This discussion paper has been written in support of the development of a position paper on student well-being and well-becoming by the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents. This purpose has driven the focus, structure and content of this paper.

STUDENT WELL-BEING AND WELL-BECOMING: A DISCUSSION PAPER

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This paper presents and discusses research literature that can serve as background information for the notion that students' well-being and their well-becoming should play a central role for the purpose, design, and enactment of school education. In the *first section*, we explore how student well-being and well-becoming have been and can be understood. The focus will be on a holistic understanding of the concept.

The *second section* provides an ecological (contextual) perspective on students' well-being and their well-becoming. An ecological perspective is important for two reasons. First, however student well-being and well-becoming are conceptualized, the actual experience and state of being well and the process of becoming well are dependent on the ecology into which a human being is embedded at any given moment. Second, school education is at its core a socially constructed and regulated (learning) environment for students; thus, it is important for school education to understand itself as providing a (school) ecology for students' well-being and their well-becoming.

The *third section* suggests that there is at the highest political level a greater recognition of the central importance of human well-being in general and child well-being in particular for what we should be concerned with as a society. The section then makes the case that the concern is of such nature, that it should give rise to a re-conceptualization of how in Canadian society student success has generally been explicitly and implicitly defined: students' well-being and their well-becoming are means and end of school education.

If students' well-being and their well-becoming are integral to the understanding of student success, then the school system should assess students' well-being and well-becoming, following the notion that what is valued should be assessed (as much as that is possible) and what is assessed should be that which is valued. The *fourth section* will engage with the idea of assessing students' well-being and their well-becoming as part of assessing student success.

Understand Student Well-Being and Well-Becoming

Human Well-Being

Human beings are purpose-oriented living beings which need to make sense of and give sense to their existence (e.g., Frankl, 1949/2006; Yalom, 1980). A functional and general understanding of human well-being can be linked to this purpose orientedness:

> In other words, *the concept of well-being is to capture what humans aim for when they exert their agency to live their lives one way rather than another*. This concept of well-being has the quality of 'prospectivity' (Sumner, 1996, p. 133) or future directedness (Hostetler, 2011, p. 50). This identifies one central reason for the importance of the concept of well-being: What we conceptualize it to mean can and should direct our decisions and actions at the individual, socio-cultural, and socio-political level. (Falkenberg 2014, 78-79)

This deep and existential concern of humans for their (and their fellow humans') well-being finds its reflection in the prominence of the topic in the scholarly literature, although not always under

the term "well-being".[1] The concern for human well-being as a response to our existential question is central to wisdom traditions (e.g., Buddhism), to Indigenous perspectives on "the good life" (see, for instance, Bell, 2016), to ancient Greek philosophers (e.g., the Stoics and Aristotle), and to modern-day philosophy (e.g., Griffin, 1986; Sumner, 1996), psychology (e.g., Diener, 1984; Kahneman, Diener, & Schwarz, 1999; Seligman, 2011), sociology (e.g., Veenhoven, 2008), and economics (Frey, 2008; Layard, 2005).

For the purpose of this paper, four different *types* of approaches to understanding well-being can be distinguished:

- approaches based on *indicators* (e.g., Bradshaw, Hoelscher, & Richardson, 2007);
- approaches based on *domains of human bio-psychosocial functioning*, like psyche (psychological well-being), body (physical well-being), intellect (cognitive well-being), social interaction (social well-being) (e.g., Fraillon, 2005; OECD, 2017);
- approaches based on *domains of human social functioning*, like the types of activities, available economic resources, life skills (e.g., Ben-Arieh et al., 2001, chapter 4); and
- approaches based on *experiences, functioning, and capabilities* (e.g., Falkenberg, 2019, in press; Nussbaum, 2011).

The first type of approach understands well-being as a phenomenon that indicators point to, like the level of education among children in a country points (indicates the presence or absence of) children's well-being. The second type of approach understands human well-being as the well-being in each of the different bio-social domains of human functioning, like a person's mental well-being, physical well-being, etc. The third type of approach to well-being puts a stronger emphasis on the quality of a person's functioning in their different contexts, for instance, how a child is using their time and what life skills the child has developed. The fourth type of approach to understanding well-being emphasizes the importance of actual experiences, like enjoyment, for well-being and the importance for capabilities that someone has developed for living a live one would like to live.

For the purpose of this paper, what is important to keep in mind is the distinction between (a) the concept/definition of (human/child/student) well-being itself, (b) *indicators that point to the presence of* what the concept is talking about, and (c) *factors that contribute to* what the concept is talking about. In some of the types of approaches listed above, this distinction is not always clearly made.

Conceptualizing Student Well-Being

Student well-being can be understood as child[2] well-being *within the ecology of the school*. As such, concern for student well-being is concern for the well-being of children as they live their lives *as students*. While this means that the concern for students' well-being is primarily focused

[1] For a historical account of Western approaches to well-being, see McMahon (2006), and for a systematic and conceptual account, see Falkenberg (2014).

