

Learning for  
Well-being Foundation



# The Essentials

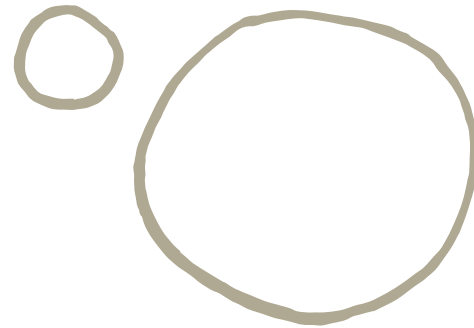


Revised Edition – May 2018

For more information about Learning for Well-being Foundation or any of its associated initiatives, please visit:

[www.learningforwellbeing.org](http://www.learningforwellbeing.org)

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# nature as our guide

The Learning for Well-being approach is based on a living systems perspective, using nature as its underlying model.

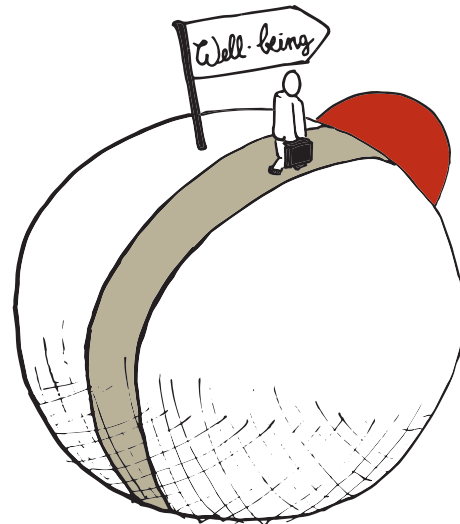
The last fifty years has seen a growing application of systems thinking and theory to the overall human experience. With attention on increased levels of globalization, ecological awareness and social, economic, technological interdependence, there has been a shift towards what is called a living systems perspective, encompassing humans and all elements of their environments.

A living systems perspective reflects the wholeness of nature. The basic premise asserts that life is more accurately viewed as a process, built on relationships and relating, rather than seen as a product or end state. Nature itself, and everything included within that term, works as a living whole system.

The shift from a mechanistic, fragmented model to an organic perspective changes our view of the way the world works, the nature of reality, our understanding of human functioning within a web of living relationships. All living systems are greater than the sum of their parts and can only be understood through the patterns of

interactions that are occurring within the system, in response to both internal and external relationships.

In describing the L4WB approach we will focus on some basic understandings about living systems: wholeness, process, purpose, patterns, and diversity.

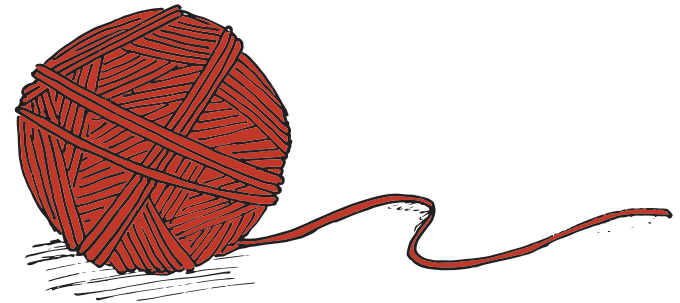


# defining well-being as dynamic wholeness

Our interest in well-being is rooted in two complementary observations that relate to the living systems perspective.

- 1 First, many of the challenges we are facing – in our societies, communities, schools, families, and as individuals – relate to the increasing fragmentation and separation experienced in contemporary cultures – the opposite of what the wholeness of nature offers.
- 2 Second, there is the recognition that a well-lived life – a life that we would hope for children – can not be measured by educational achievement, household income, or a narrow self-reported level of satisfaction or happiness. Well-being is a much more dynamic process in which the fullness of what it means to be human is expressed, in context, and in interaction with our fellow humans and the planet on which we live.

