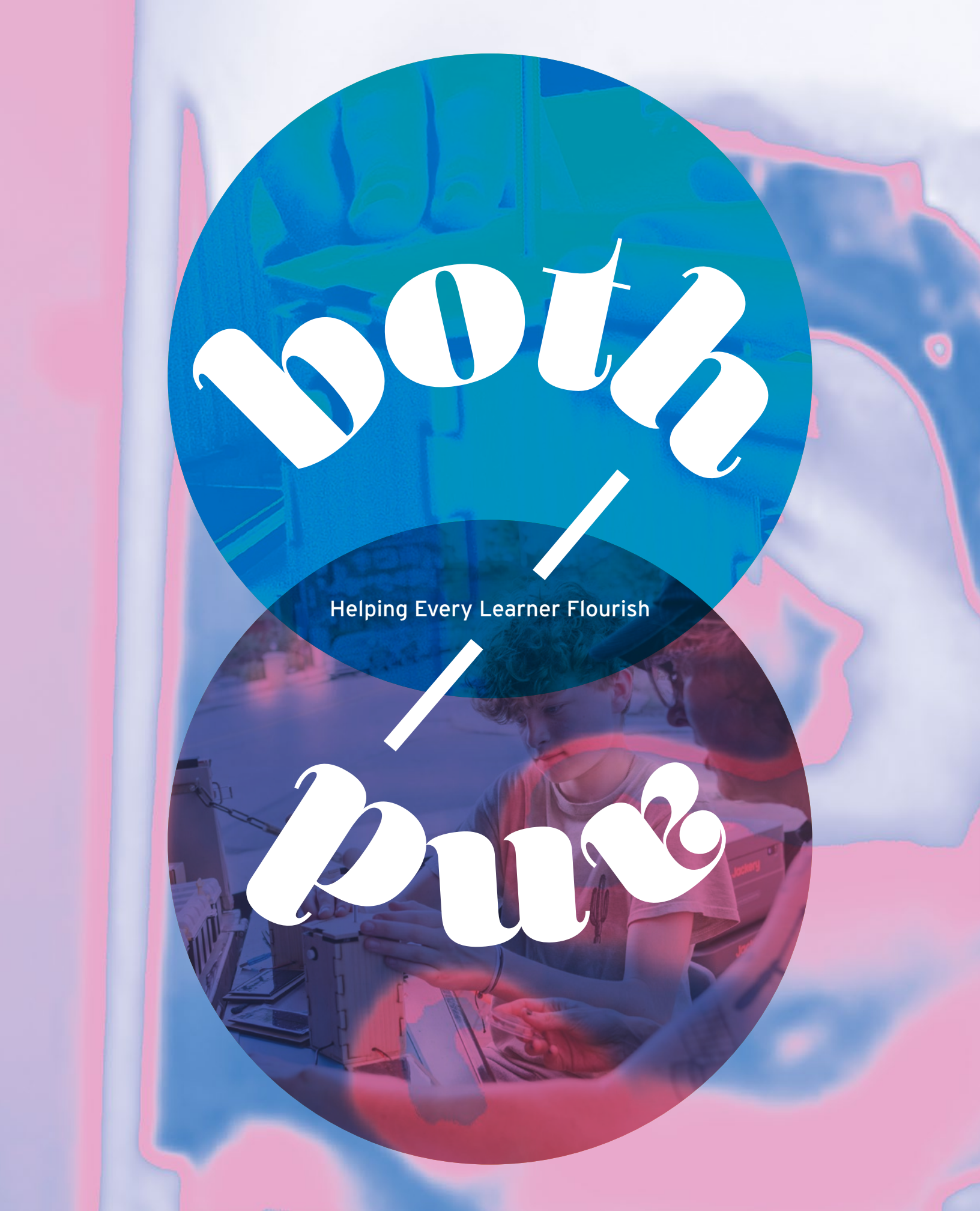




Vote

Helping Every Learner Flourish



now

Why do we learn?

To gain knowledge.

To master a skill.

To land a job.

To dive into something we love.

To find our spark, our purpose.

