

Reflecting on a Well-Being Experience With Ninth Graders in a Public School: The Why, What, and How of a Screaming Heart

Jay Kimiecik, Miami University

***Author Note:** I would like to thank all of the Miami University students who dedicated themselves to facilitating the Well-Being Way with the ninth graders and especially, Stephanie Rogers, who assisted with data collection and transcribed many interviews.*

Abstract

Data suggest that adolescents continue to face enormous struggles with their own health and well-being despite a multitude of community- and school-based positive youth development and healthy living interventions. The purpose of this article is to provide my perspective pertaining to a well-being enhancement experience—the Well-Being Way—that was conducted over a two and a half year period with ninth graders, teachers, and college students at a local public school. I will explain why education should be focused on well-being enhancement for adolescents, what form or concept of well-being that guided the Well-Being Way, and how the well-being curricular experience was implemented. It is hoped that my account of this experience will provoke thought on the part of educators and health professionals to create an inner imperative for exploring the

idea that paying attention to students' well-being should be an essential element of the educational experience.

Introduction

"You have to do what your heart is screaming at you to do." I can still feel those words spoken by a ninth grader during a post-experience interview echoing in my brain. In looking back the screaming heart serves as a useful metaphor for the Well-Being Way (WBW), a self-development experience connecting the self to health that was implemented at a local public high school over a two-year period. At the time, my heart was screaming at me to try the WBW with youth. Almost three years later, I have written up a report to the granting agency and presented the findings at a conference, but my heart is still screaming to tell more of the story. Hence, this is my reflection on "why," "what" and "how" of the WBW that was implemented with ninth graders with implications for the health, well-being, and education of young people.

The Why of Well-Being

How did I get to the point of reflecting and writing on well-being? As a college professor going on 20 years, my work has evolved from studying exercise behavior via psychological theory (Kimiecik, 1992; Kimiecik & Horn, 1998) to investigating optimal experience (Jackson & Kimiecik, 2008; Stein, Kimiecik, Daniels, & Jackson., 1995) to exploring the realms of human performance and flourishing (Kimiecik & Newburg, 2009). My life's work, although eclectic in terms of moving back and forth between theory and practice, has typically involved action or outreach in the areas of physical activity and well-being with diverse groups across the lifespan (e.g., Kimiecik, 1998; Lewis, Zullig, Kimiecik, Ward, & Horn, 2010). I have a practical itch to try things out with people in real settings and, for better or worse, I continually scratch it. I was trained to be a physical education teacher, worked as the physical education director at a boys' club, as a sportswriter, and as an editor, to name just a few of my pre-professor work lives.

For the past five years, fifty percent of my workload has been devoted to founding and directing Miami University's employee health and well-being program and much of my other time I've worked with Miami's Partnership Office. The Partnership Office's mission is to cultivate and extend school/university partnerships; grow partnerships between Miami and community/social service agencies; and connect faculty, staff, and students in partnerships across campuses. The office developed out of foundational work done between Miami University and the Talawanda School District (Oxford, Ohio) over a five-year period beginning in 2001, when Miami and Talawanda entered into a formal partnership agreement. The Talawanda-Miami Partnership is a member of the National Network for Educational Renewal (NNER) and one of 25 school/university/community partnerships across the nation working to renew public education (Poetter & Eagle, 2009).

As part of NNER's mission, the Agenda for Education in a Democracy focuses on helping youth develop skills, dispositions, and knowledges for effective participation in a democracy as well as to "nurture the learning and well-being [emphasis added] of every student" (<http://www.ieiseattle.org/AED.htm>). It is within this mission and focus that the WBW curricular experience for ninth graders was attempted. Goodlad, Mantle-Bromley, and Goodlad (2004, p. 164) contend that "something appears to be either absent in the curriculum of schooling or poorly executed, or both." The "something," I contend, is opportunities for youth to explore and enhance their well-being as part of the daily school experience; to discover and be themselves; to feel alive; and to make connections with their peers and teachers in ways that are engaging and meaningful, and that transcend academic course content. Of course, these observations about the educational experience and what it should or could be doing to engage students more in their own lives are not new. Maslow (1971, pp. 168-169) writes:

The function of education, the goal of education—the human goal, the humanistic goal, the goal so far as human beings are concerned—is ultimately the "self-actualization" of a person,

the becoming fully human, the development of the fullest height that the human species can stand up to or that the particular individual can come to.

Almost 40 years ago Maslow was writing that “the schools should be helping the children look within themselves...” This can be done, for example, pertaining to one’s vocational interest, as Maslow (1971, p. 185) states: “Another goal which our schools and teachers should be pursuing is the discovery of vocation, of one’s fate and destiny. Part of learning who you are, part of being able to hear your inner voices, is discovering what it is that you want to do with your life.” More recently, Noddings (2003, p. 167) suggests that education typically encourages students to put their lives on hold “planning to be happy ‘some day’—while they obediently strive for the rewards attached to doing their best at everything.” Noddings feels that a part of being an educator is to help students “evaluate their own interests and work and, if possible, to find tasks at which they can work happily.” Those of us who teach college students know that K-12 education doesn’t spend much time doing this. How many college students do we encounter who are really engaged in the feel of their lives? Many of them are planning to be happy “some day” while they check off the courses they need to graduate, so they can get a job, so then they can be happy—a happiness that may never come (see Nettle, 2006 for more).

The WBW work with the ninth graders at Talawanda fell under the Talawanda-Miami Partnership umbrella. The timing was right. The Talawanda administration was redesigning curriculum as well as the physical and social environment of the school to enhance the ninth grade experience and ease the transition from middle school to high school. They were looking for something to offer the ninth graders during what they called a weekly “enrichment” period. Ninth grade has been called the pivotal year of high school (Black, 2004), and rightly so. About 25 percent of ninth graders fail the grade nationwide and data from Haney (2003) show that 70 to 80 percent of students who fail to pass ninth grade will not graduate from high school. Data also suggests that most of the instruction

of ninth graders is teacher-centered, with teachers lecturing and students taking notes and completing assignments; students receive little guidance socially and academically, and even in well-managed schools, researchers have observed that “something was missing” (Lounsbury & Johnston, 1985).

