Beyond Well-being: The Quest for Wholeness and Purpose in Education

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Abstract

Purpose: This article develops a critique of contemporary understandings and practices related to well-being in education. It proposes a fuller development of wholeness and purpose that supplements and goes beyond the new well-being agenda.

Design/Approach/Methods: This article draws upon a document analysis of conceptual and policy frameworks related to well-being. It builds its critique of well-being with reference to a qualitative study consisting of 222 interviews with educators in the Canadian province of Ontario with regard to their understandings of well-being. It includes references to the research and development work in the U.S., Germany, and Norway.

Findings: The inclusion of well-being in policy agendas is an important step forward in the field of educational change, but this indication of progress is in danger of being reified through simplistic understandings of life satisfaction and other frameworks that evade the complexity of human development. Wholeness and purpose are concepts that include but also go beyond well-being that should be addressed by educators.

Originality/Value: Most of the criticisms of the new well-being agenda in educational policies and research simply assume its status as a *summum bonum* for human development. This essay acknowledges the importance of well-being but expands beyond it to define wholeness and

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purpose as an alternative set of constructs with their own independent integrity that should not simply be subsumed into current well-being agendas.

To a degree unimaginable as recently as a quarter century ago, educational reform and school improvement efforts have become globalized. For many policymakers, consensus has attained on what knowledge matters most, how it should be measured, and how countries should compare their progress with one another. As a result, new global "reference societies" (Bendix, 1978, p. 292) have emerged, such as Finland (Sahlberg, 2017), Singapore (Ng, 2017), China (Sato, 2017), and Canada (Campbell et al., 2017). Each of these has developed a roster of prominent advocates to tout their successes on international large-scale assessments and to exhort others to follow their example.

This transformation of educational discourse has had a number of consequences. It has been possible for educators around the world to learn how the Finns combine equity and achievement, how Singapore has developed sophisticated career ladders for educators so that they always are getting better at their craft, how the Chinese focus on lesson study to a degree unparalleled elsewhere, and how the Canadians have created a truly multicultural democracy with essentially no centralized national control of education that nonetheless excels on international large-scale assessments and promotes equity at the same time. Prior to the existence of tests like the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), many observers assumed that the U.S., with its unparalleled technological prowess, would have been the foremost global leader in education. The U.S., however, has struggled to demonstrate academic excellence and equitable outcomes on such tests. This has then created a new policy space in which other jurisdictions, with a wide variety of practices, have been able to legitimize their achievements and their claims for attention.

This transformation of education has not been without critics (Adamson et al., 2016). Psychometricians (Koretz, 2017; Wuttke, 2007; Zhao, 2018) have contended that the tests are culturally and linguistically biased, that samples are not representative across jurisdictions, and that the interpretations of the tests by their most prominent advocates go beyond what the data reveal. A number of scholars (Abrams, 2016; Hopmann, 2007) have argued that the tests lead school systems to narrow their curricula to focus on tested subjects; as a consequence, the legitimate aspirations of the public for a broad and humanistic education have been thwarted. Still others (Sellar et al., 2017;

Shirley, 2017) have noted that reports by the OECD, the World Bank, and the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (which administers TIMSS) never go through processes of blind peer review which are essential for academically rigorous research.

None of these criticisms appeared to have done much to dent the popularity of these tests—until recently. In 2016, the OECD published its first study of child well-being to accompany the publication of the usual PISA test results. These showed that high-achieving Korea and Japan ranked near the bottom in child well-being, as did the four jurisdictions in the People's Republic of China that were assessed. Norway, firmly in the middle of the PISA academic rankings, was at the top. Child well-being was only average in the highly touted reference societies of Canada and Singapore.

The power point slide deck posted online by Andreas Schleicher of the OECD (2017, Slide Number 5) reporting these findings stated that "Life Satisfaction and Student Performance Can Go Together." A more accurate title might have been "Life Satisfaction Negatively Related to Student Performance." Such a title could have created an opening for a more complex and nuanced exploration of the aims of education, which in turn, could have relativized the merits of both life satisfaction and student performance.

What possibly could be wrong with life satisfaction—which in the 2016 OECD report, is equivalent with well-being—as an aim of education? One issue could be that some of the young people who stated that they were not satisfied with their lives experience their dissatisfaction as a catalyst that drives them forward. Their dissatisfaction could push them to achieve their personal best in the long term, even if in the short term they have to make some sacrifices. It also could be the case that some of those with high levels of life satisfaction are complacent and passive when they should activate themselves in pursuit of a worthy goal.

