
Keynote Presentation: Education and wellbeing: the peril and the promise
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The orthodox view of the health and wellbeing of children and youth is one of continuing improvement in line with historic trends. This picture relies on rising life expectancy and underestimates the importance of mental health problems, which make the largest contribution to the burden of disease in young people and for which the trends are adverse. These trends have their sources in the defining features of western societies, and optimising wellbeing will mean making correspondingly profound social and cultural changes. This situation poses huge challenges to the education system in terms of both its impact on students and their learning (the peril) and what education can do about it (the promise). The task goes beyond health education that seeks to enhance individual health and wellbeing. It must embrace a wider, social perspective that draws its legitimacy and inspiration from the fundamental goal of education: to give young people a better understanding of themselves and their world so that they can, in turn, lead richer, healthier lives.