Wheelock’s (1993) study of school reform described ninth grade as a “minefield for the most vulnerable students” with ninth graders failing to develop bonds with teachers and their school, leading to disengagement and a downward performance spiral. Data examining the daily experiences of adolescents supplement these ninth grade experiences. Schoolwork, including classwork and homework accounts for an average of 25-30% of adolescents’ waking hours (Larson & Verma, 1999), and during these experiences they report high rates of boredom and low intrinsic motivation (Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1984; Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen, 1993). A quarter of an adolescent’s day is spent being minimally engaged in work directed by others with little interest in the work for its own sake, for the joy of learning. Larson (2000) warns that these kinds of experiences do very little to prepare adolescents to take control of their lives and create their own meaning and engagement as they move into young adulthood.

So partly based on my daily interactions, observations, and discussions with college students, my interest in optimal human experiences and flourishing, and because my daughter was transitioning into ninth grade at Talawanda, my heart was screaming to try something that might help these students look within, or at least experience themselves in a way that might be fun and engaging—to develop the inner skill to feel their lives. In addition, because of a fascination with physical activity and healthy living that began many years ago, I was interested in exploring with young people the connection between the felt self and healthy living.

Well-Being and Healthy Living

A strong connection exists between flourishing and significant markers of psychological and physical health (e.g., Ryan, Huta, & Deci, 2008; Ryff, Singer, & Love, 2004). Ryan and colleagues

(2008) suggest that flourishing leads to various healthy outcomes and is linked to indicators of well-being. They propose that living in a way that is true to one's self focuses individuals on what is intrinsically worthwhile to human beings, which would lead to enhanced vitality and self-determination, reflected through intrinsic motivation. In addition, committing to a process of engaged or enriched living will likely propel individuals towards healthy behaviors, such as exercising, eating energy-dense food, and getting quality sleep. People who feel engaged in living, who can be themselves, who feel alive are more likely to undertake the behaviors that are "good for you" than people who don't feel this way about themselves (Ryff & Singer, 1998).

Once this connection is revealed to people and they are allowed to explore it in their own way with some guidance, good things tend to happen. We have found, for example, that employees who participated in a well-being enhancement process became more physically active (Lewis et al., 2010). They naturally became more active by becoming more aware of how they wanted their lives to *feel* (more on this word in a bit). Their subjective vitality increased and they put that energy to good use by moving their bodies. In essence, this was the connection my heart was screaming at me to explore with young people partly because the health profile of adolescents is woeful. Consider:

- For children aged 12-19 years, prevalence in obesity has increased from 5.0% to 17.6% in just 30 years and 1/3 of children in this age group are overweight (Ogden, Carroll, & Flegal, 2008).
- Only 9 percent of U.S. adolescents eat the recommended five or more daily servings of fruits and vegetables (Foltz, Cook, Szilagyi, Auinger, Bucher, & Steward, 2007).
- Physical activity markedly declines as children move into the adolescent period (Brodersen, Steptoe, Boniface, & Wardle, 2007) and then further decreases

as adolescents move into young adulthood (Gordon-Larsen, Nelson, & Popkin, 2004).

- A poll by the National Sleep Foundation found that only 20% of adolescents sleep the recommended 9 hours on school nights. And studies are beginning to show that people who sleep less tend to be overweight (Kohatsu, Tsai, Young, VanGilder, Burmeister, Stromquist, & Merchant, 2006).

These data have serious implications for long-term health, productivity, performance, and quality of life in the 21st Century. In sum, the experience of flourishing seems relevant and pertinent to the lives of people of all ages and engaging young people in this process could help make begin to make intrinsic connections to healthy behaviors as well as other possible outcomes, such as enhanced academic performance and social relations. But what does it really mean to flourish or to live an enriched life?

The “What” of Well-Being

My working view of flourishing is strongly based on what’s called *eudaimonic well-being*. The philosophy, conceptualization, and current curricular experiences of the WBW evolved partly from eudaimonic well-being theory and research and my own eudaimonic experiences (Kimiecik & Newburg, 2009). Space doesn’t allow me to go into all of the details but a brief explanation of where the Well-Being Way comes from and is coming from (the what) provides the rationale for how we introduced the WBW to the ninth graders.

The WBW for youth does not focus directly on enhancing happiness as typically operationalized or self-esteem as these are considered outcomes of living within a eudaimonic perspective. As Nettle (2006) points out, eudaimonia or the good life, which he calls “level three happiness,” is a different entity or experience from typical perspectives of happiness that include momentary feelings or judgments about feelings, which he labels level one and two, respectively. Happiness is but an emotion, which results from our genes

and experiences, and over time becomes relatively stable. This has led some researchers (e.g., Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, p. 21) who study optimal experience to suggest:

...if one wants to improve the quality of everyday life, happiness may be the wrong place to start. In the first place, self-reports of happiness do not vary from person to person as much as other feelings do; no matter how empty a life otherwise might be, most persons will be reluctant to admit being unhappy.

Looked at in this way, happiness cannot be responsible for the development of a flourishing and thriving life, only a partial outcome of living one. So, despite what all of the self-help books suggest, it doesn't make much sense to try to enhance happiness—except for the people writing the self-help books!

Similarly, attempting to enhance the self-esteem of youth also seems off the mark when it comes to quality of living. Typically, self-esteem refers to a person's overall judgment about how well the self is doing (Campbell, 1984) or a personal judgment of worthiness (Coopersmith, 1967). Measuring self-esteem is problematic (Baumeister, Tice, & Hutton, 1989) as people often report more of how they wish to appear than about their "true" selves (Kohn, 1994), and, similar to happiness, few people score low on self-esteem scales anyway (Tice, 1993). In addition, extensive reviews of self-esteem research by Smelser (1989) and Schroeder, Laffin, and Weiss (1993) report that feeling good about oneself has minimal impact on adolescent risk behavior (e.g., alcohol and drug abuse). Csikszentmihalyi (1997, p. 24) concludes "from this it follows contrary to popular wisdom, increasing children's self-esteem is not always a good idea."

