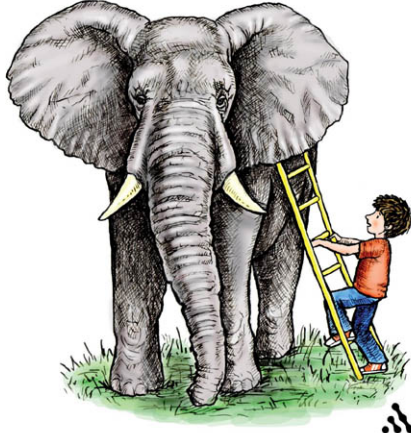


Teaching Happiness and Well-Being in Schools



Foreword by
Lord Richard Layard

Ian Morris



Teaching Happiness and Well-Being in Schools

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Teaching Happiness and Well-Being in Schools

Learning to ride elephants

Ian Morris



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Dedication

For Georgie and Olivia, the most
important people in my life and for
my parents, who taught me how
to find important things in the first place.

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Contents

| | |
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| Foreword by Richard Layard | viii |
| 1 Learning to train elephant riders: teaching techniques for happiness and well-being | 1 |
| 2 Happiness | 22 |
| 3 Learning to unite elephant and rider: caring for the human body | 31 |
| 4 Philosophy and well-being | 53 |
| 5 Emotions | 71 |
| 6 Resilience | 93 |
| 7 Strengths and flow | 110 |
| 8 Relationships | 130 |
| 9 Modern life is rubbish | 157 |
| 10 Mindfulness meditation, spirituality and meaning | 177 |
| Appendix 1: A well-being curriculum – the spider’s web | 200 |
| Appendix 2: Further reading and useful websites | 203 |
| Endnotes | 207 |
| Bibliography | 219 |
| Index | 222 |

Foreword by Richard Layard

This is a remarkable book and it reflects a remarkable change that is happening in our culture. Throughout human history people have wanted to be happy and happiness has been a central theme in literature. But in education? Not really.

The reason is partly that education is about systematic knowledge, and systematic knowledge about happiness has been a late developer. For 300 years modern science has increased our understanding and mastery of the external natural world – and this has led to the astonishing economic growth we have experienced. Material wealth-creation is easy to measure and it has taken centre stage in our civilization and in much of our education.

But it remains to understand and master ourselves. Fortunately in the last 30 years psychology has turned to this vital task. That is what has made this book possible, and it also provides the foundation for a new culture in which the quality of our subjective experience becomes the test of our progress as a society.

Of course much of this new knowledge supports (from the strongpoint of empirical science) the wisdom of the ages. So this book draws on the wisdom of the Bible, of the Buddha and of the Greeks as well as modern science. And it puts them together in a delightful way – including hundreds of practical hints for the conduct of lessons.

The book is based on the author's own experience of teaching these lessons at Wellington College. When Anthony Seldon became head of the school, he took the enormously brave decision to introduce these lessons, with Ian Morris in charge. Gloomsters predicted a backlash. But in fact it has been a huge success, both with students and their parents.

For this is what young people want. They want to be happy, not in a selfish way (since selfishness produces misery) but because being happy is the true mark of human flourishing. The government has now begun to realize this and made the teaching of well-being an integral part of the national curriculum in England and Wales. For teachers of that curriculum, this book will be a god-send.

I hope it will be widely used around the world and contribute greatly to the spread of human happiness.

London, January 2009.

1

Learning to train elephant riders: teaching techniques for happiness and well-being

Chapter preview

- Why learning to ride elephants?
- Full catastrophe teaching
- Teaching well-being: the process
- Some ideas for teaching happiness and well-being
- Teachers and well-being
- Whole-school well-being

I'd like to begin by asking you to imagine that you are about to go for a journey on the back of a magnificent, big-eared, African elephant. Having climbed onto his back, you are sitting astride him, your legs resting against his thick, wrinkly skin and your hands upon his shoulders. You don't know the elephant, but the guide assures you that he is good natured and that he likes humans. You set off: just you, alone on top of your elephant, following on behind a procession of other elephant riders. Pretty soon you get used to the elephant's lumbering rhythm: the movement of his shoulders, the swaying of his head and trunk, the bellows-like swell and shrink of his flanks as he breathes beneath you. You lift your head from your elephant's neck and begin to notice the other riders – some seem steadier than you, others seem less secure, some are ecstatically happy, others are nervous and seem to cling on to their animal for dear life. You're happy with your first attempt at elephant riding.

