

CHAPTER 2

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CULTIVATING CAPACITIES:

A DESCRIPTION OF THE LEARNING FOR WELL-BEING APPROACH TO CORE PRACTICES

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SUMMARY

This article describes the Learning for Well-being approach to core practices for developing physical, emotional, mental and spiritual capacities. Learning for Well-being (L4WB) is a collective initiative of the Universal Education Foundation, engaging with communities of practitioners, partners, and collaborators in order to cultivate expressions of wholeness in individuals and groups. L4WB offers a process approach and defines well-being as realizing one's unique potential through development of these capacities in relationship to self, others, and the environment. In the first section, I describe what we mean by physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual capacities and how their development through core capacities/practices relates to other ways of addressing the skills and competences necessary for life-long learning. Then, I provide context for my exploration and identification of the proposed core practices that support these basic human capacities. In the final section, nine core practices are described with brief examples of how individuals and groups can work with these practices to develop the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual capacities for the benefit of themselves and others.

INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly interconnected and interdependent world, we cannot afford to believe or act as if we are separate from one another or from the environments we inhabit. Fragmentation has contributed to a multiplicity of environmental, political, social, and inter- and intra-personal conflicts. Seeing distinct segments around us, we also describe and experience ourselves in segmented ways (“how I am with my family,” “how I am at work,” and so forth.) This leads to strife within and against ourselves and with each other; it also creates areas of specialization and division (“silos”) in which we live at a distance from one another – creating transactional relationships with people so they become “the other”, assuming responsibility or control without regard for the desires and competence of people, separating domains such as family, school, health care, sports and community.

Learning for Well-being, developed by the Universal Education Foundation (UEF), is a collective initiative, with communities of practitioners, partners and collaborators, which aims to place holistic well-being at the center of all endeavors – in education, health, welfare, justice, and media, and in many other fields – and to create a common language to inspire expressions of wholeness in people, communities and societies. Interest in well-being has developed out of the recognition that a well-lived life – a life that we would wish for children – can not be measured by educational achievement, household income, or even a self-reported level of satisfaction or happiness. Well-being is a 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 world, natural and human, in which we live. Well-being is ephemeral and concrete; complex in concept yet simple in experience.

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 self-direction and discovery (the search for life purpose and meaning) is at the heart of well-being and that we cultivate it by exploring our inner resources (knowing ourselves), enhancing relationships with others and encouraging participation in all our environments. There is an implicit emphasis on developing physical, emotional, mental and spiritual capacities through core practices.¹

In the following pages, I describe the L4WB approach to the core practices, the background in which the current set of practices was identified, and how they are distinct yet complementary to other ways of addressing the skills, competences, and traits necessary for life-long learning. In the final section, I include a few examples of how individuals and groups can work with and develop the core practices for the benefit of themselves and others.

CONTEXT FOR CORE PRACTICES

In the past decades a variety of social thinkers, policy makers, researchers, and practitioners have been addressing the skills and attributes needed for living and learning in the 21st century. Adults as much as children and young people need a range of abilities to navigate contemporary societies and environments. Additionally, adults are responsible for nurturing their own children and for creating structures and processes that allow younger generations to thrive.

A strong response to the question of what constitutes “21st century competences” has been an increased focus on the need for life-long and life-wide learning. In service to this, many European countries have established core objectives for education, and the European Reference Framework has identified eight key competences which are deemed necessary for personal fulfillment and development, active citizenship, social inclusion and employment. In parallel, there has been a growing trend for educational researchers and practitioners to describe sets of qualities that contribute to effective learning, both in formal and informal settings for children and adults alike. Examples of this latter trend include Costa’s Habits of Mind (Costa & Kallick 2000), Ruth Deakin Crick’s Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory (2004) and Guy Claxton’s Learning Power Capacities (Claxton 1999).

