Education for Well-Being
Conceptual Framework, Principles and Approaches

Scherto Gill
Guerrand-Hermès Foundation for Peace
scherto.gill@ghfp.org

Introduction

The purpose of this framework is to

(1) Set out conceptual considerations for exploring a child's well-being that are perceived as most relevant to education and learning environments
(2) Examine each consideration while discussing the inter-connection between them;
(3) Provide the conceptual basis for understanding the notion of 'education for well-being'
(4) Offer possible proposals for approaches to monitoring and nurturing the child's well-being and for developing indicators.

We are aware that the concept of 'well-being of the child' can be defined differently depending on the discipline and the concern, and the culture and society within which the child lives, as well as the available resources and where the child is placed in the national policy agenda. Therefore, we have prepared a separate document which is a policy glossary to articulate what we mean by education for the well-being of the child within diverse learning environments from the policy level. Here we use the term of the 'child' in accordance to the UN Convention which refers to people who are under 18 years of age.

This document serves as the conceptual framework for developing approaches to education for well-being. In the first part, we explore the current conceptual considerations and concerns which determine the emergence of 'Education for Well-Being' movement; in the second part, we delineate the particular principles in relation to determining our approaches to monitoring the child's well-being and promoting well-being in and through education.

Understanding Well-Being: A Conceptual framework

The proposed well-being framework is situated within four important domains which also articulate the key conceptual concerns that underpin the movement of 'Education for Well-Being of Children':

A. Well-Being as Realising the Rights of the Child

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as part of Human Rights (UNCRC, 1989) insists on an adherence to the best interests of the child; respect their right to life, survival and development; and their right to participate in decisions that affect their social, political, economic, spiritual, cultural and educational life. In this way, the conventions lay explicit emphasis on well-being as a key to realising the child's rights (Camfield, et al, 2009; Innocenti Report Card 7, 2007). More crucially, it specifies that the realisation of the child's rights is connected with his or her well-being and development 'physically, mentally, morally,

spiritually and socially in a healthy and normal manner and in conditions of freedom and dignity'.

The Convention also sets out the obligations and responsibilities of *all* in respecting the right of the child, including parents, other adults in the society, institutions, governments, and international agencies. A further implication is that understanding and respecting the child's rights is not only the obligation and responsibilities of those specified above, but also that of the child him or herself.

In order for the child to engage in the decisions for their best interests, the Convention sets out that it is important to 'assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child' and to ensure that 'the views of the child be given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child' (Article 12).

Connected to the child's right to expressing their views, is also the commitment from all to respect and actively attend to the views and perspectives of the child, and ensure that the child 'be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child'. Furthermore, when developing strategies and approaches to understanding the child's well-being, their role as social actors, such as their experiences, actions, resilience (when confronted with adversities), cooperation and collective action (with peers) must be taken into account (Prout, 2004).

B. **Well-being as human flourishing**

Recent research also points to the critical sense of importance in addressing both present well-being of the child and engaging in learning that enrich their future circumstances (see Fattore, et al, 2009). Thus in order to nurture well-being of the child, it requires an understanding of human flourishing. The word 'flourish' is not purely hedonistic, a subjective experience of 'happiness', and is more dynamic than 'well-being' (Gill & Thomson, forthcoming). A person's well-being, is more than a mere satisfaction with present states of things, but must have his or her flourishing embedded in it. Authors such as Ben-Arieh (2006) and Uprichard (2008) term this aspect of it as 'well-becoming'.

Basically, flourishing life ought to contain certain kinds of activities, experiences and processes are intrinsically valuable, or valuable for their own sake (Thomson 1987). To lead a flourishing life, a person has to have experiences and perform activities with the appropriate kind of appreciation of their value in each case. It requires the appropriate kinds of evaluative self-perception, which pertains to time, i.e. appreciating the life of a person as having primary value, which is a form of self-respect; an appropriate sense of one's identity, as well as appreciating her past, present and future activities and experiences constituting her life as something valuable and worthwhile. Flourishing also contains the idea of flowering through harmonious functioning. It allows for the strengthening and continuing development of the person in accordance with his or her unique nature. This includes cultivating qualities or virtues that enable a person to live a full human life.