[2] Following the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, n.d., Article 1), the term "child" is defined as any person below the age of eighteen.

on the experiences and behaviours of children in schools, there are also aspects of their lives as students that reach beyond the school as a location and place. For instance, as students engage with homework at home, they are living part of their lives as students. On the other hand, there are obviously aspects of children's lives outside of their being students that impact their well-being as students, so for instance the impact of poverty on educational opportunities (see Wotherspoon, 2009, pp. 255-266). Distinguishing conceptually between child and student well-being still allows acknowledging factors outside of children's lives as students impacting the latter.

A common approach to the conceptualization of student well-being (and well-becoming) is to "apply" a conceptualization of child well-being or human well-being more generally to the children in school contexts. An example is the use of the PERMA conceptualization of human well-being (Seligman, 2011) to the assessment of student well-being (e.g., White & Murray, 2015).

Whatever the conceptual approach to child (student) well-being, there have been a number of "principles" identified in the literature that *any* such approach to the conceptualization of well-being should consider (see Ben-Arieh et al., 2001, chapter 3):

- Children have a right to be well (child rights movement).
- Childhood has to be seen as a stage in itself rather than the child being seen as a "developing adult".
- Children have to be considered the "unit of observation" when establishing children's well-being rather than deriving their well-being from indirect data, like their family income.
- The emphasis should be on positive indicators of well-being rather than on indicators of "ill-being".
- It is important to (also) select policy-oriented indicators in order to influence policy decision making.
- Assessment of child well-being should combine subjective and objective research.
- Well-being is concerned with more than survival.
- Any understanding of well-being needs to be culturally and contextually relevant (e.g., Ben-Arieh et al., 2001, p. 109; Falkenberg, 2019, in press).

In the Canadian child and student *mental* well-being literature there is no unified meaning of mental well-being yet (Pollard & Patrice, 2003). However, three major perspectives on the definition of mental well-being can be distinguished: individual-focused definitions; context-focused definitions; and individual-to-environment-interaction definitions.

Individual-focused definitions locate mental well-being within the student as a state of being of students or as capacities and personal assets that students possess or not. Students demonstrate mental well-being when they have the capacity to motivate themselves to their potential and to work towards a cohesive sense of self, fulfillment and/or satisfaction of their basic psychological needs including autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Keyes, 2002). Mental well-being is that state of being in which students feel and act in ways that indicate that the skills, assets and supports required to live, connect and become are within their reach.

Context-focused definitions of mental well-being speak to the conditions that qualify a context such as school, to be described as a "well-being context". Research that speaks to well-

being contexts indicates that the mental well-being of children is impacted by several nested social systems which actively interact with each other (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998).[3]

Children's mental well-being has also been described in terms of *the interaction between the individual and the environment*, including the processes by which they make meaning of their experiences within the transactions (Fattore, Mason & Watson, 2007; 2009; Pervin, 1992; Reis, Sheldon, Gable, Roscoe, & Ryan, 2000; Ryff & Singer, 2000). Young people continuously evaluate the fulfillment of their needs as they encounter their environment in daily activities (Emadpoor, Lavasani, & Shahcheraghi, 2016; Van der Kaap-Deeder, Vansteenkiste, Soenens, & Mabbe, 2017). They engage in continuous emotional and cognitive appraisal of the way they experience their environment, even in situations which adults might describe as "neutral" or "idle moments". They draw from their background experiences including class, age, gender and ethnicity/race to make value judgements about what is realistic, expected and possible through and in their interactions with the environment (Khosrotash, Hejazi, Ejei, & Bonab, 2010; McLeod & Owens, 2004). This subjective information is integrated into their functioning across the domains of academic, social, emotional, and behavior including future orientations.[4]

Concern for Well-Being *and* Well-Becoming

Traditionally, in the child indicators research tradition, the "emphasis [was] on 'well-becoming,' that is, indicators that predict subsequent achievement or well-being" (Ben-Arieh, 2008, p. 9). "The 'becoming' child is seen as an 'adult in the making', who is lacking universal skills and features of the 'adult' that they will become" (Uprichard, 2008, p. 304). Uprichard (2008) points to the problematic aspects of this future-oriented perspective of concern for children:

> The child is seen as 'a future adult' rather than as a 'young human being' in his or her own right. This assumption is problematic because the temporal focus necessarily forces us to neglect or dismiss the present everyday realities of being a child. However, how we conceptualise something in future may influence how we conceptualise it in the present. Furthermore, whilst our anticipation of the future may influence how we conceptualise something in the present, our anticipations may be wrong (Davis, 1985). Therefore, to base our constructions of what a child is, primarily on what that child will be, is problematic, even if we accept that the future matters. (p. 304)

Especially through the influence of the new "sociology of childhood" (e.g., James & Prout, 1997), the originally sole focus on child well-becoming in the child indicators research movement "has been complemented by indicators of current 'well-being'" (Ben-Arieh, 2008, p. 9). "The 'being' child is seen as a social actor in his or her own right, who is actively constructing his or

[3] For a discussion of the relevant contexts for child/student mental well-being, the interaction between these contexts as they support child/student mental well-being, and some of the research findings using this definition of child/student mental well-being, see the section below on the school-ecological factors for student well-being and well-becoming.

[4] For a discussion of some of the research findings using this definition of mental well-being, see the section below on the school-ecological factors for student well-being and well-becoming.

her own 'childhood', and who has views and experiences about being a child" (Uprichard, 2008, p. 304).

