

CHAPTER XIII

The Whole Person

“Let the main ideas which are introduced into a child’s education be few and important, and let them be thrown into every combination possible.”

Alfred North Whitehead, “The Aims of Education”

• The Inspection

Say you inherit a big old house. It has a library, floor to ceiling. A studio under a skylight. A music room with a grand piano. A workshop. A garden that needs tending every week. You hire an inspector to tell you what shape it’s in.

He walks past the library and the garden, straight into the downstairs bathroom. He runs the tap, flushes the toilet, and signs a report: the house is in excellent condition. Meanwhile the studio roof leaks, the piano hasn’t been tuned in thirty years, and the garden has gone to weeds. The garden was never on his checklist.

Many of us went through school with a version of that feeling: the institution responsible for us cared about a sliver of what we were, and the rest of the house was ours to keep up on our own time, or let go.

This chapter defines what it means to raise a **whole person**, the goal Chapter 1 named as breadth.¹ Schools never set out to raise one. Their mandate is academic, and nearly everything they measure sits in one corner of one line of development. Ken Wilber's lines of development, widened by Howard Gardner, give the missing goal a map: the capacities that together make up a human being. The lines grow unevenly and semi-independently, as Kurt Fischer's web shows, so the whole person doesn't happen by accident. Each line has to be raised on purpose.

Thirteen curricula would be impossible to run. The way through is **cross-line depth**: learning objects chosen because several lines cross in them. Opened across Wilber's four quadrants as well, each object becomes a grid of possible cells. That grid is too large for any adult to hold in mind, and it's exactly the kind of complexity AI tools now make workable.

Egan's kinds of understanding come in Chapter 14.² This chapter carries the developmental science of Fischer's web itself, and uses it to show why the lines must be raised deliberately and where learning objects sit.

🍷 The Goal Schools Never Claimed

What Schools Are Built to Produce

A school's mission statement is painted in the front hallway. Its purpose is written in its accountability system: what it's measured on, and what it's penalized for failing to produce. An institution's accountability system is its honest statement of purpose.

None of this is about the adults in the building. Teachers work inside requirements they didn't write, and many of them push against those requirements every day.

In the United States, the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) requires each state to hold schools accountable on:

- annual tests in reading and language arts and in mathematics, with a measure of growth;
- graduation rates, for high schools;
- progress toward English proficiency for English learners;
- one or more measures of “school quality or student success,” such as chronic absenteeism or school climate.

The law requires the academic indicators to carry much greater weight than the rest. What counts, then, is two subjects inside one corner of one line of development, and mostly the part of that corner a bubble sheet can reach. A child can walk into the building with moral courage, a fine eye, a coordinated body, and real tact with other people, and none of it appears on the state's spreadsheet. The system has no column for the moral, aesthetic, physical, volitional, or interpersonal lines.

Whole-Child Language Describes Conditions

You may be thinking that schools talk about the whole child constantly. They do. ASCD's Whole Child initiative (2007) asks that each student be healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged. Those are good things to ask for. They're the conditions a child should learn in, the temperature and water and light in a greenhouse. They say nothing about the shape of the plant. And the fifth, challenged, points back to academic challenge and readiness for college and work. None of the five names a dimension of the person to be grown.

Neighbors That Did Claim the Goal

Some traditions have aimed at the whole person.

- **Waldorf education**, founded by Rudolf Steiner in Stuttgart in 1919, aims at physical, emotional, cognitive, social, and spiritual development. Its map rests on anthroposophy, Steiner's esoteric spiritual system, and owes little to developmental research.

- **Classical education** aimed at a rounded person inside a fixed canon.³
- **Montessori** attends to the body, the senses, and practical life alongside the intellect.³

Each names the goal. None has a map of distinct lines with levels, or a way to read how far a given child has grown in each. They know they want the whole house kept up, and they have no floor plan.

Why the Goal Falls to This Model

If no institution claims the whole person, the goal belongs to whoever holds the child's whole day: the families and innovative educators this book is written for.⁴ And if you're an adult whose own schooling checked the plumbing and skipped the rest, it belongs to you as well. You can't deliberately raise what you can't name, so this chapter supplies the map.

• The Lines: A Map of Humanness

Wilber's Lines

In Ken Wilber's integral theory, developmental lines are “relatively independent streams or capacities that proceed through levels of development.” In *Integral Psychology* (2000), Wilber gathers about two dozen from the research of others: morals, affects, self-identity, cognition, role-taking, creativity, altruism, empathy, kinesthetic skill, several lines that can be called spiritual, and more. A person can be far along in some lines, in the middle of others, and early in still others, all at the same time. Wilber's **psychograph** charts that profile, one bar per line.

