Education for Meaning: What Is It and Why Do We Need It?

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Abstract
The central assertion of the article is that the most important mission in the field of education today is to design a new, comprehensive educational concept for schools, without with schools are consigned to an "educational-pedagogical vacuum" that advances extraneous and alienating purposes. The analysis delineates the theoretical foundations and practical consequences of such a new concept called "Education for Meaning." That concept addresses meaning in two senses: meaning as understanding the world and meaning as significance of and reason for living. The pattern of teaching and learning applied in the creative arts is presented as a pedagogical model upon which such an educational approach can be modeled. The article highlights the urgent educational need to initiate a dialogue that focuses on "big theories" of education in place of the prevailing educational discourse which has become superficial and crassly economy-focused.

Keywords: Teaching for understanding; arts education; comprehensive educational concept; meaning as significance.

This article aims to establish the basic outlines of a new comprehensive educational concept for schools in the 21st century. Initially, I will clarify the notion of a "comprehensive educational concept" and why the times demand that we formulate such a new concept. I maintain that since prevailing educational concepts for schools are of a different type, there is a room for undertaking such theoretical speculation. Further, I will introduce the underlying theoretical, social and ethical assumptions of the concept called "education for meaning," indicate its key practical implications, and present the pedagogical model on which it is based, namely, the pattern of teaching and learning applied in the creative arts. Finally, I will analyze the extent to which the concept outlined here conforms to the essential conditions of a new school concept for our times.

What Compels Design of a New, Comprehensive Educational Concept for Schools in the 21st Century?

A "comprehensive educational concept" is focused on the essential *educational* purposes and dimensions of school activity—pedagogy, curriculum, and the organization of knowledge—in contrast to concepts that focus on the administrative and structural aspects of schools and on extra-educational economic or social concerns. The concept's second characteristic is that it is *comprehensive*: it must present purposes and a theory that generate practical consequences affecting all educational dimensions of the school—pedagogy, curriculum, and the organization of knowledge—and not merely some of them. To be comprehensive, it also must address all dimensions of the learner, not simply his or her intellectual side.

Our central assertion is that the most important mission in the field of education today is to design a new, comprehensive educational concept for schools. Why? Because the existing school concept, which was formulated almost a century ago, no longer copes with the paramount needs and values of advanced 21st century societies and, therefore, is perceived as obsolete and irrelevant by the lion's share of educators and students alike. This state of affairs gives rise to an "educational-pedagogical vacuum" in schools—a vacuum that becomes absorbed with extra-educational matters. The dominant extra-educational concern of the past two decades that has hobbled the educational system is of an economic nature: training graduates to compete in the global knowledge economy. When a school's central objectives do not manifest an educational-pedagogical purpose that is meaningful to teachers and students, grievous harm is inflicted on both the school and society. In such

circumstances, learning and teaching are largely transformed into instrumentalities; they are not pursued for their own sake but, rather, to advance extraneous purposes that alienate educators. The consequence is subversion of the basic motivations essential for fertile educational activity.

Accordingly, an essential condition for coping with this state of affairs is to formulate a new comprehensive educational concept that can serve as the basis for fundamental change to existing schools and fill the prevailing educational vacuum; to revitalize school activity and provide both educators and the general public with a theoretical, ethical and practical base that will enable them to withstand the external pressures that impact the educational enterprise.

Essential conditions for a new, comprehensive educational concept

The analysis that follows incorporates important insights from current educational approaches in various spheres. The teaching for understanding movement is articulated in terms of performance-based concepts of understanding (Perkins, 1992; Wiske, 1998; Gardner, 1991); Understanding by Design (Wiggins & McTighe, 1998); teaching for understanding as initiation into "World 3" (Popper, 1972) the world of ideas and theories (Bereiter, 2002; Smith, 2002); a developmental concept of understanding (Egan, 1997); and frameworks based upon learning communities (Shulman, 1997; Harpaz, 2005, 2014). Other widely addressed school models include the democratic schools movement (Hecht, 2012; Neill, 1960; Sadofsky & Greenberg, 1994); Caring Education, which incorporates key concepts from feminist thought (Noddings, 2003, 2007; Gilligan, 1993; Alpert, 2008); and environmental education (UNESCO, 2014; Karmon et al., 2012; Sterling, 2010; Tilbury, 2011).

However, the contention here is that these theories and approaches, current in educational discourse, fail to offer a comprehensive educational concept. In some instances they do not deal with all dimensions of school or all the key aspects of the learner; in others they merely offer improvements on the prevailing school model rather than presenting an alternative. Introducing such a comprehensive educational concept is an essential educational task for our time.

To serve as a suitable alternative to existing schools, the proposed concept must satisfy four important conditions:

1. It must aim for **a broad common denominator**. Understandably, it is not possible to formulate an educational concept that will be accepted by everyone. After all, education at its core is an ideological enterprise, and society in our day is rife with ideological disagreements relating to education. Yet, a concept that aspires to serve as a comprehensive one for schools must aim to find broad common ground within society and not merely settle for appeal to a limited circle of "believers" or special interests. To be sure, it might be possible to sketch out several different models of educational structures to replace the single, prevailing educational model. However, even to realize this possibility, any concept that aspires to be a comprehensive alternative must, in the end, appeal to a broad swath of society or it will quickly be channeled to the status of "solution for special interests" ancillary to current schools. This is what has happened to the democratic schools movement.

2. It must **correspond to the basic motivations of educators.** Notwithstanding the importance of appealing to society as a whole, the key target population of a new educational concept is the community of teachers and educators in the field. It is difficult to exaggerate the importance of an exciting educational concept to the work of educators. In contrast to widely held "economic" attitudes, the fundamental motivations of educators grow out of the possibility to realize the inclinations and values that drew them to education in the first instance and on the existence of working conditions to facilitate their implementation. Material rewards play a lesser role[1]. Therefore, even if a new educational concept were widely acceptable to society as a whole, it is liable to falter if it doesn't capture the educational imagination of those on the front lines.

3. Existence in the field of **effective practices** that exemplify the concept. A comprehensive educational concept is basically analogous to Thomas Kuhn's widely known concept: the paradigm. A "scientific paradigm" according to Kuhn is a constellation of theoretical principles and assumptions that become associated with practice and procedures in the relevant scientific field (Kuhn, 1970). Education, like science, is a field with a prominent practical dimension, which is driven by practical examples of effective actions no less, and possibly more, than by theories or values. Accordingly, a new educational concept must have as its foundation a successful model of educational action or, otherwise, it likely will be perceived (at least by educators in the field) as no more than an educational fantasy.
4. It must **address key societal challenges**. Contrary to commonly accepted dogma, not every societal challenge demands an educational response. There are many societal challenges for which the most effective way of dealing with them is grounded in economic, social or health policy, for example, and education has little to contribute. Moreover, even when dealing with societal challenges in which education does play an important role, more likely than not the education system alone cannot provide an effective solution. Nevertheless, today there are key societal challenges that cannot be addressed without appropriate educational solutions. In these instances, education offers essential coping mechanisms even if, by themselves, they are far from sufficient. A new comprehensive educational concept must provide solutions to challenges of this nature.

Key societal challenges of our times demand educational solutions

What are these critical societal challenges of the day that cannot be addressed without a decisive educational change? I consider three to be preeminent.

