Helping Young People Feel That They Matter

Nurturing Students' Eudaimonic Well-Being and Their Capacity to Build Peace

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Abstract

We focus on how educators can support young people's eudaimonic well-being, that is, their sense of meaning, purpose, growth, and self-actualization. This view of well-being suggests that a deep, transformative, and enduring form of well-being can be obtained through living a meaningful life. First, we discuss peace education, most notably peer mediation. Second, we draw on a case study of a young girl transformed by the experience of leadership and altruism in a high-poverty school, and we end the chapter with reflections on how helping young people feel seen and heard, and encouraging them to give back to their communities, might offer new insights on what it is to teach and learn in deeply purpose-driven and connected ways.

Keywords

Well-being · Peace education · Eudaimonic well-being · Peer mediation · Child-centered

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1 Introduction

In this chapter, we consider what the curriculum might look like if it were designed to ensure that all young people felt as if they mattered. What would this mattering look like? It might replace the notion of education for future mattering (once you have mastered all that we wish you to master) with the notion of always and already mattering. Mattering because we care about you and your education. Mattering because we value you, and because you add value to our various communities, near and far. This curriculum would reject ideas of deficit. It would place young people at the heart of the curriculum – not only as the beneficiaries of child-centered education – but also as meaning-makers in their own right who matter to others.

We take as our starting point Aristotle's eudaimonia. This view of well-being suggests that a deep, transformative, and enduring form of well-being can be obtained through living a meaningful life. We use it to inform our discussion of two areas of our work, first peace education, most notably peer mediation, and second education for well-being. We end the chapter with some reflections on how helping young people feel seen and heard, and encouraging them to give back to their communities, might offer new insights on what it is to teach and learn in deeply meaningful and connected ways.

2 Peace Education

One of the authors of this chapter, Hilary Cremin, is known for her work on peace education. For several decades, she has been working with adult educators and young people to nurture caring relationships and to support them to respond positively to conflict through the use of circles (e.g., Cremin & Bevington, 2017). Her practical work with hundreds of schools involved in-service teacher training, and classroom work with children, and teaching and nonteaching staff. It also involved work with parents and community groups. She has published extensively on the challenges of working toward positive peace in schools while navigating the fraught realities of direct, structural, and cultural violence (Cremin, 2016, Kester & Cremin, 2017).

Here we reflect on Hilary's peace education work, and how eudaimonic well-being can be achieved through a curriculum which views young people as originators of acts of altruism, compassion, and care – rather than as recipients. We build on the work of the other author of this chapter (Nomisha) to consider how a move from the noun "wellbeing" to the verb "being well" entails so much more than would be implied by a simple change of language (Culshaw & Kurian, 2021). When being-well is considered as a verb, process is all. Both Hilary Cremin's work described here and Nomisha Kurian's work described later in this chapter hold this as a central defining principle. For young people to be happy and well, they need a curriculum that enables them to feel heard, to be active meaning-makers in their own lives, and to feel able to make a contribution to the people and places that matter to them.

Martin Buber (1970) uses a similar idea to talk about what happens when people go from treating the other as object (I-It) to treating the other as subject, capable of thought and feeling (I-Thou). This latter way of connecting was for Buber a means of accessing the divine. God, for him, was present in those moments of I-Thou relating. God is thus seen as a process, and not a static entity. Likewise, Rogers (1956) speaks of self-actualization, a continual process of becoming. Buber and Rogers have been seminal in Hilary Cremin's work on peace education, most notably through their emphasis on processes of genuineness, empathy, and unconditional positive regard. It is these processes (and the resulting relationships) that make up a peace education curriculum that nurtures both inner and outer peace.

More specifically, this form of peace education involves young people being trusted as genuine collaborators in processes of community-building and conflict resolution. Unlike popular forms of discipline and behavior management in schools, this form of peace education is about what young people think and do to generate positive peace, rather than how they can be coerced, manipulated, and controlled in public schools. It favors moral development, and learning from triumphs and mistakes, as the means by which peace can be achieved in schools. It is centered around the learning needs of children, rather than around the needs of the school for efficiency and control.

Peaceful school communities are built through a curriculum that leans toward the eudaimonic while being grounded in the concrete. A peace education curriculum needs to build up skills, knowledge, values, and attitudes for peace, but there need to be opportunities to put this into practice for peace to be actualized. This is where circles come in. Circle work builds: speaking and listening; empathy; the ability to attend to the other with respect, interest, and care; emotional regulation and understanding; cooperation; self-esteem; problem-solving; group identity; and community, to name a few. If this curriculum is followed on a regular basis in all year groups and subjects in a school, and if young people are able to use what they have learnt in everyday situations, the results can be transformational. Young people can begin to take increasing responsibility for disputes in the playground and classroom, and to offer each other resolution, reconciliation, and mutual understanding through initiatives such as peer mediation and restorative practice.

