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## Justice and Human Development

Isaac Prilleltensky<sup>1</sup>

1) University of Miami, United States

Date of publication: October 24<sup>th</sup>, 2014

Edition period: October 2014 - February 2015

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**To cite this article:** Prilleltensky, I. (2014). Justice and Human Development. *International Journal of Educational Psychology*, 3(3), 287-305. doi: [10.4471/ijep.2014.15](https://doi.org/10.4471/ijep.2014.15)

**To link this article:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.4471/ijep.2014.15>

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# Justice and Human Development

Isaac Prilleltensky  
*University of Miami*

## Abstract

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Psychologists have studied certain elements of wellness, and various aspects of fairness, but they have seldom studied the interaction between the two. As a result, it is not surprising that there is a paucity of educational, community, clinical and social interventions to promote wellness and fairness in concert. In this paper I present a framework of justice consisting of substantive and contextual types. Distributive and procedural justice constitute the two main types of justice. Interpersonal, organizational, cultural and communal justice are contextual types which embed within them the two substantive aspects of justice. I explore how these various kinds of justice impact human development across six facets of well-being: interpersonal, communal, occupational, physical, psychological and economic. I claim that for children and adults to achieve optimal human development, these facets of well-being must be supported by various types of justice.

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**Keywords:** human development, justice, well-being, fairness, education.

# Justicia y Desarrollo Humano

Isaac Prilleltensky  
*University of Miami*

## Resumen

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Los psicólogos han estudiado ciertos elementos del bienestar y de la justicia, pero muy pocas veces han estudiado la interacción entre ambos. Como resultado, no es sorprendente que exista una gran escasez de intervenciones educativas, comunitarias, clínicas y sociales para promover el bienestar y la justicia. En este artículo presento una estructura de justicia que puede ser de dos tipos: sustantivos y contextuales. La justicia distributiva y la procedimental constituyen los dos tipos esenciales de justicia. La justicia interpersonal, organizativa, cultural y comunal son tipos contextuales que integran dentro de sí mismos los dos aspectos sustantivos de la justicia. Exploro en el artículo como los diversos tipos de justicia impactan en el desarrollo humano a través de las seis facetas del bienestar. Afirmando que para que la infancia y personas adultas obtengan el máximo desarrollo humano, estos aspectos de bienestar deben estar respaldados por varios tipos de justicia.

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**Palabras clave:** desarrollo humano, justicia, bienestar, equidad, educación.

To enhance educational and developmental outcomes, professionals and activists must understand the relationship between wellness and fairness. Furthermore, they need to devise interventions that enhance systems of well-being, such as schools; and fair policies, such as inclusion (Prilleltensky, 2012; Zajda, Majhanovich, Rust, & Sabina, 2006). I recommend concentrating on justice to balance the current narrow focus on cognitive, perceptual, and overall individual variables (cf. Tough, 2012). The current thrust in psychology to focus on neurocognitive functions on one hand, and positive psychology on the other, risks obviating dynamics of justice which remain powerful determinants of learning (Ehrenreich, 2009). To demonstrate the role of justice in human development, I introduce a framework for personal well-being. Following it I present a model of justice that distinguishes between substantive and contextual types. Towards the end I draw implications for various players involved in education and human development.

### **The Multifaceted Nature of Human Development**

The goal of human development is to promote well-being. Well-being consists of six separate domains: Interpersonal, Communal, Occupational, Physical, Psychological, and Economic (I COPPE), as well as overall well-being (Prilleltensky, Dietz, Prilleltensky, Myers, et al, in press). Our research demonstrates that there is a significant correlation between the specific domains and overall well-being. Thus, well-being is a positive state of affairs brought about by the satisfaction of needs across the spectrum of I COPPE needs.

