

The Flourish Model: exploring the relational foundations of human capacities and potential and how these promote and optimise human flourishing

Wendy Ellyatt, Flourish Project 2021

Abstract

In response to the acknowledgement of spiritual development as a core element of children's lives within the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1991)ⁱ, this paper introduces a new ecological framework for understanding and exploring spiritual development in child and youth care research and practice that respects the cultural and social diversity of both religious and nonreligious settings and the lifespan developmental processes of children.

As such, it further expands the theoretical model of "relational consciousness," as proposed by Hay and Nye (1998)ⁱⁱ and embeds this within the evolving science of early human development and the interdisciplinary field of systems science. It proposes the need for an eco-systemic approach, that sees the world as dynamically interrelated and that seeks to understand the interaction between any individual system and its embedding environment. Through revealing the interconnected nature of human development, evolution, behaviour and sustainability, it provides an interdisciplinary road map explaining the relational foundations of human capacities and potential and how these promote and optimise sustainable wellbeing.

Keywords: children's spirituality; spiritual development; relational consciousness; wholeness; wellbeing; flourishing

This paper explores the notion of dynamic relationship as the defining quality of human existence. It suggests that nature is interwoven and interdependent, with the physical realm as the manifestation of a deeper, unified, informational reality^{iii iv v vi vii viii}. As such, it aligns with both contemporary scientific understanding of the way the universe works^{ix x} and the teachings of many ancient and indigenous cultures^{xi xii xiii xiv xv xvi}. It presents generative creativity and the process of 'presencing'^{xvii xviii} and 'reaching out into novelty' as core life processes that facilitate and optimise human wellbeing, within the context of a unified system.

In the respect, spirituality is understood as an innate human evolutionary process, that pre-exists cultural or religious differences, that stems from a unified reality and that is grounded in connection and love.^{xix xx} As such, it exists throughout the lifespan, both coming from and returning to, an essential unity, and is an essential element for human flourishing.

"Human flourishing refers to a wholeness - of being and doing, of realising one's potential in helping others to do the same, of acting with honour and treating others with dignity, of living with integrity even during challenging circumstances. It is not the same as happiness, and it is not just a state of mind. The well lived life is a life of human flourishing."

Francis Su, Mathematics for Human Flourishing

Relational Consciousness

Hay and Nye's 1998 relational model of children's spirituality suggested that children have a spiritual inclination that is expressed through 'relational consciousness': an intentional and natural process of relating to the world, to all things animate and inanimate, including a Divine Other and to the Self (pp 119-124).^{xxi}

This paper aims to further strengthen and extend this model through the introduction of evolutionary science and by suggesting that the human spirit is part of a generative creative field, with every element materializing the form that best suits its nature, together with the circumstances that enable it to grow and perfect itself. In this respect, wholeness is a dynamic and unified system of active, energetic forces that combine together to shape the future.

"Connectedness, relationship, and interdependence are fundamental concepts of ecology; and connectedness, relationship, and belonging are also the essence of spiritual experience. I believe therefore that ecology — and in particular the philosophical school of deep ecology, is an ideal bridge between science and spirituality."

Fritjof Capra - 40th Anniversary Mystics and Scientists Conference
Horsley Park, Surrey, 7-9 April, 2017

What we suggest is a relational, participatory, and evolutionary vision of reality and human existence in which individuality, relationality, and generative creativity are all understood as interdependent dimensions of this unfolding evolutionary process. When unfolding naturally they manifest as generative creativity and the pattern languages of beauty, flow and love.^{xxii}

- Honouring the natural spiritual urge to perfect ourselves i.e., to optimise our unique capacities and potential.
- Honouring human playfulness as a vital expression of generative creativity and the evolutionary need to constantly grow and learn by 'reaching out into novelty'.
- Honouring the natural human predisposition to connect with the world relationally i.e., as intimately connected to the wider field of others and the natural world.
- Awareness of the relational nature of our bodily sensations, thoughts and emotions, the impact of language and shaping of cognition and the cultural agreements we both sign-up to and create.
- Becoming increasingly mindful about the fact that we are constantly radiating our own information into the wider system and what we would want our long-term contribution to be.
- Understanding that love is our natural condition and the grounding of our existence as human beings within the larger unified field. It is the relational matrix that is always calling us towards wholeness and growth.
- Understanding that we are social beings and that to develop and grow we need the love and support of others.
- Developing compassion towards the natural world in acknowledgment that human values, beliefs and behaviours are constantly impacting the wellbeing of the ecosystem.

