

Universal Education Foundation (UEF) and University of Wales Institute, Cardiff (UWIC)

The Voice of Children Project *Focus Groups*

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What is the Universal Education Foundation?

- ▶ Established in 2004
- ▶ Vision is:
- ▶ Recognition that learning occurs in a wider context than that of educational institutions:
 - Education
 - Health
 - Media
 - Information and Communication technologies
 - Family and community

Education by all
for the
well-being of
children



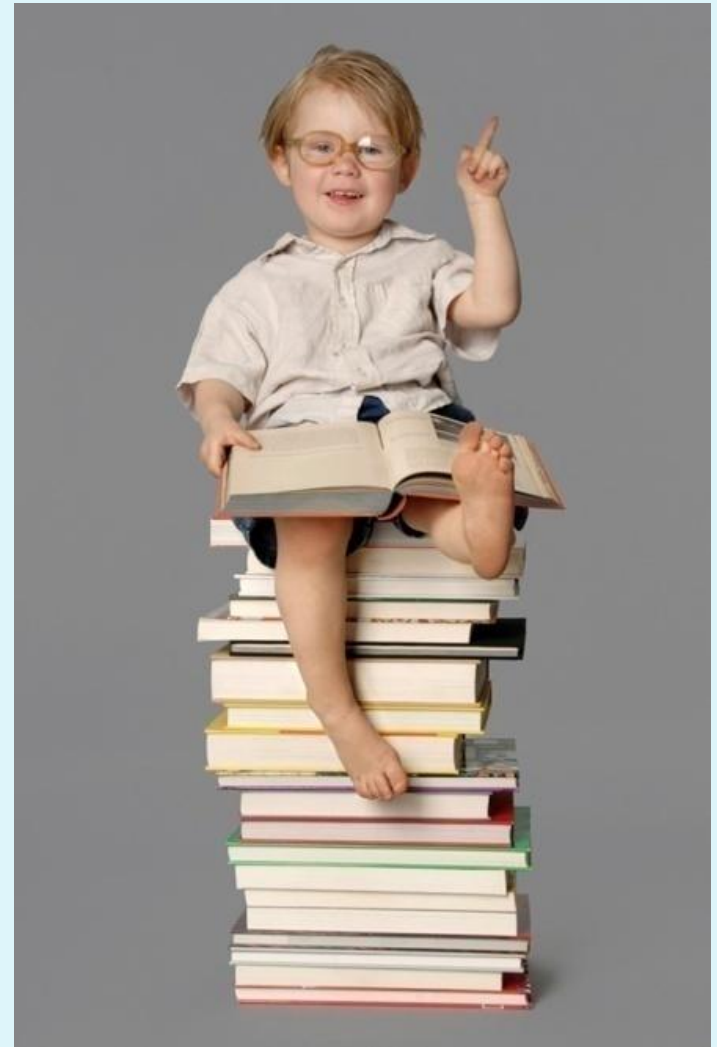
What is well-being?



“Well-being is realising one’s unique potential through physical, emotional, social, mental and spiritual development...in relation to oneself, others and the environment”

Education by all for the well-being of children

- ▶ Where does learning occur?
- ▶ Who is responsible?
- ▶ How can it be supported?



