

POICY BRIEF

Whole Child-School Community

Approach: Empowering tomorrow



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Introduction

Investing in the whole child-whole community approach is a prudent strategy for addressing the complex issues of poverty. This approach, grounded in empirical evidence, equips children to overcome adversity while ensuring long-term cost-effectiveness. By focusing on children's fundamental, nutritional, and socio-emotional needs during early childhood and adolescence, we can break the cycle of poverty and foster resilient, flourishing citizens, as substantiated by extensive research and analysis.



What's at stake?

Children who experience adversity face an elevated likelihood of encountering lower educational attainment, behavioral challenges, and adverse long-term mental and physical health consequences (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1999, Noltermeyer & Bush, 2013, Schoon, 2006). In the year 2015, worldwide, a staggering 263 million children and youth aged 6 to 17 found themselves deprived of

access to education (UIS 2017). Alarming, every year, one billion children endure experiences of violence (Hillis et al.,2016). Notably, half of the estimated 65 million persons displaced worldwide in 2015 were below the age of 18 (UNHCH, 2016). Moreover, in regions affected by conflict or natural disasters, over 104 million children, constituting approximately one in three children aged 5 to 17, are denied access to education (UNICEF, 2018). The economic cost of illiteracy for the global economy is estimated to be a staggering USD \$1.2 trillion (WLF, 2015).

"Some 200 million children live below the poverty line and/or are stunted. 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" (USG APCA, 2012; CDC, 2017).

In confronting the global challenges related to child development, it becomes evident that nurturing positive relationships with adults can serve as a lifeline for the most disadvantaged and vulnerable children. The brain's most rapid development occurs within the first 1000 days of life, establishing the critical foundation for a child's physical and mental health, as well as their lifelong capacity to learn. Recognizing the significance of early investments in children's learning capacity before the age of 3 becomes paramount. Embracing a Whole Child Development approach to children's development, that values all dimensions of a child's well-being including social, emotional, physical, intellectual, spiritual, and creative facets, is crucial. Such a perspective not only empowers children to break the cycle of poverty but also equips them to find employment, contribute to their communities, and lead healthy lives. Moreover, acknowledging the vital role of safe, cohesive, and healthy environments, communities, and societies is imperative for children and youth's holistic development. Whole child development must be at the core of how we measure the success of societies. This necessitates building partnerships that collectively support economic security, health, safety, education, employment, information, and social support. By taking this comprehensive and integrated approach, we can proactively combat the global challenges impacting child development, ultimately creating a brighter and more promising future for children worldwide.

Methods

Whole Child Development (WCD) represents a comprehensive approach to combating the issues of poverty and adversity that children face globally. At its core, WCD engages a broad spectrum of support systems, spanning family, school, and community, to ensure that children and youth have the opportunity to realize their full potential. WCD values every aspect of a child's well-being, including their social, emotional, physical, intellectual, spiritual, and creative dimensions, with the ultimate aim of nurturing them into active, responsible citizens and lifelong learners. This approach is guided by four key principles. Firstly, it recognizes that children's development occurs across multiple spaces, concurrently involving family, school, and the broader community. Secondly, it

- **Basic Needs:** The core requirements for children's healthy development include appropriate housing, nutritious food, clean water, personal hygiene, health care, and physical safety and security. Students can only focus on higher-order tasks such as learning when their basic needs are met.
- **Nurturing Relationships:** Children develop, grow, and thrive through relationships

underscores the significance of the quality of each of these environments, emphasizing that the well-being of children is directly linked to the well-being of these spaces. Thirdly, it advocates for investments in solutions that operate within environments that support child development, encompassing health, nutrition, early childcare, education, and protection. Lastly, it recognizes that this approach is particularly crucial for children growing up in poverty and facing severe adversity. WCD aligns with the irrefutable link between the well-being of children and the social and economic progress of nations. This linkage provides a compelling rationale for strengthening policies and investments in whole child development. Furthermore, findings from neuroscience and biology affirm that investing in children's holistic well-being is a proven pathway out of adversity. Beyond its effectiveness, WCD is cost-effective, influencing not only individual children and families but also schools and communities. In essence, WCD offers a well-rounded strategy to address the issues associated with poverty by simultaneously enhancing the diverse aspects of a child's development. It recognizes that by creating supportive environments that embrace the multifaceted needs of children, we can enable them to reach their full potential, break the cycle of poverty, and become responsible citizens and lifelong learners. This approach is not only socially and morally compelling but also economically advantageous, holding the potential to drive positive change on a global scale.

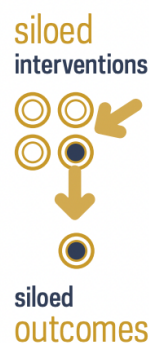
that exist across all social ecological levels in a child's environment. (Yates, Egeland, & Sroufe, 2003). It is the nature and quality of these relationships that can mediate the effects of adversity and build resilience (Shonkoff, 2003).

- **Core Capabilities and Values:** Children's ability to succeed in school is not limited to their knowledge of content or academic skills. Research suggests that children's ability to learn in school and succeed in life is also contingent on a set of capabilities and values, often referred to as social emotional skills or social emotional learning (SEL) (Jones & Doolittle, 2017).

Building Blocks for Children's Resilience



Further, siloed interventions, which address only one risk factor, are ineffective in combating the cumulative ill-effects of these risks as research continues to show that **“siloed interventions lead to siloed outcomes”** (Singer, 2014; Huebner et al, 2016). When practitioners choose to focus on only one risk, the overall impact of an intervention diminishes; therefore, “coordinated, multifaceted, and evidence-based action” (Huebner et al, 2016) is needed to enable children in adversity to overcome any risks to their development and flourish (Boothby et al, 2012).



