

# Educating for Comprehensive Well-being

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## Abstract

**Purpose:** Educational approaches that advocate “well-being,” the “whole child,” “social and emotional learning,” “character,” and the like emphasize human development beyond the acquisition of knowledge and skills. These approaches vary widely in their views of human nature, their visions of a good life, and their prescriptions for educational practice. This article maps out heterogeneous contemporary approaches to “well-being” and related constructs, thereby allowing researchers, educators, and policymakers to understand the divergent assumptions made by the proliferating approaches to education that go beyond academics.

**Design/Approach/Methods:** This article presents results from a 2-year project, which included interviews with advocates of different approaches and review of key literature about eleven

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educational approaches to “well-being,” the “whole child,” “social and emotional learning,” “character,” and similar noncognitive ends.

**Findings:** The article argues that any educational approach to “well-being” and related constructs must respond to four questions: whether humans are bundles of discrete competencies or integrated wholes, what the appropriate relation is between individuals and society, the relative importance of instrumental and intrinsic goals, and the importance of an overarching purpose for one’s life. The analysis reviews how eleven contemporary approaches address these four questions.

**Originality/Value:** Despite the global proliferation of divergent approaches to “well-being,” the “whole child,” “social and emotional learning,” “character,” and related constructs in education, there are no comprehensive frameworks for understanding the alternatives and their key assumptions. This article organizes the globally proliferating educational movements that promote “well-being,” making sense of a confusing set of alternatives. We also argue that any comprehensive approach to education that goes beyond academics must consider the four questions that we identify.

### Keywords

Character education, educational policy, social emotional learning, well-being, whole person

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For millennia, educational philosophies and practices have emphasized human development beyond the acquisition of knowledge and skills—the cultivation of virtue, passion, character, activism, and other noncognitive ends. The past decade, however, has brought extraordinary interest in educational movements that urge us to move beyond subject matter knowledge and vocational skills. While mainstream educational policy and formal assessments in most countries remain focused on subject matter, more and more policymakers, educators, scholars, parents, and children are considering broader educational ends (e.g., OECD, 2017). In response to the narrow focus on content standards and decontextualized testing that has dominated the past two decades, and in response to increased depression and alienation among children and youth (Mojtabai et al., 2016), there is a widespread hunger for education that fosters more comprehensive development.

This hunger has generated varied philosophies and practices that we will call, as an umbrella category, “education for well-being”—ranging from “moral education” to “character education” to “whole child education” to “social and emotional learning” to “civic education” to “flourishing” to “21st century skills.” We recognize that “well-being” is not a fully adequate term to cover all these approaches, but there is no perfect descriptor. Some of these movements are contemporary versions

of venerable traditions, while others are more recent creations. Many of them are increasingly visible as countries and schools, educators and parents, scholars and policymakers struggle to move beyond an exclusive focus on subject matter toward educational practices that develop whole people (Miller, 2010). We consider the proliferation of these “well-being” approaches an encouraging sign. It offers educators an opportunity to broaden our goals and help schools foster more comprehensive development. Confronted with this growing set of competing, heterogeneous approaches, however, we need a clearer view of what education for well-being is and what it should do.

How do these movements relate to each other? Are they compatible, or do they rest on different assumptions? How can we make sense of the various approaches to education for well-being such that policymakers and educators can adopt thoughtful, effective approaches to developing whole students? This article organizes the fragmented landscape of education for well-being. Despite the fact that all these approaches move beyond academic subject matter and vocational training, we should not lump the diverse movements together. Contemporary educational approaches to well-being rest on fundamentally different assumptions about human nature and have divergent normative commitments about optimal human development. A full intellectual history of these movements is beyond the scope of this article. We offer instead a heuristic for organizing types of education for well-being, one that uncovers common assumptions and maps out representative approaches. We argue that most approaches to well-being do not engage deeply enough with the central issues captured by our four questions.

Our review of selected movements in education for well-being emerges from a 2-year process in which we interviewed colleagues and reviewed key literature advocating eleven approaches:

- Social and emotional learning
- Whole child education
- Aristotelian virtue-based education
- Character education
- Civic education
- 21st century skills education
- Changemaker education
- Moral education
- Positive education
- Jesuit education
- Indigenous education

We started with interviews of colleagues who have expertise in whole child education, well-being, character/values/moral education, flourishing, religious education, social justice education,

civic education, and 21st century skills. After reading literature they suggested, we engaged in an iterative process of identifying themes, creating clusters and refining our understandings. We reviewed documents, including research published in scholarly and professional journals, books, policy documents, and guides for practitioners. We focused on work published after 2000, although we read selected earlier work. We included widespread movements that emphasize multiple dimensions of human growth beyond cognitive development. In our review, we encountered many other approaches to education for well-being beyond the eleven that we review. Because of limited space, we use these eleven to illustrate the range of well-being movements in contemporary educational scholarship, policy, and practice.

In this article, we describe how divergent approaches to education for well-being rest on fundamentally different assumptions about human nature and human development. We map out alternative visions of how schools should foster young people's well-being and the development of whole people, by proposing four basic questions that we argue all approaches to well-being must address. We hope to help researchers, policymakers, and educators recognize the divergent assumptions made by different movements and interrogate the shortcomings of various alternatives, before they adopt one approach or another.

We argue that any approach to well-being should consider each of the following four questions. These questions emerged from our analysis as we explored core disagreements among the eleven approaches and their assumptions about human nature.

1. Which dimensions of human functioning—intellectual, moral, emotional, relational, spiritual, physical, and so on—does the approach attend to? Is it holistic, emphasizing integration across dimensions?
2. How does the approach envision the relationship between individual development and social change? Does it emphasize one or the other?
3. How does the approach treat instrumental ends—like economic development or happiness—and how does it envision intrinsic ends?
4. How does the approach engage with life purpose, with the question of individuals' roles in a broader moral order?

One could ask other productive questions to illuminate educational approaches to well-being, but we argue that ours capture four key areas of disagreement. In this article, we describe philosophies and practices that answer each of the questions differently, both to illustrate what we mean by the questions and to review eleven contemporary approaches to education for well-being. The rest of the article is organized into sections addressing each question in turn, with descriptions of illustrative approaches for each question. These questions are a tool that scholars, policymakers,

and practitioners can use to uncover key assumptions and to make informed choices among the heterogeneous alternatives. Any comprehensive approach to education that goes beyond academics should engage with issues raised by these four questions.

