GLOBAL CENTER
for the Development of *the Whole Child*

DEFINING *whole child*
DEVELOPMENT

About Us

Creating pathways out of adversity...

The Global Center for the Development of the Whole Child, based at the University of Notre Dame, collaborates with researchers and practitioners to ensure the social, emotional, cognitive, physical, and spiritual well-being of children and adolescents in low-resource and fragile settings around the world.

Using an innovative whole child development framework tailored to local needs, we translate research into timely and thoughtful action, adapt assessment tools to improve programs and policies, and activate systems (families, schools, communities) to create pathways out of adversity.

What We Do:

Translate: In collaboration with our partners in the field, we translate research into concrete SEL, ECD, and resilience programs and policies in fragile, low resource contexts.

Evaluate: We adapt assessment tools to local needs, building capacity to measure, evaluate and improve education programs in development or emergency contexts.

Activate: We activate and align the diverse support systems (home, community, school) that champion children's development and learning in adversity.

Communicate: We gather and exchange best practices from around the world in whole child development and learning in fragile, low resource contexts.

Design: Green Communication Design inc. | www.greencom.ca

Why Whole Child Development?

"The irrefutable links between the well-being of children and the economic and social progress of nations provide a compelling rationale for strengthening policies and investments in whole child development"

– Neil Boothby, Professor and Director
Global Center for the Development of the Whole Child

Evidence from across disciplines—from neuroscience to biological and developmental science to economic science—has clearly demonstrated that investing in children's holistic well-being is a proven pathway out of adversity. Whole child development, and its multiplier effect, is one of the smartest, most cost-effective investments we can make to ensure the health and prosperity of not only individual children and their families, but also of entire communities and societies.
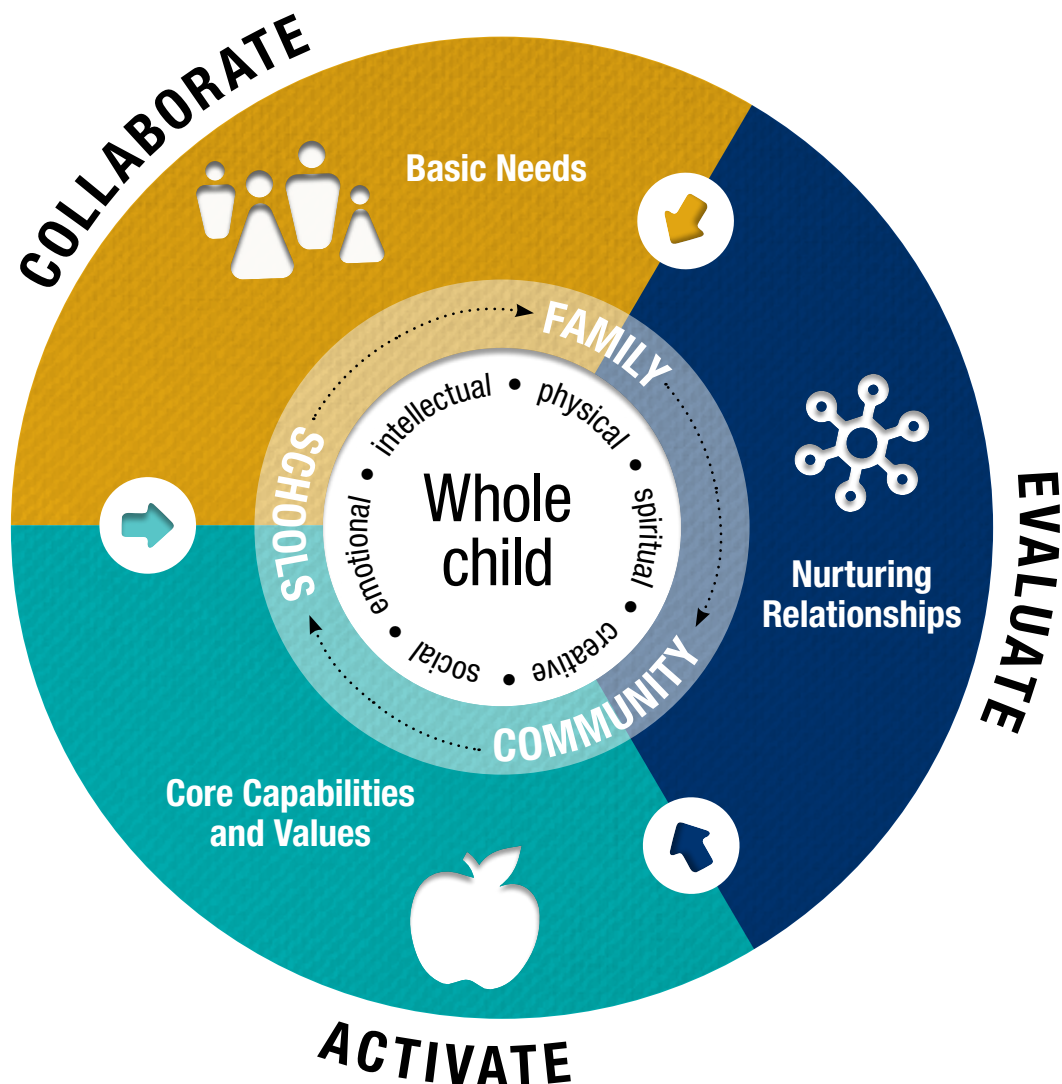
What is Whole Child Development?

