



# “Leading Learning and Teaching in a Changing World”

Pasi Sahlberg & Phil Cummins



**PARENTS WANT  
STABILITY**



**GOVERNMENTS WANT  
HIGHER TEST SCORES**



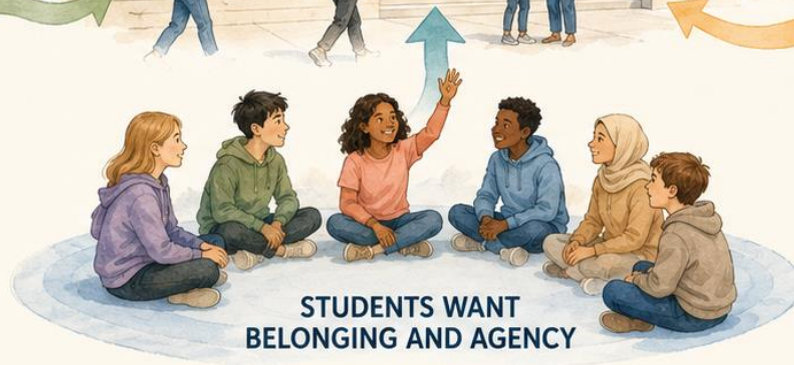
**GRANDPARENTS WANT THEIR  
GRANDKIDS TO BE HAPPY**