To be better neighbors and citizens.

To prepare for whatever comes next.

To care for the people around us
and the world we share.

**In short: we learn
to build a better life.**

But while the reasons *we learn* may be timeless, the purpose of *education*—the formal systems designed to help us learn—has shifted over time, reflecting society's priorities, anxieties, and dreams.

For much of human history, education was designed for the few, training elites to rule and seek “the good life.” As democratic societies emerged, education refocused on preparing people for citizenship. Then came the Industrial Revolution, and schools pivoted again—this time, to produce workers for factories and offices. Later, the knowledge economy ushered in a new model, one that prized technical skills and innovation. Now, as we step into the age of artificial intelligence (AI), an essential question looms: **What is education for today?**



Think about it:

- Technology is reshaping our lives faster than we can blink.
- Jobs are being disrupted, redefined, and automated out of existence.
- Our planet is ever more fragile.
- Young people are less optimistic about their future.

(And those are just a few of the big headlines.)

So, what ***should*** education be for learners today?

We need to move beyond the old “either/or” thinking—either skills *or* meaning, either personal success *or* civic responsibility, either scientific reasoning *or* artistic imagination. We need a “both/and” approach.

Because people aren't either/or. We are both workers *and* dreamers. Both thinkers *and* doers. Both questioners *and* believers. Both individuals *and* parts of a larger whole. We are many things, all at once.

And when we design education accordingly—when we nurture the “both/ands” that make us who we are—we educate for something larger. We educate for **human flourishing**.



The Good Life

Flourish:
"to bloom" or
"to flower."

Human flourishing is about thriving in every part of our lives. It's a state where happiness, health, purpose, connection, and accomplishment all come together.

And crucially, it's not just about individual outcomes—it's also about building and sharing environments that support our neighbor's growth and well-being.

Today, the idea of human flourishing is gaining momentum across fields like public health, education, and social policy. Researchers and practitioners are asking: How do we create the conditions where all people—not just a lucky few—can lead thriving, meaningful lives? How do we build and sustain communities and places that make flourishing possible?

Several thinkers and programs are helping define what flourishing means.

- **The Human Flourishing Program at Harvard University** studies how factors like relationships, character, and purpose shape our well-being across a lifetime. Led by Dr. Tyler J. VanderWeele, the program has developed a widely cited index measure based on six domains: happiness and life satisfaction, mental and physical health, meaning and purpose, character and virtue, close social relationships, financial and material stability.
- **The PERMA Theory**, developed by psychologist Dr. Martin Seligman, identifies five pillars of flourishing: positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment. This framework has become especially influential in education, helping schools create environments where students not only learn but also build resilience, form strong connections, and find purpose in their studies.
- **The Headwaters Project**, led by Dr. Grant Martsof at the University of Pittsburgh promotes teaching and research on flourishing in the applied arts and sciences. The initiative encourages exploration and discourse on conceptions of human happiness and well-being, and how our understanding and appreciation of those concepts affect outcomes in realms like public health and civil engineering.

Learning to bloom

If flourishing is the goal, education is one of our most powerful tools to get there. But it requires us to think bigger than just academic achievement or job preparation.

How can education systems provide learning experiences that nurture our most human qualities like **creativity, empathy, critical thinking, and resilience**? How can we prepare learners to thrive as individuals, as community members, and as caretakers of our shared future?

In other words: How do we grow whole people, not just workers or test-takers?



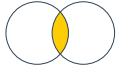
An ancient tradition, a new opportunity

If this sounds familiar, good. Throughout history, educators and philosophers have dreamed of schooling that nurtures our full human potential. And human flourishing has long been a pillar of world traditions and faiths.

Aristotle saw education as central to *eudaimonia*, a life of virtue and fulfillment. In 19th-century England, Matthew Arnold argued that education should cultivate both knowledge and beauty. American philosopher John Dewey championed schools as living communities where students learn by doing, thinking, and connecting. Lev Vygotsky showed how learning is deeply social, shaped by culture and community. More recently, former U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy has emphasized fulfillment, service, and belonging as vital ingredients for personal and societal well-being.

