

The months marked round the circumference of the map show the polar heavens about the name of the month and then the different constellations.



PATH TO PURPOSE HANDBOOK

THE WHY

Purpose is defined as...

1. An overarching life goal beyond an incremental step, such as passing a test or applying for college.
2. A part in one's personal search for meaning, but not entirely focused on the self. Instead, purpose looks at the world beyond the self.
3. The "ultimate concern." It is the definition of "Why do I care?" It is a reasoning beyond immediate goals and motives.

Stages of Purpose

1. Childhood: When a child is making sense of the world, the more self-generated achievement and purpose-driven actions one takes, the more ability they have to amplify their actions.
2. Adolescence: The formative period of purpose-finding, where soul-searching and experimentation should be encouraged.
3. Emerging Adulthood: When one's path to purpose begins to be realized. This path is delayed by cynicism, apathy, anxiety, and "directionless drift", where young people aren't really sure where to go next.
4. Adulthood: When purpose is continually acted upon, or delayed, rejected, and/or never found. Sometimes this may be seen as a "midlife crisis."



I think you were sent
here for a purpose.

Overview

In 2006, Dr. William Damon led a groundbreaking study of 1,200 young people. This laid the groundwork for future research around purpose. Damon found the majority of young people lacked a greater calling.

→ Disengaged (25%)

They express no purpose at all and are not active in any endeavor that may become purposeful, nor are they searching for these pursuits. They are apathetic, detached, and are not concerned about much beyond themselves.

→ Dreamers (25%)

They talk about desiring a purpose, but have done little to actively achieve much. They want to do great things, but have little to no practical application.

→ Dabblers (31%)

They have started to take on activities that may be purposeful, but show little awareness in seeing the bigger picture, nor committing to these ideas for extended periods of time. Sometimes, they may be involved in so many potential activities that they're overwhelmed.

→ Purposeful (20%)

They are grounded in purposeful activities, with a clear sense of what they are doing in the world and why. They have an overarching goal or cause that they've committed to, and they know the steps to achieve their next action.

The vast majority of young people lack direction or are not committed to a greater purpose.

*(101% due to rounding)

Anxiety, Cynicism, Apathy, and Directionless Drift

- » Depression and anxiety has increased over time.
- » Four out of ten high schoolers feel “engaged” at school.
- » One out of five high schoolers have contemplated dropping out.
- » Without purpose, adolescents are more likely to participate in risky behaviors.
- » Cynicism is linked to worse mental and physical health.

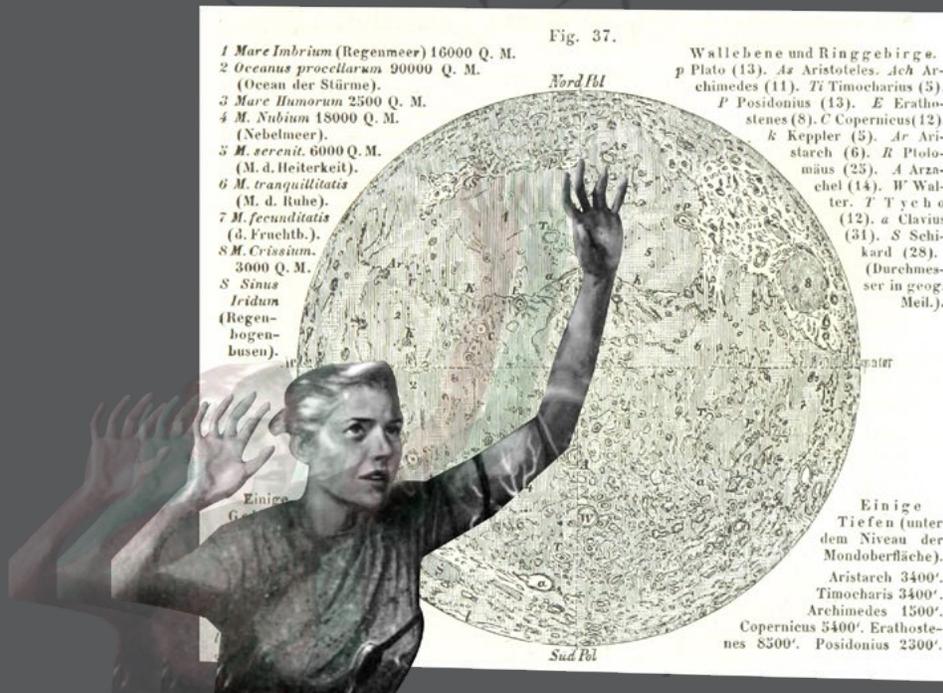
The good news?

