led and advised many educational change initiatives. He was the principal investigator of the Massachusetts Coalition for Teacher Quality and Student Achievement, a federally funded improvement network that united 18 urban schools, 7 higher education institutions, and 16 community-based organizations. He has conducted in-depth studies about school innovations in England, Germany, Canada, and South Korea. Dennis has been a visiting professor at Harvard University in the United States, Venice International University in Italy, the National Institute of Education in Singapore, the University of Barcelona in Spain, and the University of Stavanger in Norway. Some of his recent initiatives include multiple innovations in the digital environment, an online master's degree program on Global Perspectives: Teaching, Curriculum and Learning Environments, and research the human-technology frontier in education and work, supported by a Richard von Weizsäcker Fellowship from the Bosch Foundation in Berlin, Germany. He is a fellow of the Royal Society of Arts.

Dennis’s previous book is The New Imperatives of Educational Change: Achievement with Integrity. He holds a doctorate from Harvard University.

★★★★

Well-Being in Schools: Three Forces That Will Uplift Your Students in a Volatile World is the fourth book that Andy and Dennis have written together. Their last coauthored book is Five Paths of Student Engagement: Blazing New Paths for Learning and Success.