Transition to a sustainable society

The term "sustainable" relates not only to the ecological-environmental threat inherent in our current conduct but also to related political, economic, social, and cultural dimensions of the problem. My reference, therefore, is to what is called "broad sustainability" (Karmon et al., 2012). Broad sustainability deals not only with the environmental crisis and the inherent threat to survival of mankind, but also with the question, "What is worthy human existence?" From the perspective of broad sustainability, the environmental crisis is at once a manifestation and one aspect of a much deeper crisis. This crisis is related to the enormous economic inequalities among and within countries: to the accumulation of massive capital by a meager few at a time when nearly a billion people suffer from malnutrition (Hacker & Pirson, 2010); to breakneck consumerism that is becoming critical to the global economy; to dominant values such as competitiveness, ratings, unlimited growth and profit; and to recognition that dominion over our commons is passing from citizens and elected governments to multinational corporations that are accountable only to their shareholders (Mounk, 2018). This last observation goes to the core of the "crisis of democracy" that characterizes a majority of Western states nowadays: widespread political ignorance (Somin, 2016) allied with loss of faith in the core democratic foundations of the nation state—the people's representatives, parliaments, political parties, media and communications, and others (Habermas, 2001; Bauman, 2013; Giddens, 2000). In these circumstances, continuation of "business as usual" is not merely a distinct threat to our physical survival but also to fundamental values of open, democratic societies: freedom, social justice, equal opportunity, the right to dignified work, solidarity of mankind, and others.

Granted that education alone cannot cope with a crisis of this magnitude. It demands from us all a fundamental change in our way of life and in patterns of thought and action. However, in equal measure it is apparent that there is no possibility of dealing with a crisis of this nature without vigorous educational effort (Ambrose & Sternberg, 2016). Coping with the enumerated conditions through education calls for developing teaching methods and materials that lead to in-depth understanding of extremely complicated processes, cultivating the capacity for systemic thinking, and active engagement in the process of change. Since solutions to the

challenges of broad sustainability are found mainly in the domain that lies beyond the borders of the nation state, in addition to the common education for national citizenship, transition to a sustainable society also calls for education for global citizenship (UNESCO, 2015). The pedagogy and content of existing schools are not integrally designed to promote such "world understanding" and, to a large extent, schools embody the same norms, values, and national ethos that are at the root of the multifaceted crisis in which we find ourselves.

Personal and collective identity formation

One of the central characteristics of modern society is expressed in the way that people develop their identities. By contrast to traditional societies, in modern society a person is not "born into his or her identity." Personal and collective identity is not fixed from birth by ties of blood, kinship, or social caste. While there is some merit to the claims of critical theories that equality of opportunity and freedom of choice in open, democratic societies is illusory, nonetheless, individuals do enjoy the actual potential to move among social groups and to choose their lifestyles.

To paraphrase Sartre, man in modern society is condemned to choosing his identity. Yet, in the earlier stages of the modern age, generally up to the 1960s, the process of identity formation unfolded in the context of a national narrative that was largely established and agreed upon by society, in an economy in which a majority of participants persevered in their careers for decades and, in a reality where in every society there were only a few dominant and acceptable lifestyles. Existing schools are a direct product of this earlier modern era, and they served those societies exceedingly well. Their pedagogy, curriculum and structure were all highly effective tools for formation of personal and collective identities of students in a society that shared an established national narrative with which they had to be endowed and in a stable work environment for which they had to be trained.

However, the same school becomes an ineffective tool for developing identity in late modernity that characterizes society in the recent decades. This "liquid" modernity, to use the apt terminology of Zygmunt Bauman (2000), is characterized by the multiplicity of competing narratives and lifestyles; undermining of national narratives; "risk" economies (Back, 2007) in which employment is by no means assured and workers are expected to change careers several times during their lifetime; and bombardment of information that assaults all our senses. In this liquid environment, the burden of developing identity (and of stumbling in the process) falls almost exclusively on the individual, while the social space is becoming devoid of stable meanings that might serve as an anchor (Bauman, 2000, 2013). Moreover, recent research clearly indicates the dramatic influence that digital technology has had on our identity formation. For example, our ability to concentrate on a single idea for a period of time is affected when our attention is distracted every few minutes; we tend to reduce phone conversations and face-to-face encounters to a minimum; there is a sweeping transition to interpersonal communications based on short text messages that are largely directed at groups not individuals; and the experience of being alone with our thoughts and feelings—so essential to developing personal identity—is constantly under threat (Carr, 2011; Turkle, 2011). Not for nothing, asserts Bauman, that in current circumstances "there is a wide and growing gap between the conditions of individuals *de jure* and their chances of becoming individuals *de facto*—that is, to gain control over their fate and make the choices they really desire" (Bauman, 2000, p. 39).

Existing schools do not contribute to closing this gap but, rather, to widening it. In a world inundated with information, schools continue to overwhelm young people with facts that can be acquired at the flick of a switch. Rather than engaging students' capacity to make choices, learning is organized to minimize choices both among and within subjects. The dominant pedagogy does little to expand the ability to make informed and intelligent choices among a multiplicity of incompatible perspectives but, rather, persists in delivering categorical narratives and answers. Developing students' capacity "to connect with themselves"— to discover and shape personal preferences, aspirations and goals—is nowhere to be found in the school agenda. In this area, as well, radical change is called for in the functioning of schools.

Training for the knowledge economy

These days this challenge is placed at the pinnacle of the pyramid of school purposes and, in significant measure, dictates the daily routine of schools. At the same time, the way it is translated into educational practice generates increasing criticism from academics and educators in the field (Tamir, 2011; Ravitch, 2010; Alexander, 2010). Thus, it is necessary to expand a bit on the discussion, and to bring some order to the emotional discourse that saturates the topic—both to discern more clearly among the challenges, goals, and methods to actualize them and, additionally, to hone the nature of the educational response called for.

The first important clarification is that one of the central tasks of responsible, government-supported education is to impart to graduates the skills and qualifications necessary to successfully integrate into the working world. The justification for this claim is not simply practical and political; no state will rely on an educational system that isn't attuned to this purpose. The justification is also educational and ethical: appropriate education should enable its graduates to enjoy open futures and dignified lives, and the capacity to integrate in the working world is a key component for both these purposes. Therefore, the criticism by many educators of the very idea of education serving economic purposes is misplaced.

So what then is the problem? The problem lies, first, in the exclusivity that the purpose gained among education policymakers and in the biased way in which it is understood and, second, in the educational methods employed for its implementation. Anyone who reads ministry documentation and speeches of educational decision-makers and looks at what is happening in most educational systems over the past decades is likely to conclude that there is only a single educational goal: "to confer a long-term, comparative economic advantage [vis-à-vis other states]" in the words of Israel's Dovrat Commission, a national task force for the advancement of education established in 2003 (see also, A Nation in at Risk, 1983; Cuban, 2006). All the other avowed objectives, such as improved educational outcomes, support of weaker students, improved command of mother tongue, and even improved knowledge of the national heritage are all understood as contributing to the stated objective. At the heart of the process stands what may be termed "globalization anxiety"—the fear that in the future the national economy won't compete successfully with other countries in the global economy. This concern shapes the way the objective is understood and translated into action, and the educational vacuum in which schools find themselves today enables that objective to exercise absolute control of the school agenda.

The second aspect of the problem is the way in which the goal's formulation is translated into action in the field. The educational system's success in generating comparative economic advantage is measured by comparing the performance of other developed countries on international achievement tests (e.g., PISA and TIMSS). From here it is only a small step to funneling most system resources to improve student performance by these criteria. The problem is exacerbated in a country like Israel where, for short-range political reasons, there is a massive investment made in direct preparation of students for the exams (Schleicher, 2010). This situation inflicts educational harm in many ways. First, such a course of action entirely misses the essential goal, that is, preparing students to succeed in the global economy. Learning for the test represents a form of learning that is antithetical to the demands of the global economy. It focuses on imparting the skill to precisely reproduce information on tests and for students to deal with tasks in isolation, whereas the global knowledge economy demands active, creative manipulation of information, efficient learning of new knowledge, and collaborative teamwork (Schleicher, 2010). Second, it seriously harms other educational goals that aren't measured by those tests such as training for engaged citizenship, aesthetic education, and teaching for understanding, and it leads to a substantial reduction in the time devoted to subjects perceived as "lacking economic benefit" such as the humanities and fine arts (Karmon, 2012b). Third, and perhaps most important of all, instrumental, test-directed learning dictated from on high alienates many teachers, particularly the good ones, from educational practice, leads to

reduced motivation and, in some instances, to abandoning the profession (Back, In press).

