Element 8

Ensuring Well-being

Any journey of change and discovery can challenge and exhaust. It is vital to maintain a healthy life-balance and personal well-being. Well-being must be embedded into organisational thinking and action, particularly when a community is associated with lifelong learning.

Ensuring Well-being

In recent years, the concept of well-being and wellness has become a far more central focus for schools and learning communities. This focus has been spread across different domains as well - the well-being of all stakeholders in a community: students, teachers and parents. If the well-being of any group within the community is challenged or struggling, this is going to impact everything in the wider operation of the community.

There has been much research into well-being in the last decade, enabling a clearer understanding of the actions and behaviours that foster well-being. Learning communities can deliberately promote and support the well-being of everyone.

A learning community must commit itself to ensuring that all its members understand and are able to grow their knowledge and capacity in the following key areas; cognitive; physical; social; emotional; spiritual and digital well-being. Neglecting any of these can deplete holistic well-being. Learning experiences which foster them are as important as any other learning.

One of the major barriers to achieving well-being is the mis-use of competition. In education, competition measured through standardised assessment fractures learning communities and creates a toxic culture. An OECD report from 2015 suggests an existing disconnect between academic performance and well-being. Removing the pressure of success through competition enables a learning community to focus on areas that can build a culture that thrives.

Leadership must affirm its commitment to well-being in its learning community to ensure it is accessible to everyone. Drafting policy documents is not enough; well-being can only be reached through decisions made and actions taken. Any learning community committed to its achievement should be measuring regularly to sense and respond to specific needs appropriately.

Deliberate links fostered between a learning and wider community can create a supportive network for people to work together and help one another thrive. A learning community doing this immediately strengthens and supports holistic well-being in the wider community.

Our digital age is critical to supporting cognitive, physical, social, emotional and spiritual well-being. Technology can be used to support these critical areas, but digital well-being must be fully understood and developed to ensure it is not a hindrance.

In this increasingly connected world, we have the capacity to support one another by creating a global society that enables holistic well-being for all. Education has a critical role in this wellness narrative because it remains a common rite of passage which connects all children globally.

Then	Now
• Well-being was provided for in the family context.	• Families need support from the wider community to ensure well-being.
• Smaller communities were able to provide the support necessary to enable personal and collective wellness.	• An increasingly complex society means that achieving well-being is also complex and requires deliberate, careful thought and action.
• Learning was a rite of passage completed during compulsory education.	• A lifelong learning journey requires continued monitoring of well-being.

Starting Questions

1. How much emphasis is placed on the learning community in assuming responsibility for the holistic well-being of all its members?
2. What deliberate actions are taken by the learning community to foster the well-being of its members?
3. Does the learning community view academic success as a fundamental component in achieving overall well-being?
4. Does the learning community provide learning experiences and professional development opportunities that focus on individual development of holistic well-being?
5. How is holistic well-being measured, if at all, in the learning community?

Key Initial Actions

1. Develop a whole community approach to well-being so that everyone is supported and that the actions and behaviours are deliberate and shared.
2. Survey individual sections of the community on their well-being and design measures and strategies that will help support its development.
3. Create a well-being team which regularly consults on well-being across the whole learning community, covering all aspects of well-being.

On-going Actions

1. Place well-being as a leadership priority within the community and ensure its place is not limited to words on a policy document, but there are actionable tasks designed and carried out.
2. Develop or find effective tools for measuring well-being as an ongoing activity. Try and test various methods approaches to ensure ones that suit your learning community context.
3. Develop a 3 horizon strategy for improving well-being in all sections of the community. This planning should extend into the wider community to include parents and guardians, key stakeholders, outside agencies, individuals and groups from various social demographics.

Further Reading

5 ways to improve health and well-being for all

Five measures of growth that are better than GDP

A history of well-being

What if schools valued wellbeing more than results?

Neuroplasticity & Mental Wellness: Our Path Forward

The Wellness Brain

The Seven Dimensions of Wellness

Coalition for Digital Intelligence

Forget IQ. Digital intelligence will be what matters in the future

Watch

Before You Go To School, Watch This: What Is School For?

