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Scholarship 2021 Health and Physical Education

OUTSTANDING SCHOLARSHIP EXEMPLAR

Fostering Purpose in New Zealand Youth

Introduction

“Life is filled with unanswered questions, but it is the courage to seek those answers that continues to give meaning to life.” - psychologist J. D. Stroube

Purpose in life is universally considered a positive thing to have. Despite being a concept that has been largely ignored in the context of health, there is no shortage of research indicating that it offers very real health benefits physically, mentally, and spiritually.¹ This extends particularly to the health of young people, who are just as much concerned with purpose in life as those older than them are. Additionally, if purpose is an integral aspect of *Taha wairua*² (spiritual wellbeing), one of the four components of *Hauora* (wellbeing), being without purpose means that a young person's overall wellbeing is compromised. Even though young people may appear physically healthy without a sense of purpose (and an ensuing sense of *Taha wairua*), their overall health suffers. This will be more clear once I outline the benefits that a sense of purpose can offer young people below. It also, by itself, indicates that we should be doing more to foster a sense of purpose in our youth through frameworks like the *Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy*. This strategy will be referred to as I identify barriers and their possible solutions within the search for purpose.

¹"What's Your Purpose? Finding A Sense Of Meaning In Life Is ... - NPR." 25 May. 2019, <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2019/05/25/726695968/whats-your-purpose-finding-a-sense-of-meaning-in-life-is-linked-to-health>. Accessed 23 Oct. 2021.

²"Te whare tapa whā and wellbeing | Health Navigator NZ." 11 Jun. 2021, <https://www.healthnavigator.org.nz/healthy-living/t/te-whare-tapa-wh%C4%81-and-wellbeing/>. Accessed 2 Jul. 2021.

In this report, I will also be referring to Corey Keyes' definition of authentic purpose, which is purpose that "employs one's gifts, brings a deep sense of worth or value, and provides a significant contribution to the common good."³ Examples of authentic purpose for young people can also be as grand as "find the cure to cancer" or as humble as "be a good person." Do note, however, that while purpose can really be anything in technical terms and "become rich" is a perfectly valid one, that that is not the kind of purpose that I would like to instil in our youth.

So, what does a sense of purpose do for youth?

There are several reasons why instilling a sense of purpose in our young people is particularly worthwhile. That purpose contributes to the development of a positive identity is one of them, as the two concepts emerge together in adolescence.⁴ Indeed, Kendall Cotton Bronk of Claremont Graduate University confirms in her study⁵ that a sense of purpose can help teenagers resolve identity crises because it offers them something meaningful to work towards and, therefore, something to build a positive identity of theirs around; the idea behind this is exemplified by her suggestion that "one way that purpose may contribute to positive developmental outcomes ... is through its role as an identity-related-resource." This kind of positive identity is also important even though a young person's identity can change depending on their circumstances

³(PDF) Authentic purpose: The spiritual infrastructure ... - ResearchGate." 3 Aug. 2021, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/239799714_Authentic_purpose_The_spiritual_infrastructure_of_life. Accessed 11 Aug. 2021.

⁴(PDF) The role of purpose in life in healthy identity ... - ResearchGate." https://www.researchgate.net/publication/221775501_The_role_of_purpose_in_life_in_healthy_identity_formation_A_grounded_model. Accessed 16 Jul. 2021.

⁵IBID

because what matters is that a young person has a strong, positive sense of self most of the time. A young person with a positive identity will tend to keep to it even if their circumstances change for the worse, and, being resilient, they will continue to remain hopeful about the future in the face of difficulty .⁶

Secondly, a sense of purpose offers life direction⁷: it can help a young person stay focused on the things they care about during a time when guidance is needed the most. With a clear purpose in mind, clear goals materialise “which act to direct present behavior.”⁸ Young people who have a sense of purpose will show a lower propensity towards unsafe behaviour like drug or sedative use, and a greater propensity towards constructive behaviour like exercise and eating right.⁹ This is because drugs and sedatives generally do not lend themselves to whatever a young person’s purpose in life may be, whereas exercising and eating right do. In broader terms, this means that those with a sense of purpose will know what they should and should not be doing because they will be able to determine whether it is or whether it is not in accordance with their purpose; they will not be acting aimlessly. This ultimately makes them more efficient in allocating resources such as time and money, thus increasing the likelihood of future success.

⁶"Youth purpose during the great recession: A mixed-methods study." 18 Jul. 2018, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17439760.2018.1484942>. Accessed 20 Jul. 2021. ⁷"The Search for Purpose in Life - ScholarlyCommons - University of" 1 Aug. 2014, https://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1061&context=mapp_capstone. Accessed 15 Jul. 2021.

⁸IBID

⁹"Meaning in Life: Is It a Protective Factor for ... - Michael F. Steger." <http://www.michaelfsteger.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/Brassai-Piko-Steger-IJBM-2011.pdf>. Accessed 15 Jul. 2021.