In India, thinkers like Rabindranath Tagore envisioned education as a joyful unfolding of the whole child, rooted in nature and creativity. In Indigenous traditions across the Americas, education has long meant passing down wisdom that sustains both people and the planet, fostering balance between the individual, the community, and the Earth. And in Japan, the concept of *Ikigai* captures the idea of a life worth living—where passion, mission, vocation, and profession come together in harmony.

Today, we have a chance to build on these rich traditions. What does education for human flourishing mean for us today?



A Framework for Education for Human Flourishing

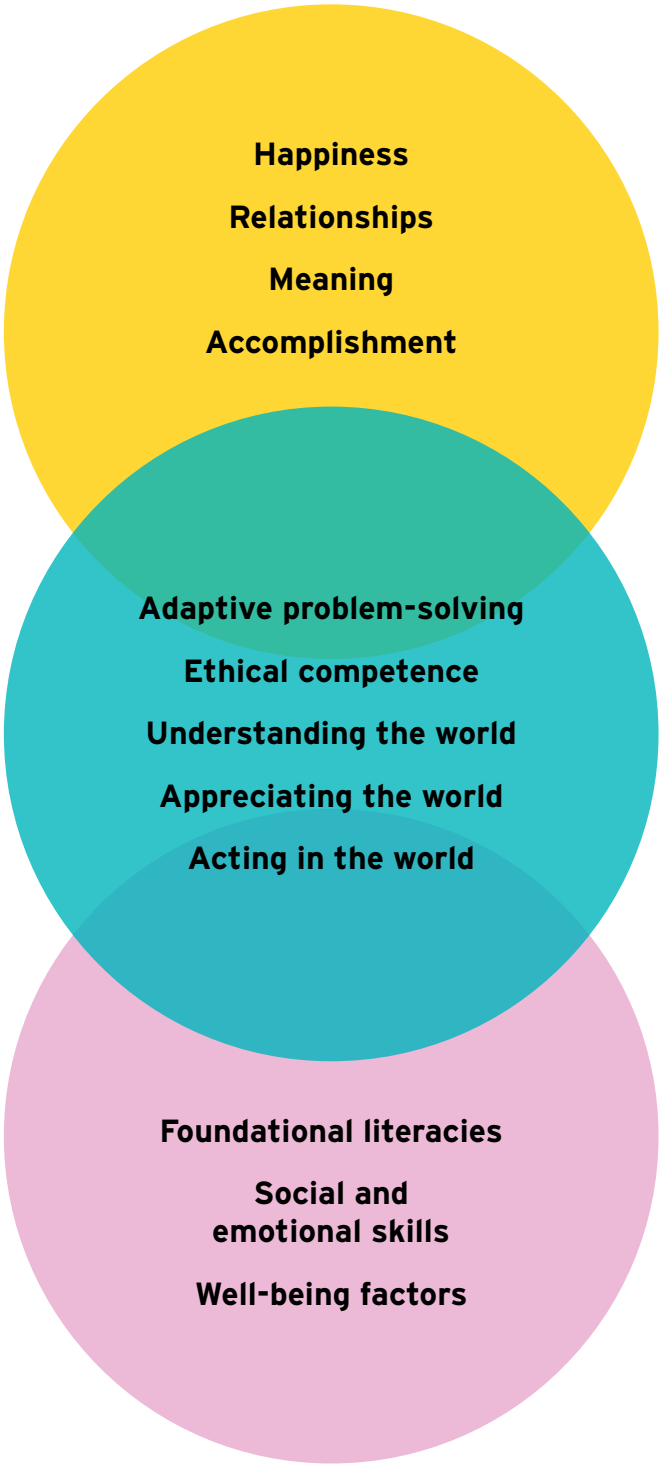
Michael Stevenson, coordinator of the OECD High Performing Systems for Tomorrow initiative, is leading the development of the *OECD Education for Human Flourishing Framework*.

Built on extensive global research, the framework reimagines education as a driver of happiness, strong relationships, meaningful purpose, and real accomplishment—not just for individuals, but for whole societies.

