Element 21

Learning within Five Life Dimensions

Students must build their capacity to successfully navigate the 21st Century. Focusing learning on the Learnlife 5 life dimensions; intrapersonal, interpersonal, societal, global and digital learning, can help individuals better thrive in an increasingly complex and ever-changing world.

Learning in 5 Life Dimensions

Appreciation: This Element and the summary draw extensively from and expand the ideas presented in Thrive: Schools Reinvented for the Real Challenges We Face, by Valerie Hannon.

In 1987, The U.S. Army War College introduced the concept of VUCA to describe the growing sense of a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous world. Ever since that time, we have seen this VUCA world in multiple areas of our individual and collective lives, whether that be with new technologies, environmental challenges and changes, population growth, socio-political relations, global health challenges and the economy, to name just a few areas.

Paradigm shifts have followed many facets of life as the world has sought to accommodate these changes. One sphere of activity though has arguably struggled to keep apace, or even understand the implications of such changes - the world of education.

Alvin Toffler wrote in his book, Future Shock (1970), that the "illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn." Perhaps now more than ever, we need to rethink education and schooling, in order to address the growing disconnect between what students are learning in schools and what students need to know to navigate an ever-changing world.

To navigate this changing world, it is useful for new generations to be helped to re-conceive how life might be lived in order to thrive. This requires strength in a range of areas:

1. A clear understand of self - our intrapersonal development;
2. The ability to connect with those around us - our interpersonal development;
3. Learning to gain positive perspectives on our wider societal and communities;
4. Understanding the interrelationships and interdependence from a global perspective; and
5. Learning to navigate digital space as well-balanced digital citizens.

There is a responsibility as communities to create learning ecosystems that enable individuals to thrive. If learning occurs with the goal of strengthening the understanding of, and ability to live within, these different life dimensions, then the individual will have a greater opportunity to thrive.

The different dimensions have their own connections - starting from developing an awareness of the inner self, through to an individual's ability to relate to others and the wider societies. This in turn would hopefully lead to an appreciation of the need to care for our wider planetary environment. Advances in technology mean that for many societies, the digital world is a significant part of daily life and another dimension in which we need to be able to not only exist, but thrive.

Then	Now
• The model of schooling was predicated upon preparing people for an industrial world	• A VUCA world suggests the need to grow the ability of individuals to thrive, despite external complexities
• Life and career paths were more linear	• Globalisation has arrived, bringing with it unprecedented changes
• Schooling has been focused on academic outcomes & dictated content	• New generations need to learn to navigate & thrive in a changing world

Starting Questions

1. Start with 'Why' - why is it important for thriving to become a goal? How might thriving be defined in your context?
2. How relevant is an awareness of VUCA to the existing community? How?
3. Survey your existing community in terms of their perceptions of thriving.
4. What might need to be addressed or developed in order for the community to thrive?
5. Would the community place equal importance upon thriving in the different dimensions: interpersonal; intrapersonal; societal; global; and digital thriving?

Key Initial Actions

1. Develop a vision in order to integrate concepts of 'thriving' into the theoretical underpinnings of the educational philosophy of the community.
2. Connect the concept of thriving in each dimension to a broader skill set of competencies, skills or character development necessary to integrate an understanding of thriving.
3. Set up initial conversations on what it means to thrive in a learning community. Ask yourself whether your key findings match the context of your own community.
4. Embed the goal of nurturing the ability to thrive into all aspects of the learning programme. Ensure an action or implementation plan exists.

On-going Actions

1. Think ahead to keep relevant. Create community conversations around each dimension, so that the concepts become understood and embedded into the learning programmes.
2. Consider how the community might actively demonstrate each dimension. How might the community be confident that strong intrapersonal understanding exists?
3. Create strategies to foster strong interpersonal relationships across the community, in order to meet the goal of thriving in the interpersonal sphere. Bring the importance of positivity in the digital space into the conversation.
4. Design learning experiences that develop and introduce students to integrating their awareness of the different life dimensions into all their thinking and actions.
5. Create events or festivals that enable personal action to grow the wider society in positive directions and also contribute to programmes that focus on the wider environmental challenges.

Further Reading

Reasons for Change

Innovation Unit, Thrive: Schools reinvented for the real challenges we face

World Economic Forum: 8 digital life skills all children need and a plan for teaching them

Innovation Unit: Thriving Societies

Reimagining Education Together

Are we teaching to survive or teaching to thrive?

