

Looking at wellbeing from all sides now: Supporting educators' reflective wellbeing work through the application of a spatial metaphor

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Abstract: Wellbeing continues to be a highly contested term. In the context of increasing pressures on educators to teach about wellbeing, this paper revisits and develops our earlier work (O'Brien and O'Shea 2017). It explores rather what it might mean to teach for wellbeing while taking seriously some of its more perplexing challenges. Reflecting on the conceptual complexity and challenges of wellbeing and wellbeing education, it argues for a reframing of these challenges in education to embrace a variety of significant perspectives across disciplines and fields. To this extent it supports a disciplinary and interdisciplinary approach to wellbeing discourse. If wellbeing cuts across ethics, aesthetics, physical and mental health, economics, planetary and species survival, to name a few domains of relevance, it makes sense to employ a wider lens and deeper reflection. While identifying some of the main tensions across the wider discourse of wellbeing, we argue for a philosophical and a social science reframing that can stay attuned to the spatial-temporal conditions of our relational existence (Taylor 2018, Noddings 2012). In illustrating this method, we consider and critique some significant and influential ideas informing and framing psychological and sociological models of wellbeing in education. Subsequent to this analysis of the social scientific contributions, we consider how philosophical inquiry and understandings of meaning-making and subjectivity can address deeper questions of wellbecoming. We challenge the dominant discourse in education that maintains an overly positive account of human nature, one that assumes happiness and wellbeing are unproblematically desirable. We introduce a reflection on suffering and the negative aspects of human life, what we refer to as illbeing, as a necessary concept for thinking about wellbeing. Our findings suggest that it is not sufficient to merely outline the challenge of complexity in teaching about wellbeing but it is also necessary to know how to support students to find their own bearings in this new terrain. To this end we employ a spatial metaphor to address the one sidedness of the subject/object dualisms that characterise so much of the academic wellbeing discourse. It provides a new ethical orientation for students and teachers, a method for finding our bearings in uncertain and sometimes hazardous terrain, and perhaps a point of hope in a crisis of meaning.

Keywords: wellbeing; illbeing; flourishing; ethical orientation; praxis; meaning

1. Introduction

Wellbeing in recent education literature appears as a normative practice; it offers prescriptive solutions to living well and as such, can appear eminently teachable to definable productive outcomes. As the more critical scholarship and research on wellbeing bears out (Bache and Scott, 2018), the prescriptive approach is an oversimplification of human experience; it downplays the

deeply contested terrain of wellbeing and the challenges associated with adopting and fostering wellbeing within public policy, including contemporary schooling. Moreover, the interchangeability of 'wellbeing' with terms such as flourishing, resilience, self-efficacy, mental health, physical health among others, creates challenges and confusions for teachers, students and policy makers as to what should be and can be taught and fostered under the more unified field of wellbeing¹. Nonetheless, the very ubiquity of wellbeing in the current schooling and curricular literature, whether seen as a new subject area for educating and preventing mental health problems among young people, or as a way of preparing students for adulthood, global citizenship, and environmental health, indicates that there is something quite significant at stake in the field of wellbeing studies more generally that warrants clarification and debate.

This paper aims at conceptualizing wellbeing anew, and to do so in view of the concerns of education. Recent years have brought curriculum reform in the direction of wellbeing programmes (see for example Thornburn 2018). In many respects these developments have only formalised a more integrative approach to wellbeing in schools that often had been left to explicit or implicit aims of specific subject areas or indeed given abstract and top-down formulation in school mission statements and indeed international policy (Bache and Scott, 2018, Rappleye, J., Komatsu, H., Uchida, Y., et al. 2020). However, some developments have brought much needed reform of content and thinking about human flourishing (some that refreshingly deemphasised rote learning and strict measurement of outcomes, e.g. see Hooker 2017). It is in this latter context that re-visiting the meaning of wellbeing in its subjective and collective forms is to be welcomed. The many challenges of teaching a more diverse curriculum prompts us to think in more wholistic ways; which, we believe, can assist our reflections on and conceptualisations of wellbeing in education, and lead to praxis-oriented activities that may curb the all too familiar overzealous productive approaches through critical reflection on educational purposes. However, 'wholeness', decontextualised and disconnected from living experience, can, when overly concerned with unifying solutions, also close down possibilities for ethical relationality (Levinas 1998).

In keeping with an open and interdisciplinary approach to the teaching and conceptualisation of wellbeing, we include a serious attempt to integrate understandings of wellbeing with illbeing. Conceptually illbeing has much in common with the discourse on vulnerability, though we argue it is also distinct. It differs from vulnerability principally by drawing attention to the more recalcitrant, subjective aspects of the human condition. As with vulnerability, human life is conditioned by illbeing. McKenzie et al. (2013) describe this conditioning with respect to vulnerability as follows: "By virtue of our embodiment human beings have bodily and material needs, are exposed to physical illness, injury, disability, and death and depend on the care of others for extended periods during our lives" (p. 1). All of these terms can be treated with objective criteria – with knowledge, interventions and outcomes. However, illbeing as a primarily subjective experience is not always open to such objective interventions. The self it seems can positively direct itself and have its outcomes improved, but it can also negatively direct itself or

¹ The authors are aware of the challenges of finding a suitable term to capture the nature of wellbeing and how the hyphen is sometimes used in different contexts describing 'well-being' and 'ill-being'. Given the nature of the issues relative to the conceptual terrain, and how we are attempting to challenge prescriptive and/or normative accounts of happiness, we have extended the non-hyphenated use of wellbeing to illbeing and recommend that when the issue arises they be conceptualized as a mutually dependent structure that is characterised philosophically by both closure and openness that cannot be resolved in advance of being taken up. Reflection of a wellbeing-illbeing structure, therefore, forces us back to their shared term: Being, and the question "what ontology or 'framework' (Taylor 1989) informs our wellbeing-illbeing practices?"

fail to adhere to sound wellbeing goals. How are we to understand this obstinate subjectivity? When we look at the philosophical tradition, we discover that thinking about happiness is not amenable to a purely constructivist account (Ward p. 9 cited in Ricoeur 2007). It demands that we revise our soft definitions of wellbeing. The reality of illbeing in human experience, as an inescapable fact of our human condition is explored and considered relative to the question of wellbeing later in the paper.

Having briefly introduced what we suggest is an inalienable relation between wellbeing and illbeing, we need to introduce the unusual structure of our paper. In outlining a rationale for a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approach to wellbeing, we attempt to engage perspectives from across the disciplines of philosophy, sociology and psychology and their associated methodologies. Our method commends itself to a deconstructive and reconstructive approach to wellbeing discourse: acknowledging the aporia at the heart of wellbeing languages while simultaneously searching for a better, fuller, more inclusive account. To do this, we firstly consider the current dominant framing of wellbeing and illbeing for educators and provide some context and critique for the development of our own conceptual framing. We then select and discuss influential and contrasting models of wellbeing from different disciplinary paradigms and consider their strengths, weaknesses and potential for educational purposes. We explore and discuss influential wellbeing approaches relative to what we propose as a human development approach and suggest a fuller account of wellbeing and indeed illbeing. The final section of the paper discusses wellbeing as a space of ethical concern and in doing so we proffer a spatial metaphor to help navigate the methodological tensions of a multi- and interdisciplinary approach to wellbeing, and to assist those educators attempting to gain their bearings or orient in this practical space of concern.

A reader may reasonably ask, why use a spatial metaphor? To try to answer this question we need to mention two important phenomenological accounts of human development, one by Charles Taylor and the other by Ian McGilchrist. Both thinkers argue in different ways that our inability to understand the basic conditions of our embodied existence in the world, witnessed across the humanities and social sciences, generates increasing levels of illbeing². So, while we propose the spatial metaphor as a way of navigating the multi-interdisciplinary contexts of wellbeing, we also offer it for the purposes of attempting to bridge the subject/ object divide and the unhelpful tendencies that it produces; tendencies that atomise and shrink human horizons, and limit wellbeing possibilities³. The point of the metaphor is to bring us back to the space we need to inhabit so as to better read the educational signposting of wellbeing. Speaking about the pervasiveness of mind-body dualism on thinking, and the tendency to rely on signposting at the expense of actual processes that help us navigate physical space, Simon Blackburn argues: "A signpost doesn't in and of itself represent the way to the village. We have to learn how to take it" (2001, p. 78). We contend that locations on a map, like signposting, have to be learned how to be taken, and this is akin to learning how to move, which requires first knowing where to begin. Hence beginning and moving are basic to adequate wellbeing education.

² For McGilchrist, who questions the materialism of much neuroscience and its tendency to reduce the mind and the brain to one thing, 'space' is expressed as a necessary distance given by the asymmetry of the brain structure. In this account, illbeing is brought about often by "unwarranted optimism mixed with feelings of emptiness" (2010 p.6). Taylor's phenomenology, as already indicated, gives us direct access to a spatial metaphor, where the technical, instrumental and bureaucratic shrinking of horizons in Western culture leads to an ethical and spiritual lobotomy.

³ The authors acknowledge that identifying the so called 'subject-object divide' does not get us out of the pernicious mind-body dualisms that proliferate across the humanities and social sciences. See Simon Blackburn, *Think*. Oxford University Press, 2001. However, the dialogical approach expressed through praxis, is we hope, a check to subjectivism and objectivism.

We hope that the spatial metaphor we employ will challenge accounts overly influenced by mind-body dualism and individualized, consumer driven approaches to wellbeing that frequently speak of 'learning journey's' and 'academic pathways' while forgetting the *learning how* of embodied existence. Furthermore, while our own discrete wellbeing projects are important, if they are not attuned to the levels of wellbeing and indeed illbeing in our world today, then they fail the basic test of flourishing (Sen 1995): that there is one who is also an everyone.