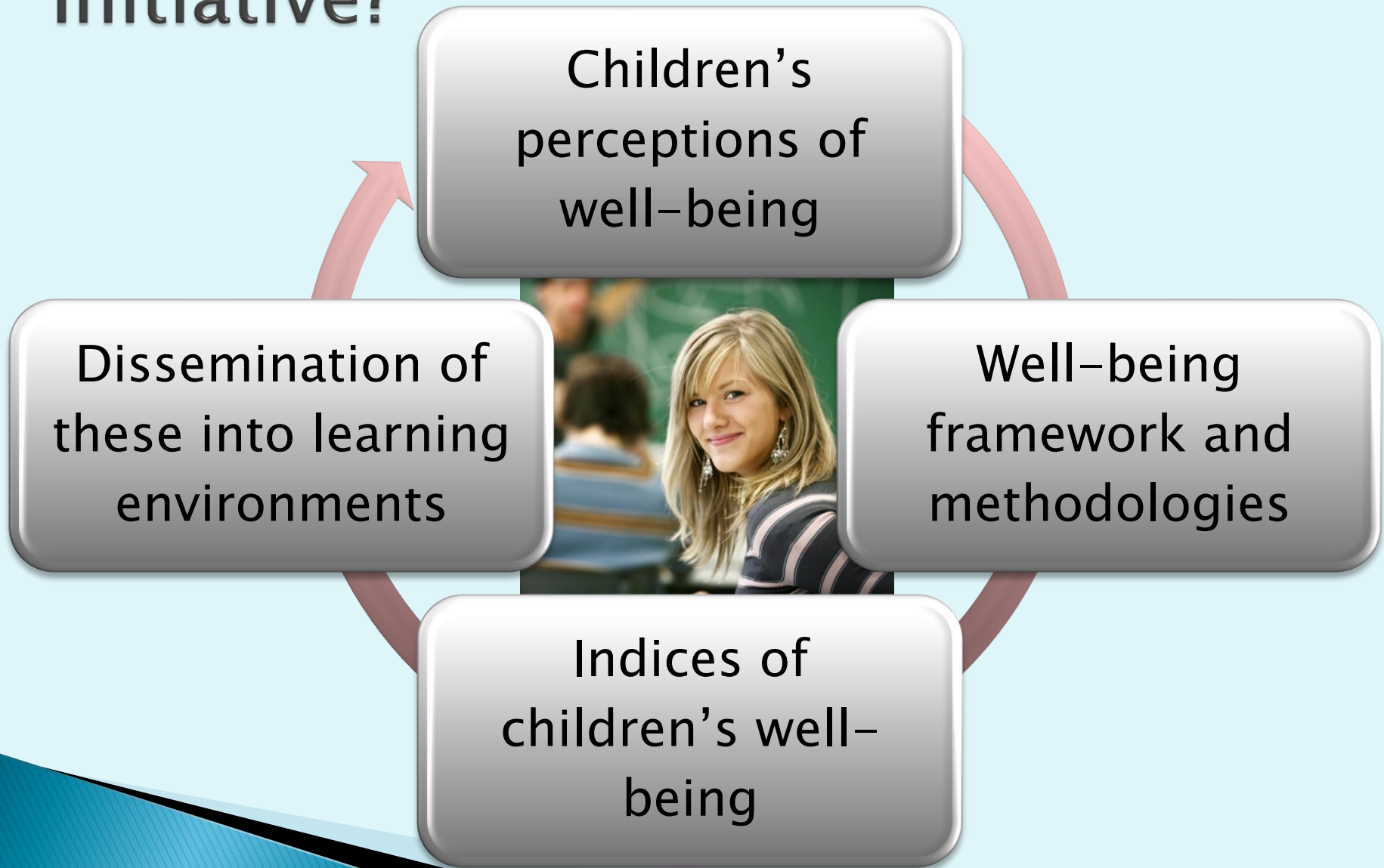
Aims of UEF

- ▶ To transcend research and policy boundaries to take account of the bigger holistic picture surrounding children's learning
- ▶ To influence and change learning for children globally
- ▶ To engage the children themselves in these changes



The Voice of Children Initiative

What is the Voice of Children Initiative?



Pilot for VOC1 – in Middle East

Approach:

- ▶ Links made with various government and public and private sector businesses
- ▶ School environment toolkit developed
- ▶ Piloted with >1600 Year 10 students in each country
- ▶ Additional qualitative data from Palestine

Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon –
VOC Stage 1



Areas to be addressed:



- ▶ Physical and verbal abuse by teachers and peers
- ▶ Schools' insufficient promotion of healthy lifestyles
- ▶ Problems with class sizes and physical learning environments
- ▶ Discrepancies in levels of participation in class
- ▶ Student dissatisfaction with their cognitive development and learning/teaching methods
- ▶ Increasing influence of ICT on student thinking.