Then you begin to think about your destination and suddenly realize that you don't know where you are going. You try to look to the head of the procession, but amidst the clouds of dust kicked up by giant feet and the swaying, colourfully

clothed compatriots ahead, you realize that the guide you had assumed to be at the front, might not be there after all. You start to get concerned. You look around nervously, but nobody else seems to share your fears: the lady behind you smiles and waves. Your mind rushes on to thinking about how to stop the elephant to get off. The guides all spoke Swahili to the elephants. You don't speak Swahili. You don't even have reins to make him change direction. It dawns on you that this elephant is out of your control. All the while, he plods along ten paces behind the elephant in front, keeping perfect step, following the route set out for him. It eventually strikes you that the elephant knows exactly where it is going: all you have to do is relax and let him carry you there.

Why learning to ride elephants?

The metaphor of riding elephants comes from Jonathan Haidt's book *The Happiness Hypothesis* and it is a metaphor which helps to illustrate the purpose of teaching happiness and well-being. Haidt explains in his analogy that the key to successful animal riding is a harmonious relationship between the animal and its rider. In order to guide an elephant to where you want to go, you have to be able not only to know your destination, but also to understand the elephant and all of the little aspects of elephant behaviour which might lead to your journey going wrong. You also have to be able to trust that, in certain circumstances, the elephant knows best and allow yourself to be guided by him.

For Haidt, the elephant and its rider is a metaphor for being human. The rider, the small component attempting to control everything, represents the conscious, thinking self. The elephant, the vast, powerful set of forces which the rider is attempting to control, represents everything else: all of the myriad unnoticed processes of the brain and all of the extraordinary panoply of events which take place in the body:

Our minds are loose confederations of parts, but we identify with and pay too much attention to one part: conscious verbal thinking . . . Because we can see only one little corner of the mind's vast operation, we are surprised when urges, wishes, and temptations emerge, seemingly from nowhere . . . We sometimes fall into the view that we are fighting with our unconscious, our id, or our animal self, but really we are the whole thing. We are the rider, and we are the elephant.¹

Teaching happiness and well-being is about trying to help children to bring the elephant and rider into one harmonious whole, as Haidt describes above. Our

mistake is often to believe that the rider, the conscious thinking self, holds all the answers, is the master in all situations and always knows best. The aim of teaching happiness and well-being is to teach the rider, not only about himself, but also about the elephant that he rides. Many people go through life experiencing an antagonistic relationship between, metaphorically speaking, the elephant and the rider and this antagonism is the source of psychological and physiological problems. If we can provide young people with an elephant rider's manual, in other words, if we can teach them how they function as humans and then teach them how to be not just functioning humans, but excellent ones, we might be able to help them to avoid many of the pitfalls that arise either from a rider that tries to exert too much control, or from a runaway elephant.

Full catastrophe teaching

'... education needs to be more than just the accumulation of knowledge, whether scientific, technical, historical, or whatever. It should really be education in how to be.'²

Traditionally, much of the type of material that this book covers has been found either in a minuscule proportion of the curriculum, in the work of the pastoral tutor or guidance counsellor, or has come incidentally as the result of good teachers who role-model the skills of elephant riding. It has had to compete, as the above quotation from Matthieu Ricard indicates, with the acquisition of skills and qualifications for the workplace or for university entrance, rather than the skills of being human that are needed once students get there.