2. Reframing wellbeing comprehensively for education

The purpose of this paper is to propose 'a wellbeing framework', sufficiently broad though admittedly incomplete. It seeks to articulate an analysis of the wellbeing discourse and introduce a spatial metaphor for navigating some of the more challenging issues associated with wellbeing, and its alternate 'illbeing'. In doing so, we wish to avoid prescription, where all the dimensions are set and related in a universal sequential way, where the subject or agent is too narrowly defined, or is rendered non-existent by overly productive conditions. Such a programmatic approach to wellbeing cannot suffice to keep the peculiarly inescapable matter of human freedom from becoming eclipsed by the more productive educational requirements (Biesta 2013). In this paper, we aim to place the whole person at the centre of our discussion and, a) reflect a disciplinary and interdisciplinary perspectives on wellbeing ordinarily glossed in the literature as it emerges from North America and Australia, and, b), introduce a spatial metaphor, through the lens of a phenomenological perspective, as a kind of practical guide or heuristic for those involved in education as they attempt to orient within the complex terrain of wellbeing. The spatial metaphor, developed here in the context of education, is borrowed from Charles Taylor's basic phenomenology in his 'Inescapable Frameworks' chapter in *Sources of the Self* (1994). While connected to the idea of gaining direction and orientation, however, the spatial metaphor does not easily align with what the OECD have described as 'The Learning Compass' (OECD 2015, p. 7). We wish to hold to the phenomenological insight that a moral and spiritual compass implies; an insight over and above a competency-based model of pedagogy where the vision of the educated citizen is largely pre-packaged. The view we take is one that values the subject's own attempts to place him or herself on the map in the wellbeing process. It thereby aligns with the constructivist 'meaning making' thrust of much curriculum reform, without eclipsing the valuable perspectives of critical realism. In taking this approach we hope to open a space for thinking about wellbeing as a process of orienting between inner and outer, or (put another way) subjective and objective concerns, that helps us to 'lean into' plurality and what it calls forth from us in both private and public spaces.

This contribution entails a reframing of wellbeing toward a philosophical *and* a social science account that can stay experientially attuned to the spatial-temporal conditions of our relational existence. Such an account acknowledges the recent spatial turn in psychology and education (Downes 2020). It takes both social scientific and philosophical questions of wellbeing seriously and can help stimulate more critical and informed perspectives on wellbeing in education. Such an enlarged person-related practice of wellbeing is frequently stifled by narrow individualized and prescriptive accounts of what we mean by wellness, health, flourishing or happiness (Evans 2018); something that educators in particular need to challenge today (McEnzie and Blenkinsop 2006, Kearney and Fitzpatrick 2021). The overly ego-centric approaches to wellbeing, we believe, can, with care, critical reflection and understanding, give way to other-directed, more differentiated models of wellbeing that generate wellbecoming as a practical concern for living well together on a fragile planet.

2.1 Keeping the wellbeing value space open in education

Given the value tensions that arise across significant approaches to wellbeing, one of the major challenges in attempting to synthesise an adequate wellbeing framework and a means for orienting oneself within it, is to keep open the space for interpretation and meaning-making, while also trying to provide a sufficient value-base overall. Such a method in education needs to stay attuned to the rich traditions of practice and praxis and seek a balance between subjective/objective and self/other perspectives. Beyond clear empirical requirements for wellbeing goals, we need to be able to revise our goals and move anew. However, an evidence-based approach here does not overly rely on objective measures but draws on a diversity of methods that include embodied experience; remembering that experimentation has its etymology in the latin word *expereri* (to experience), and that qualitative research can be transformative (Packer 2022). Amartya Sen (1995) faced this problem of competing values in developing the highly influential Human Capabilities and Human Development approach to wellbeing, but recognised that values *per se*, and the individual valuing of particular forms of self-realisation, were inescapable challenges in developing a model of flourishing. In the field of education, the philosopher Richard Pring (2010) directly confronts this issue of value differences and wellbeing in his introduction to *The International Research Handbook on Values Education and Student Wellbeing* (2010). Secular values that embrace culture and society for example can risk excluding transcendent values, thereby shrinking the horizon of human possibilities and the kinds of values that can inspire us to attempt to achieve ambitious wellbeing goals (Dunne 2015). An extended account of flourishing should include what Taylor calls 'higher goods', those goods that are incomparably beyond our ordinarily attainable targets (1989). Similarly, Pring contends that differences in values are indicative of significant differences in basic understandings around what it is to be fully human, of human flourishing and of wellbeing. He advises that education and curricula that seek to support student wellbeing cannot easily dismiss the kinds of tensions that are inherent across different value systems, and how they are expressed in particular approaches to wellbeing. Values may un/wittingly shape teachers' understandings, pedagogies and curricula, and thus some versions of wellbeing are unreflectively and uncritically privileged over others. Education that takes student wellbeing as a serious aim and priority must be capable of embracing these tensions and ensure that programmes in schools: "...must all be seen in the wider context of the many different elements entailed in personal and communal wellbeing, and thus the many ways in which values are embodied, transferred and developed through the wider curriculum and pedagogy" (Pring 2010, p. xx). Taking this lead from Sen and Pring, with the aid of Taylor's spatial metaphor, we proceed according to a principle of openness and context relevance in proposing a praxis approach which includes a multi- and interdisciplinary space of wellbeing.

This is a task with certain challenges; the issue of perspective is clearly a slippery one, because the ability to take an ethical perspective is part of the problem of translating wellbeing into being well (Cassidy 2018). It is often the inability or failure to step into the challenge of wellbeing that generates the need for wellbeing education. While not underestimating this challenge, the problem then is whether one can be authentically or sincerely engaged in making wellbeing a reality, a significant ethical question within the context of education as part of a wider socio-historical and cultural context.

If different accounts of wellbeing have different sources of meaning and value, then they are likely to be in tension with each other in practice. How then to live in this tension and maintain a wellbeing orientation? The challenge of difference in this case often means that we can teach about these different accounts yet seldom question how they help those concerned with

education to locate a source of meaning in relation to their own wellbeing. Once again this involves looking at signposts without learning how to 'take them'; how to locate ourselves and move in a space of concern, or what is the same: how to integrate wellbeing into our practice and improve. The challenge can be seen as a difference between learning *about* wellbeing and learning *to be well and to live well*; what we describe as the difference between learning *about* wellbeing and learning *for* wellbeing. Only the latter can meet the ethical demand because there is always a gap to be filled in our subjective wellbeing goals; an irreducible kernel of possibility relative to how we translate wellbeing into a first-person perspective. This perspective determines to a large extent whether we can locate ourselves and move in such a vaulted space of concern.

2.2 Illbeing, or the other side of wellbeing

Within this broad perspective, we attempt to address and recognise the other side of the coin of wellbeing, what we describe as illbeing (see footnote one). Today, it seems impossible to take the 'big idea of wellbeing' seriously without acknowledging and trying to contemplate its relation to matters of suffering, unhappiness, arrested development and illness (physical, mental, spiritual), all of which are inalienable to the human condition (Stevenson et al., 2016). Indeed, happiness matters in education are often concerned with the creation of safe, positive learning environments but without reflection on a depth perspective on human meaning and our inescapable vulnerability in the relational process of educating. Keltchermans (2011) argues that teachers need to come to terms with this conditional vulnerability as fundamental to their professional responsibility as teachers.

Modern philosophy has frequently interpreted happiness in existential terms as an original affirmation of life; what Ricoeur calls, the "Joy of Yes"; an affirmation that appears basic to our human existence. However, as Ward (cited in Ricoeur 2007) has observed this nascent joy is troubled by the experience of dependence, "the knowledge that the other is never myself; experiences of the precariousness of living; of birth and death" (p. 9) This knowledge confronts the self with the limits of its ability to reconcile the extremes of its existence, *the sadness of its finitude* and *a desire for infinity*, or a desire to unify everything into a "totality in which all things are integrated" (p. 8). This aspiration is at one with the idea of happiness, hence the self's disappointment and sadness at the opposite extreme. If these are the conditions built into the Self's quest for wellbeing, for happiness, then we must acknowledge that there is a vulnerability and fragility built into this quest for wellbeing; into the conditions of the very search for happiness, an analysis we find to a different degree in thinkers as diverse as Hannah Arendt and Martha Nussbaum (Dunne 1997).

Such thoughts prompt a deeper reflection on wellbeing (its ontological conditions) whereby the self can run aground in processes that seem beyond its control. What needs to be accounted for here is the way in which illbeing doesn't just happen to people where bad luck and circumstances create the conditions for unhappiness and human misery. In the moral sphere, human agents can generate conditions whereby their own and other's suffering produces illbeing. Taylor describes in detail how modern Western societies evolve based on an ethic that aims to both affirm life in practical terms and reduce suffering through universal standards of benevolence that attempt to measurably reduce illbeing while increasing levels of wellbeing: a process he refers to as the affirmation of ordinary life (1989, p. 209). A central feature of this modern ethic of respect is the negotiation of meaning in face of a growing disenchantment which becomes felt profoundly as 'crisis' at the level of culture and political life (we see many examples of this crisis in the trivialisation of the role of leaders, giving attention to populist interactions and treating political concerns for freedom as matters of economic exchange). This history has

made the affirmation of life more problematic, and out of this stifled affirmation, ever more relevant questions of meaning.

In recognising the human *and* historical reality of illbeing and conversely wellbeing, we acknowledge what Heidegger calls the distinction between 'being' and 'beings' or the language of ontology and the language of the study of human beings (Levinas).⁴ In this sense, one of Taylor's contributions to the human sciences highlights how the former 'being' is the background of the latter 'beings'. It prompts us to pay attention to what he calls our moral frameworks that are easily forgotten and even suppressed in our liberal culture where products 'reign' and everything appears instant and short lived. Such frameworks, if retrieved from the background where they often lie as "unquestioned fact", can allow us to make sense of our lived experience (Taylor p. 17, 18). For Taylor, such frameworks are ontologically basic; questions concerning identity cannot but arise for each of us, highlighting "the essential link between identity and a kind of orientation" (p. 28). They help us to navigate the good and not so good aspects of our lives and to gain direction in an active process of evaluation relative to the questions of meaning; questions concerning "who am I?" and "what sort of life is truly worth living... worthy of respect etc?" To fail to gain orientation, or to make meaning, can lead to crisis, a crisis that can be felt as a form of illbeing. Hence the importance of orientation to the whole issue area of wellbeing.

