

A leadership challenge paper in support of UNESCO Futures of Education 2050

Learning to Become 2050: Ontario Schools as Regenerative Learning Spaces

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The 1986 Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion offered a landmark portrait of a holistic, multidimensional ambition for the world, calling for achievement of “Health for All by the year 2000 and beyond” (World Health Organization, 1986, p. 1). In the charter, education is listed as a fundamental constituent of health along with “peace...a stable eco-system, sustainable resources, social justice and equity” (p. 1). Continuing the legacy of the charter, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) launched the joint project Global Standards for Health Promoting Schools (HPS) in 2018, heralded with the slogan “Make every school a health promotion school” (World Health Organization, 2018, p. 6). This ambitious project proposes standards that “will consider the larger environment of children and adolescents in their schools, families and communities, i.e. their life ecosystems,” (World Health Organization, 2018, p. 5) following a “whole school approach that ensures that the entire school community share a common vision” (p. 5) of achieving comparable benefit across health and education at “local, national, regional and global levels’ (World Health Organization, 2020). The paramount concerns of 21st Century health promotion including: mental health, emotional wellbeing, social harmony, and environmental sustainability appear at the core of the Global HPS Standards framework, described as “an eco-holistic model, recognizing the physical, social, mental, emotional, and environmental dimensions of health and wellbeing” (Langford et al, 2014, p. 5).

UNESCO 2050 invites us to imagine possible futures propitious for human flourishing, planetary sustainability and social harmony (UNESCO, 2019b.). The *Learning to Become* initiative invites reflections on possible futures, drawing from heartfelt consideration on what we want and do not want for our individual and collective humanity, what we hope and fear for our shared planetary home (UNESCO, 2019a). Inspired by the legacy of the 1986 Ottawa Charter, which names “[c]aring, holism and ecology

[as] essential issues in developing strategies for health promotion” (World Health Organization, 1986, p. 4), and the 2018 Global HPS Standards, which positions children, families and communities as co-existing in larger “life eco-systems” (World Health Organization, 2018, p. 5), this paper outlines the principles for rethinking the future of health promotion in Ontario elementary (kindergarten to grade twelve) schools.

Observing health-promotion from an embodied, holistic, eco-spiritual and post-humanist lens, this paper reflects my current PhD research and previous Master’s thesis (Denichaud, 2020), exploring the fecundity of integrating holistic, traditional and Indigenous health methodologies for health promotion and environmental stewardship in Ontario elementary schools. Connected with UNESCO’s core invitation “to become something we have not yet become” (UNESCO, 2019b), this paper’s proposal of a possible future for school health promotion is grounded in the following question: *How can Ontario schools become regenerative learning spaces where mental health, holistic wellbeing and environmental stewardship are cultivated at the level of organizational school culture?* Directly linking this question with the UNESCO 2050 *Learning to Become* initiative, this question can be framed as: *How can Ontario schools educate for human wellbeing, social harmony and planetary flourishing from the microcosmic eco-systems of their school communities?*

Positioned as one possible response to this question, this paper presents the future orientation of Ontario school health promotion presented in my Master’s thesis (Denichaud, 2020) applying a strategic foresight tool, entitled “The Thing from the Future” (Candy & Wilson, 2016). Originally designed as a card game to stimulate creative thinking, this foresight tool employs a four-stage process of speculative fiction to imagine a future object or cultural artefact,

outlines the kind of future that the thing-to-be-imagined comes from, specifies what part of society or culture it belongs to, describes the type of object that it is, and suggests an emotional reaction that it might spark in an observer from the present. (p. 1)