- » Teenagers are less likely to become pregnant.
- » Juvenile crime has plummeted.
- » Adolescent drug use has decreased (although vaping is causing a dramatic uptick.)
- » More students are completing college degrees (although there is serious work that needs to be done.)
- » Young people are much more likely to participate in extracurricular activities.

Identify Formation

Purpose-finding led to...

- » Better planned actions and understanding of the self.
- » Increased hope for the future.
- » Greater life satisfaction and a feeling of greater meaning.



Community

Purpose-finding led to...

- » A sense of belonging to the world.
- » A meaningful life lends itself to a society that is fair and just for all.
- » Succeeding in spite of adversity.
- » More interconnectedness.

Emotions and Behavior

Purpose-finding led to...

- » Increased overall happiness.*
- » A feeling of relatedness with others.
- » Positive well-being.
- » Thriving across time.
- » Greater life satisfaction and less depressive symptoms.
- » Reduced destructive behaviors.
- » A movement of goals away from the individual toward the greater good.
- » A willingness to work hard to achieve goals.
- » More academic success.
- » Increased physical well-being.

*Many purpose studies find a linkage between religiosity and purpose, but further research indicates that religiosity is just one common form of purpose-finding. The “path to purpose” itself is cause for increased life satisfaction.

Education

What can we do in school to bolster purpose-finding?

- » Promoting extracurricular activities leads to increased purpose.
- » Having purposeful work as a goal leads to increased meaning and motivation.
- » The earlier mentors and peers help someone begin their path to purpose, the better the outcome.
- » By simply asking students about purpose, we increase their aptitude toward it.
- » The act of discussing purpose, even with limited intervention, leads to greater purpose-finding.
- » Adult mentors outside the home are highly correlated to career and life purpose-finding.
- » Yet, when educators pay little attention to purpose-finding, or see their content superseding purpose-finding activities, students see no major shifts in their thinking.

What's familiar in this research? Does it affirm what you already know?
Does this research match up to your experiences in the classroom?



Do you see yourself as being purposeful? Does education connect to your purpose? If so, when did you realize that this was your path?



Those who find themselves taking purposeful actions often refer to an "epiphany." A certain series of events leads them to a certain conclusion, completely altering their life goals and aligning toward a clear direction.

It's important to share your own purpose in life, too. Moral exemplars are great, but sometimes you try to give them the story of Gandhi or Mother Teresa, and they just go 'blech.' It's totally overwhelming. But when you hear from a parent, a teacher, a mentor, a neighbor, or a friend, 'Here is what gives my life purpose or meaning,' that can seem much more amenable, proximal, and doable.

- Dr. Kendall Cotton Bronk

THE HOW



The primary component of school should be for young people to find a path to purpose.

Purpose is discovered as a connection between three traits:

1. Understanding one's abilities.
2. Seeing how these abilities can serve the world.
3. Feeling enjoyment by using these abilities in this way.

However, many young people lack the space to obtain the self-knowledge and understanding required to realize these points.

In what ways may young people be distracted from finding their purpose in life? Further, are there distractions as a result of their schooling?