By taking illbeing seriously, we include it as an unavoidable dimension of human depth and human vulnerability, that finds practical relevance in personally refracted spaces, where suffering in its many aspects, including the disorientation of meaninglessness, is negotiated. These aspects are definite features of human life that, despite their difficulty to express, and are worthy of inclusion in an account of wellbeing, not least because they force us to reflect on the limits of flourishing and may even point beyond this life for explanations of happiness. Thesaurus searches yield a description of 'illbeing' as associated with wretchedness and misery, lack of prosperity or happiness or health. Alongside the physical and material conditions that give rise to the phenomenon, there are the putative psychological and spiritual dimensions of illbeing that are often found in our inner life, connections to others and the possibility of healthy relationships across communities, societies, ethnic and racial divides – a possibility that must fully reckon with 'Self and Other'. Especially helpful for the purposes of comparison is McKenzie et al.'s taxonomy of vulnerability that provides a way of discerning a general ontological vulnerability and a particular or "more than ordinary vulnerability" that require specific interventions (Sellman 2005, quoted in McKenzie et al. 2013, p. 2). This resonates strongly with how we understand illbeing as a state that has normative implications for the way we view wellbeing and relative to the kinds of sociability that bind us morally as human beings. In helping us to conceptualize illbeing, the taxonomy of vulnerability also helps us to distinguish illbeing from vulnerability by drawing attention to the challenges of "pathological vulnerability" which are found in the "way that vulnerability undermines autonomy or exacerbates powerlessness engendered by vulnerability in general" (p. 9). Vulnerability can be experienced by people who lack the capacity to change this condition... a lack that is associated with the vulnerability itself. This analysis goes beyond objective conditions. What's important here, for our conceptualisation of illbeing, is the way in which attempts to ameliorate vulnerability from a narrow normative perspective, risk generating further vulnerability. Such attempts can disempower and effectively

⁴ Note: speaking about Heidegger's work in establishing the role of philosophy helping to define the background for thinking about other forms of knowledge, Levinas says: "Ontology would be distinguished from all other disciplines which explore *that* which is, beings, that is, the 'beings', their nature their relations – while forgetting that in speaking about these beings they have already understood the meaning of the word being, without, however, having made it explicit" (Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*. Duquesne University Press, Pittsburg, 1998).

alienate people from their own lives. Subjectively, if I am vulnerable, I can in my attempts to seek redress, risk further suffering, stigmatisation and trauma even within putative wellbeing settings. The stigma associated with pathologising vulnerability and illbeing negatively affects agency. Naming it is important. But so too is naming the process of pathologizing actions that don't conform to generally accepted accounts of wellbeing. Our wellbeing plans may fail for good reasons.

In failing to be well along the lines of flourishing we confront a critical challenge posed by illbeing. We may desire the good with all its ambitious goals for individual, social, political and global change but we may feel unable to rise to the challenge. Such a challenge has been described in spiritual terms by Joe Dunne as an encounter with the shadowside of oneself (Dunne, 2025 p. 251). Highlighting how what we are calling illbeing leads us into a deeper reflection on the self than standard social science accounts of wellbeing can offer, Dunne reminds us of the scale of the challenge for those of us who cannot quite remain on the usual path of wellbeing.

The shadow is not due to an egregious failure in moral formation or an arrested state of psychological development. It is understood as the default or 'normal' condition of human beings, a normality that leaves us hampered in our ability to meet ethical-spiritual demands that we still may find ethically or spiritually compelling. (Dunne, 2025, p. 251).

Much of the literature on wellbeing in education today begins with the assumption that wellbeing goals are what any reasonable and sensible person would wish to accomplish who is disposed to a generally held positive attitude. But a problem arises from this perspective when we acknowledge that it is quite normal to feel hampered in our desire for wellbeing, or to not be able to throw ourselves into wellbeing. What happens when we can't reach a general positivity threshold or when we see positivity more generally as part of the problem that needs a deeper, more critical reflection?

Such an analysis has important implications for conceptualizations of wellbeing. For example, it radically problematizes the languages of wellbeing by giving a moral dimension to illbeing – not as a deficit state or as something to be strangely sought, but rather as a position of imagination, questing, protest and critique; a kind of negative agency (in a positive sense) that places illbeing in dialectical tension with wellbeing. The tension is epitomized in the literary figure of the Underground Man, brilliantly portrayed by Russian author Fyodor Dostoyevsky in his novella of the same name. In the opening pages we get an insight into the complex psychology of the main character and anti-hero who throughout remains nameless. “And why are you so firmly and triumphantly certain that only what is normal and positive, in short only wellbeing, is good for man [sic]? Is reason mistaken about what is good? After all, perhaps prosperity isn't the only thing that is pleasing to mankind, perhaps he is just as attracted to suffering. Perhaps suffering is just as good for him as prosperity” (Dostoyevsky, 1972). Unlike vulnerability, illbeing seems to have a spiritual core that resists the usual normalising tendencies and may even place freedom above wellbeing and happiness. What the character in the novella demonstrates is the emptiness of wellbeing as a standard to live by; as something good that can command our awe and respect “independent of our of our own desires, inclinations, or choices” (Taylor, 1989, p. 20). It highlights how socially sanctioned accounts of wellbeing can fall into a kind of relativism that fails to inspire and even contribute to a diminished horizon of meaning. What we can take from this analysis of illbeing when it is refracted through a moral account of the good is that, as

complicated as illbeing is from the point of view of human agency, it may not be devoid of the good, as Dunne argues relative to the shadowside, it may still be 'normal'.⁵

Education that begins in a caring relation assumes the good of all persons in practice (Dunne 2025). In this article we are attempting to reconceptualize wellbeing by pushing received understandings to their limit and by seeking connections through genuine theoretical critique that is both sympathetic to and suspicious of the received concepts of wellbeing. The spatial metaphor we articulate in the paper attempts to address some of the complexities of such a dialectical approach, including moral complexities, that acknowledges tension and attempts to hold critique alongside affirmation.

In broadening the discussion of wellbeing, we also attempt to address the misuse of a rhetoric of wellbeing or what McAllister calls pseudo-wellbeing (2018), at a time when some wellbeing discourses themselves may tend towards a hollowing out or watering down of substantive conceptions of human flourishing. This direction in wellbeing rhetoric and programmes often seeks to maintain the status quo around education as it relates to the wider cultural and economic landscape. It is blind to technicism and remains immune to the critical challenges that become apparent from deeper reflection. We contend that an adequate analysis and a deeper reflection on wellbeing and illbeing may begin to address some of the challenges discussed here.

3. Methodological challenges and developmental concepts

A multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approach to wellbeing that keeps the challenge of education alive needs to be methodologically sensitive. Drawing on the social scientific disciplines of psychology and sociology we can explicate current and influential conceptions of wellbeing that have impacted education. Within the field of positive psychology, these have focused traditionally on subjective experience (SWB-happiness studies) and in the field of sociology, these conceptions have mainly characterised wellbeing in terms of objective social conditions and environment, how for example access to goods and resources, recognition and relationships contribute to life satisfaction. Balancing social scientific perspectives (psychological and sociological) on wellbeing with philosophical inquiry into wellbeing, provides a richer and deeper way of thinking about big questions of meaning and satisfaction, and hopefully avoids what Pring (2010) has called clichés in relation to human flourishing and wellbeing. Hu and Wong (2024) also faced this issue of methodological challenge in the field of existential positive psychology as they endeavour to introduce a depth subjective existential dimension to positive psychology wellbeing paradigms.

As a discipline philosophy has a rich and ancient tradition of scholarship in relation to ideas about a good life, selfhood and identity, the relation between virtue and the good, and in articulating questions which lie at the heart of ethical education and the issue of citizenship. These kinds of questions and forms of inquiry are important in the current educational context as educators grapple with big issues of normativity and value, and with their own personal understandings and experiences of satisfaction and happiness.

Furthermore, the method we adopt is a human development interdisciplinary approach to wellbeing and education which draws upon philosophical scholarship to question and (re)frame some of the emphases in the conceptual underpinnings to the social scientific approaches where

⁵ Conversely, we may let people off the hook for being 'ill' when a moral yardstick should be applied to their actions. According to Blackburn, we do make moral distinctions "between being ill and being bad" (p. 103), and we should be clear about apportioning the label 'ill' when it may indeed be more accurate to apportion 'bad' in those cases where underlying causal explanations of actions are poorly applied.

wellbeing is understood typically as happiness (Diener and Seligman 2002) or as welfare/quality of life (Veenhoven 2016). In this manner, we attempt to provide an appraisal of the strengths and weaknesses to situate a multi- and interdisciplinary perspective on wellbeing, and importantly, to reflexively locate ourselves as educators in the wellbeing landscape. In other words, we adopt an integrative, interdisciplinary and critical method in how we represent and formulate a human development approach to wellbeing. We draw on philosophy as an underpinning discipline for thinking about wellbeing in terms of meaning and meaning making, and it also enables us to think about illbeing as part of wellbeing as a developmental process. The significance of thinking about illbeing in its relation to wellbeing is not to be underestimated, particularly as educational emphases on individual achievement and pressures within the wider social context can lead to illbeing (Cadime, Pinto, Lima, et al. 2016). While the risk of defeatism is real, attempting to conceptualize illbeing in its reality remains an important if not urgent challenge in a time of rapid global transformation. It can often be detected as a hidden aspect of the human quest for wellbeing, since it can underscore a lack and therefore a desire for flourishing which can fail to be grasped in its complexity.

What it means to reach full human flourishing remains an open question but wellbeing can be understood as associated with that process of flourishing, although not without qualification. The origin of the connection between wellbeing and human flourishing can be traced to Aristotle's account of 'living well' and a 'life well-lived' as captured in the concept of 'eudaimonia' (Nicomachean Ethics). For Aristotle, the moral life is embedded in the art of living a good life and thereby flourishing, though missing from the ancient philosopher's account of 'wellbeing' is a deeper reflection on the person and personality (Trigg 1988). Some wellbeing accounts today preserve that idea of flourishing as a process of living well, and even in the more minimal sense suggest that one's own wellbeing or happiness need not compromise that of others, as for example in Sen's Capabilities approach (1995).