The WBW is not about happiness or self-esteem, rather it's about *eudaimonic* well-being. As suggested by many scholars, *eudaimonia* appears to have originated with Aristotle (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Norton, 1976; Ryan et al., 2008; Ryff & Singer, 2008; Sugarman, 2007). Sugarman (2007, p. 179) interprets Aristotle's eu-

daimonia as a “flourishing state of the soul.” Ryff and colleagues (2004, p. 1383) suggest that eudaimonic well-being is the “realization of one’s true potential. Each individual comes to life with unique capacities. The central task in life is to recognize and realize these talents.” Nettle (2006, p. 20) writes, “There is no single thing that it feels like to achieve eudaimonia, since everyone’s potential is different.” Eudaimonic living is the meshing of one’s true self (internal) with life activities (external) leading to authentic self-expression, vitality, and feeling alive (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Waterman (1993) writes that when people are true to their daimon, they feel intensely alive and authentic, existing as who they really are in what he calls a state of *personal expressiveness*. And according to Norton (1976, p. 216), “eudaimonia is the condition of living in harmony with one’s daimon or innate potentiality, ‘living in truth to oneself.’” Eudaimonia is both a feeling and a condition. You can only feel eudaimonia as it is an “inner imperative.” When do I feel alive? When do I feel I am being myself? What does it feel like when I am writing, teaching, shooting a basketball, whistling a song, sitting in a meeting, eating a meal with my family? Am I living out my “inner imperative” at these moments? If not, when? According to Norton (p. 5), it is when “the present activity of the individual is in harmony with the daimon that is his true self.”

This may all sound a little esoteric but discovering and experiencing one’s eudaimonic well-being is essential for a flourishing, fulfilling life. I propose that underlying eudaimonic well-being is the *skill of feel*—one’s inner imperative. At some level, most people can relate to this idea of feel. Once you are in tune to feel, it’s everywhere. For example, Bob Dylan was asked by a reporter: “Why do you sing?” His response: “I like the feel of singing.” Oprah Winfrey said in one of her aftershows a few years ago that after her first interview as a talk show host (after being demoted from news anchor), “I finished that show and I felt like, ‘Oh, I can be myself.’” She goes on to say, “You know what it is you’re supposed to do by how it feels.”

Simply, the WBW is based on this feel, a way of living uncovered by Doug Newburg (Clawson & Newburg, 2008; Newburg,

1993, 2009; Newburg, Kimiecik, Durand-Bush, and Doell, 2002). This idea of a life powered by feel parallels the notion that the self is experienced (Hoffman, Stewart, Warren, & Meek, 2008), not merely a cognitive construct (Polkinghorne, 2001). Using feel as the undergirding of eudaimonic well-being pertains to what Hoffman et al. (2009, p. 152) consider a “deeper conception of how a person experiences oneself” and approaches Gendlin’s (1997) *felt sense* of oneself. Similar to Gendlin, experiencing the feel of one’s life is something thoughts, feelings, and words cannot completely capture.

Our feel, our inner nature (Maslow, 1968), our eudaimonic well-being is always there waiting to be experienced and if we develop our skill to feel it eventually will be screaming at us to live it—the screaming heart! Feel and eudaimonic well-being go beyond words as Hoffman et al. (2008, p. 18) observe: “Contrary to many post-modern theories that emphasize the necessity of language in self understanding, this suggests another realm of experiencing oneself beyond words.” This element of well-being or feel in education has been missing for a long time because of the pervasiveness of scientific rationality where “objective” information and intellectual analysis rule the day. Granger (2006, p. 274) quotes educational philosopher John Dewey from one of his 1926 writings: “Modern preoccupation with science...has been disastrous...It is disastrous because civilization built upon these principles cannot supply the demand of the soul for joy, or freshness of experience.” Granger (2006, p. 274) implores education to “expand our perception of the meaning and value of what happens in our schools and classrooms beyond what can be articulated and known according to the tenets of scientific rationality.”

In sum, eudaimonic well-being pertains to the feel of living or one’s inner imperative (see Ryff & Singer, 2008 for a slightly different interpretation). The WBW was built on the simple idea that each of us—from young to old—is an expert on how we want to *feel*, which is that unique experience within each one of us that makes us who we are. Walt Disney recognized this aspect of being human that transcends age and said many years ago during a radio interview:

So in planning a new picture we don't think of grown-ups and we don't think of children. But just of that fine clean unspoiled spot down deep in every one of us that maybe the world has made us forget and that maybe our pictures can help recall. (Lux Radio Theater, 1938)

The assumption is that discovering and building this *feel* leads to better performance, healthier living, quality leadership, and doing good, sustainable work in one's community. Hence, my interest with the Talawanda ninth graders was twofold: 1) Could we introduce to them the concept and experience of eudaimonic well-being via *feel* in such a way (i.e., interesting) that would help them pay closer attention to, and explore, their inner imperative? and 2) Could we help them connect how they want to feel to healthier living in such a way that was not condescending or manipulative?

The How of Well-Being Enhancement with Ninth Graders

Typically, health-related intervention programs for adolescents focus on giving them information or experiences pertaining to the pros and cons (risks/benefits) of participating in "risky" or "healthy" behaviors (Reyna & Farley, 2007). These health enhancement programs or applied health behavior research interventions are based on the notion of prevention, which is grounded in a biomedical model that evolved out of a philosophy of science dating back to Descartes (see Capra, 1982). The main problem with these approaches emanating from the biomedical/prevention paradigm is that the meaning or lived experience of the individual is missing (Buchanan, 2000; Fahlberg, 2004). Thus, it is no surprise that many health-based, adolescent-focused programs or interventions have achieved limited success and that the effects "fade away in a matter of months" (Reyna & Farley, 2007, p. 3). For example, nutritional education in the schools does not work to change the eating behavior of children or their parents despite the fact that the federal government spends over \$1 billion per year on such programs (Mendoza, 2007).