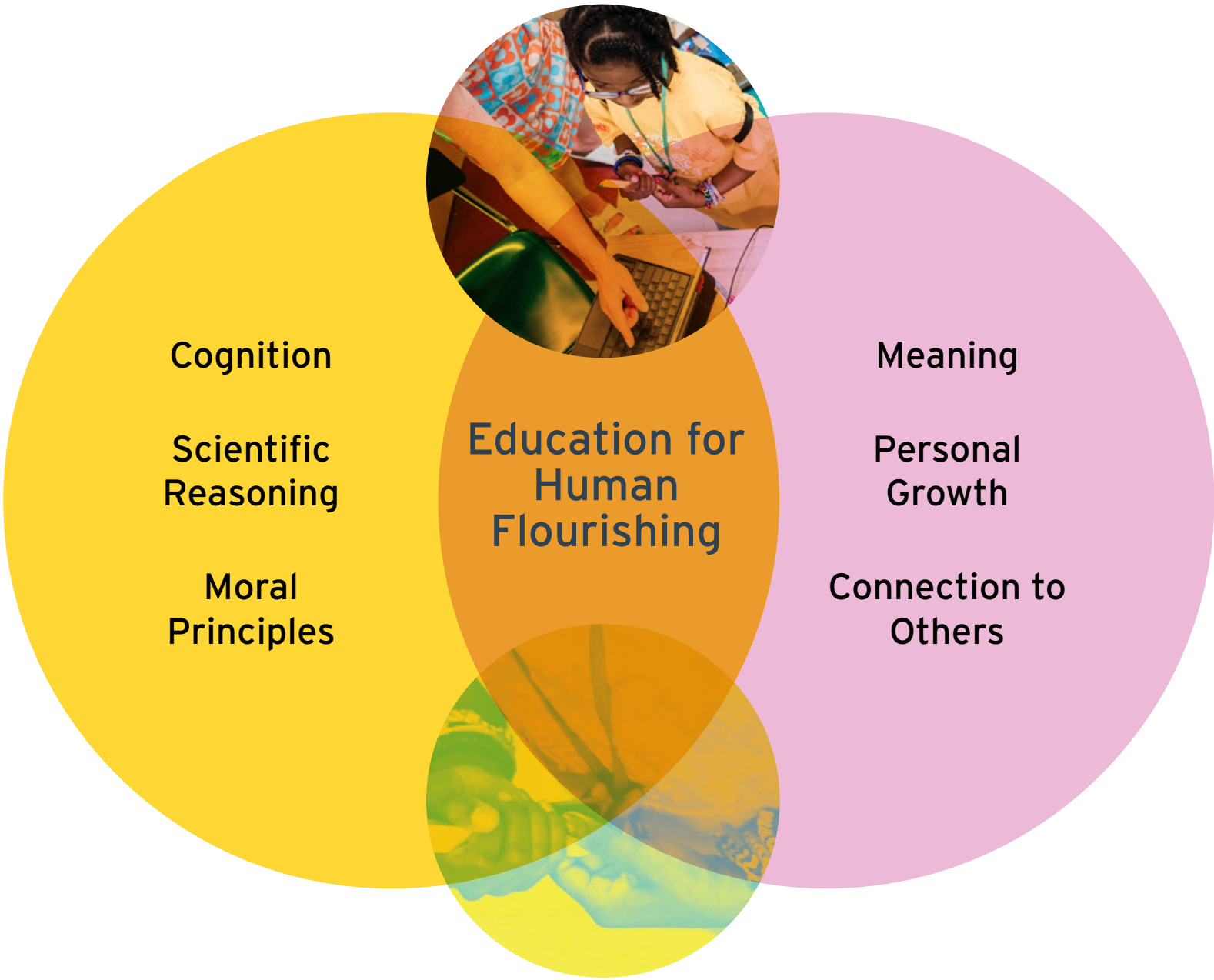
At the heart of the framework are five key competencies that learners need to thrive today and tomorrow: Adaptive problem-solving skills that enable learners to navigate new and complex challenges as they arise. Ethical competence that informs and guides choices and behaviors. Understanding the world around us through experience and knowledge. Appreciating the world in all its beauty and complexity. And acting in the world to make a positive difference.