We might usefully think of a spectrum ranging, at one end, from a set of key competences to be developed by students in formal education systems (e.g., communication in foreign languages, cultural awareness and expression, learning to learn) to more personal qualities and behaviors (e.g., persisting, striving for accuracy, thinking flexibly) to be nurtured through learning in the broadest sense. ‘Habits of Mind’ or ‘Learning Power Capacities’ (referenced above) clearly relate more to the individual resources which are necessary for life-long and life-wide learning. The L4WB core practices complement both ends of this spectrum, contributing to supporting the knowledge and competences acquired in formal learning settings, as well as developing the personal resources necessary for learning that happens in informal and everyday contexts. What distinguishes L4WB Core Practices is that they are actions and these actions have physical, emotional and mental attributes.

Physical, emotional, and mental aspects reflect ways of describing the human experience – a description with 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”, we are invoking these aspects, which can be expressed on a continuum from the material to the spiritual. Often, these aspects are described interchangeably as energies, qualities, basic attributes, perspectives, or as capacities. In terms of development through the use of core practices, L4WB refers to these aspects as “capacities” because it implies that they represent natural and inherent human qualities – not needing to be created but only to be used, supported, and developed. We have also chosen to add “spiritual capacity” because there is so much focus on the material end of the continuum that awareness of the spiritual dimension is too often forgotten, particularly in contemporary western cultures.² We are referencing these four capacities – physical, emotional, mental and spiritual – as foundational for a sense of wholeness, both as a concept and an experience. Together, they represent the dynamic human experience of well-being.

In addressing physical capacity we are relating 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, the physical capacity relates both to sensation and performance, meaning what we are able to receive and do with our physical bodies and environments. 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.

By emotional capacity, we mean 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.

By the mental capacity, 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 for development is to develop clarity of mind, including reflection, paying attention, and seeing objectively. It also includes the wisdom of the head, manifesting as intention, stillness, and concentration.

Spiritual capacity 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 considered a “spiritual capacity” and is 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.

In suggesting that cultivating capacities are vital for human development and learning, I am situating core practices within the living systems perspective of Learning for Well-being,³ an approach that focuses on *process*. In the examples used in this article, I stress the interactive relationship between core practices and discovering one’s patterns of learning, communicating, and developing because this perspective supports the learning process through allowing greater self-awareness. However, core practices – as simple and direct ways for developing these capacities – are relevant to the full human experience.

L4WB has identified nine core practices as foundational for the development of physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual capacities. In this context, the term development implies neither deficiency nor incremental progress; instead, development is seen as unfolding or expanding capacities that are already present but which are impacted by one’s actions as well as through enabling environments or conditions. The core capacities/practices are simple actions that occur naturally in a wide variety of situations; adults and children work with these practices every day, but the facility of their use can be refined, strengthened, and deepened. Based on decades of experience described in the following section, we are asserting that working to enhance these practices is the most natural and direct way to develop the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual capacities. Through developing these basic human capacities, we become more finely and deeply human, as individuals, communities, and societies. These assertions need to be explored further through additional research. The core practices include:

- Relaxing
- Observing
- Listening
- Inquiring
- Reflecting
- Subtle sensing
- Empathizing
- Enriching sensory awareness
- Discerning patterns

In general, the skills, competences, and personal traits mentioned above as 21st century competences focus on desired outcomes. Core practices differ in that they focus on the process of supporting those outcomes. For example, much of the research on Habits of Mind is based on characteristics observed in people who have been identified as performing effectively in a particular field; in that sense, the research stems from a particular image of the individual. It is “outcome oriented” in the sense that it prescribes the

development of particular character traits (such as resilience) in order to make an individual more X or more Y (more effective or better performers, as examples.) Using a process orientation, the ways through which someone becomes more resilient, or optimizes one's learning, are not universal. A process oriented approach looks at HOW the individual achieves X or Y, in a way that is natural for that individual. It is this perspective that the core practices support.

