

A conceptual framework for mapping and enhancing children's emotional well-being



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Orientation: The 7 Dimensions conceptual framework represents a synthesis of a wide range of documented theory and research concerned with children's emotional well-being.

Research purpose: The research was designed to examine the diverse, interactive aspects of children's overall emotional experience to ensure constructive, focused and relevant systems of support.

Motivation for the study: Although information about children's emotional experience abounds in academic and high-quality internet publications, challenges remain for those working with children to design relevant support in specific circumstances.

Research approach: The 7 Dimensions of children's emotional well-being emerged from a thematic analysis of publications concerned with emotional experience. These dimensions were mapped according to their emergent or generative effects on children's emotional well-being to form the 7 Dimensions framework.

Main findings: The thematic analysis indicated that emotional well-being was a multi-dimensional, interactive and dynamic state, constantly shifting in accordance with the interplay between children and their worlds. The responsiveness of neuroplasticity to environmental demands underscored the need to facilitate children's environments that are dominated by repeated, subjectively positive and meaningful interactions.

Implications for practice: The 7 Dimensions framework has been proposed as a backdrop to the practice of those working to understand and optimise children's emotional experience in social environments. It may be used proactively with groups of young people or responsively with individuals.

Contribution: The 7 Dimensions framework has been developed to assist those working with young people to understand the complexity of children's emotional experiences and construct relevant supports.

Keywords: emotional well-being; children's emotions; psychology; positive psychology; neuroscience of child development.

Introduction

The 7 Dimensions framework is a conceptual structure for understanding and supporting children's emotional well-being. Founded on theory and research from neuroscience and psychology, the framework is designed to be used responsively to enhance the emotional well-being of individual children and, proactively, to optimise children's experience in their everyday activities. The framework facilitates the exploration and enhancement of young people's emotional well-being by identifying the factors that impact well-being, be they helpful or otherwise, and interactions that impact their overall emotional experience (Annan, 2022).

Emotional well-being, as a construct, has been widely researched and continues to be documented as new information comes to light. The internet is packed with information relating to strengthening children's well-being, this being demonstrated by a recent Google search for 'children's emotional well-being' that attracted over a billion hits! Although the quality of information on the internet is variable, a substantial amount of it is of good quality, contributed by scholarly writers and based on reputable contemporary theory and up-to-date research. The challenge for practitioners, parents and others who support young people is knowing which information is most relevant to their children's specific situations. The choice can be overwhelming.

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The purpose of the 7 Dimensions framework is to help practitioners maintain an overview of children's emotional well-being while simultaneously focusing on the most relevant aspects of their experience. It serves as a backdrop to professional practice in which practitioners explore all aspects of children's emotional well-being, identifying existing supports and challenges encountered. By examining the interrelationships among the dimensions explored, practitioners can discover which dimensions are directly relevant to the well-being of the young people before them and which dimensions have an indirect impact. The interrelationships observed allow practitioners to target pivotal points for focusing direct intervention, ensuring that the support provided for young people is relevant for positive change and least disruptive to existing supports.

Firstly, the article notes a set of assumptions that thread through the 7 Dimensions framework. Secondly, the article follows an introduction to each of the 7 Dimensions, a description of the process through which the framework emerged and a comment on the implications of the dimensions' interrelationships for practice. The article outlines the theory and research that determined the relative positioning of the dimensions on the dynamic practice framework. It finishes with a note on applying the 7 Dimensions framework in professional practice.

Research design

Research approach and method

The 7 Dimensions of children's emotional well-being emerged from a thematic analysis of publications concerned with emotional experience. These dimensions were mapped according to their emergent or generative effects on children's emotional well-being to form the 7 Dimensions framework.

Targeted body of literature

The targeted body of knowledge focused on material related to theories of social and emotional development, research reports on children's social and emotional experiences and various guides for practitioners.

Data gathering method

A wide range of published books, journal articles and scholarly internet weblogs were reviewed. The publications were selected on the basis of documents previously reviewed, with new dimensions being concurrently added, combined, adjusted or deleted. This process continued until the emerging dimensions of emotional well-being were saturated.