The Thing from the Future in this paper, is a cultural artefact in the form of an organizational cultural framework for school health promotion entitled *Ethic of (Self/School) Care* (Denichaud, 2020). This cultural framework integrates Foucault's (1997) *care of the self* which understands self-care "as an ethical project, [engaging] individuals in the ongoing cultivation of the self for the mutual wellbeing of self and other" (Denichaud, 2020, p. 94), an Indigenous "ecology of healing...as seeking life" (Cajete, 2000, p. 118) and the holistic system of Permaculture, "an internationally recognized and adopted ecological design approach...that promotes a living systems regenerative culture" (Denichaud, 2020, p. 80). Aligned with the aforementioned 1986 Charter recommendations to centre *care, holism and ecology* as core issues for health promotion strategic development, and the 2018 Global HPS Standards' call for consideration of *life eco-systems*, the future imaginary of an *Ethic of (Self/School) Care* re-positions schools as regenerative learning spaces. Envisioned as social and ecological microcosms of holistic planetary wellbeing, "breathing, diverse, inclusive...striving communit[ies] of unique individuals learn and becom[e] together toward co-created wellbeing" (p. 93) for self, each other, other-than-human beings and the planet.

The following section presents an *Ethic of (Self/School) Care* using the four-part structure of *The Thing from the Future* (Candy & Wilson, 2016), providing a brief description of how this future organizational school culture of health promotion relates to current trends in Ontario elementary schools. Following this exploration, concluding thoughts will offer speculations on how Ontario could take meaningful next steps towards the realization of an *Ethic of (Self/School) Care* in 2050, including possible imperatives and opportunities at the level of teacher training and curriculum design.

The Thing from the Future – an Ethic of (Self/School) Care

The Thing from the Future entails four stages,

Arc sets the overall future paradigm theme (Grow, Collapse, Discipline, Transform). *Terrain* identifies contexts, places and topic areas where the future thing might be located. *Object*

provides a common shape or type. *Mood* establishes the emotions evoked in the present observer of the future object. (Candy & Wilson, 2016, p.2) [emphasis added]

As previously introduced, the *Terrain* is Ontario elementary schools with the inclusion of school communities and all health education related pedagogy and curricula. The Object is an *Ethic of (Self/School) Care* proposed as a future organizational culture of school health promotion. The remaining stages of *Arc (Growth, Collapse, Discipline, Transformation)* and *Mood* will now be presented to elucidate how this cultural artefact from the future compares with current trends in Ontario elementary school health promotion.

Arc – The Future Paradigm of an Ethic of (Self/School) Care

Grow

This element of the process asks how existing elements will be expanded upon. Applied to the topic of Ontario school health promotion, existing elements in *health education curriculum* and *classroom praxis* will be a focus of this section.

An *Ethic of (Self/School) Care* builds upon the existing trend in Ontario health promotion to acknowledge Indigenous, holistic and traditional health methodologies (Denichaud, 2020), integrating the philosophy of these methodologies into health education curriculum and classroom praxis. A core element of Indigenous, holistic and traditional health philosophies is the understanding that individual health is a reflection of the quality of interdependent relationships one has with all life, including other humans, other-than-human beings and the Earth (Cajete, 2000; Four Arrows, 2013; Kushi, 1978). This foundational concept of *interdependent relationships* is the locus of self-knowing, self-care, other-care and planetary-care in an *Ethic of (Self/School) Care*.

At the level of *health education curriculum*, Turtle Island Indigenous, non-Euro-Western traditional and Euro-Western holistic health methodologies are referentially present in the 2019 Ontario Health & Physical Education Curriculum (OHPEC), with specific mention of smudging, Anishinaabe

medicine wheel teachings, yoga, tai-chi, qi-gong, homeopathy and naturopathy (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2019). An *Ethic of (Self/School) Care* will integrate the philosophy and methodologies associated with diverse Turtle Island Indigenous methodologies, Traditional Chinese Medicine, Vedic and Yogic Sciences as well as Euro-Western naturopathy and homeopathy alongside Allopathic health methodologies (modern medicine). This will offer students the knowledge to distinguish between these different traditions at the level of health philosophy, socio-historical-political genealogy, and their diverse methodologies of health promotion, disease prevention and intervention. Undertaken as curricular topics, students will have the opportunity to experience and embody a diverse range of health philosophies and methodologies from the allopathic, holistic, traditional and Indigenous methodologies already referentially mentioned in the current OHPEC.

