

The physical, emotional/social, mental and spiritual aspects each play a role in well-being because they are part of our lives as human beings. However, well-being represents a *pervasive* feeling about oneself, one's life, and one's environment that is greater than the overall sum of different aspects, and more individual than any aggregated data.

We must remember that the learning environment that is most consistently present to the child or young person is his or her own **internal** "operating system". It is through the child's internal processes that thoughts, feelings, actions and beliefs are filtered. Without taking these internal learning environments into account – without acknowledging the subjective individual experiences and the patterns of processing these experiences, we are diluting the ways in which we measure the impact of external environments on well-being (including, how the questions we ask are understood and how the results are reported), as well as the ways in which we can offer opportunities to enhance well-being.

UEF is advocating an approach in which the physical, emotional, social, mental and spiritual aspects, both internal and external, are viewed from the inner perspective of the child, and children are active participants in sharing their perspectives for the benefit of their own well-being. This is a vital and unique contribution to children and young people, the world over, and to those who are responsible to and for them.

**Education by All for the Well-Being of Children**  
[www.uef-eba.org](http://www.uef-eba.org)



### **Reflections on well-being and education**

Understanding and addressing the needs of children, within any society, begins with the fundamental premise that children, like all living things in the universe, are self-organizing systems and as such, they are constantly learning. UEF believes that our individual and societal role is to support this process of learning through offering conditions under which children can thrive. At the heart of this belief is an approach to education that places the well-being of children and young people as its primary objective.

Considering the educational process in relation to the above description suggests that we need to maintain awareness of every stage of learning—not just, for example, improving the quality of information provided or being more rigorous about assessment methods, but attending to the child's whole experience of learning. It also suggests that we need to recognize that nurturing the process of learning is necessarily proactive and that learning extends beyond traditional education settings. It includes bringing education systems into closer partnership with healthcare systems, media, and information and communication technologies as well as other informal and formal community venues. **So the well-being and education of young people is the responsibility of all.**

To take action we need to know more about children's experience in the world today. It is essential that their voices are heard and taken into account as we determine policy that will impact their

future. We also need to deepen our understanding of what well-being, health and sustainability entail so that we can serve the children with greater knowledge and wisdom.

Recent years have seen growing attention to the field of monitoring the well-being of nations, communities, schools and individuals, including children. As examples UNICEF, the WHO, and UNESCO are increasingly framing their goals in terms of the overall well-being of children and various “state of the child” reports have been published leading to higher levels of interest in statistical descriptions of the well-being of children. As a result of this activity, the field is undergoing major changes, including attempts to redefine the concept of children’s well-being and ways of measuring individual and collective well-being.

As a global advocacy foundation working in partnership with other organizations, UEF has chosen to be versed in current ways of defining and measuring well-being, while participating in the movement toward innovative perspectives that will lead to increasingly more comprehensive and qualitative information for addressing the whole child within the appropriate context. **To date, mainstream research on the well-being of children has focused primarily on external/objective factors. Our focus is on the inner/subjective experience which necessarily takes into account their objective conditions as well.**

This focus aligns with our emphasis on the role of children in assessing and monitoring their own well-being. We like to see children as the actors, camera operators and editors of their evolving reality.

UEF is committed to the ongoing development of indicators of well-being that are universal, yet culturally relevant. We believe that a transdisciplinary approach is required to develop appropriate indicators and to maintain a leading edge position within the field.

UEF’s current working definition of well-being can be succinctly stated as: ***Well-being is the realization of one’s physical, emotional, mental, social, and spiritual potential.***

Several ideas are enfolded in our definition of well-being:

- Every individual expresses all five aspects – physical, emotional, mental, social, and spiritual – within a dynamic whole system.
- The dynamic balance of individuals is influenced by relationships with the many environments they inhabit, as well as the actualization, growth and development within the individuals themselves.
- Diversity – which results in the generation of new ideas, new forms, new possibilities and potential as well as optimized choices – is an outgrowth of the interactions of uniquely functioning and interdependent individuals, within the larger contexts of which they are part.

By the term, “mental” we are referring to that part of life which is primarily related to cognition and the processes of the rational mind.

By using the term “emotional/social”, we are linking the emotional and social aspects. In combination, they are referring to those arenas which are primarily related to the inner feeling aspects of life, including the relationship to one’s self and to others.

By the term “physical”, we are referring to those parts of life which are related to the physical senses and to sensory experience, to our bodies, and to the material and natural environments.

By the term “spiritual” we are referring to the indivisible life energy that is reflected in the diversity, uniqueness, and interconnectedness of all that exists.