## Using the questions to map out eleven approaches to education for well-being

### Question one: Dimensions

Our first question for evaluating approaches to education for well-being asks: *Which dimensions of human functioning—intellectual, moral, emotional, relational, spiritual, physical, and so on—does the approach attend to? Is it holistic, emphasizing integration across dimensions?*

Human beings develop emotionally, relationally, cognitively, vocationally, ethically, spiritually, politically, culturally, somatically, and in other ways (Alkire, 2002). These dimensions of development are sometimes separable and sometimes inextricable. All approaches to education for well-being move beyond subject matter knowledge and vocational training as the primary goals of education, but they emphasize different dimensions of human functioning. Many projects focus on one or two discrete dimensions, arguing that educators should add these as educational ends in addition to knowledge and skills. For example, some emphasize ethics—trying to inculcate universal moral dispositions, like respect and compassion, by selecting core values for a school, hanging banners, offering exemplars, and encouraging conversation about ethical questions. Other approaches emphasize emotional functioning, asking students to be more aware of how they are feeling, to display signals of their emotional states, and to manage their emotions more constructively.

Some approaches are more holistic, arguing for interconnections across dimensions of development (Best, 2008; Lerner & Callina, 2014). This is in part an empirical claim that development involves reciprocal relations across various dimensions of human functioning. It is also often a normative claim, arguing that we should encourage young people toward the integration of mutually reinforcing capacities and dispositions across multiple dimensions. Advocates of an integrated view argue that we do not want to replace a narrow focus on knowledge and skills with a narrow focus on civic, bodily, interpersonal, moral, emotional, or other functions. It is crucial to attend to multiple aspects of young people's development, holistic approaches argue, but not as a set of discrete competencies disconnected from each other. Our emotions, politics, morals, and relationships connect with and depend on each other. A comprehensive approach to well-being asks educators to help young people integrate these aspects of themselves.

In this section, we give three examples of approaches to education for well-being, describing the dimensions they emphasize and how they imagine connections across these. Any approach to well-

being emphasizes one or more dimensions of development, and thus we could have chosen many other examples. We have selected these three because they usefully illustrate our first question. Each of the eleven approaches in fact makes assumptions about the issues raised in all four questions. To make the presentation manageable, we offer two or three illustrations for each question. By the end of the article, we will have discussed eleven approaches, each with respect to one of the questions.

Before we begin, it is important to note that we use our questions to map out different approaches, not to dismiss some of them. Any movement that emphasizes dimensions beyond subject matter knowledge and vocational skills helps us envision broader ends for education. With the first question, as with the other three below, reasonable scholars, policymakers, and practitioners disagree on the appropriate answers, and there is value in each of the approaches we review. We do argue, however, that a fully adequate approach will engage with the deeper issues raised by each question. For this first question, for example, we argue that education should both address multiple dimensions of human functioning and also help young people integrate across dimensions.

### *Discrete competencies: Social and emotional learning*

Some approaches to education for well-being emphasize the development of discrete noncognitive competencies. One example is the movement calling for “social and emotional learning” in schools, commonly abbreviated as “SEL.” Over the past two decades, SEL has become an influential approach in the U.S. and Canada. No movement has done more to expand definitions of education beyond subject matter knowledge and skills in these countries. SEL has roots in emotional intelligence theory (Goleman, 1995) and concerns about overcoming the increasing social, emotional, and behavioral challenges among young people (Hoffman, 2009). The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning has played a central role in advocating for the inclusion of social and emotional competencies and in developing productive interventions for educators to adopt (CASEL, n.d.). More recently, the National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development had developed a comprehensive set of recommendations for policymakers and practitioners focused on SEL (Aspen Institute, n.d.). Due to the work of these and other advocacy groups, as of 2018, 25 states in the U.S. had officially adopted SEL competencies in their public-school curriculum frameworks, 14 of these with frameworks that extend from kindergarten through high school (Dusenbury et al., 2018). Many educators and parents have embraced SEL, adopting advocates’ claims that these programs help students “perform better in school, have more positive relationships with peers and adults, and have more positive emotional adjustment and mental health” (Jones & Bouffard, 2012, p. 3).

SEL advocates argue persuasively that schools must supplement their academic standards with support and expectations for developing young people's social and emotional competencies. These include the ability to identify one's own feelings, to accurately perceive emotional states in others, to manage strong emotions constructively, to regulate one's own behavior, to develop empathy, and to establish and sustain relationships (National Scientific Council, n.d.). SEL aims to help students develop core competencies for managing emotions, setting and achieving positive goals, appreciating the others' perspectives, maintaining positive relationships, making responsible decisions, and handling interpersonal situations constructively (Elias, 2014, p. 406). Extensive research has shown that high-quality programs targeting SEL can improve students' emotional self-management, academic engagement, work ethic, attitudes, commitment, and school success (Horner et al., 2010; Jones et al., 2011; Weissberg et al., 2003). Some research has also shown that SEL programs can improve the sense of connectedness and the academic performance of students from diverse groups (Durlak & Weissberg, 2007).

Like any approach to education, SEL makes assumptions about human nature and optimal human development. Advocates for SEL typically formulate their goals in lists of discrete competencies, built around core areas like self-management, self-awareness, responsible decision-making, relationship skills, and social awareness (Durlak et al., 2011; Felton, 2016). In this respect, SEL resembles the existing academic standards that advocates intend to supplement—a list of hierarchically organized, relatively independent competencies that educators should help develop in young people. When they discuss broader goals for human development, advocates for SEL argue that competent people can generate flexible, adaptive responses to demands and capitalize on opportunities in the environment (Weissberg et al., 2003). Enhanced social and emotional skills make such adaptive behavior more likely. By developing social and emotional skills, young people should obtain more successful jobs, more developed skills, higher social engagement, healthier relationships, and happier lives. Most versions of SEL do not offer any integrated account of human flourishing beyond broad generalizations like these, focusing instead on discrete competencies and their benefits.

### *Competencies with some integration: ASCD*

Some approaches go beyond discrete dimensions of human functioning, imagining some integration across the noncognitive aspects they emphasize. One example is “whole child” education. The phrase “whole child” has been used by many scholars and practitioners over the past several decades, with varying intent. Some focus on ethical and spiritual dimensions of development (Richards, 1980), while others emphasize the needs of increasingly diverse children coming into classrooms (Zill et al., 2003). Many have used the phrase to react against the narrow content focus of the U.S. No Child Left Behind law enacted in 2002 (e.g., Miller, 2010; Noddings, 2005),

emphasizing physical, moral, social, emotional, spiritual, and/or aesthetic dimensions of development that were ignored by the narrow curricula and assessments prescribed in that law and in similar policies adopted around the world. We do not have space to review all the approaches that call themselves “whole child,” so we will focus here on the version articulated by ASCD, an organization for professional educators.