Similarly, normative issues in human development are not closed questions and may even entail trauma (Castoriadis 1997). For example, as we grow from child to adult, we experience development along different axes, physical changes that are to be expected as the organism reaches its peak of growth. And in the cultural/social space, we gain maturity through a process of change, as we encounter cultural and social expectations, often through formal education. Issues of development that arise in the cultural realm however, which include education, appear nowhere near as fixed and stable as those that appear in the natural realm. For example, age does not simply equate with maturity in the same way that we might expect adulthood to equate with the peak of human growth. Hence, a broad understanding of human development, that is both disciplinary and interdisciplinary, has to acknowledge growth as both a state of being, and a process of becoming, as educational and developmental goals might be particular to stages of development and also be on-going over the course of various life stages (Archard 2004). And likewise, wellbeing understood from a developmental paradigm can be seen as *both a state of being well or a process of becoming well*. To use the analogy of age and maturity again, wellbeing while obviously not a purely natural phenomenon, is influenced by many cultural and social factors that condition how we think about the ideal, and the ways it is recognised and identified in practice.

Setting the matter of flourishing within an existential and developmental context is challenging not least because the matter of transcendence touched on above sometimes runs against ordinary human fulfillment. If we think of wellbeing as a good within the limits of human fulfillment, we may ignore demands of a transcendent account that requires some human goods to be let go of or forfeited for the sake of a greater or more Other directed Good (Taylor 2008).

Not letting go of cherished personal goods can negatively impact another person's wellbeing, something that Sen (1995) cautions against in his Capabilities Approach to Human Development and Wellbeing. Sen argues that the pursuit of one person's wellbeing should not impact or curtail another's. It may also result in drawing the horizon of human possibility too narrowly, thereby cramping human agency and our human capacity to welcome or introduce something radically new into our world (Taylor 2008, Biesta 2006). These dilemmas fall within what we are calling the methodological challenges of wellbeing.

4. Recent disciplinary models and framings of wellbeing

The following section explores and critiques recent influential framings and approaches to wellbeing from different disciplinary perspectives. These approaches include and address issues around identity, being, and meaning that can help us to develop a fuller account of wellbeing in the context of human development.

4.1 Psychology and SWB

As a discipline psychology has held a very strong position and influence within the field of education internationally. More recently, the positive psychology movement has gained considerable status within psychology itself as a discipline and in public policy and research, reframing or shifting the focus of psychology away from what goes wrong, unhappiness and pathology, to place emphasis on positive affect, happiness, and more lately, on flourishing. This field of study is known as Subjective Wellbeing (SWB) and the Subjective Wellbeing movement. The focus of SWB two decades ago was principally on 'happiness' per se, what makes me 'happy in the now', and on the background and personal factors that contribute to a state we call happiness. In this SWB view 'happiness' was often equated with wellbeing. SWB research has since developed and broadened, particularly as exemplified in the work of Seligman (2002, 2011), and now includes considerations beyond strictly affect and mood, to include more substantive areas, conceived of in terms of human engagement and meaning making. While drawing to some extent on philosophical thinking around eudemonia, and questions around subjectivity and meaningfulness, the work still remains within the domain of psychology and its emphasis lies on how an individual's own development and learning can accommodate these dimensions of wellbeing. In other words, the model is largely individualistic; construing flourishing as a process of individual psychology that risks drawing the boundary of positivity too tightly, thereby denying or suppressing the richness and complexity of negative experiences (Schoffham and Barnes 2011, p. 542).

For example, one of the latest approaches to wellbeing developed from Seligman's work is PERMA (Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning and Accomplishment) a five-pillar approach to wellbeing that has been adapted for schools. This model also supports the training of teachers about and in PERMA so they can work more systematically with students to support their subjective wellbeing and wellbeing outcomes. Clearly, this has an immediate appeal for teachers and educators as it is tailored to the needs of schools and staff. A review by Waters (2011) of 12 schools in Australia involved in positive psychology interventions (PSIs) including PERMA, shows a positive relationship between PSIs, wellbeing, relationships and academic achievement. Waters suggests that positive psychology interventions such as PERMA are worthwhile particularly because they are oriented towards fostering the positive in the human and not merely towards reducing the negative, for example, cultivating an overall positive attitude to the body and one's general health rather than just giving up smoking (Waters 2011, p. 77). The Positive Education movement is associated with the positive psychology

paradigm and is understood as applied positive psychology in education. Schools working from a positive education perspective aim to teach positive skills to students. Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich, and Linkins (2009) define positive education as education that fosters traditional academic skills and skills for happiness and wellbeing (a counterbalance to critiques levelled by the anti-therapeutic education thinkers like Ecclestone and Hayes 2009). While Seligman and his followers claim some fundamental aspects of flourishing can be taught and cultivated in schools and the positive focus seems to make good sense, there are cautions to be considered when this becomes a singular focus or perspective on wellbeing in schools or is viewed as the answer for 'all' students' healthy development. Moreover, the issue and reality of illbeing as discussed earlier needs to be kept in mind when considering positive psychology approaches and the ways that negative experiences may be rooted in real social, economic and cultural problems and not merely individual mood states.

An emphasis on positivity and inter and intrapersonal skills, and the development of resilience, are fundamental in the PERMA approach. But there is not a great deal new, perhaps, in how it tries to conceptualise wellbeing, certainly when considered relative to older philosophical approaches, which have paid attention to or influenced virtue and character education. Nonetheless, Seligman suggests that the positivity skills emphasised in PERMA can in fact lead to the cultivation of such virtues as gratitude, serenity and character strength. Indeed, Seligman goes as far as to define PERMA intelligence/skills as a new kind of intelligence. For educators, the focus on skills that enhance affect (pleasure), participation (engagement), and relationships may be seen as good for their students. The suggestion in the PERMA approach that 'character education' should not stand alone as separate and distinct from regular curricular work however is also a moot point. We know from earlier research in Health Promoting Schools and the movement for democratic education for flourishing across US, Canada and New Zealand (Cohen 2006, Anderson and Ronson 2005, Wright and Burrows 2004 respectively), the values of virtue education need to permeate across curricula and across school culture in order to be effective and cannot be taught in a compartmentalised fashion.

However, Seligman's PERMA approach goes even further, in advocating that a school wide approach needs to be *strategically* rolled out and audited. These are strong statements and may have certain value from the point of view of school managers and leaders, but they could also reduce teachers' own agency and responsibility for action and decisions with their students (Biesta 2020) and are overly focussed on productivity, outcomes and the measurable (Ball 2016). At worst we can envisage a situation where the positive approach to wellbeing creates a 'positivity bias', and that students and teachers who cannot learn positivity may be seen as somehow problematic or unwilling. Indeed, we suggest that the positivity approach can negate the significance of illbeing in our deep sense of self and our suffering as moral agents. Although positive education may not be directly harmful to students, an overemphasis on individual learning and on individual responsibility for one's own flourishing may certainly be seen as problematic (Mc Allister 2018, Reay 2024). Some factors that influence our capacity to find meaning and to participate are located in the social structure, community and culture and are not solely within an individual's control. For example, is human reality really all that positive? In other words, does our positivity really reflect the way the world is, including natural disasters and what human beings are capable of in terms of inhumanity and destruction?

As a model of human reality SWB has its limitations. In fact, we might say that a PERMA model is not really a wellbeing model in and of itself, it is a positive education model, but positive education appears to be rather individualistic and suffers from the same problem as SWB. Although more broadly conceptualised, positive education and its approach to flourishing still

see the individual actor as the ultimate source of their own flourishing. We suggest that uncritically applying particular ideas or trends around flourishing to education, as 'packages' or magic bullets that overemphasise limited perspectives at the expense of more wholistic understandings can be harmful. If we learn anything from this example, it indicates a need for balance in respect of trends within and across disciplines, and with respect to meanings and values that inform particular conceptions that claim to hold the key to 'making us well'. In the case of PERMA, it can be argued that it more resembles a construct that embraces certain dimensions of flourishing, than a broad conceptualisation of wellbeing and flourishing.

These more recent developments in flourishing research in the field of psychology, however, also embrace more expansive and less traditional views around intelligence which are also significant for schooling. Recognition of various intelligences, especially inter/intra personal and emotional intelligences is crucial within the curriculum and in the classroom to foster the full development of all students. The challenge to the recognition and status of these intelligences, as they often remain outside of formal assessment systems, is a matter worthy of further interrogation. However, as well as broadening the 'happiness frame' in relation to psychology itself, the positive psychology flourishing movement also gives a nod to the social, and towards a need for meaning-making in the world, and recognises the particular challenges that people face in making-meaning within their specific contexts. Specifically, recent neuropsychology appears to confirm how unhappiness and distress can impair memory and even our "way-finding skills" or our ability to navigate physical space (Schoffam and Barnes 2011, p. 540). This suggests that wellbeing and how we orient more generally are profoundly connected.

4.2 Welfare/social approaches

Shifting from the psychological towards the social/sociological traditions in wellbeing research brings us into the language of *welfare* as wellbeing. If psychology could be accused of being overly individualistic in relation to understandings of wellbeing, sociological approaches have been biased towards welfare models and conceptualisations based on objective conditions and objective measures of wellbeing. Traditionally, these approaches did not fully consider an individual's own responses to, and their own feelings relative to the social conditions in which they lived. Sociological approaches to welfare have been concerned with socio-economic and socio-cultural conditions for example of housing, income, employment, and importantly for teachers, differences in access to, and participation in education based on class, gender, race etc. Large scale, international research supports the claim that conditions/contexts do matter as conditions of one's flourishing⁶, but significant debates continue regarding how much they matter in overall wellbeing (Layard's 2005 work in economics for example suggests that money does not contribute to individual happiness, while earlier work suggests that socio economic status for example matters more in illbeing than wellbeing).

From the perspective of schooling and wellbeing, when considering more socially based models, we discuss Erik Allardt's model (1993) Having, Loving and Being (HLB) as an exemplar of a social approach that is not conceived of solely in terms of objective conditions, or only measured on objective criteria, but one that usefully attempts to balance subjective and objective needs. The HLB model is conceptualised in relation to an *individual's own perceptions and experiences* of these social conditions in relation to 3 domains of life; resources (having),

⁶ Wilkinson and Pickett's *The Spirit Level* (2010) created international debate as their bestselling work argued that within-country income inequality had a deep impact on health, mental health and social cohesiveness. The poorest had the highest levels of heart issues, cancers and depression.

relationships (loving) and freedom/agency (being) as significant contributors to a person's sense of their overall wellbeing. For example, regarding 'Having', income can be measured relative to the norm for the society as an objective condition, but also against the individual's own assessment of what they have as it contributes to their welfare.