A whole child approach to development and learning engages a broad spectrum of support systems, including family, school, and community, to ensure children and youth reach their full potential. It equally values all aspects of a child's well-being—social, emotional, physical, intellectual, spiritual, and creative—to ensure they become active citizens and life-long learners.

Related terms: social and emotional learning; holistic approach; well-being; head, heart, and hand; resilience; future ready.

4 Key Principles for Whole Child Development

1. Children's development happens in different spaces, simultaneously including family, school, and the wider community.

2. And the quality of each of these environments matters.

3. When we invest in solutions that work in environments that support child development, including health, nutrition, early childcare, education, and protection, we support whole child development.

4. This is particularly important for children growing-up in poverty and other forms of severe adversity. Together, we can build these environments so that all children can reach their potential and become responsible citizens and life-long learners.

Why WCD Matters:

At-a-glance

Investing in a whole child approach to development and learning reduces poverty, increases equity and launches children, families, communities, and nations on pathways to success.

→ The Challenge

- Children exposed to adversity are at increased risk of low educational achievement, behavioural problems and negative mental and physical health outcomes later in life (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1999; Noltemeyer & Bush, 2013; Schoon, 2006).

- Globally, 263 million children and youth (6 - 17 years old) were out of school in 2015 (UIS 2017).

- 1 billion children experience violence annually (Hillis et al., 2016).

- Half of the estimated 65 million persons displaced world-wide in 2015 were below the age of 18 (UNHCR, 2016).

- More than 104 million children (aged 5-17) – 1 in 3 – are out of school in countries affected by war or natural disasters (UNICEF 2018).

- The estimated cost of illiteracy across all age groups for the global economy is USD $1.2 trillion (WLF, 2015).

→ The Whole Child Solution

- Positive relationships with adults can help the most disadvantaged and vulnerable children navigate from adversity.

- The brain develops most rapidly within the first 1000 days of life, setting the foundation for a child's physical and mental health and lifelong capacity to learn before the age of 3. Early investment can improve children's chances for long-term health and life-long learning.

- Whole child development equally values all aspects of a child's well-being—social, emotional, physical, intellectual, spiritual, and creative. A whole child is more likely to break the cycle of poverty, gain employment, give back to their communities and live healthy lives.

- Safe, cohesive and healthy environments, communities, and societies matter for the development of children and youth.

- Whole child development should be central to how we measure the success of societies. Success requires partnerships that collectively support economic security, health and safety, education, employment, information, and support.

Working Together

Photo by Beth Rubenstein - Kenya

Some 200 million children live below the poverty line and/or are stunted.
(USG APCA, 2012). They attend school for fewer years—or not at all.
They are disproportionately affected by violence and are more likely to
be exploited, with an estimated 1 billion children being victims of violence
every year (CDC, 2017).