Digital Intelligence (DQ): Global Standards for Digital Literacy, Skills, and Readiness

Find out More

Society regularly reports the well-being of individuals as at risk, likely compounded by emerging symptoms of societies having grown in complexity. The traditions and structures society and institutions steadfastly observed until recent years continue to either unravel, change or evolve. The 21st century has sparked a re-evaluation of what wellness in contemporary society looks like. A wealth of literature is available to support new narratives, ideals and rituals. Quality research and practical solutions can be used to guide individual and community aspirations.

Education has a critical role in successfully implementing a modern wellness narrative because it remains a common rite of passage which connects all children globally. Nearly every human being in every nation has, in some capacity, experienced education in a community context. Globally, learning communities must make well-being a critical part of their mission, guided by wisdom and delivered through effective action.

Key Ideas

1. Well-being is broad by definition and must be fully understood to foster holistic wellness.

2. Competition practices used to indicate success in education and society do not lead to holistic well-being.

3. Leadership and learning communities must assume responsibility for individual and collective well being.

4. Deliberate links fostered between a learning and outside community can strengthen and support individual and collective well-being.

5. A digital age can increase or decrease holistic well-being, so individuals must be trained on the proper use of technology.

Questions

- How much responsibility would you place on the learning community to support the overall well-being of all its members?

- What decisions should immediately be taken to increase the well-being of the learning community?

- Does the emerging culture of the learning community reflect a healthy level of well-being?

- What measures would you put in place to assess and evaluate the well-being of all members of the learning community?

- What strategies would you put in place to tackle issues arising around individual or community well-being?

1. Well-being is broad by definition and must be fully understood to foster holistic wellness.

Below are some definitions that define well-being in different categories. Achieving holistic well-being requires a deliberate balance of all:

1. Cognitive well-being

This refers to the intellectual foundations required for individuals to participate fully in learning and society. Developing cognitive well-being fosters individual proficiency in aspects of learning such as deploying relevant knowledge, critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration or higher order thinking. It offers a pathway to lifelong learning, effective work behaviours and civic engagement.

2. Physical well-being

This refers to actions and behaviours that adopt a healthy lifestyle through physical activity, staying safe, healthy eating and nutrition, getting adequate sleep, deliberate quiet, managing stress, limiting drug use and adhering to relevant health recommendations. Physical wellness refers to all aspects of life connected to sensory experiences which includes the human body and the material and natural environment.

3. Social well-being

This refers to the quality of an individual's social life. Human beings require healthy and regular social interaction to thrive in one's lifespan. Social interaction includes relationships fostered between family, peers and other people an individual is in regular contact with. Social wellness is affirmed through belonging to a community network and from meaningful relational exchanges.

4. Emotional well-being

Emotional well-being is cultivated when an individual has a unique sense of purpose, is self-aware and can process and manage varying emotional states and feelings with resilience and inner strength. Key emotional behaviours such as self-esteem, motivation, self-efficacy, optimism and hope support emotional well-being.

5. Spiritual well-being

This refers to an individual's connection to the diversity, uniqueness, wonder and interconnectedness of all living things. Spiritual well-being is manifested by individ-

uals who know and can express their life's meaning and purpose, guided by their personal values. Individuals who are spiritually well have a connection to oneself, one's life and one's environment.

6. Digital well-being

In a world increasingly reliant on technology to accelerate progress, holistic well-being can only be achieved through its responsible use. Digital intelligence (DQ)[1] recognises skills such as screen time management, privacy management, cyber-bullying, digital identity, digital footprints management, cyber security, critical thinking and digital empathy as crucial to maintaining digital and overall wellness.

> *'(S)he who lives in harmony with themselves lives in harmony with the universe.'*
>
> *Marcus Aurelius*

Human development can be described simply as 'a process of enlarging people's choices[2]'. Only when individuals are empowered to choose their own developmental path can they thrive. When considering collective well-being of a nation, complexities arise. An individual's sense of wellness is often determined by factors beyond their control and the principles of equality, fairness and justice must exist for collective well-being to emerge. Nations must work diligently to ensure its citizens have equal opportunities for personal development. Education is crucial to fostering that freedom by enlarging people's choices.

> *'Poverty is not just a lack of money; it is not having the capability to realize one's full potential as a human being.'*
>
> *Amartya Sen*

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[1] WEF Article

[2] (UNDP 1990, p. 10)

2. Competition practices used to indicate success in education and society do not lead to holistic well-being.

Societal success, often measured economically, can be detrimental to the well-being of individuals, communities and nations. Environmental and social problems are often borne out of sustained focus on economic growth, which is neither equitable or ethical. There are always winners and losers. Evidence highlights that nations with the highest GDP and largest disparity in wealth between rich and poor - mainly developed nations - measure poorly in wellness measured by specific well-being indicators[3].