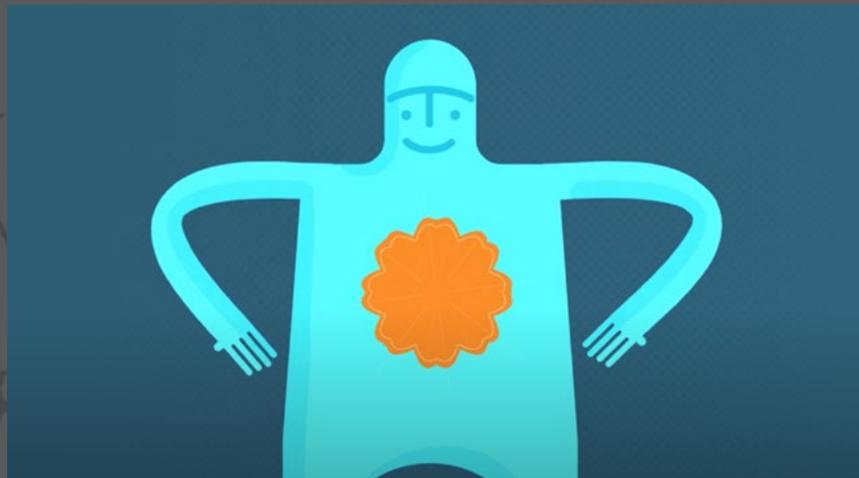
Distractions

Social media, television, and the culture at large celebrates quick results and resulting achievement.

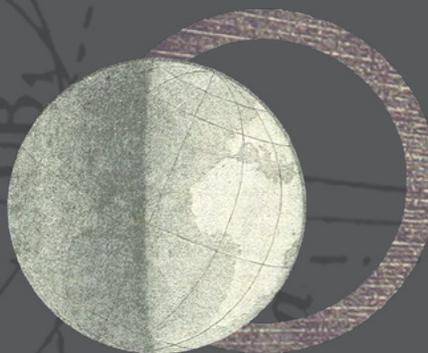
School structures hurt our ability to foster purpose. How could each of the following limit a student's possibilities? How could we change these structures?

Practice	Detriment	Shift
Grades	Students become interested in marks rather than learning, and are less likely to take risks or hone in on their interests.	Support feedback-driven classrooms; allow for retakes; shift toward gradeless learning.
Competitive Games	Students increasingly focus on themselves and being better than others, instead of building positive communal relationships.	Focus on cooperative learning; co-create community norms; make competition optional.
Standardized Testing		
A Lack of Student Voice		
Mandated/Strict Curriculums		
Homework		
Colonized Curriculums		
Biased Educators		
Little Connection to the Community		

Shifting Toward Purpose



Matthew Taylor on The Power to Create (The RSA)



These brilliant students would not be losing their motivation in college if they brought with them a better understanding of what they wanted to accomplish and why. If, during the early years of strenuous effort and high achievement, they had found purposes that went deeper than the grades and awards, they would have hit the ground running when they entered college.

- Dr. William Damon

Implementation

Developing a path to purpose is not an exact science, as the actual process of purpose-finding is unique to every individual and developed over the course of many realizations. However, the simple act of talking and acting with purpose substantiates a path to purpose.

Our goal is to make room for purpose-finding within our classrooms, in addition to pushing back against educational structures that hamper youth development (see above.)

We've assembled a collection of resources, materials, and activities that can help foster a sense of purpose.

Harvard Project Zero (Open-Ended Purpose-Driven Questions)
Value Sort (Good Work)
Activity: Distinguishing Purpose and Goals
Activity: Enjoyment and Excellence
Activity: Expressing Gratitude
Activity: Getting Specific - What Do YOU Want?
Activity: Gratitude: Benefits and Costs
Activity: Introduction to Gratitude
Activity: Magic Wand
Activity: Mind Map
Activity: My Ideal Job
Activity: Purpose Identification
Activity: Setting Purposeful Goals
Activity: The Loss of Purpose
Activity: What Do You Value?



Dr. Carol Dweck on How To Help Every Child Fulfill Their Potential (The RSA)

The following interview protocol, used by Dr. William Damon and adapted by Dr. Kendall Cotton Bronk, was both used to identify purpose research as well as foster it. These questions, broken down into class activities, reflections, and prompts could be instituted into any classroom.

Introduction

1. Tell me a little about yourself. What kind of person are you?
2. What kinds of things do you really care about? Why do you care about these things?
3. What's most important to you in your life? Why is that important to you?"
4. Do you have any long-term goals? What are a few of the more important ones? Why are these goals important to you?
 - a. If no, That's interesting, why do you prefer not to have goals? What does it mean to you not to have goals?
 - b. If yes, Are you doing anything now to achieve these goals or objectives? If yes, What are you doing? If no, What has kept you back from doing something to meet these goals?
5. What does it mean to have a good life?
6. What does it mean to be a good person?
7. What would you say you spend most of your energy on these days?
8. If you were looking back on your life, how would you want to be remembered? What would you want to be remembered for? Why?