In 2007, ASCD launched its Whole Child initiative in an effort to respond to what many saw as the pernicious narrowing of the curriculum and emphasis on achievement tests in the U.S. ASCD partners with educators, families, communities, policymakers, and sister organizations to transform educational institutions into sites for health and learning that help students develop across social, cognitive, bodily, emotional, and civic domains. The organization provides curriculum materials and organizes a network of about 300 “whole child schools” which learn from each other and receive support in their efforts to design learning environments that support more comprehensive development. As of 2020, over 200 school districts worldwide had adopted ASCD’s more comprehensive “Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child” model. ASCD provides a rubric for schools to judge how they can most effectively enact the core principles of healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged students (ASCD, 2013). It also creates programs to implement these ideals in schools. For example, ASCD has a partnership with the Centers for Disease Control that facilitates various forms of youth engagement such as peer education, peer mentoring, youth action, student voice, community service, service-learning, youth organizing, civic engagement, and youth–adult partnerships (ASCD, n.d.-a.; Lewallen et al., 2015).

ASCD’s whole child approach, now in its second decade and renamed “Whole Child for the Whole World,” articulates five goals for young people in school (ASCD, n.d.-b):

- Each student enters school healthy and learns about and practices a healthy lifestyle.
- Each student learns in an environment that is physically and emotionally safe for students and adults.
- Each student is actively engaged in learning and is connected to the school and broader community.
- Each student has access to personalized learning and is supported by qualified, caring adults.
- Each student is challenged academically and prepared for success in college or further study and for employment and participation in a global environment.

In many ways, ASCD offers a list of isolated rather than integrated competencies—with discrete goals like physical health and community engagement—much like advocates of social and emotional learning. But ASCD also argues that policies concerning physical, social, emotional, and



cognitive development should align with and complement those that affect the other dimensions. For example, ASCD supports student engagement because they envision young people as inherently curious and claim that nurturing this curiosity will allow them to realize their potential more fully. One metaphor they use in describing this potential is “weaving together the threads” from different dimensions to foster more holistic, healthy development (Slade & Griffith, 2013, p. 22). In other places, they envision an interrelated set of processes, with the

student at the center [as] the focal point. Surrounding the child/student is a ring that stresses the need for coordination among policy, process, and practice . . . . The outer ring of the WSCC model reflects greater integration and alignment between health and education. (Lewallen et al., 2015, p. 730)

Although they do not cite Bronfenbrenner (1979) explicitly, the ASCD model resembles his “ecological systems theory” in proposing interrelations among the child, the immediate environment, local settings, and broader cultural and social structures. ASCD also includes a global level, envisioning embeddedness in and contributions to the whole world. ASCD and Bronfenbrenner both imagine healthy development involving supportive connections among processes in the various spheres surrounding the child. Discrete competencies do not suffice, they argue, because any dimension of human functioning develops together with and depends on others. Many advocates of education for well-being also emphasize holism in this way, claiming that a

school’s strategic framework must include systemic, instructional, and relational dimensions related to academic, cognitive, physical, social-emotional, ethical, civic, and aesthetic dimensions . . . holistically. We can no longer think success is about putting parts into neat silos, instead of thinking of the integration of the whole . . . Many dimensions of human development, such as the social-emotional, ethical, and civic, are not divorced from cognitive processes such as critical thinking and decision-making, and so integrate and work together synergistically. (Fink & Cohen, 2016, pp. 64–65)

According to these whole child approaches, education for well-being must attend to interrelations across dimensions. “The development of the self cannot be constricted to one period or one subject area, but must be adopted across the whole school” (Slade & Griffith, 2013, p. 27).

### *Another approach to integration: The Jubilee Centre*

The Aristotelian account of virtue-based character education developed by the Jubilee Centre in Birmingham, UK, argues for a different type of integration across dimensions. Jubilee is an “interdisciplinary research centre focusing on character, virtues and values in the interest of human flourishing” (Arthur et al., 2016). The Jubilee Centre has developed a comprehensive account of the virtues needed for individual and social flourishing—based both on empirical research and on normative arguments—and it urges educators and others to develop these virtues among young

people and professionals. The Centre has been particularly successful in Britain, where it has influenced educational policy nationally and locally (Suissa, 2015), but it has also influenced research and practice in many other countries. It provides extensive guidebooks and curriculum materials that have become increasingly influential (Jubilee Centre, n.d.).

The heart of the Jubilee Centre's work is academic, with a team of scholars from the humanities and social sciences doing both basic and applied research on virtues, human flourishing, and human development. Based on Aristotle (1999) and contemporary versions of virtue ethics (e.g., MacIntyre, 1981), Jubilee has developed a model of four kinds of virtues humans ideally possess (Jubilee Centre, 2017). *Intellectual* virtues like critical thinking, curiosity, and reflection facilitate correct understanding of the world. *Moral* virtues like compassion, humility, and integrity allow people to act rightly and treat others appropriately. *Civic* virtues like citizenship, civility, and service facilitate a flourishing collective life. And *performative* virtues like determination, resilience, and teamwork allow individuals to act and grow effectively. The virtues "are understood to be settled (stable and consistent) states of character, concerned with praiseworthy conduct in significant and distinguishable spheres of human life" (Arthur, Kristjánsson, Walker, et al., 2015, p. 9). These virtues make possible individual and collective flourishing. Policymakers and educators should create schools that foster their development.

This account might initially appear to be a list of hierarchically organized, discrete virtues, similar to SEL, or some versions of character education reviewed below. The Jubilee Centre does in fact advocate for the intentional development of various dispositions. But they also argue that developing these virtues alone will not suffice to achieve human flourishing. As both Plato and Aristotle pointed out, virtues can be deployed in bad ways—too much courage leads to foolhardiness and too much temperance leads to miserliness, for example. How does a person know the appropriate amount of a virtue to engage, or how to adjudicate between competing virtues in complex situations? The Centre follows Aristotle in solving this problem with the concept of "phronesis" or practical wisdom. "Practical wisdom is the integrative virtue, developed through experience and critical reflection, which enables us to perceive, know, desire and act with good sense. This includes discerning, deliberative action in situations where virtues collide" (Arthur, Kristjánsson, Cooke et al., 2015, p. 5). The most important virtue for young people to develop is the ability to judge, in a given situation, how to enact virtues in appropriate ways that will enhance individual and collective flourishing. This Aristotelian approach contains a vision of human excellence, one centered around the capacity for discernment and the judicious deployment of virtues in context. Education, then, should aim not just toward a set of discrete competencies but also toward the development of interconnected virtues guided by the overarching virtue of practical wisdom.

The Jubilee Centre's comprehensive set of four types of virtues, coupled with an account of how they can be integrated through practical wisdom, offers one integrated account of human flourishing, and ASCD offers another. Some approaches described below—like Jesuit and Indigenous Education, for example—provide other ways of envisioning holistic human development. Approaches to well-being that foreground noncognitive dimensions of human functioning, whether holistic or not, provide important correctives to the subject matter-based approaches that have dominated recent educational policy and practice. But education for discrete competencies will proceed differently than education toward a comprehensive, integrated vision of human flourishing. It can make sense to focus on discrete dimensions, given particular needs in particular contexts. But a comprehensive approach to well-being must engage with the fact that these dimensions interact with and depend upon each other.