Where it has come as part of the curriculum, it often follows a disaster model of education: in other words, the worst-case scenario is presented to the students along with the different ways of avoiding it. For example, drug and substance misuse education often focuses on the worst case scenario: addiction to drugs such as heroin or crack cocaine, usually coupled with crime, homelessness, prostitution or death. Similarly, sex education will focus on teenage pregnancy and the transmission of sexually transmitted infections (with gruesome pictures). Whilst it is important for young people to be aware of the risks that lie in the world around them, the ultimate dangers should not be the *focus* of education, because they simply will not affect the majority of students.³

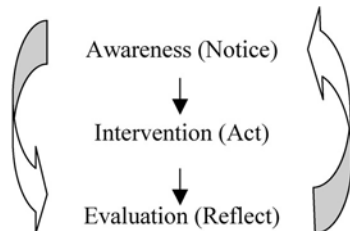
Apart from this, full catastrophe teaching doesn't have a useful philosophy behind it, as it simply teaches young people that the world is a dangerous place which will do them harm and this is not the world that they will come to experience. Because of

the focus on preparing children for the worst-case scenario, we can neglect to educate them in how to achieve the best-case scenario; we neglect to systematically teach them the skills of how to be successful as human beings – how to create and sustain meaningful relationships, how to find and develop what they are good at, how to care for the body and the mind. We have to turn the disaster model on its head and teach children what it means to flourish – teach them how to be competent elephant riders, how to be excellent human beings; not try at all costs to safeguard the elephant so much that the rider becomes bored and frustrated, or to allow the elephant complete free rein to do as it pleases.

Teaching well-being: the process

Teaching well-being is not quite like other academic disciplines: whilst the skills acquired through academic study are in constant use, it is possible for the concepts learned to exist in the mind alone, divorced from application and experience, where they can eventually cease to exist through lack of use (can you remember everything you crammed for your finals?). Well-being is different, as it relates directly to experiences that students will have in their everyday lives. It is possible to teach all *about* well-being to our students, but that would be to miss the point. The teaching of well-being must have *experience* as its primary aim: we should be teaching the students *how* to be well, how to *do* well-being. In order for this stuff to work, we have to get the students to experience it. If you are teaching about the benefits of exercise, you have to get the students to do some exercise so that they can see those benefits for themselves. If you are teaching cognitive skills (such as those on resilience), you have to get the students practising them and applying them in real-life situations: it is no good just talking about it or handing over a worksheet.

Teaching well-being involves students in a very simple three-stage, cyclical process:



The process starts with awareness, or noticing: asking the students to simply notice things about themselves and about the world around them, including other

people. The sources of this noticing will be very broad and will range from becoming aware of changes in the mind or the body brought on by positive or negative states such as flow or sadness, to noticing body language in others or things in the natural or man-made world. This is the primary skill in well-being: it is the alert system which tells us that things are going well or things are not going well, it is the audit or the stock-take we need to do to realize we have to make changes in our lives. In many cases, students will have to be taught what to look out for; they will need to be shown when their body is telling them something is wrong, or when the body language of others tells them they have made a social mistake. Noticing is a skill that has to be learned and it arises from stillness and patience: if we are constantly bombarded by sensory noise, or we do not stop from one thing to the next, we will not notice things about ourselves or others.

The second stage is the intervention, or action which will enable the students to flourish; these are the practical things, after noticing, that the students need to learn to do to keep themselves healthy and happy: they are the doctor diagnosing and prescribing. The interventions and the evidence that supports their use form the backbone of the rest of the book.

The third and final stage in the process is evaluation and reflection: how well did the intervention work? Students must get into the habit of tuning in to the effects of interventions such as practising gratitude, getting into flow or doing exercise: how does it affect the mind and body? How does it affect relationships? How does it affect progress? It is this part of the process where the students must act as 'self-scientists' and evaluate the effectiveness of the treatment they prescribed for themselves in stage two. Students must be willing to accept both that an intervention didn't work, and that it did: especially if it's an intervention (such as watching less television) which they might not in the first instance enjoy prescribing for themselves. Journals are an essential part of this process: students must be encouraged to reflect meaningfully on the effectiveness of interventions.

