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What Makes Me? Core Capacities for Living and Learning

August 30, 2022



SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL LEARNING
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Weaving a New Tapestry:

Schools, Families, and Communities Together

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Helping build the spiritual foundation for a loving world

At the Fetzer Institute, we believe in the possibility of a loving world: a world where we understand we are all part of one human family and know our lives have purpose. In the world we seek, everyone is committed to courageous compassion and bold love—powerful forces for good in the face of fear, anger, division, and despair.

Learning for Well-being Foundation

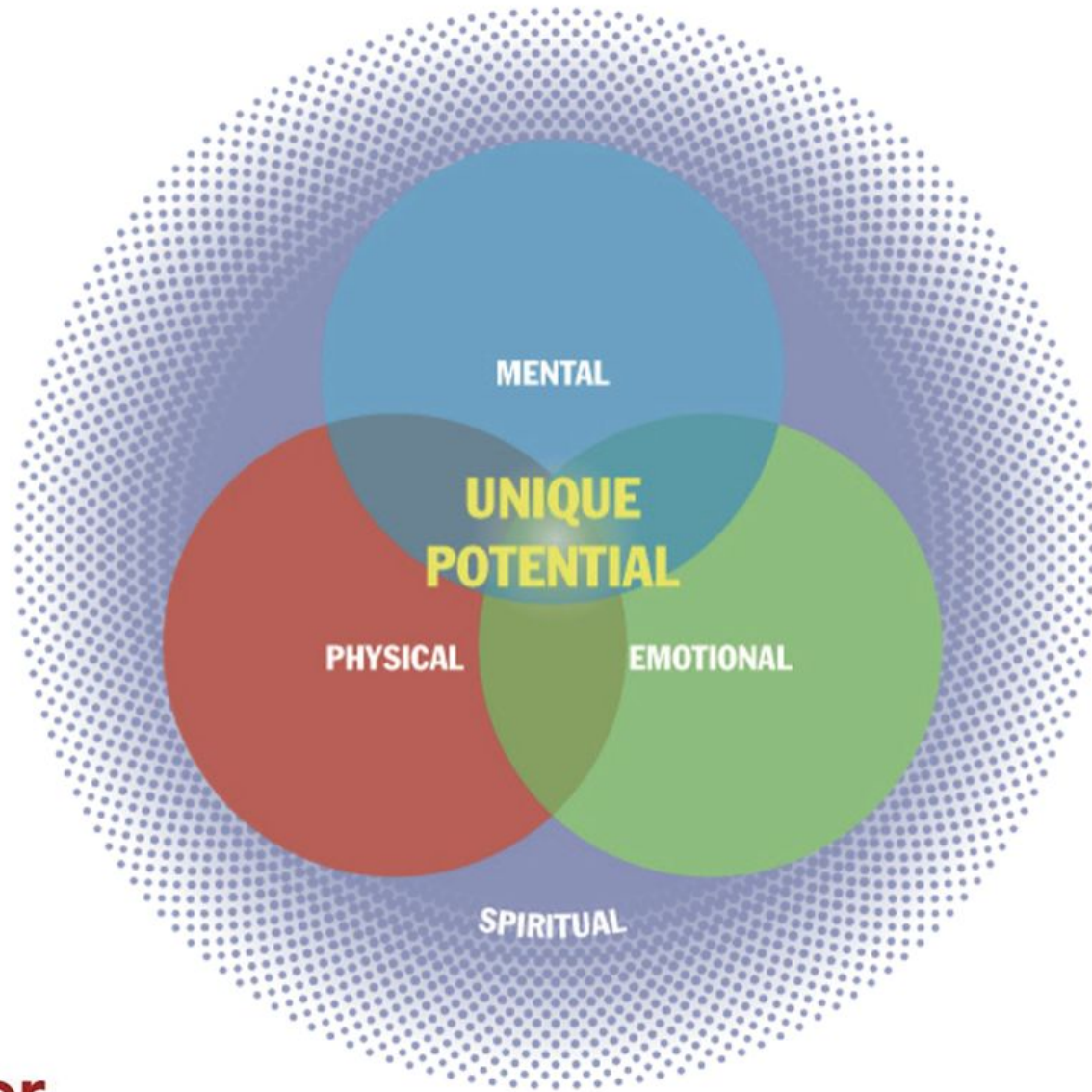


Our Purpose

We cultivate the capacities of children and the adults who interact with them, so that together they are able to contribute to a fairer and sustainable world, while realizing their unique potential.

