

Learning for
Well-being



The Essentials



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

www.learningforwellbeing.org

or contact us at info@learningforwellbeing.org

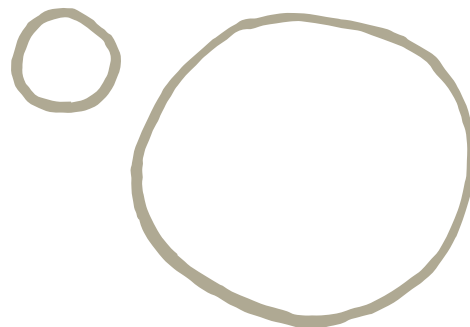


This publication is abbreviated from the article
"Well-being as Wholeness: The perspective,
process, and practice of Learning for Well-being"
by Linda O'Toole.

The article appears in the 5th edition (2014) of the
"Improving the Quality of Childhood in Europe"
yearbook, published by the Alliance for Childhood
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accessed on the organisation's website:
www.allianceforchildhood.eu

Illustrations, concept and layout by Luis Pinto

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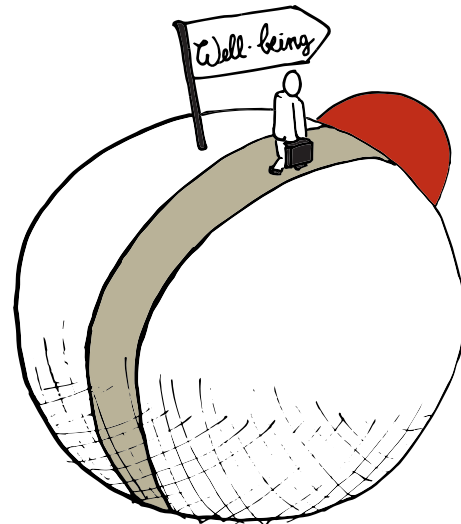
a journey

Learning for Well-being describes the journey of learning to realize our unique potential through physical, emotional, mental and spiritual development in relation to self, others and the environment.

It is learning to be and become me ... in the context of the community and society in which I live and to actively contribute to them in ways that truly nurture the uniqueness of me.

Speaking of wholeness at a conceptual level offers individuals and organizations ways to collaborate in meaningful and practical ways. Through developing a shared purpose, language, and community of practitioners we can begin to capitalize on shifting our ways of thinking, our methods and our organizational structures towards more holistic ways of operating. Engaging in joined up actions allows effective development and efficient use of resources, fosters innovative approaches, and provides opportunities for more human-centered services – whatever the context.

“Be the change you want to see in the world” is attributed to Gandhi, and sometimes interpreted as suggesting that personal transformation is all that is needed to make a difference. It is necessary, but it is not sufficient. Personal transformation and social transformation go hand in hand. By emphasizing the need to “start with the personal” we are asserting that too often we forget – as policy makers, as educators, as parents – that we must embody the qualities and characteristics that we want to see in and for children, and for ourselves as well.



a vision

The vision of Learning for Well-being is one of inclusive and supportive societies where children, young people and adults respect each other as competent partners and learn how to realize their unique potential throughout their lives.

In seeking to synthesize overarching principles with which numerous individuals and organizations can agree, Learning for Well-being (L4WB®) incorporates a broad spectrum of research and practices and takes inspiration from resolutions adopted by major international bodies.

Encompassing these various perspectives, Learning for Well-being offers an integrative framework and focuses on cultivating capacities and environments that support learning to lead happy, healthy and meaningful lives.

The emphasis is on the process of learning (values, attitudes, practices, and choices.) What we mean by a “process approach” is addressing not just what is happening, but how it is happening (why and by whom also being important elements of a process.)

The World Health Organization describes a state to be achieved by defining health as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, not merely the absence of disease or infirmity”.

The United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) emphasizes a child’s right to achieve their full potential and participate in decisions that affect their lives.

UNICEF stresses the responsibility “to advocate for the protection of children’s rights and to help meet their basic needs and expand their opportunities to reach their full potential”.