- Our individual and joint responsibility to identify and transform potentially damaging values, beliefs and behaviours.

Relationship of the Inner with the Outer

Understanding the world from 'Inside-out'

- How our own backgrounds, experiences, values, thoughts and emotions influence our mindsets, behaviour and activities and how these then ripple out into the wider system.
- The fact that we are carrying forward the patterns of the past and that these may not be serving the best interests of the future.
- The primary importance of early human development in both determining whether potentially limiting patterns and tendencies are reinforced or dissipated, and in preventing the life-long impact of adverse childhood experiences (ACES).
- Developing self-compassion as a primary tool for moving beyond old patterns to ones that better serve our own wellbeing and hence that of others and the wider system.
- Promoting psychological flexibility and resilience i.e., being able to authentically own and experience all sensations, thoughts and feelings, both positive and negative, as important information that is helping us to develop and grow.

And 'outside-in'

- How the external pressures and expectations of the systems that we live within (i.e., families, communities, political and religious systems and cultures) influence our thoughts, emotions, worldviews, values and behaviours.
- How the people that are running these systems are, themselves, the results of their own family and cultural backgrounds and that we need to understand the word from their perspective in order to effectively influence them.
- Developing compassion towards others as a tool to understand the underlying patterns that lift us away from conflict and judgement to an awareness of our mutual interconnectedness.
- Our joint responsibility to identify and transform inhibiting structures and organisations, so that we can create a more peaceful and sustainable world.

Relational Presence

- Understanding the power of being 'fully here' and how being mindful of the relational quality of our everyday moments helps to cultivate a sense of gratitude and compassion towards the natural world and our role within it.
- Honouring the future that is constantly trying to emerge, rather than being constricted by the patterns of the past
- Recognising that between each stimulus and the predictable response there is a space - and that increasing our awareness of this space provides the possibility to choose different.

- Recognising that wisdom is the ability to feel from that space of presence and awareness (which lies beyond thinking) and to fully experience, non-conceptually, how everything is interrelated and what might best serve the whole.
- Trusting the process.
- Expanding the horizons of caring to include all human beings and the global ecosystem

Relational Attunement

- Becoming increasingly aware and present to the fact that other people's actions and behaviours (why they are the way they are) have also been shaped by their family and cultural backgrounds.
- Becoming increasingly present to our own cognitive biases and learnt responses, so that we can allow new and more positive behaviours to emerge.
- Acknowledging that caring for others (people, animals and other living things) is the single most important thing that gives meaning and value to our lives.
- Cultivating compassion towards Self, Others and the Natural World.
- Valuing the simple: realising that things that seem mundane and irritating about everyday life are actually those that give it meaning and context.
- Living lightly: not taking yourself too seriously – realising that nobody cares as much as we think and that everybody else is busy inhabiting their own lives.

Relational Development

Optimising our physical, emotional, mental and spiritual growth through integrating seven core human evolutionary needs and motivations.



Image 1. Flourish Project, 2020

Flourish Project 2021

Flourishing consists of...