Previous studies support the seven factor definition of well-being; that is, I COPPE plus overall (Chmiel, Brunner, Martin, & Schalke, 2012; Cohen, 1999; Diener, Scollon, & Lucas, 2009; Nieboer, Lindenberg, Boomsma, & Van Bruggen, 2005; Prilleltensky, Dietz, Prilleltensky, Myers, et al, in press; Rath & Harter, 2010). In our studies, we measured subjective well-being, but satisfaction in all of these domains requires also the presence of objective resources, such as economic means of survival, and nutritious foods for physical well-being (Nussbaum, 2011; Sen, 2009). There are

various traditions for assessing well-being, with some leaning more on the objective side and some on the subjective. In my view, both approaches are complementary. It is possible for individuals to feel well and report high levels of life satisfaction despite adverse objective conditions, such as great poverty. At the same time, it is possible for individuals with great objective and material resources to report very low psychological well-being (Graham, 2009). To achieve a full picture of well-being, we need information on subjective and objective appraisals. Based on studies of subjective and objective indicators we know that people need both to achieve optimal development (Diener, Helliwell, & Kahneman, 2010; Nussbaum, 2011). Following the order of the I COPPE domains, we elaborate on these needs.

Interpersonal well-being requires coping successfully with two challenges: How to foster positive relationships and how to resolve conflict. Some of the benefits of attaining positive interpersonal relations include physical health, low levels of stress, optimistic outlook on life, resilience, self-efficacy, and a higher likelihood of being happy (Buettner, 2010; Cohen, 2004; Rosenberg, 2012). But not all friendships or associations are good for you. Interpersonal life is so powerful that relating to certain people might result in deleterious consequences for you. For example, if you have a direct connection with someone who smokes, your chances of smoking yourself are 61%. If your friend becomes obese your chances of becoming obese increase by 57% (Rath & Harter, 2010).

There are obvious barriers to achieving and maintaining positive relations with others, such as poor listening, lack of assertiveness, aggression, and bullying. These are barriers that can be overcome mostly with proper training and enlightened policies and practices. Schools and families play a crucial role in the development of social skills and the establishment of policies and practices that foster empathy and discourage bullying. Personal skills and structural norms go hand in hand (Tuckman & Monetti, 2011). The former without the latter cannot protect children on the playground from abuse and bullying. In turn, the latter without the former would fail to train children how to assert themselves and create a climate of respect.

The advent of social emotional learning signals progress in the right direction. Students need to be taught essential skills such as self-regulation, emotional literacy, and communication skills to establish, maintain, and restore positive relationships. Connecting with other children and adults in a

manner that fosters empathy, caring and compassion can go a long way towards creating satisfying relationships. To connect, we need to teach children and adults communication skills such as non-judgmental listening, empathic responses, and assertiveness. Like reading, writing and mathematics, social skills require a methodic approach and cannot be left to chance.

Communal well-being refers to satisfaction with one's place in a geographic or relational community. Children as well as adults need a sense of community to thrive. Belonging and mattering are very important in well-being. We want people to know how to help individuals and how to build a better community for all (Block, 2008). There are certain benefits to creating cohesive communities. Research shows that places with more social capital, or dense networks, experience higher levels of health, welfare, education and tolerance than places with low levels of social capital. Moreover, regions with low levels of social capital tend to have higher levels of crime (Putnam, 2000, 2001).

Building and having a supportive community can help individuals overcome serious challenges, such as alcoholism and obesity. Studies show that the best way to lose weight and overcome addictions is to do it in the company of friends (Rosenberg, 2012). Group settings are more powerful than individual interventions, and groups of friends are more effective than groups of strangers (Rath & Harter, 2010).

Community well-being is a paradigmatic example of the complementarity of subjective and objective appraisals. In the nineties, Colombians reported the highest level of satisfaction in the world. This was at the same time that they reported the highest rate of murders per capita, highest levels of random violence and highest number of kidnappings in the world. A similar picture emerges in Mexico in the first decade of this century. Mexicans reported the highest levels of satisfaction but also the highest levels of random violence, drug related killings and corruption. If we were to judge either country on subjective or objective data alone, we would get an incomplete and deceiving picture. Looking only at the subjective reports would lead us to think that they are oblivious to their surroundings. Judging only from the objective crime rates, we would expect both populations to live in a constant state of fear or depression. In actual fact, what happened is that during these years both countries experienced a surge

in democracy, which, accompanied by traditional high levels of social support and family cohesion, account for the high levels of happiness (Inglehart, 2010; Inglehart et al., 2008).