At the end of this process, students should be able to have the following internal dialogue:

'I know when something helpful/unhelpful is happening in my life. I know this because . . .'

(Noticing)

'When X is happening in my life, I know that I have to do Y.'

(Acting)

'I know how successful Y is because . . .'

(Reflecting)

Some ideas for teaching happiness and well-being

Teaching well-being is in many ways just like the teaching of other subjects, but with one important difference. The subject is *directly* about the students and about being human, rather than being about ideas by and large at some sort of remove from them, which then have to be translated back into something relevant. The aim of the subject is to allow students to experience something that they can then put into practice in their own lives. There are a variety of strategies that can be employed in devising a well-being curriculum,⁴ but the guiding principle should be that the students first *experience* the ideas at first hand and then *reflect* on their usefulness for them.

Experiencing techniques

There is the hackneyed but true saying about getting someone to *do* something being the best form of teaching, and experiencing is a vital strategy for the teaching of well-being. Unless students have an opportunity to *feel* how the subject can affect them, it is of lesser value and all they are left with is an intellectual grasp rather than one that is embedded in the core of their being.

The lab

The idea behind this teaching technique is to ask students to play the role of 'scientist' and test out the theories that you suggest to them using the simple process of observation, hypothesis, testing and reflection. Let's take the example of teaching mindfulness as a way of dealing with stress. The students need to connect with the concept of stress. I often use clips of Basil Fawlty losing his temper, and there are plenty of great examples in film. The aim is to create a resonance: do the students recognize this behaviour? The next step is to prescribe a cure. Ask the students for ideas and perhaps suggest meditation if it does not arise from their examples. Do some meditation and ask the students to think about whether this might help to relieve stress. Ask them to test the hypothesis that meditation lowers the symptoms of stress by practising it between lessons for homework and writing up their findings.

The students evaluate the usefulness of various well-being techniques and in this way equip themselves with techniques appropriate to them. This technique has to be open to the possibility that the students will reject the technique that you teach them, which is unusual for us as teachers as very often we require the students to accept *everything* that we teach them. This technique must also be open to evaluative

discussion afterwards, where students discuss usefulness with each other and also discuss hurdles they encountered and how they overcame them. It is unusual for students to be set homework and then find in class the week afterwards that their teacher does not punish them for not doing it. I recently asked a well-being class to keep a gratitude journal for a week: half the class had not managed it. They were surprised when I wasn't annoyed and the penny dropped when I explained that *they* are experimenting with the usefulness of these techniques: if it doesn't work, don't use it.

If it is hoped that students will adopt the skills of well-being, they should be given every opportunity to practise and experiment with them. Just reading through a worksheet once on the benefits of altruism will have little effect: getting the students to practise a random act of kindness and write about the effect it had will raise their chances of using that skill more frequently.

Game playing

Game playing is a great way of bringing a difficult concept to life through experience and it is of course something that comes naturally to us as humans. Game playing provides an opportunity for experiential learning which can help students to understand a concept in a different and fuller way than just by using the intellect: it can make a concept a lot more visceral. There are some excellent books available with some very good ideas for games in them which can be used either as ice-breakers or warm-ups, or have more specific value for well-being lessons.⁵

Making

Want to show students how their emotional brain works? Why not get them building brains out of brightly coloured modelling clay? Want to teach them about gratitude? Get them to write thank you letters. Want to teach them about flow? Get some musical instruments into the classroom and get them to make a noise. This advice is not just for the younger children: we may think that those surly 16 year olds just want to sit and watch videos, but they love playing just as much as 6 year olds. Every 'making' exercise is valuable because it offers students an opportunity to become immersed in a simple task which has important implications for their own understanding of being human. The lesson will stick with them for longer too. I still refer to the image of a brain I made out of a bagel, some sweets and a piece of broccoli in a lesson taught by a colleague, to remind me of the organs involved in emotional decision making.