Books

Thrive: Schools Reinvented for the Real Challenges We Face

Watch

[Learning to Thrive: Valerie Hannon. Education & Learning](#)
[Simon Sinek on Education - Big Change](#)

Find Out More

The 21st century has already bore witness to major changes to our environment, technology, population demographics, global health, socio-political spheres and economics. Each has impacted our lives - some positive and some negative. Paradigm shifts in these areas are occurring as a result of continued attempts to tackle issues to help remedy and improve our planet. Individuals and groups have adapted by prototyping, innovating and using agile decision-making.

Conversation, debate and action remains alarmingly elusive in arguably the most crucial area where a paradigm shift is needed to facilitate change - education.

One of the overarching promises of education - to best prepare learners for their future - is not being provided on a global scale. In this period of great promise yet great peril, education has the potential to lay the foundations from which society can better connect itself to the new realities of our world. Scientists, analysts and academics offer critical information regarding the great waves of change occurring - and education can prepare individuals and society to be better prepared to act.

If education can create a global paradigm shift to prepare all learners to be future-ready, learning can become the remedy to tackle the pressing issues affecting our planet and ultimately enable all individuals to thrive.

> *'Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed. It's the only thing that ever has.'*
>
> *Margaret Mead*

Key Ideas

1. In order to thrive in today's world, learning communities must prepare its students to navigate it successfully.

2. Learning about global perspectives helps support global change.

3. Learning about societal perspectives helps support societal change.

4. Interpersonal learning develops the key skills required to relate to one another.

5. Intrapersonal learning develops the key skills required to grow one's self.

6. Digital learning development is critical to navigating a digital age.

Questions

- Does the learning community create experiences that enable its students to develop their understanding and skills of the five life dimensions?

- Does the learning community create authentic experiences that create real life learning contexts for its students related to global and societal perspectives?

- Does the learning community support the development of interpersonal and intrapersonal development?

- Does the learning community support pathways to digital well-being?

- Are learners prepared to navigate a VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous) world once they leave the learning community?

1. In order to thrive in today's world, learning communities must prepare its students to navigate it successfully.

Valerie Hannon's book *Thrive*, comprehensively outlines the factors for preparing learners to be future-ready in ever-changing circumstances. Learnlife draws inspiration from Hannon's work, using the following four life dimensions as key components to learning in a new paradigm:

- Global perspectives
- Societal perspectives
- Interpersonal development
- Intrapersonal development
- The fifth life dimension included with Hannon's book is digital development

> *'Today has to be about learning to thrive in a transforming world'*
>
> *Valerie Hannon*

Learning through these dimensions increases an individual's sense of self and place, and cultivates a sense of purpose which education must facilitate to support individual life-paths. Understanding the life dimensions can encourage learners to take charge of their future by learning to live in new and better ways while offering a path to enter into society equipped to navigate and participate with confidence. The world is moving so fast and education must keep up if it is to deliver on its promise - to prepare learners for their future.

2. Learning about global perspectives helps support global change..

Globally our world is shrinking. Communities are increasingly connecting physically and virtually, meaning essentially we have become one world with the power to influence across continents. There is a pressing need to look beyond the local and national perspective and begin viewing our planet and species as a 'whole' entity.

A new global perspective highlights the negative impact humans are having on our planet. Scientific evidence abounds the reasons that we must become more connected to deal with the impact our species is having. Global issues such as climate change, the destruction of biodiversity, animal extinction and resource depletion must be addressed to provide environmental equity to all inhabitants.

Education's purpose should be to equip learners with the skills that can address global issues and reverse environmental damage. Global perspectives learning should empower individuals to make choices on;

- who their leaders are;
- who they buy from;
- who they work for;
- the personal choices they make, and;
- the skills they need to make a positive difference.

'If you think the economy is more important than the environment, try holding your breath while counting your money.'

Professor Guy McPherson

Global perspectives learning should include sharing in the design process for change, engaging in interventions, and learning beyond the classroom to increase connectivity with other like-minded individuals. Furthermore, this dimension for learning can help individuals understand the diversity that exists in the world through culture and language which can help develop global competence.

Learners must become equipped to take charge of global perspectives by learning and acting to:

1. Live sustainably while protecting the earth's ecosystems and biodiversity.
2. Acquire global competence.

> *'We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children.'*
> *Native American Proverb*

3.Learning about societal perspectives helps support societal change.