Through the lens of dynamic wholeness, Learning for Well-being (L4WB) defines well-being as “realizing one’s unique potential through physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual development in relation to self, others, and the environment.” This emphasizes that allowing the expression of our undivided and evolving self is at the heart of well-being. We cultivate well-being by exploring our inner resources (knowing ourselves), enhancing relationships with others and encouraging participation in all our environments. There is an implicit focus on developing physical, emotional, mental and spiritual capacities as the process for well-being.



# emphasizing our patterns of functioning

Within the wholeness that is nature, there are micro and macro patterns – cycles and processes that form the basis for stable structures as well as development. This relates to a distinctive feature of the L4WB approach: the relationship between one's unique potential and the intrinsic patterns of functioning that we call inner diversity. We can describe the unique potential as a centralizing impulse – the vital energy and qualities that provide meaning, purpose and direction to an individual's life. Another term for this is the expression of one's soul.

Patterns of inner diversity refer to the fundamental patterns through which we perceive, process and integrate information into an individually organized, and highly personal, representation of the external world. It is through these foundational processes that thoughts, feelings, actions, and beliefs are filtered, organized, and given meaning.

The interactions of the unique potential and the patterns of inner diversity require self-discovery and expression of one's particular gifts and those qualities

that are present from the beginning of life. They represent what is functioning, healthy and alive in the moment.

To relate to ourselves, others and the world, we need to understand our own patterns and processes as they unfold throughout life. The quality of the structures we create in the world is directly connected to the quality of our consciousness, and our ability to engage positively with our ways of functioning, as well as those of others.

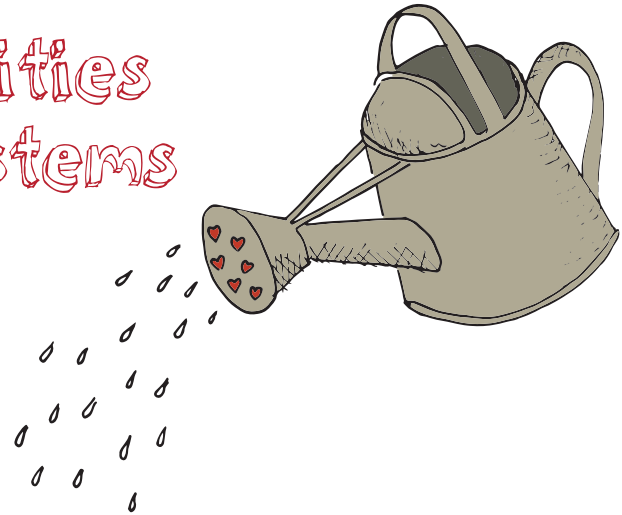


# cultivating capacities for competent systems

Learning for Well-being focuses on cultivating capacities that support individuals and communities to function as competent systems. Cultivating suggests a quality and action of allowing what is natural to come forward within its own direction and timing. Those of us who identify as “growers” – of plants, people, or organizations – know that the key to successful cultivation is finding the environments and circumstances that support the specific situation, rather than offering a standardized solution to all.

The various elements of the Learning for Well-being approach apply equally to individuals, groups, organizations, communities, and institutions in order to develop their capacities as competent systems.

We place the realizing of unique potential at the center of well-being. This resonates especially for individuals, but it can also be expressed collectively in a group’s shared purpose. By acknowledging the importance of meaning and purpose in every life, we give priority to processes that contribute to the well-being of individuals as well as whole communities and societies. This is particularly critical as we find balance