The same sentiment applies to educational success measured through standardised testing. In this model students are either winners or losers. Education should celebrate the uniqueness of every individual by nurturing potential, inspiring purpose, passion and providing pathways to lifelong learning; this can support overall, sustained well-being. In learning there should never be losers.

Competition in education creates anxiety and depletes the vital energy of individuals and learning communities. It alienates students and peers, sometimes causing forced friendship groups based on perceived academic ability. This type of model is feeding a well-being crisis, symptomatic of increased low self-esteem, helplessness and despair.

Recent well-being measures provided by the OECD reveals the inverse relationship between countries that perform well in global PISA assessments - a measure of academic ability among nations - and well-being. It indicates that success through competition in education can negate well-being, particularly in developed nations[4]. The harmful relationship between wellness and competition does not come more stark than this.

Added to the well-being complexity is an emerging learning gap, caused in part by a growing wealth gap. Social elites can 'buy' better education, leading to increased opportunity for future success. The playing field for education must provide equality of opportunity.
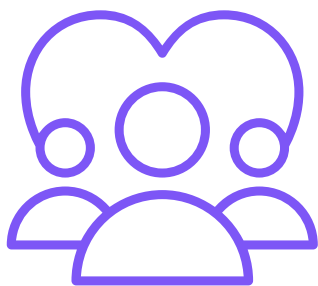
'Economic growth without investment in human development is unsustainable - and unethical.'
Armatya Sen

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[3] Find this
[4] PISA OECD

3. Leadership and learning communities must assume responsibility for individual and collective well being.

Today, the mental health of young people is increasingly placed in the hands of learning communities. Leadership should assume responsibility for ensuring overall well-being of its students, educators and all other key actors in whatever capacity. A community's mission should promote actions and decisions that support individual and collective wellness. Well-being should therefore be embedded into community policy to affirm its importance.

Learning programmes curated and facilitated in the learning community should capture the uniqueness and imagination of every student. They should inspire individual passion and purpose, motivate and offer seamless opportunities to attach unique personal vision and values.

Learning about well-being is as important as any other aspect of student learning. The human brain is the control centre from which all decisions and actions related to social, psychological, physical, spiritual, digital and cognitive well-being occur, and learning design must reflect this. Developing well-being can be supported by learning about new advances in neuroplasticity, executive functioning and growth mindsets.

Today's students are burdened with the tasks of solving issues concerning the equity and sustainability of our planet. Authentic and experiential learning opportunities highlighting key challenges, like loss of or connection to nature, the Anthropocene, coping with constant change, job uncertainty or population growth, must be facilitated to empower individuals with the resilience to persist without compromising their future well-being.

'True happiness is not attained through self-gratification, but through fidelity to a worthy purpose.'
Helen Keller

Well-being remains at risk in learning communities that prioritise learning success over relationships. A learning community must provide a relational environment based on collaboration, support, empathy, compassion and trust. Positive relationships among peers encourages thriving and supports motivation and success[5].

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[5] PISA document

One of the biggest threats to well-being is bullying. It is present in most, if not all nations[6]. A learning community must commit to low-tolerance sanctions around bullying to protect the well-being of everyone. Placing priority away from standardised assessment might alleviate individual and collective segregation that results from a toxic culture of competition.

Measuring and evaluating well-being can grow a wellness culture in a learning community. Gathering information on well-being supports policy decisions and actions. If a learning community is fully committed to promoting well-being, measuring it should become embedded in regular evaluative practices.

4. Deliberate links fostered between a learning and outside community can strengthen and support individual and collective well-being.

Learning forms just one part of a student's daily life and it is crucial that seamless transparency occurs in and out of a learning community to get the bigger picture. Parents play a crucial role in their child's life, so fostering deliberate links between home and a learning community can support pathways to overall well-being. Parents can offer insights into their child's home-life that might impact on behaviour and learning, while learning communities can offer expertise to support parents with their child's development at home.

Having deliberate, community-wide links increases family support, particularly for those requiring social, emotional or financial support. A learning community which places emphasis on individual and collective well-being can provide a rich network of support.