As discussed briefly earlier, Ryff and Singer (1998) suggest that health-promoting behaviors may be more likely to be adopted and

maintained by those who demonstrate life vitality, engagement, and quality connections to others: “It is thus attention to the broader context of people’s lives and their encounters with core life goods that may illuminate underlying reasons for practicing, or failing to practice, positive health behaviors.” (p. 22). This type of thinking serves as the philosophical and conceptual backdrop for the burgeoning areas of positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) and positive youth development (Larson, 2000, 2006). In a sense, working with adolescents to help them explore the feel of their eudaimonic well-being and make connections to healthy living would fall under the umbrella of positive youth development, which assumes that young people have an inherent agency to be directed toward positive growth and are agents of their actions (Larson, 2006). But I wanted to be careful that the WBW not fall into what Held (2002, 2004) calls the tyranny trap of positive psychology—experts telling people what happiness is and how to attain it. Sugarman (2007) suggests that when people give themselves up to the positive psychology experts’ prescriptions for the good life, their autonomy and freedom begin to disappear, “not in one enormous earth-shattering event but gradually, in tiny increments...the rights of choice and self-authorship are being surrendered bit by bit in our everyday activities” (p. 189). It would be difficult, near impossible, to find and experience one’s unique feel, one’s personal destiny with well-being prescriptions offered by others.

If eudaimonic well-being pertains to that unique experience inside each one of us then any curricular experience offered must provide adolescents with an opportunity to explore that in a safe, positive, and fun environment. The facilitator’s role in this case would be to introduce experiences where youth can experience what it feels like to be themselves, to be expressive in a way that fits them, and to help and support their peers throughout the process. As is evident, the idea of helping young people find and experience their own eudaimonic well-being is not easy to do because of what Larson (2006) calls the “Intentionality Paradox.” In his example, although not pertaining directly to eudaimonic well-being, adults need to intentionally help youth experience intentionality, which he

defines as organizing effort to work toward goals. The dilemma faced by the adults is trying to keep ownership for the activities in the hands of the youth at the same time trying to keep the activities on track. In addition, when young people are asked what they find most enjoyable about these kinds of programs, they cite those that are “activity oriented,” provide substantial opportunities for “peer interaction,” “choice” and “structure,” “being outdoors,” and utilizing “high school or college students” as facilitators (DuBois, Lockerd, Reach, & Parra, 2003). Similarly with eudaimonic well-being, most people need some structure and support to help them collect their own data on those moments when they feel alive or feel that they can be themselves, but if those experiences are too heavy handed, prescribed, or based on the facilitator’s notion of well-being, the individuals will feel judged, lose interest, be less engaged, and lose ownership of their own process.

In sum, the notion of young people flourishing or thriving seems relevant to their present quality of life as well as to how they will experience their lives in the future (the why). Education should play a role in helping young people become or be themselves, to discover, experience, and live their inner imperative (the what). The “how” of doing the “what” is what my inner imperative—my screaming heart—had led me to try.

The Screaming Heart in Action

I was fully aware that the idea of feel and eudaimonic well-being is not something that most public school administrators, teachers, and students think much about in the course of a school day. The WBW goes against the grain of our present public education system and what students are doing each day in schools. But after a number of meetings with the principal, assistant superintendent, guidance counselor, wellness coordinator, and some teachers, Talawanda was willing to give the WBW a try with all freshmen as it aligned with their weekly enrichment experience. The 37-minute enrichment period each Wednesday is for all students. Each enrichment class has about 15-20 students assigned alphabetically according to last names and includes a teacher as their enrichment leader. Students

can attend club meetings, take makeup tests, play cards, study, etc., but there is no structured curriculum or organized enrichment activities.

In Fall 2007 I taught a course called “Positive Youth Development and Well-Being” with the idea that the college students in the class would continue in Spring 2008 to facilitate the WBW with the ninth graders. At the time I had designed what I would call a very dynamic, fluid, and organic WBW curricular experience based on my work with college students in various special seminars where I offered the WBW as an educational experience, and with the Miami employees that were part of a study (Lewis et al., 2010) conducted to examine the effectiveness of the WBW as a well-being enhancer in the workplace. Although I have done a fair amount of real world, action-oriented health and well-being programming (e.g., Kimiecik, 1998), I don’t consider it a personal strength. I am drawn to this work by feel but then realize that the people involved always want or need more structure than I want or am capable of providing. When it comes to what some might call “curriculum development,” my approach has been getting people in a room and asking, “How do you want to feel? Let’s talk about that.” I like processing and writing. Fortunately, I have had a couple of great students over the years smitten by the WBW who helped give the Well-Being Way some structure with experiential activities that get people engaged in exploring eudaimonic well-being in a supportive environment.

During this Fall 2007 class, the students experimented with many of the WBW activities as I took them through the process of discovering the feel of eudaimonia. One good outcome of this course was that we had many discussions based on student feedback about what WBW activities would or would not work with ninth graders. I had recruited students into this class through Intercollegiate Athletics, various campus leadership programs, and service learning organizations. We had students from a variety of majors and the idea was that they would take the course in the fall and then continue on as WBW facilitators for the ninth graders in the spring. This was a good plan but didn’t work. In the end, some students couldn’t continue because of required class conflicts, didn’t want to

continue, or were told by me that they shouldn't continue. This left me scrambling to find quality facilitators. Utilizing college students as WBW facilitators rather than Talawanda seniors or teachers modeled the essence of the Talawanda-Miami partnership. There is a beauty in college students experiencing the WBW for themselves, sharing their experiences with ninth graders in the community, and taking them through some of the WBW curricular experiences.