So, what then is the educational response to successfully cope with the economic challenge before us? First and foremost, we must fully grasp the fundamental problem: existing schools are designed and built to train students for an industrial economy. Consequently, without a fundamental change it is not possible within its framework to prepare students for the knowledge economy whose purpose is so different. In most attempts to date to deal with the challenges of the knowledge economy (with limited exceptions such as Finland and reforms of recent years in Southeast Asian countries (Volansky, 2020; Hogan, 2012)), the initial framework of the school has been left in place, so it is no wonder that these efforts faltered. It falls to us, therefore, to establish a new comprehensive educational concept for schools that takes account of preparing students for the knowledge economy. This requirement justifiably demands that we address the educational system: after all, working with and on knowledge is its polestar. However, it by no means has to turn into the principal objective of the system, since domination of this sort will inhibit us from developing educational solutions tailored to the other social challenges identified earlier. The good news is that there is no essential contradiction between the educational solutions needed to cope with the three social challenges. It is possible to establish a new, comprehensive educational concept for schools that will offer appropriate and integrated solutions for all three challenges, and the remaining sections of this article will be devoted to that task.

Outline for a new comprehensive educational concept: Education for meaning

The new concept to be presented is termed "education for meaning." Let me begin by laying out its key underlying concepts and characteristics. Then I examine the degree to which it is comprehensive by presenting a number of its fundamental implications for teaching, for the curriculum, and for the organization of knowledge. Finally, I revisit the conditions called for by such a concept and to the societal challenges to which it responds and examine the extent to which it withstands the test.

Key concepts

"Education for meaning" comprehends the term "meaning" in two senses: first, meaning as **understanding** reality; second, meaning as **significance of and reason for living**. In the first sense, the goal of the educational process is to develop and deepen the students understanding of three interlocking spheres—personal, local (community and state), and global-environmental. In the second sense, the purpose is to conduct educational experiences likely to communicate meaning and reasons for living that go beyond economic success.

With regard to the first purpose, it's worth distinguishing between it and the stated purpose of most approaches to educating for understanding. The existing approaches place the emphasis on education intended to lead to students' understanding of what is taught – in contrast to traditional education that leads to inert knowledge. The emphasis of these approaches is pedagogical—to change teaching and learning in schools. By contrast, the purpose of education for meaning is to lead students to in-depth, complex and critical understanding of the world in which we live. In this instance, the focal question is broader and more radical. The central question of prevailing approaches is: "How do we teach the existing school's course content in a manner intended for understanding?" The question posed by education for meaning is: "What content is most appropriate to teach, and what means and organizational structures should we use such that learners will attain essential, in-depth understanding of the world in which they live?"

To be sure, prevailing educational approaches also are concerned with "understanding the world," but they assume that the material currently being taught in schools enables us to do so—if only we could learn them properly. Therefore, the desired outcomes of prevailing approaches are

expressed in various student performances relating to the taught knowledge. For example, Perkins and Gardner (Perkins, 1992; Gardner, 1991) aim for students' "understanding performances"; Bereiter (2002) aims for outcomes that are expressed through active construction of conceptual knowledge. By contrast, the desired outcome of education for meaning is development of a worldview with specific characteristics that will be explained below. Another point worth emphasizing—a point relevant to both education for meaning and existing approaches to education for understanding—is that it is no longer possible to limit education for understanding to a narrow elite. Addressing the weighty societal crises that we are facing demands education for understanding for the masses. The working models of existing schools are not intended to do this, so they must be fundamentally changed.

"Understanding" in the sense of education for meaning is not directed exclusively to the intellectual-theoretical plane. At the heart of education for meaning is the aspiration for "understanding of self"—the capacity of every learner to know himself in a complex, multi-dimensional way: strengths and weaknesses, predispositions, motivations, and goals that give purpose to life. In order to realize this aspiration, schools should offer learning opportunities and encounters that focus on acquiring knowledge of "the self"—whether by means of relevant theoretical perspectives such as philosophy, psychology, and sociology, or by means of active experiences or workshops of all kinds. This view of "understanding" leads directly to the second meaning of education for meaning: meaning as the significance of and reason for living. In this context, we define meaning as: "a personal connection to an inter-subjective environment based on values, ideas, actions, and principles that impart a purpose and reason for living."[2] For instance, activity in the arts, theoretical realms, practical trades, social engagement, and the like.

The key point is that the times demand that we experiment with activity that isn't merely instrumental, that is, activity whose purpose is within itself (Aviram, 1999). The mission becomes particularly urgent and essential in our materialistic and instrumentalist world, which confronts the individual with an "existential catch." On the one hand, a person constantly must choose among a host of possibilities in order to construct his "personal narrative" and to "self-actualize." On the other, the social pressure for material success, the pressure for unbridled consumerism, and the precipitous rate of change do not afford open space to do so. In the resulting existential emptiness, the basic human need for "meaning" (Frankl, 2006) tends to be fulfilled by insatiable material appetites or by reactionary responses in the form of fundamentalism and reversion to self-centered, isolated identities (Barber, 1995).[3] Both alternatives are devastating from the perspective of education for meaning. Therefore, one of the primary aims of a school that is educating for meaning would be to establish designated spaces for every student to experiment with constructing meaning. This, of course, is a new objective for schools that calls for profound changes in the future.

The relationship between understanding and significance

What is the relationship between the two definitions of "meaning"? In his "Ethics" Aristotle asserted that, in the final analysis, they merge into one. His analysis regarding the relationship between action and purpose in human life is the definitive analysis of the subject, and it is also fundamental to the argument advanced here. For Aristotle, all human action is performed to achieve some end, which is a means towards a larger end, and so on until one reaches the ultimate end. So that the chain of human actions over a lifetime will not become pointless—become "absurd" to use a more voguish concept—there must be an "ultimate end": an end that does not serve a subsequent end, but is an end in itself. Aristotle believed that there was a one ultimate end common to all humankind that was dictated by the uniqueness of humans among all other living creatures. Mankind's unique characteristic is the capacity for wonder and the ensuing contemplation. Therefore, to Aristotle, the ultimate end was the *vita contemplativa*.[4] Contemplative life is fundamentally the effort to understand the world in a more comprehensive and profound way, expressing the concept of meaning as the effort to make sense of the world and vest it with meaning. Meaning as the ultimate end that imbues life with significance and meaning as making sense of the world, therefore, become united in Aristotle's well-known analysis.

The key point adopted from the Ethics in our analysis is the importance of the existence of a consciously held ultimate end, which imbues our choices and actions with significance, and that life without such significance is an unfulfilled life. Another central claim of Aristotle adopted here is that an ethical life demands training and active experience with "the good life" and that learning which is only theoretical and abstract is not sufficient to achieve it. Where my view diverges from Aristotle concerns his claim that there is only a single ultimate end for all humankind. The concept underpinning education for meaning is that there are multiple and varied fields of action that can serve as appropriate ultimate ends for one's life, of which the contemplative life is only one potential choice. Therefore, engagement with learning aimed at understanding the world is likely to turn into life goals for particular students, yet in many other cases the two senses of meaning will be bifurcated.

Notwithstanding the difference between the two senses of meaning in the present context, it is worth highlighting the important affinities between them. First, they are mutually reinforcing. The more students apprehend what they study to understand the world as an end in itself, the more deeply they will understand it. Conversely, to the extent that involvement in activity from the perspective of meaning as significance is subject to theoretical explication, the experience will be deeper and the learning potential will be enhanced. The second affinity is yet more significant: the two senses of meaning share a common basis that is essential to both. What is common to meaning as understanding and meaning as significance is a specific structure of student *involvement* that is essential to them both. We are speaking of involvement on many levels—cognitive, ethical, emotional, and, in many instances, physical as well—without which there is no possibility of achieving deep understanding of a phenomenon or having an experience that is an end in itself. Such involvement must manifest itself in active engagement in creating something, or in the typical mindset of the acted upon domain and not simply settling for abstract learning about that domain. This point is equally valid for meaning as understanding as it is for meaning as significance, and it serves as the foundation of the working model of education for meaning that is shared by both of them.