Awartani, et al., (2007). The Voice of Children: Student Well-Being and the School Environment [Executive Summary]. UEF

Key initiatives achieved

- ✓ UEF has helped young people to engage with senior education and health leaders in Palestine.
- ✓ Young people met with UEF, Palestinian government officials and representatives from media and ICT
- ✓ UEF involved in “The Welfare and Well-being of the Palestinian Children” conference.
- ✓ UEF signed cooperative agreements with Palestinian Ministry of Health, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency and Palestinian Ministry of Education/Higher Education

Awartani, et al., (2007)



Pilot for VOC2 – in Europe

Context:

- ▶ Wales signed UN Declaration of Children's Rights (2004)
- ▶ Children in Wales
- ▶ Funky Dragon
- ▶ Support from Jane Hutt, Minister for Children, Welsh Assembly (2007)
- ▶ **University of Wales Institute, Cardiff**

Wales – VOC Stage 2



Child Well-being in Wales



UNICEF report:

“An overview of child well-being in rich countries”

UK children scored lowest,
out of 21 nations,
in terms of their well-being

Findings for children in Wales:

- Childhood health is improving
- School attainment is increasing
- Half of children say their classmates are kind to them
- The number of homeless families with children is decreasing
- 29% of children live in poor households
- Proportion of young people not in employment, education or training is increasing
- Levels of sexually transmitted diseases and teenage pregnancies are high
- Only 35% of 11 – 16 year olds are physically active
- One in five children under 15 years is obese



Who defines Well-being?