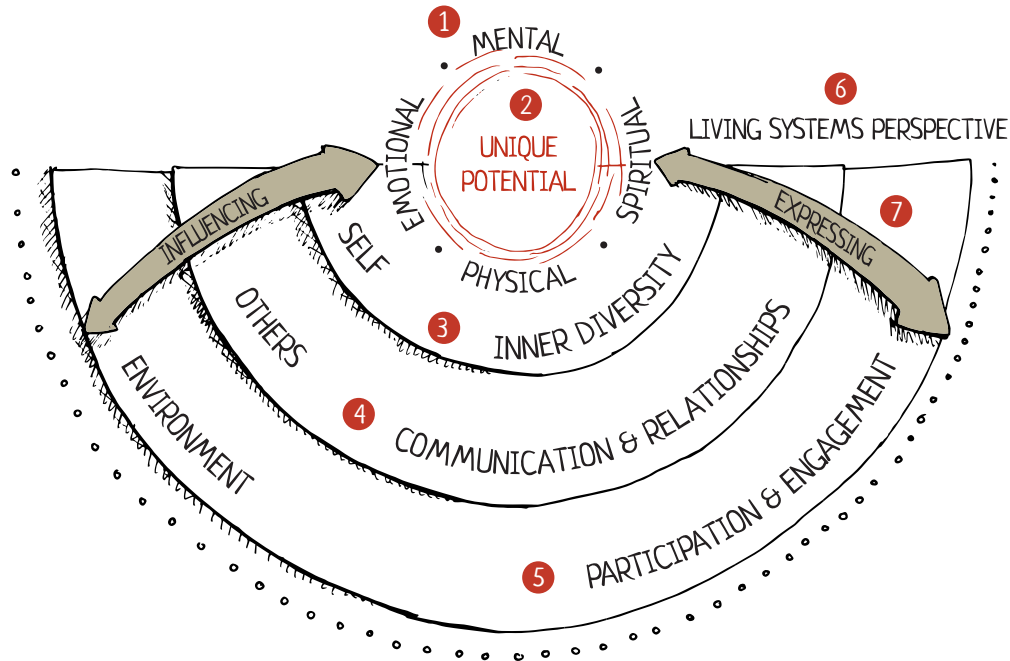
The ‘four pillars of learning’, as defined in the 1996 report to UNESCO by the International Commission on Education for the 21st Century, Learning: the Treasure Within – learning to know, learning to do, learning to be and learning to live together – underline learning as process.

The Council of Europe has described well-being as a universal human right, using the phrase “Well-being for All” to include individual well-being as well as societal and global well-being, extending to future generations.

a framework

The integrative framework is designed to provide points through which diverse organizations can recognize their interdependency while still maintaining their uniqueness (this is very much in keeping with a living systems perspective).

The following pages describe the framework. These seven elements, plus the vision of inclusive and supportive societies, are the basis for the principles of action that guide the process and practice of the Learning for Well-being partners.



1 Developing the whole child

Physical, emotional, mental and spiritual perspectives are placed around the inner circle in the diagram yet relate to all elements of the framework, for as stated earlier, Learning for Well-being aims at realizing our unique potential through physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual development in relation to self, others and the environment. These four perspectives represent a way of describing basic aspects of the human experience that are common to many cultures and diverse belief systems, from the ancient Vedic scriptures to contemporary scientists and philosophers.

physical — refers to the physical senses, to the material and natural environments, and to the functions of doing, producing, and acting;

emotional — refers to the inner feelings and motivations, and to the functions of relating, and imagining;

mental — refers to the cognitive and rational processes, and to the functions of planning, analyzing, and seeing objectively;

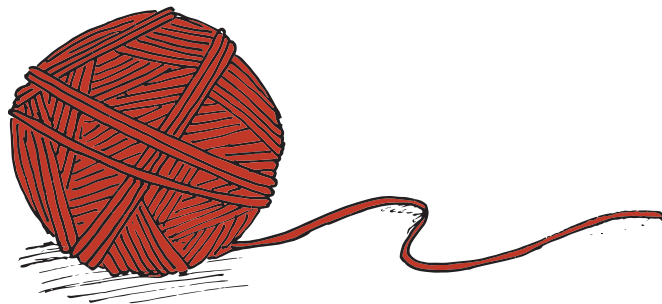
spiritual — refers to the sense of connection to all things – experienced through interconnectedness, awe, mystery, and beauty.

By taking account of all four perspectives, we engage with the whole child and emphasize life-long development. Children are thereby encouraged to grow and develop by adults who are themselves continuing to develop their human capacities

2 Expression of one's unique potential as a central focus

Unique potential refers to the vital energy and qualities that provide meaning, purpose and direction to an individual's life. The unfolding of every person's unique potential requires us to encourage self-discovery and the expression of each one's particular gifts and contributions, thereby nurturing the flourishing of the undivided and evolving self within each of us.