There are two points that we would like to make about circle work and peer mediation in the context of this chapter. The first concerns processes and relationships, and the second concerns the idea of young people as originators of altruism and eudaimonia. Both relate to the idea of young people mattering (more on this in the discussion of Nomisha's work later in the chapter). Circles are the perfect place for relationships and mattering to be nurtured through processes of being well. As we have highlighted before (Cremin & Bevington, 2017), circles represent interconnectedness, equality, and flow. Everyone in a circle relates to the center and to each other, not to an authority figure, or any other hierarchy. Unusually in school life, everyone can make eye-contact with everyone else and has a right to be in the space. The center is a place of focus and sharing, and the rituals involved (agreements about how the circle activities progress) can create feelings of safety and community. Peace-making circles are found in the first Nation cultures of North America,

where they are seen as a sacred space for human connection, problem-solving, and feelings of wonder and curiosity. When circles are used well in schools, they have an impact on speaking and listening skills, emotional intelligence, cooperation, self-esteem, and problem-solving. If they permeate school life – from tutor-time or social skills lessons to science and foreign-language lessons, and from the youngest to the oldest classes – they build a strong culture of care and fun. They also promote positive relationships at all levels and reduce bullying (Cremin, 2007). It is the process of relationship-building that counts.

In Hilary's PhD research project (Cremin, 2001), these circles were found to be very powerful when the school was committed to embedding them into school life. When schools were using them only tokenistically, or when young people's underlying social and emotional challenges were not being addressed in other ways, they had little effect. The key here is authenticity. When the circles were seen as a set of games and activities for the development of a school-mandated curriculum, their impact was not deep. It was as if the young people and adults in the circles were performing rather than being. It was seen as yet another curricular initiative that had to be engaged with. Everyone in the circle knew their place – whether as enabler, or as saboteur. It did not really matter which. While the challenges that the schools were facing were real and shared, there was little sense of ownership over the ways of building peace.

In the doctoral project school where the circle work and peer mediation flourished, the impact was not felt immediately. The circle work was effective in enabling young people to use a new language of affirmation, cooperation, emotion, and conflict resolution. Children developed new skills and attitudes but were not applying these outside of the circle. When they were given opportunities to become mediators and to resolve their own playground disputes, however, the impact was transformational. The peer mediators spoke about using their skills at home as well as in the playground, and the teachers noticed mediation and peace-building knowledge and skills being transferred into other areas of the curriculum. This can be compared with learning to drive in theory with getting into a car and learning at the wheel! The latter enables a deep form of learning that becomes unconscious for many drivers. This is what we would want for our peer mediators.

We argue that this way of learning and being enters into the territory of eudaimonia through mattering and Buber's "I-thou." Young people resolve conflicts and build peace, not because they need to be able to demonstrate their learning in preparation for some future time when they might apply it, but because they value Buber's "I-thou" way of relating in the here and now. They have learnt through experience how much more meaningful this is. They can relate in these ways because teachers too have ceased to relate to their students as I-it. Rather than seeing them as needing control or coercion, young people are seen as collaborators in community building. Teachers relate to them as originators of altruism and eudaimonia, and this is what makes a difference. The following section explores the concept of eudaimonic well-being in more detail and employs case studies from Nomisha's work to explore this in more depth.

3 Fostering Young People's Eudaimonic Well-Being

We will now move from peace education to a field with a similar interest in human flourishing: education for well-being. This section presents the work of the other author, Nomisha, whose interest in school climates of care has led her to explore how teachers may safeguard young people in high-crisis settings (Kurian, 2020a); promote empathy (Kurian, 2019); protect the rights of the bullied and socially marginalized (Kurian, 2020b; Kurian & Kester, 2018); and receive care and compassion for their own well-being (Culshaw & Kurian, 2021).

We begin by outlining the rise of well-being as a priority for curriculum design and delivery, and the instrumental role of positive psychology. We explain the two dominant conceptualizations of well-being in the hedonic and eudaimonic tradition; the complexity and interrelatedness of these constructs; and their implications for curricula. We also engage with critiques of the well-being movement in education and society and highlight the dangers of well-being curricula becoming mechanistic, performative, or overly individualistic. We argue that imbuing the curriculum with processes of "being-with" and "being-well" might help to guard against these pitfalls. First, we conceptualize "being-with" as recognizing and acknowledging the reality of pain and suffering, and creating safe spaces in the classroom to hold difficult emotions and experiences. Then, we conceptualize "being-well" as a process of letting pupils become givers of care and initiators of positive change, through curricula that respect and cultivate their agency. To illustrate "being-with" and "being-well" in practice, we draw on Nomisha's previous work in secondary schools, weaving the voices of teachers and students into our conceptual explorations.