Uprichard (2008) and others have argued, that both, the "well-being child" and the "well-becoming child" have to be given consideration, because focusing solely on "becoming" child "forces us to neglect or dismiss the present day realities of being a child" (p. 304), while focusing solely on "the 'being' child neglects the *future* experiences of becoming" (p. 305). The block quotation above, however, suggests also that both foci should not be engaged with independently: our *construction* of the "future child" (the well-becoming child) will always also influence how we *construct* the well-being and, thus, the needs of the well-being child. For instance, if we construct the future well-being of our child as being linked to becoming a physician or lawyer, it might negatively impact the well-being child that might not find meaning in the perspective of working as a physician or lawyer or enjoyment in the courses to be taken for a path toward these two professions. On the other hand, how we as adults and parents construct the well-being and, thus, the needs, of the well-being child in our care and sphere of influence will always impact the future experiences of child. For instance, the educational experiences provided to the well-being child based on our construction of the needs of the well-being child might negatively impact future possibilities available to the child in the future (the well-becoming child). One might say that adults who greatly influence the experiences of a child (like a parent or a teacher) need to *dialectically* engage with the constructions of the well-being and the well-becoming child.

Some approaches to well-being include aspects of well-being and well-becoming in the sense just discussed in the very conceptualization of well-being (e.g., Falkenberg, 2019, in press). In other approaches to well-being a distinction between well-being and well-becoming is not explicitly made. For instance, in the PERMA definition of well-being proposed by Seligman (2011), no such distinction is made. That does not mean that the well-becoming child is not given consideration. For instance, in the PERMA framework it is done through the suggested "way to flourishing" (Seligman, 2011), which includes the development of "character strengths" (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Character development from this perspective can be understood as giving consideration to the future well-being of the child and, thus, the well-becoming child, by making the assumption that the development of (specific) character traits will contribute to the child's future well-being, because having those traits will allow the well-becoming child to engage with the world, including other people, in a way that contributes to the future child's well-being as defined by the PERMA framework.

The Inclusion of Students' Perspectives in Understanding Their Well-Being and Well-Becoming[5]

Four rationales have led to a greater consideration of children's perspectives on understanding (and assessing/measuring) their well-being. First, the child rights movement (e.g., Doek, 2014; Lansdown, 2001) provides a *normative* rationale: children's perspectives on what it means for them to be (and to become) well should be considered, because children have the right to be heard in all matters affecting them (*Convention of the Rights of the Child*, 1989).

Second, the "new sociology of childhood" mentioned above provides for a *theoretical* rationale for considering students' perspectives. This re-conceptualization of childhood "is based

[5] For this section, we draw on Falkenberg (2018a, 2018b).

on accepting childhood as a phase of [*sic*] itself and children as active actors in society rather than subjects for societal concern" (Ben-Arieh, 2005, p. 574). Additionally,

> this new understanding of childhood is linked to the development of child-centred research (Barker & Weller, 2003), which moves children from passive "subjects" who solely provide information for an adult-established research agenda to active research participants that have input into or even direct the research agenda and who actively participate in all phases of a research project, from the design to the utilization of the findings. (Falkenberg, 2018b, p. 117)

Because in this "re-theorizing of childhood" (Barker & Weller, 2003, p. 34) childhood is seen as just one of a number of life phases humans go through (e.g., working life, marriage, retirement), those currently being in this phase are the experts of what it is like to be well during this phase of their life; which makes children the experts of what it means to be well in childhood.

The third is a *methodological* rationale, suggesting that for methodological reasons, children's subjective views about their own well-being as well as what it means for them to be well should be solicited and considered. As, for instance, Ben-Arieh (2010b) writes:

> This [the consideration of children's subjective views about their well-being] has proved particularly important given that studies have shown, especially during adolescence, that parents do not always accurately convey their child's feelings. (p. 13)

In other words, children provide a separate and often different data source on the understanding of their well-being and well-becoming.

The fourth rationale is an *educational* rationale, arguing that the *process* of including children's perspectives on their well-being and well-becoming contributes to educational objectives for children. The Children and Young People's Unit (CYPU) of the British government (CYPU, 2001) suggests that "good participation opportunities [for children and young people] produce more confident and resilient young people" (p. 6), and R. Hart (1992) writes:

> a nation is democratic to the extent that its citizens are involved, particularly at the community level. The confidence and competence to be involved must be gradually acquired through practice. It is for this reason that there should be gradually increasing opportunities for children to participate in any aspiring democracy. (p. 4)

The Involvement of the Community-at-Large in Understanding of Students' Well-Being and Their Well-Becoming

Positive psychology is a now prominent cluster of approaches to human well-being (Linley & Joseph, 2004; Lopez & Snyder, 2009). Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi's (2000) version of positive psychology explicitly understands itself as trans-cultural, meaning that they "ultimately aim to understand the positive states, traits, and institutions *that all cultures value*" (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2001, p. 90; emphasis added). In their critique of trans-cultural perspectives on

well-being, Christopher and his collaborators (Christopher 1999; Christopher and Hickinbottom 2008; Christopher, Richardson, & Slife 2008) argue that all theories of well-being are heavily value-laden, that they are culturally embedded, and that they are not culturally neutral or universal. This position is supported by historical studies of quite distinct understandings of well-being (happiness) in the history of Western political and philosophical thinking (e.g., McMahon, 2006) and other cross-cultural studies (see those referenced in Christopher, 1999).