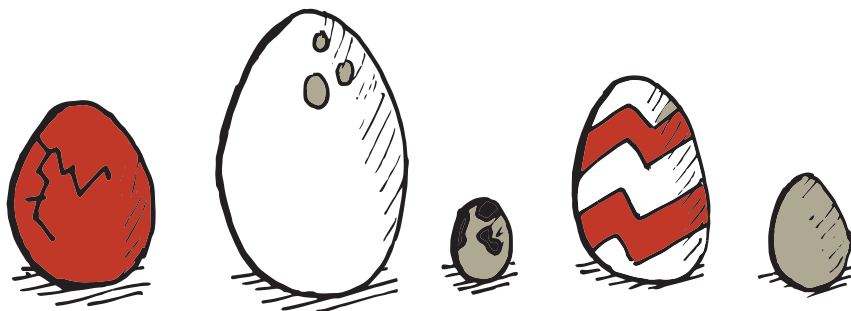
By acknowledging the importance of meaning and purpose in every life, we give priority to processes that contribute to the well-being of individuals as well as whole communities and societies.



3 Respecting uniqueness and diversity of each individual

Acknowledging inner diversity recognizes the uniqueness of every child and pays special attention to individual processes through which children learn, communicate, and develop. These are the “inner differences” – the ways in which children uniquely frame their perceptions and understandings – that are often not so readily apparent. Respecting these inner differences is at the heart of a vision centered on learning and the individual learner.

For the unfolding of one’s unique potential, we need to understand our inner processes – our way of being in the world and how we learn and develop – and that we must encourage and support diverse perspectives and multiple expressions.



4 Focusing on the nature and quality of relationships

We are hardwired for social interactions, and learn primarily through our relationships with family, peers, teachers and children and adults in our environments. The nature and quality of communications and relationships is critical to our learning for well-being. We also learn through our relationship to non-human creatures and the natural environment. Self-esteem, self-confidence and self-expression stem from the relationship to self that is central.

We need to cultivate the ways in which we communicate and express ourselves – how to nurture relationships with ourselves, with others, with the environments in which we find ourselves.

⑤ Participation of children, young people and adults

To learn a child must take ownership for his or her own learning outcomes and be an active participant in that learning. Adults can act as catalysts and enablers in creating diverse environments for the benefit of children, but well-being is sustainable only when consciously and actively engaged with and pursued by young people. Internalizing the value and practice of well-being is the beginning of choice, responsibility and action.

⑥ Consider the whole person, the whole process, whole systems

Nature itself, and everything in it, works as living whole systems. The shift from a mechanistic and fragmented model to an organic system changes our view of the world. The nature of reality is perceived differently when we understand human functioning within a web of living relationships or a "living systems perspective." Living systems are greater than the sum of their parts, and in learning for well-being we need to consider the various aspects of the person, the process and the environment – all in dynamic interaction with one another.

Our lives are interwoven with the systems within and around us so that the individual and the context -- of other people, organizations, human constructions or natural environments -- influence one another in ways that are both seen and unseen.

Ensuring conditions for self-organization and mutual learning. ⑦

There is a continuous dynamic interplay between the individual and the environment, including other people – of influencing and being influenced, of expressing and being expressed. The capacity to be uniquely myself can only occur if supported by the people and systems around me, and expressing my unique qualities adds value to those people and systems.

