

Foundations of a Flourishing Life

Why skills for well-being should be taught in schools

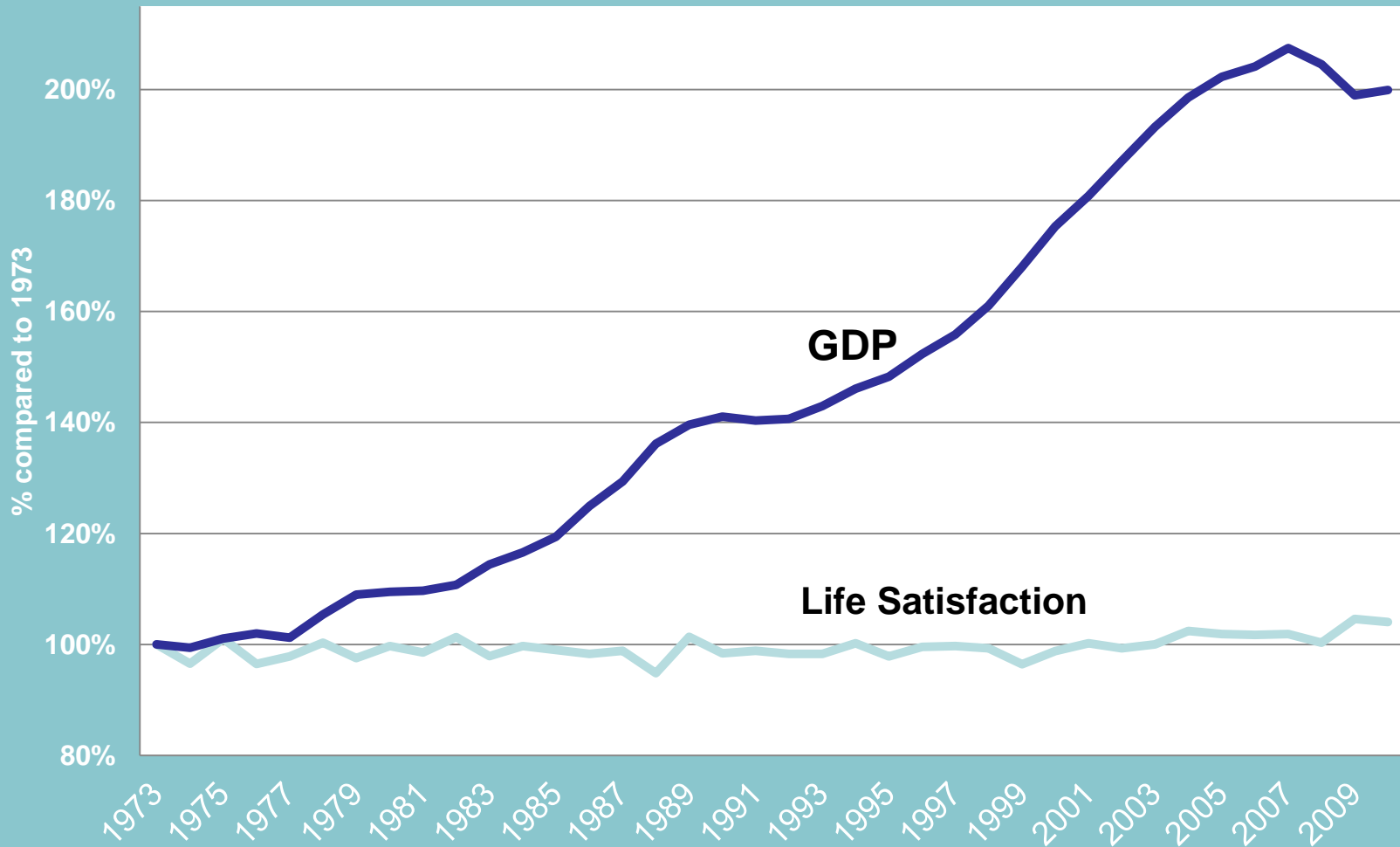
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University of Western Sydney

Wealth and well-being

UK Life Satisfaction vs GDP (per capita) 1973 - 2010



Source: Eurobarometer

UN High-Level Meeting on Well-being and Happiness:

Defining a new economic paradigm. 2 April 2012

The new economic paradigm will be “an economic system that is fully sustainable and that is rooted in true, abiding happiness and well-being.”



Jigne Y Thinley, Prime Minister, Royal Government of Bhutan

Flourishing = sustainable well-being

Sustainable psychological well-being refers to lives going well

It is the combination of **feeling good** and **functioning effectively**

Sustainable well-being

Sustainable psychological well-being refers to lives going well

It is the combination of **feeling good** and **functioning effectively**

It includes the experience of negative emotions and managing them successfully

The benefits of well-being

Why well-being matters

- Well-being is about the quality of our lives
- It is associated with physical health and survival, positive relationships, engagement and productivity
- Positive emotions broaden and build cognitive capabilities, pro-social behaviour and coping resources
- Schools benefit from staff & students with high well-being
- Society benefits from citizens with high well-being
- Governments around the world are interested in enhancing and measuring well-being.

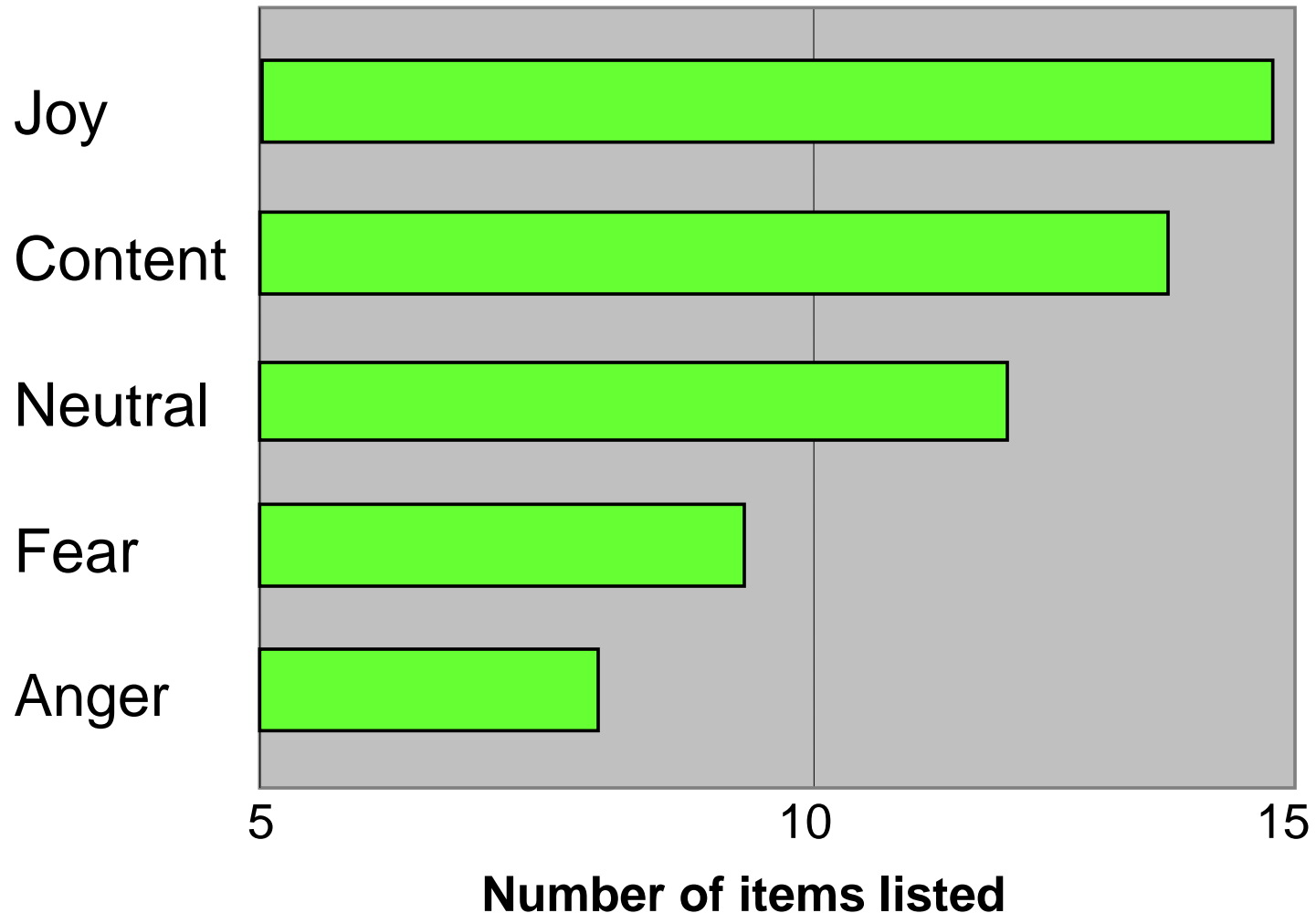
Positive mental states broaden and build cognitive processes