Quality of relationships between children and adults – across sectors -is foundational for well-being.

www.learningforwellbeing.org



Learning for
Well-being

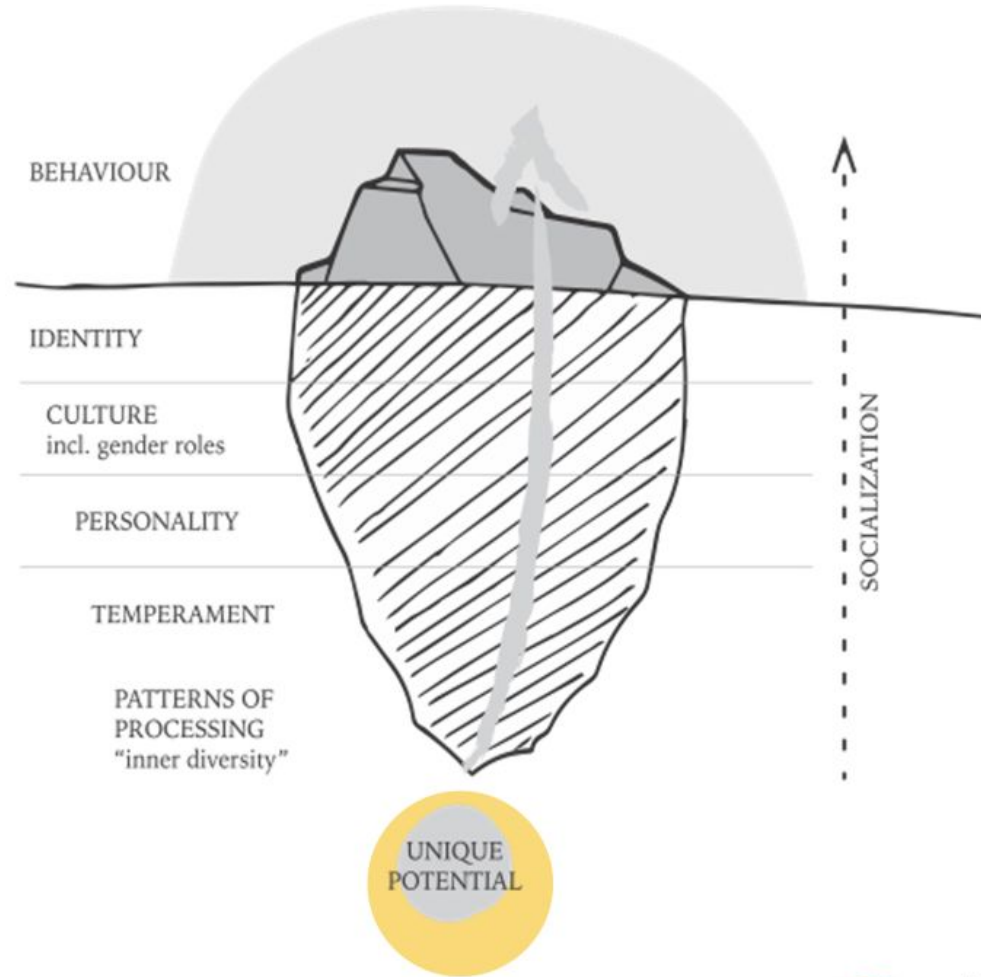


Unique Potential

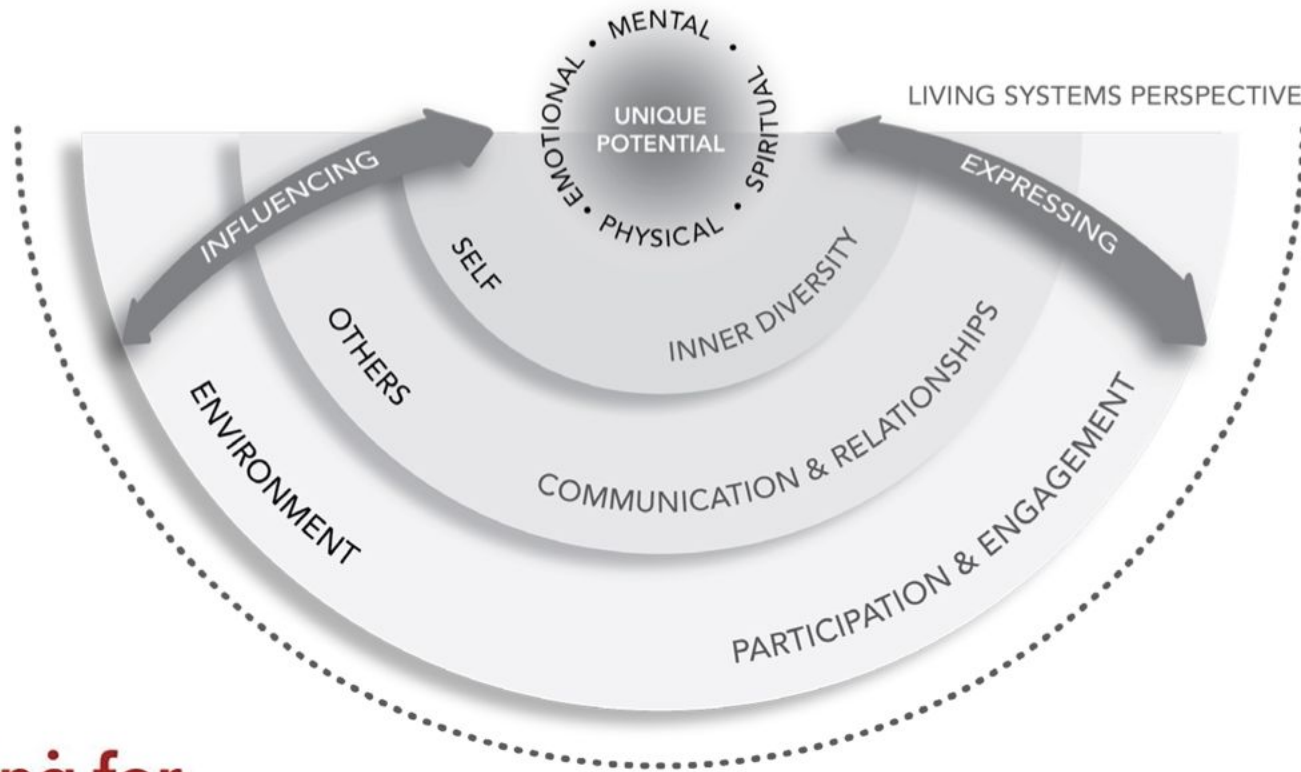
A centralising impulse and vital qualities that play an integrative role of our mental, emotional and physical aspects, and provide meaning and purpose an individual's life.

It is also referred to as *soul*, Essence, True, Higher or Self (with capital 'S'). Every person is born with innate and endless potential to be fully themselves.

A set of non-religious definitions of soul is cited by Plotkin (2008, p.37) in *Nature and the Human Soul*, "we might say that the human soul is the 'morphic field' of a person (to use Rupert Sheldrake's term), or his "implicate order" (David Bohm's), his "pattern integrity" (Buckminster Fuller's) or 'the primary organizing, sustaining and guiding principle of a living being' (Thomas Berry.) "From a living systems perspective "deep pattern" implies dynamic relationships rather than a fixed structure."



Well-being is realizing one's unique potential through physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual development in relation to self, others and the environment



Core Capacities

Core capacities reflect natural and inherent human actions that develop throughout life and are essential to explore and connect to oneself, others and the environment.