> Understandings of psychological well-being necessarily rely upon moral visions that are culturally embedded and frequently culture specific. If we forget this point and believe that we are discovering universal and ahistorical psychological truths rather than reinterpreting and extending our society's or community's moral visions, then we run the high risk of casting non-Western people, ethnic minorities, and women as inherently less psychologically healthy. (Christopher, 1999, p. 149)

While the experience of emotional satisfaction *per se* might be rightly conceptualized as a universal type of experience, *how* this experience is mentally processed to produce the actual experience happens within a culturally specific framework of interpretation. Ignoring the role of such culturally specific frameworks "means that cross-cultural studies of happiness, in Western terms of individual satisfaction . . . , can seriously distort the experience of non-Western people" (Christopher & Hickinbottom, 2008, p. 571).

Acknowledging culture as an interpretative framework for any understanding of human, and thus student, well-being and well-becoming implies that such understanding will (at some point) require the involvement of the cultural community-at-large in some form. An underlying cultural framework for understanding human (student) well-being and well-becoming is particularly explicit in Indigenous approaches to well-being and well-becoming (see, for instance, the chapters in Deer & Falkenberg, 2016). Culture, for instance, is a core theme that has shaped the First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum Framework (Health Canada, 2015):

> First Nations leadership, youth, community members, and Elders have made it clear that culture must be at the centre of mental wellness. Culture must not only guide our work, it must be understood as an important social determinant of health. Culturally specific interventions are holistic; they attend to the spirit, mind, body, and emotions simultaneously. Culture as a foundation implies that all health services and programs related to First Nations go above and beyond creating culturally relevant programs and safe practices. As such, culture as a foundation means starting from the point of Indigenous knowledge and culture and then integrating current policies, strategies, and frameworks. (p. 6)

The same emphasis on the cultural foundation for "the good life" can be found in the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Holistic Lifelong Learning Models (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007).

A School-Ecological Perspective on Student Well-Being and Well-Becoming

The Importance of the School-Ecological Context for Students' Mental Well-Being

In this section we draw on research literature that speaks to an ecological perspective on student well-being and well-becoming. The preceding section developed the idea of well-being and well-becoming as located in the individual student. This section expands on this notion by suggesting that students' well-being and their well-becoming are not absolute but rather depend on the specific context students are in and how different contexts interact.

Family, school, and community have been identified as the three core systems that shape the mental well-being of students (Newland, Giger, Lawler, Carr, Dykstra, et al. 2014; Rodríguez-Fernández, Ramos-Diaz, Fernández-Zabala, Goñi, Esnola et al., 2016). While family is reported to have the most lasting influence on the mental well-being of students, a substantial percentage of student population rely solely on school for their well-being and well-becoming support (Ekornes, Hauge, & Lund, 2012; Olsson, 2009; Ruini, Ottolini, Tomba, Belaise, Albieri, et al. 2009), This is because school has been noted as the system with the greatest potential to provide the continuum of services that can support a vast range of students' developmental needs, including positive mental health and well-being (Franklin, Kim, Ryan, Kelly, & Mongomery, 2012). However, children thrive and flourish better when the school, family and community work together as partners to provide a continuum of mental well-being contexts (Van den Berg, George, Plessis, Bothat, Basson, Villiers, & Makola 2013; Kearns, Whitley, Bond, Egan & Tannahill, 2013). Young people therefore experience mental well-being to the extent that they perceive these contexts (homes, school or communities) to have qualities that promote their personal growth, quality relationship with others, mastery, self-acceptance, and purpose (Collins, Newman, & McKenry, 1995; Pinkerton & Dolan, 2007). Conversely, they languish when they feel that the context is unresponsive to their social and emotional needs and is "cold", "distant" and not nurturing enough (Newland, 2015; Rafelli, Iturbude, Carranza & Carlo, 2014;). They may even be unable to deploy whatever strengths they have in mental well-being-deprived contexts. For example, when the home is not a well-being context, parents/guardians may maintain an unbalanced focus on future orientation, materialism, hierarchy, and competition resulting in diminished attention to what matters to children, especially during the formative years (Newland, 2014). The children may feel emotionally neglected, psychologically deprived and may experience ill-being (Newland, 2015), despite the provision of much material resources. Similarly, when schools adopt exclusive emphasis on academic accountability and curricula excellence, attention to the emotional needs of students may suffer (Kroesbergen, Hooijdonk, Viersen, Middel-Lalleman, & Reijnders, 2015; Seligman, 2005).

Children engage in a continuous emotional and cognitive appraisal of the way they experience their environment. When youth encounter negative experiences in their daily engagement with peers, depending on belief/value systems as well as developmental stages, they may develop negative thoughts and emotions about school in general, leading to the experience of social and emotional distress. Without appropriate support, this experience may diminish the mental well-being of the child and impact outcomes in other essential developmental areas such as academic learning and behavior (Huynh & Fuligni, 2010). One implication is that the work which teachers do daily is perceived by students to be part of the process of creating contexts for mental well-being (Shoshani & Steinmetz, 2014).