Supporting these competencies and enabling the loftier goals are three foundations: Well-developed, cross-curricular literacies in reading, math, and STEM. Skills like resilience and empathy that equip us for life as individuals and community members. And preconditions that provide for the well-being of all children, like healthy environments, supportive families, and access to life’s necessities.

Around the world, a quiet but profound shift is underway: Education systems are rethinking what success looks like, exploring what it might take to help young people truly flourish.



Education for Human Flourishing isn’t about choosing between knowledge and character, or between science and spirit. It’s about growing all these capacities together, helping learners lead lives of integrity, curiosity, creativity, and compassion.



The rise of AI makes it all the more urgent that education balances cognitive development with meaning making. As AI agents become capable of replicating many of our cognitive tasks, we humans will need renewed sources of purpose and fulfillment.

Indeed, the Education for Human Flourishing competencies—far from being rendered moot by AI—point the way to a future where we have harnessed the power of AI to help us develop that which makes us most human.



Where is Education Flourishing Today?

From classrooms to countries, educators, students, and communities are bringing the vision of human flourishing to life.

Skill building, with a purpose

In recent years, a lot of talk about education—from policies to headlines—has focused on helping students build technical skills for the jobs of the future. But if we want young people to thrive, we can’t stop there. Helping learners flourish also means helping them find deeper meaning, make ethical choices, and use their skills to contribute to the world. These examples show that building skills and building character can go hand in hand.

Technical Skills and Ethical Insight

At **Avonworth High School** just outside of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, teacher Scott Tuffiash guides his 12th grade Honors English students through a dialogue-driven course on human flourishing that emphasizes listening, speaking, reading, and writing—in that order. The semester begins by studying and comparing frameworks from institutions like Harvard, Penn, UC Berkeley, Pitt Social Work, and Penn State, grounding students in big-picture ideas before moving into more personal exploration. Each class begins with a provocation, such as a poetry recitation followed by a question for reflection, before moving into discussion.

Guest speakers bring the theory to life with wisdom drawn from lived experience: a playwright, a blind student, a local business owner, a combat veteran, a therapist. Their stories underscore the idea that a flourishing life is for everyone.

“I think of it as planting long seeds. If I can hand my students off to their next teacher or their next learning experience ready to go deeper, then I’ve done my job.”

– Teacher Scott Tuffiash

Through discussion, journaling, and documentary-style video essays, students develop their own definitions of a flourishing life, cultivating both knowledge and conscience.



Strengths and Purpose

At **West Virginia University**, the Purpose Center offers a unique space for students to explore their personal strengths and align their career goals with their individual values and talents.

Students complete the CliftonStrengths Assessment to understand their unique potential. Purpose Center coaches join first-year seminars to explore what finding your purpose actually looks like and why it matters in college and beyond. And throughout their time at college, students participate in guided reflections to support self-discovery both inside and outside the classroom.

“We’re helping students understand themselves and speak about their value, both what they care about and what they’re good at. This gives the students a chance to build meaningful communities where they find their fit and a sense of belonging.”

– Cate Schlobohm, WVU Purpose Center

By focusing on holistic development, the Purpose Center empowers students to lead meaningful lives both during and after their time at university.

Hands-On Learning and Environmental Stewardship

Set in a lush jungle campus made from sustainable materials, **Green School Bali** in Indonesia invites students to engage deeply with nature while building the skills they need to thrive. Learners not only study math, science, and language, they also plant organic gardens, manage composting systems, and work on real-world projects like cleaning rivers and reducing plastic waste in their communities. By combining academic growth with environmental action, Green School helps students develop a sense of purpose, agency, and connection.



Balancing work life with life's work

Flourishing doesn't mean a life free of challenges. It recognizes that real growth—in life and in learning—can be both joyful and demanding at the same time. These examples show how schools and communities are putting well-being, happiness, and joy at the heart of education.