A flourishing life would have to be full in the sense that it does not omit any important kind of valuable activity or experience. For instance, suppose a person does not have (or hardly has) any joyous experiences or fun activities in his or her life. All other things being equal, such a life would not be full or complete, and the person cannot be flourishing, even if he or she does not feel any lack. Likewise, a life without close relationships with others such

as friendship would be incomplete (Gill & Thomson, forthcoming). For a person's life to flourish, the activities and experiences that comprise that life have to fit the unique nature of the individual as well as being appropriate for the social and cultural context in which one lives (John White, 2007).

This is essentially Aristotelian notion. According Aristotle, flourishing, *eudaimonia* or happiness is the highest good of human endeavour and the ultimate aim of human life. Flourishing, conceived in this way, involves feeling well, living well and doing well, enjoying goods of the mind (such as wisdom, moral virtue and joy), enjoying goods of the body (such as physical beauty, good health and pleasure), and external goods (such as wealth and adequate material resources), relational goods (such as good parents and families, good friends), peace and security within and between communities, and well-governed communities (Michalos, 2005). In addition, the notion of flourishing put forward as such also has the idea of 'the good life' embedded in it, which involves 'people's individual and collective capability ... to build a fulfilled life, which is a source of common happiness' (Dubois, 2009, p. 83).

C. Well-being as multi-dimensional experience of the whole child

Our conception of well-being is situated in an understanding of it as a whole-child experience, involving multiple facets and aspects of being and becoming human, including the unfolding of one's unique potentials and the capacity to pursue life meaningfully within the larger social, cultural, political and economic contexts of which the child is a part (also see UEF, 2008). This definition promises an integral understanding of the whole person and rejects the compartmentalised approach to examining a person's life. Respecting the wholeness of the person avoids the sharp divisions between different aspects of the individual, and at the same time, stresses the inter-connectedness and harmony between the intellect, feelings, senses, morality, spirituality and so forth. Zaff *et al*. (2003) support the view of approaching these dimensions from an interrelated perspective. They maintain that the elements of each domain or aspect have impact on one another, which constitutes 'reciprocal influences on the development of the elements of well-being both within and across domains', and that the strengths from these interconnected domains 'reverberate in synergy' (p. 29).

It has been well acknowledged that there is little consensus in terms of how well-being of the child should be defined and how it should be understood in contexts and investigated through research studies. There has been a shift that attempts to balance the definitions of well-being focused on survival aspect of the child's life and negative or undesirable behaviours with a more positive view of the child's life, including potential, capability, resourcefulness, capacities, resilience and agency (Boyden & Cooper, 2006; Lippman, 2009; Sarah White, 2009). However, as Pollard & Lee (2003, p. 60) stated a few years ago: well-being remains 'a multifaceted construct that has continued to elude attempts to define and measure it'. Yet it is important to find a common language for the concept and endeavour of well-being in order to develop useful approaches for it to be monitored and promoted. Camfield *et al*. (2009) point out that understanding what is meant by well-being is crucial for interpreting how we are implementing the provisions of the child's rights and the monitoring of UNCRC's stated goals.

Furthermore, our understanding of well-being as flourishing acknowledges the necessity of combining an objective evaluation of external circumstances and contexts of the child's subjective personal perception of their well-being as the effect of these conditions.

Thus well-being is not merely an outcome, but 'as a state of being that arises from the dynamic interplay of outcomes and processes' (McGregor, 2006, p. 3).

D. Well-being as the primary aim of education

UNESCO's Education for All (EFA) initiative and recent UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (UNESCO, 2005) suggest that governments tend to believe that education plays an important part in achieving well-being. Similarly, from the UN Convention on the Rights of the Chid, it is obvious that all forms of education and schooling in particular ought to play an important part in nurturing well-being of the whole child, and enhance their capacity to lead a good life (also see Thin, 2009).

A child spends the majority of his or her childhood in formal education settings, or in other word, schooling. The focus on the child's well-being in education thus supports a vision of education which places the human being at the centre of all educative endeavours. This is termed as 'human-centred education' (Gill & Thomson, forthcoming). Human-centred education involves three basic principles: (1) Education ought to respect the child fully as a person, and not treat them instrumentally, i.e. as a means to an end, be it academic, social, political or economic; (2) The main aim of education ought to be the well-being and flourishing of the child as a human being, developing their autonomy, self-awareness, positive attitudes, self-direction, and more; (3) Education ought to be directed at the child as a whole, nurturing their diverse qualities and virtues as well as their inner integrity and harmony (Gill & Thomson, 2009).