Qualities of Mental Well-Being Contexts

Relevant literature suggests the following qualities of school contexts supporting student mental well-being:

- Nurturing adults maintain presence which communicates to children that the adult is "with" and "for" them (Gleason, Narvaez, Cheng, Wang, & Brooks, 2016); the adult feels deeply engaged in children's experiences and demonstrates an expanded sense of awareness of what matters to them (Murray-Harvey, 2010).
- Teachers' practice of their daily pedagogical "presence" skills such as listening, unconditional acceptance, and identification of success in each student becomes part of the creation of a mental well-being context.
- Caring adults model characteristics of mental well-being including emotion regulation, acceptance of 'obstacles', citizenship, respectful interpersonal connection, maintaining of relationship, problem solving, and growth-focused communication in their nurturing roles.
- Mental well-being contexts establish and consistently strengthen platforms for interconnectivities across the three major nurturing systems: family, community, and school (Horstmanshof, Punch, & Creed, 2008; Murphey, Stratford, Gooze, Bringewatt, Cooper, Carney, & Rojas, 2014).
- Mental well-being contexts sustain the following types of awareness:
  - awareness of the emotional needs of children/youth; well-meaning parents or teachers may inadvertently neglect children when they lack awareness;
  - awareness of what it takes to promote mental well-being for young people;
  - awareness of cultural/contextual specificities related to mental well-being;

Re-conceptualizing Student Success

Human Well-Being: A Growing Concern at the Political Level

For approximately the last 20 years a paradigmatic shift is in the process of taking place in the way societal progress, prosperity, and the quality of life of citizens is understood and measured at the macro-political level. Traditionally, the level of prosperity and progress, at least in developed countries – has been assessed primarily in terms of *economic* progress as measured by a country's gross domestic product (GDP).[6] The use of GDP as a measure of prosperity and progress has been criticized by a growing number of economists for a number of reasons. First, some economists (e.g., Jackson, 2009; Stiglitz, Sen, & Fitoussi, 2010) have been pointing out that GDP measures economic activity *regardless* of whether those activities mean an increase or decrease in quality of life – ecological disasters like oil spills or nuclear reactor accidents, for instance, increase GDP but can hardly be considered to contribute to the quality of life of citizens. Second, GDP is primarily a measure of economic *growth*, and particularly but not only ecological economists (e.g.,

[6] In contrast, since 1972 the government of Bhutan has been developing and implementing the concept of gross national happiness as a framework for political and economic decisions (see, http://www.grossnationalhappiness.com).

Jackson, 2009; Victor, 2008) have been pointing out that economic growth – measured as GDP – is closely linked to material consumption, which in turn is linked to the consumption of goods, which means the use of non-renewable or not-fast enough renewing resources, and that such consumption, and thus such economic growth, has its natural limit which is or has already been reached (e.g., Ruben, 2012). Third, some economists have argued that as an *economic* measure, GDP is a measure of a means for but not a measure of the substance of what makes for a prosperous and high quality life (e.g., Frey, 2008; Jackson, 2009; Schor, 2010; Schumacher, 1973/1999)).

The notion that societal prosperity, progress, and the quality of life have to be assessed quite differently than by using (only) economic measures, like GDP, has been getting some traction at the political level in the West. In early 2008, the then French president Nicolas Sarkozy has created the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress in response to

> increasing concerns about the adequacy of current measures of economic performance, in particular those based on GDP figures, and to broader concerns about the relevance of these figures as measures of societal well-being, as well as measures of economic, environmental and social sustainability. (Stiglitz, Sen, & Fitoussi, 2010, p. xvii)

In the UK in November 2010, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) launched its Measuring National Well-being Program "to provide a fuller understanding of 'how society is doing' than economic measures alone can provide" (Beaumont, 2011, p. 1). In 2011, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

> launched the OECD *Better Life Initiative* . . . . Building on almost ten years of OECD work on progress, *How's Life?* is a first attempt at the international level to go beyond the conceptual stage and to present a large set of comparable well-being indicators for OECD countries" (OECD, 2011, p. 14).

Starting in 2013, the OECD has been publishing statistics on the well-being of the population in OECD countries based on these indicators every two years (http://www.oecd.org/statistics/better-life-initiative.htm). OECD's Better Life Initiative is grounded in the recognition that "GDP is not an accurate measure of people's well-being" (OECD, 2011, p. 16).

This shift at the political level is supported by a rapidly increasing research base, which, for instance, suggests that: (a) while real GDP per capita has been rising in developed countries over the last decades, the level of subjective well-being has stayed more or less constant (e.g., Frey, 2008); (b) in cross-national comparisons, countries with higher levels of economic inequality show lower levels in a variety of measures of well-being (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009); and (c) "a strong relative focus on materialistic values is associated with low well-being" (Kasser, 2002, p. 21).

Child Well-Being: A Growing Concern at the Political Level

The paradigmatic shift in the process of taking place at the highest political level described in the preceding section finds a parallel development in the more recent interest at the highest political level in child well-being.