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A Rewarding Profession and a Full Life

Motivated by the mental health crises and digital dissociation they were seeing among their students, **University of Pittsburgh** professors Dr. Grant Martsof and Dr. David Sanchez created the Happiness and Human Flourishing course. The course helps students preparing for careers in nursing and engineering complement their clinical experience and practical projects with opportunities for deep contemplation about the purpose and meaning of their work. After exploring theories of well-being, students practice applying those theories to domains of life like money, work, meaning, love, purpose, and technology. To demonstrate their learning, students prepare final presentations showing how they plan to be living flourishing lives 5, 10, and 20 years from now.

“We’re helping nurses and engineers think about what their chosen disciplines are for. We all have unique areas of expertise that in some small way contribute to human flourishing. The thing we’re trying to remind students of is that our academic and professional disciplines are meant to work together to help people live their better lives.”

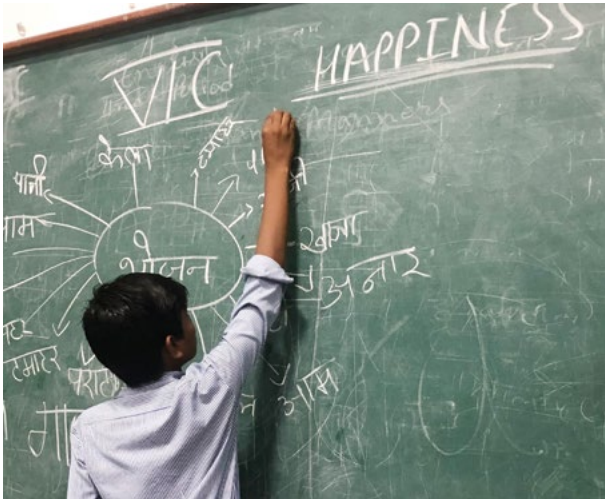
– Dr. Grant Martsof

Students are equipped not just for the demands of high-pressure professions, but also for building meaningful, balanced lives.



Boosting Academics and Well-Being

Launched across thousands of public schools in India, **Delhi's Happiness Curriculum** is showing that emotional well-being and academic success reinforce one another. Daily mindfulness, reflection, and relationship-building exercises have led to better classroom engagement, stronger academic outcomes, and improved mental health among students. It's a reminder that education for flourishing must nurture the heart as well as the mind.



Rigor and Joy

A network connecting more than 1,200 practitioners in schools, museums, libraries, afterschool programs, and elsewhere, **Remake Learning** is building a vibrant learning ecosystem in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania that blends high expectations with joyful exploration.

Grant opportunities incentivize school teachers and out-of-school educators to form unlikely partnerships with tech developers, research scientists, entrepreneurs, artists, and more to create experiences that spark curiosity, creativity, and collaboration for learners.

The annual Remake Learning Days festival engages hundreds of thousands of children and families in free, hands-on learning experiences in neighborhood settings. The inclusive, intergenerational environment builds shared meaning for learners young and old.

By catalyzing experiences where rigor and joy coexist, Remake Learning is helping young people develop both deep skills and a love of lifelong learning.



Bridging personal success and collective well-being

Flourishing goes beyond individual achievement—it thrives in communities where well-being, success, and social cohesion are nurtured together. These examples demonstrate how education can be a powerful force in fostering personal growth, social harmony, and shared prosperity.



Social Harmony and Economic Prosperity

As a post-industrial city in transition, **Doncaster, UK** is focusing on fostering social cohesion, reducing inequality, and strengthening community ties, while also building pathways to economic opportunity.

Through a prolonged community-advised process, Doncaster identified five focus areas: Best Start to ensure young children are ready to learn, Accelerating Achievement to help school children reach their full potential, A New Model for Post-16 Education to help residents thrive in life and work, New Skills & Pathways to Fulfilling Life & Work to support lifelong learning, and Equitable & Inclusive Learning, a cross-cutting value that addresses disparities across communities.

“We know that as students age and move through the system, outcomes drop off in comparison with the national average. At the same time, it’s increasingly the case that people need to upskill and reskill throughout their life’s work. So we wanted to take a wider view of the education and skills system.”