A human-centred approach to education would allow the focus of learning to be on nurturing the child's human qualities or (non-moral) virtues. Learning is essentially about being and becoming more human within appropriate socio-cultural contexts (*ibid.*), rather than merely acquiring knowledge and skills. In this way, the well-being and development of the child is paramount over other aims such as social transformation, economic growth, and academic goals. However, this does not mean that the development of the child always takes priority over other aims in all circumstances. Nor does it mean that other aims are valuable merely as the means to the development of the individual. Gill & Thomson (2009) argue that these other ends have value only in relation to the value of the life of the child as a human being. Wherever conflicts exist between these aims, it is the child's well-being and development that should take a leading role and balance the requirements and recommendations of the other objectives (*ibid.*).

Summary

In reviewing the current conceptual background to the vision of 'Education for Well-Being' Consortium Europe, there are four broad implications for developing principles for identifying approaches to monitoring and nurturing the child's well-being in learning environments:

First it requires a positive and holistic approach to defining well-being which focuses on the human potentials and virtues (here we mean non-moral virtues or qualities) that enable the individuals to be well and to flourish, as opposed to the dysfunctional aspects of human existence related to which everything we do is remedial (Seligman, 2002; Kahneman *et al.*,

1999). Such an approach allows us to focus on children's assets, competencies and capacities[1] (Pollard & Rosenburg, 2003).

Second, our conception of well-being highlights the need to take a child-centred approach to exploring the child's experience. In particular, it recognises well-being as an essential right of the child, and that children are active agents and social actors who can play an important part in shaping their own lives, influencing their environment and advocating their own well-being. In this way all attempts to understand the child's well-being must start from where the child is, and be driven by their experiences and opinions. Thus engaging the child's 'voice' or perspectives in monitoring and promoting well-being ought to be a central theme.

Third, it is necessary that the conception of well-being recognises the tension between fundamental human needs and aspirations that exist at many levels, the denial of which will mean harm to the person and those identifications of human needs and aspirations that are contextualised and constructed. These fundamental needs may include, but are not limited to, health, education, autonomy, security, competence, relations, personal meaning, goals, and achievement, and more. Whilst these are socially and culturally situated, they are also individually conceived so that the differences in orientation to any or all of these aspects can occur within social, cultural, political, economic, and psychological processes. Furthermore, as we have already seen, these multiple aspects do not occur separately, but are inextricably linked in dynamic interplay.

Fourth, the notion of flourishing as we put forward consists of the two mutually-constituted concepts – well-being and well-becoming. The latter was described by Pat Kane, writing on the Guardian website (Feb 27th 2007), as 'our multitude of life-journeys towards meaning and purposefulness, not some steady-state of managed contentment'. We have asserted that childhood has value in itself and should be merely perceived as preparation for adult life.

Fifth, the concepts of well-being and flourishing are further interwoven with the environmental and contextual factors, including cultural norms, values, expectation, personal aspiration, individual characters, relationships, and the well-being of the significant others around the child. The 'significant others' are often parents and/or carers, siblings, peer groups, teachers and staff at the school, and others within the wider community where the child lives. Indeed, we want to stress the last element within the child's environment, the well-being of the significant others which ought to be given due weight when examining, monitoring and nurturing the child's well-being and what constitutes it.

In summary, our interpretation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child has convinced us that the nurturing the child's well-being is the realisation of their Rights. It also affirms the obligations and responsibilities of all towards the child's wellbeing, including the child him or herself in participating in the decisions that affect their 'best interest'. In particular, the primacy of developing the child's well-being ought to be placed at the top of the education agenda. Learning is therefore to be perceived as nurturing and developing well-being. Our exploration of flourishing also points to the importance of recognising the uniqueness a person's nature within diverse socio-cultural contexts. It highlights, amongst other things, the importance of identity, self-respect and seeing human life itself as valuable. Lastly, the UNCRC and our aspiration for human well-being and well-becoming specify that

---

[1] Similarly, World Health Organisation (1983) takes a positive approach to defining health as 'a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity'.

the child's development should be perceived from the angle of the positive flowering of the diverse potentials of the whole child, and that the child should be a key voice in the debate and discussion about their well-being, as well as playing an active part in realising their potentials.