**SCHOOLS WANT  
PERFORMANCE**



**TEACHERS WANT  
TO TEACH**

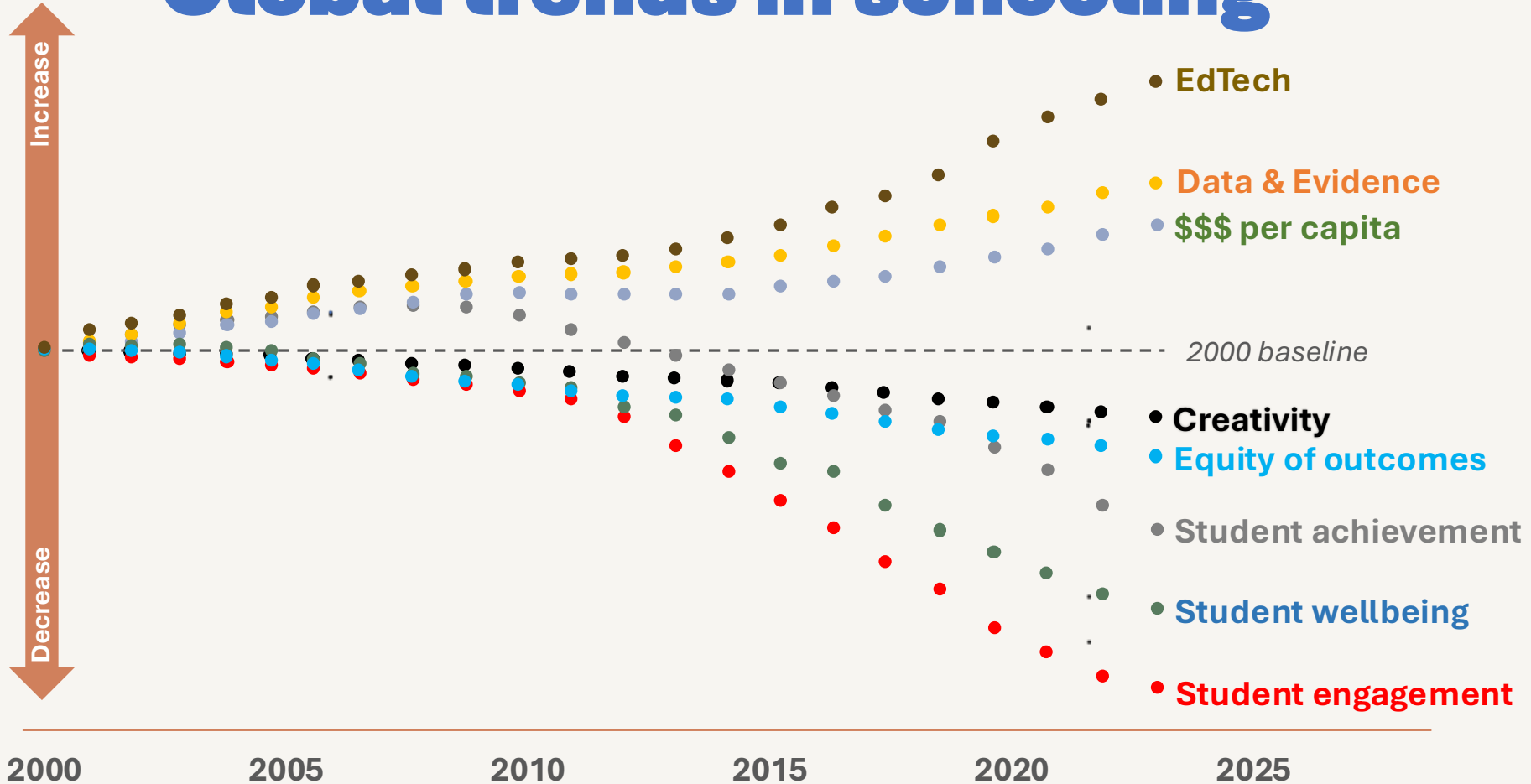


**STUDENTS WANT  
BELONGING AND AGENCY**

# **[ THE BIG PICTURE ]**

**of global education**

# Global trends in schooling



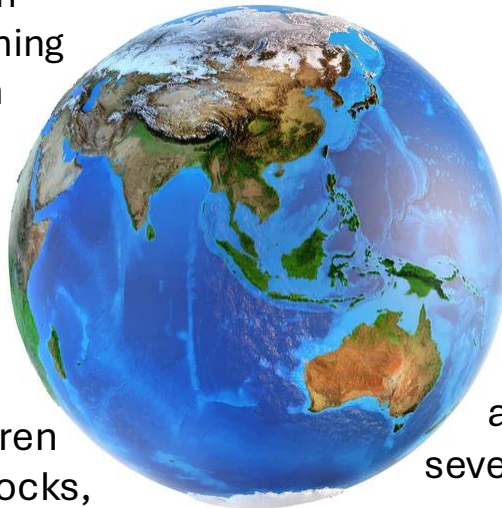


“Over the past decade there has been virtually **no improvement** in the learning outcomes of students in the Western World, even though expenditure on schooling rose by almost 20% during this period.”  
– OECD 2018



“There are 258 million children living under war, climate shocks, and displacement that is the biggest emergency in education. ”

– Education Can't Wait (ECW) 2026



“An estimated 273 million children, adolescents and youth, or 17% of the global total, were **out of school** in 2024”

– Global Education Monitoring Report 2026



THE WORLD BANK

“There is **a global learning crisis** that amplifies educational inequalities that severely hobbles the disadvantaged youth who most need the boost that a good education can offer.”

– Human Development Report 2018

?