With this proposal of adding more material to an already over-crowded curricular load, questions of subject priority and time allocation are necessarily raised. Following trends in Nordic countries, a *learning outcomes* approach to curriculum content design prioritizes “what pupils or students can actually do with what they know and have learned” (Mølsted & Karseth, 2016, p. 329), focusing on “the significance of learning content [as] the most important aspect in education” (p.333). Within an *Ethic of (Self/School) Care*, student, teacher, other-than-human and planetary well-being are named as priority learning outcomes of the elementary school experience, and thus compromise in currently existing academic subject matter will be necessary. An objective-driven *learning outcomes* model orients curriculum as “designed to develop specific capabilities directly connected to the needs of society” (p. 333), which supports the vision of the 2018 Global HPS Standards to recognize teacher, staff, student, community and eco-system flourishing as primordial concerns of 21st Century school health promotion. Such a commitment would require reconsideration of *why* students are taught subject content in schools, and *how* their knowledge and skill acquisition are being stewarded for meaningful application within the contexts of their life ecosystems. A curricular shift at the provincial level would require concerted

collaboration with various stakeholders, including teachers, teacher unions, school boards and the Ministry of Education (Kempf, 2018). The development and enactment of curriculum within an *Ethic of (Self-School) Care* is envisioned as a co-creative process with teachers, respecting them as professional pedagogues and caregivers, thus acknowledging that their “professional judgement must be central to the promotion of wellbeing (Kempf, 2018, p. 20). As health curriculum within an *Ethic of (Self/School) Care* aims to empower teachers and students to autonomously live their health literacy within the subjective contexts of their lives, the Indigenous, traditional and holistic health content is not “defined as a fixed body of knowledge to be learned, but as a range of possibilities to be explored through reasoning and interaction” (Mølsted & Karseth, 2016, p. 333).

In terms of *classroom praxis*, an *Ethic of (Self/School) Care* builds upon the existing practice of Indigenous land acknowledgement by integrating a daily practice of gratitude as a dynamic and unfolding process of learning how to care for self, other, other-than-human beings and planet. As an example, the Haudonesaunee traditional Thanksgiving Address entitled *Ohenten Kariwatekwen* “reflects their relationship of giving thanks for life and the world around them...teach[ing] mutual respect, conservation, love, generosity, and the responsibility to understand that what is done to one part of the Web of Life, we do to ourselves” (Sink, n.d.). A daily thanksgiving address of gratitude in an *Ethic of (Self/School) Care* serves as a practice of reflection on the interdependence of all life, as well as a source of inspiration to strategically, creatively and compassionately engage in health promotion practices that support mutual benefit across all levels of local and global relationships. Such a practice would be co-created with students and educators for age-appropriateness and current relevance, undertaken as an evolving meditative practice to “[l]earn to understand the depth of Self in Relation” (Graveline, 1998, p.154).

Collapse

This element of the Arc process asks what existing components are left behind or diminished. With reference to Ontario elementary school health promotion, an *Ethic of (Self/School) Care* engages with the component of *school purpose*.

Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario (Ministry of Education, 2014) introduces Promoting Wellbeing and Ensuring Equity as broadened goals of education, built upon “the education system’s three current priorities: increasing student achievement, closing gaps in student achievement and increasing public confidence in publicly funded education” (p. 3). An *Ethic of (Self/School) Care* leaves behind increasing academic achievement and increasing public confidence as the foundational priorities of school education, replacing them with the goals Promoting Wellbeing and Ensuring Equity at the level of humans, other-than-humans and the planet, while maintaining the priority of Closing the Gap in Student Achievement. With this fundamental shift, the image of schools producing learned citizens striving to “be recognized as among the best in the world” (p. 3), is collapsed into a goal of educating unique members of local communities towards the co-creation of a peaceful and just society of thriving individuals living on a flourishing shared planet. This vision not only places autonomy in self-care, other-care and planetary-care as a desirable and attainable outcome of education, it affirms that human beings have an inherent capacity to steward wellbeing and that this requires explicit cultivation. An *Ethic of (Self/School) Care* recognizes that schools simultaneously transmit knowledge, socialize students and contribute to the ways that individuals come to know themselves as agents of choice, with the freedom to contribute to the world they inhabit (Biesta, 2020). Embracing the influential power of education to shape character and identity, an *Ethic of (Self/School) Care* actively entrains an interdependent awareness of self as inhabiting broader life-contexts from within the school microcosm, essentially positing that “instead of personal interests, the purpose of self-realisation is for all living beings” (Wang, 2016, p. 1259).