4.2.1 Allardt's HLB-Having, Loving, Being, Health approach, an exemplar

Finnish educators perceived Allardt's HLB model as a way of conceptualising wellbeing that could have significant potential for students' development, and thus an adapted model was developed for schools with the addition of a 4th dimension of wellbeing as Health, understood as both physical and mental health. Both objective and subjective criteria/indicators for HLB wellbeing reflect what educational researchers have found elsewhere, that it is important to balance personal/individual and social dimensions of wellbeing. For example, Belgian researchers Engels, Aelterman, Petegem and Schepens (2004) suggest that wellbeing at school should be understood in terms of specific personal needs for development *and* more socially defined factors and environmental conditions: "Wellbeing at school (of pupils in secondary education) expresses a positive emotional life which is the result of harmony between the sum of specific environmental factors on the one hand and personal needs and expectations of pupils vis-a-vis the school on the other" (ibid: 2004, p. 128). The Allardt model appears a helpful one for use in school contexts as research has borne out the significance of interpersonal skills and capacities (what are often understood as soft skills in education) for both school achievement and for the social development and wellbeing of students.

4.2.2 A broader vision of wellbeing: Loving relational wellbeing and its significance in education

A significant component of this four-pillar approach to wellbeing reflects a growing awareness in the social sciences, and more recently in sociology, of the significance of caring relationality to human development (Noddings 2012, O'Brien 2021, Lynch 2022). In the HLBH model, loving as indicative of the relational dimension of life in school is considered to be equally significant to students' wellbeing as that of 'having' resources and of expressing agency in relation to their schooling. This is a powerful development for education and schooling. The contribution of relational life to wellbeing is also borne out in research carried out by the World Health Organisation of Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children. This survey showed that 'being liked and accepted by peers' is 'crucial to young people's health and development, and that those who are not socially integrated are far more likely to exhibit difficulties with their physical and emotional health' (UNICEF, 2007, p. 25). On the other hand, when we consider influences on illbeing, data collated in the US National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health demonstrated that respondents who lacked attachment to peers were more likely than others to have thought of, or actually attempted suicide (Bearman and Moody, 2003). Research carried out by Watson, Emery and Bayliss (2012) explored models of wellbeing for schooling in Northern Europe that had evolved from Allardt's ecological model, and that focused particularly on the significance of the loving dimension. Their focus on the relational, dialogical and caring emphasis on 'loving' wellbeing is an attempt to counterbalance certain strong criticisms in the UK that wellbeing in schooling has been conceived in an overly facile manner, is too focused on the therapeutic, and is a dumbing down of the academic role of schools and of teachers (Furedi 2004, Ecclestone and Hayes 2009).

More recently, research on young people's wellbeing suggests that young people in the UK (Groarke, Berry, Graham Wisener et al. 2020) and Ireland (McHugh-Power and Swather 2025)

and across European (Schnepf, Boldrini and Blasko 2023) show high and concerning levels of loneliness.

These important findings imply a need for a greater focus on care and relationships as dimensions of education as argued by some feminist educators in these jurisdictions (Baker, Lynch et al. 2004, O'Brien 2011, 2018). We might even agree that it has been rather taken for granted that teachers have care responsibilities as part of their professional role (Noddings 2012, Kelchtermans 2011) without any explicit support or focus in this regard. The literature and wellbeing models discussed in this paper seek to make this aspect of the teacher's role and indeed responsibilities more fully explicit than heretofore. Given the intense demands on teachers in the current performative and productive context, it makes good sense to remind us of this dimension of educational work that is often part of the hidden but fundamental relational work that teachers and schools do (Lynch 2021). The philosopher Nell Noddings argues that relational life and care are in fact the ethical ideal of education. Care is at the core of life and of wellbeing. Noddings holds that: "The primary aim of every educational effort must be the maintenance and enhancement of caring...To receive and to be received, to care and be cared for: these are the basic realities of human being and its basic aims". (Noddings, 1984, pp. 172-173). Care theorists across multiple disciplines have followed Noddings, arguing that care is fundamental to human development and flourishing, to the very development of 'a self'. In her book, *The Capacity to Care*, Wendy Hollway (2006) comments on the human need for care in early life and which has strong implications for schools as contexts of care:

Early maternal care⁷ – non-negotiable, asymmetrical – is, I have argued a prototype for the capacity to care. This is because the experience of this care (good enough or not) creates a floor for everyone's self and lies at the heart of all dependency and all care receiving as well as care giving (ibid. p. 128).

Hollway suggests that in the earlier stages of our lives when we have inescapable dependency needs, we are in asymmetrical relationships with those who care for us. We can see how a later example of this type of asymmetrical relationship may be experienced with our teachers. The care that teachers give, and the ways in which they model an ethic of care for their students, strongly fashions the selves the students can become and how they flourish. There is a great deal to be said in relation to an ethic of care in schools and how a teachers' identity, and professional role, has the capacity to hold and articulate this ethic. It requires, according to Noddings, a relationship that creates a motivational displacement on the part of the teacher (of being engrossed in the other), knowing students' needs (not that we always know best), listening to students, and competency (subject knowledge that enables us to teach). This will of course have implications for educators and teachers' own wellbeing and how they can find wellbeing orientation.

This section, which has explored loving and care in the context of education, is rather too brief to deal adequately with many questions in relation to care praxis in education, but it has emphasised a dimension of teaching and school life that has come under threat, as intensifying regimes of managerialism and performativity put pressure on schools and the care work of teachers. Caring/loving, we suggest, is an indispensable dimension of an interdisciplinary wellbeing approach/model for education. (See O'Brien, 2011 for a more in-depth discussion of the professional responsibilities of teachers and teacher education for caring 'for' and 'about' students).

⁷ Maternal care for Hollway is not assigned to a biological mother or to a specifically gendered parent, she uses maternal care to indicate the care given by the primary caring parent.

4.2.3 Being and wellbeing-freedom and agency

The being dimension of Allardt's HLB model also has significance for schools and warrants attention as we try to place ourselves in relation to wellbeing and to enact agency towards our own wellbeing goals. It recognises a need for serious consideration of young people's voices and agency in their schooling. Having and loving alone will not be sufficient for the development of young people's wellbeing without appropriate experiences of freedom (see Biesta 2020), choice, participation and decision-making by students. This is challenging for schools where traditionally authority has rested in the main with teachers and adults. For example, while the Irish school system is now legally required to facilitate students in decision making in relation to school issues through the institution of Student Councils, research shows that students do not always experience empowerment in this regard (Fleming 2013, Skerritt, O'Hara, Brown et al. 2021). Research shows that schools may take up the challenge of recognising student voices, and engaging students in decision making at very different rates. Structures and relationships across the school as a whole need to reflect the agency of students, and even further than that, to educate that agency for democratic participation. The curriculum alone cannot deliver this, teaching about agency and empowerment must be mirrored by appropriate experiences of that agency. From a Human Development perspective one of the strengths of the HLB approach to wellbeing in schools lies in its recognition of the subject/ object problem (a person's perceptions and the objective conditions of his or her life). On the being dimension, it includes their view of their freedoms to participate in school, and on the objective view of this dimension, what the school states as policy in this regard. It also brings into conversation *both* psychological conditions and social conditions that facilitate or hamper a student's experiences and capacity to experience wellbeing on these dimensions. The being dimension is closest to what the PERMA model talks about as meaning making. While the school may say that student views, for example around choices of assignments in a particular subject area are open to their suggestions, in reality teachers may want to set the assignment themselves. Where there is conflict between, what is said in relation to freedoms, and what is experienced in reality, can curtail the students in their experience of participation and in making sense of their experiences and the development of their wellbeing.

4.2.4. HLBH: Recognising the significance of Health and embodiment for wellbeing

As the Finnish schools adapted the Allardt HLB model for use in schools they added the dimension of health, thus creating a Having, Loving, Being and Health Model (HLBH). This addition of health has however, been critiqued by Konu and Rimpela (2002) as not sufficiently grounded in any theoretical wellbeing model (in other words just added on), and they suggest that health was understood reductively as merely the absence of disease and illness rather than in a fuller fashion (see O'Brien 2008). Nonetheless, given the emphasis internationally on health as a dimension of wellbeing today, it does seem appropriate to include some dimension that addresses health more holistically. As discussed above, the ability to interact with peers may affect physical and mental health. Prioritising health too strongly may however also ignore deeper challenges for young people around social relationality and peer interaction. Perhaps a more comprehensive approach to addressing the issue of health in relation to wellbeing is to see it through the conceptual lens of our experiences of 'embodiment' (Murphy 2026).

Conceptualising embodiment as an aspect of wellbeing guards against reductive, normalising or medical discourses associated with disease, and enables us to think about ourselves and our experiences as embodied beings in relation to our own health and development. If we include a dimension or aspect of wellbeing as embodiment, this can

incorporate experiences for example of our social relationships, sexuality, our gender and how these relate to other categories of our identity such as our 'classed' or our cultural identities and wellbeing. This use of a broader conceptualisation of individual, subjective wellbeing as embodied, also allows us to take into consideration individual and group differences in experiences of embodied identities. Embodiment in this broad sense includes how we give and receive respect, what we owe to others, what in turn is owed to us, and how we hold ourselves in public and in peer-related settings. The example of forcing or merely adding a health perspective into for example Allardt's model of wellbeing, can mean that issues around an individual's own agency along the 'being dimension' could be compromised by imposed health norms around their physical health and wellbeing. At the very least, this leads us to question norms and moral panics around bodies and health, while also acknowledging current concerns around ill health and growing levels of obesity and sedentary lifestyles in children. In other words, the dimension of embodiment in a wellbeing model can leave greater space for criticality and be more empowering. There is also an interesting parallel and perhaps even contradiction at work in relation to teaching about wellbeing and health and the need to create an environment for wellbeing and healthy development. Physical education very obviously provides a space in the curriculum for learning skills and for appreciating aspects of embodied development and our identity. But wholistic wellbeing development necessitates a whole school approach to physical and embodied development and health. All teachers are engaged in a relationship with embodied learners, and while physical education teachers have specific responsibilities in this area for health and bodily wellbeing, all teachers have some responsibilities to support the physical and mental wellbeing of students. Moreover, recent pedagogical movements in education internationally and in particular the Critical Contemplative Pedagogy Movement advocates approaches to education that seek to overcome the old mind/body dualisms, and to model and practice ways of being that nurture experiences of wholeness and presence in the here and now for wellbecoming (Ergas 2019, Kaufman 2017).