**“Insanity is doing the  
same thing again and  
again but expecting  
different results.”**

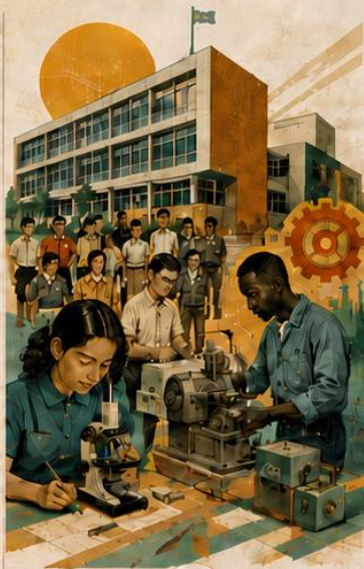
# **[ A BIG SHIFT ]**

**in the purpose of schooling**



1945–1950s

EDUCATION FOR PEACE  
AND HUMAN RIGHTS



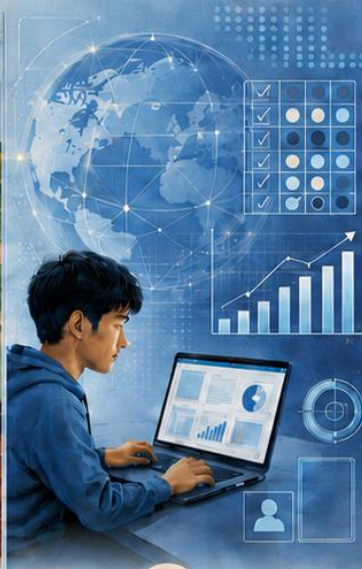
1960s–1970s

EDUCATION FOR  
ECONOMIC GROWTH



1980s–1990s

EDUCATION FOR ALL—  
AND THROUGHOUT LIFE



2000s–2010s

EDUCATION FOR AN  
INNOVATION SOCIETY



2020 ONWARDS

EDUCATION FOR WHAT...?

Education for human capital development

# Education for human capital development



Education



Skills



Productivity



Growth &  
Prosperity



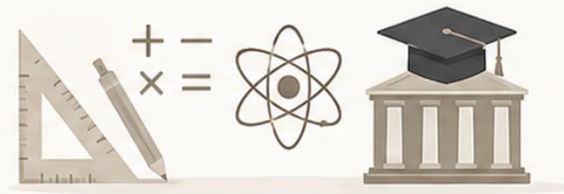
## Skills for the economy

Education is viewed as an investment in knowledge, competencies, and employability.



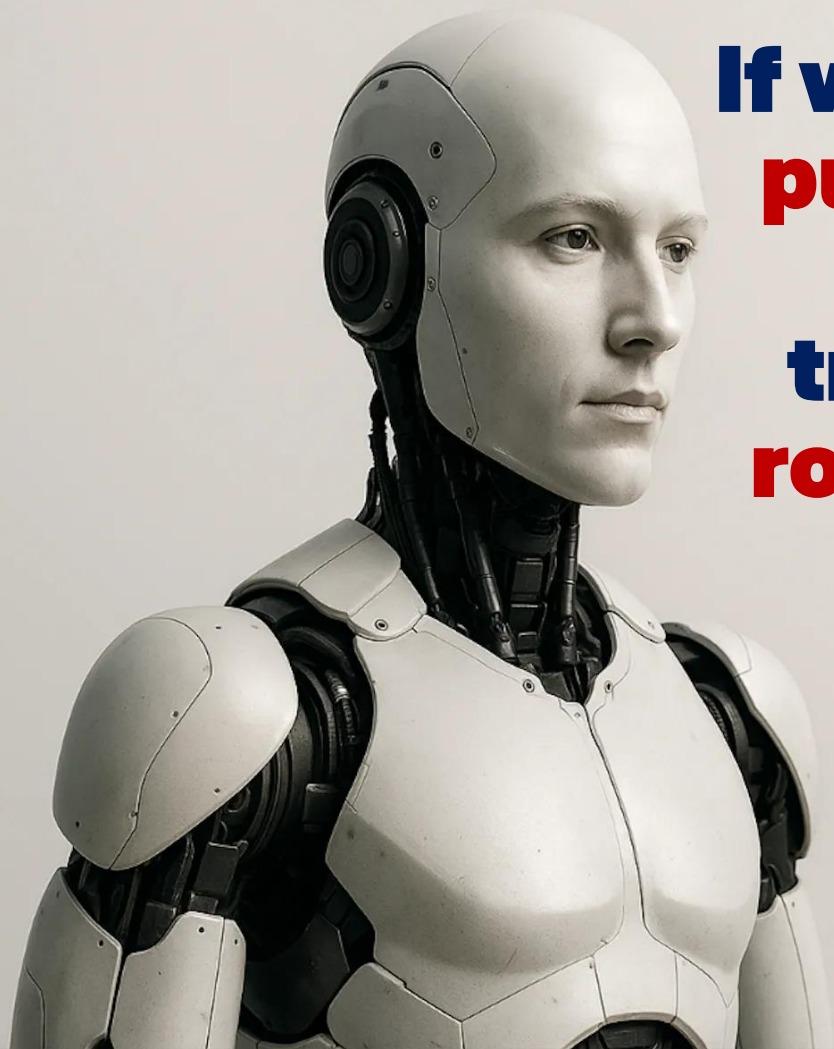
## Equity and talent

All students should have the opportunity to develop their abilities, regardless of background.