## **Question two: Individual and social approaches**

Our second question asks: *How does the approach envision the relationship between individual development and social change? Does it emphasize one or the other?* Education for well-being often focuses on the individual student. Many approaches argue that educators should address the individual—whether that involves more robust development of discrete dimensions or more holistic development. These individual-focused movements envision more optimal human functioning in terms of ideal human persons and human lives. Such a focus on the individual can be valuable, but there are other approaches that focus more on society. These argue that education for well-being should not focus on an allegedly autonomous individual but must instead envision a collective goal. Some versions of civic education, for example, work toward a vision of democratic society based on equality and deliberation, while other versions of education prepare students to create more just societies.

We argue that both the individual and society are important, because humans develop in context and societies are composed of individuals. We do need more robust visions of optimal individual functioning that go beyond a narrow focus on knowledge and vocational skills. We also need to create more adequate forms of social organization that can facilitate the flourishing of whole people. An exclusive focus on individual development runs the risk of ignoring the contexts that always facilitate that development, while an exclusive focus on social ends can treat individuals as merely derived from social categories. Some approaches avoid these risks by integrating the individual and the social, envisioning a reciprocal relationship between them. Most approaches to education for well-being claim to include both individual and social dimensions, but in fact most emphasize one or the other. In this section, we explore how two approaches address individual development and social change.

### *Developing the whole individual: Character education*

Some approaches to education for well-being begin with the individual, first articulating a vision of how the development of noncognitive dimensions can lead to individual flourishing. We will use character education as our example. Character education is one of the oldest versions of education for well-being, traceable back to the ancient Greeks. The Aristotelian vision of the Jubilee Centre, described above, is one type of character education, but the term “character education” is used by a wide range of movements. The website Character.org defines character as “the intentional effort of living out one’s core values and working on continuous growth through ethical and compassionate decision-making” (Character, n.d.). Pala (2011) describes character education as a “national movement creating schools that foster ethical, responsible, and caring young people by modeling and teaching good character through emphasis on universal values that we all share”—like honesty, fairness, responsibility, caring, and respect (Pala, 2011, p. 23). “Ultimately, the goal of character education . . . is for students to become better people (i.e., for them to develop the positive and moral, social, and emotional competencies and motivations that undergird ethical societies)” (Berkowitz & Bustamante, 2013, p. 12). Lickona et al. (2002) articulate eleven principles of character education, emphasizing that young people must learn to understand, believe in, and act on core human values. Especially in democratic societies, we must educate young people to move beyond self-interest and uphold such values (Berkowitz & Bustamante, 2013; Noddings, 2013).

Because “character education” describes a range of approaches, from an emphasis on discrete personality traits and instrumental ends to comprehensive visions of human flourishing, we must carefully examine the assumptions behind any given movement. Some versions of character education emerge from personality psychology and focus on discrete character attributes like “grit” or empathy—aiming to develop specific dispositions and skills in an approach that resembles social and emotional learning (Character LAB, n.d.; Duckworth, 2016). These approaches generally remain psychological, describing individual character traits like confidence, balance, responsibility, nurturance, altruism, civility, moderation, tolerance, and work ethic (e.g., Peterson, 2006; White, 2016). Social considerations enter character education when advocates describe the attributes that individuals need to flourish in their collective activities. Relationships in character education are typically a context for individual well-being, not the central focus themselves. We can see this in the research methods used in this tradition, which measure properties of individuals and not properties of collectives.

Other versions of character education have begun to develop systematic, theoretically integrated versions of character education that remain psychological but include more robust social components. For example, Richard and Jacqueline Lerner describe how out-of-school organizations can foster “positive youth development” by offering caring, sustained relationships between

young people and adults and activities that provide opportunities to practice key life and leadership skills in authentic contexts (Lerner & Callina, 2014; Lerner et al., 2005; Lerner et al., 2015). This approach to out-of-school programming creates learning environments that foster the development of young people's competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring (Bowers et al., 2015; Lerner et al., 2015; Lerner et al., 2016). The Lerner's work on character education takes place outside of school, but many of the principles have also been applied to school settings (Curran & Wexler, 2017; Flay, 2002; Flay & Allred, 2003; Shinn & Yoshikawa, 2008). Their work moves beyond individual character traits in its vision of mutually constitutive relationships among individual development, interpersonal relationships, and social contexts. More complex forms of character education like this one sometimes integrate individual and social goals, while others focus exclusively on the individual.

### *Preparing for collective life: Civic education*

Even the more sociocentric approaches to character education do not typically emphasize normative commitments to a particular kind of human society. In contrast, some versions of education for well-being begin with a normative vision for social change. These approaches also envision flourishing individuals, but their guiding principles come from a vision of ideal social organization. Civic education, for example, is based on such an ideal. Westheimer and Kahne (2004) argue that all education tacitly presupposes a vision of a good society and that schools should deliberately prepare students to participate in a more ideal society. Advocates for civic education typically envision a fully functioning democratic society that provides representation of and participation by all citizens, embraces divergent points of view, fosters thoughtful deliberation, and facilitates the peaceful resolution of differences. Some versions of civic education focus on subject matter knowledge, claiming that students should learn the history of how our political system developed and how the government functions. Participation in a democratic society clearly requires some such knowledge. More complex versions also include democratic practices and dispositions. The most influential theory of this type comes from Gutmann (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004), centered around her concept of "democratic deliberation." She argues that democracy crucially involves a particular kind of ongoing, reasoned argument—one in which participants must provide "reasons that should be [accessible to and] accepted by free and equal persons" (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004, p. 3). To create and preserve democracy, a society must routinely go beyond ideals and knowledge to engage in deliberative practice when making decisions.

Civic education thus requires content knowledge about democratic history and government, together with knowledge of, dispositions toward, and practice in activities like reasoned deliberation. As Hess (2009, p. 15) argues, "democratic education is a form of civic education that purposely teaches young people how to *do* democracy." Westheimer (2008) describes how the

heavy focus on subject matter knowledge and high-stakes assessments in the 2002 U.S. No Child Left Behind law left no space in American schools for students to grapple with fundamental questions about society and the larger world. Civic education programs themselves overemphasized subject matter, and those that did not usually offered inadequate goals. “The kinds of goals and practices commonly represented in curricula that hope to foster democratic citizenship [unfortunately] usually have more to do with voluntarism, charity, and obedience than with democracy” (Westheimer, 2008, p. 7). Instead of settling for these inadequate approaches, he argues that genuinely civic education should push students to acknowledge difficult collective challenges, critically assess diverse perspectives on those challenges, and engage with each other through reasoned deliberation. In addition to deliberation, Westheimer adds an emphasis on justice—on confronting, deliberating about, and acting to overcome injustices—as a central part of democratic citizenship and goal of civic education (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). Students should practice these key democratic activities in school, to prepare themselves to participate in and strengthen our democratic society.