Also in Fall 2007, I introduced the WBW to Talawanda teachers who were assigned to ninth grade enrichment for that year via two 2-hour workshops. These workshops were eye-opening. I engaged the teachers in a few of the WBW experiences that the ninth graders would experience and allowed opportunity for discussion. They enjoyed some of the activities and there was a healthy mix of buy in and skepticism. Overall, the workshops were well-received and I felt I did my best to listen to their experiences and concerns. Two experiences stand out. First, we had a long discussion that revolved around these questions: "Why did you get into teaching?" "How do you want to feel when you teach?" and "What gets in the way of that feel?" The stories of how some of them discovered their feel of teaching stay with me: one teacher when very young would play "school" with the neighborhood kids and would plan lessons for each child in the "school." Another teacher's mother forced him to join the high school choir and he fell in love with music, particularly with how it was taught. He was now a music teacher at the high school. Second, the teachers described "administrative work" and "state tests" as major barriers to feeling how they wanted to feel as teachers. They felt a big void between why they got into teaching and how often in the day they got to do what they loved. This, of course, is one of the challenges of eudaimonic well-being: How do you hold on to what's best about you if an environment isn't conducive to drawing it out of you? The answer is that's why feel is a skill that must be cultivated and protected.

By the end of the fall semester things were in place to implement the WBW curricular experience in Spring 2008 with the first cohort of college students, ninth graders, and teachers. We had the first few weeks of class to prepare the college students. This was a

chaotic time and that spring semester is a blur. Unlucky snow days and inexperienced college student facilitators were major challenges to overcome. But the biggest challenge was the ninth graders themselves. There was not enough mental/emotional preparation on my part or the school administration so that when we first started with the ninth graders on enrichment days, we disrupted the enrichment world they had created in the fall. Even though we had piloted the activities with ninth graders and attempted to follow the best practices of “how” to implement the WBW, the ninth graders resisted at first—they actually resisted some fun and playing around with their peers. They resisted play and getting to know each other on schooltime! This surprised me at first but upon reflection, play is becoming a lost art for this generation of young people. Schools are becoming achievement-oriented with emphasis on standardized tests. High school sports—once a bastion of play—are becoming highly-organized, year-round, adult-run experiences. As Noddings (2003) observes, schools are boring with little opportunity for playing around with things, ideas, and your peers. Playing around is a built in aspect of the WBW because when you play, you free yourself up to be yourself. And through this process, you begin to develop this skill of feel (Clawson & Newburg, 2008), which guides people into vocations and performances that optimize their lives and the lives of the people around them. Play is crucial for helping one’s inner imperative begin to unfold and develop. In interpreting the philosopher Gadamer, Vikhagen (n.d.) writes, “When we take part in a game, even though we are just playing for fun, or maybe because we are playing for fun, it is exactly what makes us able to see things represented the way they are supposed to...Through play, we can get a glimpse of the truthful representation of things.”

That entire fall the ninth graders had gotten into a routine of doing “their own thing” during the enrichment class and had gotten used to the inertia. Cliques had formed as well. As one ninth grader described her enrichment classroom before the WBW: “...And usually we’d group together in what we did—there was the band corner, the choir corner, and the sports corner...” It took almost the entire semester of weekly WBW activities to break down these walls of

seriousness, cliques, and the fear of being judged by one's peers, all of which block one's ability to explore and experience eudaimonic well-being. Some classrooms, some ninth graders, some college student facilitators, and some teachers never got there. But many of them did. The same ninth grader who commented on the cliques earlier reflects on the social impact of the WBW:

I was talking about how we'd all break up into groups before the Well-Being Way—we'd be over here playing cards, and the girls would be over there talking, and the boys would be over there talking about something. But after the Well-Being Way came here we all interacted together and not in separate groups.

Many of the WBW activities revolved around the idea of suspending judgment of your peers and appreciating each other's uniqueness. This social process is crucial to uncovering and experiencing one's eudaimonic well-being because it helps young people—or anyone for that matter—not worry about what others might think of them and frees them up to be themselves. Two more of the ninth graders we interviewed commented on this aspect of the WBW:

After you get to know the people in your enrichment class and you share something personal and they don't, you realize no one is going to judge you or anything and it's just easier.

When we were just talking about how unique everyone is, I remember that everyone was totally different in the class and then we started to know everyone better because of our uniqueness. I don't know if that's a word or not, but we just started going on and on, we just started piling up each other into a group.

When people believe they won't be judged by their peers or their teacher or the college student facilitator, they are more willing to share, to engage in their own process, and to pay attention to how

they may help their peers as well. This does not happen by accident nor does it happen overnight, which is apparent from one college student facilitator's account of her WBW experience:

I wasn't really nervous but I didn't really know what to expect...but I was really excited because I thought I could really have an impact on these ninth graders. I thought "I can go through the motions and get it over with" or "really try to connect with them." I think I could have done a better job, but you know I would probably say that either way. And I was lucky, I had a really good class and there were a couple that didn't speak up very often or participate but on the whole they would really stay focused on the activities each week. At first, they all didn't really know what the point was and at first I'd say when I started taking this in the fall I didn't really know what it meant either, so I would try to let them know it was okay that they didn't understand it. But as time went on they really did start to get it because in my last few sessions we would do an activity and I'd ask "Why did we do this activity?" and they would know what it means right away...so at the end I told them a lot of this stuff you might not use right now but in a few years or maybe not until you're in college you'll look back and think, "Oh that's why I did this or that's what she was talking about." I think they did a good job and I think a lot of them were engaged and connected but I think a lot of them won't know what we did that for...for a few years.

This college student, a graduating senior, took the WBW to heart and gave up an internship offer from a professional basketball team to pursue her interest in a foreign language when she graduated by applying for a language program in Europe. She was accepted and went. Her heart was screaming at her to do the language program all along but popular notions of success, status, and achievement were drowning out her ability to hear it. She credited her participation in the WBW for helping her quiet the noise around her and so she

could really pay attention to how she wanted to feel. Once that happened, the decision of going to Eurpoe, although not easy, became obvious. There were definitely some ninth graders who experienced the link between feel, healthy living, and performance but realized that verbalizing the relationship is difficult:

It's hard to explain, I mean we learned when you find your feel you're probably going to do better at the things that you're trying really hard to do and you're probably going to eat better and have respect for yourself and once you can find your feel you're going to want to keep doing it, so you're probably just going to want to keep doing it and you'll probably be better and become more successful.