Re-enacting experiments

Much of our understanding of human well-being comes from experiments conducted in the world of the psychologist's lab and some of these experiments lend themselves nicely to being re-enacted with students. With a bit of preparation and the use of 'confederates' (students whom you use as stooges), very important lessons can be learned by students about themselves and how they are prone to act in certain situations. They can be a great way of highlighting to students some of the hurdles that we have to overcome in order to enjoy well-being fully.⁶

Drama and role-play techniques

The use of drama and role play has been popular in teaching for years for obvious reasons. One of the key problems that drama techniques face is that of authenticity and when using drama, it is important to set certain standards of preparation and performance to avoid the inevitable descent into painful attempts at humour and entertainment.

When taken seriously, one of the best techniques to use is called Forum Theatre. This was developed by an Argentinean theatre practitioner called Augusto Boal in order to put oppressed Latin American people back in touch with the issues that governed their lives. The basic idea is to create a short piece of theatre; a story which is acted out by a cast. The piece ends on some kind of cliff-hanger decision and the audience is then invited, via a compère called the 'joker', to decide what should happen next in the story, or in fact to make changes to the earlier parts of the story that might impact the outcome. Audience members are invited to take the place of cast members and the story is re-enacted to see if a different outcome is possible. Obviously this is something of an undertaking, but elements of this technique can be used in short lessons. 'What happened next?' is a particularly useful technique for the classroom and invites dialogue and discussion of key ideas that you may have been exploring. For example, a group could stage a conflict and the audience could be invited to suggest solutions to that conflict based upon techniques that you have taught them.

Role play is extremely important for getting students to develop empathy; one of the most important skills that we can teach our young people. The more it is used, the better it gets and if groups are particularly proficient, they can be used to teach children in lower years.

Reflective techniques

As mentioned above, reflection is a vital component of a life lived well and students should be taught to reflect, but not to dwell, as soon as possible. How many times do

we find ourselves wondering why students (and indeed colleagues) don't stop and think before they do X, Y or Z? Reflection is a skill that helps to insert that all important punctuation between events.

Reflection should be distinguished from rumination. If we reflect upon an event, we study it and draw lessons from it with a view to making changes or resolutions. Rumination is dwelling: it is rarely productive and usually leaves situations unchanged. Reflection leads to the skill of meta-cognition: thinking about thinking. Many of the advances that a person makes in their life come from reflecting on who they are and how they can change that for the better in the light of learning something about how humans function.

Keeping a journal

Keeping a journal between well-being lessons is vital. Each well-being lesson should end by setting a 'reflective exercise' where students are encouraged to write about their experiments with particular well-being techniques using 'the lab' method, or perhaps to make notes on things that they notice about themselves, about others and about situations. For example, if you are teaching about the benefits of altruism, ask the students to practise a random act of kindness between lessons and write about how it felt afterwards compared with some other form of pleasurable activity such as eating chocolate. If you are teaching about emotions the following week, ask students to notice their emotional states, what causes them, what physical symptoms accompany them and how they move out of that state.

But why do they have to write? Research conducted by James Pennebaker⁷ has suggested that writing about the events in our lives, particularly bad ones, can make us healthier. But it's not just any old writing; it's writing that makes sense of the event that counts – simply venting spleen or letting off steam is not helpful as it encourages us to rehearse the negative event rather than the more constructive approach of trying to find explanations that enable us to prevent those events from happening again. In processing our thoughts by turning them into written language, it can help us to structure our ideas and learn important lessons from them. Of course, there will be some children whose faces fill with dread at the prospect of writing, but you may find that by giving them an exercise that is about them and that will not be graded, they overcome that fear and grow to enjoy the exercise.