Studies using techniques to induce different moods have shown that compared to neutral or negative mood, people in a positive mood:

- have a broader focus of attention
- are more creative
- are more resilient in stressful situations
- are more generous and tolerant to others

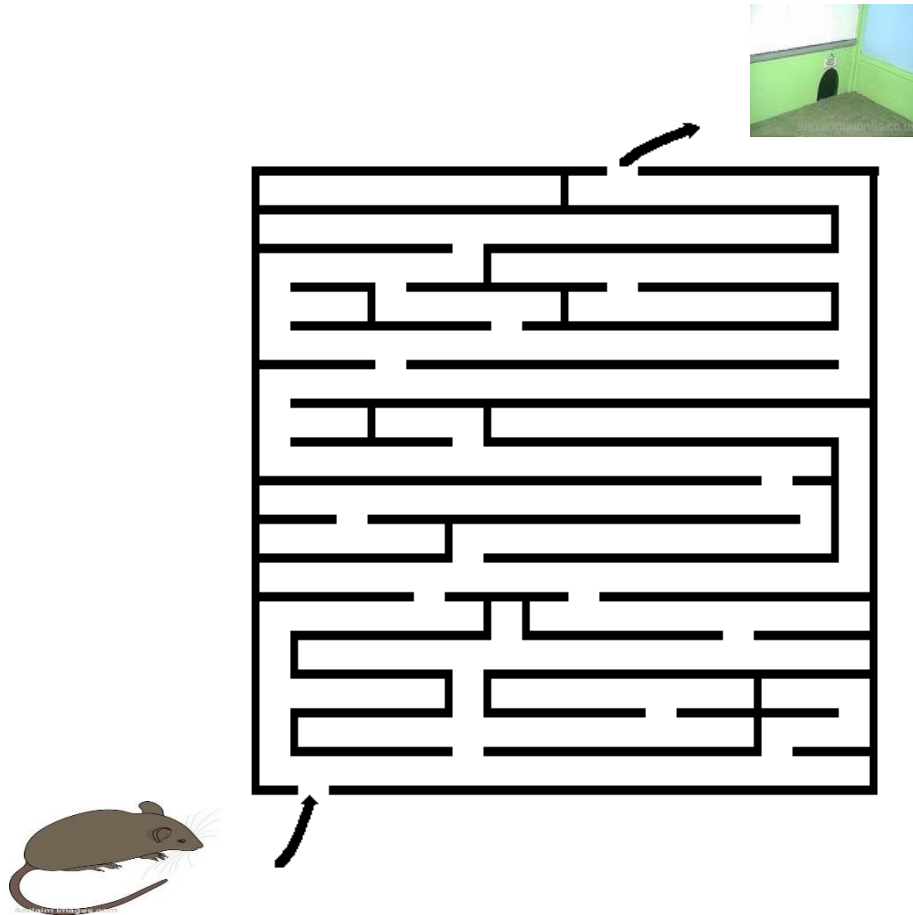
Number of ideas generated in different emotional states

Fredrickson & Branigan, Cognition & Emotion, 2005



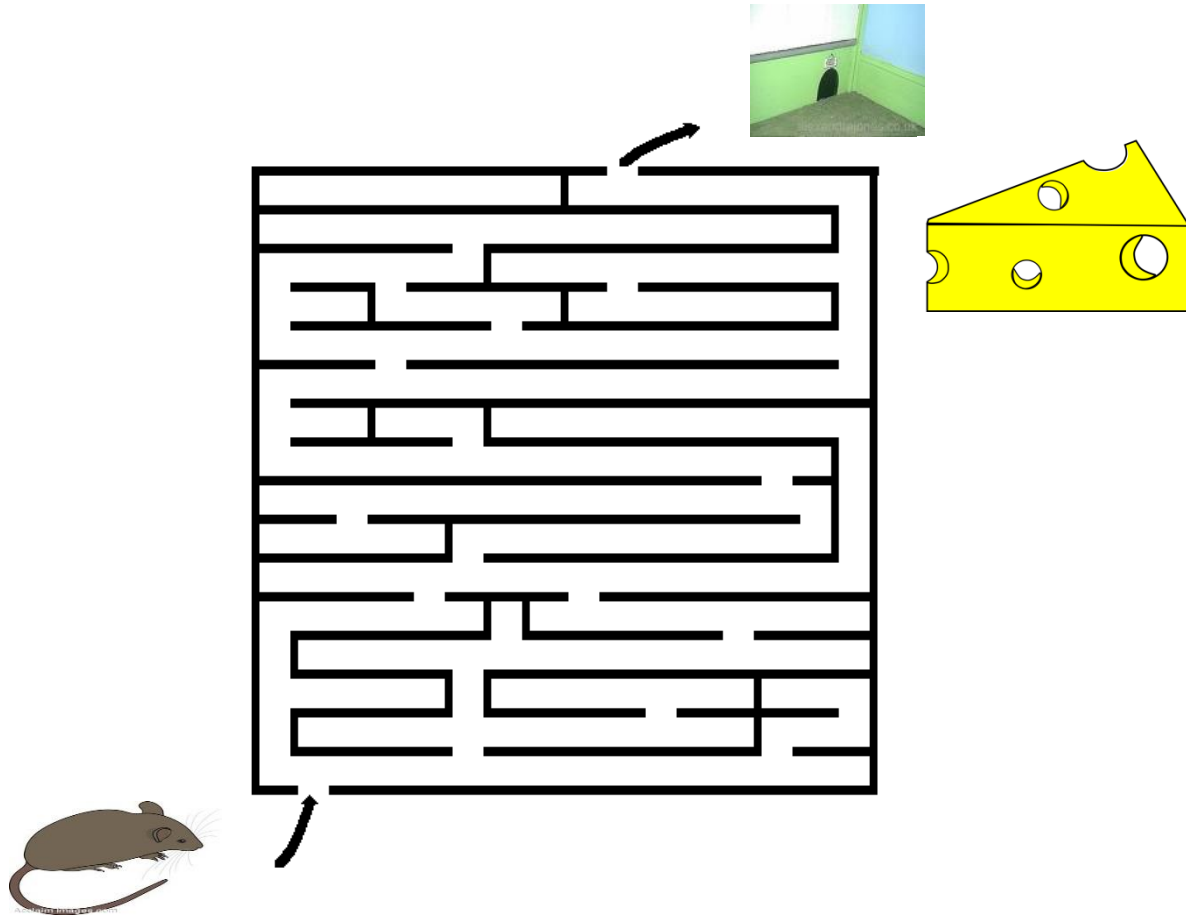
Effects of promotion & prevention cues on creativity