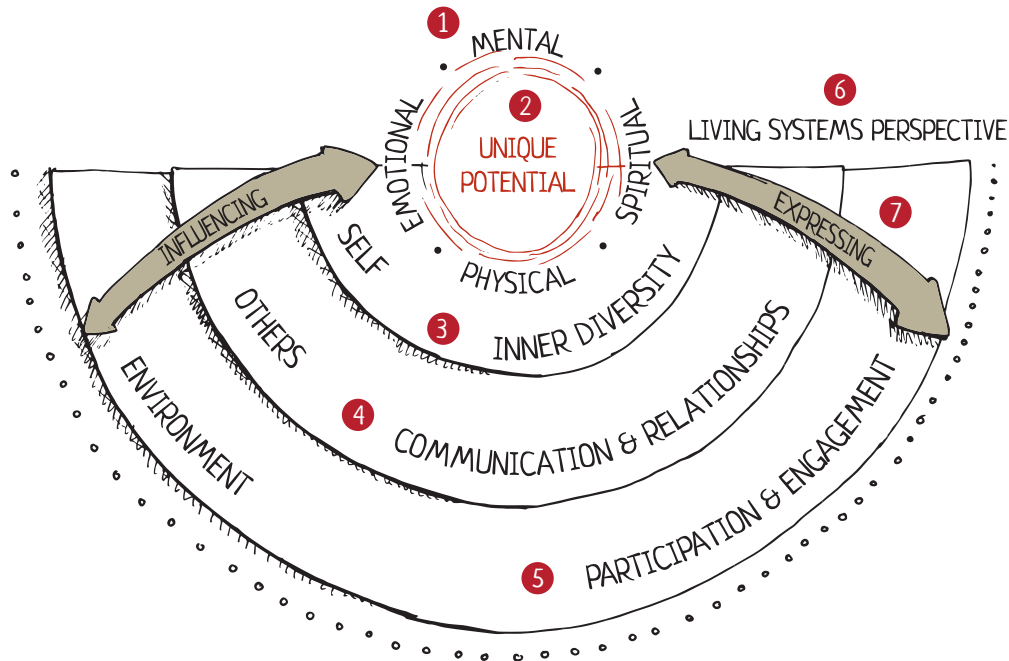
in the relationship between the ‘I’ and the ‘We’ in group actions and decision-making. By focusing on individual differences in our processes we want to highlight the contributions of individuals in the shared experiences of wholeness – not to lose sight of either the individual or the group.

In cultivating capacities for individual and collective competent systems, we have created an approach that carries both the seeds – purpose (unique potential) and individual patterns (inner diversity) – and ways to cultivate those seeds through the principles and the practice of core capacities. We call it Learning for Well-being.

# an integrative framework

We want to bring together a critical mass of partners to engage in mutually reinforcing activities that support competent systems in Education, Health and Welfare. To do this effectively, we need a way to express our common intentions and understandings about the ways

in which systems work and how they can develop. The integrative framework, depicted in the graphic, is one way to express a common language that is equally appropriate at the individual, organizational, or societal level.



The Learning for Well-being integrative framework expresses the essential characteristics and organic way by which systems function and evolve. It begins with a way of referencing wholeness through taking into account the four perspectives (1). It continues with the unfolding of our unique potential (2); understanding inner diversity as our way of being in the world and how we learn and develop (3); cultivating how we communicate and express our relationships (4); taking responsibility to participate in our lives (5); recognizing the interdependency of systems in which we live (6); and allowing a flow of feedback from internal and external sources (7).

We refer to the L4WB Integrative Framework as **4-7-9-1** because it describes:

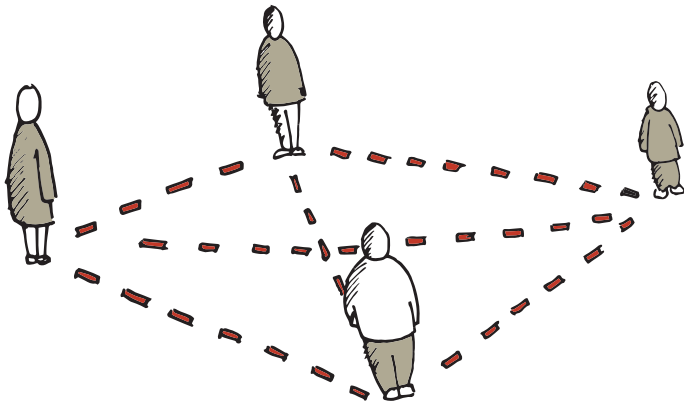
- **4 Perspectives:** Physical, Emotional, Mental, Spiritual;
- **7 Principles:** Wholeness, Purpose, Diversity, Relationships, Participation, Systems, Feedback;
- **9 Core Capacities:** Relaxing, Noticing, Reflecting, Listening, Inquiring, Empathizing, Subtle Sensing, Enriching sensory awareness, Discerning patterns and systemic processes; and
- **1 Vision:** Inclusive and supportive societies where everyone realises their unique potential throughout their life





# 4 perspectives

We begin with three universal aspects that are represented in a long tradition spanning cultures and diverse belief systems from the ancient Vedic scriptures, through Platonic philosophy, to the reflections of contemporary scientists. For example, when we speak of “head”, “heart, and “hand” or Input-process-output or mental, emotional, physical, we are invoking these aspects. They can be expressed on a continuum from the material to the spiritual. These aspects have also been described as energies, qualities or basic attributes.