Discipline

This component of Arc asks what will be continued or refined in the future from the present now. With regards to health promotion in Ontario elementary schools, this section addresses the existing efforts to increase equity through refinement of *community involvement*.

In Ontario elementary schools, equity and inclusion have an integrated presence throughout all academic subjects and school life following the *Ontario Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009). Currently, the focus of the strategy is to create a school climate that “respect[s] diversity, promot[es] inclusive education, and identif[ies] and eliminat[es] discriminatory biases, systemic barriers and power dynamics that limit the ability of students to learn, grow and contribute to society” (Ministry of Education, 2019, p. 75). In an *Ethic of (Self/School) Care*, this endeavour is expanded from the school classroom and school environment to the context of the broader school communities of students, staff and their families. In this future vision, equity, inclusion and anti-discrimination are undertaken as a community aspiration with schools serving as meeting places for families and community members to gather, voice opinions and exchange ideas, collaborating towards achieving the aforementioned vision from the *Ontario Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy*. In this way, school efforts will be informed by the lived realities of the local community, serving to cultivate greater coherence between school and home life as well as support the removal of “discriminatory biases, systemic barriers and power dynamics that limit the ability” (p. 75) of students’ families and local community members from thriving and fully participating in society. This integration of community as an interdependent branch of the school eco-system reflects the concept of responsive feedback loops from living systems theory (Macy & Brown, 2014), wherein components of the system provide vital insight into the harmonious or dissonant effects of existing elements. Concretely, inviting the community to voice their experiences of equity and inclusion would symbiotically educate a school’s response-ability to community needs.

Transformation

This final dimension of Arc asks what existing elements will be changed or transformed in the future. For the context of health promotion in Ontario elementary schools, this section engages with the components of *physical school environment (including school materials, food, air and water), teacher and staff role in health promotion, and the academic school calendar.*

An *Ethic of (Self/School) Care* magnifies its eco-spiritual focus on “care, holism and ecology” (World Health Organization, 1986, p. 4) at the level of local school eco-systems to include the *physical environments* of individual schools. Following the regenerative living systems culture of Permaculture, the schools who integrate an *Ethic of (Self/School) Care* will use 100% equitable, fair-trade, ecologically sustainable and/or recyclable materials for school building construction. The buildings themselves will make optimum use of natural light and employ the most efficient alternative energy technology available. Air quality is prioritized, and so schools will have ample indoor plant life and outdoor food gardens, including medicinal plants, pollinating plants and other soil building plants; these indoor and outdoor gardens will be an integral part of student learning and school care. The water quality in the school will be optimal, offering school communities filtered well or living spring water. Food served in schools will be 100% organic, grown without chemical pesticides, herbicides or insecticides, cruelty-free, sustainably harvested and locally sourced as much as possible. Focused attention will be paid to all school curricular materials to ensure that they align with the highest standards of ecological sustainability, human flourishing and social harmony. In doing so, schools adopt the role of social and ecological microcosms of the thriving world we truly want for future generations of humans, other-than-human beings and our shared planetary home.

An *Ethic of (Self/School) Care* transforms the role of *teachers and staff* in health promotion. Currently, in Ontario, student mental health and wellbeing is prioritized over that of teachers and staff (Kempf, 2018). In the future vision of schools as regenerative learning spaces, teachers and staff act as

embodied models of holistic wellbeing informed by and expressed through the cultivation of their own health. This reflects the aforementioned locus of care in an *Ethic of (Self/School) Care as interdependent relationships* as well as the principles of regenerative living systems, which recognize that “all elements directly contribute to the holistic health of ecosystems” (Denichaud, 2020, p. 82). This transformation is intimately linked to the *academic school calendar* which, in an *Ethic of (Self/School) Care*, will serve to support the priorities of student, staff and educator wellbeing. Relying on the experiential wisdom of educators, the academic calendar will reflect realistic academic expectations in balance with the priority of maintaining student, staff and environmental wellbeing. Adopting a truly regenerative and eco-holistic model, “the physical, social, mental, emotional, and environmental dimensions of health and wellbeing” (Langford et. al, 2014, p. 5), will be evenly prioritized throughout an academic year, never compromising the fundamental commitment to individual and collective thriving for the sake of academic achievement or performative results.