It is also evident from research that there is a relationship between inequality, class and poor physical and mental health and wellbeing. Wilkinson and Pickett's work *The Spirit Level* (2010) has created major debates around levels of economic inequality and the illbeing. Once again this raises the issue of resources and structural problems which cannot be directly tackled by the school while the school is assigned responsibility for wellbeing and health promotion. This tension could be the subject of a lively debate at school level. Moreover, within an interdisciplinary approach to wellbeing, there are many ways of approaching the dimension of embodiment and health. The example above illustrates a more sociologically understood concept of embodiment, and the disciplines of philosophy and psychology have their own particular debates around embodiment and its significance in relation to education and the schooling context. Health (both physical and mental health) can be understood as a resource for wellbeing development, that is, as an objective condition within the HLBH model, and as an outcome of wellbeing achievement. In our approach we propose that health be better understood and as an aspect of our embodiment and as a subjective state of the self.

5. Finding our way in Wellbeing Space – recognising inner and outer dimensions of wellbeing

By employing a comparative, dialogical and praxis-based methodology the authors have attempted to grapple with some of the bigger conceptual issues and questions concerning wellbeing. Specifically, we hoped to connect these issues and questions for those teachers and educators who likewise take seriously the significance of wellbeing along a wholistic learning

continuum. The job of identifying and exploring the challenges relative to our ethical commitment in education is, we believe, akin to moving in a space of concern and making wellbeing a reality in our lives; something each of us, prompted by our own questions, can do. The issue of meaning that both Seligman and Allardt identify in their different ways, touch on an important philosophical problem already highlighted with reference to the historical sources of happiness and what Taylor calls the background or framework definitions that our sense making activities require relative to questions of identity. Without a reliable framework we lose our sense of what is good, or worthwhile, valuable and meaningful. When this happens, when we lack a horizon within which things take on stable significance, it gives rise to a painful and frightening experience (1989 pp. 27-28). The lack of meaning that is akin to losing our way, Taylor describes as an identity crisis and in its most radical forms it is akin to what we're calling illbeing. Why is this important for wellbeing?

Like most other value laden terms today, wellbeing exists within an uncertain multiform context and a complex, plural space of concern. Negotiating this space of values requires an adequate map of the terrain; the possession of which is by no means straight-forward today. But it also requires an ability to place oneself on the map and to orient oneself in relation to a shifting landscape and a variegated topography where values may be poorly defined. As such, how we move in relation to wellbeing has a strong analogy with how we move in physical space. As with what Taylor calls frameworks, the moral and spiritual markers in a person's life need definition or clarity if one is to move well in a given moral and spiritual terrain, in the same way that one needs definition if he or she is to move successfully in physical space or on a physical landscape. An adequate account of wellbeing must involve an account of how we move, not just physically, but also in the many ways that have value, including for example, ways that relate to the moral, spiritual and cultural spaces that can determine our lives. Wellbeing in education today needs to be able to provide a sensible and sense-making map of the values that give weight and substance to our lives or leave it empty and without substance.

While learning about wellbeing goals can be valuable, it is no replacement for learning how to orient ourselves towards such goals. In other words, wellbeing orientation entails being equipped for our own wellbeing journey – realizing where the journey begins without ignoring the need for social change. Reminding ourselves of the distinction between 'about wellbeing' and 'for wellbeing' also reminds us of the difference between the meanings that experts give to wellbeing in literature, and the meanings that people give to wellbeing for themselves in practice so that it makes sense in the contexts of their lives as a whole. Programmes about wellbeing are limited. As Biesta reminds us, signification can close us in on ourselves rather than open us to the other (Biesta 2016). How we orient ourselves in relation to wellbeing, we believe, relates to two principal needs: 1) the need for a good map, which in concrete terms has to do with an adequate account of wellbeing, the 'about wellbeing' issue, and 2) the need for orientation, an 'inner compass' or inner co-ordinates to help place ourselves on *our* wellbeing map and to orient ourselves with respect to our actions and goals: a subjectivation (Biesta 2020) of wellbeing as distinct from an individualisation of wellbeing which tends to close in on itself. As such, wellbeing requires an outer *and* inner dimension; the latter related to our subjective experience and the former to the normative claims on us as human beings in a social world. As mentioned, orientation involves the moral, the spiritual and the physical spaces and requires not only a good map that tells us about wellbeing but also its relevance to our own values and how we move relative to that space of values. This we suggest need not surrender to a relativism of values, since moving in such open spaces always implies an engagement with differences: the joys and challenges of others and otherness (Biesta 2016, Noddings 2012). It also implies that experiences

associated with the shadow side of life cannot be easily consigned to pathology as they may belong to a normal range of experiences that seek higher, more spiritually sensitive ends than standard accounts of flourishing can offer.

How do multiple disciplines work to contribute to particular understandings of wellbeing, and how do multiple fields of study work together in an interdisciplinary manner to support a broader perspective on wellbeing? In wellbeing terms psychology has been concerned with the exploration of human development across the lifespan, and more recently some branches e.g. positive psychology, have focused specifically on gathering empirical data around the relationship between happiness and affect. This field of psychology addresses questions as to the kinds of factors that add or detract from 'feel good' states, and that promote an individual's own feelings of happiness. Recent developments in subjective wellbeing scholarship (SWB) however, have now moved beyond a singular concern for 'happiness states', and for example, they may take a multi-dimensional approach to 'flourishing', exploring it along the dimensions of emotional state, engagement and meaning-making of an individual (Seligman 2011). It suggests that the normative field of psychology is more flexible than usually thought. From a disciplinary and interdisciplinary perspective, we suggest that depth psychology can help us to see the relation between individual and wellbeing development as a process that can empower freedom and personal agency (O'Shea, 2022).

As a discipline, sociology has concerned itself with social structure and inequality and the social conditions that enable or hamper agentic expression and development. Some social models of wellbeing have more recently attempted to combine subjective and objective approaches and measures of wellbeing. An example of this combined approach was discussed with respect to Allardt's (1993) Having, Loving and Being (HLB) model of *welfare wellbeing*, which is strong on individual agency *and* social/contextual factors. In terms of a space of concern and how we orient within this, the HLB model articulates a concern for our own sense of wellbeing, as well as focussing on more objective criteria that have been agreed as significant to wellbeing achievement. It combines both subjective and objective measures of having (resources), loving (access and engagement in relationships) and being (capacity to act, be heard and to participate, which takes account of the inner and outer considerations relative to wellbeing and how we move between these limits.

As already discussed, ideas of human happiness have long innings in the history of philosophy, and which treats questions of meaning subjectively; outside the realms of the social scientific disciplines of psychology and sociology. As such, it frequently serves as a check to treating the self as an object of study (Taylor 1989, p. 33) or ignoring the requirements of freedom and subjectivity (Biesta 2013). As an ancient discipline philosophy brings considerable scholarship and thought to bear on various conceptualisations of wellbeing in education which includes problematising wellbeing in the context of illbeing (that which conceptually presupposes our desire for *being well*). From a philosophical perspective the ancient view of wellbeing, *eudemonia*, as a conception of the good life has had a profound effect on thinking about wellbeing through the ages and while not without its challenges today still remains influential (for example, it is evident in Seligman's SWB psychological approach). In *The Ethics*, the philosopher Aristotle argues that a good life, a virtuous life, tends towards happiness and satisfaction within the political arrangements that govern social life. Goodness and happiness in a sense are inseparable. The eudemonic approach today stands in contrast to hedonistic approaches which are concerned with immediate happiness. This virtue-based approach has significant educational potential as young people are educated, for example, for citizenship and for social justice. However, traditional Aristotelian accounts of virtue are not always compatible

with newer applied accounts of virtue. Much of modern philosophy has given priority to issues around selfhood and identity (Taylor 1989, 2017). It places a strong emphasis on individual meaning-making, though not inconsiderate of higher-order goods and transpersonal ideals (Kristjansson 2016). Central to Taylor's work is the articulation of frameworks that seek to bring the often-hidden languages of 'being' found in the discipline of philosophy together with the language of 'beings' found in the social sciences. Frameworks thus become the very conditions of our orientations in moral space, and as we have been arguing give meaning to our wellbeing projects.

Given some of the challenges outlined above, is it possible to provide the coordinates to begin orienting in a broad space of wellbeing concern, both as a way of negotiating the literature on wellbeing and (though not separate) also negotiating the moral, spiritual and physical spaces of personal development. Arguably, wellbeing cuts across so many value concerns today the question might be better posed: have we any choice but to try to gain our bearings with respect to such a vital human challenge? The ways we approach wellbeing from multi- and interdisciplinary perspectives provide a rich and evolving approach to wellbeing itself, taken as both an idea and as a significant human good. It opens up space for individual meaning-making and problem posing. As such, it transforms the existing field of wellbeing into a more personally dynamic, reflexive and dialogical practice. Questions can then emerge and be affirmed. The value of wellbeing can be assessed where it matters; that is, relative to the individual or 'wellbeing orienteer' as he or she navigates the socio-historical and cultural concerns of full human flourishing, where sharing the world with others is increasingly urgent (Fitzpatrick, 2020).