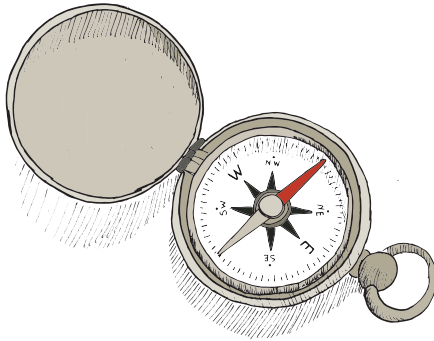
In formulating the framework we added “spiritual” as one of the perspectives to balance the expression of the human experience. This is primarily because there is so much focus on the material end of the continuum that the spiritual dimension is too often forgotten, particularly in contemporary western cultures. We use these four perspectives – physical, emotional, mental and spiritual – to provide the foundation for a sense of wholeness, both as a concept and an experience. Together, they represent the dynamic human experience of well-being or wholeness.

## Physical

The physical perspective relates to the physical senses, to our bodies, and to the material and natural environments. We include the functions of doing, building, taking apart, detailing, producing, and acting. Thus, it relates both to sensation and performance. Development implies cultivating bodily awareness, healthy habits, and positive attitudes about our bodies and the natural world. It also relates to becoming aware of how to rely on the wisdom and intuition of the body, and how to make choices about what we produce and build.

## Emotional

The emotional perspective refers to both our intrapersonal functions – our inner feelings and motivations and our interpersonal functioning – our interactions with others. Developing the intrapersonal includes awareness of one's emotions, the ability to differentiate between them, to understand their triggers and natural cycles, and the ways in which they can, when necessary, be managed and transformed – this also suggests a widening and deepening of one's emotional range. In the interpersonal sense, development points to the ability to express feelings and needs in effective ways and to engage and negotiate with others in mutually respectful and rewarding ways; it also includes compassion, implicit and explicit, and the ability to see from others' perspectives. Development of the emotional aspect also implies accessing the wisdom of the heart, which may manifest as compassion, felt intuition, empathy, and imagination.



## Mental

By the mental perspective, we mean our cognitive and rational processes. Development of the mental capacity includes envisioning, planning and valuing. It involves the skills to analyze, synthesize and create knowledge, integrate, manage and communicate information, and to solve problems, assess options and scenarios, plan and organize in ways that are relevant. Of critical importance is developing clarity of mind, including reflection, paying attention, and seeing objectively. It also includes accessing the wisdom of the head, manifesting as intention, a higher view and concentration.

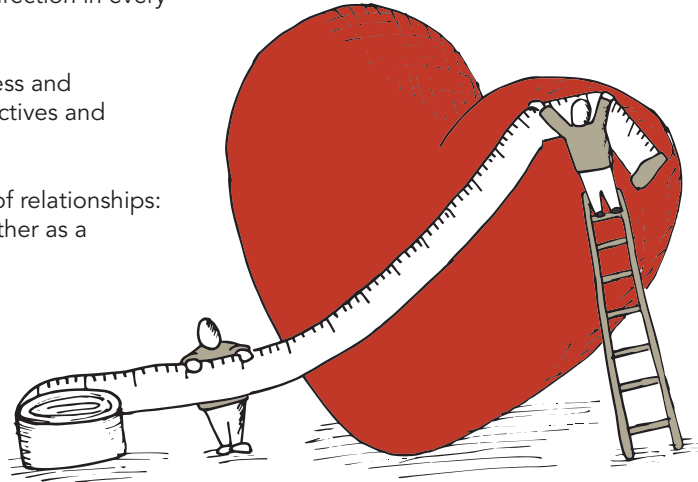
## Spiritual

The Spiritual perspective refers to a sense of connection to all things, including the natural and manmade environments. When we recognize a connection with life beyond the material dimension, we are tuning into a spiritual dimension. Development of an awareness of the spiritual dimension can be supported by practices that allow a deeper sense of the interconnectedness and sacredness of all things, a sense of awe and wonder in nature and the universe, and opportunities to experience the joy of service and expressions of mindfulness and lovingness toward all beings.