In 2009, the OECD used a range of indicators to report on child well-being in OECD countries (OECD, 2009). Since then the OECD has built a "Child Well-Being Portal [as] a platform for conducting policy-oriented research on children, enhancing child well-being and promoting equal opportunities among children" (OECD, n.d.).

The UK government "set up the Children and Young People's Unit in 2000, as 'a visible symbol of the Government's continued commitment to improving the life chances of our children and young people'" (Rose & Rowlands, 2010, p. 70); and as part of the already mentioned ONS's Measuring National Well-being Program in the UK, ONS has started to also measure children's well-being, because:

> During the Measuring National Well-being national debate many respondents told us of the importance of children's well-being. It is now largely accepted that what children become in their adult life is to a great extent a product of their experiences in the early stages of their lives (Aldgate et al, 2010). (Jaloza, 2012, p. 1)

In Ireland, State of the Nation's Children reports have been published since 2005 (Brooks, Hanafin, & Langford, 2010); these reports have been "based on the National Set of Child Well-Being Indicators, which were developed in 2005" (Brooks et al., 2010, p. 144).

Interest in and measuring child well-being has some history in these and other Western countries. "Pioneering 'State of the Child' reports were published as early as the 1940s" (Ben-Arieh, 2008, p. 3). The difference that suggests a paradigmatic shift lies in a shift in the *quality* of the concern for children's well-being. This shift is characterized by a qualitatively different understanding of what it means for children to be well, with the consequence that the indicators for child well-being have changed accordingly. Ben-Arieh (2008) has identified five changes in "the evolution of child indicators" (p. 9). First, while traditionally "much attention has been paid to children's physical survival and basic needs" (p. 10), the focus has now shifted from survival to well-being, which is a concept that goes beyond mere survival and considers the quality of life of children (p. 10). The next two changes in focus concern the understanding of the well-being of children. The second shift is from "measures of risk factors or negative behaviors" to measures of "protective factors and positive behavior" (Ben-Arieh, 2008, p. 10); and the third shift is from the concern for children's development – with a focus on their *future* being as adults – to a concern for children's *present* being, not just their well-becoming, i.e. their future being. "Qvortrup (1999) laid the foundation for considering children's well-being in claiming that the conventional preoccupation with the next generation is a preoccupation of adults" (Ben-Arieh, 2008, p. 10). The first three shifts – which are the basis for the new understanding of and concern for child well-being – are greatly influenced by the child rights movement (e.g., Doek, 2014; Lansdown, 2001), which provides for a normative rationale for these shifts (Ben-Arieh, 2008, pp. 5-6). The fourth change in focus is a consequence of the first three changes: a shift away from traditional domains of child well-being "to new domains that are child-centered and defined as interdisciplinary and cutting across services (such as civic life skills, safety, and children activities, among others)" (Ben-Arieh, 2008, p. 11). Along the same lines is the fifth change in focus, which is a shift away from a collection of individual data sets based on a set of different indicators toward a composite index of child well-being (Ben-Arieh, 2008, p. 11).

> Such a composite would, it is argued, facilitate easier assessment of progress or decline. Moreover, it might be easier to hold policymakers accountable if a single number were used. In addition, it would be simpler to compare trends across demographic groups and different localities and regions. (Ben-Arieh, 2008, p. 11).

This last shift can be seen as linked to a greater policy orientation of indicators research (Ben-Arieh, 2010a, p. 8).

A Growing Interest in Student Well-Being

A growing interest in and concern with *student* well-being and well-becoming can be identified. For instance, as part of its last PISA testing in 2015, for the first time the OECD assessed also student well-being across participating countries (Borgonovi & Pál, 2016, OECD, 2017). Futhermore, a number of Canadian provincial governments are explicit about student well-being as a major concern for the provincial education system, so, for instance, in Ontario (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014), Alberta (Alberta Education, 2009), and Manitoba (Manitoba Education and Training, n.d.).

Student Well-Being and Well-Becoming: Re-conceptualizing Student Success

With the growing concern for human, child and student well-being, the question arises what role in school education *does, can and should* student well-being play? The questions have clearly empirical components (what role student well-being does and can play in school education), but it has also a normative one (what role it should play). While the normative component is clearly framed by, it is not determined by, the empirical component: what should be the case is best framed by what can be the case – we should not ask that something should be the case if it cannot be the case; on the other hand, what is and can be the case does not determine what should be the case.

The first observation from the empirical research on the role school education does play for students' (children's) well-being and well-becoming is that the well-being is impacted by a child attending school, even if student well-being and well-becoming does not directly define student success. For instance, Bacete et al., 2014) observe:

> Starting in the 1970s, a number of somewhat serendipitous findings led to a greater appreciation of the fact that schools make a difference, in fact a substantial difference. For example, it was noticed in many longitudinal studies on children's well-being and adjustment that there were large differences among schools in their pupils' well-being that could not be explained by any variables other than those pertaining to the schools themselves. (p. 43)

Newer studies have identified direct positive impact of school education (of certain quality) on students' well-being – relative to their respective conceptualization of well-being. For instance, by drawing on research on positive mental health, Morrison and Peterson (2013) argue for the potential of school education to contribute to students' well-being. Using the perspective of Self-determination Theory (STD), Bacete et al. (2014) reference empirical evidence that schools provide opportunities to actually and potentially meet students' "three basic psychological needs

of autonomy , relatedness, and competence" (p. 1256)[7] and thus, contribute directly to the well-being of students, that is to the meeting of their three basic psychological needs. Huebner, Hills, Siddall, & Gilman (2014) report on studies that suggest a correlation between students overall life satisfaction (subjective well-being) [8] and school satisfaction. Huebner, Gilman, Reschly, & Hall (2009) report on empirical research that speaks to different factors in school education that can contribute to school satisfaction ("positive schools").