Lastly, a sense of purpose brings higher levels of happiness. This is partially due to ¹⁰the relationship between purpose, identity, and direction. However, it is also partially due to purpose's ability to give a young person the opportunity to live for something bigger than themselves; to provide a satisfactory answer to "the meaning of life." And while it might be trivial to say that a sense of purpose constitutes a sense of meaning in life, that it is true is not trivial in terms of increasing overall life satisfaction¹¹, which is defined by sociologist Ruut Veenhoven as "the degree to which a person evaluates the overall quality of his or her present life as a whole positively."¹² A sense of purpose reduces a person's focus on their worries and anxieties¹³ while providing a reason to live, thus detracting meaning from less important things and giving meaning to more important things. With that being paired with its effects on a person's identity and direction, it should be no surprise that young people—and, surely, all people—are happier living with purpose.

It is very clear that a sense of purpose can promote positive youth outcomes. On an individual level, certainly, purpose contributes to the development of a positive identity, offers life direction at a crucial time, and brings higher levels of happiness. For those reasons, it is unsurprising that *The Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy*¹⁴ considers

¹⁰"When is the Search for Meaning Related to Life Satisfaction? - Park"
<https://iaap-journals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1758-0854.2009.01024.x>. Accessed 15 Jul. 2021.

¹¹"When is Meaning in Life Most Beneficial to Young ... - NCBI - NIH." 30 Nov. 2017,
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5940722/>. Accessed 14 Jul. 2021. ¹²(PDF) The Overall Satisfaction with Life: Subjective ... - ResearchGate." 6 Mar. 2016,
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/283735498_The_Overall_Satisfaction_with_Life_Subjective_Approaches_1. Accessed 15 Jul. 2021.

¹³IBID

¹⁴Erik H. Erikson. Identity, youth and crisis. New York: W. W. Norton"
<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/bs.3830140209>. Accessed 15 Jul. 2021.

being “*involved and empowered*” as an outcome needed for the health of our youth because clearly, young people must be involved and empowered in whatever they choose to do if they are to lead purposeful lives. More specifically, *The Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy* aims to increase “*child and youth voice and participation*.” This is because young people will be *empowered* to act on whatever their purpose may be if we make their voices heard. There are, however, weaknesses to the strategy in that purpose is not wholly enabled through promoting child and youth voice and participation. These weaknesses will be discussed at length later in my report.

So: having a sense of purpose is an important aspect of youth wellbeing with concrete contributions to positive youth outcomes, and it is considered as such in *The Child and Youth and Wellbeing Strategy*.

Finding Purpose

It is important that we consider where purpose may come from before we consider how we may foster it. Research by Kashdan and McKnight examine the roles played by ¹⁵ “biological vulnerabilities, psychological processes, and social environments” in the development of purpose to classify the ways that people can develop purpose into three broad avenues: proactive learning, social learning, and reactive development. Proactive learning involves effort over time and only results in purpose after “gradual refinement and clarification.” Someone who finds purpose through proactive learning is expected to be naturally curious and open to new experiences, because only then can interests

¹⁵“Origins of Purpose in Life: Refining our Understanding of a ... - Hrčak.”
https://hrcak.srce.hr/index.php?show=clanak&id_clanak_jezik=74339. Accessed 18 Aug. 2021.

receptive to the development of purpose be formed. Thus, proactive learning can be considered a process of trial and error, involving an individual intentionally seeking new experiences that only might be the catalyst for the gradual formation of a clear, defined purpose. In contrast, reactive development relies heavily on chance. Purpose is developed after a chance event such as the death of a loved one or a chronic illness diagnosis causes an individual to re-evaluate their priorities and seek more rewarding behaviours. Reactive development essentially elicits a transition to the proactive development process without the lengthy and effortful trial and error process that it is otherwise characteristic of—though this also means that it is, unfortunately, not conducive to the reliable development of purpose. As such, in this report, I will be placing far more emphasis on the proactive—rather than the reactive—developmental process.

I will also be focusing on social learning as a reliable developmental process for purpose. Through social learning, purpose is developed through mimicry; individuals note how others' behaviours result in certain desirable outcomes and attempt to reach the same outcomes through the same behaviour. Additionally, there is intersectionality in that social learning is, for the most part, a driver of proactive learning. Note that the “desirable outcomes” that drive social learning are not necessarily materialistic; an example of a “desirable outcome” would be the fulfilment one gets through helping others.

Positive feedback is also evident in the social learning process: those who mimic the purposeful behaviours set forth by others will drive others to do the same, and perhaps even eventually develop a clear, defined purpose for themselves. This effect is prominently seen in online and school communities, which are both frequently navigated by today's youth. At my own high school, for example, student-led clubs like the Sustainable Coastlines Club gather like-minded students for beach clean-ups. Such school communities are connected more widely by online communities: people followed on platforms like Facebook and Instagram frequently inspire others through their purposeful actions. This explains why young people are clamouring to have their voices heard now: nearly sixty percent of young people 10 to 20 years old have taken part in some kind of social action.¹⁶

Thus, as well as referring to information gathered from research for fostering purpose in youth, I will be referring to the developmental processes of both proactive learning and social learning in the next sections of this report where appropriate.