EXPLORING CORE PRACTICES

At an early age I recognized, and was fascinated by, individual differences in people: specifically, their pacing, how they pay attention, the relative importance of story-telling, the amount of background information needed, and so forth. This fascination has been reflected in my life-long interest in noticing and describing the patterns through which people engage and process their inner and outer experiences, including how they select and express information. I refer to these patterns as "inner diversity" and I have come to believe that an understanding and ability to work with our individual patterns of processing is foundational for a sense of wholeness and well-being, as well as our interactions with others.

The current set of core practices was developed through helping people integrate the cognitive, relational and sensory functions within a living system perspective. This was work in which I engaged with colleagues from many countries around the world, working in large and small companies, government departments, training organizations, parenting groups, formal education and research from the early 1980s onwards. There are three major threads.

In 1981 I started meeting with a group of educators, psychologists, artists, and scientists who were researching individual differences in school age children; later our research extended to adults. We were interested in determining attributes and patterns that could be used to predict, understand, and support effective learning and communicating. The outcomes of this research were formalized in a system that became known as Human Dynamics. Subsequently, it evolved into a model which borders on personality typing but my own work for more than 20 years was in engaging people in ways to explore their own patterns of what I now call *inner diversity* (the ways in which people differ in how they process their perceptions and interactions.)

In training large numbers of people⁴, I was learning from and testing ways to help seminar participants, facilitators, managers, and educators engage in understanding their ways of communicating and functioning in their daily tasks and responsibilities. Our focus was two-fold: strengthening working in a team, and implementing practices that supported individual development in learning and leading. I also had the opportunity to work with primary school children in a number of countries, which meant that it was possible to observe these patterns at various age levels.

From those experiences, I continued to investigate and refine my understanding of inner diversity and the value of a holistic perspective.

Specifically, I observed that individual ways of processing remain relatively consistent over time and domain. I also learned the importance of fieldwork – the interplay of concept, research, and practice – and the value of exploring through open action research.

The second major thread in developing my thoughts about core practices began in the early 1990s, when I was involved in what became the organizational learning community of which Peter Senge (1989) of MIT's Sloan School of Management was the initial centralizing force⁵. I participated in a community of practice with those who were engaged in sharing and expanding a structured way of working with the interdependent impact of systems, eventually placing this within an ecological context. This type of professional exchange was particularly well suited to the approach that I was developing, and brought a further focus and structure to my interest in holistic and systemic interventions.

The third major thread began in the mid 2000's when I started helping UEF develop the L4WB Framework. Of particular interest was the work being undertaken on social-emotional development and learning, the growing trend among educational practitioners towards developing habits and practices that serve life-long learning and an exploration of indigenous and education traditions outside the European/North American context. It was enriching to find that others, coming to the same place through different routes, spoke about many of the same “qualities and skills” with which I had been working.

With the perspective of almost a decade working with UEF, what I believe is distinct about the L4WB core practices is the interplay of the following elements:

- 1 Core practices are intended as *actions* to develop and support inherent human capacities;
- 2 All core practices have physical, emotional, and mental expressions, related to material and spiritual dimensions;
- 3 Core practices reflect natural human abilities, already present, needing only to be respected, refined and used consciously;
- 4 Certain practices, or clusters of practices relate to differences between people – for example: some people excel at listening, empathizing, and inquiring, while others may rely more on reflecting, discerning patterns, and observing;
- 5 Core practices are applicable in all environments (not just formal or informal education environments, but also family, work, and community environments.)

Taken together, these elements illustrate the dynamic created when the focus is on process rather than predominantly on outcomes. Through this attention to process and taking account of inner diversity, core practices offer a way through which individuals, both children and adults, can begin to engage more fully with the attributes, skills, and competences needed for life-long and life-wide learning.

CORE PRACTICES COMPLEMENT OTHER APPROACHES

Core practices are a means for exploring and expressing the individual qualities, aspirations and innate ways of processing of each person. They are also foundational for the developing and assessing of various kinds of competences and personal attributes for effective learning. Thus, they provide a link between understanding how one functions (self-understanding) and the choices one makes for greater effectiveness and for one's own well-being, and that of others.