Could it be that a certain amount of creative tension and spirited disagreement are necessary to improve the human condition? If this is so, an uncritical pursuit of well-being as defined through the lens of "life satisfaction" needs to be problematized rather than reified. In fact, rather than promoting well-being as life satisfaction, it might be that schools should encourage the young to be critical thinkers who are keen to shape a better world.

Consider the case of one of the 20th centuries as most inspirational social activists. In Martin Luther King's famous 1963 "I Have a Dream" speech at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC, he said, "No, we are not satisfied, and we will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream." The phrase "justice rolls down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream" is a direct quote from the Old Testament prophet of Amos (5:24). *Nota bene*: the given passage is about a moral imperative *against* life satisfaction in contexts of injustice.

By the time of the March on Washington, King and his fellow activists in the Civil Rights Movement had engaged in acts of civil disobedience that repeatedly had led to their arrests. Their

sense of righteous indignation was rooted in a religious tradition of prophecy and protest. Absent that living tradition—and the holistic understanding of the human personality it conveys—it is impossible to imagine the "I Have a Dream" speech.

Such questions open up three lines of interpretation. First, while we should acknowledge the importance of well-being, we also should question how it is being defined in many official documents and government policies. Why is it, at this particular historical conjuncture, that well-being is receiving so much attention and becoming a matter of educational policy around the world? While part of the explanation might be that systems are trying to balance out the negative aspects of the single-minded focus on raising academic achievement that has been prevalent in national policies in recent decades, is this the entire explanation, or is it the case that other forces are at work as well? What are some of the benefits of the new attention being devoted to well-being—and what could be some negative dimensions to which we should be alert?

Second, what is the construct of the self that is being encouraged to be well? As the companion essay in this Special Issue of the *ECNU Review of Education* by Stanton Wortham and his colleagues illustrates, there are many competing definitions of human potential that can be found in school reform movements around the world today. In general, these emphasize positive attributes, like emotional self-awareness, empathy, and creativity. But could there be some merits in more negatively inflected emotions like anger, guilt, and shame, when it is appropriate to judge oneself critically after acting unfairly, for example? If so, then can we ensure that our concept of well-being is expansive enough to acknowledge these other kinds of emotionality and their role in promoting the development of individuals with a mature sense of social conscience?

The third line of interpretation has to do with the quest for the purpose and the role of meaning-making in the human condition. We currently are living in an age of growing precarious labor (Blustein, 2019). Global flows of information, media, people, finances, and ideas (Appadurai, 1996) have many blessings, but they do not provide people with a sense of stability about which they can organize their lives. In the U.S., a rising generation reports a striking decline in belief in the virtues of patriotism or of religious belief, and less than a third of the young are interested in starting families (NBC/Wall Street Journal, 2019). Instead, identity formation is now being expressed increasingly through the lens of popular culture—through attachments to social media platforms, video games, music groups, or fashions. Into this mix are added ethnic, linguistic, racial, or gendered markers of various forms that shift into the foregrounds or backgrounds of our lives depending upon our evolving contexts and aspirations. The coronavirus epidemic has added yet another, unexpected complexity to the quest for meaning and purpose, as the value of old forms of schooling and work are thrown into question.

All of these phenomena provide new points of departure for educators to work with our students to help them discover a fulfilling sense of purpose for their lives. But too much of the research on

purpose is value-neutral about the kinds of purposes the young can select from. The stark reality is that populations in many nations are retreating into insular perspectives that mean that less attention is given to worthy aims such as those espoused by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations, for example. When only markets connect people across countries, a wealth of opportunities for the release of human potential by attaining the SDGs is lost.

In this interpretive essay, I argue that the young should be invited to develop a sense of wholeness and purpose by coming together across the world in pursuit of the common good as never before. I begin by referencing recent research (Shirley et al., 2020) conducted in Ontario, Canada, where student well-being is being addressed in schools as part of a recent policy change. This research found that well-being is understood and developed in schools as a separate initiative from schooling's cognitive aims. Further investigation reveals that the bifurcation of academics from well-being can be found in the accountability and high-stakes testing regimes implemented in many schools around the world beginning as far back as the 1980s.