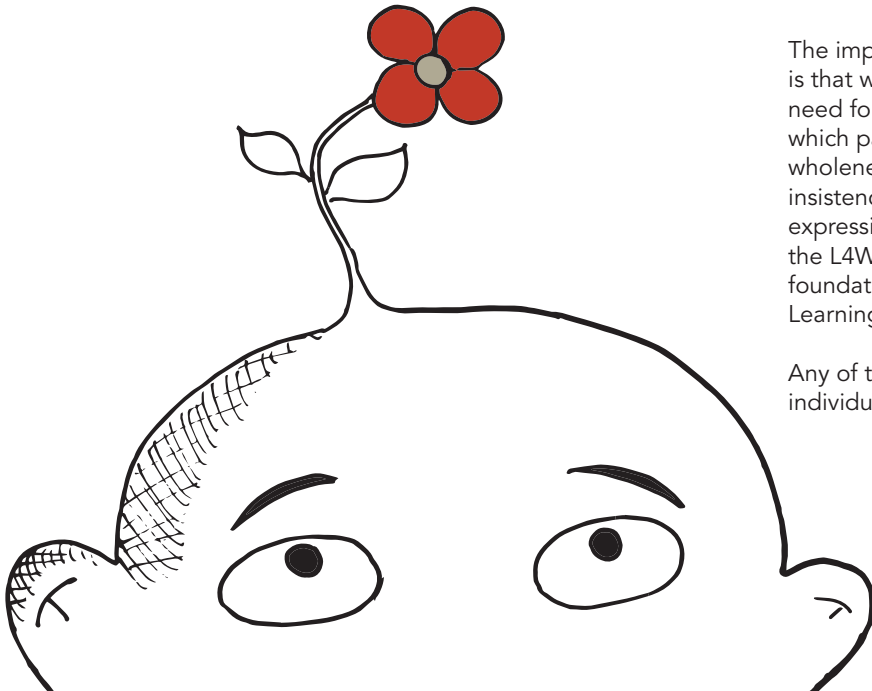
Self-organization is the way in which living systems adapt to their environments and create themselves anew, through a constant process of influencing and being influenced. The principles apply to individuals, classrooms, communities, and well as forests, oceans, and so forth. Impositions or assertions of external control have a direct impact on the quality and sustainability of the system. When control is internal -- through following the interests, motivations, and enthusiasm of the individual -- it is possible to optimize potentials for growth, learning, and well-being.

principles

We use the term, “principles,” to describe those essential characteristics of the system that function as guidelines for translating ideas, values, and vision into actions. In describing Learning for Well-being from a living systems perspective, we are taking nature as our model. Like nature, the basic perspective is organic, sustainable, and capable of continuous development.

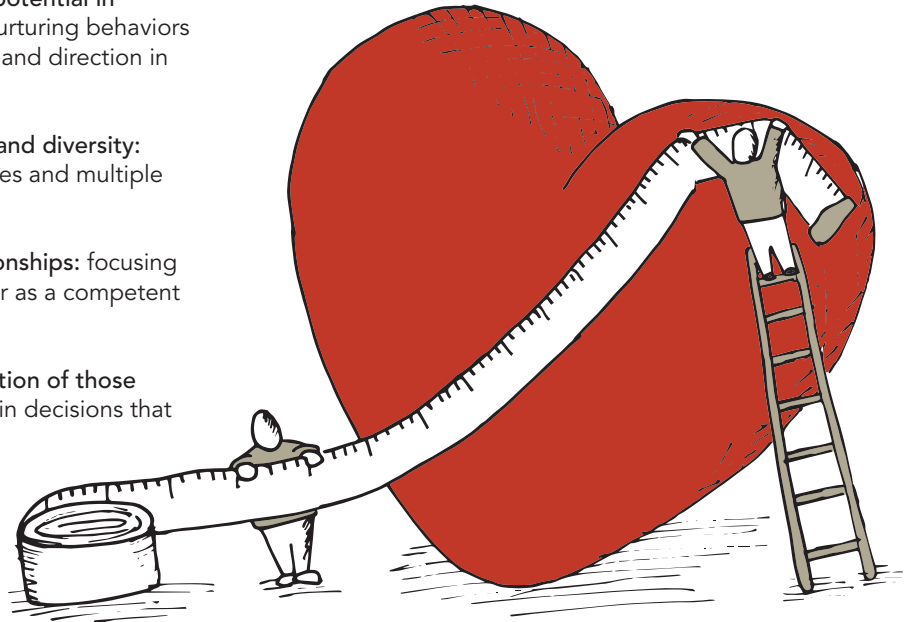
The importance of summarizing the L4WB principles is that we are balancing several considerations: the need for clarity; the diverse sectors and contexts in which partners are working; the difficulty of describing wholeness in practical and concrete terms; and the insistence on allowing diverse perspectives and multiple expressions to emerge. In this section we state briefly the L4WB® principles derived from the Framework as foundational to the perspective, process, and practice of Learning for Well-being.

Any of the principles can be broadly applied – to individuals, groups, and organizations.