The second observation from the empirical research literature focuses on the impact of school education on children's lives as adults (on aspects of their well-*becoming*). [9] For instance, OECD (2011, p. 146) draws on such studies to argue that school education can and does have an indirect positive impact on children's later life as adults, due to the positive correlation between education and people's material living conditions, their health status, their political participation, and "the skills necessary to integrate more fully into their societies" (p. 146).

The third observation from the empirical research literature on the link between school education and students' (children's) well-being and well-becoming is a link of students' well-being in school to their academic achievement.[10] Bacete et al. (2014) reports "positive correlations between academic achievement, well-being, and mental health" (p. 1253) based on the studies they reviewed. Some studies identified a positive impact of particular well-being programs on students' academic achievement. For instance, Tran, Gueldner, and Smith (2014) report that social-emotional learning programs improve students' academic performance (p. 302; see also Morrison & Peterson, 2013, pp. 8-9). In this latter case, well-being programs are identified as *means* for supporting or increasing students' academic achievement, the latter of which is traditionally considered the primary measure of student success.

The forth observation from the research literature identifies student well-being not as a determinant of student success (generally, students' academic achievement), but rather as an *end* of school education itself, and thus a "measure" of student success. Since the question what the end of school education is is ultimately a values question, it has been traditionally more philosophically oriented research that has been arguing for this role of student well-being in school education (e.g., Brighouse, 2006; Noddings, 2003; White, 2011). Following is one line of argumentation for student well-being as a core purpose of school education that draws on different lines of philosophical research. Frankfurt (1971/1988) argues that what distinguishes human beings from other animals is their ability to have "second order desires", which are desires to have certain desires and motives: human beings "are capable of wanting to be different in their preferences and purposes, from what they are" (p. 12). For instance, the desire to be a person that

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[7] On the postulation of these three basic human psychological needs, see Deci and Ryan (2000) and Deci and Ryan (2011).

[8] On the subjective well-being approach to well-being, see for instance, Diener, Oishi, and Lucas (2009).

[9] On the distinction between well-being and well-becoming, see below.

[10] This refers to achievement in so-called "academic subjects", which are traditionally the subjects of mathematics, the natural sciences, and English language arts, and, sometimes, social studies. As such, "academic" is used quite inappropriately here, since more or less all school subjects are subjects that can be studied in the academy, including theatre, home economics, fine arts, and physical education. On the other hand, academic subjects (subjects offered to study at university level) are not school subjects, like economics, medicine, engineering, and (at least not as commonly offered courses) psychology and philosophy.

helps people in need is a second order desire. This very human capacity – which one could call human agency – challenges human development, which is the core concern of school education, in the following sense:

> Equipped with agency, humans face the challenge of having to decide what first order desires to have, or in other words, they have to decide how they want to live their lives. The notion of "human well-being" becomes relevant in the sense that it is the generic notion of what humans generally aim for when exerting their agency: to live well, to live a good life, to live happily, and so on. In other words, *the concept of well-being is to capture what humans aim for when they exert their agency to live their lives one way rather than another*. This concept of well-being has the quality of "prospectivity" (Sumner, 1996, p. 133) or future directedness (Hostetler, 2011, p. 50). This identifies one central reason for the importance of the concept of well-being: What we conceptualize it to mean can and should direct our decisions and actions at the individual, socio-cultural, and socio-political level. (Falkenberg, 2014, pp. 78-79)

School education is *the* means of society at large to support and direct human development (of children). If human agency is at the core of what makes us human and provides us with the basis for our ability to live a flourishing life (to live well and to be well), then the development of students' human agency to live well and be well should be the core concern for school education. School educational concern for students' "academic" competencies receives its purpose from their contribution to students' well-being and well-becoming. Also, other domains of human living that have received less curricular attention in Canadian school education, like self-understanding, relating to others, parenting (see, for instance, Noddings, 2006), would become more central to school education as they contribute to a flourishing life.

Arguments for well-being as a core *purpose* of school education can also be found in the more empirically oriented literature, where researchers draw conclusions for school education from the findings of relevant studies. Two lines of argumentation can be distinguished here. First, some researchers draw on empirical research pointing to a changed, now more challenging childhood:

> I argue that a focus on wellbeing in education is important today because of the conditions under which young people are living. It has become increasingly necessary for young people to have the skills and capacities to manage uncertainty and complexity. . . . Their [i.e, adult participants in a study] comments underline the importance of attending to new educational tasks associated with the formation of identities and personal capacities that equip today's young people to manage their lives in times of uncertainty.
> (Wyn, 2007, p. 36)

Second, other researchers draw on empirical research on the impact of specific educational programs that are to support the development of (specific aspects of) human well-being in school education. One example is the "positive school" approach, which derives its empirical basis from positive psychology: "positive schools seek to orient their goals toward promoting students SWB [subjective well-being] as well as their cognitive and academic competencies" (Huebner et al.,

2009, p. 566).[11] Another example is the comprehensive schools health framework, which "has been recognized internationally as a better practice framework for supporting children and youths' academic development *concurrently with addressing school health areas* in an intentional, multifaceted and integrative manner" (Morrison & Peterson, 2013, p. 23; emphasis added).