Mood

In this final section, exploration is made into how it might feel for a member of present time to observe *The Thing from the Future*, which has been framed as an organizational school culture of health promotion in Ontario elementary schools entitled, an *Ethic of (Self/School) Care*. In reflection on possible emotional reactions to such a proposal, a diverse range seems most probable. As an *Ethic of (Self/School) Care* alters the purpose of schooling, transforms the role of teachers and staff, as well as collapses Ontario education’s priority focus on academic achievement; fear, distrust and hostile resistance seem reasonable to expect. On the other hand, the promise of mental wellbeing, equity and environmental sustainability as orienting goals of education and school culture could inspire hope, enthusiasm and reassurance for individuals who are currently pre-occupied with the future wellbeing of their children, social harmony and ecological stability. Additionally, in further support of a positive emotional response, these components have already been introduced into current educational discourse at both local and

international levels (Institute of Medicine, 2013; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014, 2016; Rootman & Gordon-El-Bihbety, 2008; World Health Organization, 2018, 2020). Considering the cost that it would take to rebuild schools using specific materials, optimize food, water and air quality, doubts over feasibility could be strongly present for administrators, as such an endeavour would need to be subsidized and coordinated with other social sectors, private sectors and the government. However, coordinated communication with public health and environmental sectors could demonstrate the long-term cost-effectiveness of improved mental health, social harmony and environmental flourishing to concerned economists. It merits noting that degrees of uncertainty and trepidation are not unwelcoming to this paper's proposal, as these feelings naturally emerge when considering the

significant leap our culture must make...Creating regenerative systems is not simply a technical, economic, ecological or social shift: it has to go hand-in hand with an underlying shift in the way we think about ourselves, our relationships with each other and with life as a whole. (Wahl, 2018)

Concluding Remarks

UNESCO 2050 presents the existential challenge to stretch our imaginations in order to envision a future of education that supports a world that does not yet exist (UNESCO, 2019a, 2019b). Present day concomitant expressions of individual mental illness and chronic disease, social disharmony and environmental instability offers a unique opportunity to re-think the causal and correlative relationships between individual, social and ecological health. In the face of ubiquitous suffering, we can embrace our collective fear, anger and sorrow as catalysts "to unleash our intelligence and our ingenuity and our solidarity for the healing of our world" (Macy in Tippet, 2016); for creating 'Health for All' from the microcosmic eco-systems of our classrooms and schools. This paper's exploration and presentation of an *Ethic of (Self/School) Care* engages with UNESCO's invitation through the recognition that,

[t]he health of human populations and the health of global ecosystems are inextricably linked and the need for fundamental changes in how we live is becoming impossible to ignore. While not the

complete answer, education must be a part of imagining and transforming our *patterns of living*.
(Davis & Cooke, 2007, p. 346) [emphasis added]

Adopting the vision of Ontario elementary schools in 2050 as regenerative learning spaces has strong implications for immediate steps at the level of teacher education and curriculum design in Ontario. From our current time, teacher training programs will need to rethink how curriculum is taught, examine the commitment and obstacles to integrating different ways of knowing and being in teacher health education, and how practices of educator self-care are related to student wellbeing. At the level of curriculum design, bridging conversations with Indigenous communities, holistic and traditional health practitioners, Ontario educators and administrators is essential to begin unpacking the possibilities and challenges for integrating different ways of knowing and being at the level of curricula, pedagogy and policy design. This paper concludes with an active hope for the cultivation of individual, collective, and planetary wellbeing from the heart of Ontario elementary schools in 2050, reassured by the aspirational words of the current Ontario Ministry of Education (2016).

If our goal in Ontario is for all of our students to become active members of their communities, able to bring about positive change and to flourish in society, we must heighten our focus on well-being as a crucial prerequisite for long-term success. We must also acknowledge that the well-being of our children and youth is our priority as a society. (p. 2)

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