Societal change requires us to navigate through a disruptive and uncertain landscape, challenging our assumptions of technology, jobs, democracy and the economy. Our relationship to them all needs reimagined. The difficulty in navigating through this landscape is that changes are occurring more rapidly than is possible to keep up.

Growth is sometimes a false sign of thriving

The success of a society, or its 'health,' is often measured by economic growth. Growth in this context becomes a dangerous word. Unless society is growing economically, it is deemed to be failing. Economic growth in relation to neoliberalism sets the conditions for success through competition which drives growth - the successful rise to the top.

The issue with 'growth' in an economic context is that it often creates inequality and if a society is to thrive together, equality must exist. Research indicates that an increase in wealth gives rise to an increase in inequality[1] with further research indicating that a society's well-being is not solely determined by its economic growth or wealth[2].

Inequality leads to political instability, war, health problems and rising anxiety, which fuels a vicious cycle of societal suffering - this common trend must be broken to enable societal thriving to occur.

> *'The world will not be destroyed by those who do evil, but by those who watch them without doing anything.'*
> *Albert Einstein*

In education, the growth-as-success principle has manifested itself through competition brought about by assessment. Assessment causes individuals to be labelled by assumptions based on their learning success. This mindset requires a monumental and immediate shift if all individuals are to feel they are equally worthy of contributing to society.

For learners to thrive, they must be given opportunities to confront and address inequality gaps to provide universal participation.

> *'Until we get equality in education, we won't have an equal society.'*
> *Albert Einstein*

Technology can and will outthink us but we can still thrive

Technological advances have caused widespread uncertainty and put into question the future landscape of work. Continued technological development is going to exponentially increase the use of automation and artificial intelligence, which will render a substantial portion of current jobs obsolete. This is accelerating the growing need for jobs that will require innovation to ensure humans can outwit their technological counterparts to remain relevant. The current global education model does not provide sufficient opportunity for learners to become innovators, which is fuelling widespread fear.

---

[1] How rising inequality hurts everyone, even the rich

[2] Hannon thrive page 66/67

Education must prepare learners for the future of work, not work from a previous era. Learning opportunities must therefore prepare learners to;

- thrive in societies where digital technology drives opportunities and development;
- perform tasks that they can perform better than machines;
- learn, unlearn and relearn skills which require human actions, and;
- increase knowledge and skills that can shape and direct machines.

Life expectancy will change society for good

Added to future societal complexities is the impact of increased life expectancy on individuals. The current generation born today is going to significantly increase the number of future centenarians, placing uncertainty around existing pension structures. Individuals in the future may need to continually reinvent themselves beyond what is currently the accepted retirement age if they are to ensure economic stability throughout their lifetime.

Learners must become equipped to take charge of societal perspectives by learning to:

1. Navigate a disruptive and uncertain landscape of work.
2. Reinvent a participative, authentic and meaningful democracy.

4. Interpersonal learning develops the key skills required to relate to one another.

Interpersonal thriving depends on an individual's ability to form and sustain relationships in a range of scenarios - with family, friends, lovers and co-workers. Interpersonal thriving is brought about by individuals acquiring the key skills to relate to one another. The Learnlife model places relationships as one of its core elements because it recognises that the best learning occurs in a community where individuals can relate and cooperate.

Technology has altered the nature of social interactions and highlighted concerns about the quality of interpersonal relationships. People's increased use of digital devices to communicate is proving detrimental to the quality of effective collaboration and relation to others. Empathy, a personal trait enabling us to relate to one another, is diminishing through increased use of digital devices for social interaction, with less time spent interacting physically.

Developing interpersonal skills is a critical component to solving societal problems.

Current and future challenges are going to require increased quality interactions and collaboration, and education must provide the necessary opportunities so learners are future ready to work with and relate to others.

If an emerging, increasingly complex society requires strong relationships and empathy to be a key component for success, then they should be placed at the centre of learning before all academic success.

Learners must develop their interpersonal capabilities by learning to:

1. Build equitable, lasting relationships in a range of contexts and collaborate effectively.
2. Use digital devices to support communication, but not replace authentic, physical interactions.

5. Intrapersonal learning develops the key skills required to grow one's self.

Intrapersonal development is about attaining a secure sense of self and having the skills to adapt to an unfolding and ever-changing world, no matter what scenario arises. This inward thriving enables individuals to gather personal meaning, purpose, identity and cultivates inner strength and peace.