This schism can be overcome by educators. By bringing issues of wholeness and purpose back into the center of contemporary school improvement deliberations, it is possible to develop models of education that go deeper and are more rewarding than has been attainable in the recent past. I provide three research-based strategies for advancing in this direction. Two of these are straight-forward and can be implemented in schools rapidly and efficiently. The third requires a broader system-level transformation of schools across the three "message systems" of pedagogy, curricula, and assessment (Bernstein, 1975).

Questioning well-being

In 2014, the Ontario Ministry of Education in Canada introduced a new policy agenda that for the first time included well-being as one of its four strategic directions for the province (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014). In research (2018, 2019) that Andy Hargreaves and I subsequently conducted in 10 school districts in Ontario, we found that schools energetically were pursuing the new well-being agenda. They were teaching students how to self-regulate their emotions by becoming better at identifying and controlling them; they had introduced breathing exercises that students could use when they were stressed or distracted; and they had created peer groups of students and even new apps to support one another when they were struggling with depression or anxiety. Schools were providing support services for teachers, also, in the form of online classes in meditation or yoga, that they could access when the workload was too heavy or parental or administrative expectations were too high for them to reasonably fulfill. On the whole, most of these programs were popular and well-regarded by students and teachers alike.

At the same time, we also found a number of patterns that recurred across the 10 school districts when it came to their well-being programs. First, most of the well-being programs focused on

attaining a state of quiescence that could fit comfortably into the preexisting rules and routines of schools. Elementary school students learned to go to "calming areas" when they needed to settle down, where they could read a book of their choice or draw, for example. High school students had offerings of extracurricular clubs focusing on healthy lifestyle choices. In general, these kinds of programs did not require any deeper considerations about changing the underlying structure of schooling. More energetic forms of well-being—for example, the "right to play" codified in the International Declaration of the Rights of the Child and embedded in some school systems in the Nordic countries—were not conceptualized as part of well-being.

Second, it became clear from our interviews that Ontario's testing regime created a great deal of stress for the students and their educators. Third-grade, sixth-grade, and ninth-grade teachers reported far greater academic press and much less time for innovative activities or project-based learning than educators in other parts of the school system. Especially at those grade levels, it seemed that the well-being agenda was being used to manage stress created by the system, rather than to ameliorate the system that was causing ill-being in the first place.

Third, there was a division among mental health counselors in the schools on the one hand and teachers and administrators on the other with regard to new technologies in the lives of young people today. Many of the schools participated in an international change network that endeavors to capitalize upon new digital pedagogies to promote deeper learning. Their teachers reported excitement about the role of new technologies in their classes, and their students demonstrated skill in using digital tools. Focus group interviews with mental health counselors, however, demonstrated numerous negative side effects in the lives of their students. They said that their students told them that they found it hard to stay away from their cell phones for long. Rather than providing students with a technology-free zone in which students would experience other ways of learning, schools were actively pushing new technologies on them.

Our Ontario data were rich and variegated, so the description provided here necessarily is brief and simplified. What it all boiled down to in regard to well-being was that a particular way of understanding well-being was being enacted in schools. With the best of intentions, educators were promoting a way of viewing well-being that fit comfortably with the preexisting testing regime in schools and that also was being crafted to appeal to the ubiquitous presence of new technologies in the lives of the young.

What was missing from this approach? Well-being was not being developed to promote critical ways of thinking about the world, or to impart to the young moral lessons that could help with their overall socialization. Without doubt, the new well-being agenda was providing young people with tools that they could use to manage unhealthy levels of stress and to maintain positive attitudes. This is of value in and of itself. Nonetheless, it must be acknowledged that the new well-being programs had socially conformist dimensions that were being brought into line

with the conservative nature of schools as agents of enculturation and adaptation to the larger society.

To summarize the argument thus far: First, well-being should be about more than calmness. Second, schools should be about more than tests. Third, life should be about more than technology. The major issue with each of these points must be that one sidedness of any kind undermines some of the core moral purposes of education.

Beyond well-being: Wholeness

There could be multiple rejoinders to each of the criticisms advanced in the preceding section. Schools offer students physical education courses that provide opportunities for spirited competition, usually on teams that develop their social skills. Tests generate important information on students' cognitive development to educators and the public for accountability purposes. Technology provides a world of information to students on the most disparate subjects, and, from the user's perspective, it does so for free, in a way that previous generations scarcely could have dreamed of. Given these considerations, is it unfair to say that today's schools are offering students a one-sided education that focuses on students' academic development excessively?