This brief discussion of the two senses of "meaning" and of the relation between them barely broaches the philosophical and educational discussion necessary to design an educational concept on a firm theoretical and practical foundation. A long series of questions and distinctions with important practical ramifications remain to be clarified. For example, what is the dividing line between an enjoyable casual activity and meaning as significance? What are the different types of ends, and should we establish a hierarchy among them? And, in this connection, should the educational system cultivate specific types of meaning for living? Is there a difference between the educational methods that are required for different categories of meanings-significances? However, in order to conduct a productive inquiry into these issues, we first must resolve that one of the stated objectives of the educational system in the 21st century is coping with the question of meaning, since any effective educational inquiry must integrate theory and practice, as one sustains the other (Dewey, 1938). Moreover, it is important to note that, in significant measure, the answers to these and other questions are best given in communal and local frameworks by reference to cultural contexts and the prospects for actual implementation.

Arts education as a model

A number of practical implications of education for meaning follow from the foregoing analysis. I have maintained that one of the central conditions upon which a comprehensive educational concept must be based is the existence of effective practices out in the field that serve as models. Are there any such examples of what we mean by education for meaning? In fact, there is a working model in the field that well illustrates education for meaning in both its senses, one that summons students to that multi-dimensional involvement and experience in creating things that is essential to both senses of meaning. This model finds expression in creative arts education that take place in secondary schools in the areas of the fine arts, cinema, theater, music, and dance.

Arts education constitutes an excellent instructional model for education for meaning for two reasons. First, it offers living proof of the possibility of education for meaning at its best, performed

with flesh and blood teachers and students in actual schools. Second, arts education is a domain that organizes knowledge and learning in a way that is very different from the way other subjects are organized in schools, thus facilitating inquiry into its unique characteristics. Not uncommonly, observers of students pursuing a course of study in the arts rub their eyes in disbelief. Students who are "slackers" in all other school subjects learn here with enthusiasm, take responsibility for complex tasks such as mounting exhibitions, staging plays and screening films, and form mature relationships with their colleagues and teachers. Their experiences strongly influence their personal, communal and professional identities.

What is the "secret" of arts education? To reveal it we must examine the organizing framework of arts education in comparison to that of the other knowledge domains of schools. An "organizing framework" is a sort of practical mold with specific features whose purpose is to arrange knowledge and learning. Every institution that educates by means of knowledge tends to create a dominant organizing framework through which it educates and teaches. For example, the organizing framework of K-12 schools is the "school subject", whereas the organizing framework of universities is the "research discipline". All information selected for teaching in the respective institutions, regardless of the domain of knowledge, is arranged in accordance with the basic characteristics of its dominant organizing framework. The basic dimensions that constitute organizing frameworks of knowledge are: the main cognitive aim, the key learning performance, the structure of questions, the principles for knowledge selection, the sources of information, the relationship to taught knowledge, and the spread of knowledge across time and space. To these one might add the attitude towards students' choice and towards their emotional dimension (Karmon, 2007, 2010a, 2010b).

Organization of knowledge in school subjects and the arts

Let us briefly consider how knowledge is organized in the arts compared to the typical organizing framework of schools—the school subject. The **main cognitive aim** of the arts as taught in schools is not clearly defined. It tends to fluctuate on a continuum between initial "professional training" of the student as craftsman in his or her chosen specialty to fostering creativity and teaching cultural literacy. Whatever the scope of the purpose, it is far removed from the principal purpose of the school subject, which is to transfer select items of information and skills to the entire student body.

The gap between the aims is most conspicuous with regard to the key **learning performance.** In stark contrast to school subjects, the learning performance in the arts is not a written exam intended to test the ability for precise reconstruction of the taught knowledge but, rather, a creative performance in a discipline—an exhibition, film, theatrical show, and the like. This kind of performance demands that students make choices, actively construct "artistic knowledge" and, in some instances, engage in coordinated teamwork. In this framework there is hardly room for closed-ended **questions**, questions that have only one correct answer, that are typical of the school subject, since classes in large part are conducted as workshops based on guiding and coaching students. A significant number of the questions in art education are posed by the students themselves and are intended to direct them in the process of their art work, while teachers' questions are basically guiding questions for the purpose of improving and advancing this process.

Knowledge selection for what is taught in art is basically done by the teachers themselves in contrast to selection "from above" by officials of the education ministry and disciplinary experts as is common in the school subject. The closer one gets to the culminating project, the more the selection passes to the student. Often, the result is selection (or creation) of works that critique and go beyond the compass of the regular school subject's "accepted knowledge."

Sources of information for arts education are not essentially teachers' talk in the classroom, textbooks, and workbooks typical of the school subject but, rather, authentic creations from the artistic domain—the plastic arts, music, dance, etc.

The **attitude towards knowledge** that is learned in the arts is characterized by deep intellectual and emotional involvement of the students, and the initial assimilation of the perspective through which we perceive and construct the world with the art that has been learned.

And, finally, the **spread of knowledge** in the arts is comparable to that in other areas of learning (art generally being taught in the course of the school day), but often it is taught in longer units than those of other subjects (typically 45 and sometimes 90 minute units), and a significant amount of the learning takes place outside of formal classroom time.

To these features of arts education in schools we should add two additional important characteristics. First, the relation to **choice** of studies. In the arts there are two areas of choice that are rare in ordinary subjects: the choice of the domain of study itself and the choice of the content within it (what to draw, paint or sculpt, what play to stage, what film to produce). Second, the respect accorded to the **emotional dimension.** Involvement with the emotional side of the learner is an essential and legitimate part of the arts discipline relative to its marginal role in other school subjects.

This brief comparison between the organizing framework of the arts and the dominant framework of schools—the school subject—pinpoints the profound differences between them and simultaneously enables us to identify a critical source of the educational potency latent in the arts. Arts education in schools integrates the inherent advantages of the two central models of teaching and learning: the apprenticeship model that characterized the pre-modern period, and the didactic-theoretical model that characterizes the modern period. From the apprenticeship model they derive active engagement of the student in what is being taught—experience with the relevant activity rather than "learning about it"—and from the didactic model they take the systematic presentation of knowledge and looking at things beyond the narrow practical context.

Spheres of meaning

The way arts education works, therefore, constitutes the bellwether model for education for meaning. We can generalize and expand this working method to devise a general organizing framework tailored to serve as the organizational basis for teaching and learning in both senses of "meaning." We'll call this framework a "**sphere of meaning**." A sphere of meaning is an organizing framework that has recast the characteristics of art education so that they also will be suited to other areas of study. Let's take a look at them.

The main aim of the sphere of meaning is **to help students in constructing a worldview that is sustainability-focused, informed, and active.** As maintained earlier, the purpose of education for meaning is to develop the student's worldview. A worldview is a mode of comprehension and experience that guides a person's choices and actions. It is constructed from the two senses of meaning: the way a person understands the world and him or herself and the individual's motivating objectives and values. A sustainability-focused worldview is one that places at its center understandings and ends that advance a broad conception of sustainability, that is, understandings and ends that displace economic and personal success (which are unresponsive to the public sphere) or that infringes on the personal welfare of others. By "informed" we mean a view that is based on sound information and evidence and on thoughtful, guided experiences. By "active" we mean a view that promotes active involvement in the world and particularly with its improvement.

