

contemporary challenges

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The threatening truth of the world we live in



(dreamstime, 2023)

While there are currently several threats to humankind, each with great importance, affecting the world in different ways, in the current situation we find ourselves in the biggest threat is placed upon our health, wealth and happiness. As a society we must go back to basics, focusing on ourselves. Only then are we equipped with the motivation and abilities to tackle the world of problems that awaits us.

Over time there has been a decline in the average rates of health, wealth and happiness and we now find ourselves in an all-time low with more people struggling.

Statistics from the Health, Wealth and Happiness Report 2022 shows that “the population of the United Kingdom faced a decrease in happiness, the lowest in over 10 years.”(LifeSearch, 2022).

With the impact of coronavirus and the global pandemic the world changed and overnight we became isolated, unemployed, and scared for the future. Since this moment numerous events have negatively affected the world. A war invasion from Russia caused a humanitarian crisis and disruptions to global supply chains, Pakistan faces enormous debts meanwhile a third of the country suffered flooding and the world faces a 15% inflation leading to a cost-of-living crisis.

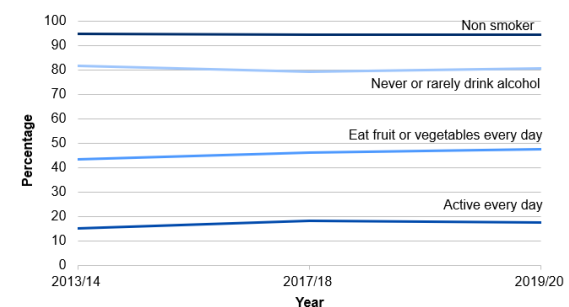
We now face a world where anxiety and depression amongst others, are becoming increasingly common and more people are struggling with their mental health than ever before. “Since 2021, 30% of the population in Wales have continuously

struggled with low mental health with further studies showing 54% have faced difficult periods where their mental health was not described as 'high'." (Welsh Government, 2022)

Similarly, physical health faces challenges of its own. With less people keeping active and eating a balanced diet there is an increased risk of developing diabetes, obesity and cardiovascular diseases, which continues to be the leading cause of death in adults. The issue is worldwide "with 46.3% of American adults failing to meet the recommended physical activity guidelines." (Elgaddal et al, 2022). Physical activity is necessary for everyone to have a healthy lifestyle.

As shown in this graph, although slightly increasing since 2013, less than 20% of adolescents partake in the recommended 60 minutes of daily exercise. This continues to be an issue, not only in Wales but in many parts of the world, especially in poorer areas.

Chart 3.5: Percentage of children aged 11 to 16 following selected health behaviours, 2013/14 (academic year) to 2019



Source: Student Health and Wellbeing in Wales, School Health Research Network Student Health and Wellbeing Survey

(Welsh Government, 2022)

The demand on health services is increasing as more people are seeking support regarding their physical and mental health. If we can manage these symptoms ourselves, taking preventative measures including regular exercise, balanced diets, quality sleep and coping methods to manage stress and anxiety we can relieve pressure from medical professionals allowing them to use their time and resources to manage on-going health problems, disability, or emergencies.

Poverty levels are rising for many and are no longer to provide basic needs to survive. Because of poverty, 22,000 children die each day from unclean water, malnutrition, inadequate living conditions. Around the world so many are being affected by poverty and the numbers continue rising. Children exposed to the insecurity of poverty often experience hunger and fatigue and difficulty concentrating, affecting academic outcomes, social and emotional development. In

low-income areas children are less likely to have the same opportunities and resources in education and parents aren't able to provide these as they are facing financial difficulties in providing essential items. The added stress for parents contributes to their health and happiness and increases the risk of developing chronic illnesses, cardiovascular disease, depression, and its time we make a change.

We need to make the world a happier place, improving poverty rates around the world and encouraging the population to live healthier lives with adequate knowledge and tools to improve these outcomes.

A Better Future

‘Children are resilient, they always bounce back’ - I'm sure you've heard this saying before, right?

While there is an element of truth in this, children often adapt to changes much quicker than adults and are more accepting of the challenges they face, adults are responsible for providing children with skills, such as resilience, to prepare them for a future where they can make positive changes, from their generation to the next.