Photo by Maxence Bradley - Haiti

All these factors limit their future ability to live healthy and productive lives, obtain gainful employment, and contribute to their communities and families, perpetuating a multigenerational cycle of poverty. As a result, countries where these 200 million children live have an estimated 30 percent loss in adult productivity and are prone to instability and conflict (Grantham-McGregor, 2007).

The needs and risks of children growing up in poverty and other adversities are multidimensional. Tackling one issue at a time, divorced from these complex realties, is ultimately a disservice to time- and resource-strapped families. Young children require integrated support, including health, nutrition, education, care, and protection. The science explains why. By turning attention and resources toward coordinated investments and delivery platforms, it is possible to close the gap between what is known and what is done to support young children globally.

To fully benefit from future opportunities in life and become productive members of society, children must be healthy and well-nourished; securely attached to caregivers; able to interact positively with families, teachers, and peers; able to communicate in their native language; and able to learn throughout their schools years and beyond.

Child's Developmental Needs

Multisectoral Approach

Health

Nutrition

Education

Health Safety/ Protection

Relationship

Psychosocial

Working in Alignment

A whole child approach seeks to identify and align interventions that support positive human relationships, meet core needs, and promote the competences and skills required to succeed as a child, an adolescent, and an adult in a given social and economic context.

Most often, these essentials are best addressed within the family, the school, and the immediate community.

School

Home

Whole Child Development

Community
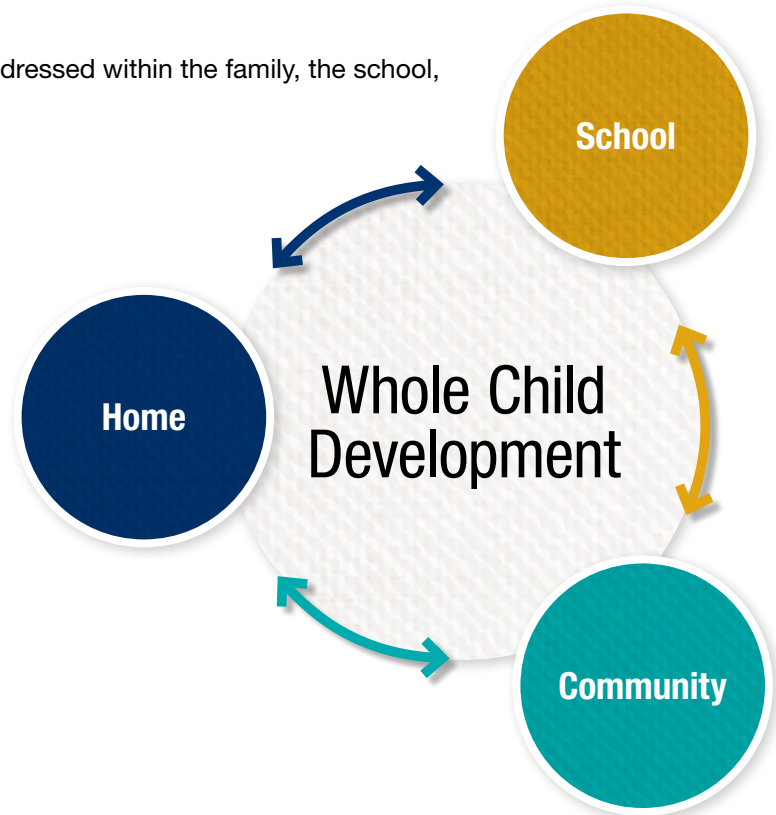
A Whole Child Blueprint for Action

Key action points for consideration by *educators*,
when working with children and youth in adversity

A whole child development approach identifies how children can
be supported to attend and participate in school, obtain knowledge
and skills, and achieve academic goals despite the adverse
environments in which they live.

- ## What are the characteristics of a Whole Child development approach in education? (Porticus, 2017)

- A redefined purpose of learning in support of the common good.

- The potential of the child to play a full and active part in society.

- The process of learning (the pedagogy) as much as the content taught.

- The role of the teacher (shifting from sage on the stage to guide on the side).

- The individual needs of each child rather than the system average.

- Physical development, child safety, good health and nutrition.

- The development of social and emotional skills.

- Experiential, active learning that is linked to real-life issues rather than academic theory only.

- Breadth over depth in the design of the curriculum.

- The arts, humanities, languages, and social sciences as much as science, technology and mathematics.