I got to know one ninth grader because I had to sub twice in her enrichment class on WBW days due to a college student facilitator's illness. I felt this student made dramatic strides from beginning to end so we interviewed her to find out more:

Well, to be honest, I thought it [WBW] was a little cheesy. By cheesy, I thought it was going to be dumb, like why did we have to do this, it's just something out of random. And when we started doing this—like how do I feel—well, I usually never feel anything, to be honest. I don't know how to express myself really in anything. But now I really got to know all the people in my enrichment class and sometimes I wonder why did it just have to be ninth graders and why couldn't it be the whole school doing it?

In one of the WBW classroom sessions, this student shared the fact that she missed her brother who was in the military at the time. She kept his picture on her nightstand to help her remember how it felt when he was around. No one in her enrichment class knew this part of her. In the interview she got emotional when describing the moment she decided to share this side of her with the class:

I just decided that we all have equal powers and no one can take that away from you. I wanted to share the story about my brother because I wanted them to know my story. Don't lose yourself, don't give yourself up, and don't do things you wouldn't do, just be yourself. Make sure you are going through the right path you need to follow, what you want to follow, not what others want you to follow. You truly have to find yourself and what you want to do, what your heart is screaming at you to do.

Of course, not all ninth graders in that first cohort had transformative experiences. Some of them wrote nasty cracks on the post-assessment forms, such as, "Didn't understand and seemed like a bunch of people on weed," "I thought the WBW was stupid," "I personally thought it was a waste of time."

We listened to the feedback and came back the following year more prepared. We offered a special adventure challenge in Fall 2008 at a local state park utilizing the talents and resources of Miami's Outdoor Pursuit Center staff. I also conducted an assembly-oriented WBW session in the school's auditoria in December. These activities were offered to better prepare the second cohort of ninth graders from a social and mental perspective. The purpose of the outdoor experience was to begin to orient the freshmen to the WBW experience and provide them with an opportunity to get to know the other students in their enrichment class. Each enrichment class (accompanied by their enrichment teacher) walked to six different challenges, where they had to work together as a team to complete the challenge before they could move on to the next challenge. For example, one challenge required the group to paddle in kayaks in pairs out to buoys and find the buoys with their team color. This challenge required skill, teamwork, and perseverance. Feedback from the adventure challenge indicated that outdoor experiences have great potential to contribute to the self-development process (see Larson, 2000, for more on outdoor education for positive youth development). For example, 63% of the students stated the out-

door experience helped me “get to know students in my enrichment class.”

Also, in the second year I had more time to recruit college student facilitators and I required attendance as part of the course at a weekend workshop just before the start of the spring 2009 semester that introduced the facilitators to the revised WBW process (Kimiecik, Poetter, & Newburg, 2009). And many of the same teachers were involved again and paired up with facilitators based on personal and life interests. Many improvements were made in the curricular experience and the data bore out the fact that we did a much better job of implementing the WBW experience for the second group of ninth graders. Forty eight percent of the ninth graders agreed that the WBW helped them get to know the students in their enrichment class. In addition, freshman failure rates dropped and attendance increased. And the data near and dear to my screaming heart showed that from pre- to post-curricular experience students increased feelings of autonomy and subjective vitality and that these variables were linked statistically to increased physical activity, decreased use of technology, and healthier eating as evidenced by increased consumption of green salad and carrots. On the prevention side, 41 percent of the ninth graders believed that participation in WBW helped them to avoid risky behaviors such as doing drugs.

The End of the Screaming Heart?

My screaming heart had led me to try the WBW process with young people and the experiences of the ninth graders and the college students as well as the interviews and quantitative data seemed to justify my hunch that when young people are guided to be more attune to their felt self good things happen: performance is enhanced, healthy behaviors become more attractive, and social connections are built. But we weren't invited back to continue with the WBW for the following year. Hindsight being 20-20, the WBW is a very different process that most people—young and old—are not ready for. We should have offered the WBW to a few of the enrichment classes on a voluntary basis rather than to the entire ninth grade

class. Start small and grow. But, ultimately, I'm not sure whether the philosophy of the WBW—one that emphasizes individual freedom, play, and autonomy—can work within the present institution of schooling that values standardization and testing.

I became acutely aware of this philosophical tension early on in the process when at one of the early teacher workshops, I showed a clip from *Surfing for Life* (Brown, 1999), a video documentary that highlighted the lives of older adults who were still stoked and surfing in their 70s, 80s, and 90s. I was using the clip as an example of what something feels like and how it can enhance the quality of one's life in many ways. These surfers, some of whom were teachers and doctors, were full of energy and vibrancy, and really loved life. One segment highlighted the life of Woody Brown, 88, who early in his life had experienced the death of his wife during childbirth. He was so distraught that he left his child with relatives, moved to Hawaii, and found surfing, which helped him to find the courage to create a new life. Another segment highlighted two teachers, Peter Cole and Fred Van Dyke, who described times when they missed meetings or classes to engage in their favorite activity, especially when the surf was up. As Cole states, "When the surf's good, you just have to cancel the social gatherings, forget about the party, forget about the wedding that we were going to go to, and this and that, the surf's up."

The reaction from some of the teachers caught me a little by surprise. Some of them judged Brown's actions as unconscionable. They judged him as selfish for leaving his child. Second, some teachers could not get past their belief that Cole and Van Dyke were being irresponsible for missing some mandatory meetings even though their comments were made with a twinkle in their eye, and add the fact that the clip stated they were teachers at the esteemed Punahou School, one of the premier college-preparatory schools in Hawaii. I explained that the intent of showing the clips was to serve as an example of how finding the feel in an activity can lead to one building a pretty cool life and many of these surfers were recognized as being high quality teachers or doctors. They had figured out how to balance freedom and responsibility. Surfing on some days pro-

vided them the energy they needed to do good work—faculty meeting be damned. In the end, I agreed not to use the surfing clips in any of the WBW curricular experience for ninth graders.