Friedman & Forster, J. Personality & Social Psychology, 2001



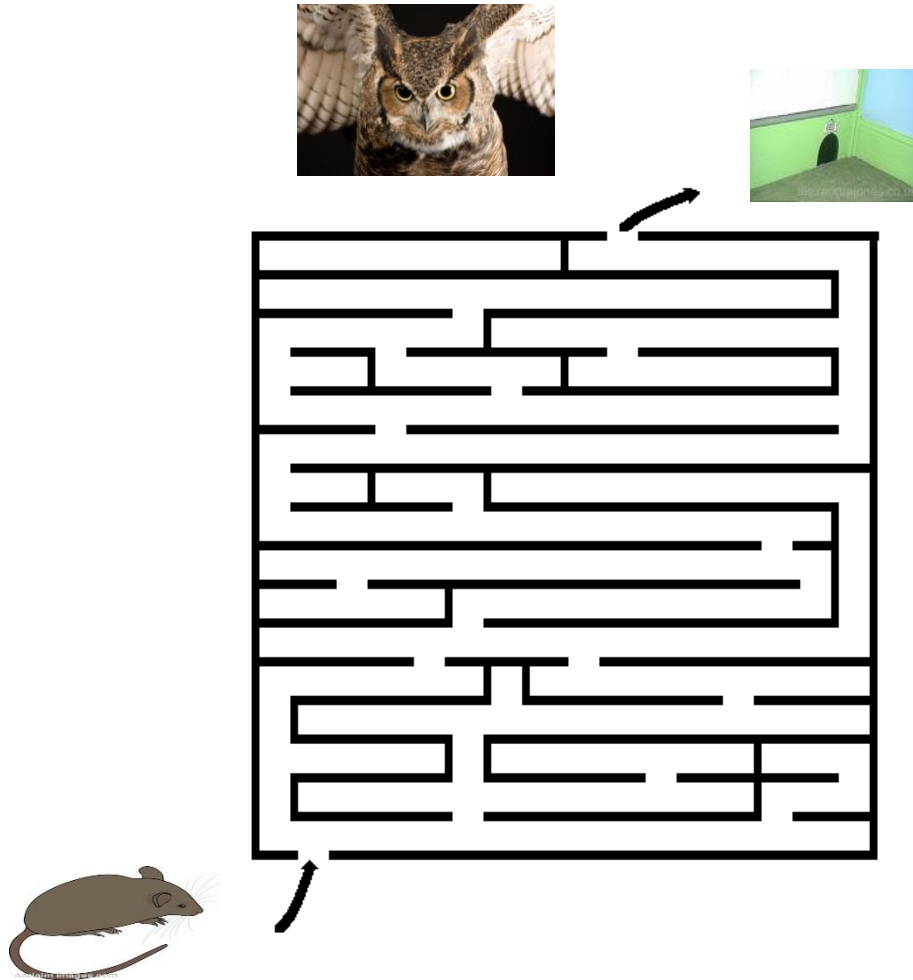
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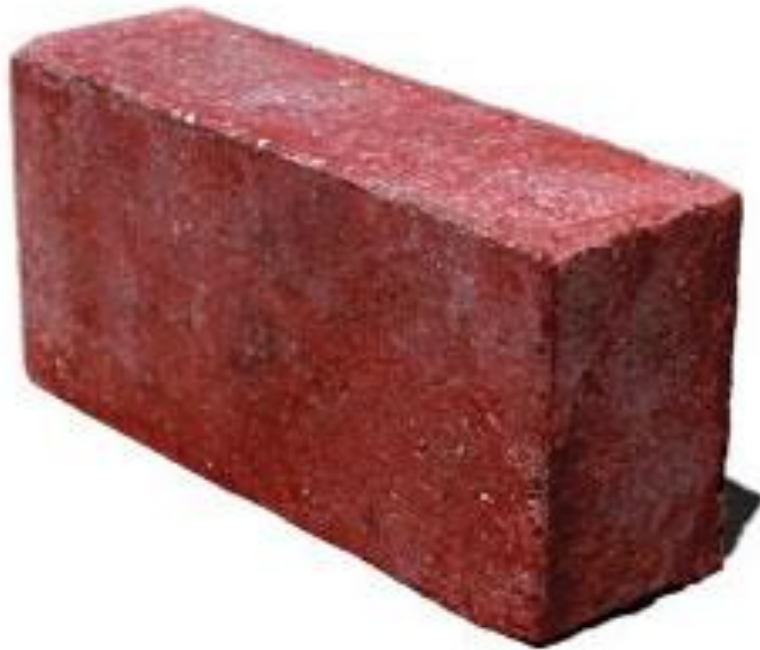
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Friedman & Forster, J. Personality & Social Psychology, 2001



Creativity test

How many uses for a brick?



The challenge of measuring well-being



“If you treasure it, measure it.”

Sir Gus O'Donnel, November 2011

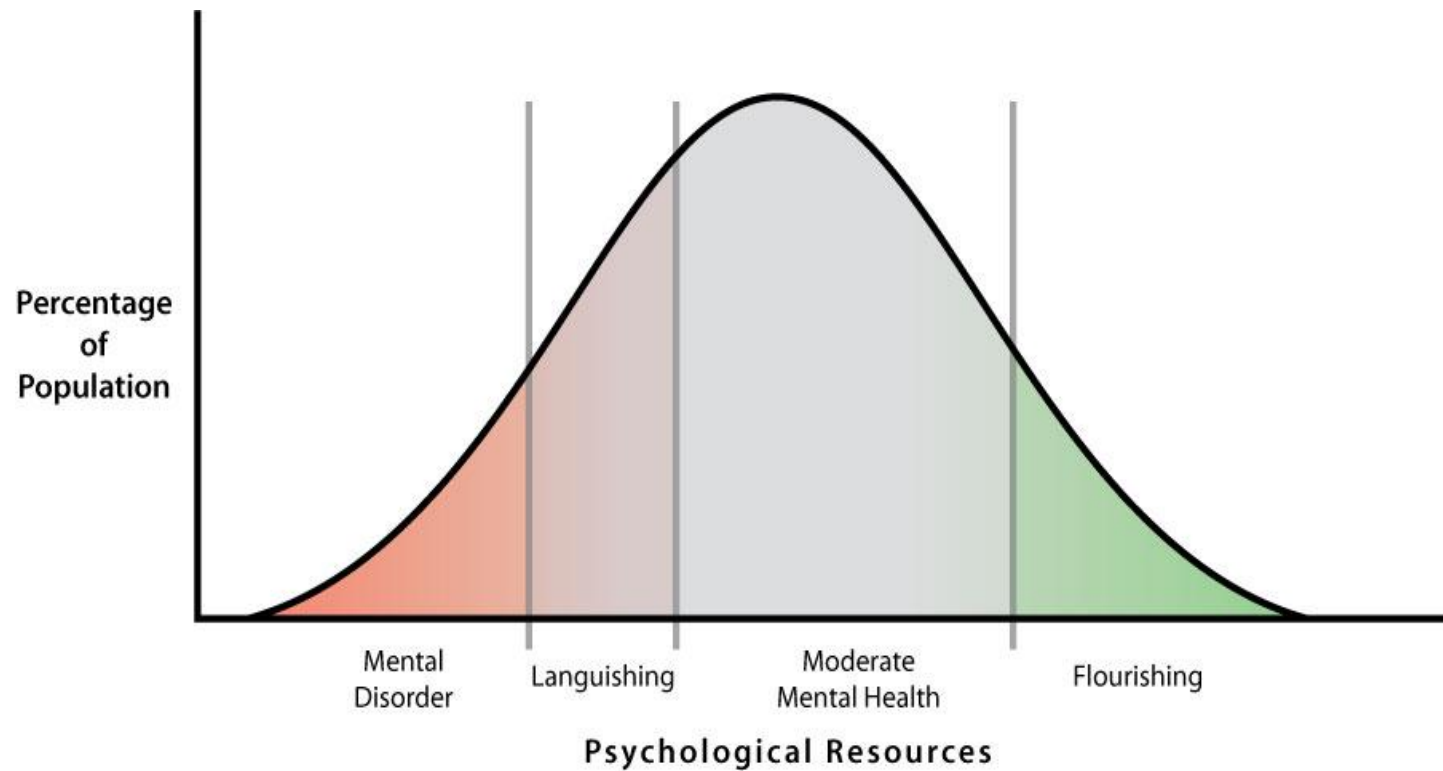
Well-being = happiness?