It is this forth observation that gives rise to a re-conceptualization of student success. Rather than defining student success by graduation rate and academic achievement, student success is to be re-conceptualized by what students graduate with and by what they graduate with includes *all* capabilities relevant to the development of human agency to living a flourishing live.

Such re-conceptualized understanding of student success would be akin to what Indigenous communities have already traditionally understood success in child rearing and education (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007) to mean. For instance, the human capabilities identified in the Circle of Courage (Generosity, Independence, Belonging, and Mastery)[12] and the Seven Grandfather Teachings (Truth, Humility, Respect, Love, Honesty, Courage, Wisdom)[13] are capabilities linked in First Nations' teachings to living "the good life".[14]

Assessing Student Well-Being and Well-Becoming

If student well-being and well-becoming is part of how we define student success, then assessing it needs to be part of any assessment scheme that is to tell school educational partners how successful school education is in achieving its declared objectives. The notion that we should asses what we value (and value what we assess) is reflected in the notion of "alignment" in classroom and learning outcome assessment (e.g., McMillan, Hellsten, & Klinger, 2007, p. 83) and it can also be found in the literature on child well-being (e.g., Ben-Arieh et al., 2001, pp. 7-10). In this section of the paper we discuss some ideas that should be given consideration in any approach to the assessment of student well-being and well-becoming.

The Inclusion of Student Voice in the Assessment Process

The same arguments presented above for the inclusion of students' perspectives in the conceptualization of their well-being and well-becoming apply to the inclusion of student voice in the process of assessing students' well-being and well-becoming. Such inclusion affects two different aspects of the assessment process: what data are collected as part of the assessment; and the development and implementation of an assessment scheme itself. The inclusion of students' voices as part of the data collection process means that students are asked for their views on how well their lives as students are going, and their inclusion into the development and implementation of an assessment scheme means that students' voices are involved in decision making concerning the different steps in the development and implementation of the assessment scheme. All four

[11] See also Huebner et al. (2014, p. 798). For articles on a positive school in Australia, see White and Murray (2015).
[12] See, for instance, Government of Manitoba (n.d.).
[13] See, for instance, http://www.7generations.org/?page_id=2396
[14] For the First Nations concept of "the good life", see for instance, Bell (2016) and M. Hart (2002).

rationales for the inclusion of student perspectives identified above can be drawn upon to argue for such inclusion. [15]

The Involvement of the Community-at-Large in the Assessment Process

Above we argued for the need to involve the cultural community-at-large in some form in the understanding of what it means for students to be well and to become well. If involvement of the community-at-large is crucial to the understanding of the phenomenon under study – that is the well-being and well-becoming of students – then such involvement is crucial particularly to the development of a scheme to assess student well-being and well-becoming.

Different Purposes for Assessing Student Well-Being and Well-Becoming

Drawing on (program) evaluation literature, the following *five purposes* of assessing student well-being and well-becoming can be distinguished (Patton, 2012, p. 115):

- assessing for a summative, judgement-oriented evaluation;
- assessing for improvement-oriented formative evaluation;
- assessing for evaluation for accountability;
- assessing for knowledge-generating evaluation; and
- assessing for developmental evaluation.

The type of assessment scheme needs to be appropriate to the purpose of the assessment.

Different *organizational levels* can be distinguished at which assessment can happen for *each* of the five purposes listed above:

- assessing student well-being and well-becoming *at the systems level*;
- assessing student well-being and well-becoming *at a specific program level*; and
- assessing student well-being and well-becoming *at the individual student level*.

The distinction between these levels is grounded in a distinction between the "unit of analysis" in the assessment and evaluation process. The unit of analysis refers to the entity (e.g., persons, groups, places) "on" which the assessment or evaluation is undertaken. At the *systems level*, the unit of analysis is the system as a whole. For instance, PISA and PCAP assessments are whole system assessments; they assess specific student achievement (outcome) as it can be found across the system. Assessing student well-being and well-becoming at this level establishes how well students are across the system; one can speak here of student well-being *within the system as a whole*. The system can be a provincial school system, a school division, or a school. Assessing at this level does not require an understanding of specific student's well-being or data from all students of the system. At the *specific program* level, the unit of analysis is a specific program with its identified features for which its impact on the well-being of (a group of) students is assessed. If the unit of analysis is at the *individual student level*, the well-being of each identified student is of concern.

[15] For a discussion of what such inclusion of student voice can look like, see Falkenberg (2018a, 2018b).

The unit of analysis when assessing student well-being is not directly linked to the number of students whose well-being is assessed. For instance, an assessment scheme can collect well-being data from all students within a school division, but the unit of analysis can still be the individual student. In this case the assessment scheme is concerned with the well-being of each and every student in the school division rather than with the well-being of students across the school division.

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