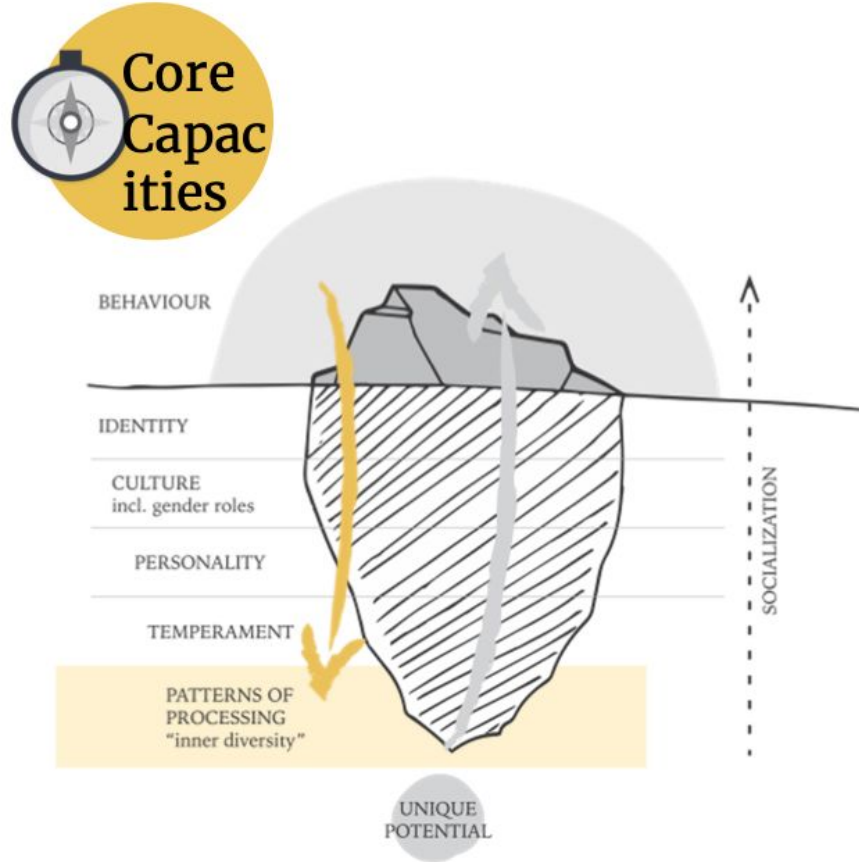
Core capacities can be cultivated and supported. They represent essential and process-oriented instruments to understand oneself and others as competent and unique whole systems.

Core capacities are dynamically interdependent, functioning in relationship with one another — e.g. relaxing enables listening

People express core capacities differently and rely on some capacities more than others. Individual differences can be elicited by considering physical, emotional, and mental aspects in each capacity.

They are cornerstones of more familiar competences and life skills in support of well-being. Some examples are: emotional self-regulation, creativity, critical thinking, relationship and communication skills.

Based on these premises, nine core capacities were identified: *relaxing; observing; listening; inquiring; reflecting; (subtle) sensing; empathizing; embodying; and discerning patterns*



What makes me?

... or What are Core Capacities?