Well-being = life satisfaction?



The mental health spectrum



Operational definition of flourishing

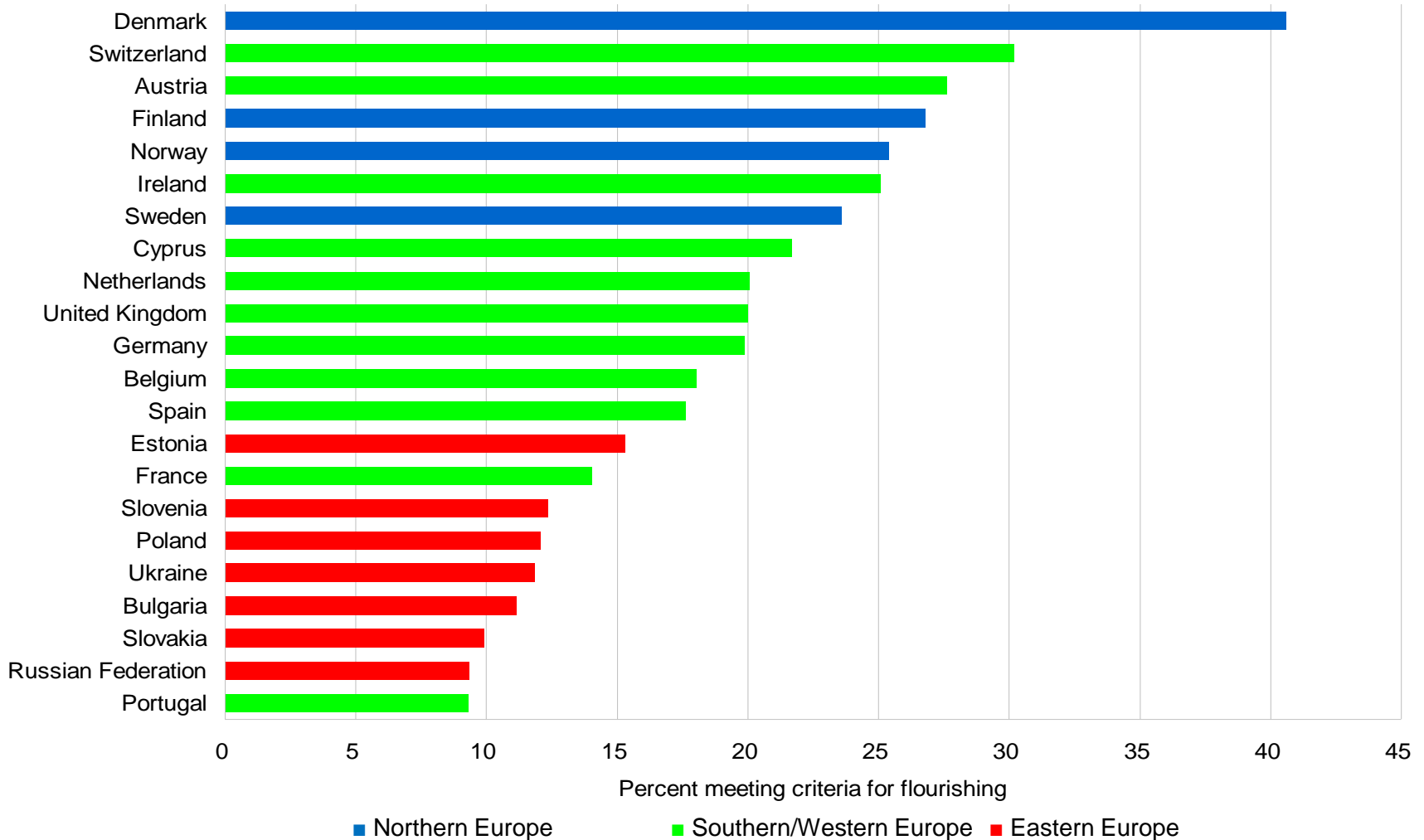
Huppert & So, Soc. Indicators Research, 2011

Flourishing is the positive end of the mental health spectrum, the opposite of the symptoms of the common mental disorders (depression and anxiety).

Ten features of flourishing	
P ositive emotion	Resilience
E ngagement	Emotional stability
R elationships	Self-esteem
M eaning	Optimism
C ompetence	Vitality