As mentioned earlier, in 2006 the European Commission identified eight key competences. Several transversal skills are considered vital for each of these competences; these include: critical thinking, creativity, taking initiative, problem-solving, risk assessment, decision-taking and constructive management of feelings (Gordon, et al. 2009) To these transversal skills we can also add the set of personal qualities and dispositions that the social-emotional learning community and such researchers as Costa have identified.

Core practices are fundamental for developing complex behaviors such as the transversal skills mentioned above, as well as for enhancing personal dispositions. Here are two examples to illustrate various aspects of what I mean by that assertion: creativity and constructive management of feelings (or, emotional self-regulation.)

Creativity is a concept with multiple definitions, which has contributed to making it difficult to encourage, teach and assess creativity (Collard & Looney, 2014) Creativity, Culture and Education (CCE), a UK-based non-profit organization, has developed an assessment tool that identifies five specific 'habits of mind' that are associated with individuals predisposed to exhibit creativity (Spencer et al., 2012):

- Inquisitive
- Persistent
- Imaginative
- Disciplined
- Collaborative

The first point to note is that all five of these personal dispositions need to be interpreted according to how they are expressed individually; for example, "collaborative" can be understood or demonstrated in multiple ways –such as, being willing to talk together about the work we will do, accepting your ideas as well as my own, completing the task in the assigned time, generating new ideas, and so forth. This is equally true for the other four dispositions. Second, refining our use of the various core capacities/practices offers ways to begin to more deeply understand ourselves in the sense of how we function, and to understand how others have different yet complementary ways of functioning. Through implementing core practices, all of the identified habits of mind can be more consciously addressed. This allows the development and assessment of creativity to be more personally relevant; it also provides a way of teaching a systemic perspective through noticing the complementarities of your own ways of functioning, and those of others.

Emotional Self-Regulation (or “Managing one’s emotions”) is widely accepted as one of the skills to be taught, particularly emphasized in the field of social-emotional learning. A key point is that different children “manage” their emotions in different ways, and this needs to be respected and utilized as part of their natural ways of being. “Managing impulsivity” in *Habits of Mind* includes the following admonitions: *Take time to consider options; Think before speaking or acting; Remain calm when stressed or challenged; Be thoughtful and considerate of others; Proceed carefully.* These admonitions clearly preference some children over others; as one example, some children naturally think before they speak (they pause to consider the words they will use); other children need to speak in order to know what they are thinking (it is through interaction that they know what they want to say.) These examples represent critical differences in how children naturally express their emotions. Depending on the adult’s own ways of listening and observing, interpretations of specific expressions may be regarded as positive or negative. It’s not that the components of “managing impulsivity” are not important, it’s that children need to come to the overarching competence of emotional self-regulation in their own ways. Not without guidance, of course, but with the guidance that is provided when the adults around them recognize and respect that there are different ways of engaging with your emotions, and the “right way” is not necessarily the one that the adult prefers.

DESCRIPTION OF CORE PRACTICES

In this final section, I will briefly describe nine core practices and suggest one or two ways in which each can be enhanced.⁶ I am deliberately offering very simple ideas so that the reader understands that it is easy to begin to practice more explicitly. The suggestions can be used by adults as well as children in order to reinforce a point that too often we forget: as policy makers, practitioners, educators, and parents we must embody the qualities and characteristics that we want to see in and for children, and for ourselves as well.

For increased self-awareness, notice the ways in which you naturally engage with each of the core practices, and the ways in which others in your life engage with them. For example, when we ask questions, we are often seeking different kinds of answers. Some people are seeking factual clarity (“what did that word mean?”); others are seeking personal validation (“are we still communicating?”); still others are seeking the action that is needed (“what are we suppose to do with this information?”) It is natural to consider that the kind of answers you seek varies with the context, and so it does. Still, there is often a predominant pattern (a type of default position) that is subtly present for each of us. Discovering this pattern and registering the patterns of others allows us to create stronger and more effective relationships, which in turn helps us to perceive more systemically.