Elsewhere (Shirley, 2011, 2017) I have written about the many political pressures that have led educators to narrow the curriculum to better prepare students for tests and the ways that new technologies are often used to reinforce rather than overturn traditional grammars of schooling. For reasons of brevity here I will describe three ways in which this narrowing has occurred and three counterexamples of how it can be reversed to provide our students with an education that will promote their holistic development.

In the first example, I spent many years researching the community organizing strategies of the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) in uplifting teaching and learning in some of the poorest and ethnically segregated schools in the U.S. State of Texas (Shirley, 1997, 2002). The organizing had lifted academic achievement on tests, but its more lasting contribution may have been its development of a model of community engagement that broke through the bureaucracies of urban school systems to create a more participatory approach to education for students, teachers, and parents. This broke down, however, after the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act in the U.S. The reason was that school principals started to see organizing as a distraction to a laser-like focus on raising test scores. Parent meetings that had been a fulcrum of civic engagement began dropping off of school schedules and eventually were abandoned altogether.

Public schools found it difficult to accommodate the pressures of the tests, but a new wave of charter schools sprang up that made the improvement of test results the impeccable evidence of their apparently superior model. In my second example, I recalled a discussion with an overweight student in one of these schools in Boston. He said to me, "Just look at me—I obviously need a gym!

But in this horrible school we don't even have any physical education!" Students knew their bodies need exercise to flourish. But they weren't getting it.

The third example came from a school I observed that participated in the Northwest Rural Innovation for Student Engagement (RISE) network, with which I served as a technical consultant for 7 years. During that time, I visited a rural school and struck up a conversation with a seventh-grader. Like many seventh-graders, he found school boring. When I asked why, he said that they always had boring texts to work with. When I asked him what he might find interesting, he said, "I don't know—something exciting—like maybe something about *dragons*!" His teachers were giving their students informational texts, as required by the Common Core State Standards.

Socializing students through community organizing for school improvement, providing students with exercise so that they are in optimal physical health, and enabling students to stimulate their creativity by giving them fantastic narratives to read that take them far away from their humdrum lives—these are all dimensions of what can be seen as an education for wholeness that has been eroded by policies placing excessive emphasis on tests measuring a narrow range of skills. One could see each of these examples as presenting one dimension or another of well-being—but that imposition honestly is forced. Why?

Community organizing entails moments of confrontation that don't fit well with the theme of "positive emotions" that are emphasized in some well-being models (Seligman, 2002, 2011), for example. Many models of well-being completely neglect students' physical health, prioritizing their socio-emotional learning (Frey et al., 2019; Hoerr, 2020). Fantasy thrills young people around the world and entails encounters with the grotesque and macabre that aren't exactly congruent with cheerful, peppy, well-being talk. We need to think beyond well-being. We need to imagine an education for wholeness that welcomes in all of these other dimensions of life into schools and gives them space in pedagogy, curriculum, and assessments.

It isn't hard to imagine how wholeness could be brought into schools, because it already has been done well in many different places. In Germany, the federal states have school accountability systems, but they use these exclusively for diagnostic purposes. This has enabled the "One Square Kilometer of Education" project of the Freudenberg Foundation to adapt the community organizing strategies of the IAF from the U.S. to integrate the lives and cultures of low-income immigrants into the German school system (Shirley, 2017). In Norway, all students participate in a year-long preschool program that takes place outside, so that they learn to thrive in their country's long, dark winter months (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018). Physical education starts young and continues throughout the entire school system. In the U.S., plucky educators collaborating with the National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Endowments for the Arts have fought back fiercely against the Common Core State Standards and have shown a host of positive outcomes

for students who have access to all of the arts, even in cities under the grip of pervasive account-ability pressures, such as Houston, Texas (Bowen & Kisida, 2019).

Important aspects of the human condition such as community engagement, physical education, and the creative arts have a value in and of themselves whether they relate to a given theory of well-being or not. Community organizing regularly involves conflict as a way to dramatize social injustice. To train as a top athlete requires a willingness to endure suffering and physical pain in ways that many nonathletes would consider beyond the pale. Artists frequently experience frustration and even rage when their musical compositions or visual representations fall short of what they've imagined. Well-being is part of these phenomena, but only a part. An education that focuses excessively on well-being is missing out on part of the mystery of what makes the human condition so complex and compelling in the first place.