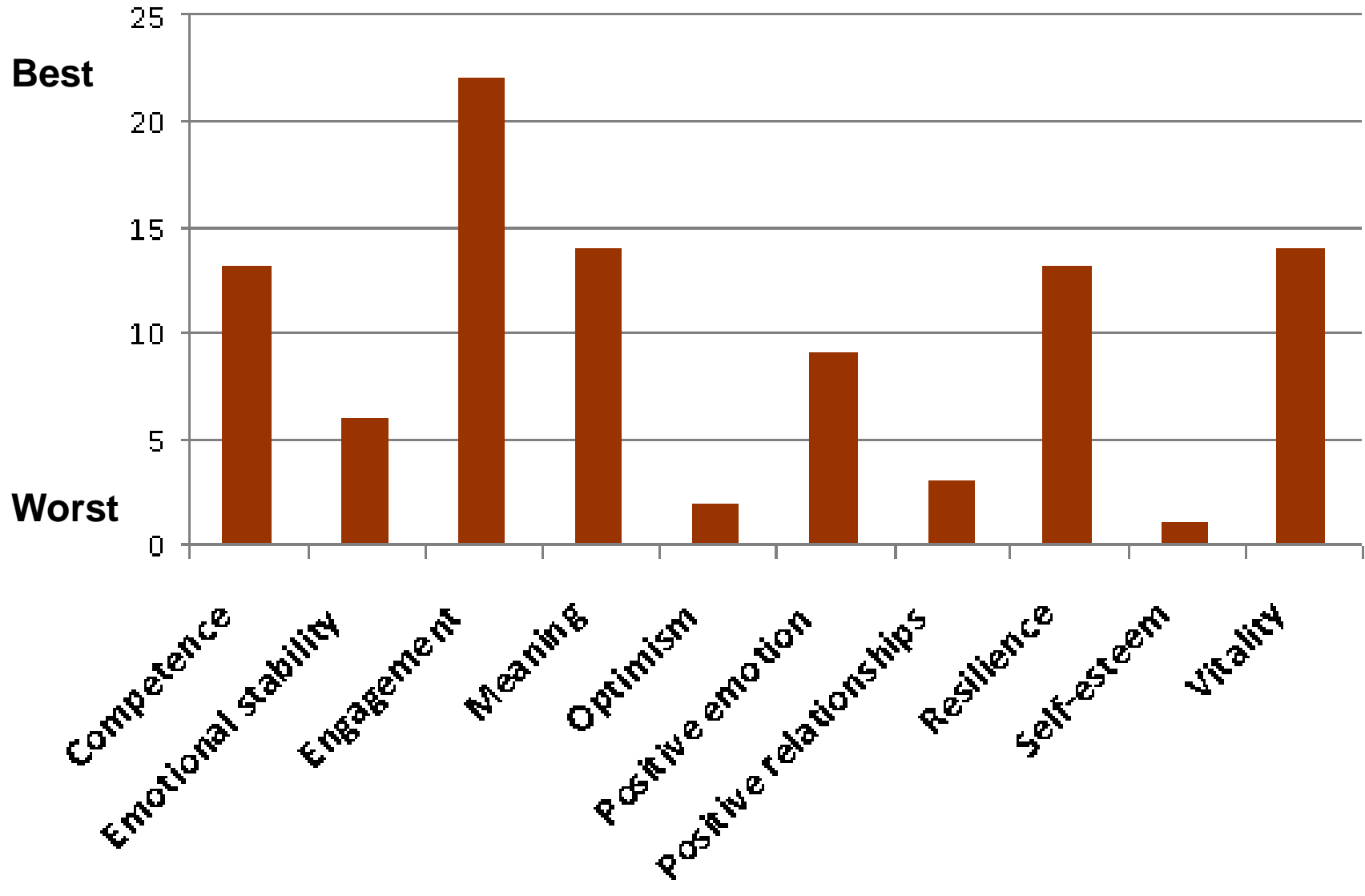
Percentage of population meeting criteria for flourishing (n=43,000)