You've met the profile. The executive who can hold a company's whole supply chain in her head and loses her temper like a four-year-old when a board member disagrees with her. The gifted athlete with no moral compass. Our culture pays handsomely for a spike in one or two lines and rarely looks at the valleys beside it.

Gardner's Widening

Howard Gardner's *Frames of Mind* (1983) rejected the idea of intelligence as a single ability measured by IQ. He proposed distinct intelligences, each meeting criteria such as a distinct developmental path, its own core operations, and the existence of prodigies. His list reached eight with the naturalist intelligence in 1995. His motive is the one this chapter needs: to widen what counts as human ability beyond what a test of words and numbers can see.

The Working Set

The book combines the two into thirteen lines. Gardner's linguistic and logical-mathematical intelligences fold into the cognitive line. His intrapersonal intelligence separates self-knowledge from the emotional line. Wilber treats the number of lines as open, and this set is a working choice. Someone else could draw it with eleven or fifteen, and I'd like to hear the case.

LINE	WHAT IT IS	WELL GROWN, IT LOOKS LIKE
Cognitive	Understanding, reasoning, language, number	Thinks clearly, explains, builds and tests ideas
Emotional	Feeling, and handling what one feels	Feels fully without being ruled by it
Interpersonal	Reading and relating to others	Understands others, cooperates, repairs conflict
Moral	Sense of right, fairness, and care	Acts on a conscience of their own
Physical	The body's strength, coordination, and skill	Capable, coordinated, at home in the body
Will	Choosing, persisting, self-command	Starts, persists, finishes, and can wait
Aesthetic	Perceiving and making beauty	Notices, prefers, and makes with care
Spiritual	Meaning, wonder, the largest questions	Asks what life is for and lives by an answer
Values	What one holds as worth pursuing	Knows what they value and why
Musical	Rhythm, pitch, and musical form	Hears, keeps, and makes music

LINE	WHAT IT IS	WELL GROWN, IT LOOKS LIKE
Visual-spatial	Seeing, imagining, and arranging space	Pictures, maps, designs, builds
Naturalistic	Noticing and ordering the living world	Knows the plants, animals, and patterns around them
Intrapersonal	Knowing oneself	Knows their own mind, strengths, and limits

The lines matter most in combination. A well-grown interpersonal line beside a stunted moral line gives you someone who reads people perfectly and uses the reading against them. A strong cognitive line beside a weak will produces brilliant plans that never get started.

What the Map Is For

The lines are a map of what to grow. They make no claim about how the brain is built. That keeps the chapter clear of a debate it doesn't need: multiple intelligences theory has thin psychometric support, and its intelligences correlate with general intelligence. It also keeps the lines apart from learning styles, which Gardner himself has said intelligences are not. Whether you'd rather watch a video or read a page is a question about input. The lines are about what a person can do in the world.

The claim here is normative: these are the capacities worth raising in a human being. The claim that they grow semi-independently rests on firmer ground, in the next section.

 Why Each Line Must Be Raised on Purpose

The old assumption is that growth takes care of itself. Feed a child, send her out the door, and maturity arrives with the birthdays, every line rising together like boats on a tide. The developmental evidence says otherwise.

The Web Grows Unevenly

Kurt Fischer and Todd Rose (2001) describe development as a web of strands: “the strands represent potential skills that are developing in a domain, and the points of connection among the strands represent the integration of these skills.” Strands develop separately before they join, some never join, and each learner “constructs distinct pathways in every important learning domain.” The same learner performs at different levels in different domains and settings, and with or without support.⁵

The web explains a teenager who can give a sophisticated account of climate justice and can't get his laundry into the hamper. Different strands, at different heights.

The Theory Behind the Web

Kurt Fischer (1943–2020) built **dynamic skill theory** to explain both the consistency and the variability in how people develop. He co-founded Harvard's Mind, Brain, and Education program and was founding editor of the journal *Mind, Brain, and Education* (2007). Thomas Bidell and Michael Mascolo carried the work forward in the *Handbook of Integrative Developmental Science* (2020).

In Fischer's account, skills are built by coordinating smaller skills into larger ones, and they climb through broad tiers: actions, then representations, then abstractions, and for some adults, principles. The tiers don't form a single ladder. A learner can be far along in one skill and early in another, even within one subject.