How do we get youth interested in purpose?

The search for purpose must be accompanied by an interest in purpose. The underlying challenge, however, lies in purpose not being classified as a need in the same way that water, food, and shelter are classified as needs. The difference is that purpose is found on Maslow's hierarchy of needs¹⁷ as a transcendence need, and thus is, by definition,

¹⁶"Nearly 60% of young children are social justice activists - a future full" 27 Jul. 2018, <https://theconversation.com/nearly-60-of-young-children-are-social-justice-activists-a-future-full-of-elin-ers-sons-100634>. Accessed 21 Aug. 2021.

¹⁷"Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs | Simply Psychology." 29 Dec. 2020, <https://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html>. Accessed 31 Jul. 2021.

only satisfied after all other needs. These other needs include needs of the first level, which are physiological needs, and needs of the seventh level, which are self-actualization needs. But it is unlikely, even, for the majority of youth to have satisfied the second level of Maslow's expanded hierarchy, let alone the seventh. Most youth, therefore, are not at all "ready" to begin to consider purpose as a need, and for them, the need for water, food, and shelter; the need for security, order, and routine; and the need for friendship, intimacy, and trust far outweigh the need for purpose.

Thus, a consideration that different socio-economic factors that influence the availability of basic needs for certain groups of people must be met with the conclusion that certain groups of young people are less likely to have purpose in life because of their circumstances. The predominant groups in question in New Zealand are Māori and Pasifika children, who, on the national level, are more likely to live in households with lower income or material hardship.¹⁸ The challenge that this brings with regard to almost all aspects of physical and mental health is indisputable, but just as important are the long-term impacts that lacking deficiency needs have on obtaining higher needs.

Overall, however, I have identified little that we can do to develop an interest in purpose in young people lacking "deficiency needs" beyond ensuring that the requisite needs are met. The *Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy* has certainly addressed this issue of having youth lack these needs, and related actions are detailed under almost all outcomes. There are, of course, also strengths and limitations to the actions to be

¹⁸"Child poverty statistics: Year ended June 2019 | Stats NZ." 24 Feb. 2020, <https://www.stats.govt.nz/information-releases/child-poverty-statistics-year-ended-june-2019>. Accessed 12 Aug. 2021.

taken, though that will not be the focus of this report. Here, rather, I will be identifying strengths and limitations to the strategy while looking through a lens of wanting to develop an interest in purpose in our youth; though I will, by necessity, be looking at youth who have more or less satisfied the deficiency needs occupying the bottom of the hierarchy, have spent time preoccupied with the higher needs occupying the top of the hierarchy, and have perhaps started to consider the transcendence needs under which purpose falls. So does the *Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy* help those youth develop an interest in purpose?

Currently: no. Under the outcome “involved and empowered”, I have identified little relevant action. Consider the focus “increase child and youth voice and participation.” It introduces the Youth Action Plan¹⁹ and the Youth Voice Project²⁰, both of which aim to increase youth participation in government policy decisions. However, I question: is the aim to increase youth participation in government policy decisions to involve and empower youth? Or is the aim to increase youth participation in government policy decisions so that those are better informed? This distinction is one that is particularly important to make, and it is one that I will be considering with regard to the Youth Action Plan and the Youth Voice Project.

¹⁹“Youth Plan 2020-2022: Turning Voice into Action – Rebuilding and”
<https://www.myd.govt.nz/documents/young-people/youth-plan/youth-plan-2020-2022-turning-voice-into-action-rebuilding-and-recovering.pdf>. Accessed 14 Sept. 2021.

²⁰“The Hive – a new approach to engaging with rangatahi (young” 4 Dec. 2019,
<https://www.digital.govt.nz/blog/the-hive-a-new-approach-to-engaging-with-rangatahi-young-people/>. Accessed 14 Sept. 2021.

The Youth Action Plan sets out actions “that government will take, in partnership with others, to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 for rangatahi.” Their aim is “to enable rangatahi leadership and to drive transformative change”: actions involve government engagement with young people in various ways. However, the Youth Action Plan also suffers from the distinction made above. Although it is incredibly important that young people are allowed the opportunity to make themselves heard in government policy decisions, it is also important that the action plan does not omit the importance that government engagement with young people is meaningful; that young people can see the value of their voice in government policy decisions and become interested in the sense of purpose that it gives them. If that is the case, there is likely to be proactive learning. Young people might decide that their involvement with government policy decisions aligns with their strengths and values, and thus look to further engage. Indeed, what I think the Youth Voice Project does particularly well through “The Hive” is enabling such meaningful engagement. It acknowledges the need for “relaying information and data back” to young people that have engaged so that they are empowered and, therefore, “encouraged to participate in future engagement opportunities.” That The Hive is also easily accessible, exemplified by eighty-four percent of responders on its first implementation reporting that they had never submitted to government previously, means that it can effectively “act as a gateway to more intensive forms of engagement.”