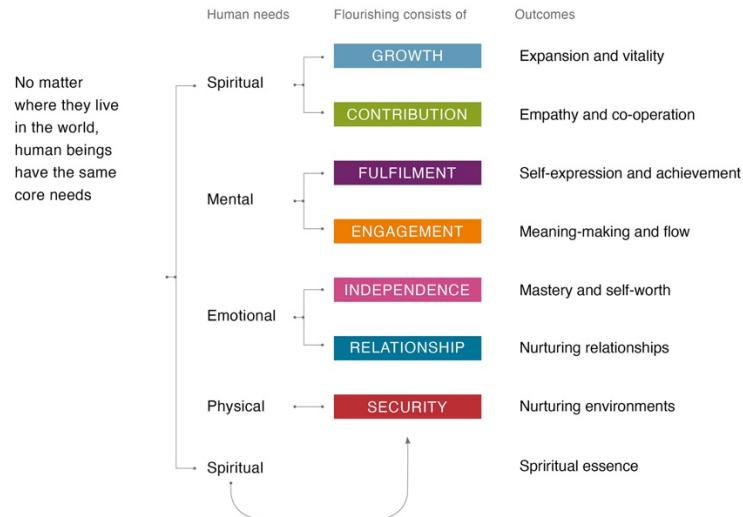


Image 2. Flourish Project, 2020

We all need ...

Growth	to expand who we are and what we know
Contribution	to contribute to something greater than ourselves
Fulfilment	to test our skills and know that we can overcome challenges
Engagement	to explore and take risks in order to learn
Independence	to feel a sense of self-worth
Relationship	to love and be loved
Security	to have a safe and secure place to live



In order to ...

Growth	positively impact a dynamically interconnected world
Contribution	be able to follow and fulfil our unique purpose
Fulfilment	be able to fully optimise and express our skills and capacities
Engagement	be fully playfully and creatively involved
Independence	develop a sense of personal mastery and agency
Relationship	develop a sense of personal mastery and agency
Security	be able to develop healthy bodies and minds

Image 3. Flourish Project, 2020

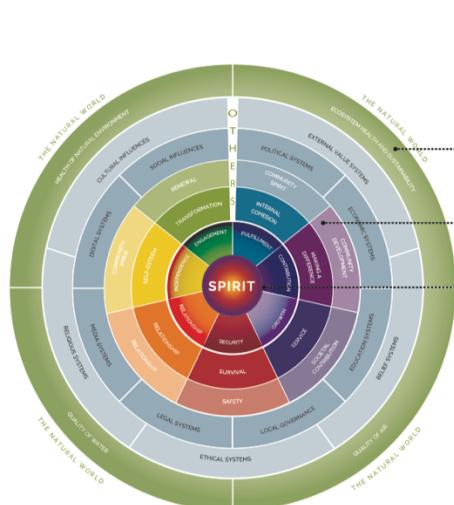
Relational Responsibility

“In human societies there will always be differences of views and interests. But the reality of today is that we are all interdependent and have to co-exist on this small planet. Therefore, the only sensible and intelligent way of resolving differences and clashes of interests, whether between individuals or nations, is through dialogue.”

- The Dalai Lama

- Stepping back from potentially damaging personal and group values, beliefs and behaviours, so that we can become the best version of our selves.
- Sharing the individual and group responsibility for creating the processes through which the values that we need to see in the world are identified, nurtured and sustained.
- Identifying and transforming inhibiting structures and organisations, so that we can create a more meaningful, peaceful and sustainable world.
- Redefining success, so that it reflects personal, community and organisational integration and wholeness.
- Taking responsibility for our everyday actions that compromise the wellbeing of others and the sustainability of the planet.
- Connecting with millions of other people around the world who are using technology, collaboration and the power of community to bring in a new and more meaningful future.
- Love in action: becoming a living example of compassion for Self, Others and the Natural World.

One Unified Relational Field



One unified relational field

- **The wider cosmos/deep time**
The patterns and influence of the wider universe
- **The natural world**
Relating to other living systems on the planet
- **Others**
Connecting to family, community, society
- **Self**
Optimising potential

Wellbeing as Relationship

From the relationship with our own personalities, to how we are influenced by the wellbeing of other human beings and all species on the planet and beyond, our lives are intimately ones of connection and interrelationship.

Image 3. Flourish Project, 2020

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