Most versions of character education focus on individual development, and most versions of civic education focus on social ideals. Almost all accounts claim to include both individual and social components, but only some approaches deeply engage the interdependence of individual development and social contexts. In fact, developmental pathways for individuals only take shape within the affordances of certain contexts, though contexts do not determine individual development (Dewey, 1916; Wortham, 2012). From a scholarly point of view, it is clear that we must acknowledge the complex interrelations between individual development and evolving social systems (Cole, 1996). From a policy point of view, however, it can sometimes make sense to emphasize either individuals or societies. Expanding the goals of education to include individual flourishing beyond subject matter knowledge and vocational skills is a worthwhile enterprise even without a robust vision for social change. Similarly, educating for social transformation and for democracy is also important, even if such an approach does not address how individuals can pursue divergent pathways toward fulfillment. Scholars, educators, and policymakers should examine the relative emphasis on individual and society adopted by various approaches to education for well-being, to understand the assumptions about human nature that underlie each approach. A comprehensive approach to well-being, however, will contain both individual and social ideals and will more deeply address how the two interrelate.

### **Question three: Instrumental and intrinsic ends**

Our third question asks: *How does the approach treat instrumental ends—like economic development or happiness—and how does it envision intrinsic ends?* Many popular justifications for education cite its role in helping students get into a university, get jobs, contribute to the economy,

and gain social status. It is of course important that individuals become self-sufficient and contribute to economic productivity. There is nothing wrong with educating students to get jobs, make money, and become socially respected. But most accounts of human flourishing distinguish between instrumental action toward extrinsic ends—like money, status, and transient happiness—and intrinsically motivated action toward generative ends—like pursuing a true vocation and contributing to positive social transformation. Aristotle (1999) distinguishes between technical rationality, producing something contingent as an external end, and “practical” rationality that aims toward acting well—where the goal of the action is intrinsically related to the person acting and the practice within which he or she acts. Weber (1978) and Habermas (1985) elaborate this distinction, describing how technical rationality aims at an end without considering its intrinsic value while what they call “value” or “communicative” rationality focuses on the inherent value of the end and the nature of the action.

Aristotle, Weber, and Habermas acknowledge that money, jobs, status, transient happiness, and other extrinsic ends are often good things. But they argue that education must be more than an instrument to reach such ends. Human nature and human practices have certain goals and values built in. We are drawn toward particular kinds of relationships, activities, and conditions—for example, ones involving love, friendship, mutual respect, reciprocity, labor, and beauty. These ends vary somewhat across individuals and societies, and they can change over developmental and historical time, but everyone is intrinsically drawn to some ends and every robust human practice has intrinsic ends. Certain kinds of action and certain kinds of development bring us closer to who we are or who we should be, while other kinds of action and development do not. Education for well-being, on this view, must lead young people toward defining and pursuing intrinsically valuable goals. Some approaches to well-being focus mostly on instrumental goals, while others emphasize intrinsic ones. Some combine these types of goals in interesting ways. This section describes three ways in which education for well-being can invoke instrumental and intrinsic goals. Although each of these approaches is valuable, we argue that a fully adequate approach will engage with intrinsic as well as extrinsic ends.

### *Educating for instrumental ends: 21st century skills*

Some approaches to education for well-being argue that we should expand the goals of education beyond subject matter knowledge to help young people reach instrumental ends like money, status, and happiness. One example is the movement for “21st century skills”—“those skills and competencies young people will be required to have in order to be effective workers and citizens in the knowledge society of the 21st century” (Ananiadou & Claro, 2009, p. 6). 21st century skills education responds to a changing, globalized economy that relies heavily on digital technology and contains jobs that “require highly skilled workers faced with increasingly complex and

interactive tasks,” workers who must have skills like “collaboration, communication, digital literacy, citizenship, problem solving, critical thinking, creativity, and productivity” (van Laar et al., 2017, p. 577). These skills are “required” for modern learners in a “different world” (Jukes et al., 2010, p. 1). 21st century skills are intended as supplements to content knowledge—coupled with appropriate knowledge, these skills can prepare young people to succeed in the global economy (McComas, 2014). In a rapidly changing world, with the ongoing evolution of today’s workplaces and intensifying global competition, young people will need such skills to meet complex demands and adapt to the future workplace (Jukes et al., 2010; Rychen & Salganik, 2003).

Advocates of 21st century skills argue explicitly that these skills are needed because young people would otherwise not be able to compete in the economy of the future. “Today’s labour force has to be equipped with the set of skills and competencies which are suited to the knowledge economies” (Ananiadou & Claro, 2009, p. 5). Schools should foster the development of these skills because they will help young people get jobs and earn higher incomes. We agree with these advocates that economic self-sufficiency is crucial. But we should also ask whether economic success, or other instrumental ends like status and transient happiness, can stand on their own as the fundamental educational goals. We describe in this article various approaches to well-being that argue for intrinsic ends—including character education, whole child education, civic education, multicultural education, moral education, Jesuit education, and Indigenous education. We acknowledge, however, that any educational system which does not prepare young people to support themselves economically has failed them, because many other aspects of human flourishing cannot be achieved without sufficient income, self-esteem, and happiness.

Advocates of 21st century skills sometimes include other goals—as in the brief mention of “citizens” that appears in the quote from Ananiadou and Claro (2009) above. Mentions of citizenship, collaboration, and similar ends by advocates of 21st century skills typically refer to how these skills can foster career success. By learning to collaborate with others, for example, young people will become more employable and contribute to higher functioning workplaces. But the pursuit of instrumental goals does not necessarily rule out intrinsic goals. One could advocate 21st century skills because of their instrumental value in helping young people toward economic success, while at the same time also supporting intrinsic goals related to citizenship in a democratic society or to core universal virtues. Such a combination of extrinsic and intrinsic, however, must address the risk that emphasizing extrinsic goals can undermine intrinsic ones (Schwartz, 1986). One classic study showed how children stopped doing intrinsically rewarding activities once they started receiving extrinsic rewards for doing them (Lepper et al., 1973), concluding that the introduction of extrinsic rewards can ruin the pursuit of intrinsic ends. Education that tries to sustain both extrinsic and intrinsic ends can struggle to sustain students’ pursuit of intrinsically valuable activities.



