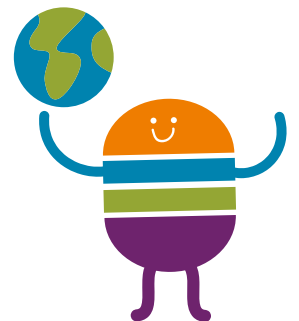




THE LITTLE BOOK OF EDUCATION

Learning for life

by Wendy Ellyatt



“THE ONE FORCE IN SOCIETY THAT SEEMS ESPECIALLY WELL POSITIONED (BUT NOT YET SO EMPLOYED) TO HELP IS EDUCATION. YES, WE NEED TO HAVE POLITICAL ACTION IN RELATION TO TECHNOLOGY, CLIMATE CHANGE, INVESTMENT IN EDUCATION, AND SO FORTH. BUT MOST OF ALL, WE DESPERATELY NEED A NEW KIND OF EDUCATION—ONE THAT MOBILIZES US TO LEARN ABOUT THE WORLD AS WE CHANGE IT FOR THE BETTER. SUCH TRANSFORMATION IS NOT JUST FOR A FEW BUT FOR THE VAST MAJORITY. OUR PRECARIOUS FUTURE IS A SYSTEM PROBLEM; IT REQUIRES A SYSTEM SOLUTION THAT INVOLVES US ALL.” - MICHAEL FULLAN, 2020

2020 INITIATED A TIME OF GREAT OPPORTUNITY FOR THE CREATION OF A MORE EQUITABLE AND PEACEFUL WORLD

Outside of families and communities, education systems are the key influencers in how we learn to think about ourselves, others and the natural world. They inform us about what our cultures most value and significantly shape our subsequent motivations and behaviours. They profoundly shape our sense of personal agency, worth and wellbeing and either promote or inhibit what we feel is possible in terms of personal aspiration.

If we want to create a better world, we have to start by looking at whether the values that we have been promoting to children through our education systems have been serving their long-term wellbeing and potential, within the context of a sustainable future.



Photo by Akil Mazumder from Pexels

WHAT IS EDUCATION FOR?

"The basic function of education in all societies and at all times is to prepare the younger generation for the kind of adult life that society values and wishes to perpetuate." - John Abbott, 21st Century Learning Alliance, 2009

The literal definition of education means to 'draw out' what is already there, rather than to teach or 'force in' what is absent

Most people understand it as the process of facilitating learning, or the balanced acquisition of cultural knowledge, skills, values, beliefs, and habits. Over the last two decades the focus of many countries has, however, become skewed towards academic attainment, with an associated emphasis on core subjects, standardisation, test-based accountability, low risk ways to reach learning goals and corporate management models. What we now know from the global evidence, is that such unbalanced approaches can profoundly undermine both child and teacher wellbeing and there is now global consensus that the acquisition of skills and capacities need to be matched with nurturing the kind of societal values and behaviours that we need for a sustainable future.

In the imminent future success will no longer be defined as a solely individual quality, that is predominantly related to academic achievement or to the acquisition of money, possessions or

celebrity status. Instead it will be more closely related to the kind of people that we become in the world, to levels of courage, authenticity and personal fulfilment, but always in the context of how our own lifepath activities impact the wellbeing of the whole.

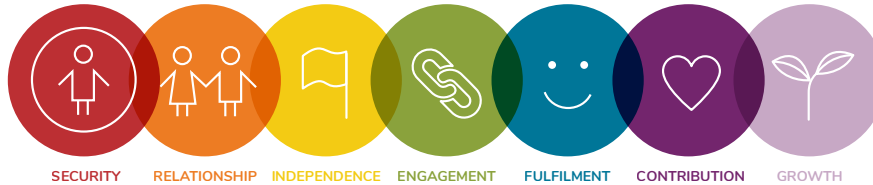
"In the context of job disruption, demand for new skills and increased socioeconomic polarization, primary and secondary school systems have a critical role to play in preparing the global citizens and workforces of the future. Education models must adapt to equip children with the skills to create a more inclusive, cohesive and productive world" - World Economic Forum (WEF) Schools of the Future 2020