Children and youth yearn to belong to groups of friends in schools, neighborhoods and sport associations. The social development of children and teens is predicated on being accepted and appreciated by peers. Rejection by peers comes with the heavy price of isolation, ostracism, and low self-image. Schools and informal education settings play a vital role in implementing policies of inclusion that lead to climates of acceptance and mutual respect (Sahlberg, 2011; Tuckman & Monetti, 2011).

Sense of community is a key ingredient in mattering. Mattering is a feeling that what we do and who we are matters to other people. It is the perception that what we do has meaning for other people. Mattering is related to meaning-making, which derives from life projects having to do with recognition and impact. Recognition means that our presence, our ideas and our actions are felt and acknowledged by other people in the community. Impact, in turn, means that we can exert influence in our community.

Recognition sits between invisibility and sense of entitlement. We abhor feelings of invisibility because they make us feel ignored. We do what we can to escape feelings of invisibility. On the other hand, we tend to stay away from people with a great sense of entitlement because they are very self-centered and do not afford much space for other people or ideas. We want to be recognized, but what we do not want to feel ignored or entitled. When we are entitled we tend to ignore other people and their fundamental right to be accepted, acknowledged, and appreciated.

The second aspect of mattering is having an impact in the community. As with recognition, impact exists along a continuum. On one hand there is helplessness or the sense that we do cannot effect any change around us. On the other hand there is domination, or the thirst to exert control over those around us. Neither extreme is healthy for us. In my view, we feel that we matter in socially productive ways when we feel recognized and effective. Ideal communities, schools, and families make us feel that we matter and that we can make a difference in the world.

Mattering derives from the accumulation of experiences of self-efficacy over time. It behooves all of us, teachers, parents, peers, and relatives to

nurture it in children, friends, and family members. An ideal community is one that responds to the needs of all members to be recognized regardless of level of ability, gender, sexual orientation, race or cognitive competencies. Similarly, a great community is one that controls dominating members from exerting undue control over others.

Occupational well-being revolves around two challenges: how to be organized and how to feel engaged and use personal strengths. Organization is crucial to self-efficacy, which is associated with psychological health. Engagement, in turn, is related to better physical and psychological health. Men who live to 95 tend not to retire until they are 80 years old. As engagement at work increases and people feel more useful, cholesterol and triglycerides go down. On the contrary, as engagement goes down, through unemployment for instance, people report more physical diseases and depression (Clark, 2010; Harter, Schmidt, & Keyes, 2003; Rath & Harter, 2010).

For children and youth, their main occupation is schooling. It is the responsibility of teachers, parents and administrators to make sure kids feel engaged and use their strengths. One of the main outcomes of a good education is increased self-efficacy, which can lead to a productive career and better mental health. Self-efficacy is conducive to a sense of control, which is highly related to psychological and physical well-being (Bandura, 1997, 2006).

As noted earlier, self-efficacy is a building block of mattering. The more we feel effective and impactful in the world, the greater our level of confidence and our predisposition to take risks.

Physical well-being refers to satisfaction with personal levels of vitality and functionality. There are three essential avenues to physical wellness: proper nutrition, physical activity, and adequate sleep. Unfortunately, millions of people around the world suffer from obesity and a host of diseases related to poor nutrition and lack of exercise. Despite all we know about nutrition and physical activity, hundreds of millions of people suffer from preventable diseases. Food can be a great healer or a great killer (Campbell & Campbell, 2006). In the United States, obesity is an epidemic affecting children and youth. This is directly related to poor eating habits and lack of physical activity. Whereas some of these behaviors can be attributed to personal variables such as poor impulse control and lack of

education, environmental influences such as advertising and food deserts cannot be ignored (Campbell, 2013).

It is easy to blame individuals for their physical ailments. However, we cannot ignore environmental influences such as advertising in schools and on TV. To promote physical well-being we need to create environmental cues that are healthy, such as plenty of fruits and vegetables in schools and at home. We also need to model to children physical activity. Most people believe that they have more willpower than they really do. Instead of expounding the virtues of willpower we need to work collaboratively to build environments that model physical well-being and expose children to proper nutrition.