The key learning performance in the sphere of meaning is the experience of creating personal and/or team products that are typical of the domain. This experience can take the form of artistic expression, as shown earlier, but it also can manifest itself by building conceptual knowledge (Bereiter, 2002). Example might include students' choice of an important question or a written work based on research and its oral presentation (possibly online) to experts the way arts students are currently examined (Sizer, 1992). The questions in the sphere of meaning are open-ended, authentic questions that come largely from the students themselves and that require application of the domain's practices to answer them. Within a broad outline established by policymakers, knowledge selection is largely done by the teacher but is progressively transferred to the students. The focus of the chosen area of knowledge is "disciplinary insights": central ideas that constitute the discipline (rather than scattered bits of information) and principal disputes that expose its theoretical and moral complexities. The sources of information in the sphere of meaning are authentic sources of the discipline. Such

sources are today found in abundance on internet sites, in popular scientific literature, and among experts accessible through new technology-based communication media. The spread of knowledge in the sphere of meaning requires reduction of the fields that are concurrently taught in order to facilitate active involvement with them, and flexible time units both in and outside of school during which considerable learning time becomes the student's responsibility (in other words, time not dominated by the instructor's frontal teaching). The required attitude towards knowledge in the sphere of meaning is critical involvement. The idea is that the learner will be engaged in the subject and will be able to apply its perspective, in at least a preliminary way, but will not fall prey to dogmatism that, on occasion, characterizes the researcher in that discipline. And, finally, the sphere of meaning must include emphasis on choice and the emotional dimension that are characteristic of arts education.

The following diagram sets out the general construct of education for meaning.

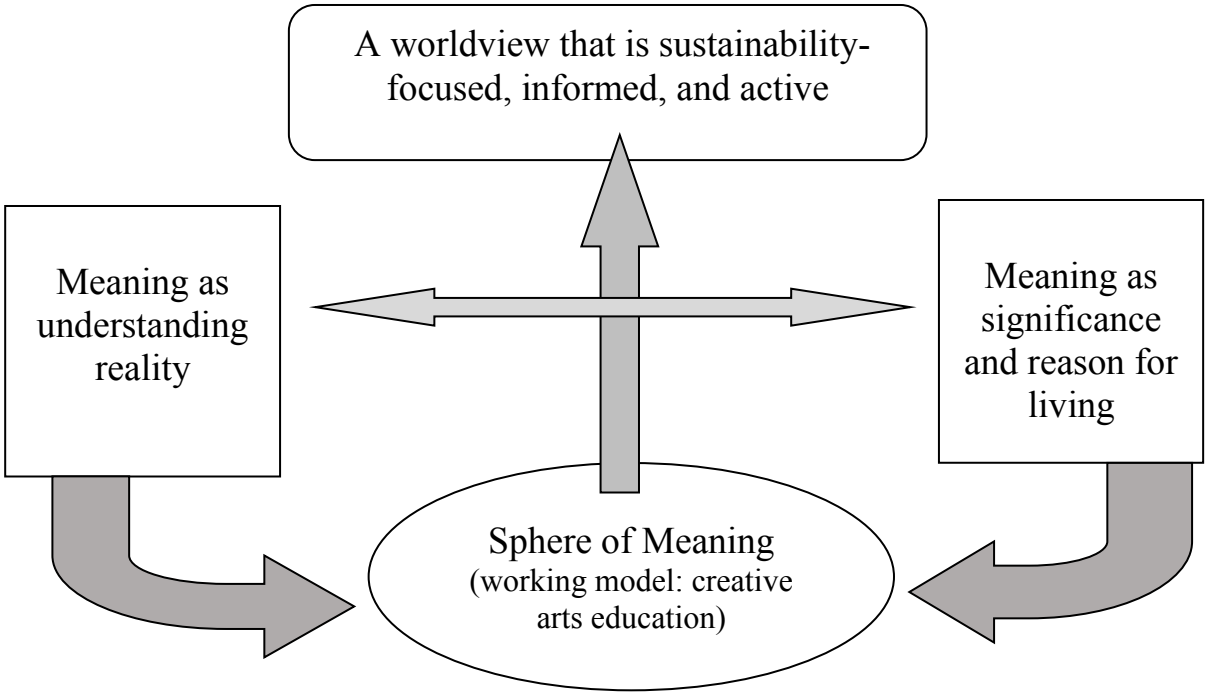

Figure 1: A construct for education for meaning.

Education for meaning: Implications for teaching

Whether the emphasis is on developing the student's understanding of the world (meaning as understanding) or on experiences within the scope of meaning as significance, education for meaning calls for teaching and learning methods as well as teaching personalities that are different from those common in most school subjects. In what follows, I will present three key implications for teaching of the proposed educational concept: personal mentoring; guiding pupils as they experience meaning as significance; and teaching for comprehending the world.

Personal mentoring

Serious engagement in sensitive questions of identity and in complex cognitive questions demands professional, ongoing personal coaching. It cannot be accomplished with frontal teaching, however capable, or by means of a "classroom educator" that is not organizationally and intrinsically structured for personal coaching of students. The role of the personal mentor is to coach the learner along the way through school. He or she may come from the ranks of schoolteachers who simultaneously are teaching subject matter or from the community at large—retirees, students, or others for whom this is their sole task in the school. The mentorship is accomplished by means of regular, face-to-face meetings between the teacher and student and relates to all aspects of school life: studying, social relationships, emotional issues, questions of identity, etc. To these personal

encounters, of course, one could add the variety of virtual contacts and group get-togethers, but the heart and soul of personal mentoring is individual, face-to-face meetings. The mentor "sees" the learner, is acquainted with him or her in multiple dimensions, including family and home environment, and is concerned for his or her wellbeing (Lampert, 2008; Noddings, 2003, 2007).

Providing for at least one significant adult in the life of each student is recognized today as key to student wellbeing, which has a positive influence on all aspects of education. It also is an essential condition of education for meaning. There is a degree of educational irresponsibility in attempting to deal with the deep strata of students' identity—in the process, questioning social conventions and commonly held beliefs—without sensitive and committed personal coaching. The intention, therefore, is that the personal mentor**,** like other teachers in a school, should become significant adults for the sake of their learners. It should be noted that schools do exist that provide deft, ongoing personal mentoring, and we should learn from their cumulative experience.

The teacher-guide in the sphere of meaning as significance

A teacher-guide is a fundamentally different teacher from the familiar "subject matter teacher." A key aspect of his role is coaching, guiding and accompanying learners in their creative processes by means of leading questions, suggestions for change and fresh thinking when the need presents itself, modeling improved performance, providing generative feedback, and the like. In spheres of meaning for significance, we should aspire for a teacher-guide that would be active in the field, even partially—an artist, a researcher, a social activist—and, thus, able to set a personal example as someone who experiences the field as truly meaningful. In addition, it is desirable that such a teacher be subject to professional training in the areas of coaching and guiding of novices in the field, gaining in-depth familiarity with the complex emotional dimensions that the process entails.

In this instance as well, it is conceivable that a portion of the teacher-guides would come from outside the ranks of the main schoolteachers. There is room to expand the circle of schoolteachers with other professionals in the community who desire and are able to serve as teacher-guides for young learners. Spheres of meaning are suited to activities beyond the school walls, especially in senior high school. It is worth noting that spheres of meaning as significance offered for students' choice and experimentation should be taken in the widest possible sense to include not only the arts and academic subjects but also physical and mental activities such as various sports, yoga, martial arts, etc., crafts such as carpentry and metalwork, and social or community activities such as community development, elder support, and the like.

Teaching for understanding the world

The idea behind teaching for understanding the world is to progressively build the learner's worldview such that it will be based on reliable information and on perspectives that go beyond intuition, and that these understandings will function as active knowledge in his consciousness. Therefore, the focus of education for understanding is transforming the knowledge learned in school into active knowledge, which is to say developing the learner's ability and disposition to apply the newly acquired knowledge flexibly and appropriately in new contexts. Additionally, a deep understanding that diverges from our intuitive theories (Leiser, 2001; Gardner, 1991, 1999) necessitates exposing and articulating students' intuitive theories—a deliberate subversion of those earlier conceptual "schemas"—and construction of new insights that will lead to new understandings and actions. There is no prospect of effecting a learner's cognitive transformation without generating undermining and stimulating processes of this sort. This is why learners' "understanding performances" are at the heart of education for understanding—applying new insights that diverge from intuitions, in contexts beyond those that were taught, getting informative feedback (with the help of the teacher) that indicates difficulties and issues that require improved performance, and renewed performance by the learner based on that feedback.