Sharing

An exercise related to the keeping of a journal is that of sharing ideas through anonymous feedback. Students' learning is often moved on most when they are exposed to what their peers are capable of. By asking students to share some of the reflections from their journals and by getting other students in the group to read

them out anonymously, you can often visibly see eyebrows raise and heads nod as peers absorb ideas that are often not shared. For example, I observed a lesson with 14 to 15 year olds once, where the students had been asked to write about the experience of striking up a conversation with someone they didn't know well at school. They emailed their observations to the teacher who then printed them off anonymously and handed them round at random. When it came to the more astute observations, you could see how much the others in the group were learning from realizing that one of their peers saw the world in this way. It was very moving. The anonymity also guarantees safety for individuals and doesn't put anyone on the spot.

Discussion

All good lessons are based upon the gently guided, but free flow of ideas through dialogue. What is important to well-being is that the students are given the opportunity to discuss their experiences of implementing these techniques into their lives and that they are allowed to be constructively critical of them. The subject stands or falls by whether or not students feel as if they are being indoctrinated or preached at.

Discussion can be led in myriad ways: you can work it in pairs, small groups or whole class. You can provide fixed structure through questions that have to be answered. You can use Edward de Bono's thinking hats method, which restricts the type of discussion in order to solve thinking problems fully.

Stimuli

Complex ideas are often best brought to life by a short clip from a film or from a TV programme, a piece of music, a piece of art or an excerpt from a book. There are some unrivalled characters in comedy who exemplify much of what we try to teach in well-being, not least of which is John Cleese's portrayal of Basil Fawlty in 'Fawlty Towers'. Every topic that is covered in well-being classes will have some kind of resonant clip available to it in the world of film: just keep your eyes peeled and remember to have some kind of recorder ready. Alternatively, most broadcast material seems to appear on YouTube or GoogleVideo sooner or later as do some more inventive approaches to film making.

Anything that is visual and engaging can be used to tease out the kind of ideas that a well-being course ought to explore and very often the students are the best source of ideas for things that can be used to enlighten a particular topic.

Scenarios

A very effective way of enabling students to discuss 'real-life' situations is the use of scenarios: give them a very short situation and ask them to speculate upon why the characters did what they did and, also, what they would do in that situation and why.

Biographical learning

Learning from others is a very important human skill and young people seem unusually prone to not heeding the advice of others and to repeating other people's mistakes. This is part of being human and part of growing up, but if learning from others can be made an integral part of someone's outlook on life, and indeed of their character, some of those silly mistakes might be avoided.

As the aphorism goes, there is nothing new under the sun and you can be sure that for anything that you want to teach as far as well-being goes, there will be examples of it and you don't have to be an avid reader of biography to stumble across them (although it can help). Sunday supplements often have fascinating articles about individuals who exemplify something we wish to teach: in April 2006, for example, the *Observer Magazine* ran an article on Jean-Christophe Lafaille, one of the world's greatest climbers, who died pushing himself to the absolute limit of what is possible. I have used his story to teach about the idea of challenging ourselves but also of retaining balance. 'Celebrities' provide some great examples of how to live or how not to live. Amy Winehouse is a good current (at the time of writing) example of someone tortured by substance misuse; her music reflects many of her troubles too and could be used to stimulate interesting discussion.⁸

Testing

I have left this to last as it is a thorny issue. Modern education is dominated by testing and students are rightly tired of it. Well-being classes should be a haven away from the pressures of preparation for testing where students can learn strategies for coping with pressures heaped upon them in other areas of their educational lives.

However, it is helpful to have some kind of measure that the students have made progress in their well-being classes, particularly if senior leaders are unwilling to allocate resources without empirical verification of the worth of something new, even if other areas of the curriculum do not have to justify their existence.

We should remember to ask ourselves why we are testing in the first place though. If it is being used to help the students to move towards leading more fulfilling lives, then it is worthwhile. If it is being used to justify our place in the school, I think that there are ethical problems with taking the students' time up to pursue what is essentially an ego-driven endeavour.

There are a number of tools for testing of 'happiness' out there, some of which are free to use on the internet,⁹ others of which are widely available¹⁰ and still others which require training and have a cost and a licence attached to them.¹¹ Most of these tests are what's known as 'self-reporting' measures, where the outcome of the test is essentially a subjective picture of what we think about ourselves at the time of the test. Others provide a more objective picture but may be more time-consuming to administer.