### *Combining extrinsic rewards and intrinsic ends: Ashoka changemaker education*

One approach that combines extrinsic and intrinsic goals is “Changemaker Education,” advocated by the Ashoka Foundation. As is also true for ASCD’s whole child approach, there is to date little scholarly research that describes the practices or documents the effects of Changemaker Education, but it provides an interesting example to explore the relation between intrinsic and extrinsic ends. Ashoka is a nonprofit organization that creates social change by identifying and empowering “social entrepreneurs,” innovators who address social problems through entrepreneurial techniques, “whose system-changing innovations solve deep-rooted social problems” (Ashoka, n.d.). Ashoka began as an organization that identified talented Fellows and provided them with seed funding and mentoring to accelerate their social entrepreneurial projects. In 2006, the organization’s founder reported that “between 49 and 60 percent of those elected by Ashoka have changed national policy within five years of their start-up-stage election” (Drayton, 2006, p. 84). Two had become Nobel Laureates. Today Ashoka has over 3,500 Fellows who work in over 90 countries. In recent years, Ashoka has expanded its work by partnering with universities and helping to create “Changemaker Schools.” These schools aim to help young people develop the skills and dispositions to become the kinds of changemakers exemplified by Ashoka Fellows—people with the optimism, the energy, the creativity, and the commitment to build innovative solutions to social problems.

Ashoka combines the extrinsic and the intrinsic in a unique way. It foregrounds entrepreneurial qualities and the power of an individual with talent and drive to solve problems and achieve personal success. Ashoka presupposes a familiar, heroic vision of an entrepreneur—an individual who has ideas for change as well as the drive and savvy to make these ideas work and achieve success in the real world. But Ashoka is also committed to the idea that entrepreneurship should be harnessed to create positive social change and serve the disadvantaged. Social entrepreneurs mobilize entrepreneurial strengths to accomplish social improvement. In an analysis of the language used by Ashoka, Alden et al. (2014) argue that

phrases such as ‘Believe in . . .,’ ‘Take initiative . . .,’ ‘Practice empathy . . .’ all point to an individual’s capacity. Whereas phrases such as ‘. . .make positive changes in society,’ ‘. . .make a difference,’ ‘bring about innovative change’ imply a social dimension. The dual-focus on the personal and the social does not imply a dichotomous relationship. Inherent in these principles is the reflexive and overlapping nature of developing the individual’s capacity through active social engagement (e.g. ‘engage in another person’s world,’ ‘work in groups.’). (2014, p. 2)

Ashoka believes in the traditional model of talented, driven entrepreneurs who innovate and attain individual success. But they also believe in harnessing that entrepreneurial effort toward positive social change.

Changemaker Schools work to develop the kinds of people who can act like Ashoka Fellows. They simultaneously teach “changemaking and empathy” (De Sio, 2015). Young people are given a sense of agency and the skills to be creative and effective, and as changemakers they are prepared for innovation, effort, and success. Unlike earlier eras that involved mass production, success in the contemporary world demands entrepreneurial skills (De Sio, 2016). But Ashoka schools simultaneously teach empathy and encourage students to use their talents in service of others. Ashoka’s Changemaker Schools have from the beginning focused on building empathy. They sometimes call their approach “empathy education” and work with partner schools in “identifying and sharing stories, tools, and how-to’s that can help educators everywhere put empathy into practice” (White, 2012). Empathy is a “foundational skill” in a rapidly changing world that demands collaboration (De Sio, 2015). Ashoka argues that we need Changemaker Schools for both extrinsic and intrinsic reasons. Sometimes, like advocates for 21st century skills, they cite young people’s need to be entrepreneurial and succeed in the changing economy, because changemaking and empathy are “mission-critical for the emerging changemaker economy” (De Sio, 2016). At other times, they cite intrinsic human imperatives to care for others and work toward more just societies. In Ashoka’s vision, entrepreneurship and empathy complement each other as the crucial dispositions of the “changemaker” that all students should become.

### *Pursuing intrinsically valuable ends: Moral education*

If one interprets the term “moral” in a broad enough sense—to encompass dispositions and practices that lead to a good, flourishing life—then several of the other approaches reviewed in this article would qualify as “moral education.” Comprehensive versions of character education, like Aristotelian ones focused on virtues as described by the Jubilee Centre, for example, are one type of moral education. Civic, Jesuit, and Indigenous approaches have explicit moral components as well. We limit our use of the term here to educational projects that explicitly call themselves “moral education.” Schuitema et al. (2008), for example, review what they describe as a decade of renewed interest in moral education that began in the 1990s. Nucci et al. (2014) provide an entire *Handbook of Moral and Character Education*, and the *Journal of Moral Education* has been published since 1971.

Accounts of moral education vary. According to Schuitema et al. (2008, p. 70), “moral education refers to the deliberate teaching of particular values, attitudes, and dispositions to stimulate the prosocial and moral development of students.” This is a broad account, aiming to develop various dimensions of ethical competence. Nucci et al. (2014) limit the term “moral education” to the development of moral reasoning and judgment, using “character education” to refer to the development of individual virtues. Noddings (2005, 2010, 2014) has been an influential advocate of moral education, and she provides a third approach, arguing for a “care ethics” (Noddings & Slote, 2003).

From the perspective of care ethics, the primary aim of moral education is to produce people who will engage successfully in caring relations. We want our students to be prepared to care for those they encounter directly and to care about the suffering of people at a distance. (Noddings, 2010, p. 394)

She argues that educators can encourage the development of caring students if

moral education . . . concentrates on the construction of a moral climate for education . . . in which it is both desirable and possible to be good. Within such a structure, we provide an education designed to produce moral people through modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation. (2014, p. 172)

Moral education on this view involves creating a school climate that encourages moral behavior and socializes students into ethical practices. These programs argue that students should, for example, engage in dialogue with each other about disagreements, treating each other with respect and care. Furthermore, they suggest that schools should not be organized around competition for grades but instead around cooperation and care. Models of caring, ethical individuals should be provided throughout the curriculum.

Supporters of moral education typically argue that schools must pursue ends that are intrinsically related to human flourishing. Whether moral education focuses on virtues and moral dispositions, on moral reasoning, or on caring relationships and practices, advocates presuppose an account of how humans ideally act with respect to others. Moral education aims to develop students who approximate this intrinsic goal. One could argue for ethical behavior because it will help more children succeed academically, get better jobs, and contribute to the national economy. Whether or not ethical behavior reliably leads to career success and economic flourishing, however, moral education does not advocate ethical action in order to accomplish extrinsic rewards. Advocates of moral education believe that humans and their societies inherently presuppose certain principles, dispositions, and practices. Human flourish when they embody virtues, reason ethically, and act with care for others. Moral education must help develop young people who will internalize these dispositions and carry on human life according to these inherent values.

We acknowledge that extrinsic rewards have a place both in human life and in education. All humans act instrumentally much of the time, and some extrinsic ends are necessary. Education must prepare young people for a world in which instrumental action is often required. But we would argue, following most approaches to ethics, that a fully adequate approach to human well-being must also include intrinsic ends. To flourish, young people must be guided to pursue ends that connect to something inherent in their natures. Reasonable people can have divergent beliefs about what count as intrinsic ends and human nature, but a comprehensive approach to education for well-being must include intrinsic ends of some kind.