Principles derived from the L4WB® vision and framework:

1. **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. **Allow the unfolding of unique potential in individuals and communities:** nurturing behaviors that provide purpose, meaning and direction in every activity
3. **Respect individual uniqueness and diversity:** encouraging diverse perspectives and multiple expressions
4. **Emphasize the quality of relationships:** focusing on process and seeing the other as a competent partner
5. **Support the engaged participation of those concerned:** involving everyone in decisions that impact them
6. **Recognize nested systems as influencing one another:** providing opportunities for different sectors and disciplines to work together
7. **Ensure conditions for feedback and self-organization:** measuring what matters for the well-being and sustainability of any system



cultivating core capacities

Cultivating certain capacities and practices enhances our ability to realize our unique ways of contributing to the fullness of our own life and the lives of those around us; to paraphrase Albert Schweitzer, they allow us to become more finely and deeply human.

The phrase “cultivating core capacities and practices” highlights the desire to nurture and help expand capacities that are naturally present in young children; therefore, we speak not of “building” or “creating” these capacities, but instead speak of “cultivating” or the act of providing environments, including models and mentors, that allow for their natural growth. Making these core capacities explicit in all learning environments is a way through which we, as children, young people and adults, deepen our practice of being more fully human, uniquely ourselves, and more capable of contributing over the course of a lifetime.

A preliminary list of core capacities and practices include:

Relaxing — physical, emotional, mental and spiritual relaxation

Paying attention — 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' thoughts, feelings, experiences

Discerning patterns and systemic processes — recognizing interdependency and the relationship of the parts to the whole

Subtle sensing — including intuition, imagination and resonance

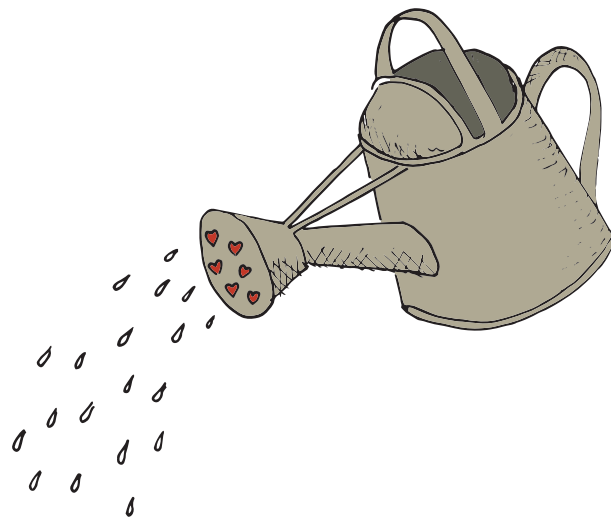
Enriching sensory awareness — nurturing, stimulating, and expanding the capabilities of our five senses

These capacities and practices can be approached from the most direct to the most subtle: for example, listening involves hearing the words and tone of another person, and it also involves expanding into the space around one, to listen to the wisdom of one's body, the change of the seasons, the intentions behind words, to name only a few. Core capacities engage the physical, mental and emotional aspects – along a continuum from the material to the spiritual – and in relation to the inner world within oneself, the social world with others and the physical world both natural and human-made. They provide means for exploring the individual qualities, aspirations and innate ways of processing of each person; ways to be addressed with respectful awareness of the differences that exist 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.

In connecting to all elements of the Framework the core capacities and practices provide a substantial, accessible, and practical basis for working with the process of L4WB®. By focusing on core capacities as practices (rather than as competences, qualities, abilities, or desirable outcomes), Learning for Well-being is stressing that these capacities are a solid basis for all life activities (including learning, creativity and inner resourcing). The practices of these capacities help children understand how they frame their

thinking, experience feelings, engage in imagining and discover motivations, and so forth. At another layer of functioning (within society, in a classroom, in an occupation) these core capacities underpin and support the development of key competences and skills for lifelong learning. In the broadest sense they can be termed a key competence for living and functioning in society: personal fulfillment and development, active citizenship, social inclusion and employment.

The reason we put considerable emphasis on the core capacities is that they offer a means for enlivening the L4WB® Framework and the aspirations that we have for children – indeed for each of us.

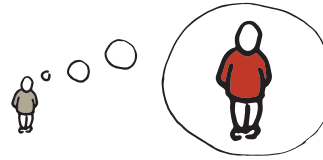


aspirations

The following statements point to a dynamic state of well-being that is holistic and addresses the multi-dimensional life of a child. This list is informed by the work of various academics, practitioners, and policy-makers who have addressed the topic of children's well-being.