Intrapersonal development increases personal health and well-being if fostered correctly, and ensuring the personal health and well-being of every individual should be a key objective for any learning community. A new learning paradigm must provide solutions to the following issues if it is to cultivate the conditions necessary for intrapersonal thriving:

Disconnection to nature
A large majority of people are not spending enough time in nature which has proven benefits to personal health and well-being. The longer this continues, the less knowledgeable individuals will be about how they can use nature to thrive.

Hyper-connectivity
While digital communication provides great benefits to individuals and society, spending too much time online can cause individuals to lose connection to their individual self and increase anxiety. We live in an over-stimulated world where disconnecting for suitable periods of time is becoming increasingly hard to do.

Rise of technology and artificial intelligence
This is causing increased uncertainty and anxiety, contributing to widespread ex-

istential crises as a result. Individuals are becoming more disenfranchised by their place and relevance in society, caused by a fear of machines taking over and resulting in mass unemployment, poverty and diminishing the importance of self.

Changes to employment

Getting a job was once the main motivator for becoming educated. Our work identities defined us. The widely used global education model is no longer providing the best pathway to securing employment because of its outdated methods.

Longer lifespans

Living longer is a wonderful result of advances in healthcare. This will however, change the age and concept of retirement. Lifelong security, once provided by pensions, is no longer a guarantee as the predicted centenarian boom is set to destabilise pension schemes. Individuals must become equipped with self-management and self-knowledge skills to live in an agile world.

Adapting to the modern world requires embracing the benefits it provides whilst maintaining connections to those traditions that support intrapersonal development. A new learning paradigm should offer learning opportunities to enable individuals to personally thrive by;

- engaging with creativity and the arts;
- nourishing the inner-life through spiritual or meditative practices;
- experiencing life in a deep way and not just for the pursuit of success;
- becoming the maker and creator, not just the consumer;
- spending time outdoors;
- being active or exercising at least one hour per day, and;
- identifying self-purpose and pursuing it.

These self-development pathways provide crucial skills to alleviate future challenges and gain the necessary perspective to relate oneself to society. If individuals understand their place and themselves, they will have the confidence to profoundly impact others.

'Investing in yourself is the best investment you will ever make. It will not only improve your life, it will improve the lives of all those around you.'
Robin Sharma

6. Digital learning development is critical to navigating a digital age.

Technology definitely deserves its place in the world. Using it appropriately however, deserves equal consideration. Individuals must learn that, while technology can enhance all aspects of a person's life, it is not the only sole support for learning or communication. The responsibility of educators to increase peoples' understanding of using digital technology is vital.

The World Economic Forum (WEF) provides a useful visual to help individuals navigate a digital age. The key developmental requisites, described as *Digital Intelligence*, or DQ[3], should become embedded into the learning design experiences in any learning community.

DQ CITIZENSHIP

Digital Citizen Identity
Ability to build and manage a healthy identity online and offline with integrity

Privacy Management
Ability to handle with discretion all personal information shared online to protect one´s and others´ privacy

Critical Thinking
Ability to distinguish between true and false info, good and harmful content, and trustworthy and questionable contacts online

Screen Time Management
Ability to manage one´s screen time, multitasking, and one´s engagement in online

Digital Empathy
Ability to be empathetic towards one´s own and others´ needs and feelings online.

Cyber Security Management
Ability to protect one´s data by creating strong passwords and to manage various cyber attacks

Digital Footprints
Ability to understand the nature of digital footprints and their real-life-consequences and to manage them responsibly

Cyberbulling Management
Ability to detect cyber-bullying situations and handle them wisely

---

[3] 8 digital life skills all children need – and a plan for teaching them

Learning within the 5 life dimensions includes the key components individuals need to cultivate a life of purpose, and assist them to be future-ready in a world which requires radical responses to the current challenges we face as a species. While the life dimensions can be viewed and understood entirely separately, they remain connected to one another.

Education has a moral duty to ensure that today's generation of individuals learning, embarking and discovering, are made aware of these life dimensions so they can thrive. Raising awareness of them will create the necessary conditions for self-determined, lifelong learning.

Act now

The actionable steps below are relatable at individual, leadership or community levels. Individuals or groups can use the steps to increase their readiness to design learning experiences, consider their mission and the values they wish to advocate, take steps to preparing a learning community for learning through the 5 life dimensions, or engage learners, parents, educators and leaders on the importance of the 5 life dimensions to solve global and societal issues and ensure continued individual and collaborative relevance into the future.