- Approaches designed to encourage reflection and meta-cognition (eg. learning to learn).

- Learning that happens in the context of peers, families and communities.

- Time outside the classroom and in informal learning environments.

- The role of education in developing values and ethics.

• How can I adopt Whole Child strategies and practices in the classroom?

- Looping, where teachers stay with the same students for more than one year.

- Morning meetings, to encourage conversation with students about current events.

- Inviting students' experiences into the classroom and communicating that all students are valued.

- Real-world learning and culturally appropriate lessons that are relevant to students' lives.

- High expectations with positive reinforcement and adequate student support.

- Community walks or neighbourhood tours to build cultural competence and to raise awareness of increase of students' lives outside school.

- Restoration and reconciliation practices (rather than punitive discipline) to help students. recognize and take responsibility for their role in relationships with peers and teachers.

- Students plan, monitor and evaluate their own tasks so they feel in control of their learning.

- Flexible use of time and space to dive into an activity so children work at their own pace without pressure.

- Peer collaboration such as group projects to build teamwork skills.

- Positive attitudes toward experimentation, risk-taking, curiosity and creativity.

- Openness to new ideas and seeing things from the perspective of children.

• How can I activate and align families, school and the wider community?

- Create advisory programs that provide students with a community and allow you to check in with students and parents on a regular basis.

- Capture your classroom on video to self-reflect, evaluate, debrief with peers and improve.

- Encourage home visits and regular parent-teacher-student conferences to strengthen connections between school and home.

- Create opportunities for staff collaboration, peer learning and leadership across departments to strengthen well-being and trust among educators.

- Identify existing partnerships, programs and services that support and engage teachers, families and other members of the community.

- Urge and assist education ministries to develop a whole child development approach, particularly for the unique needs of children facing adversity

- Develop alliances with public and private partners to increase awareness and leverage resources

Photo by Maxence Bradley - Haiti

- ## How can I best communicate Whole Child Development to get buy-in? DOs and DON'Ts

DOs:

- **Adapt messaging to local context**
Communicating and measuring whole child development needs to be grounded in cultural realities of what 'succeeding' means in a given context.

- **Emphasize the return on investment**
Communicate whole child development's reciprocity: investing in children now will lead to a better future. Engaged, life-long learners will give back to their communities.

- **Promote early intervention: first 1000 days**
Show the importance of brain architecture in life-long learning and health outcomes: Science shows that 80% of brain development takes place in the first 1000 days and that many children's futures are undermined when adversity damages brain architecture.

- **It takes a community…**
Use examples that show the impact of external influences on children's development and learning, i.e. teachers, community leaders, conditions in society such as violence or gender inequality. Move away from notion that only family members are responsible for a child and connect the child to the larger environment.

- **Encourage supportive adult-child relationships**
Although early intervention is best, emphasize importance of positive, nurturing relationships with wider community leaders and members to help children bounce back from adversity.

- **Share best practices and success stories**
Using simple, concise language and storytelling techniques, share the WCD successes of children who have thrived in your community with other educators, policy makers, practitioners.

- **Recruit WCD champions to spread the message**
Target those with leadership, energy and will, who are already involved and engaged in WCD to inspire educators, the community and policy makers to support WCD across multiple sectors.

DON'Ts:

- **Don't impose normative, top-down messaging**
A community-led, consultative approach to communication strategies should be considered which does not prespecify objectives but rather builds community ownership, support and sustainability

- **Don't use lingo, academic or technical language**

- **Don't use fear tactics**
(i.e. If we don't embrace whole child development now, we risk losing a generation of youth)

- **Don't assume that people understand the impact of whole child development on society and economy**

- **Don't talk about parent or teacher incompetence**

Sources: January 2020 Stakeholder Interviews; From Strong Beginnings to Youth Resilience: Pathways Out of Adversity (August 2013); Early Child Development Frameworks Message Memo (Frameworks Institute 2005); Whole Child Development is Undervalued (Edutopia.org blog, August 2015); Overview of evidence behind Porticus' approach to Whole Child Development (March 2017); Fostering Resilience in Adversity: An Interactive Outcomes Framework (Fischer, Boothby and Wessels, 2017).

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