Psychological well-being refers to the ability to foster positive emotions and meaning in life, and the capacity to cope with stress. People who report higher levels of positive emotions are more sociable, cooperative, charitable, flexible, productive, resilient, and overall healthier than those on the opposite end of the spectrum (Buettner, 2010; Fredrickson, 2009; Rath & Harter, 2010; Seligman, 2011).

Poor psychological health is characterized by poor self-esteem, helplessness, low self-efficacy, poor impulse control, negative self-talk and mental health issues (Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2006). External circumstances are often to blame for these negative outcomes. They include bullying, abuse and scorn. At the core of psychological well-being is a sense of control. The more we feel in control of our lives and environments, the healthier we are. These negative circumstances erode our sense of control and self-efficacy. Studies reviewed by Marmot (2004) and others (Levy & Sidel, 2006) demonstrate the connection between objective levels of well-being, such as income and education, and psychological health. People with higher levels of education and income report significant lower levels of hostility, isolation, poor self-efficacy, depressive symptoms and negative events in life. We have to protect children not only from adverse experiences such as psychological, physical and emotional abuse, but also from poverty and lack of literacy (Duncan & Murnane, 2011; Kozol, 2012).

Like sense of community, psychological well-being is related to mattering. Having a sense of control, as noted earlier, makes us feel impactful, one of the two essential ingredients in mattering.

Economic well-being refers to satisfaction with financial security and ability to manage money. While a certain level of economic security is crucial for well-being, we know that money is not the only precursor to happiness. According to some research, money is not even one of the most important ones (Dunn & Norton, 2013). Studies show that after a certain threshold, money stops increasing our subjective well-being (Graham, 2009). What money can do for our happiness though, is to improve our well-being by making sure we can purchase memorable experiences – not objects. Studies also show that the best way to use money to increase our well-being is to spend it on others, not on ourselves (Dunn & Norton, 2013).

Children and youth are exposed to a consumerist culture that basically forces them to spend money to acquire the latest gadget. Parents are pressured to acquiesce with cultural norms of acquisition. Much work needs to be done to make sure children learn how to save and how to make the most of money.

Our studies show that these six domains of well-being are significantly correlated with overall well-being (Prilleltensky, Dietz, Prilleltensky, Myers et al., in press). Research also shows that all aspects of well-being must be present for optimal human development. Our multidimensional framework honors the complexity of life and the multitude of needs that people must satisfy to flourish (Prilleltensky and Prilleltensky, 2006).

There is much synergy across the I COPPE domains of wellness. As noted above, it is easier to achieve physical wellness goals when you engage the interpersonal, communal, and social support of others (Rosenberg, 2012). Similarly, it is easier to eat healthier when you have the economic resources to buy organic food. Along the same vein, sharp occupational skills, such as organization, and psychological attributes, such as self-efficacy, can contribute to economic security.

Subjective well-being derives from positive feelings, emotions, and cognitions; and from positive experiences in families, schools, and communities. These experiences are related to justice (Prilleltensky, 2012). As I will try to demonstrate in the next section, for people to thrive across the I COPPE spectrum, conditions of fairness must prevail.

### **The Multifaceted Nature of Justice**

Philosophy and psychology offer various classifications of justice (Arfken & Yen, 2014; Louis, Mavor, La Macchia, & Amiot, 2014; Sandel, 2009; Sen, 2009; Tornblom & Vermunt, 2007). In my view, there are two general categories: substantive and contextual. Substantive includes distributive and procedural justice. Contextual entails the application of substantive types in various contexts, such as relationships, families, schools, workplaces, and communities.

The reason I call distributive and procedural substantive types of justice is because they address two fundamental aspects of fairness: what and how. Distributive justice is about the fair and equitable allocation of resources, burdens, pains and gains (Miller, 1999; Sandel, 2009). This type of justice is concerned with the “what.” What to grant individuals or groups is the central concern here. Procedural justice, in turn, deals with the “how.” How do we make decisions affecting various parties, and how do they participate in the process. Therefore, distributive justice is mainly about outcomes, and procedural is chiefly about processes (Laden, 2013; Reich, 2013; Tornblom & Vermunt, 2007).