Functional and Optimal Levels

Most of what children do, Fischer and Rose (1998) write, does “not push the limit of their capacities.” Each learner has a **functional level**, what they manage alone, and a higher **optimal level**, what they reach with support. “Removing the support leads to a natural, rapid drop in the level of understanding.”

Think of a bench press. Alone, you can safely lift 150 pounds. With an experienced spotter standing over you, cueing you and keeping two fingers under the bar, you get 180. Step the spotter away and you're back to 150 on the next set. The gap between the two numbers is where teaching works.⁵

Growth spurts

Optimal levels rise in clusters of spurts across many domains in the same age periods, and the energy in the EEG shows spurts that “closely parallel” them (Fischer and Rose, 1998). The spurts show up at the optimal level, with support. Everyday performance doesn't automatically follow. For the whole person this matters twice. A spurt opens new reach in many lines at once. And each line still has to be exercised, with support, for the new reach to be used.

What Follows for the Whole Person

Growth in one line doesn't carry another with it. A child can reason far ahead of her age and handle her feelings like someone much younger. A morally serious teenager can be timid in his body. Integral theory makes the same point for the self-related lines: cognitive development is necessary for them, and it isn't enough.

The division of labor is simple. Fischer supplies the evidence that human capacities grow semi-independently. Wilber's lines name which capacities are worth raising.

A line left untended isn't held in reserve for later. It grows by accident, from whatever the child happens to collide with, or it stalls. A school's choice to measure one line is therefore also a choice about the other twelve.

The Pattern in Every Line

Each line shows the same dynamic at the moment a child takes initiative in it. Initiative met with support builds self-trust and an inner reference point in that domain. Initiative met with correction builds a hesitant version of the same capacity, one that looks outward for permission.⁶

LINE	THE INITIATIVE	MET WITH SUPPORT	MET WITH CORRECTION
Cognitive	A five-year-old insists the moon is following the car	“Let’s watch it at the next turn”	“It only looks that way”
Emotional	An eight-year-old cries after losing a chess game	The loss is named and sat with: “That one stung”	“It’s just a game, stop crying”
Interpersonal	A nine-year-old tries to settle a fight between younger cousins	The adult watches, then asks afterward what worked	The adult steps in and settles it
Moral	A ten-year-old objects that a house rule is unfair	He is asked to make his case, and the rule is reconsidered	“Because I said so”
Physical	A two-year-old climbs the playground ladder	An adult spots from below and lets her find the rungs	“Get down, you’ll fall”
Will	A teenager commits to training for a race	The plan is his; an adult asks what he needs	The schedule is set for him and checked daily
Aesthetic	A six-year-old paints the sky purple	“Tell me about your sky”	“Skies are blue”
Spiritual	A seven-year-old asks where the dog went when it died	The question is taken seriously and explored together	The subject is changed
Values	A twelve-year-old wants to spend her savings on a camera	She’s asked what draws her to it, and the choice stays hers	She’s told what’s worth buying
Musical	A fourteen-year-old writes her first song	She plays it for the family after dinner	Her chord choices are corrected first
Visual-spatial	An eleven-year-old rearranges his bedroom furniture	He lives with his layout for a month	The furniture goes back
Naturalistic	A six-year-old brings home a jar of beetles	Someone helps her find out what they eat	“Get those bugs out of the house”
Intrapersonal	A fifteen-year-old wonders aloud whether she still wants to compete	She’s asked what she’s noticed about herself	“You’ve put in too many years to quit”

Correction has its place. A child running toward traffic gets grabbed, and nobody asks her opinion first. The trouble comes when adults use emergency moves on non-emergencies. The purple sky is a painting, and a six-year-old isn't making a weather report. Correct the color and she learns that her own sense of what looks right doesn't count, and starts painting for the adult. Take over the teenager's training plan and you've lent him your will in place of growing his.

Nearly all of this correction comes from love, worry, or a wish to be efficient. That's what makes it so common. You may be able to name a line of your own that stalled at eight or fourteen, after a first clumsy try was met with a well-meant correction.

Tracking Every Line

Chapter 1 promised that every line is tracked rather than assumed. The psychograph becomes the running record: where the child's reach sits in each line, and where engagement runs high. Some lines read easily, such as physical skill or musical pitch. Others, such as the spiritual and values lines, show mostly in what a child asks, chooses, and returns to, and have to be read that way. Nobody should give a seven-year-old a multiple-choice test on the meaning of life.