Beyond well-being

Much recent research on purpose in education has been informed by Damon's *The Path to Purpose: How Young People Find Their Calling in Life* (2008). Damon conducted extensive interviews with young Americans and found that only about one in five of them could "express a clear vision of where they want to go, and what they want to accomplish in life, and why" (p. 8). About 60% had taken part in "potentially purposeful activities" but did "not have any real commitment to such activities or realistic plans for pursuing their aspirations" (p. 8). Finally, about a quarter "express no aspirations *at all*," and in some cases, "they see no point in acquiring any" (p. 8). Since "an extremely ambitious goal is not necessarily naïve; for many it is a practical source of intense motivation" (p. 33), its absence is associated with a passive, fatalistic attitude toward life.

Damon's research is significant in contemporary educational discourse because he distances himself from critics (Robinson, 2015; Sahlberg & Doyle, 2019) who argue that experiences of frustration, competition, or academic press in schools are inherently problematic, even downright oppressive, and should be avoided at all costs. Increasingly, research (Baumeister & Tierney, 2011; Duckworth, 2016) is showing that we do our young people no favors when we clear away all obstacles in their paths and fail to develop their capacities for fortitude and resilience in the pursuit of worthy goals. Popular complaints about "strawberry children" who are easily bruised and "bubble-wrapped childhoods" so that children never experience any challenges or setbacks have a basis in reality, from this point of view. Damon forthrightly argued that "Hard work and competition have never broken the spirits of young people, *as long as they believe in what they are doing*" (p. 15, italics are mine).

When it comes to thinking through the ways that schools might change to help young people develop a sense of purpose, however, Damon is at a loss. He dedicates a few pages (pp. 171–175) at the end of *The Path to Purpose* with a section on "Schools with Purpose," but, like many

psychologists, he has difficulty understanding potential strategies for transforming the social and organizational aspects of schooling. As a result, he is unable to offer any practical suggestions as to how the vast and often unwieldy nature of K–12 schooling could involve to make purpose more central to the work of schooling.

So, how could an education for purpose be brought into schools in a way that includes well-being and also extends beyond it? A first step might be to explore where purpose is part of schooling but is often overlooked. Mehta and Fine recently (2019) have argued that there is a great deal of what they call "deep learning" occurring in American high schools in the periphery zones of electives and extracurricular programs. In these settings, students get to exercise free choice in exploring activities that they find potentially meaningful. Adults often give them genuine responsibility—as when a drama teacher gives them keys to lighting and equipment rooms, or when debate coaches place them in charge of transportation logistics when traveling to a distant tournament. Furthermore, the social stakes are high and obvious to all—no one wants to forget their lines on stage or disgrace their school in a real-life competitive setting.

Mehta and Fine also find that purposeful education can occur in the core, required disciplines of mathematics, science, English, and history, and they provide examples of veteran teachers who do this. Such teachers create seminar settings where students have time and space to engage in Socratic discourse. The teachers have in-depth content knowledge and they make sure that whatever their interpersonal strengths with students, their courses always focus on content-level mastery. They encourage students, but they don't pamper them.

The difference between those who teach for deep learning, and those who do not, resides largely in the teachers' understanding of pedagogy. Especially in tested subjects, teachers feel that they have to transmit large bodies of knowledge to students, so creating openings for critical dialogue and problem-solving is viewed as a distraction. Such pressures are nonexistent in electives or extracurricular settings.

Mehta and Fine do not accept the premise that teachers cannot transform their pedagogies because of high-stakes testing. In their observations, they found that too many teachers repeatedly evaded students' questions that could have opened up dialogue about the purpose of any given activity. They argue that better teacher education programs and continual professional development of teachers could help them to become more skilled at capitalizing on these opportunities.

A second way of bringing purpose into schooling could be by integrating small-scale "purpose interventions" (Klein et al, 2019, p. 104) in the curriculum. Such interventions help high school students help young people to identify tacit or intrinsic goals they have for their learning and their lives and give them practical tools with which to pursue them. The interventions can be as simple as "a classroom based, year-long curriculum that is provided weekly for 1 hour by a masters' level guidance counselor" (p. 104). The "purpose intervention" curriculum enables students to identify

significant role models in their lives and to recognize topics that they are passionate about. It gives them ways of understanding whether their selected purpose fits with their current skills and strengths and identifies ways they could cultivate those further. Finally, the "purpose intervention" curriculum entails a prosocial component, asking how the given purpose could "benefit other people or society as a whole" (p. 104).