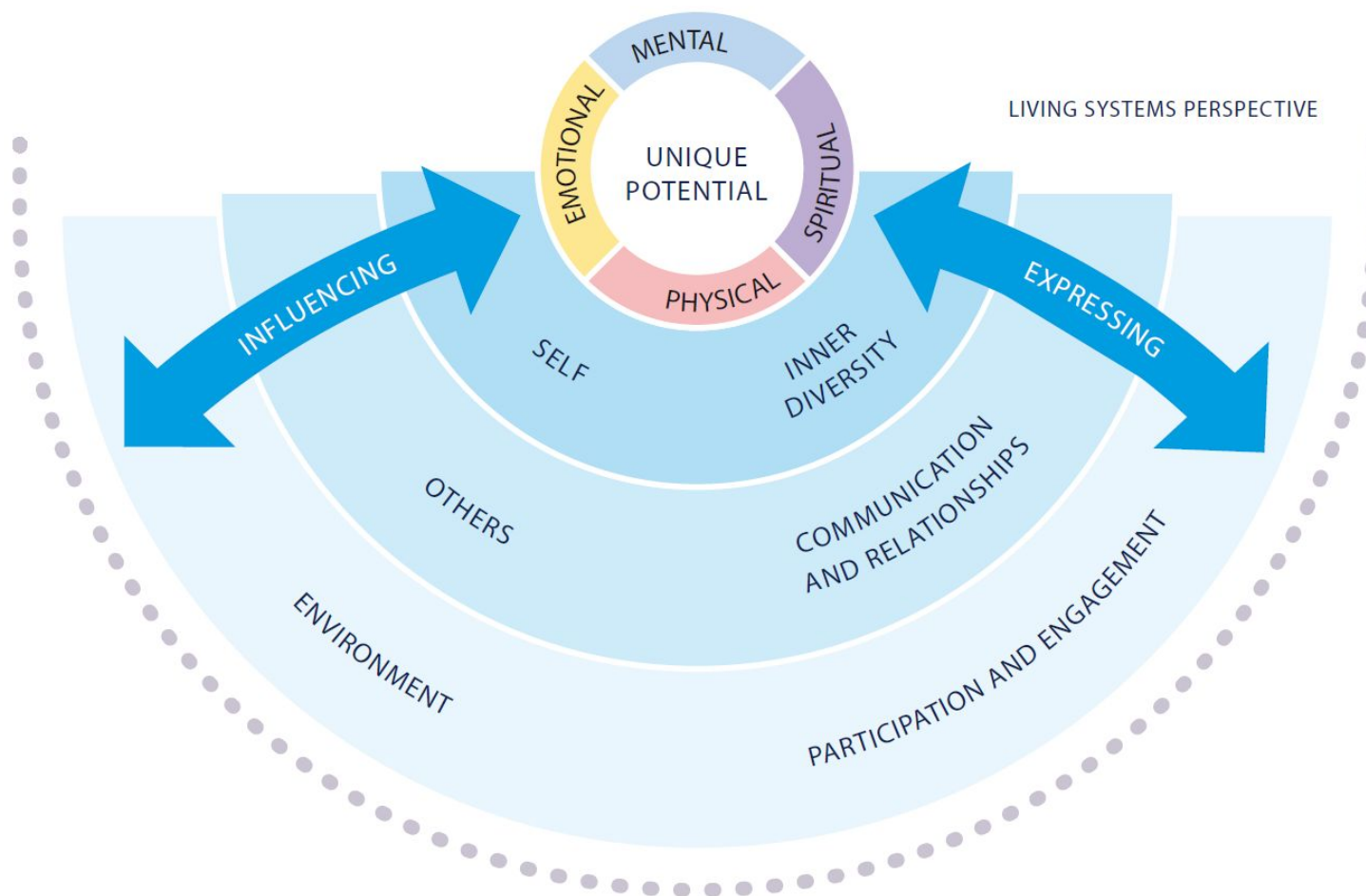
- > Human ability to relate with oneself, others and the environment
- > Building blocks of life skills, for the same goals
 - Often overlooked
- > Do not promote economic, social or civic returns above one another
- > They evolve, and can be taught out of children
- > Drives unique and full potential





Children as complex systems...

... in complex systems



What can core capacities achieve?

... and how?

- **Policies for children:** complementarities and timing of policies for critical and sensitive periods of development
- **School practices for children:** the main vehicle through which a country's commitment to its children, and their future – is delivered
- **Adult interactions and social conditions:** complementary skills in adults working with children, and moderating factors
- **Life outcomes for children:** with new data on 'how' to achieve well-being, and children's rights and agency



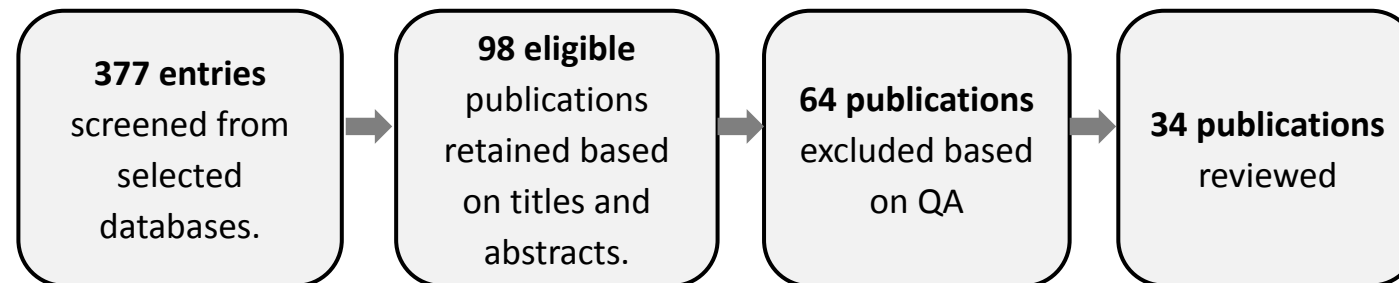
What did we do?