4 The Rise of Well-Being Curricula

A younger cousin to peace education is the well-being movement in education. It was accelerated by the growth of positive psychology in the 1990s (Seligman, 2011). The psychologist Martin Seligman, now known as the father of positive psychology, argued that it was time to shift away from the (then) mainstream psychological approach of understanding human welfare solely in terms of deficit, pathology, and illness (Seligman, 2011). Instead, Seligman advocated an assets-centered approach. This meant conceptualizing well-being as more than the mere absence of illness and as the active *presence* of positive emotions and rich experiences that make life feel worthwhile and satisfying (Seligman & Csikszentmihaly, 2000).

Subsequently, the global spike in interest in well-being over the last three decades has been compared to an "explosion" (Mills & Klein, 2017). For the first time, individual well-being has been prioritized within global policy. Target 3.4 of the Sustainable Development Goals for 2030 calls for "promoting mental health and wellbeing" (UN, 2015, p. 18). This marks a "watershed moment for mental health" (Scorza, Poku, & Pike, 2018, p. 72). This commitment is further marked by the growth of specialized policy groups. For example, the FundaMental SDG Group has

been established as "a global initiative aiming to strengthen mental health" and identifies individual well-being as "one of the most pressing issues of our time" (FundaMental SDG, 2015, p. 1).

The framing of well-being as a "new opportunity to raise the bar in terms of the best attainable state of health globally" (Davidson, 2019, p. 4) has attracted much educational interest. It is now well-established in research that schools exert formative and lifelong effects on young people's mental health (Thapa et al., 2013; Weare, 2010). Consequently, schools are increasingly positioned as key relational and affective sites for well-being (McLellan & Steward, 2015). Innovations such as the "positive education" movement aim not only to safeguard students against poor mental health, but also to actively cultivate students' intrapersonal and interpersonal assets – such as meaning, pleasure, engagement, positive relationships, and accomplishment (Seligman, 2011).

The curriculum has been recognized as integral to a whole-school culture of well-being (Burgess et al., 2009). Waters (2014) notes that "what seems unusual now - to explicitly teach a subject on wellbeing - will one day be a normal part of the curriculum" (p. 116). Indeed, an ever-growing amount of empirical and theoretical scholarship points to the benefits of curricula that explicitly promote mental health: the capacity to foster life satisfaction, promote social connectedness, develop emotional literacy, and prevent anxiety and depression (Brooker et al., 2019; Souter et al., 2012; Waters & White, 2015). Educational settings around the world have pioneered curricular initiatives to teach elements of well-being, from self-care (e.g., Lo et al., 2017) to hope and optimism (e.g., Field & Duffy, 2012) to social belonging (e.g. Levin et al., 2019). This paradigm shift has been compared to the change ushered in through the Industrial Revolution, when teaching all children the three Rs – reading, writing, and arithmetic – was seen as a groundbreaking curricular innovation (Waters, 2013). In the twenty-first century, "just as it is now considered normal for all students to learn reading, writing and arithmetic, it will be considered normal to learn about wellbeing" (Waters, 2013, p. 118).

5 But What Kind of Well-Being: Hedonia or Eudaimonia

The reader might, at this point, wonder how well-being is understood in the first place. In this regard, a major contribution of positive psychology has been to offer educators two distinctive ways of conceptualizing well-being. The first, hedonic well-being, refers to positive moment-to-moment affect, such as joy, happiness, pleasure, amusement, or comfort (McLellan & Steward, 2015). Hedonia denotes what feels good, satisfying, or enjoyable (Waterman, 2008). Pioneering work in positive psychology favored this hedonic perspective, discussing how well-being could be promoted through "a life full of frequent experiences of positive emotions, infrequent experiences of negative emotions, and an overall evaluation of one's life as satisfying" (Schueller, 2013, p. 2661).

By contrast, eudaimonic well-being refers to meaning, purpose, growth, and self-actualization (McLellan & Steward, 2015). The word "eudaimonia" originates from

the Greek word for good (eu) and spirit (daimon). Eudaimonic well-being, according to Aristotle, meant "living in truth to one's daimon" or actualizing one's full potential through the pursuit of excellence and virtue (Waterman, 2008, p. 235). While the ingredients of eudaimonia vary across different contexts, Huta and Waterman (2014) found that four elements emerged in almost all definitions: self-growth/personal development/self-actualization, meaning/significance, authenticity/autonomy to be one's truest self, and excellence/quality/virtue/ethics. Eudaimonic pursuits may result in feelings of transcending the self or connecting to something greater (Vittersø, 2016). Since meaning and purpose can be more long-lasting than fleeting moment-to-moment positive affect, eudaimonic well-being is generally considered to have more enduring effects than hedonic well-being (Steger et al., 2016).