Implementing the WBW within a public school challenges many of the curricular activities embedded within the traditional “deep structures of schooling” (Goodlad, et al., 2004, p. 165). Ultimately, our present institution of education is aligned with the structure of responsibility based on a model of success that focuses on getting good grades, getting into college, finding a good job, building a family, buying a house, and being a consumer (Clawson & Newburg, 2008). Be responsible, act your age, grow up is what we are teaching young people. But that is only one side of the human development coin. A sense of being yourself, developing the skill of feel, discovering how you want to feel and building your life around that—this is the other side of the coin and without it we aren’t building up much human capital.

Nussbaum (2010) argues that a system of education (both K–12 and higher education) needs to prepare students for rich and meaningful lives, and suggests that the survival of democracy depends on it. It is imperative that education help young people develop the skill of finding and listening to their screaming heart. What about that unique experience inside each one of us that makes us who we are? What about that fine, clean unspoiled spot down deep in every one of us? Are we afraid to stir that pot in young people, afraid that freedom will trump responsibility and that chaos will ensue? Have we forgotten that moment when the feel of teaching came alive for us? Are we afraid that our magic is fading and that we don’t know how to get it back or how to help young people make their own magic? Robert McCammon (1992, pp. 2-3), the novelist, captures this process in a passage from *Boy’s Life*:

We all start out knowing magic. We are born with whirlwinds, forest fires, and comets inside us. We are born able to sing to birds and read the clouds, and see our destiny in grains of sand. But then we get the magic educated right out of our souls. We get it church-ed out, spanked out, washed out, and combed out.

We get put on the straight and narrow and told to be responsible. Told to act our age. Told to grow up, for God's sake. And you know why we were told that? Because the people doing the telling were afraid of our wildness and youth, and because the magic we knew made them ashamed and sad of what they'd allowed to wither in themselves. . . . Life itself does its best to take that memory of magic away from us. You don't know it's happening until one day you feel you've lost something but you're not sure what it is.

We must not let the magic of school wither away until we can't get it back for ourselves or for the young people who desperately want to experience a screaming heart.

I hear a feeble sound. It's getting louder. My eudaimonic heart is still beating.

This gives me hope.

References

- Baumeister, R., Tice, D., & Hutton, D. (1989). Self-presentational motivations and personality differences in self-esteem. *Journal of Personality, 57*, 547-579.
- Black, S. (2004, January/February). The pivotal year. *American School Board Journal, 42-44*.
- Brodersen, N., Steptoe, A., Boniface, D., & Wardle, J. (2007). Trends in physical activity and sedentary behavior in adolescence: Ethnic and socioeconomic differences. *British Journal of Sports Medicine, 41*, 140-144.
- Brown, D. (Producer & Director). (1999). *Surfing for life*. United States: David L. Brown Productions.
- Buchanan, D. (2000). *An ethic for health promotion: Rethinking the sources of human well-being*. New York: Oxford University Press.

- Campbell, R. (1984). *The new science: Self-esteem psychology*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.
- Capra, F. (1982). *The turning point: Science, society, and the rising culture*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Clawson, J., & Newburg, D. (2008). *Powered by feel: How individuals, teams and companies excel*. Hackensack, NJ: World Scientific.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1997). *Finding flow: The psychology of engagement in everyday life*. New York: Basic Books.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M., & Larson, R. (1984). *Being adolescent*. New York: Basic Books.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M., Rathunde, K., & Whalen, S. (1993). *Talented teenagers: The roots of success and failure*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Coopersmith, S. (1967). *The antecedents of self-esteem*. San Francisco, CA: W.H. Freeman.
- Deci, E., & Ryan, R. (2008). Hedonia, eudaimonia, and well-being: An introduction. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 9, 1-11.
- Dubois, D., Lockerd, E., Reach, K., & Parra, G. (2003). Effective strategies for esteem-enhancement: What do young adolescents have to say? *Journal of Early Adolescence*, 23, 405-434.
- Fahlberg, L.A. (2004). *The human world of meaning: An interpretive study of "health behavior."* Unpublished manuscript.
- Foltz, J., Cook, S., Szilagyi, P., Auinger, P., Bucher, S., & Steward, P. (2007, May). *Assessing how well adolescents across the U.S. meet obesity prevention goals*. Presented at the Pediatric Academic Societies' Annual Meeting, Toronto, Canada.
- Gendlin, E. (1997). *Experiencing and the creation of meaning: A philosophical and psychological approach to the subjective*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press. (Original work published 1962).

- Goodlad, J., Mantle-Bromley, C., & Goodlad, S. (2004). *Education for everyone: Agenda for education in a democracy*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Gordon-Larsen, P., Nelson, M., & Popkin, B. (2004). Longitudinal physical activity and sedentary behavior trends: Adolescence to adulthood. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine, 27*, 277-283.
- Granger, D. (2006). *John Dewey, Robert Pirsig, and the art of living*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Haney, W. (2003, September 23). *Attrition of students from New York schools*. Testimony before the New York Senate Standing Committee on Education, New York.
- Held, B. S. (2002). The tyranny of the positive attitude in America: Observation and speculation. *Journal of Clinical Psychology, 58*, 965-991.
- Held, B. (2004). The negative side of positive psychology. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology, 44*, 9-46.
- Hoffman, L., Stewart, S., Warren, D., & Meek, L. (2008). Toward a sustainable myth of self: An existential response to the post modern condition. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology Online First*, 1-39.
- Jackson, S., & Kimiecik, J. (2008). Optimal experience in sport and exercise. In T. Horn (ed.), *Advances in sport psychology*, 3rd edition (pp. 377-399). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Kimiecik, J. (1992). Predicting vigorous physical activity of corporate employees: Comparing the theories of reasoned action and planned behavior. *Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology, 14*, 192-206.
- Kimiecik, J. (1998). *YPersonal Fitness: Twelve Weeks to a Better You*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Kimiecik, J., & Horn, T. (1998). Parental beliefs and children's moderate-to-vigorous physical activity. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport, 69*, 163-175.