Leaders from all disciplines are now calling for the role of 21st century education systems to become:

- 1. The optimisation of potential**
- 2. A celebration of diversity**
- 3. Protecting the natural joy of learning**
- 4. Ensuring the balanced cultivation of the whole child and**
- 5. Eco-literacy: promoting the values and behaviours needed for a healthy, peaceful and sustainable world**



OPTIMISING POTENTIAL



We are all born with the same seven core human developmental needs and these are:

Security - We all need safe, healthy and secure environments in which to live and grow

Relationship - We all need to develop positive relationships with our selves, others and the natural world

Independence - We all need to be able to feel strong and independent

Engagement - We all need to be able to explore and take risks

Fulfilment - We all need to be able to test out our skills and to express our thoughts and experiences

Contribution - We all need to be able to contribute to something greater than ourselves.

Growth - We all need to have the opportunity to expand who we are and what we know.

No matter where we live in the world, these needs are the same. As we grow and develop, we will each seek to fulfil these needs in ways that have meaning for us and whether or not they are met will then shape the values, beliefs and behaviours that then become our personalities.

The nurturing of positive values and mindsets is, therefore, an essential element of any school curriculum if we want to support students in becoming healthy, happy and informed global citizens and change agents. **This is particularly so for children coming from difficult or disadvantaged backgrounds.**



FLOURISHING CONSISTS OF...

No matter where they live in the world, all human beings have the same core needs.

To flourish, all children need their physical, emotional, mental and spiritual needs met.

And so do the adults that live in their world

HUMAN NEEDS

Spiritual

GROWTH

Expansion and vitality

CONTRIBUTION

Empathy and co-operation

Mental

FULFILMENT

Self-expression and achievement

ENGAGEMENT

Meaning-making and flow

Emotional

INDEPENDENCE

Mastery and self-worth

RELATIONSHIP

Nurturing relationships

Physical

SECURITY

Nurturing environments

Spiritual

Spiritual essence / innate potential

Generative life force

HOW VALUES ARE FORMED

FLOURISHING IS THE BALANCED INTEGRATION OF PHYSICAL, EMOTIONAL, MENTAL AND SPIRITUAL CAPACITIES

Values are formed on the inside, but are carried in the relationships of life.

Children are amazing learners way before they start school. In fact, from pre-birth to age five, their brains develop more quickly than at any other time in life. The most rapid period of brain growth and plasticity is in the last trimester of pregnancy and the first two years. At birth the average baby's brain is about a quarter of the size of the average adult brain and it doubles in size in the first year. It keeps growing to about 80% of adult size by age 3 and 90% – nearly full grown – by age five.

We are genetically unique, as we each carry the DNA traces of our ancestors, so the personalities that we develop are a combination of the biological patterns and dispositions that have gone before, overlaid with the unique patterns created by our own experiences in the world. We are not born with the same dispositions and capacities, but we have all been designed to optimise our own growth and potential in the ways that have meaning for us, and we just need the right environments to help us to do so.

Scientists now think that only 50% of who we are is shaped by our genes - with the other 50% coming from the environment.

The worlds that we experience as children, therefore, literally shape our biology and who we will become. Our mental maps of the world are made up of all the internal images, sounds, tactile awareness, internal sensations, tastes and smells that form as result of how our brains process the incoming information. Neurons that fire together, wire together, so the emotional responses that are connected to our lived experiences become fused into our memory of that experience.

We are also born with a natural intelligence, or generative life force, that is shaped by our unique genetic and environmental backgrounds and that is expressed as purpose and potential. This intelligence acts like a guiding force and ensures that we each develop as a unique aspect of the whole. **It is always trying to achieve the balanced integration of our physical, emotional, mental and spiritual capacities – that we call human flourishing.**

CELEBRATING DIVERSITY

EDUCATION SYSTEMS SHOULD ALWAYS BE SEEKING TO BALANCE THE INNER WITH THE OUTER

Nature loves diversity and biodiversity matters because it boosts ecosystem productivity, where every element, no matter how small, has an important role to play in the larger system. Greater diversity ensures healthy system functioning and natural sustainability for all life forms. In this way, every child needs to be seen, known and valued as a unique individual of inherent worth.