Cross-Line Depth

Learning Objects on the Web

Label the strands of Fischer's web with the thirteen lines, and a learning object becomes a point on the web. Its **line depth** is how many strands meet in it. A thin object sits on one strand. A timed sheet of multiplication facts asks something of the cognitive line and nothing of the body, the conscience, or taste. A rich object sits at a crossing, where several lines are asked to grow at once.

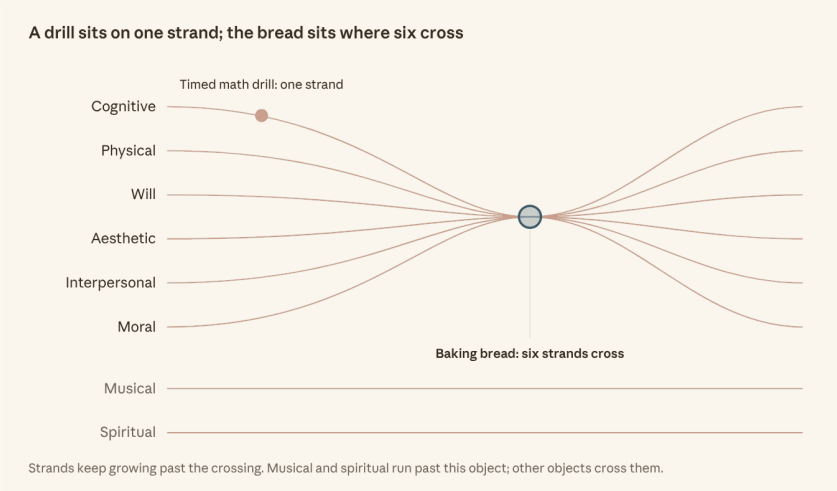


Figure 13.1 · learning objects on Fischer’s web (schematic)

The drill asks something of one line. The bread asks something of six, and every strand keeps growing past the crossing.

One Afternoon, Six Lines

Sam is seven. On Saturday he bakes a loaf of bread with his mother and his five-year-old sister.

LINE	WHAT THE BREAD ASKS OF IT
Cognitive	Halving the recipe; why the dough rises
Physical	Kneading, shaping, handling heat safely
Will	Waiting an hour for the rise; leaving the oven door shut
Aesthetic	The shape of the loaf, the crust, the taste
Interpersonal	Sharing the steps with his sister: you measure, I’ll pour
Moral	Feeding someone else; cutting fair slices

One afternoon, no textbook, six lines asked to grow.

A Second Axis

Line depth asks how many human capacities an object calls on. The quadrants, in the next section, ask from how many perspectives the object is seen, and the grid after that puts the two together.

Cross-Line and Interdisciplinary

You may be thinking this is interdisciplinary learning under a new name: study Rome in history, build a catapult in science. Interdisciplinary units join subjects, and they almost always stay inside the cognitive line. History and physics are two flavors of reasoning on one strand. Cross-line depth asks one object to demand something of the body, the will, taste, and conscience as well. Asking the body and the conscience to show up beside the mind is the difference between schooling and raising a person.

Touching a Line and Growing It

Fischer insists that skills belong to their contexts. A line grows only where the object genuinely asks something of it. The bread builds patience only if the waiting is real and Sam does it. If his mother runs short of time and swaps in store-bought dough that has already risen, the will line drops out of the afternoon. Each line's engagement has to be read in the child, whatever the object's label promises.

Choosing Objects for Their Crossings

The model can now work in two directions. It can start from a line that lags on a child's psychograph and look for rich objects that include it. A child whose interpersonal and physical lines have stalled might build a tree house with the neighbors' kids. Or it can start from an object, a community garden, say, and ask which lines cross in it. Both replace the single path of walking one line to one object.

Whitehead gave the rule a century ago, in the line that opens this chapter: a few important ideas, "thrown into every combination possible." The grid is

that rule made workable: a few rich objects, opened across many lines and perspectives.

▮ Quadrant Depth

The thirteen lines map what a person can grow. A person also lives among other people and inside systems, and anything worth learning can be looked at from more than one side.

The Four Quadrants

Wilber crosses two distinctions, inner and outer, individual and collective, and gets four perspectives on anything: “I,” “it,” “we,” and “its.” A brain scan shows what’s happening in a head from outside; it can’t tell you what the person feels. A single child acts; she also lives inside a class, a family, and a school. Wilber holds that the four perspectives are complementary and that all are needed for a complete account. Applied to a learning object, each quadrant becomes a different question the learner can ask of it.

Take a question every child meets sooner or later: the whole class is kept in from recess because one child misbehaved.