Building Connections

9. Earlier you talked about [x] being important to you. Can you tell me how and why this became important? When did it become important to you?
10. Why did you get involved with this particular objective or cause rather than with a different one?
11. Is there someone who helped you act on your goal(s) initially?
12. Would you say your friends and family are concerned with the same things? Have your friends, family and other people in your life generally supported or opposed your efforts?
13. Have you gotten others involved in your efforts? If yes, how did you do this?
14. Apart from particular people, were there other things that influenced you (books, films, particular experiences, or other things)?

For this reason, adults who wish to help young people find their purposes are in a somewhat awkward position. We cannot present a ready-made purpose to a young person and expect that it will suit her comfortably. We can and should, however, introduce inspiring ideas, and sources of ideas people, books, religious or secular organizations that may provide young people with the inspirations that will get them on their way. We also can create conditions that facilitate their own efforts to fashion purposes.

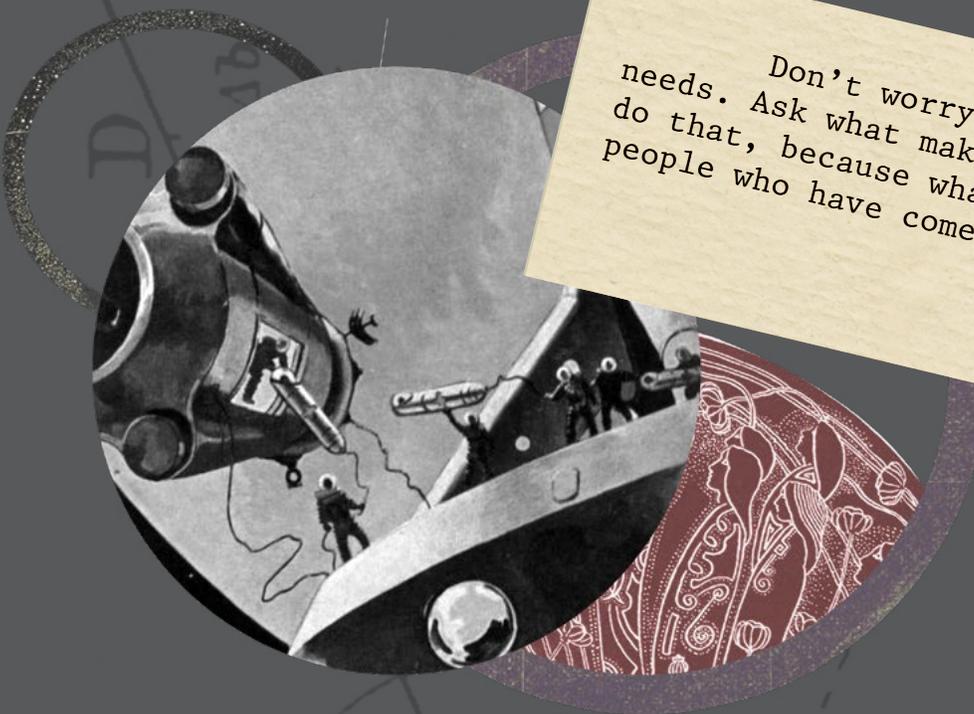
- Dr. William Damon

Categorizing Purpose

21. Tell me about your friends and family.
22. How important are they to you relative to the other things in your life? Why?
23. Do you want to have a family of your own someday? Why? How important is that to you? Why?
24. Do you do anything special to show your family or friends that they are important to you? If yes, what do you do? Why?
25. (*If religiously-based) What role does religion, faith, spirituality, or God play in your life, if any? Are you active in a church or organized religion? What kinds of things do you do there?
26. Is your community important to you? How does it play a role in your life? Do you do anything to help improve your community? Do you do any community service? If yes, what do you do? Why do you do it?
27. Are you an x (e.g. American) citizen? What does it mean to you to be a citizen? Is it important to you to be a citizen? Why or why not?
28. When you get older, what kind of work would you like to do? Why? Will your career be important to you? Why? How important will it be? Why? Are you doing anything now to prepare you for your life's work/career?