1. Educate yourself on the modern world
Understanding the modern world and its current predicaments provokes some immediate questions:

- How can one solve these issues?
- How can one make a difference?
- What can one do on their own to contribute positively to local and global contexts?
- What can one do in the community to support others?
- How can one become an influencer in their position as a learner, educator or leader?

2. Attach the learning dimensions to your education's mission
The 5 learning dimensions all deserve a place in 21st century learning communities. Attaching these to a learning community's mission statement immediately signals the intention that it aims to provide the individuals within it to connect to a learning purpose that is 21st century relevant.

3. Variety can reveal one's purpose

For learners to find their purpose, it is necessary that they are exposed to all the 5 life dimensions. This increases the likelihood of a new learning paradigm inspiring individuals to find their unique, purpose-inspired lifelong learning pathway. Variety increases the likelihood of learner engagement, and once individuals find their purpose within the 5 life dimensions, the course is set to cultivate the principles of self-determined learning.

4. Connect to others outside your context

As the 21st century requires continued engagement and collaboration across multiple skills contexts, it makes sense to create a learning community that embraces opportunities for outside learning support and expertise. Learning through the 5 life dimensions will be enhanced through collaboration as it exposes learners to the culture of thriving that can be realised by weaving communities together.

5. Think ahead to keep relevant

The world is as agile as it is fragile. Setting the course for the current generation of learners to remain future relevant and able to navigate our fragile planet is the responsibility of a learning community. Learning designs must support individuals to find relevance in an ever-changing world. To do this requires continued surveillance on global and societal current affairs and what predicted trends are.

Examples in action

Thriving can be observed in many contexts. Cultures and communities vary, therefore one must remain objective when viewing thriving through their own personal lens. The Cambridge dictionary definition of thrive, 'to grow, develop or be successful'[4], sets the case in point. Every individual, community or nation is beginning from a different starting point, but the main measure of thriving is that there is continued, forward momentum and equitable, sustainable action present.

The following examples are specific to the learning dimensions discussed in Valerie Hannon's book, Thrive. The success of these thriving learning communities and organisations is that they have attached one of the key life dimensions to their learning manifesto, providing the necessary roadmap for continued growth.

---

[4] https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/thrive

Schools

[Intergenerational Schools](#)
Intergenerational Schools connect, create, and guide a multigenerational community of lifelong learners and spirited citizens as they strive for academic excellence. They are multi-generational learning communities that excel at preparing students to be confident and engaged citizens in a fast-changing world.

[St Cuthbert's School, Auckland](#)
From age 5 to 18, St.Cuthbert's girl's school recognises that personal success comes in different shapes and sizes. Whether it's academic, sporting, the arts or social, it provides learners with the opportunities to grow into all of their potential, at their own pace.

[Naturally Smart Schools](#)
Naturally Smart Schools have used a permaculture design approach adapted to school environments, which has now been used from kindergarten through to University level. The programme adopts the idea that intelligence is not ours alone, but a property of the earth and its systems, in which we are immersed.

[Connect Charter School, Alberta](#)
Connect Charter School's vision is to prepare students to be extraordinary citizens, and that goal begins with understanding the value of deep inquiry; instilling in students the confidence to ask difficult and challenging questions and then think critically about how to reach solutions and solve problems in meaningful ways. Inquiry at Connect is supported by the integration of technology into learning, as well as a robust outdoor education program and a focus on connecting learning to the 'real world' through experiential education.

[Huntington High School](#)
The mission of the Huntington Union Free School District is to educate students by effectively teaching an enriched body of knowledge through the active participation of all students, building upon their unique talents and abilities to produce creative, self-assured, responsible citizens who are capable of critical thought and action."

Organisations

[Dream a Dream](#)
Dream a Dream is a registered, charitable trust empowering young people from vulnerable backgrounds to overcome adversity and flourish in a fast-changing world using a creative life skills approach.

[Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL)](#)
Secondary SEAL is a comprehensive approach to promoting the social and emotional skills that underpin effective learning, positive behaviour, regular attendance, staff effectiveness and the emotional health and well-being of all who learn and work in school

Further reading

[Valerie Hannon, Thrive: Schools Reinvented for the Real Challenges We Face](#)

[Innovation Unit, Thrive: Schools reinvented for the real challenges we face](#)

[World Economic Forum: 8 digital life skills all children need and a plan for teaching them](#)

[How rising inequality hurts everyone, even the rich](#)

Watch

[Learning to Thrive: Valerie Hannon. Education & Learning](#)