Nevertheless, the two are not meant to be promoted in isolation or pitted against one another. Both are significant in promoting life satisfaction and a sense of vitality (Huta & Waterman, 2014). The majority of scholars agree that hedonic and eudaimonic well-being are closely intertwined constructs (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Ryan & Huta, 2009; Vittersø, 2016) (For a comprehensive overview of how hedonic and eudaimonic well-being have been conceptualized, operationalized, and contested, see Huta and Waterman, 2014.). We "need to interrelate both perspectives if we are to comprehend the complexities of children's lives" (Estola et al., 2014, p. 932). Indeed, the boundaries between eudaimonic and hedonia blur within the vibrant realities of day-to-day school life. For example, a curriculum that encourages a student to invest significant time and energy to achieve a challenging goal (a eudaimonic pursuit of self-growth and purpose) may also help that student to feel joy, gratitude, happiness, or satisfaction upon attaining it (a hedonic moment of positive affect). Eudaimonic well-being and hedonic well-being thus enjoy "substantial overlap," and "if a person experiences eudaimonic living he or she will necessarily also experience hedonic enjoyment" (Deci & Ryan, 2008, p. 3).

Given this overlap, a well-known critique within well-being literature has even questioned whether separating eudaimonia into its own distinct concept is necessary, suggesting that the two concepts be integrated into a single "Big One" approach (Kashdan et al., 2008). This critique, in turn, has been countered with defenses of the distinction between hedonia and eudaimonia (Ryan & Huta, 2009; Waterman, 2008). In agreement with the latter, we consider that this distinction offers educators a rich and fine-grained vocabulary to understand well-being. Without it, subtle variations in emotion and experience might be lost. As Ryan and Huta (2009) point out, there would be no way to differentiate between "meaning, awe, inspiration, sexual pleasure, egoistic-gratifications or self-transcendent ecstasy" (p. 203). Without eudaimonia, an "oblivious person with electrodes continuously stimulating reward centers of the brain would be, by this definition, not only happy but also well" (Ryan & Huta, 2009, p. 203). The curriculum could stagnate without crafting opportunities for young people to grow, determine their values, and discover their purpose. Retaining the Aristotelian notion of well-being, as a path to meaning and self-actualization, thus seems fruitful. For the purposes of this chapter, we focus on eudaimonic well-being, while acknowledging its connections to hedonic positive affect.

6 Critiques of Well-Being Curricula

The blossoming of well-being literature and policy bodes well for our hope to see all young people feeling confident that they matter. Yet, this brings new challenges and dilemmas for the curriculum. Some of the assumptions of this research and praxis have been contested. Some sociologists abhor the "tyranny of the positive" (Held, 2002) arguing that the well-being movement pathologizes negative emotions and pressurizes individuals to display only positive emotions (Held, 2002; Ehrenreich, 2009). Others consider that some personality traits, such as being sociable, extroverted, cheerful, and optimistic, are extolled within positive psychology to the neglect of other personality traits, such as being introverted or contemplative (Miller, 2008). Critics point out that students in school well-being programs may be pushed to share emotions and experiences without fully consenting, and to feel anxious about nonpositive emotions (Ecclestone & Hayes, 2009). They have also questioned whether students will be assessed on their well-being and whether such assessments can fairly account for differences in students' personalities and worldviews (Ecclestone & Hayes, 2009).

Moving beyond the school to society, some sociologists argue that enshrining well-being as a policy goal for every sphere of social life is a neoliberal tool of governmentality (Joseph, 2020). That is, they see promoting "positivity" as a push to make people content with the status quo and compliant in the face of unjust social structures (Ahmed, 2010; Sointu, 2005; Miller & Klein, 2018). These critics question whether curricula encouraging young people to be happier will ignore the social structures that make them unhappy (Zembylas, 2020).

While these are all different strands of critique, a unifying theme is concern about whether the well-being movement is sufficiently nuanced, critical, and societally informed: Does it heed the range and complexity of people's emotions, needs, and experiences? While it is beyond our scope to address every strand of critique, we concur that a narrow emphasis on positivity and inattention to context could reduce well-being curricula to assembly-line products, designed for young people to consume and perform in the same manner as any other curricular unit. This risk is worrying. As Hilary expressed in her section on peace education, we do not advocate for curricula that coerce, manipulate, or pressurize young people. Rather than simply steering students to the knowledge, skills, and traits that we adults consider necessary for well-being, it also seems vital to honor the voices, emotions, and experiences *they* bring to us. Miller's (2008) critique proves insightful:

> The positive, optimistic attitude that Seligman associates with achievement, success and happiness and which he exemplifies with a successful insurance salesman— seems moreover to pre-suppose a very narrow range of emotional response. Indeed, one might argue that it is the mark of wisdom and maturity, of an appreciation of the mysteries, tragedies and ironies of life, not to respond unambiguously positively or negatively, optimistically or pessimistically, to any given situation. (Miller, 2008, p. 606)

In agreement with Miller, we conceptualize a curriculum for well-being as going beyond a hedonic focus on positive affect and creating possibilities for rich and varied forms of meaning-making. This brings us to the eudaimonic concept of "being-with" – holding space for a range of difficult emotions and experiences to help young people feel seen and heard.