Nevertheless, while the Youth Action Plan and the Youth Voice Project are undoubtedly doing things right, I would also like to point out that purpose is not limited to

government. This is one aspect of the *Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy* that falls short because a difference can be made by people in other positions. Thus, I suggest that the strategy implement actions that give youth a broader view of the purposes that exist. This can be done through promotion programmes that invite people who have a purpose to speak at schools. If young people can identify with those people, they might become interested in looking for a similar, but unique, purpose of their own.

Purpose Anxiety

In my analysis of the Youth Action Plan and the Youth Voice Project, I have assumed that young people will become interested in purpose while they figure out what their purpose is. Other times, however, young people will become interested in purpose without also knowing what their purpose is. For those people, there will be psychological distress associated with their struggle to find purpose in life.

Lacking purpose is linked to psychological distress named “purpose anxiety”, provisionally defined by researcher Larissa Rainey in her paper²¹ as “the experience of negative emotions in direct relation to the search for purpose.” She contends that purpose anxiety can be experienced at two different stages in the search process; in looking for purpose and in acting on purpose. She also contends that several factors make a person more likely to experience purpose anxiety. Several of these factors are applicable to young people.

²¹"The Search for Purpose in Life - ScholarlyCommons - University of" 1 Aug. 2014, https://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1061&context=mapp_capstone. Accessed 20 Jul. 2021.

For young people, the need to belong outweighs the need to be their “true selves.”²² Gaining peer acceptance is an important objective in the school context because *belonging* is a need that is far more basic than the need to find purpose. That purpose also draws on a person’s unique strengths and values is unfortunate because it also means that purpose is far more difficult to find for those who put aside their “true selves” in favour of belonging. They will be unlikely to possess the self-efficacy necessary to find purpose, and they will feel purpose anxiety more sharply. The same young people will also be faced with potentially life-altering decisions, especially in terms of what the future means to them. They will certainly feel some degree of general anxiety over the direction in which they want their lives to go, particularly because the number of pathways out of school can look overwhelming (or underwhelming) to many. This will also translate into purpose anxiety: young people will also feel purpose anxiety more often due to the potentially life-altering decisions they are faced with. I suspect that the pairing of a lack of self-knowledge with the life-altering decisions common to all adolescents is a significant contributor to the experience of purpose anxiety in young people.

So: there is psychological distress associated with the search for purpose in life that can be termed purpose anxiety. Furthermore, young people experience purpose anxiety to a greater degree: this is significant because it is an indicator for where focus should lie in relieving purpose anxiety in young people, if only because it can negatively affect their mental health. However, purpose anxiety itself can also tell us why young people are

²²"Full article: 'Fitting in' in high school: how adolescent belonging is"
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02673843.2013.866148>. Accessed 4 Nov. 2021.

generally anxious when it comes to finding their purpose. This insight can not only be used to mitigate the effects of purpose anxiety effectively in our youth, but to aid them in finding their unique purpose in life.

There are several ways such information can inform future steps when “fostering purpose in New Zealand youth” because:

1. Knowing that purpose anxiety can be caused by a struggle with identity tells us that it is one reason youth find it difficult to identify their purpose. Although there is a limited amount that we can do to help with the identity development process itself, enabling young people to reflect on and explore new life experiences is important.²³ This should be done by offering a larger number of easily accessible extracurriculars at school, which will not only allow young people to further their interests, but will also allow them to connect with others like them through those interests. It is one way in which a young person’s need for belonging can be addressed while they are still their “true selves”. Extracurriculars will thus cultivate interests that shape identity; and, because purpose and identity are so interlinked, the same interests might also shape purpose.
2. Knowing that transition times in adolescence are times when purpose anxiety is more common tells us that any efforts that we do make should be focused around those periods. It also tells us that it is likely the consideration of future pathways that is the cause of purpose anxiety. Thus, the consideration of future pathways should be met with substantial guidance, and more effort should also

²³"Links of Adolescents Identity Development and Relationship with"
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4879949/>. Accessed 24 Sept. 2021.

be spent speaking to teenagers about their futures by informed schools and parents in relation to the things that are meaningful to them: the reflection encouraged within such conversations will inspire proactive learning.

Education as a tool

When a person is motivated to seek purpose, they might find it difficult to express what the need for purpose is. This is well exemplified by the many people who report feeling aimless in life but are unable to explain why they feel that way.²⁴ So: while I have assumed so far in this report that the most significant challenges to “fostering purpose in New Zealand youth” lie in getting youth interested in purpose and allowing them to act on purpose, I now realise that this is not the case.

Emerging from the lack of conceptual understanding of purpose are harmful stereotypes like exclusivity, which is largely the result of survivorship bias.²⁵ If, indeed, the young people who are successful in the search for purpose are predisposed to it, it is unsurprising that young people believe that the ability to find purpose is an innate trait. The “radical” successes²⁶ with regard to the search for purpose are publicised while the doubts, struggles, and failures otherwise universal are not. Young people are led to believe that the search for purpose should be easy; that something must be wrong if they are struggling with it; and thus that purpose is something that is found by a person

²⁴"Everything is right in my life, but I don't know why I feel aimless. I." <https://www.quora.com/Everything-is-right-in-my-life-but-I-dont-know-why-I-feel-aimless-I-dont-understand-this-feeling-I-laugh-at-times-but-dont-feel-genuinely-happy-like-I-used-to-nor-sad-Why-do-I-feel-somewh-at-empty>. Accessed 7 Sept. 2021.