Every child has an inner guide that leads them be interested in those elements of the environment that most fulfil their own unique development needs and the expression of this innate natural intelligence. **We are not all designed to be the same.**

The process of facilitating learning, that we call education, therefore has two main aspects:

1. Optimising the unique capacities and potential of each child (bringing forth the inner) and
2. Passing on the knowledge, skills, values and beliefs that help that child to feel a sense of belonging, contribution and stewardship to a sustainable world of others (passing on the outer)

If either of these are out of balance it can affect the wellbeing of the child, as too much of the former and the child will not understand the rules and values of the external world – and too much of the latter and the natural intelligence/ spirit of the child can be crushed by external demands that are not in alignment with internal developmental impulses or needs



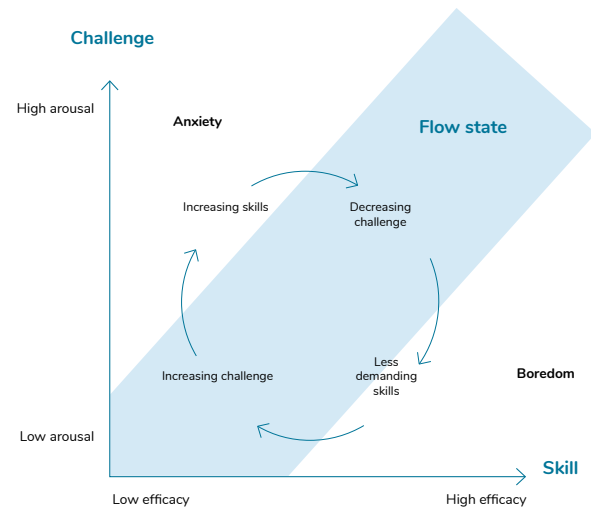
THE NATURAL JOY OF LEARNING

Just like every other natural system, we have been designed to constantly learn, evolve and grow. All living systems have the potential for emergence, are self-generating and self-organising and interact cognitively with the environment.

Researchers into creativity and intrinsic motivation have discovered an underlying similarity that is common to all intrinsically rewarding activities: they all give the participants a sense of exploration, discovery and problem solving. They also need no external goals or rewards to achieve a sense of personal fulfilment. **Flow occurs when the experience of learning becomes its own reward. It is a key characteristic of play.**

Many flow activities are immensely complex, time-consuming and even frustrating. They are all about finding the balance between personal capacities and environmental challenges and each person will respond to this in his or her own unique way. There is, therefore, more to learning than simple achievement, as often the most powerful and rewarding personal meaning-making comes from overcoming huge challenges and difficulties.

Play is so important to human beings because it allows us to generatively reach out into novelty without the risk of failure or the need to achieve any externally imposed result. **Personal meaning, purpose, playfulness and resilience are all, essential for human flourishing.**





NURTURING THE WHOLE CHILD

“IT IS NOT EDUCATION, BUT EDUCATION OF A CERTAIN KIND, THAT WILL SAVE US.” - DAVID W. ORR

Children carry forward not only the impact of adverse experiences that have happened in their own lives, but also the impact of spending time with adults who are struggling with their own challenges. Which is why, if we care about the wellbeing of children, we must also be concerned about the wellbeing of the adults with whom they spend their time and the systems that are impeding their own ability to flourish.

The health and wellbeing of parents, carers, families, teachers, communities and the planet itself is, therefore, essential to the healthy development and wellbeing of children.

That means that we always need to understand the external systems that might be impacting or supressing the creativity and wellbeing of adults. What we are seeking is the achievement of 'right relationship' between all the different elements of the living system.



To grow and flourish children need to feel whole, and that means that all aspects of their wellbeing – physical, emotional, mental and spiritual - need to be taken into account. This is particularly so in the early years, when children are optimising their developmental capacities.



DIGITAL LITERACY

THE CAPABILITIES WHICH SERVE LIVING, LEARNING , WORKING PARTICIPATING AND THRIVING IN A DIGITAL SOCIETY

One of the key systems that is now impacting children's wellbeing is digital technology and there is growing global concern about the impact on lived experience. Children and young people need to be helped to better understand the ways that their own realities and choices can be manipulated by others, and the impact that these technologies can have on their happiness and wellbeing. **The youngest children, in particular, need to have real experiences in the real world.**

Schools need to be at the forefront of the call for technologies that support our shared well-being, sense-making and democracy and that enhance our ability to tackle complex global challenges.