7 Being-With: Holding the Space for Struggle

The curriculum is a matter of *process* as well as content, as Houghton and Anderson (2017) remind us. A curriculum for well-being, then, is not only about teaching skills but also about the relational climate in which topics of human flourishing emerge and are discussed.

In this section, we suggest that educators be willing to sit with uncomfortable emotions (such as pain) and difficult experiences (such as struggle or injustice) that students may voice in the classroom. Helping them to feel seen and heard and acknowledging the reality of the adversity and suffering they face can deepen their eudaimonic well-being. We animate this argument with extracts from Nomisha's primary data with two participant-schools in India.

The first participant-school was an urban K-12 school practicing an ethic of care. Despite their commitment to compassionate and empathetic pedagogy, teachers and students struggled to navigate forms of inequality, violence, and crisis in the region, such as gender-based violence, child labor, and child abuse (Kurian, 2020a) (See Kurian, 2020, for full details of the methodology and findings.). When asked how they engaged with youth well-being in the face of societal challenges, the teachers reflected on changes in the power dynamics between teacher and pupil. They referred to the historic Vedic tradition of "guru–shishya" in India, a form of spiritual and academic mentorship wherein pupils were expected to give their teacher absolute obedience and devotion. The curriculum provided in the guru-shishya tradition was meant to be accepted unquestioningly. Psychosocial concerns such as well-being were not foregrounded, given the academic imperative for the pupil to master the knowledge the teacher provided. However, the teachers noted intergenerational shifts in understandings of youth agency.

> There has been a cultural shift. In India and globally as well. My generation went to school in the 60s and it didn't matter whether a teacher was strict or warm. She was the guru, we were brought up to think we have to respect her. We had to sit silently whenever we heard her coming through the corridor. Like, 'Stay quiet, Ma'am is coming!' But today's generation is not like that. They want their voice to be heard. (Piya, Year 10 teacher).

> The guru-shishya relationship has changed. Today's generation will rebel if you condemn them or tell them rudely that something is not right. You have to put it in a diplomatic way and be loving, then they just might listen to you. They might ask you questions like, 'Why not?' 'Why should we do this?' This generation responds more to love and care. (Anjali, Year 9 teacher)

According to teachers, these intergenerational shifts meant that students were more vocal, curious, and critical about their social ecology. For example, students were sensitive to the social dynamics of gender discrimination. The prevalence of gender-stereotypical imagery in textbooks has been much-discussed in Indian sociology for the past two decades (Bhoge & Ghose, 2014; Blumberg, 2008; Kalia, 1986; Pandey, 2006). On the ground, students were willing to openly question curricular material they perceived as biased:

> Kids today are more independent-minded. For them, happiness is... asking questions, why do we have to do this, why that. They even question what they see in the textbook, like if women are only seen holding pots and pans and in the kitchen. We were not allowed to question like that when we were kids! (Ram, Year 10 teacher)

In turn, to actualize the school's ethic of care, some of the teacher-participants adopted a receptive attitude.

> It keeps us on our toes and they need to feel we are listening. (Piya, Year 10 teacher)

They perceived the students' criticality as a catalyst for social change in the long term.

> I think this is a good trend because if the kids are asking questions today, for example, 'Why do girls have to be quieter than boys?' then this will be to the good of the nation and the world later. Bring in change in society. (Ram, Year 10 teacher)

Students also expressed resistance to social norms that impinged upon their own lives. For example, the city within the school was located consistently recording the fourth-highest rate in India of sexual violence against women and girls (National Crime Records Bureau, 2011). For this reason, female students were often forbidden by their parents to take morning walks; go out to play in the evenings; travel with friends; or go anywhere unaccompanied. The effects of this restricted social mobility upon their well-being became a frequent topic of classroom discussion, even though such issues were not covered within the official curricular content. Female students spontaneously shared feelings of frustration and anger. Rather than attempting to banish or quell these emotions, teachers reflected on the need to show empathy in a reflective dialogical space:

> Caring for a child is no longer just about ordering them to do something. If I tell the girls, you should not go out post 7pm, we hear so many cases of attacks on girls. But today's generation will take it negatively, the girls say, 'Why should we have to stay in? Why can't it be safe for us?' For me, helping them be happy means. . ..I have to slow down, listen to them, hear them out, not just condemn what they're saying. (Srilata, Year 9 teacher)

> "If the same thing were to happen to me, I would feel upset as well. For me, their wellbeing means...just the fact that they feel they can come and open up to me, and they know their information is confidential and there is someone ready to listen to them. They know my

> perception is not, 'They are children so it doesn't matter what they say.' I actually do care about what they want to say." (Namha, Year 9 teacher)

In turn, students identified their teachers' receptivity as beneficial for their well-being.