²⁵"How the Survivor Bias Distorts Reality - Scientific American." 1 Sept. 2014, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-the-survivor-bias-distorts-reality/>. Accessed 20 Sept. 2021. ²⁶"charity: water founder Scott Harrison." <https://www.charitywater.org/about/scott-harrison-story>. Accessed 21 Sept. 2021.

rather than built by them. While purpose is stereotyped in such a way, young people will make the choice not to go through the difficult process of building purpose because purpose will be assumed to come to them in time or not at all. But by wrongly relying on the reactive developmental process to begin the proactive one, the chance application of which is what really causes a young person's predisposition to purpose, the "average" person will find purpose very difficult to obtain.

One remedy to the above stereotype is education. Education addresses stereotypes at their core, and by disabusing young people of the notion that purpose is found by a person rather than built by them, it will lead directly to the proactive learning otherwise not occurring: having let go of the presumption that it is easy, young people will be encouraged to go through with the difficult process of building purpose. Moreover, by providing young people with the space to share what their purpose is, it can be said that education itself will facilitate social learning. Overall, however, in teaching a young person what purpose is and how to look for it, they will be helped far into the future. That purpose is refined over the entirety of a person's life means that we should be trying to give young people the tools to look for purpose (proactively learn) over their entire lives, especially because the concept itself is so important in providing meaning day to day.

In spite of that, though, both the NCEA health curriculum and the *Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy* are lacking in terms of purpose related health education. The NCEA

health curriculum²⁷ does not address the need for purpose in any capacity; little emphasis, in fact, is placed on any higher need as an important component of wellbeing even indirectly. The *Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy*, similarly, has no structure in place to implement the teaching of purpose. Why?

Here, I think, is the place to consider the stereotypes believed by educators. Is the lack of education about purpose caused by the assumption that young people are incapable of considering existential constructs? One may wonder whether young people are even able to question their purpose in life due to either their lack of life experience or still developing cognitive skills. More recent research, however, seems to suggest that they can, and that young people are able to describe purpose consistent with the way that it is defined in “adult literature”²⁸ indicates that education about purpose will be constructive rather than useless. Thus, as Fitzgerald suggests, in “avoiding the use of existential ideas as they might apply to adolescents because they are ‘too young’ and ‘not advanced’ enough” to understand them, a disservice is being done.”²⁹ It is “a disservice” because school is a place at which stereotypes about purpose can be corrected and through which the search for purpose can occur. Knowing now that young people are capable of understanding the conceptions of purpose required, then, implementing education about purpose in the education system must be prioritised.

²⁷"Health subject resources - NZQA." <https://www.nzqa.govt.nz/ncea/subjects/health/levels/>. Accessed 1 Nov. 2021.

²⁸"Classifying adolescents' conceptions of purpose in life - Taylor" <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/17439760.2010.534488>. Accessed 10 Sept. 2021. ²⁹"An existential view of adolescent development - PubMed." <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/16468672/>. Accessed 14 Sept. 2021.

At the same time, the curricula might be modified to highlight important aspects of purpose. If science teachers focused on the moral and ethical dimensions of their work, for example, ensuing discussions are likely to highlight students' beliefs and values, which is a core aspect of purpose. Kendall Cotton Bronk proposes³⁰ that history teachers could encourage students to "put themselves in the place of historical leaders and to imagine how they might have handled the same situation" to introduce them to the bigger thinking inherent in purpose. She also states that English teachers, particularly in younger age groups, could set writing assignments that encourage students to reflect on their aspirations. There are clearly ways in which each subject can indirectly incorporate purpose.

Other changes beyond the curriculum could be made. A common criticism of NCEA is that it is "teaching to the test"³¹ and promoting memorisation, resulting in the "why" of education being forgotten. Why learn math when it seems so useless? Why write that essay when I'm never going to do something like that in the real world? Teachers might address these "whys" more thoroughly. If their answer is satisfactory, students will be able to connect what they hope to achieve in academia with the things they hope to achieve in the future³². Bronk states here that the moral questions of the classroom should also be discussed more. Why should students not cheat? Who does it hurt?

³⁰"Purpose in Life | SpringerLink." <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-94-007-7491-9>. Accessed 5 Nov. 2021.

³¹"NCEA is damaging kids' learning and breaking teachers, thinktank" 4 Mar. 2018, <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/education/101824114/ncea-is-damaging-kids-learning-and-breaking-teachers-thinktank-report-finds>. Accessed 5 Nov. 2021.

³²"How forgiveness, purpose, and religiosity are related to the mental" 11 Jun. 2007, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13674670600841793>. Accessed 5 Nov. 2021.

Within such discussions, the bigger thinking inherent in purpose is also explored, and the same “why” thinking is addressed.