Young people are the heart and soul of any community. Deliberate links between the learning and wider community strengthens bonds, increases relational skills, creates experiential learning opportunities and prepares students for future civic engagement. Links should be inclusive of all age demographics and cultures to foster opportunities that strengthen learning and the community-wide culture.

> *'Thousands of candles can be lit from a single candle, and the life of the candle will not be shortened. Happiness never decreases by being shared'*
> *Buddha*

[6] PISA document

5. A digital age can increase or decrease holistic well-being, so individuals must be trained on the proper use of technology.

Using technology is necessary to prepare learners for an inevitable future of digital engagement. It strengthens collaboration, supports information-gathering, broadens communication and can accurately measure learning outputs. Arguably, learning without technology compromises an individual's well-being by narrowing future opportunities. Technology used wrongly however, is detrimental to well-being.

Learning communities must assume responsibility to ensure the digital well-being of everyone. When rules or regulations are neglected, individuals and learning communities are at risk. Neglect heightens problem behaviours such as frivolous screen-time and social media use, exposure to risky or inaccurate content, decreased social engagement, bad habits and addictive behaviours, cyber-bullying and over-reliance. These behaviours cause students to lose sight of their passion, purpose and motivation and can hinder success, deplete vital energy and compromise well-being.

Developing digital intelligence can increase well-being. Digital intelligence has been described as, 'the sum of social, emotional and cognitive abilities that enable individuals to face the challenges and adapt to the demands of digital life'[7]. The links below highlight the skills and competencies young people must develop to navigate a digital age:

[What is DQ (Digital Intelligence)?](#)
[DQ World homepage](#)

DQ Citizenship   *Courtesy of World Economic Forum[8]*

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

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

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

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

Screen Time Management
Ability to manage one´s screen time, multitasking, and one´s engagement in online
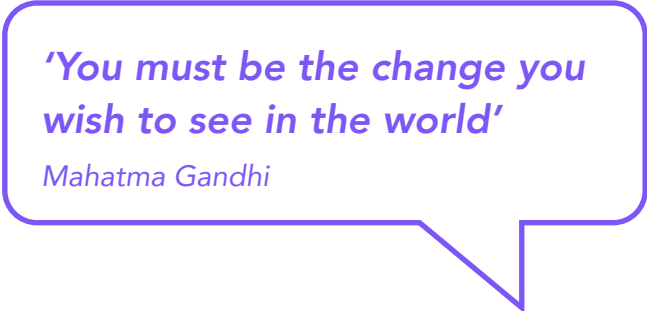
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[7] [Forget IQ. Digital intelligence will be what matters in the future](#)
[8] [8 digital life skills all children need – and a plan for teaching them](#)

Lasting, sustained well-being is a complex journey, requiring a rethinking and re-structuring of the key areas that can develop and sustain it. At the macro level, policy change on economic growth can support the social and environmental well-being of our planet. Reimagining education's purpose is also required. Removing competition caused by standardised assessment, will increase equality of opportunity and support individual, purpose-inspired learning by connecting everyone to fulfilling their lifelong learning journey. In education, everyone should be a winner.

At the micro level, learning and local communities must promote well-being. They must connect to ensure a balanced delivery of social, emotional, physical, emotional, digital and spiritual well-being. This can encourage more tolerant, peaceful and thriving networks. Well-being practices must become a daily ritual, not a tick box exercise that fulfil policy duties.

In a connected world, incremental changes spread across local networks, into nations and across continents. It is time to take the well-being of global citizens out of the hands of those who silo it, and put it into the hands of those who can nurture and spread it.

> *'You must be the change you wish to see in the world'*
> *Mahatma Gandhi*

Act Now

Well-being to some might be regarded as metaphysical in nature, and acquiring it limited to various lucky few. This should not be the case. Those individuals and collective communities who have created a balance of wellness have taken effective action to foster it. The following points relate specifically to the actions to be taken in a learning ecosystem to promote well-being. Acquiring it does not have to be viewed as a lottery - having the correct strategies in place and being proactive is what is required.

The following points should assist to inspire a well-being culture that can support any learning ecosystem:

1. Develop a whole community approach to well-being

This should be supported by a well-being mission statement provided by the learning ecosystem. The well-being of every key actor in a learning ecosystem must be placed as the number one, fundamental priority. Everything else should come

second. When the whole community recognises and effectively communicates well-being as the highest priority, the resulting trust formed is a crucial step to building the type of relational ecosystem that can embed itself in the whole community and generate well-being.