## Science, maths, and progression

Systems prioritise problem-solving, strong academic foundations, and expanded access to higher education.



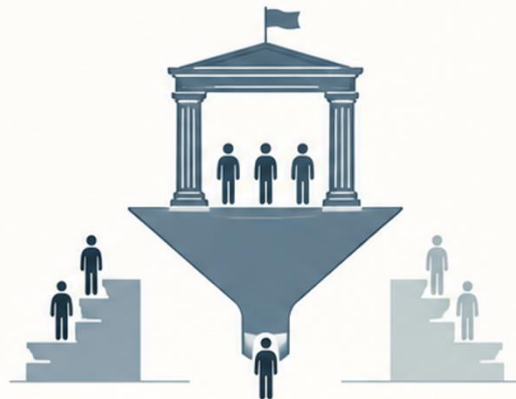
**If we don't rethink the  
purpose of schooling  
now, we may risk  
training second-rate  
robots when what we  
need are first-class  
humans.**

# Three critiques of the **human capital** model



## Growth at too high a price

Economic growth has come with inequality, climate strain, and ecological loss.



## Sorting winners and losers

Exams, credentials, and prestige often reproduce advantage and narrow merit.



## Skills without meaning

Many young people gain qualifications but struggle with purpose, belonging, and hope.

**As **AI** takes on more of what  
schools have done so far,  
education must focus on  
**what remains deeply  
human.****

?

**What's the point of school?**

# Education for...

**Human Capital**

PARADIGM SHIFT

**Human Flourishing**

**Learning as duty**

**Education as a right**

**Basic skills**

**Achievement**

**Predictability**

**Standards &  
compliance**

**Productivity**

**Human  
competences**

**Agency**

**Adaptability**

**Creativity &  
flexibility**

**Wellbeing**

# Happiness

Experiencing positive emotions, life satisfaction and a sense of wellbeing in everyday life.

# Meaning

Having a sense of purpose and feeling that one's life contributes to something larger than oneself.

# Accomplishment

Developing capabilities, pursuing worthwhile goals and gaining satisfaction from progress and achievement.

# Relationships

Experiencing trust, belonging, care and meaningful connection with others.