Nine separate working papers

Supported by a review research group

Quality-assured, narrative review of 260 recent studies

Three steps of selection and four of QA



‘What Makes Me?’ report synthesises the evidence



Quality assurance steps

Three-step quality assurance process:

Conceptually coherent: Do the data used to represent the family outcomes and policies of interest?

Methodologically valid: Does the author use an appropriate methodology and method to test associations?

Scientifically valid: Are the results of statistical/empirical tests fully and correctly interpreted?

Each author mapped: Study method, intervention and delivery method, where the intervention was undertaken?, for who (ages)?, what were the results? links with other core capacities



Key findings from *What Makes Me?*

Some capacities are gateway capacities: Listening, Embodying, Observing, Sensing

Core capacities are not inherently positive or negative: Reflecting (Rumination); Embodying; Sensing (Intuition)

Adults and children (need to) use core capacities differently: Listening and Inquiring

Enabling environments matters for children: Over stimulation, space, observation, safety

Personal and social attributes can matter: gender, trauma, age, parental poverty, education

Discerning patterns and child development

“Capacity to perceive what is interconnected, recognizing interdependency and the relationship of the parts to the whole”

Onset: 4-5 years, strategic thinking and self-regulation increase with age

Preschool levels > learning outcomes in primary school (WM, EF)

Physical, mental, social and emotional health; social functioning; improved learning practices (SR)

Reflecting

Empathizing

Sensing



Inquiring and child development

“Capacity to seek what can expand knowledge and actions, tracking, asking, and uncovering an experience with openness and curiosity”

Onset: 0-1 year (preverbal); Function inquiry 2-4 years; meaningful inquiry, from 2 years onwards

Learning outcomes; well-being / stress; social and emotional well-being (IBL)

Spiritual development (discovery of meaning)

Reflecting

Observing

Listening

Discerning Patterns

Sensing

Embodying



Listening and child development

“Capacity to tune in to what surrounds, connecting to words, sounds, spaces in oneself, others and the environment”

Onset: from utero, spatial listening from 1.5 years;
spatial listening improves with age 1-8 years

Reading comprehension, learning outcomes, self-esteem, concentration

Various mental health and youth well-being outcomes (music)

Learning and school relations (AS)

Reflecting

Observing

Discerning Patterns

Sensing

Embodying

Empathizing

Relaxing

Inquiring



Reflecting and child development

“Capacity to explore other views, pondering, looking back, projecting forward and offering feedback”

Onset: 2 years; increases with age

Working memory, cognition and generosity, reduce negative self-reflection and depression

Poorer well-being (MR)

Academic achievement (SRL, metacognition)

Anxiety in children (MM)

Discerning Patterns

Empathizing

Relaxing

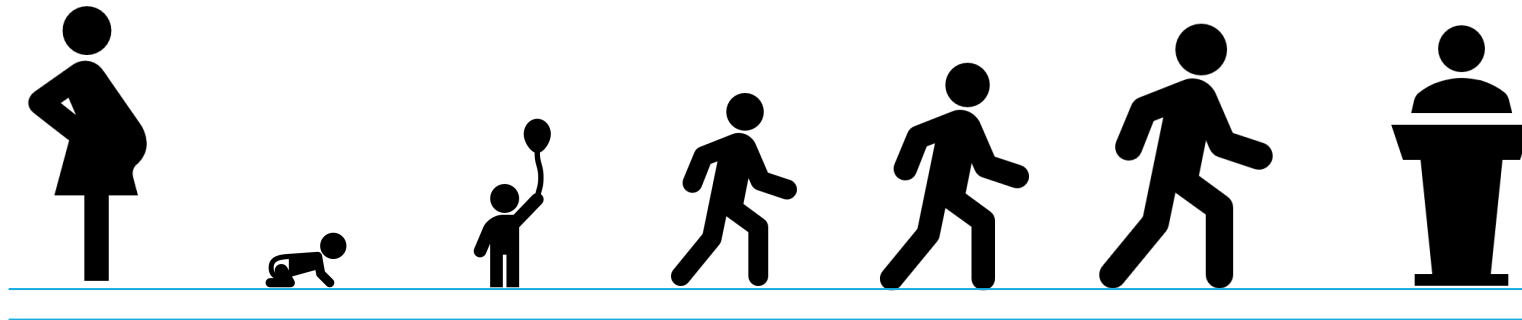


Age-related development of core capacities

Listening, Empathising, Inquiring

Discerning patterns, Embodying, Observing, Reflecting, Relaxing, Sensing

Fluency in ideation, divergent thinking, self-regulation (ado), affective empathy, intuition



Speed of development and 'type' also matter!