QUADRANT	WHAT IT ASKS OF THE OBJECT	THE CLASS KEPT IN FOR ONE CHILD’S MISTAKE
Inner individual (“I”)	What do I feel and think about it?	How it felt to be punished for something I didn’t do
Outer individual (“it”)	What can I observe, test, or do?	Watching what the class does in the week after
Inner collective (“we”)	What do we believe and value about it?	What the class thinks is fair, and why families disagree
Outer collective (“its”)	How do systems and institutions handle it?	How schools, sports leagues, and courts treat collective punishment

Depth in One Sitting

Your ten-year-old comes home furious about recess. Do you have to cover all four quadrants before dinner? No. One object can be opened in one quadrant or several, and three filters decide how many.

Richness. Conceptual, relational, and values-laden objects support real depth. Tying shoelaces or a street-safety rule serves a child better as a single fast loop.

Live engagement. Open another quadrant while engagement holds. Close back down when it drops.

Safety. Safety-critical objects stay narrow, whatever their richness.

Depth Across Returns

A rich question comes back many times over a childhood, and each return can open a quadrant it hasn't yet visited. At six, the recess question may live entirely in feeling: she's angry, and she needs help with the anger. At ten, fairness comes back as a fight about playing time on a soccer team, and the conversation can open the "we": what does this team think is fair, and why? At fifteen, studying history, she can open the "its" and look at how courts and treaties have handled punishing a group for one member's act.

There's no fixed order across the quadrants, in keeping with the model's refusal of fixed sequences.¹¹ The signal to read is **staleness**: a question that keeps landing in the same quadrant across several returns, re-argued as a feeling each time and never tested against what others believe or how a rule actually works. A teenager who answers every rule with "but it feels unfair to me," month after month, is stuck in the "I." That's the moment for the adult to open another quadrant: I hear how it feels; now let's look at why the school wrote the rule, and what happens in schools that don't have it.

Individual quadrants tend to be within reach earlier than collective ones. Young children reach the collective quadrants readily through story, though: a myth about how a village treats a thief is a lesson in the "its."¹²

Practice and the Quadrants

Quadrant depth serves Inquiry most. A Practice skill lives mainly in the outer-individual quadrant, the body or mind doing it. The others can be opened around it: what mastery feels like from inside, the culture of the craft, the systems the skill serves. Those are often where worth and ownership enter a drill.¹³ A piano student grinding through scales is in the “it.” The night she hears how a pianist she admires talks about practicing, she’s in the “we,” and the scales feel different the next morning.

Limits

The quadrants come from Wilber’s philosophy, and no experiment produced them. Critics such as Jorge Ferrer and Frank Visser have called his wider framework overly hierarchical and culturally biased. The book uses only the two distinctions, as a checklist of perspectives worth opening.

☛ The Grid

Line depth and quadrant depth are separate axes. Together they give each learning object up to fifty-two cells, thirteen lines by four quadrants. Here is Sam’s bread across the six lines it touches.

LINE	INNER INDIVIDUAL	OUTER INDIVIDUAL	INNER COLLECTIVE	OUTER COLLECTIVE
Cognitive	The puzzle of why dough rises	Halving the recipe; measuring	Why nearly every culture has a bread	Where the flour comes from: farm, mill, store
Physical	The feel of dough coming right	Kneading, shaping, handling heat	Kitchen skills passed down in a family	How a bakery organizes its work
Will	What waiting an hour feels like	Leaving the oven shut	Why a family waits to eat together	Rising times and a baker’s schedule
Aesthetic	What makes a loaf beautiful to me	Shaping and scoring the crust	The breads a family or culture prizes	How shops display and sell bread

LINE	INNER INDIVIDUAL	OUTER INDIVIDUAL	INNER COLLECTIVE	OUTER COLLECTIVE
Interpersonal	How it feels to share the work	Taking turns with a sibling	Bread as something shared at a table	Who bakes, who buys, who delivers
Moral	Wanting to cut fair slices	Serving others first	Breaking bread as a sign of welcome	Food banks, and who goes without

The lines the bread barely touches have cells too. In the spiritual line's "we," bread opens into ritual: challah on a Friday night, the bread of communion, the meal that breaks a fast at sundown in Ramadan. In the values line's "its," it opens into what a loaf costs to make and who can buy one.

Reading the Grid

No afternoon opens all twenty-four cells in the table, let alone fifty-two. The grid is the field of what one object could become. The child's psychograph and live engagement choose the handful that open today, and the rest wait for a later return. Sam's Saturday might open three: the halving, the waiting, and the fair slices. The food bank can wait until he's ten and asks why some families don't have bread.