Huppert & So, Social Indicators Research, 2013



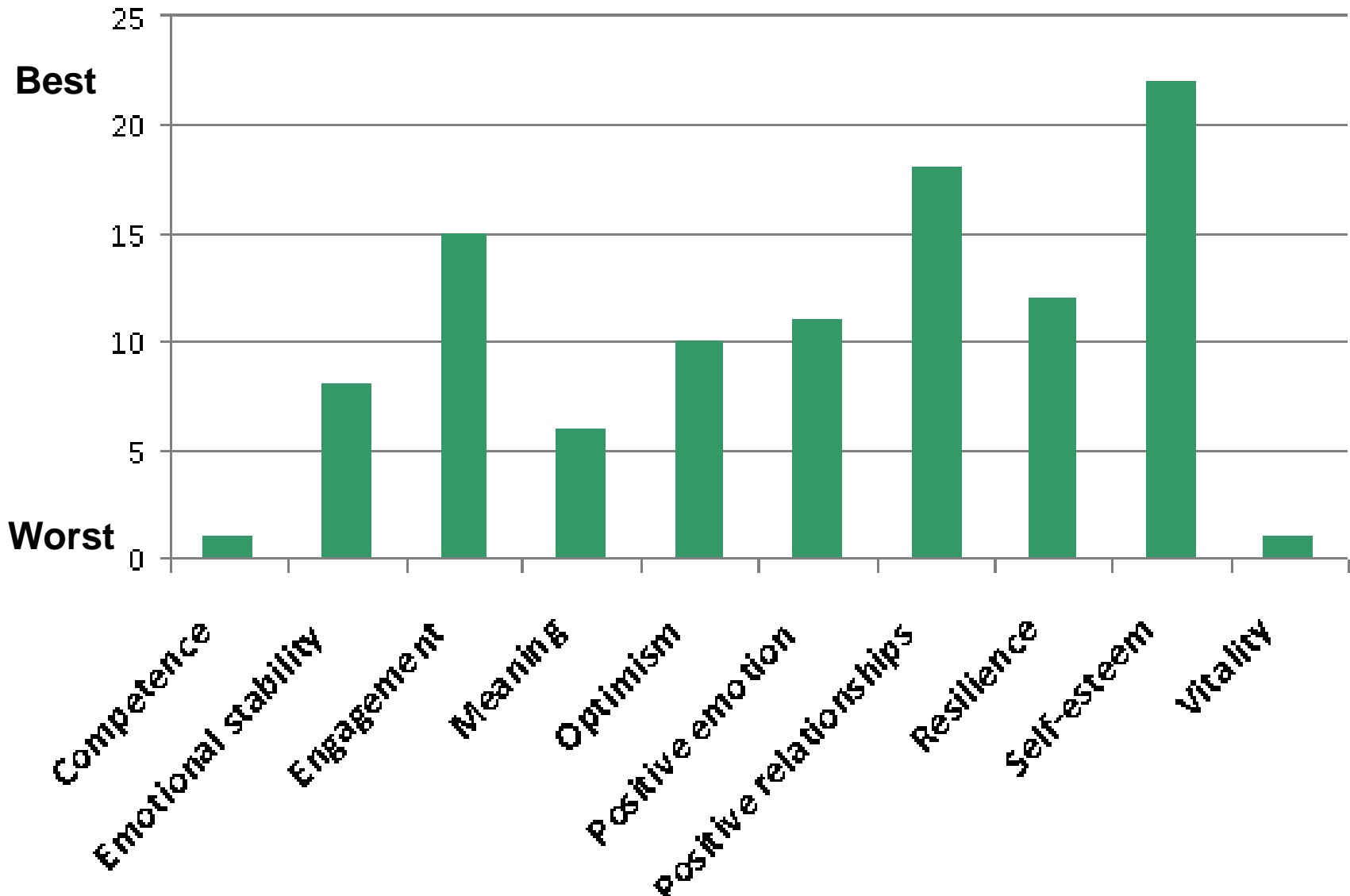
France

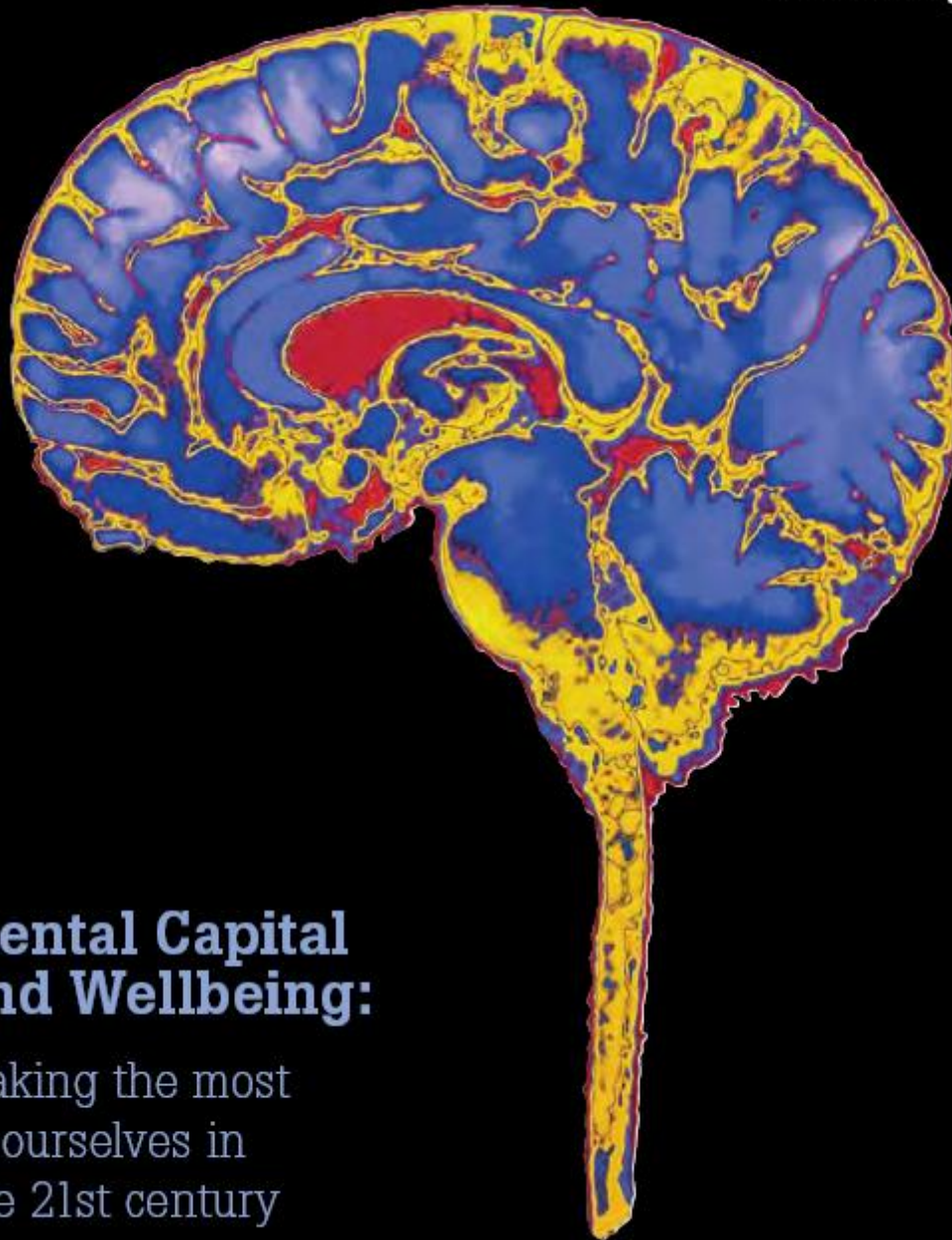
Life satisfaction 6.4



Spain

Life satisfaction 7.4



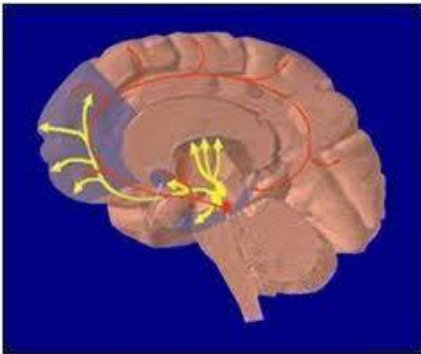


Mental Capital and Wellbeing:

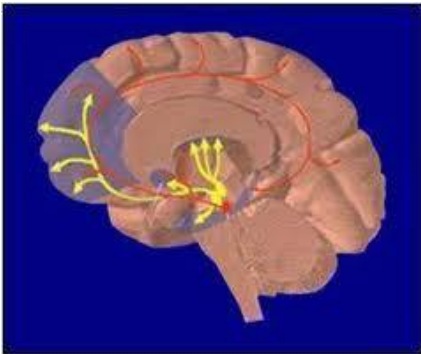
Making the most
of ourselves in
the 21st century

Brain and behaviour

- The structure and function of our brains influence our thoughts and behaviour



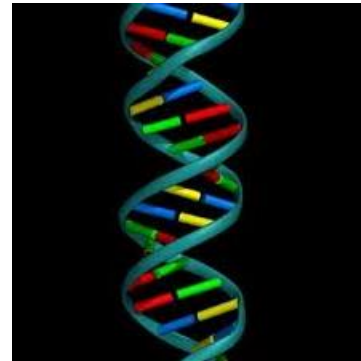
Brain and behaviour



- The structure and function of our brains influence our thoughts and behaviour
- Our thoughts and behaviour influence the structure and function of our brains

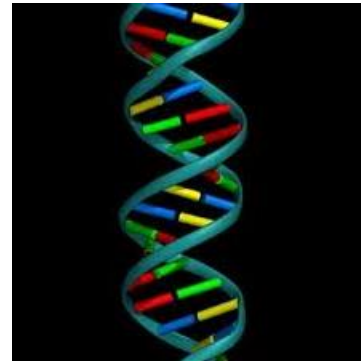
Genes and behaviour

- Our genes predispose us to think and act in certain ways.



Genes and behaviour

- Our genes predispose us to think and act in certain ways.
- Our experiences determine whether or not our genes are expressed.



Applying the knowledge

Can well-being be improved?

Five ways to well-being

The Foresight Project commissioned the new economics foundation (nef) to summarise the evidence from the Mental Capital and Wellbeing Project into 5 key messages



Mindfulness

Mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR)

Mindfulness based cognitive therapy (MBCT)

- A way of paying attention to what is going on right now in the mind, the body, and the world around us
- Not making judgements
- Not being on automatic pilot
- Quieting the mind, creating clarity
- Allowing better choices and decisions

Mindfulness and Self

Core skills developed in mindfulness practice include:

- self awareness
- self knowledge
- self regulation
- self acceptance
- self worth

Mindfulness research

systematic reviews, RCTs, meta-analysis

MBSR/MBCT is effective in a wide range of conditions:

- depression
- anxiety
- eating disorders
- chronic pain
- fibromyalgia

Benefits include:

- perceived reduction in stress and anxiety
- increased positive mood
- Improved sleep quality
- vitality
- empathy
- improved immune and endocrine function

Neuroscience of mindfulness

A standard 8 week MBSR course lead to:

- increased grey matter density in brain regions associated with learning and memory, emotion regulation, self-awareness, compassion, and interoception (bodily awareness)