> The teachers are kind. In my previous schools teachers scold the children a lot, here they actually talk to us. I like how they listen without shouting. (Rehan, Year 7)

> You get this feeling that you can tell them anything. (Rishabh, Year 6)

> When we have Circle Time, I get to tell my teacher what I read in the newspaper. We talk about current events, sometimes the bad things too. I liked that we could freely share. It makes us have a more trusting relationship with people in our class. (Vaibhav, Year 8)

These extracts suggest a context-sensitive approach to cultivating young people's well-being through being-*with*: listening to students and offering empathy and respect without shying away from difficult questions. Helping students feel that they matter, in this sense, may mean creating safe spaces for shared vulnerability (Bevington et al., 2019).

Teachers' framings of "happiness" as "asking questions" and "slowing down" to engage with "negativity" rather than "condemning it" are intriguing, given critiques that the well-being movement may overlook the productive potential of negative affect. Protesting what he sees as an uncritical push for happiness in education, Zembylas (2020) argues that a socially just curriculum must show empathy for some amount of *unhappiness,* because "bad feelings in the classroom can be an important resource" to "engage more actively with the alleviation or eradication of suffering in the world" (p. 29). Ahmed, a sociologist of affect, makes a similar point about the emotional cost of civic responsibility:

> "To recognize the causes of unhappiness is thus a part of our political cause. This is why any politics of justice will involve causing unhappiness even if that is not the point of our action. So much happiness is premised on, and promised by, the concealment of suffering, the freedom to look away from what compromises one's happiness." (Ahmed, 2010, p. 196)

These authors join a substantial body of critics who deplore individualistic or decontextualized framings of well-being on the grounds that these underplay the social context of pain (Jackson & Bingham, 2018; Joseph, 2020; Miller & Klein, 2018; Sointu, 2005). A paradox thus emerges about human flourishing: Helping young people feel seen and heard can mean bearing witness to uncomfortable emotions and experiences. A curriculum imbued with this empathy may, by creating opportunities for solidarity and change, open up eudaimonic pathways for meaning. After all, "a world in which unhappiness is seen as shared allows students to mourn suffering and... opens up new possibilities for an ethical living in the world" (Zembylas, 2020, p. 28).

This case study has thus sought to illuminate the value of "being-with": curricula that make space for struggle. In contrast to a mechanical or performative push for positivity, being willing to sit with discomfort may bring greater depth and meaning to the pursuit of well-being. As Nomisha notes in previous work, "how can we seriously talk about being well if we do not understand what it means to be struggling?" (Culshaw & Kurian, 2021, p. 7). Moreover, as we saw in Hilary's peer mediation work, students gain a sense of eudaimonic well-being once they have been given both the skills and the opportunities to transcend their everyday conflicts. We therefore call for curricula that open up "new spaces for emotion, encounter and engagement with struggle, risk and voicing" (Cremin et al., 2021, p. 2).

8 Being-Well: Young People As Agents of Change

Nomisha's other work has used the term "being-well" to playfully subvert the term "wellbeing" (Culshaw & Kurian, 2021). This linguistic revision signifies that well-being is not a static property, but a fluid state. It ebbs and flows depending on the structures and relationships that surround young people and their educators (Culshaw & Kurian, 2021). In this section, we use the term "being-well" to explore the agency of young people. In keeping with the nature of "being-well" as an active verb, we argue that the curriculum need not treat students as passive recipients of knowledge, but encourage them to take responsibility and propel positive change for individual and collective well-being.

As a case study, we spotlight the story of 14-year-old Saloni, a child-participant in Nomisha's research with a secondary school in urban India. This school served a high-poverty youth population, with approximately 60% of students living below the international poverty line of $1.90 or less a day. Interviews were conducted with 11- to 14-year-old child-participants and their teachers over the course of 2 months of fieldwork.

Saloni lived with her grandmother and her mother in a tenement near the school. Having lost her father and grandfather before the age of ten, Saloni identified her grandmother as her inspiration:

> My grandmother is the one who mostly takes care of me and I owe to her, I want to be exactly like her. She is the one who gives me inspiration because she has been through such tough times.

She went on to explain that her grandmother had had to endure multiple adversities throughout her life, including gender-based abuse and alcoholism in her marriage and the upbringing of four children and the financial support of six extended family members while enduring extreme poverty. Saloni saw these hardships as deepening her respect and admiration for her grandmother:

> She is my role model. She came up in her life. She is very daring...I must be like her. It will help me in life.

She also noted that her grandmother "wants me to do well in school" since the intergenerational cycle of poverty "has to end at some point, she doesn't want me to go through the same things."

Saloni regularly attended the "Life Skill" lessons the school provided. This curriculum included information about psychosocial elements of well-being as well as skills for personal development, such as elocution. However, when asked about the elements of school life she found most influential for her well-being, Saloni named an informal encounter with her head teacher outside formal curricular provision.