Note, here, that I am by no means expecting young people to find their purpose over a few years of learning. Rather, the goal is not only to provide young people with the necessary tools to navigate the decisions that are common to them all before they leave high school, but also to provide them with the necessary tools to consider their purpose far into the future, either through education or through the other methods suggested above.

Other factors?

That gender impacts the search for purpose is unavoidable. Women, for example, are deterred from STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) by the sexism in the field³³. This is exemplified by how women only make up 28% of the STEM workforce³⁴ even though they take roughly half of the advanced science and math classes in high school³⁵. Historic gender bias creates the stereotype that only men can handle the work required in STEM, and the lack of female role models endorses this stereotype. Women are thus, more than anything, socially discouraged from pursuing the kinds of purposes offered by the hard sciences. Could this be happening in other areas of work? I have identified the experiences of women in STEM as one example in

³³"Why Are There So Few Women In STEM - Western Governors" 1 Jul. 2019, <https://www.wgu.edu/blog/why-are-there-so-few-women-in-stem1907.html>. Accessed 9 Sept. 2021.

³⁴"The STEM Gap: Women and Girls in Science, Technology - AAUW." <https://www.aauw.org/resources/research/the-stem-gap/>. Accessed 9 Sept. 2021.

³⁵"Keeping Girls in STEM: 3 Barriers, 3 Solutions - Edutopia." 12 Mar. 2019,

<https://www.edutopia.org/article/keeping-girls-stem-3-barriers-3-solutions>. Accessed 9 Sept. 2021. 18

which the search for purpose has been affected by stereotyping; however, there are certain to be other examples. That men are discouraged from social work³⁶ due to stereotyping is one. That Māori and Pasifika people are discouraged from academia³⁷ due to stereotyping is another. What others are there? The importance of considering the stereotypes within society must not be understated. Will youth be able to find purpose if their very identity is supposedly incompatible with what they want to do?

Likewise, I would also like to point out the issue with parental—and often cultural—expectations. In one study³⁸ by researcher Sabrina Eveland, which explores how Asian American students have been influenced in their career choices, she emphasises that, for many people, the expectation to “attain academic success, obtain a high paying job, and support their families” is “an unquestionable reality.” Such a reality is, I think, also applicable to many young people in New Zealand. Here, many young people are just as much pushed “to attain traditional success over what is personally rewarding” in order “to live a comfortable life.” Any deviation from the formula is just as much looked down upon, and many parents, indeed, do not even understand the rationale behind choosing a career that is not seen as traditionally stable. To many of them, it does not matter that traditionally stable careers are not purposeful if they do not align with a young person’s strengths and values; nor, in any case, that if purpose is something that is driven by

³⁶"The Multiple Dimensions of Gender Stereotypes: A Current Look at"

<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00011/full>. Accessed 15 Sept. 2021.

³⁷"Underachieving and racial stereotypes - The Gisborne Herald." 20 Nov. 2015,

<https://www.gisborneherald.co.nz/i-am-youth/20151120/underachieving-and-racial-stereotypes/>. Accessed 15 Sept. 2021.

³⁸"Stable, Practical, and High-paying: How Second Generation Indian" 8 Jul. 2012,

<https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3585&context=capstones>. Accessed 16 Sept. 2021.

intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation is not productive.³⁹ Instead, the idea that young people *must* follow a course of study in medicine, law, engineering, or business is widespread, with the result being that young people might unnecessarily neglect to realise their purpose in order to do so.

I would further like to point out that because Māori and Pasifika young people are generally of lower socioeconomic status⁴⁰, they will be less likely to search for purpose because of purpose's status as a higher need. This was considered earlier in my report; however, here, I would also like to acknowledge what this does with regard to further stigmatising purpose within Māori and Pasifika communities. Indeed, even though lower socio-economic status is linked to being less likely to find purpose, it might not be viewed as such by the hegemonistic forces that give rise to cultural stereotypes. Instead, if the confounding variable of low socioeconomic status that is actually causing those in Māori and Pasifika communities to be less likely to find purpose goes unconsidered, it might appear as though Māori and Pasifika communities are *inherently* less purposeful than others. Would Māori and Pasifika young people, then, come to the conclusion that purpose is *inherently* not for them to find?

Bringing these issues together, in a sense, are the prevailing societal attitudes toward wellbeing. With the widely accepted Western understanding of health viewing the mind

³⁹"(PDF) Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation - ResearchGate."
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/311692691_Intrinsic_and_Extrinsic_Motivation. Accessed 15 Sept. 2021.