6. The wellbeing-illbeing structure along the continuum

The humanities and social sciences have much to teach us about wellbeing; indeed, this learning is itself an orientation toward an adequate account of living well in face of the reality of human existence. When considered through a multi- and interdisciplinary frame, we gain an important perspective for understanding the other side of wellbeing, what we are calling 'illbeing'. Illbeing is often represented as a lack of wellbeing. When situated on the developmental continuum of wellbeing, like the one found in developmental psychology, it constitutes a deficit with regard to the goal of wellbeing as ordinarily understood; be it human flourishing, happiness or wholism of mind and body. Such a deficit model is not the whole picture. As in a developmental model, whereby childhood is seen as a stage antecedent to adulthood with no intrinsic value (Archard 2004), illbeing can be also viewed negatively, as lacking any positive attributes that might reasonably contribute to a condition or state; one that could be deemed good enough on its own terms. Negative moods, feelings, thoughts, or poor self-esteem, cannot in this account be given any real meaning; indicative only as an absence of the goal of wellbeing. However, when wellbeing is considered as a process, and not as a state, both wellbeing and illbeing exist together, to a greater or lesser extent at any given moment in a way that is alive to a complex hermeneutics (Kearney 2001). Within any temporal process, at each phase on the continuum, illbeing remains active as the other side of the wellbeing structure. Improvement is implicit within the 'more or less' nature of wellbeing as a process. An advantage to this kind of developmental approach to wellbeing or well becoming (Cassidy 2018), is that it allows negative states the possibility of being in some way meaningful on their own terms. This of course is a process that is experienced in a profoundly personal way but need not only concern the individual or remain self-referential. It can also create the possibility for negative personal states to be integrated into a higher goal – where higher here takes in the concern of the other and the world community: a sense of universality or common humanity (Gaita, 2000 Kearney and Fitzpatrick 2020). Educators will

recognise this dialectic in the connections between transformation of self and of the world (Freire, 1970).

Within current dominant models of wellbeing, genuine meaning goals remain a considerable challenge however, because of the fear of or bias against negative experience, and the ways in which most young adults experience the challenges of growing up, as precisely a confrontation with an imperfect world. This challenge can involve risk with devastating consequences whereby crisis often brings with it the failure to secure any meaning whatsoever. Meaning is important for wellbeing precisely because of what is at stake for people when they attempt to give their lives meaning. As discussed, it is underscored as important in both subjective and objective accounts of wellbeing (SWB and HLB accounts). The many meanings we hold as individuals are no less important when we attempt to understand the processes of granting and gaining meaning in every instance, including those negative painful experiences that don't appear to make any sense.

6.1 The significance of illbeing?

Returning to illbeing in the context of meaning-making, depending on how we characterized it, it can appear radical and authentic or narcissistic and pathological. It does not sit easily along the continuum of normative development but nonetheless, we believe it can find a creative home within wellbeing education, not merely as a position that is doomed to remain stuck, but rather as one that is vital and brings much to the dialogue of wellbeing in the context of deeper meaning goals that can be transformative for wellbeing projects. Illbeing has practical characteristics. Because it acknowledges myriad experiences of suffering (and its often-mysterious origins), meaning is sometimes found in and through crisis, through acts of mourning, grieving, and through acts of resistance and even through a recognition of the need for 'letting go', creating the conditions of different wellbeing possibilities (Ricoeur 2007). We have argued that wellbeing in schools needs to be not just *about* wellbeing but *for* wellbeing; less about delivery and more for possibilities that arise from genuine and sometimes difficult embodied experiences (NCCA 2017). Another way of putting this is to say that the outer content designed for building capabilities needs to be balanced with the inner experiential, reflexive and contemplative positions that can keep us anchored in a relational practice and that recognises the more shadowy aspects of life. While acknowledging the limitations of our metaphors, we wish to argue, in the context of the spatial metaphor, that 'inner/ outer' join up to provide direction for the wholistic work of orientating in a space of concern by seeking to keep language rooted in experience (McGilchrist 2010, p. 116, 117). Such a wholistic method is critical, we believe, in light of the fragmenting forces in our world. Such fragmentation is felt at the level of the self and often mitigates against wellbeing. It can even be seen to generate greater levels of illbeing in the inner and outer spaces of human development more generally (Taylor 1992).

Illbeing understood as a *via negativa* when taken up creatively and subjectively can be a basis of positive action, of transformation at the social level. An example of this can be found in the climate disaster protests that target outer change. Mikaela Loach, climate activist states in her book on climate change: "At Calais, I felt deeply inspired by ordinary people doing the non-glamorous quiet work of the building of revolutionary change" (Observer Magazine 2023, p. 21). The point is relevant to illbeing experienced as embodied affect whereby the self is fractured by alterity and disorientated by strangeness (Kearney and Fitzpatrick 2022). The non-glamorous quiet, inner work of the self helps illbeing evolve towards wellbeing.

As discussed above, our wellbeing points of departure are often given to us in culture and are frequently set over and against the self as it attempts to create or discover meaning. The very

conditions of where and how we find ourselves in any given place and time provide the basis for a conversation that can generate personally refracted meaning goals, which are salient situated signposts for individuals, and not merely 'hand-me-down' meaning goals, or free-floating signposts without embodied learning. The process of gaining orientation in the space of wellbeing is at one with the process of getting clear on our values and what is meaningful for us. Our wellbeing, like our identity, never hangs on one thing, and therefore, must be put in perspective relative to the other things that matter. What is better or worse, what is significant or trivial, all play a part in deciding what is of value for me and where it fits within the overall spaces of importance or value for me.

Hannah Arendt (2006) argues that the issue of values belongs to the age of capitalism, but we need not concede that all values are materials for consumption. Values imply judgements about matters of significance that may or may not be clear to us. They reside along a scale of better or worse, often appearing relative to each other. We never define ourselves only in relation to one thing but rather in relation to a host of things that may not always sit comfortably together, or at any rate sit comfortably on the same rung of the ladder. Orienting in moral and spiritual space involves getting clear on what we value most, and while maybe not ordering our values relative to each other in any explicit way, at least having a sense of where each fits relative to what is more important. It means taking ourselves and our passions seriously. This can be understood as Kristjansson argues, as a form of Extended Aristotelian Flourishing (EAF) that includes transpersonal ideals and values, or it can go beyond this to what Taylor includes as ultimate meaning. In all cases an orientation and reorientation to an open and fuller future is a desired or hoped for possibility; one that can only chime with a suitably enlarged conception of wellbeing.

6.2 Wellbeing Values and orienting in the classroom

There are no easy solutions for those who see wellbeing as part of a values curriculum (and currently for example 80% of States in the US have mandated the teaching of values education). Earlier in the document we explored the space of wellbeing and how it is complex and multi-layered. The perspectives on wellbeing outlined above provide a rich and variegated topography. In one sense this complex picture is the map of wellbeing that practitioners must use to navigate. The spatial metaphor introduced here can work for teachers who are attempting to navigate the complex terrain of wellbeing with their students as it details the different ways we can be lost in relation to the many and varied identity and wellbeing goals. It provides an important heuristic although, when we consider this analogy relative to the ways we actually move and gain orientation in physical space, we discover that we are already very much rooted in a space that requires orientation, and so, moral and spiritual space can be given more embodied anchor points as teachers attempt to stitch the two together through their practice. If moving, discovering, and getting clear on where we are, can be drawn out in relation to lived wellbeing issues, then the spatial metaphor will resonate with students in the classroom. However, like most good practice it will require risk and imagination. Being lost has an important significance for wellbeing. It goes beyond what we ordinarily mean as teachers when we refer to externally measured standards of comprehension, or someone not learning to the lesson plan. In the context of the work presented here, and specifically the spatial metaphor, we can be lost if we cannot locate the most suitable wellbeing goal on our wellbeing map as a destination to be arrived at or successfully achieved. This is one way of being lost that can perhaps be remedied by a good map where things are easily located. One of the issues for schools is whether the map of wellbeing is clear and comprehensive enough to include ultimate meaning goals in a way that translates for students' realities. However, there is a deeper significance to being lost which we have attempted to emphasize

here. It is where being lost connects up with being in crisis. We can be lost if we fail to place ourselves on the map; in other words, to take a stand towards a meaningful self project, whereby wellbeing is accomplished in each particular instance and where questions that address what Simone Weil calls 'the needs of the soul' are actively facilitated.

As we have tried to show in this section, addressing disorientation and crisis in the wellbeing space in education entails designing programmes not only about wellbeing but for wellbeing. That is, outer content and targeted competencies, but also embodied inner capacities that create contexts for judgement and contemplation relative to where one stands, and whether and how one moves in a space of ethical concern. Only such movement understood as orientation can satisfy the requirements of wellbecoming as a rich domain of values (not merely corroborative facts). This of course would mean trusting the goods that are not easily externalised as outcomes, which admittedly goes against the grain of much of what passes as assessment.

We have attempted to draw out some of the similarities between illbeing and vulnerability above. Crucially we addressed a distinction between these two concepts which underscores the significance of the subjective element of illbeing as a reflexive aspect of the concept that gives a pointed meaning to our spatial metaphor and why being able to place ourselves on our wellbeing map is necessary if we are to move in an ethical space of concern. Being stifled by normative accounts of wellbeing can be debilitating relative to our desire for being well in difficult circumstances and agendas that often appear pitted against personal understandings of human happiness. The example of the underground man (UM) as a limit case serves to remind us that the good of wellbeing cannot be unproblematically presupposed. Despite or because of a tendency latent in illbeing to reject wellbeing (or overly organized sociability), we recommend that wellbeing include a subjective dimension, a kind of singularity, that underscores its own normalizing limitations. For this reason, we propose the UM test to draw awareness to what or who gets left out of the wellbeing account and whether such an exclusion is warranted or justified in any given wellbeing initiative. Such a test can challenge normative thinking about wellbeing that privileges being over becoming. It can also, we believe, highlight the incompleteness of wellbeing in particular situations where wellbeing fails to include both a plurality and a unity, or a map without the conditions to locate oneself and move.

7. Concluding remarks

Within current rapidly changing models of economy, technology, globalization, and performativity where adaptability outpaces any secure base other than the logic of change itself, education can seem no different than less human centered industries, and teachers themselves can feel like they are running to stand still. Add to this the malleability of our models of learning and our enthusiasm for certain versions of wellbeing in the classroom and it becomes difficult to apply the brakes on preconceived though limited notions of happiness and wellbeing. But such brakes need to be applied if we are to assess where we stand relative to the bigger more substantive matter of wellbeing and indeed illbeing.