The best tests out there are those that give the students a better insight into themselves as personalities. In this respect, the VIA strengths test¹² is hard to beat as it gives students an understanding of what they are good at in terms of virtues and what they value, rather than being good at accomplishing certain tasks (e.g. playing scales on a violin). This is an insight that we rarely get.

In terms of summative (and also formative) assessment of the course, one approach could be a non-graded interview/Socratic dialogue where each student is given a particular well-being-related problem to solve and they have to apply what they have learned throughout their lessons to that problem. Because it is a dialogue between a student and their teacher, those who have clearly absorbed the materials and put them into practice can be congratulated and those who may not have been quite so sponge-like can be given some non-judgemental advice and hopefully helped to see that this stuff is relevant to them. The dialogue would take the form of a tutorial, rather than a check up and it is imperative that no grade is awarded, although a report could be written. Well-being should be exempt from the obsessive desire to quantify and grade that permeates education.

Teachers and well-being

'Teachers who are stressed, or demoralised, make poor role models for young people.'¹³

I was lucky enough to have had a lot of very good teachers at school. The best one, though, taught me English. I can't remember him ever losing his temper, or even getting frustrated. He turned readily to humour and a razor sharp wit that would cut through even the worst miscreant's behaviour: never through humiliation but simply by showing his challenger that continued misbehaviour was pointless. In fact, despite the fact that my English class had some real characters in it, I don't recall them ever being difficult, especially given what we did to some supply teachers. This teacher was fascinating: a master of accents when telling stories, provider of occasional

snippets from his own life; but never so many that we thought him narcissistic and setter of great work that inspired us to do our very best. Praise came when it was merited; guidance and assistance was the alternative. There was never any ego, never any clash of personalities, just dialogue and enjoyment of the subject. His classroom was a place where creativity was encouraged and when trying to interpret a difficult text we always had room to voice our ideas and were gently guided towards something meaningful if we were a little bit off the beaten track.

This particular teacher was a very important role model for me. Not only did I learn the joys of interpreting text from him, but also a million and one little things about life which became lodged in my character. The best teachers are those who not only impart skill in a particular academic discipline, but also successfully and intelligently model the skills of being human.

Teachers leave a huge impression on the people that they teach and children are fascinated by them. They look not only to the leadership of their teachers in academic matters, but also to their leadership in social ones too. How many times have you seen students mimicking teachers that they either love or despise? How quickly do students notice the strange little peccadilloes that we have as teachers, the peculiar character traits that set us apart from our colleagues in the way we pronounce certain words, explain certain concepts, or even hold our posture at the board? That children will go to such lengths to imitate their teachers to win approval from their peers is a sure sign that, as teachers, we have an enormous influence over our students. When it comes to the teaching of happiness and well-being, perhaps more than any other subject, we have to be conscious of our status as role models.

Whilst there may be new content to teaching well-being that has developed over the last few years, some of the most important content has been happening in schools for years, where dedicated and excellent teachers show young people how to be skilled elephant riders: for example, how to excel at what they are good at or how to overcome adversity without incurring physical or psychological damage and hurt. It has been said that no matter what our discipline, we are all teachers of English: well, no matter what our discipline, we are all teachers of well-being too.

When I think back to the teachers that I most admire, they are the ones who resolved conflict patiently and with care; they are the ones who never raised their voices in anger at students; they are the ones who never humiliated students in a vain attempt to preserve their ego in front of the rest of the class; they are the ones who did interesting things outside school and they are the ones who took care of themselves and didn't drown in alcohol to get over a hard day at the chalk-face. Teaching is a testing profession, but as people responsible for teaching well-being, we must respond to those tests in a way that exhibits the behaviour we desire our young people to emulate.