Results

CASEL's framework focuses on promoting interpersonal, and cognitive competence and organizes itself around five core competencies: self-awareness, self-

1. Self-awareness: identifying emotions, accurate self-perception, recognizing strengths, self-confidence, and self-efficacy
2. Self-management: impulse control, stress management, self-discipline, self-motivation, goal-setting, and organizational skills

management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. Each of these competencies can be further divided into specific tasks and skills (CASEL, 2017).

3. Social awareness: perspective-taking, empathy, appreciating diversity, and respect for others
4. Relationship skills: communication, social engagement, relationship-building, and teamwork
5. Responsible decision making: identifying problems, analyzing situations, solving problems, evaluating, reflecting, and ethical responsibility

“Multi-level approaches that engage key relationships across children’s social ecologies build children’s resilience and improve academic performance. This understanding necessitates identifying the ways in which families, children’s social networks, community members, and children themselves can be reached and supported through relationship-focused interventions” (Waxman, Gray & Padron, 2003).

Reach Up Early Childhood Parenting Program Fostering resilience through parent-focused home interventions for early childhood development.

6 CORE PRINCIPLES

1. Work through caregivers by building a positive relationship to support them in strengthening skills to promote child development.
2. Use a structured curriculum of developmentally appropriate activities.
3. Aim to build caregivers’ skills, self-esteem, and enjoyment in helping their child play and learn.
4. Use an interactive approach of demonstration, modeling, and practice of activities to build skills.
5. Train home visitors to listen to the caregivers, seek their opinions, and ask about things they already do with their child in order to acknowledge these and give encouragement and praise.
6. Emphasize praise for caregiver and child.

A long-term cohort study of the Jamaica Home Visit program, out of which Reach Up was developed, shows that children who participated in the program were happier and did better in school, and as adults, they had higher IQs, experienced better mental health, demonstrated less violent behavior, and earned more money than similar children who did not participate in the program (GranthamMcGregor et al, 1975). Additional program evaluations in Bangladesh and Colombia have affirmed this (Attanasio et al, 2014; Hamadani et al, 2006; Nahar et al, 2012). This study showed that stimulative, nurturing care was even more impactful than nutrition in this population. Although the Reach Up Program was famously started in Jamaica, it is already being implemented in several countries such as Bangladesh, India, Brazil, Madagascar, and Peru, with plans for expansion into Guatemala, Zimbabwe, and China (The University of West Indies).



“...children who participated in the program did better in school, were happier...”

Happiness Curriculum

The main point of the study is the implementation and impact of the Happiness Curriculum (HC) in New Delhi, India. The HC was developed in response to India's low ranking on the World Happiness scale, and it aims to foster resilience and well-being in students. The curriculum, designed through collaboration with teachers and the non-profit organization Dream a Dream, focuses on shifting the value of education from solely making a living to promoting a good life and contributing to society. It incorporates mindfulness, critical thinking, storytelling, and play-based activities to address students' emotional and mental needs. Importantly, the HC emphasizes social and emotional learning, helping students develop skills to regulate their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. The study highlights that, in contrast to traditional education, the HC creates a more inclusive and less pressure-driven environment. It is designed to provide students with the freedom to express themselves, fostering positive changes in relationships with teachers, increased class participation, and improved focus and calmness. Teachers have observed changes in students' willingness to engage in class and prioritize values over academic success. The curriculum encourages teachers to vary their pedagogical styles. The study emphasizes that long-term evaluations will determine whether the HC not only improves academic skills but also social and emotional learning (SEL) skills like mindfulness, critical thinking, reflection, and inner stability. The study's importance lies in its exploration of an innovative curriculum that prioritizes holistic well-being, emotional intelligence, and resilience, which can have profound implications for education and student development in India and potentially beyond. It addresses the need for a more balanced approach to education that goes beyond academic achievements and focuses on students' emotional and mental well-being, ultimately contributing to happier and more resilient individuals.

Participating students have reported positive changes ... **increased participation** in class, **improved** ability to **focus**...



The Happiness Curriculum (HC) in New Delhi, India, is intricately connected to the principles of whole child development. It prioritizes students' holistic well-being by focusing on their emotional and mental needs, aligning with the whole child approach that emphasizes comprehensive development. HC places a strong emphasis on social and emotional learning, fostering resilience in students, and creating an inclusive and supportive educational environment, all key elements of whole child development. By shifting the focus from academic pressures to a broader perspective on education, the HC embraces the notion that education should equip students with the emotional intelligence and life skills necessary for a well-rounded and fulfilling life. In essence, the HC exemplifies how whole child development principles can be effectively implemented in an educational context to promote happier, more resilient individuals.

Conclusion

The Whole Child-Whole community approach emerges as a comprehensive and compelling strategy for tackling the multifaceted challenges posed by poverty. By providing children with the necessary tools to overcome adversity and nurturing their resilience, this approach sets the stage for a brighter future. The evidence-based nature of this approach not only assures its effectiveness but also underscores its potential for long-term cost savings. When we prioritize children's fundamental, nutritional, and socio-emotional needs, particularly during their formative years, we take a significant step towards breaking the cycle of poverty and cultivating a generation of resilient, thriving citizens. The extensive body of research and analysis unequivocally supports the importance of investing in

this approach, making it a sound and visionary choice for policymakers and stakeholders committed to building a more equitable and prosperous society.

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