⁴⁰"Child poverty statistics: Year ended June 2019 | Stats NZ." 24 Feb. 2020,
<https://www.stats.govt.nz/information-releases/child-poverty-statistics-year-ended-june-2019>. Accessed 29 Oct. 2021.

and body as separate entities, young people are taken to wrongly believing that physical health is the most important aspect of wellbeing. And while steps are being taken to correct this belief through projects aiming to destigmatise other aspects of wellbeing like mental health⁴¹, one issue that remains is the perceived unimportance of spiritual health within modern health services⁴². Young people comfortable with discussing mental health are still not comfortable with discussing spiritual health, with implications regarding purpose being exemplified through the cavalier treatment of the concept of an “existential crisis”⁴³ despite the seriousness of the pattern of thinking that it characterises. The purpose anxiety that young people experience when having an “existential crisis” is discounted rather than acknowledged, so young people are less likely to look for guidance even if they are struggling to realise their purpose. And the struggle that they feel might be related to the stereotypes that exist around a preferred pathway; or to parental disapproval of what they want to do; or to the idea that they will never be able to find purpose because they are Māori or Pasifika; or to any other factor not discussed in this report. Regardless, if young people are not comfortable with looking for guidance, we will never become truly aware of the struggles that young people face in trying to realise their purpose, and we will never be able to help them.

As a final note, I do also question whether the tendency to trivialise having purpose in life also has something to do with stereotypes like exclusivity, and, therefore, might be a

⁴¹"Like Minds, Like Mine: Home." <https://www.likeminds.org.nz/>. Accessed 11 Sept. 2021. ⁴²"Māori health models – Te Whare Tapa Whā | Ministry of Health NZ." 18 May. 2017, <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/populations/maori-health/maori-health-models/maori-health-models-te-whare-tapa-wha>. Accessed 11 Sept. 2021.

⁴³"Existential Crisis: Symptoms, Causes, and Treatment - Healthline." 27 Nov. 2018, <https://www.healthline.com/health/existential-crisis>. Accessed 7 Nov. 2021.

result of something more than a perceived unimportance of spiritual health. Similarly, might the reluctance to seek purpose also have something to do with a perceived unimportance of spiritual health, as well as stereotypes like exclusivity? Such suggestions certainly shed light on the complexity encompassing causality, and thus the reality that there is more than one conceptual misunderstanding that must be addressed when designing an educational programme around purpose. Further complexity is revealed when one considers the sheer number of systemic issues that play into a young person struggling to realise their purpose. These issues, in particular, cannot be addressed solely through educational programmes, but require collective action. Societal attitudes towards the way we see others, towards the way we see the future, and towards the way we see certain groups must change via multiplexed additions to the *Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy*.

Synthesizing: the model of action

With the purpose developmental process being almost solely an individual pursuit, but with the negative stereotypes involved within the purpose developmental process, I propose that the self-empowerment model and the collective action model are suitable health promotion models to guide the changes to the *Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy*. I have, indeed, already made many suggestions for fostering purpose that are reflective of one or both of these models and are guided by the understanding that purpose should primarily be developed through either social learning or proactive learning. Here, I will be making a few other suggestions that I believe may complement

the ones I have already made while summarising, with solutions, the barriers that I have identified to exist around fostering purpose in New Zealand youth.

The search for purpose, unique to the individual, is undertaken by the individual. The aim, therefore, is to empower young people. How is this to be done under the self-empowerment model?

Young people should, firstly, be provided with purpose-related education. With a good understanding of purpose in terms of what it is but particularly of how it relates to them and the stereotypes around it, they can begin to consider what their purpose is. Education would thus provide the basis for all further purpose development. Young people should then be provided with other tools to look for purpose. Purpose anxiety is common in young people because they lack knowledge of themselves and are faced with life-altering decisions. For these causes of purpose anxiety—which are reflective of why they are generally anxious when it comes to finding their purpose—I have suggested that we give young people the chance to reflect on and explore new life experiences while offering guidance with regard to their future pathways. Young people must finally be provided with the opportunity to become interested in and to act upon purpose. The Youth Action Plan and the Youth Voice Project look to achieve this to some extent, though the actions they take are entirely government-related: purpose should be promoted in a more general sense. This might be done through the suggested promotion programmes that invite people with purpose to speak at schools, or through easily accessible digital navigation

tools that help young people look for volunteering opportunities.

The self-empowerment model is a suitable health promotion model to guide the changes to the *Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy* because the search for purpose is undergone by the individual. However, one limitation of the self-empowerment model is that it is unlikely to change social norms. The model, while successful for the individual, is not targeted at population groups. It assumes that all individuals will equally benefit from self-empowerment because they are all equally in control of their respective environments. Otherwise, it assumes that the negative stereotypes that arise from hegemony are the responsibility of those who experience them. This being the case, the self-empowerment model is unsuitable if used alone. While the search for purpose is undergone by the individual, the individual cannot control their environment; so the self-empowerment model should, therefore, be used in tandem with the collective action model, which focuses on community change over individual change. Under the collective action model, aspects of the community that oppress certain groups within it are specifically targeted.

The stereotypes that are attached to certain career paths like STEM, the tendency for parental—and often cultural—pressure to be placed on young people to follow a set pathway, and the assumption that Māori and Pasifika people do not have the necessary predilection towards purpose are the wider, societal issues that require the community—and in certain cases, systemic—change outlined above. There are certain to be many

others. Such change must span across multiple levels of the socio-ecological perspective: any system that oppresses the attainment of purpose in minority groups must be addressed by the *Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy*. Unfortunately, that this change is, in many ways, completely absent under the “involved and empowered” outcome means that New Zealand is not “the best place in the world for children and young people” as purported by the strategy. Next steps there would, therefore, be implementing such change.