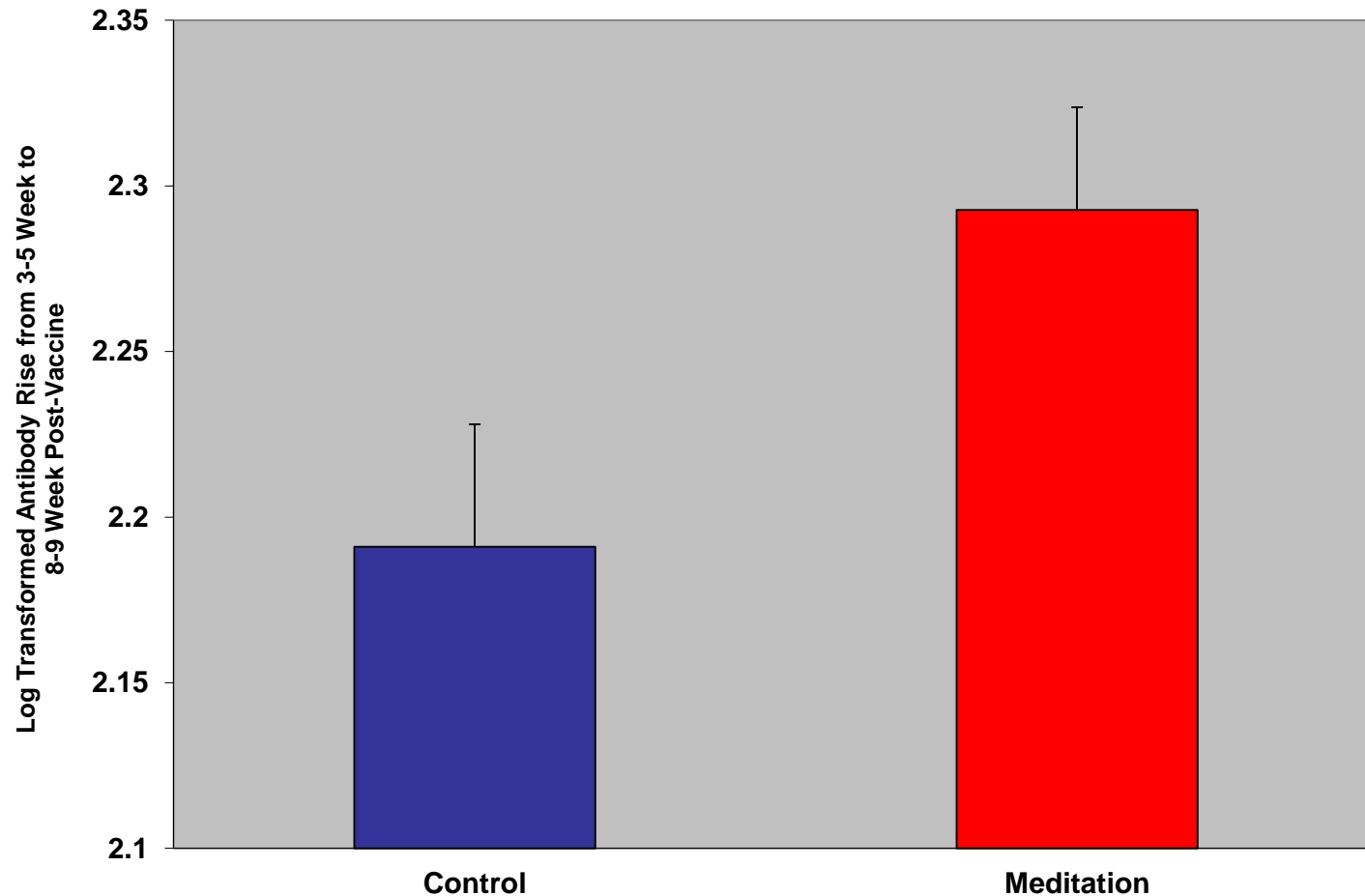
Holzel et al, Psychiatry Research: Neuroimaging, 2011

- Increase in left frontal brain activation and improved immune response to a 'flu vaccine

Davidson et al, Psychosomatic Medicine 2003



Meditation effects on antibody titers to influenza vaccine



Mindfulness and Education

The aim of education

- Traditional focus on acquisition of skills and knowledge about the outer world
- Emphasis on a curriculum of content rather than the process of cultivating the mind itself.

Attention and self-regulation

These are fundamental skills for learning and for life.

To learn effectively in a classroom setting, children need to be able to sit still, pay attention, follow rules, and avoid disruptive behavior

Attention and education



“The faculty of voluntarily bringing back a wandering attention over and over again is the very root of judgment, character and will. An education which should improve this faculty would be the education par excellence.”

William James, *The Principles of Psychology* (1890, p. 424)

Meta-analysis of social and emotional learning interventions

Durlak, et al, Child Development (2011)

Compared to controls, SEL participants demonstrated significantly better:

- social and emotional skills
- general attitude and behaviour
- academic performance that reflected an 11 percentile point difference in achievement.

Effects of mindfulness-based teacher training

Review by Meiklejohn et al, Mindfulness, 2012

Personal training in mindfulness skills can increase:

- teachers' sense of well-being
- teaching self-efficacy
- ability to manage classroom behaviour
- ability to establish and maintain supportive relationships with students

Effects of mindfulness-based student training

Review by Meiklejohn et al, Mindfulness, 2012

Training students in mindfulness has shown benefits in primary schools (6 studies) and secondary schools (8 studies), including:

- cognitive skills - attention and working memory
- academic skills
- social skills
- emotion regulation
- self-esteem
- improvements in mood
- decreases in anxiety, stress and fatigue

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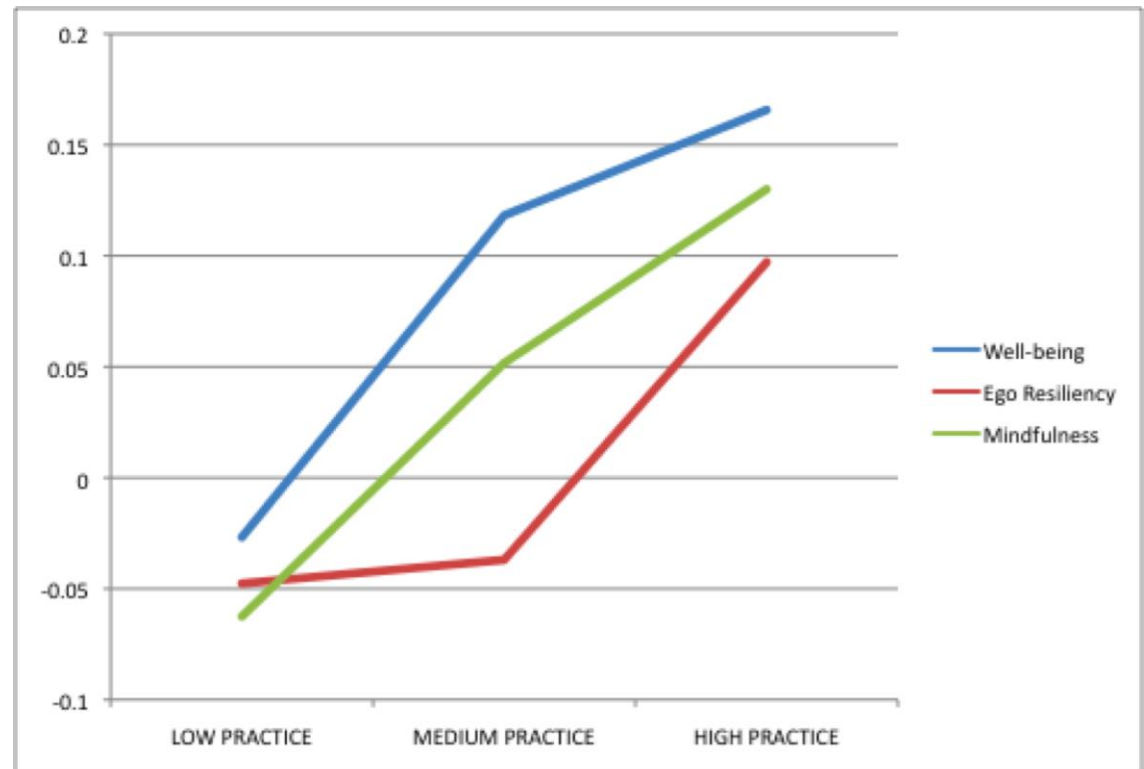
Qualitative results: very positive



- 62% thought they had learned a lot
- 69% enjoyed the training
- 43% thought the training was not long enough
- 74% thought they would continue with mindfulness practice in some way

School-based mindfulness training improves well-being

Huppert & Johnson, Journal of Positive Psychology, 2010

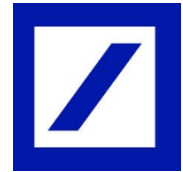
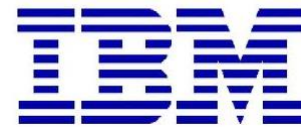


Report of the UN High-Level Meeting on Well-being and Happiness: Defining a new economic paradigm, 2 April 2012

- “Constructive and positive education is perhaps the most important facilitator of the mindsets necessary to support an economic paradigm based on happiness and well-being.”
- “Teach mindfulness widely to counteract the psychic hunger that causes materialism as the primary spirituality of our time.”