Earlier I mentioned that one of the distinct features of the L4WB Core Practices is that they all have physical, emotional, and mental expressions; this relates to the example of differences in the preceding paragraph: the drive for action corresponds to the physical aspect, personal validation to the emotional aspect, clarity to the mental aspect. In empathizing, we can see

these aspects represented as the drive for compassionate action, the affective dimension of responding directly to the emotions of others, and the cognitive understanding of another's point of view. As you begin to practice with each of the core capacities/practices, it is likely that you will notice that you have greatest affinity with one or two of the aspects, and less with the third aspect – that is, you may notice in relaxing that there is greater ease with the mental and physical aspects, and less with the emotional aspect. This has significance to your understanding of yourself, but it also provides an entry point for developing a more holistic perspective in which you begin to know how to access all three aspects in your practice, and in all your activities.

My suggestion for beginning to work with these practices involves two parts: First, select one capacity practice with which you have experience and resonance – perhaps a practice in which you feel you have some mastery. What are the ways in which you can begin to refine and enhance this practice? This might be through using the practice more consciously in circumstances in which you ordinarily do not use it, or it could be in bringing another aspect (mental, emotional, or physical) more explicitly into your practice. Second, select a practice with which you feel less familiar – one that you feel you do not use frequently or well. What are the ways in which you can begin to refine and enhance this practice?

1 Relaxing

Relaxing implies being awake and fully present, with minimal tension or stress. Too often we think of relaxing as a passive state, but it is an active centering – consider the action of someone preparing to perform as an athlete or a concert pianist or in one of the martial arts.

For Cloninger (2006), relaxation is the fundamental activity on which self-aware consciousness depends; for neuroscientists, it is the most critical factor in learning (OECD, 2010) The fundamental quality of relaxing is that we have access to all our resources. In the body, relaxing allows one to be more fully present to experience all of one's senses as well as what is needed; in the mind, it allows stillness and clarity; in the feelings, relaxing is a first step in allowing one to listen to and be with one's emotions.

Like the other core practices, relaxing is highly individual: it requires the activity that brings you to a state of feeling centered and ready to act fully. This can be a physical activity, ranging from running to breath work or it may be a more meditative practice requiring physical stillness, or a number of other activities.

2 Enriching Sensory Awareness

Our physical senses provide the raw material – the content – for our experiences of the world including the images with which we think, feel, and act. To be fully alive and whole, our senses must be engaged and enlivened. This implies nurturing – proper care and healing – but also attending to our senses so that we expand and enhance their capabilities, so that we learn to see, hear, taste, smell, feel ever-finer distinctions. Our relation to our senses seems so fundamental that we might not even consider the need to give them additional attention; yet, there is widespread evidence that there has been significant decline in sensory abilities, particularly in children.

Studies in Germany indicate that in less than 15 years young people's ability to distinguish sounds has declined from 300,000 sounds to 180,000, and in some cases to barely more than 100,000 sounds. Douglas Sloan (2005) argues that this has resulted from overstimulation, neglect of proper care, and even the amount of time that we spend in virtual worlds, or isolated from our natural surroundings.

Practicing discernment is often key to enriching sensory awareness – for example, listening for distinctly different sounds that are not often heard in one's familiar environment. Tracking bird songs would be an example of this practice, or learning to distinguish between subtly different tastes.

3 Observing/Noticing

Both inner observation and outer observation relate to this practice. Noticing involves being intensely, objectively and exquisitely aware of the details of life, including one's inner life (paying attention to one's inner world, on a moment to moment basis, is often used as a mindfulness practice.) Observation is a central factor in noticing, but it is not a passive or distant type of observation; it requires cultivating a deep desire and motivation to engage intimately with oneself, others and the environment. Children often express this "motivation" through their natural curiosity and their ability to stay intently engaged in something as seemingly simple as watching a bug move through its environment.