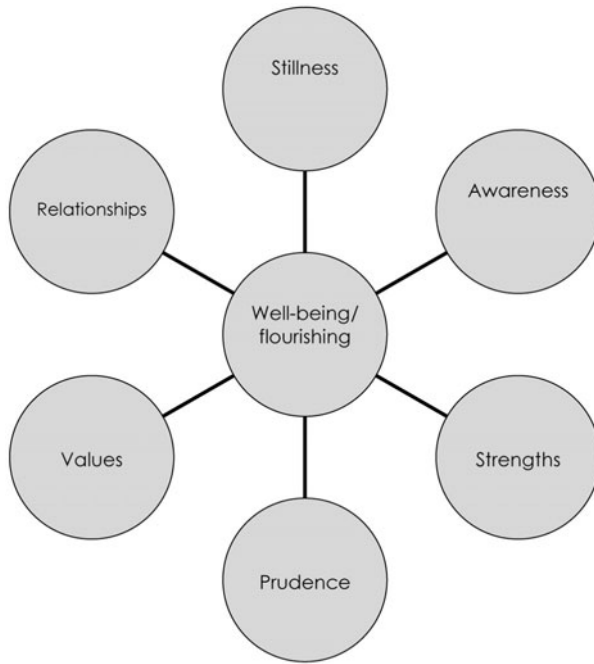
If we are aspiring to use educational opportunities to inculcate important skills of well-being in our students, we must model those skills ourselves: this means, that for a school to take the teaching of well-being seriously, it must make sure that its teachers are given the opportunity to learn the skills of well-being through continuing professional development. An inspiring example of this in practice is Geelong Grammar School in Australia. In January 2008, almost all of the teaching staff and a good number of the school's support staff were trained for a week in the skills of resilience and Positive Psychology (resilience is explained in Chapter 6). The school then spent several months looking at how to incorporate the skills that the staff had acquired into every aspect of school life, from the entire curriculum to the letters it sends home to parents. Staff at the school have described this investment in the skills of the teaching and support staff as transformative. Where Geelong have really taken the lead is in realizing that there is little point in having happiness or well-being on the curriculum if it forms only a small slice of the experience the students have at school. Why teach students the skills of well-being if the work is going to be undone in other areas of their lives? Everywhere that every member of a school community turns, in every interaction, every system and every structure, they should see well-being reflected back at them. It is with this that we turn to the idea of whole-school well-being.

Whole-school well-being

Whilst few in the teaching profession would disagree with the premise that the improvement of well-being should be a function of education, I think that we should go further than that and argue that well-being should be the *primary* function of education and that all schools should be geared to the maximization of the flourishing of the students and staff that comprise them.

In a culture that is, at the time of writing, dominated by measurable outcomes, it is easy to lose sight of what the real function of areas of life such as health care and education really is. Education is about finding, drawing out and building upon the strengths of individuals and enabling them to excel. There are ways of measuring this, such as examinations, or winning places at universities, but these measures are incidental to what is being measured: excellence. In places, especially where the call to raise standards has been heeded too literally, the measure has become the driver and this is wrong. Exams are not going to go away and they serve an important function, but we should be bold and place well-being at the centre of education, not hidden away once a fortnight in a classroom.

With well-being at the core, there are six satellite principles which can help guide a school towards enabling everyone who belongs to the community to flourish. The diagram below helps to illustrate this:



Stillness

Stillness is probably the most important feature to introduce into school communities. Schools are busy, hectic places and it is very easy to get swept along by that; to feel the need to *appear* busy; to rush from task to task and to feel guilty every time you stop. Teachers very often find that between the hours of 9 a.m. and 3.30 p.m. their blood pressure is higher than during the rest of the day. They may feel that they don't have time to stop. Chapter 10 looks at stillness and meditation in detail, but for the moment it is sufficient to point out three main benefits to be had from its practice:

1. Reduced stress.
2. Increased immune function.
3. Increased creativity.

There is an alarming and oft-quoted statistic that a male teacher who retires at 60, on average has a life-expectancy of 20 years, but a male teacher who retires aged 65

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