The learner's encounter with knowledge in education for the sake of understanding takes place in various ways: the systematic presentation of information online by experts; communication with

experts; student enquiry conducted in the field, on the internet or in academic sources; peer learning; and, naturally, also by the teacher's presentation of information in the familiar way. Success in education for understanding cannot be measured by the tests in currency today. Assessment must be based on student performances such as presentations before peers and experts, exhibitions, or creating a product that is accepted in the domain such as an inquiry-based document, a film, or the like.

In summary, education for meaning intended to develop the learner's understanding of the world has far-reaching implications for teaching and requires the teacher to act differently from what is customary in existing schools.

Education for meaning: Implications for content

Education for meaning as understanding the world focuses on three intersecting spheres: the global-environmental; the local; and the self. We will indicate below several key educational implications of this tripartite focus by laying emphasis on the new subject matter required by education for meaning.

The global-environmental sphere

The global-environmental sphere receives little attention in the current educational system. At the heart of this sphere is **ecological literacy** and education for **global citizenship** (Boix Mansilla, 2016; UNESCO, 2015). The focus of ecological literacy is **systems thinking**—which ought to be learned as a stand-alone subject as well as an organizational axis of science and social disciplines that constitute the basic knowledge necessary for such literacy.

Among the key characteristics of our age is the increasing complexity of social and economic systems and the accelerated pace of change. As a result, many of our fundamental intuitions about "how the world works" are imprecise or incomplete and, therefore, misleading. The mechanistic legacy of the modern age has taught us to think in discrete "compartments," to divide learning into separate subjects in schools such that each discipline is thought of as a separate "knowledge packet" unrelated to the others. A fundamental cause of major problems in our times, therefore, lies in the poor understanding of reciprocal relationships among the different components of the system. Owing to the interval in space and time and the complex reciprocal relationships between cause and effect, it's hard for us to foresee the operation of the domains in which we operate and to understand the long-term consequences of our actions. Accordingly, to understand what is happening in the world and to enable us to act effectively in response, we must understand, think and act systemically. Systemic thinking enables us to get a clearer picture of the connections between things and to develop a vision of the whole—a vision that is essentially ecological. This is especially critical nowadays owing to the general need to understand the operation of systems whose degree of complexity is increasing exponentially and the reciprocal relations between human action and earth's life support systems.

Ecological literacy complements education for global citizenship, which also must be taught both as a discrete subject and as a component of civic-democratic education (see infra). Within the framework of global citizenship studies, the clear and responsible presentation of key data regarding the social, economic and, of course, environmental situation around the world is of the utmost importance. It is particularly important to emphasize data that indicate fundamental problems on the global level, which promote solidarity and empathy with others, and encourage concrete action to remedy them. For example, poverty statistics and widespread world hunger, income gaps among and within countries, the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few, ecological damage, social and environmental injustice, and the like. Concurrently, it is important to offer practical courses of action for dealing with the problems, e.g., international treaties or an international poor tax. In addition, there are many actions on the local level that reflect a consciousness of solidarity with and commitment to repairing the world. For example, actions that undertake reduction of the ecological footprint of a school or of the community, or actions that emphasize local economic development, sustainable food sources, or fair business and employment practices.

An additional area of content that is essential to developing global consciousness is "**world history.**" This subject area has been refined over the past fifteen years in response to the growing interest in globalization, and a number of books on the subject have achieved best-seller status (e.g., Diamond, 1997; Harari, 2012). Contemporary world history emphasizes humankind's common heritage and explains people's differences based on environmental circumstances in contrast to the racial, national, and cultural explanations common in other historical perspectives. The history taught in schools is still largely rooted in nationalism, with a focus on wars between nations. To nurture a consciousness of global citizenship it is essential to counteract this trend by teaching with a more global perspective.

The local sphere

Education for global citizenship integrates with **civic-democratic** education, which constitutes a pivotal axis of the second sphere of understanding: the local context. Civic education, in contrast to the citizenship studies familiar to us today, is not a separate subject; it is an amalgam of a series of learning activities distributed across all the school years. It includes encounters with a variety of personalities that make up the cultural mosaic of the local community and the state; close-up familiarity with principal political, social and economic institutions; familiarity with youth from distant communities through online shared learning; and learning about pressing problems on the local level. A substantial part of the learning should take place outside the classroom, where the relevant individuals or institutions do their work. These activities should be combined with those that relate to deepening democratic values, which may include learning about the founding principles of democracy as well as techniques for engaging in democratic discourse that will bring about serious and deep discussion of genuine dilemmas in the life of the school, the community and the nation. And complementing all these should be **volunteer work in the community and society**, which is inseparable from civic-democratic education and an important means of developing the students' feeling of capability for social engagement.

The second axis in the local sphere of understanding is the axis of **local identity**. Here we are referring to knowledge areas that are more familiar to us from existing schools, such as literature, history and heritage. These subjects may be taught as discrete subjects or in various cross-disciplinary combinations, but in all instances they should be taught with an aim towards mutual connection and particularly in relation to actual dilemmas of identity and to questions relating to the common good. It is no accident that these subject areas are at the core of the curriculum of existing schools. In point of fact, they are the areas that are likely to mold the national ethos, a process that is a central goal of the modern school.

These subjects play an important role in education for meaning as well, but they always must be taught in conjunction with the other two spheres, the global sphere and the personal sphere. There is, of course, an inherent tension between cultivating local and communal identity on the one hand and identity that is based on membership in the global community that calls for sensitivity and engagement beyond local ties. However, in education for meaning this tension is at the center of the educational dialogue, and it focuses on the varied possibilities of resolving the tension in a productive and constructive way.

Understanding of the self

The third sphere of understanding is the understanding of self. This is the sphere in which meaning as comprehension of the world and meaning as significance merge. Three types of content will be taught in this sphere:

The first type is theoretical **content essential to understanding of self** and one's relation to society. We are referring here to knowledge areas such as psychology, sociology, and anthropology in combination with core subjects in the humanities such as philosophy, literature, and history. (We should note that in existing schools the first four subjects listed here are not part of the general curriculum and constitute only an elective course of study in senior high school.) The second type of

content consists of a variety of **group workshops** related to social and emotional aspects of school life. The emotional dimension is hardly addressed at schools in any structured manner. This, in itself, is highly problematic, and it simultaneously has serious consequences on students' cognitive functions. We are referring here to activities similar in spirit to those found in informal education or group facilitation that enable students to become more introspective and consider their peers from the emotional and social perspectives. The third type of content in the sphere of self is, of course, **spheres of meaning** as significance, which was described more fully in the previous section.

To be perfectly clear, subjects currently taught in schools will continue to be taught within the framework of education for understanding: reading and writing skills (which must include various oral presentation skills that are essential to personal and social action today), science subjects and mathematics at a level required to understand key natural and social processes, mother tongue and foreign languages, etc. However, all subjects should be taught for the sake of understanding—not as discrete, disjointed subjects, but as the indispensable foundation for cultivating an informed, sustainable and engaged world view. And, finally, it should be noted that even today there are schools implementing action of the type described here that offer evidence that the proposed program is decidedly within the realm of the possible.

Education for meaning: Organizational implications

As Seymour Sarason taught us a long time ago, every proposed fundamental school change should identify the main programmatic regularities of existing schools that demand change and propose alternatives (Sarason, 1996; Sizer, 1984). Accordingly, I will lay out here several key programmatic regularities that will facilitate, indeed advance, realization of the behavioral regularities relating to patterns of teaching and content of education for meaning offered in the preceding sections.