(Furshaw, 2023)

As educators we are dedicated to teaching children essential skills in preparation for an ever-changing world with opportunities to expand their knowledge on the current issues the world is facing, firstly decline in the population's health, wealth, and happiness. Educating children on this current problem will present a generation better prepared to improve the health, wealth and happiness of themselves and others.

The Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015 encourages “a collaborative approach to improving the social, cultural, environmental, and economic wellbeing in Wales.” (Welsh Government, 2015) To influence these positive changes 7 goals, listed below, have been developed to ensure an equal understanding for all involved.



(Welsh government, 2015)

In order to make a positive impact we need to provide children with a wide range of skills that are useful in fighting for change. A widely used skill is critical thinking. As children learn, they achieve the ability to problem-solve, analyse research and data, make informed decisions, amongst others to navigate their way through challenging situations to determine an appropriate outcome. These skills are developed when children are encouraged to think deeply about a task, problem or situation and are useful into adulthood.

Conflict can be a difficult process to overcome. opposing opinions, ideas or wants can result in disagreements, and the ability to manage conflicting situations is a skill that can drastically alter the outcome. Consideration for all parties is essential while understanding the need to share your plans or opinions is necessary. To achieve this effectively it is important approach empathetically, and think slowly, known as system 2 thinking to remove judgemental responses, instead thinking logically, and making informed decisions. If conflict occurs, restorative practice can be an effective method in resolving the situation. It can encourage positive interactions, providing appropriate ways to address difficult conversations, building, and repairing relationships.

In preparation of tackling the issues surrounding health, wealth, and happiness these intellectual skills are essential in order to propose functional solutions to change the world. But we cannot overlook the need for providing children with practical, sustainable skills. Guidance from Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship promotes opportunities for children to understand such issues and

develop the skills to act against local and global issues. Implementing this approach across the whole curriculum provides children with skills in all areas. Listed below is recommended opportunities for children in key stage 3 to develop their understanding:

Wealth and Poverty Learners should be given opportunities to: • develop a sense of fairness and justice about the access to resources and wealth • develop opinions about exploitation and poverty • learn to value non-material things as well as material goods and to understand: • inequalities exist between people within countries and between countries • how goods are produced and traded and what Fair Trade is and why it is important • why people migrate	Choices and decisions Learners should be given opportunities to: • participate in the school and wider community in order to change things • develop opinions about the denial of human rights • appreciate the value of a well balanced and well supported argument • appreciate the benefits of resolving conflicts peacefully and to understand: • the complexity of making decisions and the need for precaution • what is meant by basic human rights and that not everyone has them • the principles of democracy • how conflict can arise from different views about global issues
Identity and culture Learners should be given opportunities to: • develop an insight into their own values • develop respect for themselves their culture and others • value, celebrate and show sensitivity to diversity locally, nationally and globally • question stereotypes • appreciate that people's actions and perspectives are influenced by their values and to understand: • where their beliefs come from • how to recognise and challenge effectively expressions of prejudice, racism and stereotyping • the links between culture, faith and individual values • their own society is enriched by diversity of cultures • the impact of past actions on cultures and identity e.g. slave trade and colonisation	Health Learners should be given opportunities to: • develop concern for their own health and the health of others in other parts of the world and to understand: • the links between a healthy lifestyle and physical and emotional well-being • ways in which health and quality of life can be improved in countries across the world • applications of science, medicine and technology are being used to improve health and quality of life in a variety of countries

(Welsh Assembly Government, 2008)

Following this guidance within the curriculum provides children with the knowledge and skills to make a positive impact on the world's health, wealth, and happiness through sharing ideas, making plans, opening future employment opportunities the future can become a better place with a population more equipped to overcome the challenges.