References

Ben-Arieh, A. (2006). Is the study of the 'State of Our Children' changing? Revisiting after five years, *Children and Youth Service Review*, 28/7, pp. 799 - 811.

Ben-Arieh, A. (2008). 'Indicators and Indices of Children's Well-being: towards a more policy-oriented perspective', European Journal of Education, vol. 43, number 1, March 2008

Ben-Arieh, A. &. Goerge, R. (2006) *Indicators of Children's Well-being: understanding their role, usage and policy influence*, Spinger

Boyden, J. & Cooper, E. (2006). Questioning the power of resilience: Are children up to the task of disrupting the transmission of poverty? Paper presented at the CPRC workshop on Concepts and Method for Analysing Poverty Dynamics and Chronic Poverty, 23-25 October 2006, University of Manchester, UK.

Camfield, L, Streuli, N. & Woodhead, M. (2009). What's the use of 'well-being' in contexts of child poverty? Approaches to research, monitoring and children's participation. *International Journal of Children's Rights* 17 pp. 65-109

Fattore, T., Mason, J. & Watson, L. (2009), When children are asked about their well-being. *Child Indicators Research*, 2:57-77.

Gill & Thomson, forthcoming, *Human-Centred Education.*

Gill & Thomson, (2009) *Human-Centred Education – A Summary*, Brighton :Centre for Research in Human Development, Guerrand-Hermes Foundation.

Kahneman, D., Diener, E., & Schwarz, N. (Eds.). (1999). *Well-being: The foundations of hedonic psychology*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Lippman, L., Moore, K. & McIntosh, H. (2007) State of the Art of Positive Indicators of Child Well-being, paper presented to the UNICEF, OECD, European Commission Well-being Expert Consultation, 25-27 May, 2009.

Lundy, L. (2007). ''Voice' is not enough: conceptualising Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child', *British Educational Research Journal*, Vol. 33:6, pp. 927- 942

Marks, N., Shah, H. & Westall, A. (2004). The power and potential of well-being indicators, London: New Economics Foundation

McGregor, J. A. (2006). Researching well-being: from concept to methodology, ESRC Research Well-being in Developing Countries Working Paper 20.

Michalos, A. (2007). Education, happiness and wellbeing, Paper presented at International Conference on 'Is happiness measurable and what do those measures mean for public policy?', at Rome, 2-3 April 2007, University of Rome 'Tor Vergata'

ORGANISATION FOR ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT (OECD), (2007). Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI) Understanding the brain: the birth of a learning science (Paris, OECD).

Pollard, E. & Lee, P. (2003) Child Well-being: A Systemic Review of the Literature, *Social Indicators Research* 61 (1).

Pollard, E., & Rosenberg, M. (2003). Well-being: Positive development across the life course. In M. Bornstein & L. Davidson (Eds.), *Well-being: Positive development across the life course,* (pp. 13-32), Mahwah, NJ: L. Erlbaum.

Prout, A. (2004). *The future of childhood: Towards the interdisciplinary study of children.* London: Routledge-Falmer

Seligman, M. (2002). *Authentic happiness*. New York: Free Press.

Universal Education Foundation.(UEF) (2007). *The Voice of Children Component, Student Well-Being and the School Environment, Middle East Pilot. Preliminary Survey Results: Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine.* Ramallah, Palestine: Universal Education Foundation.

Universal Education Foundation (UEF) (2008). Summary of Well-being Framework. Paris: Universal Education Foundation.

UNCRC (1989). UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by General Assembly resolution 44/25, 20 November 1989.

Uprichard , E. (2008) 'Children as "Being and Becomings": Children, Childhood and Temporality', *Children and Society* 22 (4) : 303 – 313 .

Weisner, T. (1998). Human development, child well-being, and the cultural project of development. In D. Sharma & K. Fischer (Eds.). *Socio-emotional development across cultures. New directions in child development,* No. 81, Fall, (pp 69-85). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

White, J. (2007). Wellbeing and Education: Issues of Culture and Authority, *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, Vol. 41, No. 1, pp. 17-28

White, S. (2009) Analyzing wellbeing: A framework for development practice. Wellbeing in Developing Countries working paper 44. ESRC Research Group

Zaff, J., Moore, K., Papillo, A., & Williams, S. (2003). Implications of Extracurricular Activity Participation During Adolescence on Positive Outcomes. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 18, 59