## Question four: Life purpose and meaning

Our fourth and final question deals with ultimate purpose, asking: *How does the approach engage with life purpose, with the question of individuals' roles in a broader moral order?* Damon defines purpose as “a stable and generalized intention to accomplish something that is at the same time meaningful to the self and consequential for the world beyond the self” (2009, p. 33). We expand this definition to include a sense of being called to participate in a larger moral order. Some versions of education for well-being ask young people to develop a sense of purpose. This means, first, asking young people to recognize a more ideal state of the world and the appropriate role of the self in that world. Students might be drawn toward an ecological vision of harmony with nature, or a political vision of structures and practices that foster justice and dialogue, or a relational vision of responsibility for the other, or a religious vision of a divinely ordained order, or some other account of how the world is meant to be. Educating young people to have a sense of purpose means, second, asking them to figure out how they can bring themselves and others closer to that ideal. This does not involve indoctrination. It is not our place as educators in a heterogeneous society to tell young people what vision of the moral order they should adopt. But approaches that emphasize purpose demand that young people ask questions about what the world needs them to do, while leaving it up to them to determine what vision of a larger moral order they will choose to embrace.

Many worthwhile approaches to well-being do not involve any deep sense of purpose. Educators can help young people become emotionally healthy, civically engaged, and morally reflective, for example, without necessarily asking them to inquire about the purpose of their lives. Forms of education for well-being that pursue worthwhile ends without addressing questions of purpose can usefully push us beyond schooling focused on knowledge and skills. Furthermore, any educational philosophy at least tacitly presupposes some vision of a worthwhile human life, and such visions can provide a sense of purpose for individuals. Some approaches nonetheless engage questions of purpose more robustly than others. We argue that a comprehensive approach to well-being must engage with questions of purpose. Without some commitment to and reflection on larger purpose, any approach to education for well-being will be truncated. Furthermore, as we know from Damon (2009) and others, young people struggle with questions of purpose as a developmental challenge, and educators should provide opportunities for them to engage with these issues.

### *Meaning as one desirable outcome: Positive education*

“Positive education” is an approach derived from Seligman’s “positive psychology” (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Seligman founded positive psychology to counteract the disease and deficit focus of much psychology—which often emphasizes treating problems instead of fostering strengths. He argues that psychology should study optimal human functioning and create methods

to help people build on their strengths, instead of focusing on pathology and weaknesses. This movement has influenced both the academic discipline and popular culture. “Positive education” is a more recent movement within positive psychology, applying the principles to foster positive development in schools (Norrish et al., 2013; Peterson, 2006; Seligman et al., 2009). Positive education has been implemented in more than a dozen countries around the world (Seligman & Adler, 2018), though its spread in the U.S. has been uneven (White, 2016).

In its contemporary version, positive psychology focuses on Seligman’s PERMA model—encouraging positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishments (PERMA, n.d.; Seligman, 2011). Positive education encourages educators to foster well-being in each of these domains, while sometimes adding health as a sixth. Some versions of positive education have been criticized for a focus on creating positive emotions, on fostering transient happiness and neglecting more enduring flourishing (Pennock, 2015). More recent work, however, has come to emphasize a deeper sense of well-being. At least some versions of positive education aim to help students both “feel good” and “do good” (Huppert & So, 2013). Based on research into best practices for creating these positive dimensions of students’ lives, positive education builds on students’ strengths to encourage development in the five key areas Seligman summarizes with the acronym PERMA. Adler (2016) provides one example of how this can work. He describes a curriculum he developed with colleagues in Bhutan, one designed to develop gratitude, empathy, mindfulness, and other life skills that positive psychologists claim increase well-being. His research shows that students receiving this positive education curriculum, as opposed to a control group, experienced significantly greater well-being as well as higher academic achievement.

According to positive psychology and positive education, “meaning” is one among several positive outcomes that educators should strive for. Positive psychologists have studied how meaning differs from more transient happiness, and they provide guidelines for how to foster a sense of meaning (Baumeister et al., 2013).

The meaningful life, then, has four properties. It has purposes that guide actions from present and past into the future, lending it direction. It has values that enable us to judge what is good and bad; and, in particular, that allow us to justify our actions and strivings as good. It is marked by efficacy, in which our actions make a positive contribution towards realising our goals and values. And it provides a basis for regarding ourselves in a positive light, as good and worthy people. (Baumeister, 2013)

Positive psychology provides useful analyses of these various dimensions of meaning, but the approach does not offer an integrated vision of meaning and purpose that describes how they relate to a larger moral order. Positive education’s more disaggregated vision of meaning differs from the two other approaches we turn to next—both of which base a sense of purpose in an integrated, normative view of the universe and both of which consider purpose more important than other educational goals.

### *Religious education toward purpose: Jesuit education*

Some approaches to education for well-being that engage students with questions about purpose stem from religious traditions concerned with ultimate realities. We will use Jesuit education as our example. Jesuit education is an approach that emerged in the late 16th century and has been developed by the Catholic religious order of Jesuit priests over almost 500 years. Its guiding document until recently was the *Ratio Studiorum*, perhaps the first international curriculum in modern history (Pavur, 2017). Presently, Jesuit education is practiced in 27 universities and 76 schools in the U.S. and 205 universities and 845 schools worldwide (Educate Magis, n.d.). Jesuit education has various components—including an emphasis on holism and intrinsic ends—but here we describe its emphasis on questions of purpose.

Jesuit education arose in the context of early modernity with the goal of training Christian youth to commit to the common good in public and civic matters (O'Malley, 2015). At its core is Jesuit spirituality, a distinctive way of recognizing the presence of the divine in everyday realities, calling everyone to cooperate in building a more just and loving world. To educate from this perspective, Jesuits created a humanistic curriculum in which secular works of literature, philosophy, and other humanities were used as a means to engage young people in conversations about meaning and purpose, as well as for learning to value humanity and human striving across times and places. Jesuits also promoted an experiential approach to learning through out-of-school experiences, including both individual and collective reflection on these experiences. In recent decades, this approach has evolved toward a deeper commitment to works of justice and reconciliation, which Jesuits understand as central to God's will in this historical moment. The centuries-old humanistic curriculum and out-of-school experiences have been adapted to address pressing issues in contemporary culture and to address marginalization and injustice in various contexts.