Navigating the Grid

The Size of the Design Space

Each learning object has up to fifty-two cells, and each cell can be run as Inquiry or as Practice. A child meets hundreds of objects a year. The psychograph that should guide the choice among them has thirteen lines, each at its own level, each growing or stalling or going stale in its own quadrant. No parent or teacher can hold that in mind. Try, and you'll be conducting an orchestra of fifty-two players from fifty-two different scores.

Until now the whole person could only be approximated. A gifted teacher could do some of it by intuition. Aristocratic families did more of it by hiring a team: a riding master for the body and the will, a music master, a tutor in

languages and logic, a chaplain for the moral and spiritual lines, all comparing notes on one child. Only a few families could ever afford that.⁸

Why It Becomes Workable Now

The grid is exactly the kind of complexity AI tools can carry. A tool can:

- lay out an object's full grid, every line and quadrant it could open, at almost no cost;
- hold the child's psychograph and notice which lines are lagging or stale;
- propose objects whose crossings include the lines that need attention;
- keep the record of engagement line by line over months and years, on the knowledge and behavior graphs sketched in Chapter 16.⁹

This is the shift Chapter 14 describes for the kinds of understanding, now across the whole grid: generating versions stops being the constraint.⁷ The whole-person goal moves from an aspiration to a design problem.

What Still Limits It

The binding constraint becomes the child's attention and the adult's presence. So the rule is **generate broad, deliver narrow**. The tool lays out the grid. The child's engagement, read in the moment by an adult in the room, decides which few cells open today.

Some things the tool can't do. It can't be present at the kneading, or notice the set of a child's shoulders when the halving goes wrong. It can't supply the relationship with a caring adult that Chapter 15 treats as half of what a tutor gives.¹⁰ And the observation it would need to read growth off a screen is still largely unbuilt. Cameras and keystroke logs aimed at a child's moral and emotional life raise questions no family should wave through. Whatever gets built has to be designed with the family owning the data, and with an adult entering what the child did.⁹

The Whole House

Call the inspector back. This time he gets a floor plan with every room on it, and a notebook to record what each one needs. He'll find the library well kept and the music room shut. He can't fix the roof on his own. He can tell you where to start.

You have a house like that too. Some of its rooms are bright because, early on, someone spotted you on the ladder or asked about your purple sky. Others went dark after a well-meant "because I said so." Pick the line that lags most in your own psychograph, and one rich object you could bring into your week that would ask something of it. Something to do, with your hands and your patience and your conscience, rather than something to read about.

• Open Questions

- How many lines can one object carry before each line's share becomes too thin to grow it?
- Should every line reach a floor, or should each be pushed toward the frontier of the child's reach?
- Do crossings produce integration, strands that join in Fischer's sense, or only growth side by side?
- How can the spiritual and values lines be read without turning them into tests?
- Who weighs the lines against each other, and how much of that weighting belongs to a family's own values?
- Which choices in the grid should the tool never make on its own?

The thirteen lines are a working set. If you'd draw the map differently, I'd like to hear where.

• Notes

1. See Chapter 1, "The Goal, in Four Criteria."

2. See Chapter 14.
3. See Chapter 1, “Neighbors.”
4. See Chapter 1, “Readers and Range.”
5. See Chapter 5, “Two Views of One Sweet Spot,” on the zone of proximal development.
6. See Chapter 8.
7. See Chapter 14, “Applying the Lens to a Learning Object.”
8. See Chapter 15.
9. See Chapter 16, “The Knowledge Graph and the Behavior Graph.”
10. See Chapter 15.
11. See “Why Each Line Must Be Raised on Purpose,” above.
12. See Chapter 14, on mythic understanding.
13. See Chapters 7 and 8.

Sources

SOURCE	USE
Every Student Succeeds Act (2015): state accountability indicators	What schools are held accountable for
ASCD, Whole Child approach (2007)	Whole-child language as conditions
Rudolf Steiner; Waldorf education	A neighbor that claimed the goal
Ken Wilber, <i>Integral Psychology</i> (2000); Integral Life on lines	Lines of development; uneven development; the psychograph
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Ken Wilber, the four quadrants of AQAL (integral theory overview)	The four quadrants; criticism by Ferrer and Visser
Alfred North Whitehead, “The Aims of Education,” in <i>The Aims of Education and Other Essays</i> (1929)	Few and important ideas, thrown into every combination; epigraph

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