- Kimiecik, J., & Newburg, D. (2009). *Runner as hero: The inner quest of becoming a runner or athlete or just about anything at any age*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.
- Kimiecik, J., Poetter, T., & Newburg, D. (2009). *The Well-Being Way for Young People: Mentor Playbook and Guide*.
- Kohatsu, N., Tsai, R., Young, T., VanGilder, R., Burmeister, L., Stromquist, A., Merchant, J. Sleep duration and body mass index in a rural population. (2006). *Archives of Internal Medicine*, 166, 1701-1705.
- Kohn, A. (1994, December). The truth about self-esteem. *The Phi Delta Kappan*, 76, 272-283.
- Larson, R. (2000). Toward a psychology of positive youth development. *American Psychologist*, 55, 170-183.
- Larson, R. (2006). Positive youth development, willful adolescents, and mentoring. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 34, 677-689.
- Larson, R., & Verma, S. (1999). How children and adolescents spend time across the world: Work, play and developmental opportunities. *Psychological Bulletin*, 125, 701-736.
- Lewis, P., Zullig, K., Kimiecik, J., Ward, R., & Horn, T. (2010). *Evaluating a well-being enhancement process: Connecting eudaimonia with healthy living*. Manuscript submitted for publication.
- Lounsbury, J., & Johnston, J.H. (1985). *How fares the ninth grade? A day in the life of a 9th grader*. Reston, VA.: National Association of Secondary School Principals.
- Lux Radio Theater. (1938, December 26). *Walt Disney interview with Cecil B. DeMille*. Retrieved March 5, 2010 from C:\Documents and Settings\kimiecjc\Desktop\Special Guest Star Walt Disney by Bill Griffiths - StartedByAMouse_com's Archives Section.mht.
- Maslow, A. (1968). *Toward a psychology of being*. Princeton, NJ: Van Nostrand.

- Maslow, A. (1971). *The farther reaches of human nature*. New York: The Viking Press.
- Mendoza, M. (2007, July 4). *Review finds nutrition education failing*. AP News. Retrieved March 5, 2010 from <http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Review+finds+nutrition+education+failing-a01611370352>.
- McCammom, R. (1992). *Boy's life*. New York: Pocket.
- Nettle, D. (2006). *Happiness: The science behind your smile*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Newburg, D. (1993). *The role of freedom in the performance of a professional musician and an Olympic swimmer*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Virginia, Charlottesville.
- Newburg, D. (2009). *The most important lesson no one ever taught me*. Lexington, KY: CreateSpace.
- Newburg, D., Kimiecik, J., Durand-Bush, N., & Doell, K. (2002). The role of resonance in performance excellence and life engagement. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 14, 249-267.
- Noddings, N. (2003). *Happiness and education*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Norton, D. (1976). *Personal destinies*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Nussbaum, M. (2010). *Not for profit: Why democracy needs the humanities*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Ogden, C., Carroll, M., & Flegal, K. (2008). High body mass index for age among US children and adolescents, 2003-2006. *JAMA*, 299, 2401-2405.
- Poetter, T., & Eagle, J. (2009). Introduction: The role of scholarship in our partnership work. In T. Poetter & J. Eagle (Eds.), *The art and science of partnership* (pp. ix-xiii). Lanham, MD: University Press of America.

- Polkinghorne, D. E. (2001). The self and humanistic psychology. In K. J. Schneider, J. F. Bugental, & J. F. Pierson (Eds.), *The handbook of humanistic psychology: Leading edges in theory, research and practice* (pp. 81-99). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Reyna, V., & Farley, F. (2007). Risk and rationality in adolescent decision making: Implications for theory, practice, and public policy. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 7, 1-44.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2001). On happiness and human potentials: A review of research on hedonic and eudaimonic well-being. *Annual Review Psychology*, 52, 141-166.
- Ryan, R., Huta, V., & Deci, E. (2008). Living well: A self-determination theory perspective on eudaimonia. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 9, 139-170.
- Ryff, C. D., & Singer, B. (1998). The contours of positive human health. *Psychological Inquiry*, 9, 1-28.
- Ryff, C., & Singer, B. (2008). Know thyself and become what you are: A eudaimonic approach to psychological well-being. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 9, 13-39.
- Ryff, C. D., Singer, B. H., & Love, G. D. (2004). Positive Health: connecting well-being with biology. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London B*, 359, 1383-1394.
- Schroeder, D., Laflin, M., & Weiss, D. (1993). Is there a relationship between self-esteem and drug use? *Journal of Drug Issues*, 23, 645-665.
- Seligman, M., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000). Positive psychology: An introduction. *American Psychologist*, 55, 5-14.
- Smelser, N. (1989). *Self-esteem and social problems: An introduction*. In A. Mecca, N. Smelser, & Vasconcellos, J. (pp. 1-23). Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press.

- Stein, G. L., Kimiecik, J.C., Daniels, J., & Jackson, S.A. (1995). Psychological antecedents of flow in recreational sport. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 21, 125-135.
- Sugarman, J. (2007). Practical rationality and the questionable promise of positive psychology. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 47, 175-197.
- Tice, D. (1993). The social motivations of people with low self-esteem. In R. Baumeister (Ed.), *Self-esteem: The puzzle of low self-regard* (pp. 37-53). New York: Plenum Press.
- Vikhagen, A. (n.d.). *Gadamer's concept of play*. Retrieved March 5, 2010 from <http://www.scribd.com/doc/12729783/gadamers-play>.
- Waterman, A. (1993). Two conceptions of happiness: Contrasts of personal expressiveness (Eudaimonia) and hedonic enjoyment. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 64, 678-691.
- Wheelock, A. (1993). *School reform for secondary school students: A case for focusing on ninth grade*. Unpublished manuscript.

Jay Kimiecik is an associate professor in the Department of Kinesiology and Health at Miami University. His work blends theory and practice in the areas of well-being, health, and optimal performance across the lifespan. He recently served as director of Miami's employee health and well-being program.