One of the ways to enhance this capacity practice is through drawing, which requires you to look intimately and objectively at what you are depicting. Too often drawing is relegated to "the arts curriculum", but when it is seen as a way to increase our practice of observing it is clear that it can be used in many different areas, most especially in the natural sciences.

4 Subtle sensing

This practice acknowledges that there are senses or faculties that are beyond what we typically consider "the five senses." Increasing evidence in neuroscience and educational fields points to the value of engaging energetic ways of knowing. The ability to sense subtle signals, whether through the imagination or vibration, is often not reinforced in traditional educational settings, but they can be important in allowing the non-rational aspects of ourselves to have a voice. One way of engaging with these aspects is through the imagination. Thomas Aquinas supposedly said: "Imagination is the only human faculty that unifies body, mind, and spirit with the past, present, and future." Imagination allows us to explore "what if" and "how would you ..." questions.

Exploring guided visualizations, using projective exercises (which ask people to project their feelings and thoughts onto other things and then explain their responses) or playing with metaphors are useful ways to unleash different channels of knowing. Imagination is also a cornerstone of reframing practices, which help us to consider other possibilities for ways of understanding diverse perspectives or behaving in new ways.

5 Reflecting

Reflecting involves considering events, feelings, and thoughts in a way that makes explicit what has been tacit. Generally it requires looking at what is past; when cultivated, it encourages knowing what you could/might have done differently. Although there is often a quiet and contemplative opening to other ways of noticing what has happened, there is also a more active aspect, particularly with regard to other people and the environment. The action is reflecting in the sense of a feedback loop, offering what has been seen, felt or sensed, and accepting and receiving feedback into the system. Reflecting is the basis for metacognition – thinking about how one thinks.

Some kind of “evening review” is often helpful to enhance reflecting. This might take the form of individual journal writing or it could be a group activity – the kind of activity that happens in families as they prepare and share meals together.

6 Listening

Listening creates a space in which one can hear much more than the words spoken or the sounds present in the environment. One listens to the wisdom of one's body; the integration of mind, emotions and body; one's personal history; the change of seasons and ways of knowing – to name only a few possibilities. Listening involves an action – creating a space in which one can hear oneself, as well as other people; one can hear the spaces between the words as well as the words themselves.

There are numerous ways to enhance listening. The most basic action is to keep connected with the person or object or environment to which you are listening. When you notice your attention drifting back towards yourself, you re-connect to the source of your listening ... whether it is music or a person or the sound of the wind.

7 Inquiring

Inquiring is sometimes mistaken as a synonym for asking questions, but it is far more expansive than simply using techniques such as open-ended questions, paraphrasing ideas or “being respectful.” Inquiry is tracking an experience with true curiosity – whether it involves your self, other people, or the environment. Children do this naturally and are the best sources for demonstrating the meaning of “true curiosity.”

The ability to ask “surprising questions” is one that engages your imagination as well as your practice of inquiry. What I mean by “surprising questions” is inquiring about areas that are unexpected but authentic. Often it is simply being present (“what is happening with you right now?”) or imaginative (“what color would you imagine love to be?”) or intriguing (“Can you draw a picture of how your brain functions?”) For both children and adults, these kinds of questions move you into “out of the box” explorations, enhancing learning and relationships as a result – and most often result in delightful responses.

8 Empathizing

Focusing on empathy is a current trend in media, education, health, business and a number of other fields. Research on mirror neurons – suggesting

that humans have specific areas of brain functioning that allow us to feel the emotions that we are observing – has intersected with the increasing interest in Emotional Intelligence (EI) which names empathy as one of the basic traits of emotional expression and regulation. While there are many definitions of empathy, most refer to two dimensions: cognitive (the ability to understand another’s point of view) and affective (responding viscerally to the emotions of others.) These can, but do not necessarily, occur together. A few researchers and writers point to a third aspect of empathy – sometimes called “compassionate action” in which one acts spontaneously to help.