They need to help students understand both the negative and positive aspects of 21st century information and communication technologies, so that they can enhance their cognitive and technical skills in ways that nurture, rather than diminish, their own capacities and wellbeing.





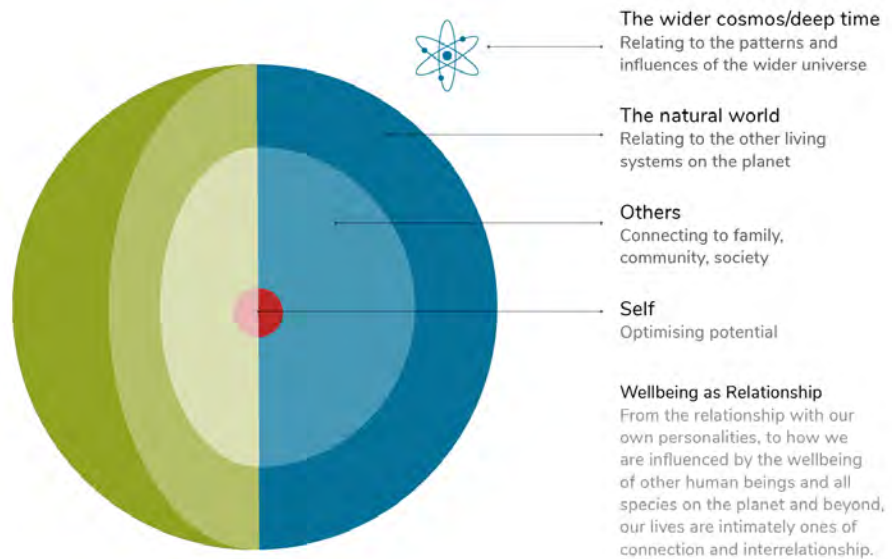
ECO-LITERACY

EDUCATION IS THE MOST POWERFUL WEAPON WE CAN USE TO CHANGE THE WORLD.” - NELSON MANDELA (2003)

The Ecological Self

One unified relational field

Wellbeing as right relationship to Self, Others and the Natural World



Eco-literacy is the ability to understand the natural systems that make life on earth sustainable. It is a fundamental necessity for 21st century of education systems. When young people are given the space to think deeply about, and connect to, the things that really matter, they develop a broader sense of knowledge, compassion, values, confidence and resilience, giving them the tools and motivation to create a healthier future.

Wellness is, therefore, a multi-dimensional state that integrates children's physical, emotional, mental and spiritual needs and enables them to fulfil their potential and achieve life satisfaction.

But only in the context of a more just and sustainable present and future, in which people and planet are connected.



“THE WORTH OF EDUCATION MUST NOW BE MEASURED AGAINST THE STANDARDS OF DECENCY AND HUMAN SURVIVAL-THE ISSUES NOW LOOMING SO LARGE BEFORE US IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY. IT IS NOT EDUCATION, BUT EDUCATION OF A CERTAIN KIND, THAT WILL SAVE US.” - DAVID W. ORR

THE ROOTS OF VIOLENCE

“HEAVY CHILDHOOD EXPOSURE TO MEDIA VIOLENCE PREDICTS HIGHER LEVELS OF AGGRESSION IN YOUNG ADULTS OF BOTH SEXES (“AGGRESSION” RANGING FROM BEHAVIOUR IN AN EXPERIMENTAL SETTING TO VIOLENT CRIMINALITY). THE EFFECT TYPICALLY REMAINS AFTER CONTROLLING FOR TOTAL MEDIA WATCHING TIME, MALTREATMENT OR NEGLECT, SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS, LEVELS OF NEIGHBOURHOOD VIOLENCE, PARENTAL EDUCATION, PSYCHIATRIC ILLNESS, AND IQ. THIS IS A RELIABLE FINDING OF LARGE MAGNITUDE. THE LINK BETWEEN EXPOSURE TO CHILDHOOD MEDIA VIOLENCE AND INCREASED ADULT AGGRESSION IS STRONGER THAN THE LINK BETWEEN LEAD EXPOSURE AND IQ, CALCIUM INTAKE AND BONE MASS, OR ASBESTOS AND LAYNCEAL CANCER.”
- ROBERT SAPOLSKY ‘BEHAVE’

Human beings have a capacity for violence and aggression, but also display a clear propensity for co-operation and compassion.