Companies that have implemented mindfulness programs at work



Deutsche Bank



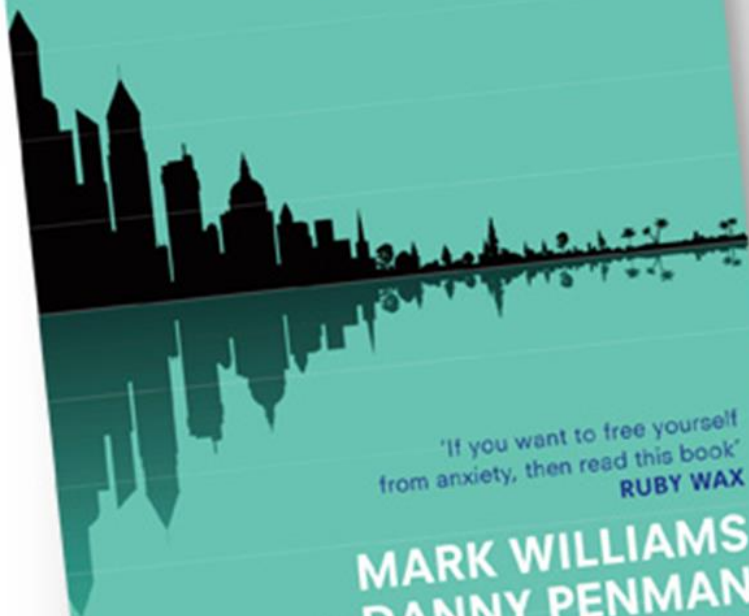
TOYOTA



Mindfulness as the foundation of flourishing

Mindfulness

a practical guide to
**FINDING PEACE IN A
FRANTIC WORLD**



'If you want to free yourself
from anxiety, then read this book'

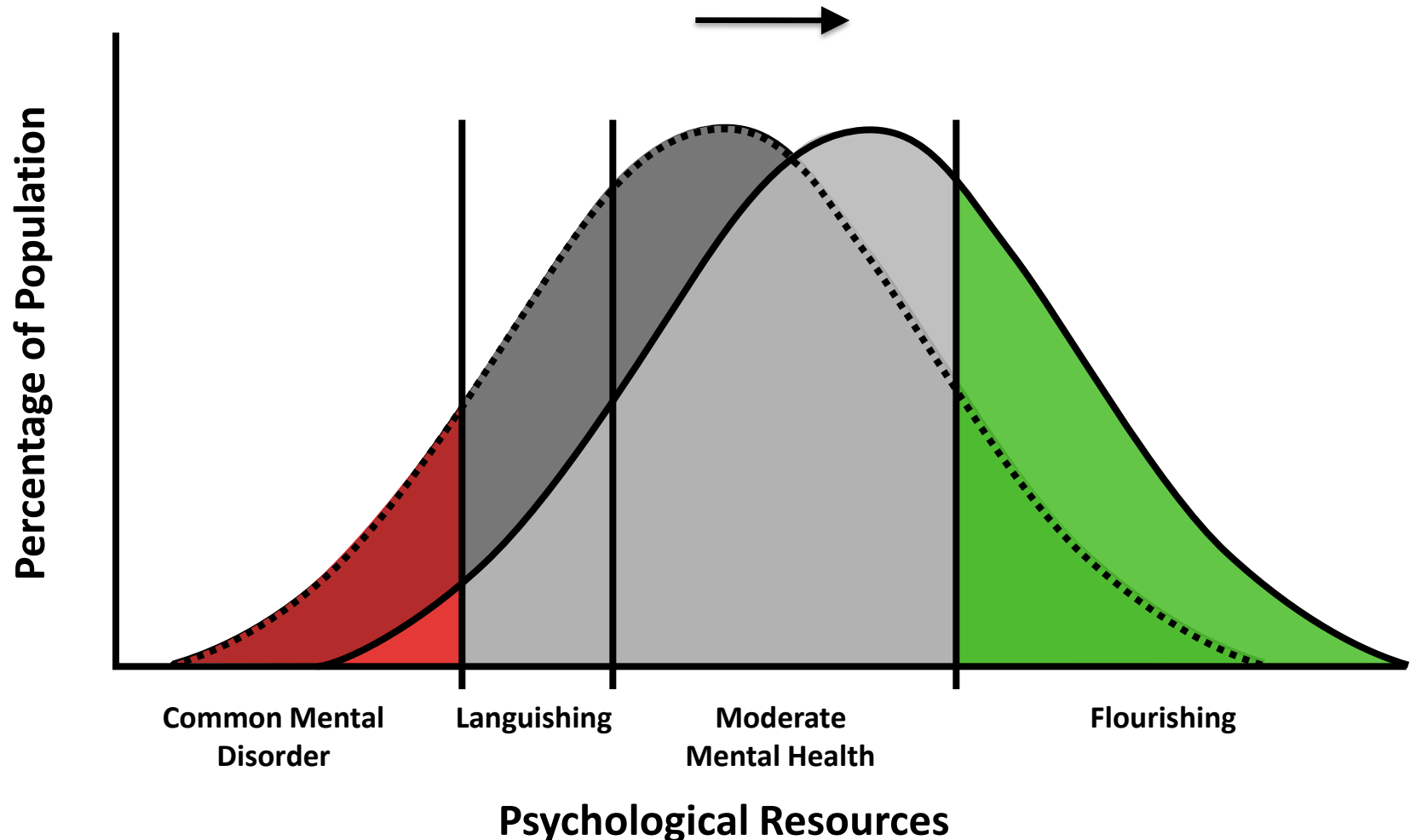
RUBY WAX

MARK WILLIAMS
and **DANNY PENMAN**

Foreword by Jon Kabat-Zinn

Implications for policy

The effect of shifting the mean of the mental health spectrum



A new goal for public policy?

To ensure that as many people as possible will flourish:

- developing their full creative potential
- being mindful of self and others
- contributing to a thriving society.

Mental health promotion and problem prevention in schools

Weare and Nind, *Health Promotion International*, 2011

The most effective interventions comprise:

- whole school approach
- focus on the whole child
- focus on positives, not just problems
- high quality implementation
- universal approach
- interactive learning
- involvement of parents and communities
- starting early and carrying on

Mindful brain and education

“So much of school experience focuses on acquisition of important skills and knowledge regarding the outer world. We learn to read, to write, to calculate numbers. Perhaps this approach stems from our educational system’s emphasis on a curriculum of content rather than one that focuses on the process of cultivating the mind itself. Wouldn’t it make sense to teach children about the mind itself and make reflection become a fundamental part of basic education? If teachers became aware that attuning to the self, being mindful, can alter the brain’s ability to create flexibility and self-observation, empathy and morality, wouldn’t it be worth the time to teach such reflective skills, first to teachers and then in age appropriate ways to the students themselves?”

Daniel Siegel, The Mindful Brain (2007), p. 260