Time structure

The first regularity that demands fundamental change is the time structure in schools. It is evident that teaching for understanding and serious experiences in the spheres of meaning for significance cannot be achieved within existing school time structures. Deep cognitive and emotional engagement in any area of learning is not possible within the existing structure with its multiple subjects, taught in brief class units during the typical school day. Moreover, this structure creates a situation in which many teachers, who teach subjects that are studied for a limited number of hours in the course of a week, are forced to meet with hundreds of different students every week (Sizer, 1984, 1992). This makes it impossible for them to form the close relationships and the mutual acquaintance between teachers and students that are essential to education for meaning in our intended sense. Therefore, in a school aiming for education for meaning, class sessions must be longer—from a minimum of one and half hours up to an entire day—and a smaller number of subjects will be covered in a typical week of learning.

A second programmatic regularity that is related to time allocation is what may be referred to as "community day." To introduce spheres of meaning that will be learned beyond the four walls of the school, and in order to bring about genuine encounters with community individuals and organizations so essential for learning in the local sphere, it is appropriate to allocate one day a week to learning activities in the community. This is a day during which students will experience spheres of meaning outside of school, will meet with key figures where they work, will take nature outings, will tour major institutions, and the like. Needless to say, this study outside of school can be accomplished in two half-day sessions or time allocations can be adjusted. The important point is that if we want to achieve meaningful out of school learning, we have to design appropriate programmatic regularities.

Mentors

The next programmatic regularity necessary for the proposed school is individual and group meetings between the mentors and students. In most existing schools there are no established one-on-one meetings between teachers and students. Such meetings take place informally during recess or after school and, generally, only to censure or discipline students. However, in schools where a central

pattern of teaching is personal mentoring, this situation must be fundamentally changed. Therefore, a key programmatic regularity in education for meaning is the allocation of a regular time each week for individual meetings between the mentor and the student and, similarly, allocation of time for weekly workshops of learner groups or mixed-age groupings of students and others.

Students' choice

Another key programmatic regularity to establish in schools is systematic choice by students. It is evident that in education for meaning choice is an important means for promoting student motivation and interest, as well as a goal in and of itself in the prevailing social reality. Therefore, in contrast to existing schools, where students hardly exercise any choice whatever, in the proposed schools students will deal with varied choices coached regularly by the educational staff. Students will choose their mentors; they will choose among different spheres of meaning; they will choose what questions to address within the spheres of meaning that are attuned to developing understanding of the world; and they will choose the social action projects in which they want to participate. All this requires construction of a sophisticated organizational mechanism to regulate the different selection processes and, concurrently, building the procedures for student coaching. Accordingly, it appears that for purposes of teaching for meaning a number of "networking teachers" will have to dedicate a majority of their time to these procedural matters, particularly in providing support to students who inadvertently fall between the cracks.

I have set forth here a number of key programmatic regularities that must be restructured from the perspective of teaching for meaning. It is not possible, and there is no reason, to provide here an exhaustive description of all the programmatic changes demanded by such a school. The purpose of the outline presented here is to identify the key areas requiring change and, particularly, the requisite course of thought and action to successfully establish new schools different from existing schools. One may assume that most of the new and effective programmatic regularities will be created and developed within the schools that focus on education for meaning.

Education for meaning: Does it meet the essential conditions?

The discussion to this point regarding education for meaning has demonstrated that we are talking about a comprehensive educational concept: an *educational* concept insofar as it relates to fundamental aspects of education—pedagogy, content and organization of knowledge; a *comprehensive* concept insofar as it relates in a coherent way to all central educational aspects of the school and to the central facets of the student—intellectual, ethical, identity, and emotional—rather than focusing on only some of them. However, does education for meaning conform to the essential conditions of a 21st century educational concept? Here we will examine this question in light of the four conditions set out earlier (see supra, pp. 158-159).

1. To aim for **a broad common denominator**. It would appear that this is the most challenging condition for education for meaning. It is certainly possible that the pedagogy implicated in education for meaning as understanding the world will be accepted by broad segments of the community and educational policymakers, particularly if its capacity to train students for work in the knowledge economy is emphasized. There is close relationship between the pedagogy of education for understanding and teaching and learning methods recommended by many documents that address "21st century skills" (OECD, 2018; Melamed & Salant, 2010). A good example in this respect is evident in the pedagogical reforms of the last decade in Southeast Asia, where educators are trying to implement problem-based learning and similar pedagogies in order to train students for the global knowledge economy (Volansky, 2020; Hogan, 2012). However, the substance of education for understanding the world—the more critical part concerned with the principles of broad sustainability and that demands learning new subjects beyond the "economic core" subjects that are tested in the international examinations (math, sciences, mother tongue, and English)—is likely to encounter opposition.

   The second aspect of education for meaning, experience with the spheres of meaning as significance, also is likely to encounter vigorous opposition. The basic idea that one key purpose

of school must be active inquiry of personal significance is far from accepted today, and it appears that allocating a substantial number of school hours to activities of this sort is likely to be seen by many as a waste of time and public funds. In current circumstances, education for meaning is, to a large degree, a subversive educational concept in most countries.

Nevertheless, four considerations offer the promise of wider adoption in the near future. First, it appeals to deeply held interests of the general public today, not just to an isolated segment of the population. The need to understand the world and construct meaning is a general human need, not tied to any particular group. Second, despite the fact that it challenges prevailing educational policy in many countries, it does not propose radical changes such as abolition of schools, distance learning, home schooling, or the like. Fundamentally, it seeks to generalize, broaden, and deepen the operating patterns and content currently found in schools and educational systems that are recognized as most successful, such as the Finnish system (Sahlberg, 2011) and schools that offer the International Baccalaureate diploma. Third, criticism of existing schools based on the sense that they are irrelevant to contemporary reality is becoming increasingly common among parents, students, and quite a few educational policy makers as, for example, in Israel (Educational Echoes, 2013; Harpaz & Horwitz, 2020). As these attitudes gain momentum, a concept that offers a comprehensive and coherent alternative that straightforwardly addresses these widely held feelings is likely to be received more favorably. And, lastly, broad support of education for meaning likely will come from educators in the field and academics. Accordingly, if educators succeed in becoming major players in public discourse on the future of education – a discourse that has been dominated in the past decades by business people and politicians – public support for education for meaning will increase correspondingly. This point brings us directly to the second essential condition for a new educational concept.

2. **Correspondence to the basic motivations of educators**. Here education for understanding stands on firm ground. What motivates most teachers to choose their profession is what is referred to as "Bildung culture": the desire to help young people develop their identities through meaningful engagement with knowledge and with individual and societal questions (Back, In press). Education for meaning in both its aspects relates directly to advancing those basic elements. On a number of occasions, I have presented the central ideas of this article to schoolteachers and faculty members of teacher training institutions and, invariably, the reaction has been clear and unequivocal: "This is why we joined the educational system, but the problem is that the ministry of education seems to have a different agenda." To be sure, there is a gulf between emotional and abstract reliance on a concept on the one hand, and teachers' willingness to alter accepted practices to actually effect the concept. And, yet, if education for meaning gains sufficient professional support and teachers in the field feel that this support is not merely rhetorical and empty, driven by some ulterior policy motive, one may count on the fact that an overwhelming majority will embrace it wholeheartedly.

3. Existence in the field of **effective practices** that exemplify the concept. As set forth in the preceding section, the instructional model of education for meaning is teaching that is characteristic of the fine arts in secondary school. This is a major strength of the proposed concept. There is no need to invent a new working model; the concept is based on a successful working method that is being adapted to the demands of new contexts. It is important to qualify this assertion. The road to "translating" the teaching and learning model common in the arts to theoretical subjects and other significant areas besides the arts is a long one, riddled with potholes. The transfer from a student's experience in creating a painting or film of his own to his experience in building knowledge in subjects such as world history or ecology is by no means simple, and it presents us with weighty theoretical and practical questions. Nonetheless, the cumulative experience in thoughtful building of knowledge as a core component of school offers room for optimism (Bereiter, 2002).