What seems to matter most is the quality of relationships that we experience. If we experience security, trust and loving attention, then it is likely that this is what we will later bring to the world. If, instead, we experience fear, distrust and aggression, then this is the pattern that will have been set down for us. We are born full of both possibilities and it is the world that decides which way we will go.

As social beings, we are also predisposed to mimic and normalise the values and behaviours that we see going on around us - especially those modelled by our peer groups and the adults in our worlds. That is why teachers are so important.

If children and young people do not have strong relationships that give them a sense of self-worth and value, they will ultimately seek them elsewhere - which is where gang culture comes from.

They are also impacted by the messages they receive, both consciously and unconsciously, from the media.



THE PATH TO COMPASSION

Perhaps education's most important role is to ensure that children do not simply take forward the negative and damaging patterns and prejudices of the past. Every child should feel loved and valued,

every child should appreciate that others may think and feel differently from themselves, and every child should know that their own values, beliefs and behaviours impact the wellbeing of the whole.

“UNIVERSAL HUMAN DEVELOPMENT MUST ENABLE ALL PEOPLE—REGARDLESS OF THEIR AGE, CITIZENSHIP, RELIGION, ETHNICITY, GENDER, SEXUAL ORIENTATION OR ANY OTHER IDENTITY—TO EXPAND THEIR CAPABILITIES FULLY AND PUT THOSE CAPABILITIES TO USE. THIS ALSO MEANS THAT CAPABILITIES AND OPPORTUNITIES ARE SUSTAINABLE THROUGHOUT AN INDIVIDUAL’S LIFECYCLE AND ACROSS GENERATIONS. BUT THOSE LESS ENDOWED OR LAGGING BEHIND NEED SUPPORT FROM OTHERS—FROM INDIVIDUALS, COMMUNITIES AND STATES—TO REALIZE THEIR FULL POTENTIAL.”
- HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT 2014

COMPASSION FOR SELF

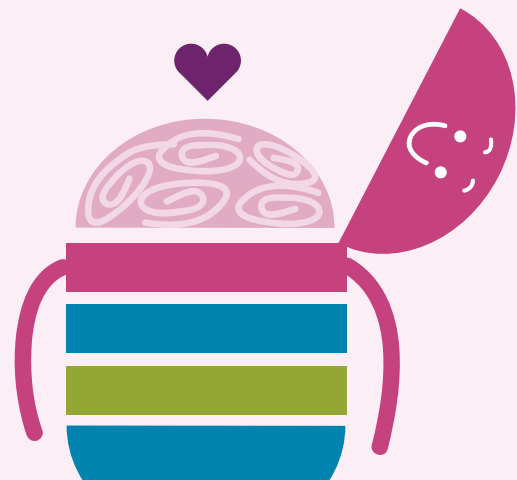
- Understanding why we are the way we are and the value of self-kindness
- Recognising suffering within ourselves and others
- Responding to difficult and conflicting feelings and emotions

COMPASSION FOR OTHERS

- Understanding that other people see the world differently from ourselves
- Understanding that values, beliefs and behaviours are a reflection of genes, cultures and lived experiences
- Recognising the universality of human suffering

COMPASSION FOR THE NATURAL WORLD

- Understanding that everything is interconnected and that we share responsibility for creating a world fit for children
- Being motivated to act to prevent damage, alleviate suffering and protect future generations



“IF YOUR PLAN IS FOR ONE YEAR,
PLANT RICE. IF YOUR PLAN IS
FOR TEN YEARS, PLANT TREES. IF
YOUR PLAN IS FOR ONE HUNDRED
YEARS, EDUCATE CHILDREN.”

- KUAN CHUNG (7TH CENTURY BC)



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