– Dani Adams, Skills Transformation Manager

Doncaster’s approach shows that thriving societies don’t have to choose between harmony and prosperity—flourishing incorporates both.



Individual Agency and Civic Responsibility

Finland’s education system is internationally celebrated—and for good reason. Finnish schools help students develop remarkable agency that gives them choices and voice in their learning, while also maintaining a strong sense of collective responsibility and care.

Student well-being is foundational to learning. Schools prioritize low-stress environments, shorter school days, and minimal standardized testing, allowing students more time for rest, play, and creativity. And rather than “teaching to the test,” Finland’s highly trained teachers emphasize purposeful, real-world learning, collaborative problem-solving, and community engagement.

By blending independence with community belonging, Finland offers a model of education for human flourishing at the national level.

Raising Literacy and Health Together

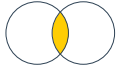
In **Florida’s Suncoast region**, the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading is tackling more than just reading scores. Funded by The Patterson Foundation, the campaign recognizes that health, nutrition, and stability deeply impact learning. The initiative weaves support for social determinants of health into its literacy efforts.

Among their most impactful activities are Pop-Up Neighbor Through Laundry events during which families get free laundry service while enjoying family reading experiences in the book nook. Community partners also provide free health screening and flu shots, fresh produce, and even tax help.

“We’re spreading a feeling of hope and caring, because people who are struggling can feel like nobody cares.”

– Beth Duda, Director

The result: stronger readers, healthier kids, and communities investing in whole-child success. In 2025, the program celebrated serving its 2,500th family.



Aiming to Flourish

To make human flourishing the ultimate purpose of education, we need a shift across multiple dimensions of the education system.

First, **practices** in learning environments must focus on more than academic performance. Schools should foster interpersonal and intellectual growth, cultivating skills that enable students to thrive in both individual and group contexts. This includes creating spaces that support mental health while sparking empathy, creativity, and collaboration alongside traditional learning.

Second, **policies** at all levels must support an education system that values well-being. Policymakers should broaden their scope to address the different needs of students. This means investing in teachers, supporting community-driven education models, and addressing barriers that prevent all students from reaching their full potential.

Third, **assessments** need to broaden their definition of success. Traditional tests often fail to capture important aspects of human flourishing, such as emotional intelligence or community engagement. A new approach to assessment might include measures of resilience, collaboration, and critical thinking, reflecting the full range of competencies necessary for thriving in an interconnected world.

Finally, **advocacy** plays a key role in shifting mindsets. By valuing shared well-being alongside individual success, we can reorient education’s purpose toward human flourishing. This involves challenging the traditional focus on competition and highlighting the importance of collaboration, holistic growth, and shared prosperity, ensuring that education prepares students to thrive both personally and collectively.

As we look to the future, with all its possibilities and challenges, the opportunity to make these shifts has never been more exciting—or more important. Centering education on human flourishing—helping people build meaningful, connected lives while contributing to their communities—offers a powerful and hopeful path for the future of learning.



Systemic Challenges

Education systems are massive, complex, and entrenched. Shifting them toward the aim of human flourishing means confronting and navigating some serious challenges.

Agreeing on outcomes and metrics:

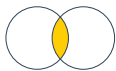
Aligning centers of power, relationships, and resources around human flourishing as the shared purpose of education.

Removing barriers:

Finding ways to ensure that every learner has the tools, resources, and relationships that set them up to flourish.

Expanding beyond schools:

Embracing an “ecosystem” model that includes both formal schooling and out-of-school learning experiences as equally valuable and mutually supportive.



What is the purpose of education? Is it to find the meaning of life, or to find a job? Is it about mastering skills, or mastering yourself? Instead of saying “either/or,” education for human flourishing says “both/and.” Both/And explores how educators, learners, and communities around the world are learning to flourish.

A flourishing future is nearer than you think.

A Root + All project

Design by Little Kelpie

Photography by Ben Filio for Remake Learning. Additional photos courtesy Scott Tuffiash, Government of NCT of Delhi, Ministry of Education and Culture Finland, John Colombo for the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, City of Doncaster Council.

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