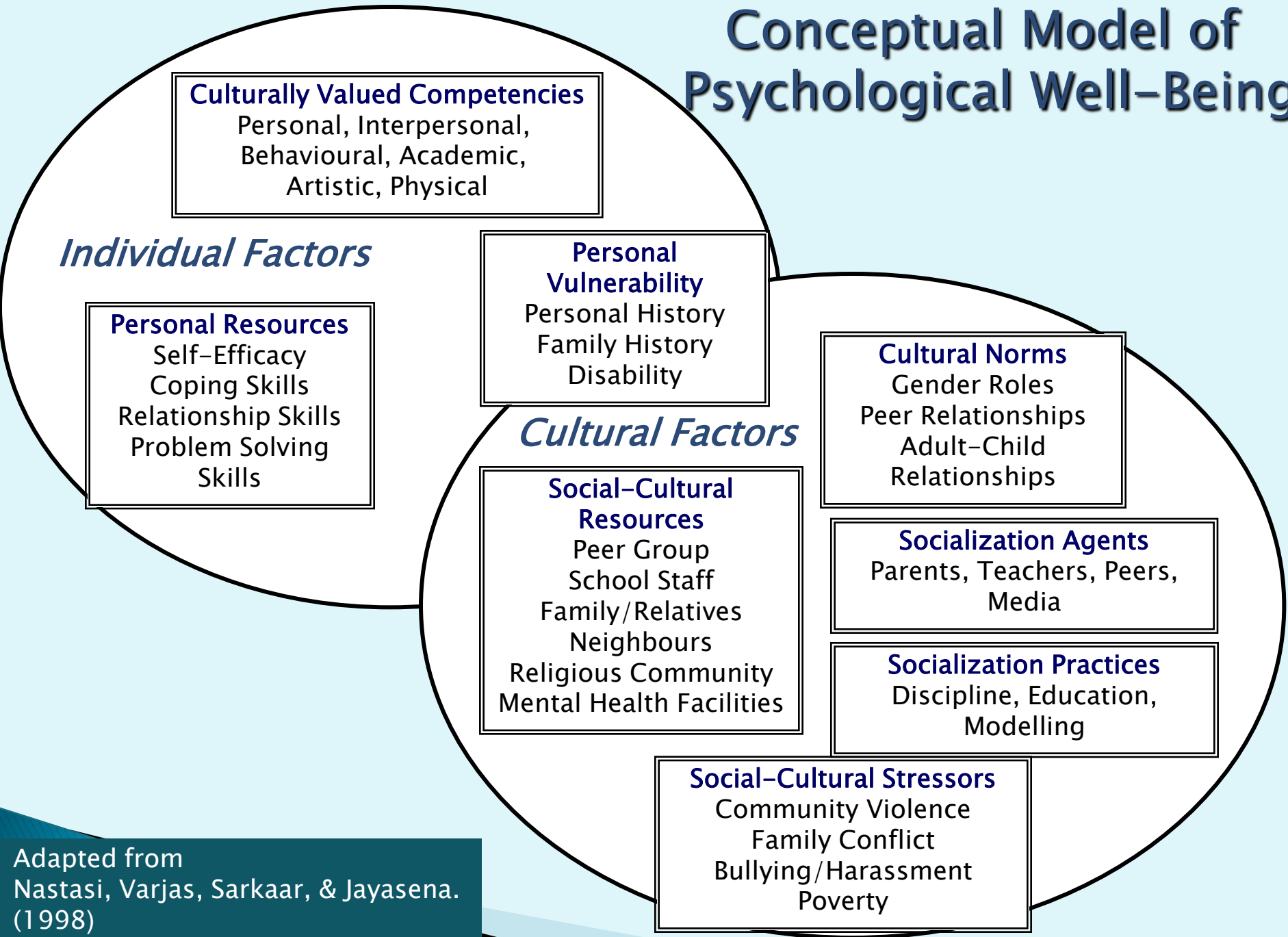


Children and Young People's Well-being Monitor
for Wales (2008) Welsh Assembly Government

“There is very little information available on children and young people's own priorities and experiences, and how these vary by geography, age, gender, socio-economic circumstances and other factors”

“The scientifically based information we have on what improves and detracts from children and young people's well-being is critically important, but we need to set this alongside children and young people's own perceptions and experiences.”

Conceptual Model of Psychological Well-Being



Adapted from
Nastasi, Varjas, Sarkaar, & Jayasena.
(1998)

Focus Groups



▶ Rationale for carrying out focus groups:

1. Research based on children's well-being has used different indicators of well-being
2. Essential to find out from the children themselves what well-being means to them
3. Factors thought to impact on well-being should also be elicited from the children
4. Focus group data represent a useful starting point for mixed method research
5. Focus groups provide valuable insights into the thoughts, feelings, cultural norms and language of expression that make sense to the target population
6. Focus groups make it possible to include participants who are not able to read or write well

Benefits of Focus Groups:

- ▶ Flexibility
- ▶ Fast results
- ▶ Participant comfort
- ▶ Real-life examples
- ▶ Useful initial step



Focus groups can help refine the research questions and decide what questions to include in a questionnaire.

Structure of Focus Groups:



1. Brainstorm definitions of ‘well-being’
2. Participants independently write down up to 5 factors that they believe influence their well-being
3. Open discussion of well-being and factors that impact on it
facilitators will only intervene to ensure participants stay on track and that everyone has a chance to contribute to the discussion
4. Card sort of factors thought to influence well-being rated in terms of importance.

Benefits of this process...



- ▶ Elicits participants' definitions of well-being
- ▶ Ensures all participants have a say as individuals and as part of the group
- ▶ Provides opportunity for weighting of factors as well as identification of factors
- ▶ Makes it possible to use the factors that emerge from the focus groups to adapt the UEF questionnaire to the Welsh context



Progress to date:

- ▶ Ethics approval obtained
- ▶ Access to 5 diverse schools agreed with head teachers
- ▶ Appointments for introductory school visits arranged
- ▶ Pilot focus group carried out
- ▶ Plan for focus groups designed and revised and ready to go.....