Closing

29. We're coming to the end of the interview; is there anything you would like to add about what's important to you or what you are trying to accomplish in life?
30. Summing up, what do you think matters most to you at this time? Will that still matter most to you as you get older? Why/Why not?



Don't worry about what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive and do that, because what the world needs is people who have come alive.

- Howard Thurman

In structuring purpose finding activities, we can look to research on how to best plan our course. The following is how young people tend to connect to their purpose:

1. Finding mentors or peers that inspire and motivate.
2. Connecting and observing these mentors or peers at work or doing what they love.
3. Having a “revelationary moment” on something that can be connected or improved.
4. Having a second “revelationary moment” where one realizes they can make a difference.
5. Starting to identify a purpose, along with how to accomplish it.
6. Obtaining support from family and friends.
7. Expanding efforts to pursue one’s purpose in new ways.
8. Acquiring new skills connected with this pursuit.
9. Becoming better at these new skills.
10. Enhancing one’s optimism and self-confidence.
11. Following long-term commitment to this purpose.
12. Transferring these skills and character strengths as a result of this purpose to other areas of life.

Spreading the Idea

How can we take these ideas back to your school for more educators to understand?

What purposeful activities can we connect to any classroom?

How can we connect “traditional” subjects to purpose-finding?

Mathematics	
Science	
Language Arts	
Social Studies	
The Arts	



Resources

Below we've compiled a short list of materials to arm yourself with more tools to help form a path to purpose. None of these would be required to start the practice, but may prove useful for further fortitude or influencing peers:

Books

- » *Where You Go Is Not Who You'll Be: An Antidote to the College Admissions Mania* by Frank Bruni, 2015.
- » *Purpose in Life: A Critical Component of Optimal Youth Development* by Kendall Cotton Bronk. 2014.
- » *Noble Purpose: The Joy of Living a Meaningful Life* by William Damon. 2003.
- » *The Path to Purpose: Helping Our Children Find Their Calling in Life* by William Damon. 2008.
- » *Excellent Sheep* by William Deresiewicz. 2015.
- » *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*. bell hooks. 2003.
- » *Man's Search for Meaning* by Victor E Frankl & Harold S Kushner. 2006.
- » *Age of Opportunity* by Laurence Steinberg. 2014.
- » *The Top Five Regrets of the Dying* by Bronnie Ware. 2011.
- » *Brother West: Living and Loving Out Loud, A Memoir* by Cornel West and David Ritz. 2009.

Articles

- » [People Age Better If They Have a Purpose In Life](#). TIME. Amanda Macmillian. 2017.
- » [Seven Ways to Help High Schoolers Find Purpose](#). Greater Good. Patrick Cook-Deegan. 2016.
- » [How to Help Teens Live Life on Purpose](#). Orbiter. Mark Moring & Kendall Cotton Bronk. 2018.
- » [Driven to succeed: How we're depriving teens of a sense of purpose](#). Palo Alto Weekly. Terri Lobdell. 2011.

Websites

- » [Greater Good Magazine](#)
- » [Adolescent Moral Development Lab \(Kendall Cotton Bronk\)](#)
- » [Human Restoration Project](#)

Podcasts

- » S3: E1: The Good Life feat. Steven Gumbay, REENVISIONED, The Future Project, Anne Connolly, Richard Loeper-Viti, & Gamal Sherif. Human Restoration Project.
- » S3: E2: It All Orbits Purpose feat. Kendall Cotton Bronk, John Cagle, Skylar Primm, and Elizabeth Martin. Human Restoration Project.
- » S3: E7: Writing for Purpose and Advocacy feat. Bryn Orum, J.J. Burry, John Warner, Stephanie Hurt, & Dr. Richard Wilkinson. Human Restoration Project.
- » The Science of Happiness. PRX.

Materials

- » Foster Purpose Toolkit
- » The Good Project
- » #ToolkitTalk – Helping Kids Find Purpose
- » Project Zero

None of us alone can save the nation or the world. But each of us can make a positive difference if we commit ourselves to do so.

- Dr. Cornel West



MY

LEARNING JOURNEY

This is my “why.” I went into education because of this. And it’s not just my idea, there’s research to support it.

Here’s what’s holding me back. I may be able to mitigate these problems by...



These elements of purpose-finding are more than possible within my classroom:

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