To achieve distributive justice, certain criteria must be invoked; for example, merit, need or effort. If we are to distribute a social good, such as a scholarship, we must balance all three considerations: effort, need and merit. It would be justified to give a scholarship to the student who obtained better grades (merit consideration), provided that all students received the same opportunities in life. If some students did not have good educational experiences, or their parents could not afford to send them to extracurricular activities, they may not have been able to achieve educational outcomes according to their potential, but due to no fault of their own. Therefore, it would be unfair to penalize them for something they are not responsible for. It is entirely possible that two students worked equally hard in school (effort consideration), but that some did not have the resources to obtain enrichment (need consideration) and therefore did not perform as well (merit consideration). As can be seen, it is important to ponder the dynamic interplay among need, effort, and merit before allocating an educational good, such as a scholarship. These are all distributive justice questions (Facione, Scherer, & Attig, 1978; Reich, 2013).

When it comes to procedural justice, different criteria apply. To achieve procedural justice, we must take into account whether people affected by the decision have been consulted (participation consideration) and whether the process has been fair to all (impartiality consideration). Procedural justice is not just about following rules, but rather about a proactive process of meaningful engagement and democratic participation in decisions affecting our lives. Have people been consulted? Have students participated in decisions affecting their well-being in school? Have their voices been heard? These are all procedural justice questions (Apple, 2010; Ayers, Quinn, & Stovall, 2009).

In my view, questions of distributive and procedural justice take place in specific contexts, such as families, schools, and workplaces. There is a vast literature on organizational justice (Colquitt, 2001), but not so much on family justice. There are many publications on educational inequities, but they are not, in my opinion, fine-grained enough to understand the multifaceted nature of justice in education and human development. We need a refined understanding of various types of justice and how they impact human development.

Contextual types of justice deal with substantive aspects of fairness in particular settings. Essential settings for human development are family, school, workplace, community, and government. Distributive and procedural questions take place in relationships within families. Decisions such as who gets what, and how do members arrive at that decision, pervade families. To be concrete, families make a certain amount of money. The money can be used to send one of the children to music lessons, or for the father to indulge in a drinking habit. This is a distributive justice question. How does the decision get made is a procedural question. Does the father consult with the mother? Do the children have a say?

Another instance of family injustice is developmental. This kind of injustice takes place when a person, by virtue of her power or authority abuses or takes advantage of another who is developmentally vulnerable, such as elderly parents or young children. This may also be called generational injustice.

In schools, distributive and procedural dilemmas abound, but so do opportunities to practice fairness. Hundreds of decisions are made in classrooms every day. Do students participate in them? Do teachers have a

say about a new curriculum, or is it foisted upon them by school boards? Who decides who gets awards and privileges? What are the criteria? To the extent that we talk about school or educational justice we are talking about distributional and procedural issues (Apple, 2010; Laden, 2013; Reich, 2013).

There is a vast literature on workplace fairness pointing to four elements of justice: informational, relational, distributive and procedural justice (Colquitt, 2001). While we have already discussed the last two, the first two require some elaboration. Informational justice refers to transparency, and relational justice pertains to dignity and respect. All these elements apply equally well to schools, which are a particular type of workplace with a unique mission: to educate students.

Community justice consists of several subtypes, all dealing with distributive or procedural issues. Cultural justice, for example, refers to the treatment of all racial and minority groups in society with equal respect (procedural justice), and affording them all equal opportunities, such as jobs and education (distributive justice) (Powell, 2012). It may be argued that granting dignity is another form of justice. While dignity is not a material good, it is definitely a subjective good, in which case we may claim that it is a form of distributive justice. When minority groups are granted the dignity and respect they deserve, we engage in distributive justice of a subjective good, as opposed to a material good such as financial support for refugees.

Another type is retributive justice, which deals with accountability for transgressions, or paying the price for a crime (distributive concern). Corruption is a particular case of community injustice, in which a particular group violates distributive (e.g., not paying taxes) and procedural rules (e.g., disrespect for norms of conviviality).

At the governmental level, educational, health, and welfare policies have profound consequences for wellness and fairness. Funding for schools, which in some parts of the United States depends on local taxes, can be highly unequal. Regions with a high tax base can support schools in ways that poor communities could never afford (Henig, Malone, & Reville, 2012). Also in the United States, some cities and states channel public dollars to charter schools, which receive public funds but are independently run. Some of these schools discriminate against students with disabilities or immigrants for fear that they would depress the overall scores and rankings of the

schools (Ravitch, 2010; 2013). Access to a well-funded school is a distributive question. Education is an objective good that can be translated into better jobs and better pay, but it is also a subjective good that confers status, confidence, and prestige.