For the Jesuit tradition, the mainstream educational policy focus on subject matter and cognitive development results in “a disconnect between the classroom and the other parts of students' lives” (Boston College, 2007, p. 1). In contrast, Jesuit education emphasizes *cura personalis*, care for the whole person. This means attention to developing the mind, heart, and spirit in concert, within a community. Jesuit education is holistic, oriented to both the individual and society and toward intrinsic ends. In Jesuit schools, academic work is often interconnected with projects on and reflections about the implications the subject matter has for students' understanding of and development toward a larger purpose. Jesuits favor retreats of several days, in which students have space to discern their most authentic desires. Even though Jesuit education is Catholic, it does not aim to convert students. Jesuit schools and universities

welcome students from all faiths, as well as those who define themselves as secular. Jesuit education does demand, however, that all students explore questions of purpose and transcendence. It asks every student to engage in “discernment,” the process of discovering what the world needs and what they are called to do.

### *Non-Western education for purpose: Indigenous education*

Indigenous people have been displaced from their lands, and in most cases their cultures and languages have been marginalized or eradicated by colonialism. Education played a central role in these colonial projects (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2002; Oppelt, 1990). “One of the main avenues for subjugating Indigenous peoples to colonial culture and governance has been through the imposition of education . . . that denies the legitimacy of thought, lifestyles, religions, and languages of First Nations people” (Ball, 2004, p. 457). In response, Indigenous people have asserted control over their children’s education as a central component of their sovereignty and self-determination (Brayboy et al., 2015; Grant & Gillespie, 1993). “Native experiences and perspectives—both resistance to imposed education and the creation of alternative models—reveal the liberating power of choice and the importance of self-determination” (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006, p. 5). Indigenous education must be understood as a response to the history of colonialism that makes Indigenous children more than just another “minority” group (Brayboy et al., 2015). Indigenous education concerns the establishment of sovereignty for a people as well as the assertion of individual students’ rights.

Indigenous education is a means of “reinforcing Aboriginal identity, instilling the values, attitudes and behaviours that give expression to Aboriginal cultures” (Ball, 2004, p. 453). It enacts the right of Indigenous people to maintain their languages and cultural traditions, however they may envision these (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008). Brayboy and Maughan (2009) argue that “Indigenous epistemologies,” different fundamental beliefs about knowledge and learning, require different approaches to education. Hampton (1988), for example, argues that Indigenous education should be collective, not individualist—it should focus on service to and respect for others and emphasize contributions to the community more than competition. Hampton also argues that Indigenous education should be spiritual, envisioning connections among the people, their land, and the spiritual world. To help their children develop a sense of meaning and purpose in the contemporary world, Indigenous educators must build on their distinctive ways of knowing and help them appreciate their interconnectedness with others and the spiritual world (Singh & Reyhner, 2013). From this perspective, purpose involves helping young people place themselves within the history of their people and the meaningful universe as they construe it.

Positive psychologists, Jesuits, and Indigenous educators all want young people to develop a sense of purpose, but they envision this in different ways. Positive educators consider meaning one

of several desirable outcomes to maximize well-being, while Jesuit and Indigenous educators offer more integrated accounts of what it means to lead a purposeful life. Most approaches to well-being do not address purpose explicitly. It is nonetheless important for advocates of education for well-being to consider whether attention to purpose might enrich their approaches and fit their contexts. We would argue that all humans have spiritual needs, whether they subscribe to an organized religion or not. A comprehensive approach to well-being should engage with issues of purpose.

## Discussion

In recent years, many around the world have become disenchanted with a narrow educational focus on subject matter knowledge and vocational skills. In response, various approaches to “education for well-being” have been developed or revitalized. These proliferating movements reflect a welcome desire among educators, students, scholars, parents, and policymakers to move beyond narrow academic and vocational goals. It might be tempting simply to adopt one or another of these approaches, because they all facilitate broader visions of education beyond mere academic knowledge. We argue, however, that scholars, policymakers, and educators must not simply pick one of these approaches and expect that they have addressed the need to move beyond narrow academic outcomes. Instead, first, we must examine the breadth of available approaches and the divergent assumptions that underlie them. As illustrated by the eleven approaches reviewed above, movements in education for well-being vary widely in their views of human nature, in their visions of a good life, and in their prescriptions for educational practice. We must approach the cacophony of heterogeneous approaches—many of which hope to brand themselves as *the* key exemplar of the entire movement—by examining their underlying assumptions and comparing them to divergent alternatives. Second, we must acknowledge the depth of disagreement among the approaches. Choosing an approach to education for well-being is not a technical matter of selecting the most efficient means to universally accepted ends. Movements vary in their beliefs about whether humans are bundles of discrete competencies or integrated wholes, in their beliefs about the appropriate relation between individuals and society, in their embrace of instrumental and intrinsic ends, and in their commitment to an overarching purpose for human life. We encourage scholars, policymakers, and educators to recognize that approaches to education for well-being are divergent, to consider a broad range of alternatives before adopting any approach, and to examine the conflicting assumptions made by various approaches before making a choice. Our four questions can be used to facilitate this examination.

We also encourage scholars, policymakers, and educators to explore how an approach’s answers to the four questions rest on an underlying vision of the good life. We have reviewed each of the eleven approaches while focusing on only one of the questions, for clarity of exposition. But any approach to education for well-being makes assumptions about each of the four questions.



When considering an approach, scholars, policymakers, and practitioners should reflect on the whole set of assumptions underlying that approach. Some approaches, for example, adopt market metaphors, seeing humans as competing for resources and striving to maximize their own satisfaction. From such a perspective, “education is viewed primarily as a mechanism for producing ‘human capital’ so as to ‘service’ and ‘compete’ in the global economy” (Loh & Hu, 2014). Market-based movements tend to be individualistic and they tend to emphasize discrete competencies and extrinsic goals, without attending to purpose. Other approaches emphasize the spiritual, imagining humans as connected to a meaningful normative order through which they can gain fulfillment—whether their vision of that order is primarily ecological, relational, social, or divine. Spiritual movements tend to emphasize intrinsic goals, holism, and purpose. Other approaches emphasize social cohesion, therapeutic adjustment, or social justice. In reflecting on each version of education for well-being, it can be useful for scholars, policymakers, and practitioners to consider whether they are drawn to one or another of these underlying worldviews.

We have argued that a comprehensive approach to education that moves beyond subject matter and vocational training will engage with each of our four questions. Any educational movement beyond narrow academics is a step in the right direction, and we do not condemn any of the approaches reviewed here. But we urge scholars, policymakers, and practitioners to consider how comprehensive well-being requires at least these four components: the development of multiple dimensions of human functioning and integration across these, such that young people have an opportunity to become more whole; simultaneous engagement with individual and social ideals, such that individuals have an opportunity to flourish and live respectfully with others; the embrace of intrinsic as well as extrinsic goals, such that young people have space to pursue truly worthwhile ends; and the development of a larger sense of purpose, so that young people have an opportunity to discern and pursue a calling. These four commitments will allow educators to move beyond more superficial, fragmented approaches to well-being.


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