A whole community approach to well-being needs to be supported by;

- a policy and mission statement to reflect its importance;
- learning design and delivery that ensures its development among students and other key actors;
- existing links outside of the learning ecosystem with the wider community who can support, foster and deepen well-being for all.

2. Survey individual sections of the community

Students, teachers, non-teaching staff, parents and guardians must form the community of individuals who participate in well-being surveys. The surveys should seek to capture information on the following key areas:

1. Perceptions of current well-being
2. Areas for attention
3. Key issues
4. Crisis responses

3. Develop or find effective tools for measuring well-being as an ongoing activity

The digital age provides some excellent tools to support a learning ecosystem's overall well-being. Using measurement tools consistently across a whole community is the most accurate method for capturing information that can be used. It is equally important to seek to improve well-being measurements through research and development actions as more impactful well-being measurement tools emerge. The tools used do not have to be exclusively digital - some of the best well-being measurements might come in the form of collaborative experiences captured through relational exchanges in groups.

Every learning ecosystem will have unique priorities requiring a selection of different tools of support as their learning culture evolves. It is crucial to formulate a sense and respond organisational mindset to cope with well-being needs as they emerge. Also, in varied cultural contexts, different well-being strategies are required. It is best not to be too rigid with the tools used to measure well-being, and let intuition gained from surveys to guide decisions.

4. Develop a 3 horizon strategy for improving well-being

Planning in short, medium and long term cycles is crucial to ensuring a learning ecosystem's well-being strategy is robust and subject to ongoing monitoring and evaluation. A 3 horizon strategy provides immediate action, and a 6 month and 18 month plan.

The horizon strategy should encompass all key actors in a learning ecosystem and extended into the wider community to include parents and guardians, key stakeholders, outside agencies, and individuals and groups from various social demographics.

### 5. Place well-being at the high end of leadership responsibility

Leadership must make well-being its priority above everything else. In a learning ecosystem that is measured through standardised assessment approaches, well-being should still remain high-priority. Leadership must assume full responsibility for ensuring its position by communicating the message of well-being as number one to all key actors in the learning ecosystem and to parents and guardians. The only effective way to actualise well-being in a learning ecosystem is to make sure it is recognised as fundamental to the overall driving success in a learning culture.

6. Identify and train a well-being team to support the well-being lead

Every learning ecosystem should have a well-being lead/coordinator that is responsible for driving the well-being narrative across the whole community. This cannot be done in isolation however, and requires a team of individuals to support the lead/coordinator. The well-being team should be represented by all key actors who make up various staff and include students and parents.

Examples in Action

Examples of well-being are evident in many contexts. This section focuses on well-being in educational contexts, nations with high-performing well-being initiatives and information from well-being interest groups and software companies who might help inspire a well-being mission statement or action in your learning ecosystem.
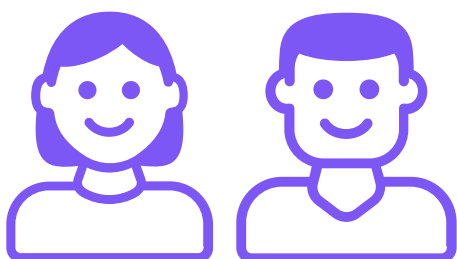
"Happiness is the meaning and the purpose of life, the whole aim and end of human existence."

Aristotle

[Creating ecosystems of kindness and wellbeing at St Francis Xavier College](#)
3000 young people, 500 educators and a community of parents working together to create an ecosystem of wellbeing and social innovation.

[St Francis Xavier College Home Page](#)

[Promoting Well-being And Inclusiveness In Sweden](#)
The Swedish population is among the most satisfied with life in the OECD, and the country performs well on many measures of well-being. Sweden is also committed to the fight against climate change and the implementation of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. Page 5 of this report sets out the Swedish agenda for strengthening the quality and equity of Sweden's education system.

[Student wellbeing: New Zealand](#)
New Zealand Government landing page which includes whole country school policies on well-being. New Zealand is recently lauded with its initiatives to foster the well-being of its citizenry, which begins at school.