Parents & parenting practices

Parents as role models, good for children developing core capacities

Parents own listening, inquiring, reflecting and empathising skills support children's development

Parenting programmes are shown to work

At home parents can apply both active inquiry and reflecting with their children during reading, play, and listening to music (amongst other activities)

...safe and well-resourced home environments matter



Practitioners: & age-related development

Inquiring and Empathising are expressed in preverbal infancy, and listening in-utero, so...

Start early...

All child services sensitized to their roles in the **protection** and **promotion** of these capacities

Follow the evidence on age-related development

Fluency in working memory, empathy, applied intuition, tend to decline over childhood.

Get the timing right, policies aligned to these trajectories



Polycymakers: Support practitioners

Promote core capacity development in all child professions, and professional environments

Support schools, to promote core capacities as part of broader social emotional learning (without further burdening staff)

Flexible guidelines on classroom layout

Create the time for relaxation and reflection in learning

Encourage innovation in teaching for learning, report and assess what matters



Core capacities boost to child development

... and beyond

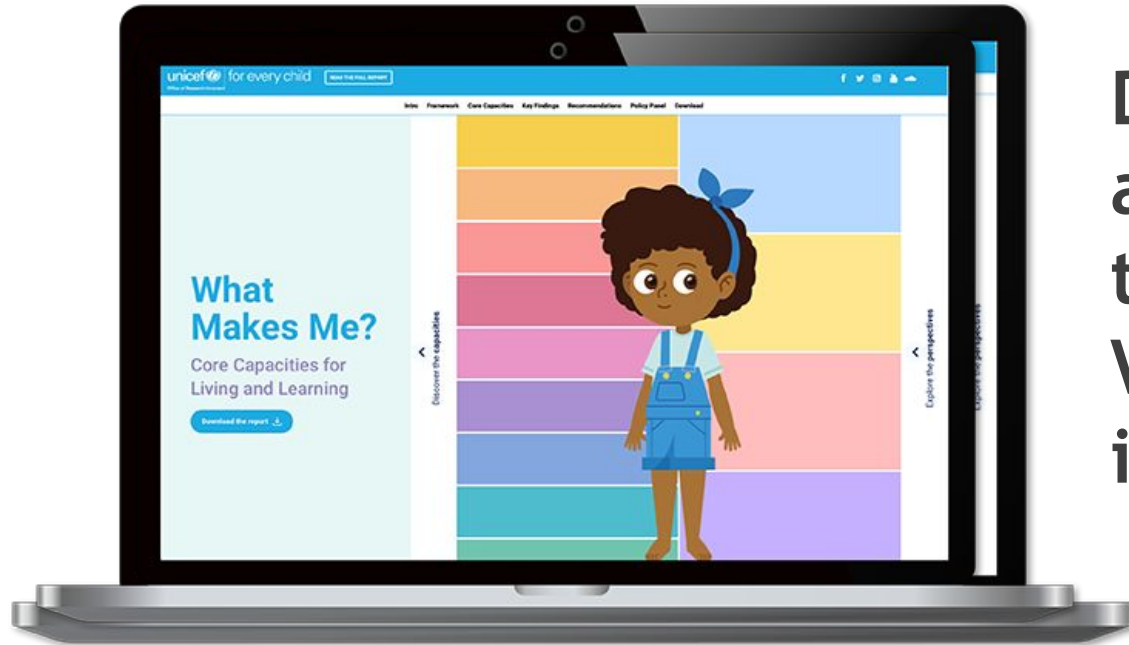
- Core capacities are essential prerequisites to child development
- Evident in children from the earliest ages
- Need to be protected *and* promoted to
 - > Significantly improve children's life chances
 - > Maximise the potential of education systems globally

Thanks

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Explore the Core Capacities



Download the report and dive deeper into the core capacities on the **What Makes Me?** interactive website

www.unicef-irc.org/what-makes-me