# 7 principles

From the framework the following principles for action have been identified.

- 1 **Wholeness:** Cultivate expressions of wholeness in people, communities and societies: creating environments for physical, emotional, mental and spiritual development through the practice of core capacities.
- 2 **Purpose:** Allow the unfolding of unique potential in individuals and communities: nurturing behaviours that provide purpose, meaning and direction in every activity
- 3 **Diversity:** Respect individual uniqueness and diversity: encouraging diverse perspectives and multiple expressions.
- 4 **Relationships:** Emphasize the quality of relationships: focusing on process and seeing the other as a competent partner.
- 5 **Participation:** Support the engaged participation of those concerned, involving everyone in decisions that impact them.
- 6 **Systems:** Recognize nested systems as influencing one another: providing opportunities for different sectors and disciplines to work together.
- 7 **Feedback:** Ensure conditions for feedback and self-organization: measuring what matters for the well-being and sustainability of any system.



# 9 core capacities

The core capacities, all of which can be practiced from the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual perspectives, are the processes that enliven the L4WB framework and derived principles.

Core capacities engage the **physical**, **mental** and **emotional** aspects, along a continuum from the material to the **spiritual**, providing means for exploring the individual qualities, aspirations and innate ways of processing of each person. They offer ways to address, with respectful awareness, the differences between people. Their practice helps deepen relationships and transform communications of all kinds. Engaging and practicing core capacities contributes to the nature and quality of our participation, responsibility and decisions, and allows us to experience the wholeness of life and its interconnections.

The preliminary list of core capacities include:

- **Relaxing**: physical, emotional, mental and spiritual relaxation
- **Noticing**: keen, engaged and consistent inner and outer observation
- **Reflecting**: pondering; looking back, looking from other perspectives, offering feedback
- **Listening**: connecting to words, sounds, and spaces

in oneself, others and the environment

- **Inquiring**: asking questions to track an experience with openness and curiosity
- **Empathizing**: active and deliberate resonance with others, their thoughts, feelings, experiences
- **Subtle sensing**: acknowledging and expanding the use of non-cognitive forms of knowing such as intuition, imagination and resonance
- **Enriching sensory awareness**: nurturing, stimulating, and expanding the capabilities of our five senses
- **Discerning patterns and systemic processes**: recognizing interdependency and the relationship of the parts to the whole

Developing these core capacities provides a solid basis for all life activities, including learning, creativity and inner resourcing. Practices that support the core capacities help children understand how they frame their thinking, experience feelings, engage in imagining, discover motivations, and so forth. In a classroom or other group environment, these core capacities support the development of key competences and skills for lifelong learning. In the broadest sense, together and separately, they can be termed as key competences for living and functioning in society.

# 1 vision

The Learning for Well-being approach is designed to contribute to our vision of how we would like our world to be:

**Inclusive and supportive societies where everyone realises their unique potential throughout their life**

Implicit in this vision is the belief that it is only through developing inclusive and supportive societies that everyone will be able to realize their unique potential. Therefore, learning for well-being must focus on supporting environments and processes that allow individuals and groups to impact their institutions and societies. Changes to societies are only possible through individuals and groups engaging in holistic and systemic processes. We believe this can occur through developing their capacities to make decisions and take actions that serve themselves, others, and their communities.

Therefore, we offer this set of aspirations that can also be considered as qualitative statements or indicators of well-being.