4. Adequately **addressing key societal challenges**. According to this condition, the proposed concept must provide appropriate educational responses to key societal challenges of the day that

cannot be addressed absent educational activity (as a necessary but not sufficient condition). I have posited that there are three critical societal challenges that satisfy this condition—transition to broad sustainability; constructing a personal and collective identity in the fluid modernity of our times; and training for the knowledge economy—and that effective educational solutions to each of them demands a profound change in the basic model of existing schools. Does education for meaning provide appropriate educational responses to these challenges? That appears to be the case. First and foremost, education for broad sustainability demands deep and complex understanding of the world as well as a new type of education regarding local and global citizenship and democracy. These, in turn, require a profound change in the forms of teaching and learning, as well as significant changes in content. Education for meaning, as we have seen, proposes a series of changes along these lines.

However, that's not enough. Transition to broad sustainability calls for a humane society in which a majority are motivated by "sustainability-oriented meanings". In other words, the ends that motivate them to action are ends that facilitate, and even reinforce, broad sustainability, and not those that undermine it. At present, the dominant ends are conspicuously adverse to sustainability. They find expression either in terms such as economic gain, self-branding, and competition between individuals and societies (what Benjamin Barber calls the "McWorld" tendency) or in their dialectic opposites such as ethnocentricity, nationalism, and religious fundamentalism (what Barber calls the "Jihad" tendency) (Barber 1995; Ram, 2004).

Experience within the framework of general education in spheres of meaning not narrowly geared to economic or personal financial gain—such as the artistic creation, various crafts, study of various types, social activism, intense physical or spiritual activity, etc.—therefore is an essential stage in the transition to a sustainable society. Of course, sustainability-oriented educational experience does not guarantee that a graduate of the system will make such choices down the road but, nonetheless, they would seem to be an essential step to that end.

Understandably, experience within the spheres of meaning as significance also is an essential educational means of coping with the second challenge—constructing a personal and collective identity in the reality of fluid modernity. By the nature of things, the educational system alone cannot change the structure of the public sphere, but it can provide young people with a variety of worthwhile meanings from which to choose, a protective and supportive environment, and responsible adult guidance that will help them negotiate the intense and complex process of establishing their personal and communal identities. The second aspect of education for meaning, which deals with understanding the world, also is essential to dealing with this challenge. The learner's intellectual understanding of himself and the world he inhabits also constitutes an essential stage in shaping our identities.

And, lastly, does education for meaning serve the need for training graduates for work in the knowledge economy? As maintained earlier, it appears that here, as well, the answer is in the affirmative. There is a strong correlation between the skills and qualifications demanded of the knowledge economy and the working model at the core of education for meaning. In both instances we are talking about active knowledge building, developing the ability to analyze and study new problems, cultivation of independent and team learning skills, and the like. And in both instances it is apparent that the pedagogy of existing schools does not make this possible.

Our discussion of the extent to which education for meaning satisfies the conditions we established yields the following picture: the proposed concept satisfies three of the four conditions, while the first condition—the likelihood of gaining widespread social agreement—is the most problematic. I have posited that even with regard to this condition there are circumstances that are likely to improve the standing of education for meaning and that one of the key factors likely to influence its acceptance is the extent to which educators will fight with determination for their professional positions in the public and political debates regarding educational issues. The future of education for meaning, therefore, is far from secure. Nevertheless, with all necessary caution and modesty I would maintain that the discussion here demonstrates that education for meaning may have

the potential to become one possible synthesis for 21st century education, just as the educational system in existing schools represents a synthesis that took place in the late nineteenth century. Existing schools created a coherent and effective model that served as the appropriate educational response to the central social challenges confronting that generation: molding citizens of the modern nation state and training workers for the industrial economy. Education for meaning offers a coherent model for schools that provide an educational response to the key challenges we confront at the onset of the 21st century: molding individuals and a civil society that will lead the global knowledge society to a sustainable society and the training of workers for the 21st century knowledge economy.

Conclusion

This article has presented five central claims:

1. A critical task in the field of education today is to design a new, comprehensive educational concept for schools, because the existing concept does not address the central societal and educational challenges of the 21st century.

2. In the absence of such a new concept we are left with an "educational-pedagogical vacuum" in schools that currently is filled with extra-educational objectives that are at odds with the basic motivations of educators in the field.

3. The consequence of this situation is the acute instrumentalization of school education that materially denigrates the value of education in the estimation of teachers, students, and the community at large.

4. The concepts current in educational discourse cannot serve as the basis for a new, comprehensive educational concept for schools because either they do not deal with all dimensions of school or the key aspects of the learner; or because they merely offer improvements on the existing model rather than an alternative model.

5. Education for meaning has the potential to become a new, comprehensive educational concept for schools. This concept is designed to address the key societal challenges of our day and to fill the educational-pedagogical vacuum that exists in schools with both theory and practice that relates to the professional ethos of educators in the field.

Most of the foregoing discussion was devoted to education for meaning, but that was not its sole purpose. No less important is pointing out the urgent educational need to initiate a dialogue that focuses on "big theories" of education. In the beginning of the third decade of the 21st century, social and technological conditions are ripe for development of schools that are no longer based on the mass production logic of existing schools. However, for this process to unfold successfully and responsibly, we must think on a large scale and comprehensively about education suitable to our times and to implement our ideas in the field. Unfortunately, just when conditions for change are ripening, the educational discourse of the last decade—a lost decade from the educational perspective—has become superficial and "earthbound," crassly economy-focused, almost totally unconcerned with the important educational and social questions (Karmon, 2012a). This article, therefore, offers one possible alternative for a different kind of school and, at the same time, embodies a call for a different educational dialogue appropriate to our times.

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Notes:

[1] In recent years, general agreement has emerged from a variety of disciplinary perspectives on the importance of motivations that are not external and material. See, e.g., Ariely, 2008; Pink, 2009. On the importance of values as a motivation for learning, see Nisan, 2001, and on teacher motivation that contrasts with common educational policies in many states, see Back, In press.

[2] This definition is largely based on Harpaz's characterization of a "sphere of meaning.. See Harpaz, 2012, p. 54

[3] Barber maintains that the defining characteristic of globalization is a destructive dialectic between the global McWorld of corporations, marketing, competitiveness, and superficial entertainment on the one hand, and the "Jihadistic" reaction that, despite its name, is common to all religions and cultures. This opposing force is characterized by ethnocentricity, isolationism, and fundamentalism (a modern phenomenon that purports to restore the glory of an imaginary past), which frequently finds expression in totalitarianism and terror. According to Barber, McWorld and Jihad are mutually dependent and reinforce each other: McWorld justifies itself as the bearer of freedom and democracy, and as the antidote to Jihad, whereas Jihad sets itself as the protector of local values against the corrupting McWorld. Our common tragedy, he concludes, is that both cultures are anti-democratic and harmful to our personal freedom. Therefore, a central claim of this article is that education for meaning is a vital means for liberating ourselves from the catch identified by Barber.

[4] Aristotle's view on this topic is not unequivocal. In the *Ethics* he sets another ultimate end, namely, the life of the statesman, which constitutes the fulfillment of a second kind of knowledge that he characterizes as "practical knowledge" (phronesis). (The third kind of knowledge is the "techne," which refers to the technical skills of the artist and the craftsman.) Practical knowledge is a person's ability to devise appropriate actions to accomplish his ends in concrete contexts, together with wise deliberation concerning the ends themselves: the ability to choose those ends that will lead to happiness. Practical knowledge requires judgments taken in specific cases that all differ from one another. That is why it develops over the course of one's life through cumulative experiences in exercising judgments and reflecting on their consequences. Accordingly, Aristotle claims, practical knowledge cannot be taught in a theoretical and didactic fashion like scientific knowledge (episteme). To nurture it, one needs to experience it over an extended period of time and with coaching by a wise adult. In many respects, education for meaning fulfills Aristotle's educational concept: education for meaning as understanding the world focuses on scientific knowledge, whereas education for meaning as significance focuses on practical knowledge that is developed through reflective and coached experiences in spheres of meaning that are offered for students' choice in school.

About the Author

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