Empathy is central to relating and engaging with other people – a sharing that creates stronger social bonds. Equally, it involves offering that experience to oneself, and receiving it from others (allowing yourself to be changed through receiving new understanding from others.) Empathy helps us to see one another – to stop and listen. For full expression, it requires a complete cycle of understanding (to see from another’s perspective), to be touched in our hearts (to experience the feeling *with* the other), and choosing to make this shared experience operational through action. Whether that action is only to speak, there is an action that needs to happen to complete the cycle of genuine connection ... of deliberate and active resonance.

Experiments in which cyber-bullying has been reduced through sharing facial photos of “victims”, or Mary Gordon’s Roots of Empathy process which brings infants into an elementary classroom to provoke empathic responses, encourage expressions of affective empathy. Likewise, there are a number of simple exercises for parents and teachers to use with children to open awareness of the perspective of others, which relate more to cognitive empathy.

9 Discerning patterns/systems

Cultivating this core practice begins in a simple way – the awareness of oneself as part of the group and the environment. This implies that you understand (and act from the understanding) that you are influenced by everyone/everything around you, and, in turn, are influencing those people and environments. Seeing the patterns and the relationship between patterns occurs whether it is a matter of developing storms, organizational dynamics, or one’s own behavior. Intrinsically, discerning patterns as a core practice recognizes the impact of me on the world, and the world on me, and my ability to make choices on that basis.

One of the ways to practice is through deliberately shifting between macro and micro perspectives. Photography can be an aid in noticing what you notice when you look broadly (seeing the city from the top of a hill) or when you look narrowly (the leaf of a plant.)

IN SUMMARY

By focusing on core practices, Learning for Well-being asserts these are foundational for all our life activities (including learning) and that they are individually and uniquely expressed. A central premise is that achieving specific skills and competences for life-long and life-wide learning depends on attending to the holistic development of the individual. In the most

essential way, activation of the capacities rests on four simple yet significant actions: finding a point of stillness within one's self, shifting one's perspective, connecting to the issue, person or situation, and choosing the appropriate action. These are the basic movements that undergird all the core practices for developing physical, emotional, mental and spiritual capacities.

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BIOGRAPHY

Linda O'Toole is a consultant to the Universal Education Foundation (UEF), which is the initiator of the Learning for Well-being community (www.learningforwellbeing.org). O'Toole brings more than 30 years of experience of writing, training and personal coaching in education, healthcare and global corporations, with a focus on helping people integrate the cognitive, relational and sensory functions within a living systems perspective. She began working with UEF in early 2006 and has participated in creating the Voice of Children surveys and developing the Learning for Well-being Framework and various communication materials. Her particular focus is on delivering youth and adult workshops for cultivating capacities that contribute to physical, emotional, mental and spiritual development. She has found a home within UEF for her approach to inner diversity, while continuing to explore new ideas and practices for shifting awareness.

END NOTES

- 1 Since the purpose of the core practices is to promote the explicit development of these inherent human capacities, we sometimes refer to the core practices as “core capacities/practices.”
- 2 The term spiritual refers to the impulse to search for meaning and transcendence. It does not relate directly to religion or religious traditions although those may be expressions of the spiritual impulse.
- 3 *Well-being as Wholeness*, Chapter 2 of the 2014 Quality of Childhood Book, introduces Learning for Well-being as a vision, framework, and community. See also www.learningforwellbeing.org
- 4 This included training approximately 10,000 people at various sites in a multinational semiconductor company over an 8 year period.
- 5 See list of references for those in this community who were particularly influential on my thinking and practice.
- 6 Numbering the capacities is for convenience. It does not indicate any ordinal association or hierarchy.