We can perhaps see from an analysis of the psychological and sociological accounts of wellbeing discussed above how both, while comprehensive and relevant to education in their own disciplinary ways, have limitations within a more wholistic framing of wellbeing. However, our analysis hopefully makes clear that they also hold genuine possibilities for a fuller, more interdisciplinary account of wellbeing that may yet serve students well in the ongoing shifting contexts of lived wellbeing practices. If from a social science perspective, 'meaning and being' (Seligman 2011, Allardt 1993) is where the discourse of wellbeing overlaps then from a philosophical perspective it makes sense to argue that this space of overlap is where critical

reflection can be most fruitful for a fuller, more coherent account of human flourishing. What the authors of this paper have attempted to do in applying an interdisciplinary lens is to focus on the educational relevance of this critical reflection. It seems to us, the issue of the agents' practice is relevant here in anchoring the insights that come back to a first-person perspective where meaning-making and being frequently run aground in didactic, rule-based procedural activities that rely on performativity metrics or evidence-based, objectivist accounts of human reality (Lynch and Lodge 2025, Reay 2024). Meaningful-being-related-activities are irreducibly subjective, but they can become personally and interpersonally refracted in the direction of becoming, through care, dialogue and continuous relationality. Such an approach we believe can keep open an ambitious horizon beyond the sum of the parts of wellbeing, even beyond full human flourishing; towards a transcendence that is at once ethical and inspiring in light of the demands of a fuller wellbeing. In this process the very act of gaining orientation helps to generate vital wellbeing goals. We can acknowledge that this 'opening up' may belong to what radical hermeneutics refers to as the 'impossible possible' (Caputo 1987). However, it may also be closer than we think, hence the relevance of being able to locate ourselves in a space of concern and to move; personally, culturally, politically and socially. Such phenomenological methods of orienting the self in education are not new. Martin Buber's 'I/Thou' relation is as much a displacement of self as it is a re-placement. The current method too forms an important narrative mode of reinhabiting time not dissimilar to how we conceive our spatial metaphor (Pinar 2005). And, not unlike critical contemplative pedagogy that seeks to bring us back to the self anew, Augusto Boal's pedagogy gives us a way of breaking open the unhelpful roles and power dynamics that keep us locked in alienating systems and blind to present realities (Boal 2008) as do more recently conceived critical contemplative pedagogies (Kaufman 2017). Our paper owes a debt to these precedents of wellbeing orientation and to all those critical voices who have grappled with the historical and relational conditions of wellbeing and ethics in education.

Multi- and interdisciplinary perspective-taking is not a singularly positivistic approach to wellbeing as it does not seek clear solutions to definite problems. Rather, it brings together the evidence-based approaches of the social sciences with the deeper reflections of philosophy and the humanities to consider wellbeing in more wholistic ways; acknowledging an important phenomenological point for educators: experience is not self-transparent (Long 2023). Having considered how various fields of knowledge/disciplines conceive of and contribute distinctively to our understandings of wellbeing and the phenomenon of illbeing, we suggest that schools and teachers need to be mindful of the 'magic bullet' approach to engaging with a wellbeing curriculum, which claims to have the answer regarding how to teach about wellbeing in some productive, uniform and mechanical fashion. This, we suggest, has more to do with a neuro-normative approach to wellbeing and an overriding desire for control than a programme attuned to genuine wellbeing needs. The discussion here has illustrated that different fields conceptualise and approach the fostering of wellbeing from within their own paradigmatic values and concerns. In response to this rich but often disconnected complexity, we have recommended a spatial metaphor for wellbeing orientation in the many spaces of concern. Central to this is the need to balance cognitive pedagogies with more embodied pedagogies that can remain open to terrain knowledge, beyond codes or 'thingish signpost knowledge,' what we might call representational cognition. Such terrain knowledge recommends itself to a positional wisdom that can learn 'how' to move or direct the learner, over positional advantage that seeks pathways for instrumental reasons. The discussion has attempted to demonstrate areas of common concern across fields of knowledge, and a growing recognition that no one discipline holds the key to conceptualising human wellbeing in an age of increasing interdependence. As Pring has advised,

in education we need to take a broad praxis-based approach to a wellbeing curriculum, and one that includes a dialogue across the generations to take account of the social and historical dimensions of development (2010). Orienting through a multi- and interdisciplinary wellbeing framework, needs to be nurtured in the context of a culture of respect and recognition for students' own goals, voice and agency, and in a way that recognises that sometimes one's own freedoms to achieve certain meaning goals or act in certain ways can compromise collective wellbeing. And so, these goals must be reconsidered or/and educated so that a certain harmony or balance can be realised between one's own wellbecoming and that of others we are in community with. What Kant said of humanity is true of wellbeing, it is degrading anywhere connects to its degrading everywhere (Kearney and Fitzpatrick 2023). Its realisation is not easy to achieve in the context of schooling today. Increasing pressures for specific learning outcomes and measurable achievements can easily undermine the openness and freedoms required to enable students to express their individuality, or to provide time and space for students' own development needs and goals to emerge (Biesta 2020). Pressures to conform within a school culture driven by testing metrics and the need for unproblematised 'success' can inhibit wellbeing development (McAllister 2018, Lynch and Lodge 2025).

We have attempted to argue that independent of having a comprehensive map of wellbeing, one that might generate valuable though limited learning outcomes, the act of placing oneself on the map of wellbeing is an end in itself that is worth educating for along a continuum. Being able to place oneself on a map of wellbeing that you can in some sense also shape, thereby making meaning relationally and dialogically, creating possibilities for connecting and relating to the world and others in ways that are democratic and transformative. In learning we are often unlearning and in meaning-making we are often unmaking meaning, thus opening new possibilities for new making that create the basis of a process of continuous orientation.

It is not only in the area of fostering and respecting students' values and relationships that teachers are challenged in supporting wellbeing development for their students. From the welfarist sociological perspectives on wellbeing (having dimension in Allardt's model), we know that resources and environment for living and for schooling matters significantly for wellbeing development. Access to necessary goods, safe shelter and safe spaces within a particular society are necessary for the achievement of wellbeing goals and as conditions for development (see Sen 1995). Gross inequalities of resources inhibit development and have an impact on recognition and on agency. Outwardly targeted initiatives for change alone however cannot transform illbeing into wellbeing. This is a particular challenge for educators as they try to create conditions for the wellbeing development of their students who are responsible for teaching and learning activities and yet have little control over resources, and material inequalities (Baker, Lynch et al. 2004). Nonetheless, staying with a collaborative process (O'Neill 2017), a dialogical and problem posing approach to wellbeing education enables students and teachers to name these issues so that they can be recognised and addressed in ways that empower students and educators.

The broad interdisciplinary method of inquiry we propose, is one that supports and encourages teachers and students to reflect on and take their own wellbeing bearings and to enter a dialogical engagement with big ideas and perspectives on wellbeing with their students. Such a method does not claim value neutrality but rather encourages critical engagement, and the recovery of a relational space for this depth conversation and the risks it entails (Freire 1970). Because of this, it confronts and aims to tackle the issue of authentic approaches to the teaching and to the existential *living out* of wellbeing. It acknowledges that this active collaborative method may challenge teachers and students in relation to the matter of values and perspective, but it raises and names, again in the spirit of Freire, the important question as to how teachers can

educate for wellbeing as a lived practice while merely teaching *about* wellbeing? Combining spatial orientation of wellbeing values with wellbeing content can help teachers to understand the complexity associated with diverse approaches to wellbeing, thus supporting them as they take a position themselves, in relation to their own values and biases within the terrain of wellbeing, and that opens beyond the technical, administrative and procedural aspects of the school. This, we believe, will help enable them to grasp both the required knowledge of wellbeing and the embodied wisdom of wellbeing, wisdom that comes 'dropping slow' in the reflexive wellbecoming process.

At this point we hope it is clear that a multi- and interdisciplinary approach to educating for wellbeing is an endeavour that places value on wholistic development, and we believe ties in nicely to an inclusive achievement focused learning that is found in diversity pedagogy and universal design learning (UDL). Such an approach to development relative to wellbeing, at the very least, avoids seeing wellbeing through a prism of non-relational didactic pedagogy, and hopefully avoids mere 'hat-tipping' to notions of agentic education. It respects the ethical dimension of human beings as agents of their own wellbeing. It challenges dualistic thinking and unreflective binarisms and seeks to provide some heuristics for navigating the often fragmented, objectified, and specialised terrains in the fields of knowledge. Crucially, it helps us to navigate ourselves in relation to the complex and often confusing spaces of illbeing and wellbeing.

We live in increasingly diverse and pluralistic societies whereby strong values that attempt to appeal to all citizens are difficult to articulate and difficult to define (O'Shea 2013). The type of democracy we hold actively frees up the public space for individuals to select their own values while not being overly prescriptive about what ought to define issues of identity. For some teachers the challenge for teaching values is too great if the trade-off is a lack of freedom. For others, who perhaps attempt to prepare students for an uncertain world, they may readily accept that they cannot teach students what to think but still wish to teach them how to think. These rational approaches are not without their own presuppositions. Against the more programmatic and procedural interventions, Biesta and Todd have sought to give a central role to the teacher in the 'event' of learning. Such pedagogies of difficulty (or difficult knowledge) have considerable merit over standard progressivist pedagogies and seems more in touch with the subjective concerns of illbeing. But tough love also risks being perceived as not caring. Discerning the difference here can be a fine line in wellbeing education where vulnerability and human suffering are persistent concerns. For this reason, we emphasise the importance of care ethics in fostering wellbeing in the school system. Relational listening and recognition of students' expressed rather than assumed needs (Noddings 2012) is fundamental to school wellbeing processes.

What we have set out to do in this paper is to address a conceptual weakness in wellbeing discourse as it pertains to education. Admittedly our approach is ambitious, perhaps too ambitious. However, the nature of the theoretical problems that beset wellbeing is not peculiar to wellbeing as it is usually understood. Rather the difficulties and tensions are found in many areas across the social sciences and humanities, and we must acknowledge that any wellbeing terrain is tricky. For this reason, we recommend a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approach to thinking about wellbeing; one where orienting toward a fuller picture of wellbeing, though difficult, can illuminate limitations within any one perspective. Such limitations should not be seen as weakness qua ineffectiveness, but rather as ethical possibilities. In the context of the bigger picture where tensions speak of shared challenges and gaps in our understanding, we can see this as an invitation to further explore what makes these tensions resonate at the level of wellbeing as a whole.

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