In the broadest sense of the term, these statements of aspirations are "indicators" of the wholeness implied in defining well-being as realizing one's unique potential – whether we are referring to a child, an adult, an organization or a society.

The principles derived from the Framework offer guidelines for developing measurable indicators which allow us to monitor -- for example -- how we maintain well-being as a central purpose for our activities and organizations, and how we represent diverse perceptions and multiple expressions in processes and content. The core capacities not only guide research on indicators but can constitute an essential part of the research process, notably in qualitative research.



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.*

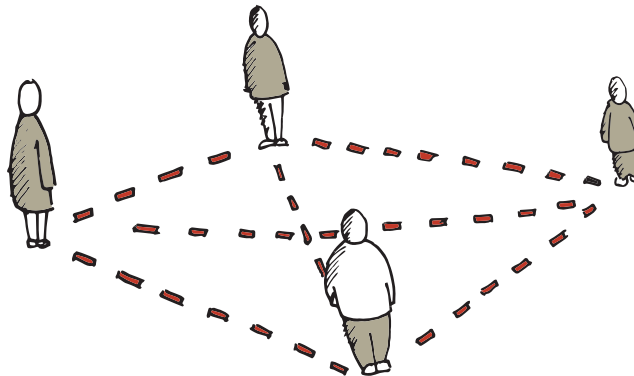
a community, an invitation,

We invite an even greater community to develop around Learning for Well-being – whether it is one of a formal association of partners or of advocates who embrace the ideas or individual researchers and practitioners who want to share in developing ways to work together. To date, the major areas have included: advocacy, capacity-development and local initiatives that support well-being and bring together different sectors, settings, and age groups. All of the activities are undergirded by the L4WB® principles.

Here are examples of how we are working in Europe at this time. These examples continue to multiply as the Learning for Well-being Community expands through partnerships with organizations -- and with individuals in these organizations - who intend to be the change they wish to see in society.

The Alliance for Childhood European Network Group is a long-term partner in Learning for Well-being. The Unfolding Conference in October 2013, co-sponsored by the Alliance for Childhood and the Universal Education Foundation with the participation of Eurochild, and hosted by the Higher Institute for Family Studies in Brussels, brought together many sectors of society, all of whom are vitally interested in the well-being of children, to find common ground. The Alliance for Childhood and UEF organize six meetings yearly of the Working Group on the Quality of Childhood at the European Parliament. Hosted by MEPs, the expert-speakers address a wide range of contemporary topics and provocative issues which are also addressed in the Quality of Childhood publications.

- www.allianceforchildhood.eu



The **European Peer Training Organization (EPTO)** has adopted Learning for Well-being as a framework that underpins their peer education programmes which aim at helping young people in embracing their differences, and realizing their unique potential. Strengths-based and holistic perspectives are thus brought to peer training, and notions of diversity are expanded to include individual differences in learning and communicating. UEF partners with EPTO and its members in developing “Potential4Life” a programme where young people support younger peers in finding a sense of purpose and direction, connect to their unique strengths and discover their optimal way of learning. - www.epto.org

Elham (Palestine) means “inspiration”. It is a bottom-up and top-down approach to inspire systems at national level to embrace the principles of Learning for Well-being. Elham aims at enhancing children’s learning environments to become more conducive to their well-being. Elham stimulates, identifies, supports and disseminates innovative initiatives that “made a difference in children’s life journey”, and leverages various cross-sector partnerships to replicate them and take them to scale. In Elham programme, children are celebrated as initiators of innovative initiatives together with other actors in the school community. A panel of children jury has equal standing as a jury of experts in deciding each year’s laureates. - www.elham.ps

CATS (Children as Actors for Transforming Society) is an international learning community of children, young people and adults that collaborate to explore and improve ways in which children, with all their diversity, participate in decisions impacting their lives. CATS models and celebrates examples of equal partnership between children and adults, where they can be themselves and create the unexpected. It transforms attitudes of children, and towards children, so they are seen, heard and engaged in their environments - from local to global. The programme’s flagship event - CATS Global Forum - is co-planned, co-led and co-evaluated with children from all over the world. It offers a space to engage and exchange perspectives, learn from one another and find a common voice for participation, partnerships, and action. - www.catsconference.com

