

Chapter 11 (excerpt from *Grow Together: Parenting as a Path to Wisdom*)

APPLICATIONS FOR PROFESSIONALS: BEYOND THE PARENT AND CHILD

Professionals who work with children or families are in a wonderful position to help parents and caregivers increase their awareness of the important benefits of supporting the child's innate capacities. When we apply Natural Learning Relationships with the children, well-being comes forth in the children, their families, and, perhaps surprisingly, in us as professionals. We know that living in well-being is the ground for wisdom to emerge. Actualizing wisdom as an adult has a profoundly positive influence on life satisfaction that is independent of our objective circumstances. Wise adults tend to be more reflective, caring, empathic, and compassionate toward others and they can access greater satisfaction in actualizing their life's purpose and meaning.

Teachers, counselors, physicians, and family attorneys are among those professionals who have used NLR to help their clients who are parenting. Over my years speaking with many such professionals, they have described the changes in their personal development as rewarding and enriching experiences when caring for children's developmental imperatives is at the center of practice. Thus, the relationship with the child is a system of multi-directional development—practical applications of whole-child development during the care of the child benefit everyone involved. We, as professionals, gain as much as the children we serve.

Because we professionals alter the world of children by the attitudes we bring, the environments we create, and the social norms we uphold, self-development is essential for anyone working with students, children, or families. Who we are strongly affects our students and is the underpinning of all that we do with them. In essence, it is our first teaching. The best educator/student relationship requires us to have affection and empathy toward our students and enough trust in their innate goodness and capabilities to allow them freedom. The affection I speak of here must not come from our needs or dependency of any kind...but rather a profound wish for the student's optimal well-being.

Students absorb who we are—everything we say and do, and, just as importantly, everything we feel. The message of our whole-being is transmitted in any number of non-verbal ways: by our presence, language, attitude, behaviors, methods of teaching, aesthetics of dress, arrangement of the environment, time management, etc. Moreover, children have an inner experience of us through empathy (see Chapter 2). Thus, our development and psychological health is known to our children, our students, and our clients through what is called *being-to-being experience* (Appendix 11-A: Being to Being Knowledge). This is not a cognitive type of *knowledge*, yet it is sensed, felt, and experienced in every way. This is true in any profession. Similarly, we have an inner experience of our clients and students through empathy.

Natural Learning Relationships has been integrated into use in many areas: teacher training, social and human services, adult education, corporate work/life balance support, non-profit and school partnerships, prevention programs for youth at-risk, college course materials, children's camps, and parenting support groups. Professionals who engage in practical applications of nurturing children's developmental needs have found these benefits for themselves:

- Increased access to personal meaning in their professional practice
- Greater professional confidence and competence
- Greater professional empathy

- The ability to see through the child's eyes and skillfully bring forward developmental relationships with each age child
 - Ways to apply their adult growth and development to their professional practice
 - Encouragement to embrace new ideas based on the interests of their students and clients
 - Greater freedom from their own biographical pasts
 - An increased ability to appreciate diverse views
 - Ways to skillfully engage in self-inquiry without self-judgment
 - An ability to do more complex thinking with the ability to embrace paradox
 - A greater ability to collaborate with others
 - A greater ability to construct positive solutions in times of conflict
 - Access to greater self-knowledge
 - Resilience and open-mindedness in their professional practice
 - Greater ability to be authentically present with their students
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Blogpost

DEVELOPMENT OCCURS IN RELATIONSHIP

Josette Luvmour, PhD

A child's relationship with educators and parents is central to the child's perception of self and the world. Children learn in informal interactions with educators and in the family environment during everyday activities. To make those interactions as effective as possible, it is important to understand how the child sees the world and to nurture that child's developmental needs. We can co-create educational environments with supportive relationships that match the child's developmental capacities. Well-being flourishes in both child and adult.

Who is the child as a unique individual? Who is she when she's not seen as a part of a class or grouped with others in a grade level. How does the child, in his own right, perceive the world?

Welcome to my blog on *parenting involvement matters*. These discussions on supporting well-being in children will include talk about development—both the child's development *and* the caregivers' development, past and present.

This blog supports healthy development in children with practical applications to home life and education. In that healthy development, your involvement is key. In fact, **caring for your child's development will promote optimal well-being for you both.**

Here, the word development means a movement through stages of life that the child goes through as he or she organizes the world. Because these developmental changes are strongly influenced by both genetic inheritance *and* environmental influences, we must pay careful attention to our relationship with each child. Each stage of life is seen through the manifestation of all the child's abilities: cognitive, emotional, spiritual, and self-perception. If we ignore the different ways in which each child's organizes her or his world, we may end up distancing ourselves from that development and that can lead to objectifying the child or stereotyping.

As adults, we must be careful to not group children into categories; e.g., terrible-two's, awkward tweens, oppositional teenagers, etc. In my consulting practice, I encourage parents and caregivers to take a unique approach with each child they are with. In order to do this, we need to see each child as an individual with innate and unique characteristics influenced by his or her developmental capacities in combination with the context in which he or she lives.

The key is for any adult to understand how the child sees the world and to acknowledge and balance the two main influences on who the child is: the child's age of development with its needs and characteristics and the environmental influences (family, school, clubs and sports). I have seen amazing trust develop when we can relate to the child in this way.

Since the child's consciousness develops in relationship with others, we need to take great care to learn about the child's development. Consciousness shows up primarily in changes in *perception*, which determines behavior, identity construction, ego development, relationship, knowledge formation, and emotional connection. To really look at and see the child is a form of respect for the child and, I dare say, for life. This requires understanding how the child's worldview is directly related to development.

- Knowledge of child development is crucial to parents because family relationships are an essential contributor to the patterns that influence the child's emotional development and social interactions for a lifetime.
- Knowledge of child development is crucial to educators because it can help educators understand the optimal age for appropriate communication strategies, for relationship, and for environments that provide the best needed support for developing the child's innate capacities.

It is also important to know who we are in our own development (and resulting consciousness) because this strongly affects our students and our children and is the underpinning of all that we do with them. In essence, who we are is what we teach.

In a recently article, I discussed the importance of taking the time to understand how our children perceive the world at each age of development. This excerpt is an example:

...it is time that education supports each child in a web of relationships with educators and parents who share in the primary responsibility of guiding that child's development. In this view, the boundary between *adult and child* does not exist. Our relationship with the children in our care, whether personal or professional, is of critical importance to well-being in the child's consciousness. During each age of childhood, connection, understanding, and appreciation of child development are required.

Children learn competence in their developmental capacities in informal interactions with educators and in the family environment during everyday activities. To make those interactions the best they can be, it is important to understand how the child sees the world, a seeing that is governed by the organizing principle, and to nurture that child's developmental needs. Every aspect of a human being is continually adapting to relationships, interpersonal communication, and educational experiences. With knowledge of child development and attention to attuned relationships with the child's consciousness, we can co-create educational environments [and home environments] with supportive relationships that match the child's developmental capacities. Well-being will flourish in both child and adult... The benefits of right relationships with children nourish children, adults, families, and society as a whole.

“It's not about performance—it's always about relationship.”

Sources:

Luvmour, J. (2011). Education and the Consciousness of the Developing Child. *Encounter: Education for Meaning and Social Justice*, 24(4), 15-23.

A review of this article by Paul Freedman, head of the Salmonberry School in Eastsound, WA can be found at: <http://goo.gl/6dwu84>