The Power of Design

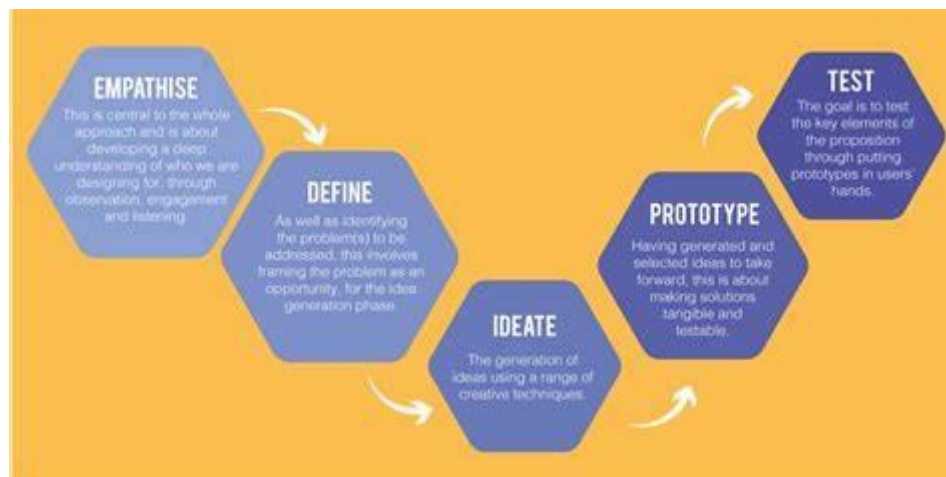
“Design thinking is a powerful process that facilitates understanding and framing of problems, enables creative solutions, and may provide fresh perspectives on our physical and social landscapes.” (Pressman, 2018. P.2)



(Rawpixel, 2014)

This method widely used provides endless creative possibilities to discovering original solutions to a variety of issues. With no specific rules this process can be tailored to suit individual needs in a variety of ways in education, from designing seating plans, behaviour management approaches and improving school curriculums. It is important that we share our knowledge, providing opportunities that enable students to partake in the design thinking process to acquire the skills involved in an attempt to overcome the complex challenges the world is facing and those on a smaller scale.

This technique, without limitations is non-linear, encouraging opportunities to review and alter when necessary and offers guidance to support the process. Shown in the image below is the 5 steps created to assist those involved, beginning with empathy, travelling back and forth through each stage using a combination of convergent and divergent thinking skills until the final solution had been thoroughly tested in order to present the outcome.



(Dufort, 2018)

The current approach to education includes a curriculum that is heavily reliant on academic input/achievement, while this is important it is not the only approach that should be available for all children. Including design thinking provides a different outlook from the current academic teaching style delivered to children. It opens countless possibilities to allow children to continue seeking/being/developing creativity in a world where there are limited opportunities to do so. As children develop/progress into adulthood the demand for organisation, critical thinking and control are seen as essential qualities, creating adults who are rigid in their thinking process. If we can increasingly encourage the use of this technique, we can create a society where adults have the motivation to develop unique, original ideas with the confidence to follow it through.

Following this method requires a combination of knowledge and skills including resilience, patience, emotional intelligence, and communication alongside the need for creativity, curiosity, and originality. Continuously encouraging design thinking as a problem-solving tool removes the barriers preventing creative exploration and creates adults who are “not confined by the boundaries or preconceptions of what a solution could be.” (Pressman, 2018, P.67)

Design thinking is a lifelong skill beyond education. It encourages a person to pursue their individual thoughts and ideas. In a world where creativity isn't a skill widely used, it is time to make changes and encourage a population who feel confident in pursuing their individual thoughts and ideas as this is an important role within the

process that can lead to a solution improving the challenges the world is facing. With a new range of ideas creates possibilities that society has yet to discover.

Of course, a single method cannot meet the needs of everyone, and other methods are favourable. With all great techniques comes issues. One of these is the time it can take to complete the process. There is no limit with this technique to allow those involved the opportunity to provide a sufficient outcome. For some this is challenging, and motivation is lost to complete the process. The initial stages of generating multiple ideas unnecessary for some who prefer using every effort on a single solution rather than pursuing multiple ideas simultaneously as it can be seen to waste time having no official purpose. Having the confidence to work with and share ideas with others can be a difficult issue potentially preventing ideas from being shared, similarly, this process relies on others and can provoke emotional reactions rather than an intellectual response preventing individuals from making improvements based on the criticism they have received. An issue that could change by continuously using this approach is the limited imagination we have as adults but involving design thinking repeatedly from childhood can enhance an individual's ability to use their imagination when discovering new, creative ideas throughout their life.

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Kirstin Jones
2214408