Finally, a third way to bring purpose into schools would be by transforming entire schools and systems so that all students have opportunities for continual conversations with adults about what activities they could find meaningful and how best to realize them. This would require that adults themselves become proficient in identifying ways of being that are purposeful and those that are not, and acquire comfort and facility in discussing these kinds of topics with students. This would require far-reaching cultural transformations in schools and society that would break once and for all with the more instrumental and mechanistic aspects of education that became prevalent in the 20th century. Schools would need to become more flexible, responsive, and adaptive to students, while at the same time holding fast to the curricular ways of knowing that students require if they are to attain expertise in any given discipline.

The struggle to create a space for schools to address youth wholeness and purpose faces multiple challenges. The first recommendation advanced above—ensuring that schools offer a range of electives and extracurricular activities, and that teachers feel free to address issues of wholeness and purpose—does not require large-scale transformations of schools. "Purpose interventions" also can be brought into schools easily. These two interventions do not necessitate a rupture of the three "message systems" of pedagogies, curricula, and assessments that Bernstein identified as the institutional core of modern forms of schooling.

The third, more ambitious recommendation, however, is more daunting. Part of this resides in the very nature of inquiry into what a whole human being is, or what purposeful activity consists in. Such topics can seem philosophical and a distraction from the academic press needed to attain subject matter mastery. In addition, unlike the cheerful pursuit of well-being, exploring a sense of wholeness and purpose can entail investigation of the nettlesome sides of life, such as climate change or social injustice.

The transformation of schools is important, however, even if it is challenging. If educators know that when they take the time to help their students to develop a sense of purpose, and are steadfast in exposing their students to the world's most troubling issues and discussing ways to address them, even the more traditional goals of schooling can be more easily attained. Students who are clear about their purposes are more likely to identify with school subject matters (Dukes & Lorch, 1989) and to get better grades (Adelabu, 2008). They score better on intelligence tests (Minehan et al., 2000) and are more motivated (Nurmi, 1991).

Conclusion

In the past decade, well-being has surged onto the education policy agenda of many nations. This is more of a good thing than a bad thing, as virtually all observers agree that the focus on testing of previous decades had crowded out other worthwhile purposes of education. How well-being strategies are being implemented in schools and systems, however, merits the same critical analysis as any other reform strategy.

In this article, I have argued that two other facets of education, that sometimes overlap with and sometimes conflict with well-being, need greater inclusion in our school improvement strategies. The first facet has to do with wholeness. Whole human beings—students included—are not only happy. They have other emotions that need to be acknowledged and accepted. Personal unhappiness is a worthwhile sacrifice to make, at least in the short term, in pursuit of important social goals. Wholeness in this regard refers to the dynamic unfolding of the individual over time. This includes the ability of the self to practice mindful detachment, and to view oneself from other points of view, including those that are critical. Such a disposition should not be viewed as one tangential part of an education, but rather as an essential component of one's moral formation over time.

The second facet has to do with the incorporation of wholeness and purpose into education. This can be done in small steps by changing our pedagogies and revising our curricula. More ambitiously, it is time to rethink the bureaucratic structures of schooling that too often lead to dehumanizing situations in which students are not encouraged to explore the purposes which they would like to give to their lives. This is an "existential imperative of educational change" (Shirley, 2017, p. 113) that for too long has been denied.

Educators frequently underestimate their power and influence, deferring to the authority of others even on matters in which they know better. Unchecked, this creates a culture of "alienated teaching" (Shirley & MacDonald, 2016, p. 3) that is neither in the interests of the profession or the public. Alienation can be an important step in the process of learning, as it entails a moment of detachment and critical reflection. As a permanent way of being, however, it has enormously deleterious long-term consequences.

Our schools need a fresh burst of humanistic education. This must value individuals in their quest for well-being but also encourage them to be their best whole selves, with their freely chosen inspirational purposes guiding their lives. This Special Issue of the *ECNU Review of Education* has explored why this matters so urgently and proposed several ways in which this can be done. We invite our readers to join with us in opening up a bold new age of educational change.

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