# aspirations

We want children, and adults that support them, to experience:

**Autonomy** — I have a sense of my own independence and uniqueness.

**Appreciation** — I feel respected and valued for who I am – and respect others.

**Agency** — My choices have meaning/significance, and I am able to make decisions that impact me.

**Achievement** — I have opportunities and am encouraged to work at my highest and best level.

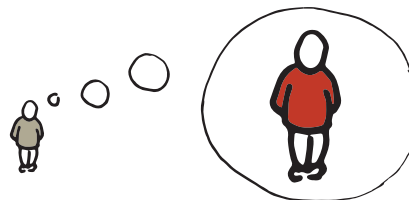
**Attachment** — I have relationships in all aspects of my life for which I care, and by which I am cared for.

**Altruism** — I have the means/opportunities to express my caring for others through specific acts/attitudes.

**Adventure** — I have opportunities to exercise curiosity and am encouraged to try new experiences /ideas.

**Aliveness** — I am filled with vitality, play, a sense of being alive!

**Awe** — I feel wonder, peace and connection with the world around me.



# activities

At its heart, the L4WB Foundation (and Community partners) is a group of people who have come together to support a shared vision – and activities to enliven that vision. In line with our definition of well-being, our initiatives focus on transforming ourselves, how we relate to others, and how different communities connect and collaborate in society. All of these are supported by expanding the content and process of research.

## Transforming Ourselves

A central premise is that change begins with oneself, expressed through the inner life and qualities that we bring to any interaction or situation. In keeping with this, we design and offer learning experiences to individuals of all ages so that they become more competent individuals in terms of making decisions and taking actions that are more holistic, and therefore more sustainable.

A distinctive aspect of the L4WB approach is the focus on the **relationship between one's unique potential, and one's inner diversity** – the intrinsic patterns of functioning that impact all crucial dimensions of life. Since 2016 we have offered the community opportunities to cultivate self-awareness, and acquire tools to explore one's natural way of being, including

workshops on the Learning for Well-being framework, inner diversity, and core capacities. Our most recent offering is an integrative decision-making process that allows individuals and groups to generatively address the natural challenges between independence and interdependence.

## Transforming Relationships

Decisions and actions never occur in a vacuum; they are expressed through relationships. In our programs and activities, we focus on cultivating competent partnerships between children and the adults who support them. This implies treating one another, regardless of age, social standing, abilities, etc., with respect, curiosity, love, and honoring individual competency and experience.

An example: Children and Adults Transforming Society (C.A.T.S.) is an international programme that gathers an equal number of children and adults in a week-long forum where they work and play together while addressing challenges faced by children today. It is a transformative experience that enables actors of all ages involved in child rights and well-being to move from working for children, to working with children.

## Transforming Societies

Transforming societies necessarily rests on a foundation of transforming ourselves and our relationships. These

activities focus on making a difference on a macro level of national policy makers, and on process, operational and structural interventions so that we move towards competent systems at all levels of society.

An ongoing project: The Alliance for Childhood, in partnership with the L4WB Foundation, works with Members of the European Parliament to develop the agenda for the Quality of Childhood (QoC) working group sessions.

- The sessions are organized six times per year
- The sessions are hosted by MEPs
- The sessions are open to the public.

The QoC sessions aim to influence policy makers and professionals to place the quality of childhood in the centre of all their activities, while assessing the effects of their decisions on children.

Following each QoC session, L4WB Foundation hosts an informal discussion on the session's theme with the aim of eliciting action plans among those participating. These plans focus on ways to harness the experience, focus, and connections of the L4WB Community towards a joined up action for the development of competent systems that nurture children.

## Expanding Research

"What you measure gets done" We are interested in expanding what we measure so that as individuals,

groups, and societies we pay greater attention to areas that are sometimes marginalized or ignored. Thus, we aim to initiate and engage in research initiatives that uncover new ground, and new ways in which measurements can occur. Currently our research and assessment activities focus on exploring the practice and development of core capacities, children's participation, and educational assessment.

One of the ways we are expanding research and assessment is by collaborating on a civil society partnership dedicated to bringing pluralism to school assessment. Spearheaded by the European Council for Steiner-Waldorf Education, the advocacy group is collecting good practice of assessment that offers enlarges the view beyond standardized testing and offers tools to measure the development of the whole child.