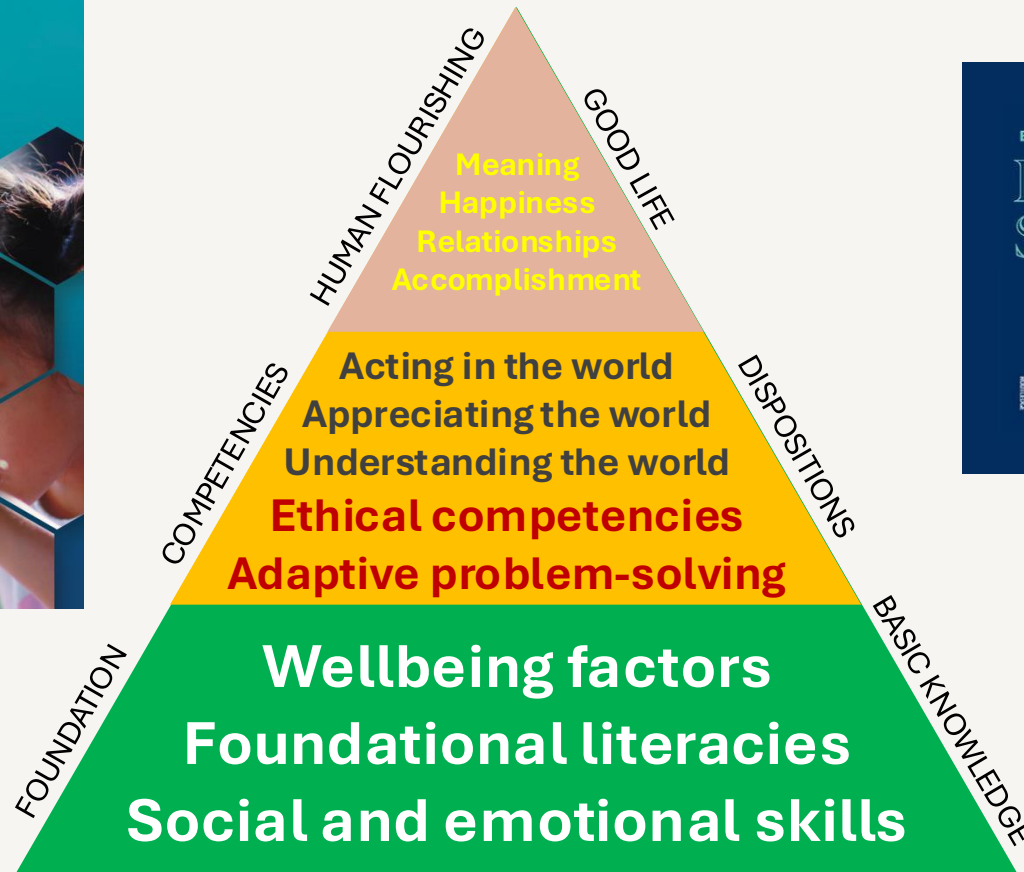
**HUMAN  
FLOURISHING**

Who am I?

Where am I?

What am I for?

# EDUCATION FOR HUMAN FLOURISHING



# APPROACHES TO HUMAN FLOURISHING

## LIBERALISM

Individuals build and develop autonomously chosen capabilities within fair enabling conditions.

**Education** is about helping individuals acquire the knowledge, skills, critical judgement, moral reasoning, and civic capacities needed to choose and pursue their own life paths.

## CONFUCIANISM

Become human through moral self-cultivation, respect for tradition, and responsibility to family, community, and society.

**Education** is the cultivation of moral character and right relationships so that each person can contribute wisely to social harmony.

## CATHOLICISM

We flourish as persons in relationship with God, with one another, with community, and with creation.

**Education** is about forming the whole person so that each learner can grow in wisdom, compassion, justice, and service to the common good.

# APPROACHES TO HUMAN FLOURISHING

For **First Nations** people flourishing means living in right relationship with Country, kin, community, culture, spirituality, ancestors, and future generations.

**Education** strengthens identity, belonging, responsibility, cultural continuity, care for Country, and contribution to collective wellbeing.



# **THREE BIG IDEAS**

**for leading learning & teaching**

# MORE PLAY

## Learning through play

→ Show students how play can be learning

## Amplify your imagination

→ Help students dream and think big

## Freedom to play

→ Let students play more without adult oversight

“A primary cause of the **rise in mental disorders** is a decline over decades in opportunities for children to play, roam, and engage in other activities **independent of direct oversight and control by adults.**”

– Gray et al., 2023

# HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

**‘Teacher Looping’** is an old practice in which whole class is taught by the same teacher in two or more sequential years in school. Research shows that this is linked to **healthier peer- and student-teacher relationships**, improved student engagement, wellbeing and learning, and better teacher job satisfaction.

## Belonging together

→ Design regular mixed-group experiences for students

## Being known and trusted

→ Ensure every student has a trusted adult

## Connecting & contributing

→ Let students work on real problems that contribute their communities

# **STRONGER AGENCY**

## **Value voice and choice**

→ Let students decide and plan their own study

## **Support self-directive skills**

→ Help students understand and lead learning

## **Collective action**

→ Guide students to change the world together



**“If you are not  
prepared **to be  
wrong**, you will  
never come up  
with anything  
original.”**

**-Sir Ken Robinson**



# 2026 Educators Conference

## Thank you!