> I told her about my grandmother and how I am having this aim to work hard because of her. Then the next week she came to me in the corridor and said, 'Saloni, why don't you try being the Green House Captain?' I was really excited and I was like, 'Yes Ma'am, I am trying my level best now and I'll be trying it always.

Saloni noted that "after that day, I became a lot more happy." After becoming captain, Saloni felt the desire to work for social change and "do something for the other children" out of the knowledge that, when her grandmother faced adversity, "no-one did anything to help her or my mom, they were just thinking of themselves, it's I, me, myself." She elaborated:

> My grandmother is not like this. She admires Abdul Kalam (A former Prime Minister of India.) and she encourages everyone to look up to other people, you should never be just I, me, myself. You should take inspiration from great personalities, what they have done for the country. Even if not 100 percent, at least we can contribute 1 percent to our country. Like, India faces many problems and the girls who come from tough backgrounds, there is sadness in their life until they grow up and find their own feet. So I feel good that I can do things for other children like me, I am not going to lose hope and I will not put anyone else down that way.

Saloni put this life philosophy into practice at school. Over the course of her leadership, she initiated multiple forms of positive change: advocating for teachers to understand the plight of orphaned children enduring child labor and caregiver abuse; teaching her peers financial literacy and money management skills; talking to her peers about the value of resilience and self-discipline; and helping a bereaved child secure a fee waiver in the wake of losing her father, who was her family's primary wage-earner. She explained how these experiences enhanced her own well-being:

> I feel good that I can do things for other children like me. Now, when I walk into school, I feel happy, I feel like I believe in myself, my teachers do too. Where my confidence comes from - it's my grandmother. Because she also takes the initiative, in money matters and all. Other ladies are looking up to her. I take inspiration from her only. And her confidence, what she has, has come upon me.

Saloni's story suggests the potential of curricula that enable young people to "be well" as an active verb: by becoming dynamic agents of change in their communities. Saloni was taught skills in the formal curriculum. However, the moment she

identified as transformative for her well-being was when she was given responsibility to work for individual and collective good herself. This finding is reminiscent of the oft-quoted observation that "mental health promotion is much more than simply inserting curriculum materials" (Wyn et al., 2000, p. 595). Perhaps the curriculum comes to life when the relational climate affirms the assets of the young people imbibing it.

A promising blueprint for this capability-centered approach comes from the social psychologist Isaac Prilleltensky. Prilleltensky argues that we can help people to feel as though they matter in two stages – "recognition" (feeling valued) and "impact" (adding value) (Prilleltensky, 2014). He conceptualizes these two stages thus:

> The moment of recognition refers to signals we receive from the world that our presence matters, that what we have to say has meaning and that we are acknowledged in the room, in our family, at work, and in the community at large. The moment of impact, in turn, refers to our sense of agency; that what we do makes a difference in the world and that other people depend on us. (Prilleltensky, 2014, p. 151)

Indeed, both stages seem visible in Saloni's journey to being-well. When her head teacher asked her to become a school captain, she went beyond formal curricular provision to enable the first stage of mattering – helping Saloni feel valued (Prillentensky, 2014). The moment of recognition thus took place. The potential of this first stage to make students feel appreciated seems well-captured by Elliot's (2009) analysis of mattering: "When there are many who could fill the bill and the person notices me…I can be more confident that I really do matter."

In turn, Saloni's altruism toward her peers ushered her into the second stage of "mattering": which moves the giver from feeling valued to *adding* value (Prilleltensky, 2014). Contributing to a community has been found to foster meaning in life, as it helps the individual invest effort and time in goal-fulfillment (Ryff & Singer, 1998); fulfill their psychological needs of purpose, value, efficacy, and self-worth (Baumeister, 1991); and thereby feel that life has "significance beyond the trivial or momentary, to have purpose, or to have a coherence that transcends chaos" (King et al., 2006, p. 180). From the lens of eudaimonic well-being, this discovery of meaning nurtures a person's daimon: the inner spirit or "true self" uncovered through purposeful pursuit (Schueller, 2013; Little, 2016). Indeed, becoming a leader helped Saloni make meaning out of her family's intergenerational history of trauma. Far from being a passive acceptance of the status quo, resilience can be a potent tool of resistance to cycles of suffering (Hajir et al., 2021). Saloni's pride in fulfilling her grandmother's legacy also suggests the need for well-being curricula to honor young people's life histories. As Houghton and Anderson (2017) note, an emotionally intelligent curriculum can draw on students' lived experience to convey that educators see and value young people as multidimensional individuals in their own right, rather than as simply consumers of content.