On one last, unrelated note outside of the strategy itself, I would also like to make it clear that the onus is on every parent or mentor to be able to have conversations with young people about what they want to achieve in life. These conversations are critical to identifying the “spark” that is unique to each and every young person, which, according to psychologist Peter Benson, is all too often missed and allowed to languish.⁴⁴ Nurturing such a spark by connecting young people preemptively with opportunities and initiating further conversations about plans to achieve their goals is, I think, the most important component for purpose development: it initiates proactive learning early. And if the parent or mentor is successful and the young person is subsequently able to effectively realise their “spark”, it is likely that the “spark” will transform into purpose—and the young person might even then have no need at all of support offered by the *Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy*.

⁴⁴ Benson, Peter L. *All kids are our kids*. 2nd ed., Hoboken, Jossey-Bass, 2006.

Final thoughts

While Maslow predicted that individuals who were “basically satisfied” were the minority in 1943⁴⁵, it can now be argued that many modern countries have made substantial progress towards ensuring that even the majority of individuals are “basically satisfied.” Statistics NZ supports this assertion in New Zealand: all measures of child poverty are trending downwards⁴⁶. That people are living longer than ever before thus shifts the existential narrative from questions of death to ones of life. How to spend it? What to do with it? Keyes summarises, “science has succeeded in putting death further at bay, leaving in its wake new questions for individuals regarding what to do with the added years of life and how to make that time meaningful.”⁴⁷ It is, therefore, imperative that young people are given the tools to know “how to make that time meaningful” through questions of purpose. And satisfying these questions will not *only* be beneficial to wellbeing on an individual level, because, really, how awesome would Aotearoa be if the youth who inherit it each have purpose in mind?

⁴⁵“A theory of human motivation. – APA PsycNET.” <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/1943-03751-001>. Accessed 5 Oct. 2021.

⁴⁶“Latest release of child poverty statistics – corrected | Stats NZ.” 21 Feb. 2021, <https://www.stats.govt.nz/news/latest-release-of-child-poverty-statistics>. Accessed 5 Oct. 2021.

⁴⁷“Authentic purpose: The spiritual infrastructure of life – ResearchGate.” 30 Sept. 2021, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/239799714_Authentic_purpose_The_spiritual_infrastructure_of_life. Accessed 5 Oct. 2021.

Outstanding Scholarship Exemplar 2021

Subject	Health and Physical Education	Standard	93501	Total score	22
Annotation					
<p>This report has been graded at an Outstanding Scholarship level. This report was constructed with a logical development of the candidate's argument and ideas, with effective use of headings to structure the report. The candidate coherently and convincingly interconnects knowledge, ideas, and concepts through a sophisticated examination of fostering purpose and integrated it with a critical evaluation of the <i>Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy</i>. The <i>Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy</i> is critiqued, as well as a critique of actions taken that stem from the <i>Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy</i>. Strong understanding of the <i>Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy</i> is demonstrated throughout the report and is synthesised with other high-level concepts.</p> <p>The candidate draws on and critiques further NZ models such as the Youth Action Plan and Youth Voice Project for exceptional depth of understanding and a balance between theoretical concepts such as research on how purpose can be developed, and practical actions that are being taken to achieve that within Aotearoa New Zealand.</p> <p>The focus of the report on fostering purpose is kept at the forefront of all discussion, analysis, and evaluation. The candidate demonstrates unique insight and divergent thinking around the topic through their independent reflection on both the research and the actions taken from the <i>Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy</i>. Critical thinking is sustained throughout the report and challenges the <i>Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy</i>, Youth Action Plan, Youth Voice Project, stereotypes, attitudes and values, NCEA, and the application of Maslow's hierarchy of needs to an Aotearoa New Zealand context. Ideas/ theory / arguments are well substantiated and well referenced. The development of the discussion is sophisticated and keeps a potentially broad topic focused on the fostering purpose in Aotearoa New Zealand youth. Independent reflection is clear and convincing, and the points made are well substantiated and compelling.</p> <p>The candidate demonstrates a strong understanding of the underlying concepts of the HPE curriculum throughout the report and is able to synthesise research and theories/ concepts from multiple sources to draw insightful conclusions. These conclusions are extrapolated to suggest strategies for enhancing future wellbeing of youth in Aotearoa New Zealand. While there are limited links to the candidate's own experiences, the report itself is firmly embedded within Aotearoa New Zealand culture and schooling system that the candidate is part of.</p> <p>Overall, this response is an excellent example of an Outstanding Scholarship level response. The candidate has produced a high-level sophisticated report on a unique and creative topic that questions and challenges issues, theories and practices with sophistication and insight. The connection to and evaluation of the <i>Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy</i> document has exceptional depth and is synthesised with broader concepts and research. The topic is unique, and the candidate has demonstrated divergent thinking in a compelling and critical manner.</p>					

Confirmation of check	Y / N
This exemplar has been checked for similarities with current online exemplars.	Y