[Supporting Minds: An Educator's Guide to Promoting Students' Mental Health and Well-being in Ontario, Canada](#)
A comprehensive strategy for addressing mental health and addiction problems. The aim of the strategy is to "reduce the burden of mental illness and addictions by ensuring that all Ontarians have timely access to an integrated system of excellent, coordinated and efficient promotion, prevention, early intervention, community support and treatment programs"

[DQ World](#)
The DQ mission is to provide innovative, research-backed educational tools that help children unlock their potential with core skills and values for the digital age.

[8 digital skills we must teach our children](#)
This example focuses on the importance of digital intelligence, which is widely regarded as crucial to fostering well-being among today's children. On reading this report - and many others on digital well-being - it is clear that other aspects of well-being; social, emotional, physical, cognitive and spiritual rely on digital well-being to support them.

[Mental health apps](#)
This website from the National Health Service (NHS), United Kingdom, includes several apps that can be downloaded support individual well-being. It is crucial to note that these apps should never replace professional help delivered through human interaction, but merely preventative measures or short term support.

[Action for Happiness App](#)
Advocated by His Holiness, The Dalai Lama, Action for Happiness has produced staggering results through research, demonstrating increases in well-being in people who took an Action for Happiness course. The mission of Action for Happiness is to increase well-being in homes, workplaces, schools and local communities.

[Sweden is a top performer on well-being. Here's why](#)
World Economic Forum report highlighting the key trends which make Sweden a global exemplar of well-being.

[New Zealand will have a new 'well-being budget,' says Jacinda Ardern](#)
In 2019, New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern announced a New Zealand wellbeing budget to address societal well-being of the nation, not just economic well-being.

[Mindfulness Academy for Mindful Teaching](#)
Eline Snel established the International Academy for Mindful Teaching in 2008, to train professionals from education and (mental) healthcare in the 'Mindfulness Matters' method, mindfulness for children and adolescents.

[Safe, happy and free: does Finland have all the answers?](#)
How Finland went from famine to topping nearly every global social ranking.

> *"Think of what you have rather than of what you lack. Of the things you have, select the best and then reflect how eagerly you would have sought them if you did not have them."*
> *Marcus Aurelius*

A recent impact report found that children globally who completed DQ World workshop saw a 10% increase in their digital intelligence score, which led to a 15% reduction in cyber-risks. The platform has had a significant and positive impact on children's development across several important areas, including safe and responsible attitudes and behaviours online, balanced screen time and self-control, better understanding of online presence, privacy and data protection and increased social, emotional and physical well-being[9].

Well-being support apps are readily available at affordable prices, however they cannot replace professional help provided by human interaction. Technology does however assist in the short term. Support networks are available for individuals to collaborate in learning, mental health and well-being, or subcultures related to one's personal

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[9] [Cyber-risk exposure among 8-12-year olds drops by 15%](#)

passions. These support individual and collective well-being by offering a network of like-minded people. Digital intelligence remains crucial to ensuring safe navigation through a treacherous sea of information.

"Competition has been shown to be useful up to a certain point and no further, but cooperation, which is the thing we must strive for today, begins where competition leaves off."

Franklin D. Roosevelt

Further reading

[Happiness apps: how schools are joining the fight for better student mental health](#)

[5 ways to improve health and well-being for all](#)

[Can reading improve your wellbeing?](#)

[Five measures of growth that are better than GDP](#)

[A history of well-being](#)

[Developing Instruments to Capture Young People's Perceptions of how School as a Learning Environment Affects their Well-Being](#)

[Help Guide: Your trusted guide to mental health & wellness](#)

[What if schools valued wellbeing more than results?](#)

[Neuroplasticity & Mental Wellness: Our Path Forward](#)

[The Wellness Brain](#)

[This is how the smartphone changed an entire generation](#)

[Student mental health is a major issue. So, what's the solution?](#)

[The Seven Dimensions of Wellness](#)

[Balancing Your Life With 7 Dimensions of Wellness](#)

[DQ Institute](#)

Digital technology safe use guide for schools

DQ World: Digital skills learning platform for kids aged 8-12

Coalition for Digital Intelligence

Forget IQ. Digital intelligence will be what matters in the future

Cyber-risk exposure among 8-12-year olds drops by 15%

Watch

Digital Intelligence (DQ): Global Standards for Digital Literacy, Skills, and Readiness

Matthew Walker: "Why We Sleep:
The New Science of Sleep and Dreams" Talks at Google

Before You Go To School, Watch This: What Is School For?