The whole policy decision-making process is one big procedural question. In the United States, private foundations exert an outsized influence on the federal government. Through connections and funding, these private entities have the ability to dictate public policy. Meanwhile, parents, teachers and students have little or no say on closings of schools or the introduction of new curricula (Ravitch, 2010, 2013).

As can be seen, the two main substantive aspects of justice, distributive and procedural, figure prominently in relationships, families, schools and government. Decisions made at each one of these ecological levels can and do have profound effects on human development.

### **Towards Action**

To promote human development in a methodic fashion, we need to connect social justice to specific aspects of well-being in various settings. Each one of us is a recipient as well as an agent of human development and justice. It is up to all of us involved in education and human development to make sure that distributive, procedural, interpersonal, cultural, and developmental types of justice are enacted in family, school, and community contexts to promote well-being across the various domains of life.

Policy makers must balance their focus on intrapersonal variables in education with an emphasis on (a) the creation and dissemination of systems of human development and (b) the implementation of fair policies and practices. Educational achievement is a cooperative enterprise among teachers, parents, administrators, professional helpers and the community at large (Levin, 2008; Mediratta, Shah, & McAlister, 2009). Instead of always trying to change the child, we should try to change the structures and the forms of parental participation in education.

There is much that educators can do to improve systems of educational well-being and practices of fairness, such as paying attention to school climate, availability of resources, professional development, and provision

of time for team work. Likewise, they can make sure students and parents have a voice.

When it comes to procedural fairness, there must be vehicles for the meaningful involvement of parents and community members in the life of the school. In many western countries, the obsession with test scores prevents so called distractions such as parental involvement, arts, physical education, or enrichment.

Educational and school psychologists play an important role in deciphering for parents and teachers the relationship among variables impacting educational outcomes. In that role, they are communicators and educators in the most genuine sense of the word. Their role often is to explain to parents and teachers what is happening with the education of their child. If the focus of psychologists is exclusively on cognitive processes, nobody will pay attention to systems of well-being, such as school or family climate, or policies and practices of fairness, such as parental engagement in educational processes (Prilleltensky & Nelson, 2002).

Community activists often target the wrong group. It is fashionable, at least in the United States, to blame teachers for the educational state of the country. Activists must understand the triangle formed by individual human development, systems of educational well-being, and fair policies and practices.

### **Conclusion**

Opportunities, resources, structures and processes make up systems of human development. The extent to which these systems have a positive effect on children and youth depends on the fairness of prevailing policies and practices (Nussbaum, 2011; Powell, 2012). Each one of the I COPPE domains of life is influenced by one or more types of justice. For students to benefit from high quality systems they must have fair access to them; and once in them, they must benefit from, as well as promote, interpersonal, cultural, developmental, retributive, and procedural justice.

All over the world there are excellent educational institutions that only few families can enjoy due to cost and other barriers (Attewell & Newman, 2010; Darling-Hammond, 2010). Racial discrimination persists even when minority children can access these institutions (Fulgini, 2007). Changes in

distributive, procedural, cultural, interpersonal, and developmental fairness would have to take place to make the benefits of stellar organizations available to all. The burning question, surprisingly, is not how to create high functioning educational environments, for many of them already exist, but how to make their benefits available to all children. It is up to us, agents of human development, to shine a light on educational justice to illuminate a brighter future for all children and youth.

#### **Acknowledgements**

I wish to thank Adam Clarke and Yvette Carpintero for their editorial assistance.

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**Isaac Prilleltensky**, PhD is Dean of the School of Education and Human Development and Erwin and Barbara Mautner Chair in Community Well-Being at the University of Miami. He is Professor of Educational and Psychological Studies.

**Contact Address:** Communications may be sent to Isaac Prilleltensky, PhD, Dean, School of Education and Human Development, University of Miami, P.O.Box 248065, Florida, United States, 33142. E-mail: isaac@miami.edu