Saloni's proactiveness and ingenuity in helping other marginalized young people also suggests that the second stage of mattering – adding value – may tether human

flourishing to the pursuit of justice and equity. Since "people will go to great lengths to pursue fairness for themselves, their loved ones, their communities, and their countries," the opportunity arises to connect "mattering and fairness on the one hand, and wellness and thriving on the other" (Prilleltensky, 2014, p. 151). Similar to Hilary's observations of young people empowered through their work as peer mediators, Nomisha observed that Saloni gained confidence and happiness through her work as school captain. This reinforces previous findings that altruism can develop feelings of self-efficacy and social worth (Alessandri, Caprara, Eisenberg, & Steca, 2009; Grant & Gino, 2010), and "the salience and strength of one's identity as a capable, caring contributor" (Grant & Dutton, 2012, p. 1034). Saloni's references to positive emotions – excitement, hope, and happiness – also suggest how curricula encouraging eudaimonic pursuit need not ignore young people's hedonic well-being. In a well-balanced curriculum, "the same circumstances giving rise to eudaimonia" can "simultaneously give rise to hedonia" (Waterman, 2008, p. 240).

Age need not be a barrier to taking up responsibility. We urge caution against overly deterministic views about child development, as rising numbers of youth and well-being scholars suggest that the traditional stereotype of the young child or adolescent as self-preoccupied and ego-driven is not necessarily accurate (Epstein, 2007; Stevens et al., 2007). In fact, research has shown that young people at all ages can thrive through dedicated social and civic engagement (Lerner, 2004). This is not to suggest that all young people will make meaning in the same way. However, Saloni's case suggests how a curriculum that encourages students to be change-agents might facilitate several components of eudaimonic well-being: being able to actualize one's potential (Huta & Waterman, 2014); develop and utilize skills and talents (Kashdan et al., 2008); act as a role model or exemplar for others (Waterman, 2008); do good and make a positive impact on others' lives (Steger, 2016); and express one's values through practical action (Little, 2016).

Crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic have only deepened the need for educators to encourage collective action and social change (Moulin-Stożek et al., 2021). Whether we are concerned with young peer mediators in the UK or young people like Saloni in India, the urge to turn conflict and adversity into peace and well-being is strong when young people feel that they (always and already) matter. Prioritizing this in curriculum design is fundamental to nurturing care and human thriving in and through education.

9 Final Reflections and Ways Forward

This chapter has offered two conceptualizations to help foster young people's eudaimonic well-being. The first is "being-with" – creating safe spaces to hold the difficult emotions and experiences students may articulate with empathy, respect, and compassion. The second is "being-well" – encouraging students to actualize their potential, take up responsibility, confront the reality of adversity and suffering in the social world, and become agents of individual and collective change. Taken together, we consider that a curriculum which offers the ability to "be-with" and "be-

well" may foster young people's sense of mattering and their pursuit of self-growth, meaning, and purpose. The eudaimonic learner can certainly experience hedonia but transcends an exclusive focus on positive affect in order to embrace a "fully engaged life of trial and error, failure and success, pleasure and, at times, disappointment" (Schueller, 2013, p. 2661).

In terms of practical ways forward, we suggest the following points for reflection when designing and enacting curricula for young people's eudaimonic well-being.

Start by looking at the ground beneath your feet.

- How do young people experience conflict and well-being in your education setting? What opportunities do they have to make meaning from their life experiences, good and bad? Where do they learn how to resolve conflicts and build peace? What opportunities do they have to practice and develop these skills?
- What do you know about the struggles that young people are facing? Do they feel safe, seen, and heard in the classroom? What supports them to feel a sense of meaning, purpose, and growth?
- What processes do you have in place for finding this out? Are these processes robust? Do they involve young people as peer supporters?

Continue to collate information and improve policy and curriculum for understanding young people's experiences and acting on them.

- What patterns emerge when you look at what you have found from investigating the above?
- How can you improve school policy and curriculum to make it more likely that young people will have the skills and opportunities to resolve conflict and build peace and well-being as active agents? How can you involve young people themselves?

Plan for sustainable peace and well-being.

- Is what you are implementing having an effect? How do you know? What needs to happen next to continue to improve? What do young people say about it? How can they be involved in continually reviewing and sustaining this work?

This list is not meant to offer prescriptions, but avenues of possibility. The content and processes shaping curricula are ultimately fluid and contingent upon the priorities and capacities of their unique contexts; "a curriculum that works in one setting might not work in another" (Brooker et al., 2019, p. 61). Moreover, the daimon (spirit) that characterizes eudaimonic pursuit looks, feels, and sounds different in each individual. Rather than a standardized mold, the daimon is "an ideal, in the sense of being an excellence, a perfection toward which one strives" (Waterman, 2008, p. 240). Thus, we close this chapter in the hope of a curriculum that infuses a unique sense of meaning and mattering within each young person that encounters

it. In this approach to well-being, "doing good and being well can come together" (Vittersø, 2016, p. 20).

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