Data analysis and presentation

The final phase of development was analysis. This process involved identifying relationships among the 7 Dimensions through linkages established in the fields of

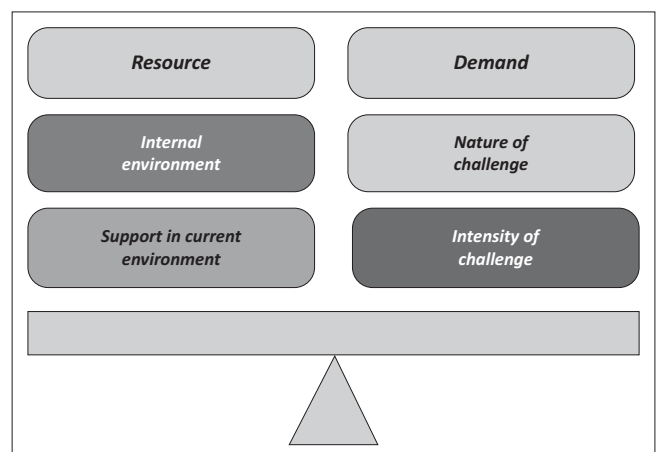
psychology and neuroscience. This information guided the development of a well-being map that preceded and facilitated the design of the 7 Dimensions of children's emotional well-being framework.

Assumptions of the 7 Dimensions framework

Several assumptions thread through the 7 Dimensions framework. These are based on the neuroscience that has explained the links between dimensions and the interactive theories of human development supported by this science. These theories, including those proposed by Vygotsky, Bronfenbrenner and Bandura, consider human development and the human condition to be a dynamic state located within social interaction.

Emotional well-being is a complex, interactive, dynamic state

Emotional well-being is depicted in the 7 Dimensions framework as a fluid, genetically influenced and socially constructed quality that reflects a child's past, present and anticipated future experiences. Its quality is determined by the everchanging balance between a young person's amassed and available resources and the demands of the task at hand. This dynamic notion of emotional well-being builds on a definition proposed by Dodge et al. (2012, p. 230), who took the concept beyond the individual person, locating it in the interaction between a person and their environment. Emotional well-being is understood in the 7 Dimensions framework as a variable condition influenced by the internal environment of children's minds, such as the perspectives through which young people view the world and the understandings that contribute to their sense-making, combined with the quality of the support they have around them and the nature and intensity of the particular demands of the challenges they encounter. Therefore, emotional well-being is not a static quality of an individual but a dynamic state found between children and their worlds (cf. Figure 1).



Source: Annan, J., 2022, *7 Dimensions: Children's emotional well-being*. Mary-Egan Publishing

FIGURE 1: Emotional well-being is depicted as a balance between internal and external resources combined and the demands in specific settings.

Emotional well-being emerges from and contributes to the dynamic interaction between a child and their world. As children live in relation to others rather than existing as individuals alone, their emotional well-being is inseparable from the social contexts in which it develops.

Young people live their lives in narratives

Children live in the narratives they hold about themselves and their fit in the world around them. These narratives, elements of which can be both personal and shared across groups and communities, are derived from children's analyses of the stories they gather from their multiple experiences (Denborough, 2014; White, 2007; White & Epston, 1990). Unlike stories with a discernible structure, narratives cannot be fully recognised or articulated. They can only be inferred from children's expressed beliefs and values, inherent feelings and actions. Irrespective of their obscured nature, *self-narratives* are powerful governors of the way children interact. They simultaneously reflect and impact children's emotional well-being.

The brain can change with experience

Children's minds, brains and bodies are primed for learning. Indeed, every interaction with the world impacts the brain with consequent learning through neuroplasticity, the brain's ability to form new connections. As Cozolino (2013, p. xxvi) explained, our 'ability to learn is interwoven within our brains and bodies with our physical, emotional, and social survival'.

Hebb (1949) proposed that when neurons repeatedly fired together, they formed increasingly stronger and faster connections that consolidated learning. Conversely, when established links between neurons were left unused, their connections weakened. In a healthy brain, this is a life-long process. While the rate at which neural growth is significantly greater in the early years of life, recent research has demonstrated that people continue to produce new neurons up to at least the age of 97 years (Moreno-Jiménez et al., 2019). Such findings imply that children's emotional well-being is a dynamic state, constantly changing through experience and new learning. Several writers have commented on the notion that the brain can change with experience and how the 'Hebbian principle' underpins the application of neuroscience to practice (e.g. Arden, 2019; Cozolino, 2013; Grawe, 2007; Immordino-Yang, 2016; Rossouw, 2014; Siegel, 2012; Van der Kolk, 2014).

The constant adaption of the brain to surrounding circumstances through neuroplasticity suggests that children's narratives of self and others are negotiable and that change is possible throughout the lifespan. Denborough (2014, p. vii) noted that '[o]ur lives and their pathways are not fixed in stone; instead, they are shaped by story'. However, change may take time and reflection as the mind is somewhat resistant to this change. Current narratives influence the features of events to which people attend and the sense they make of what they perceive (Schön, 1983).

Positive experience paves the way for an upward spiral

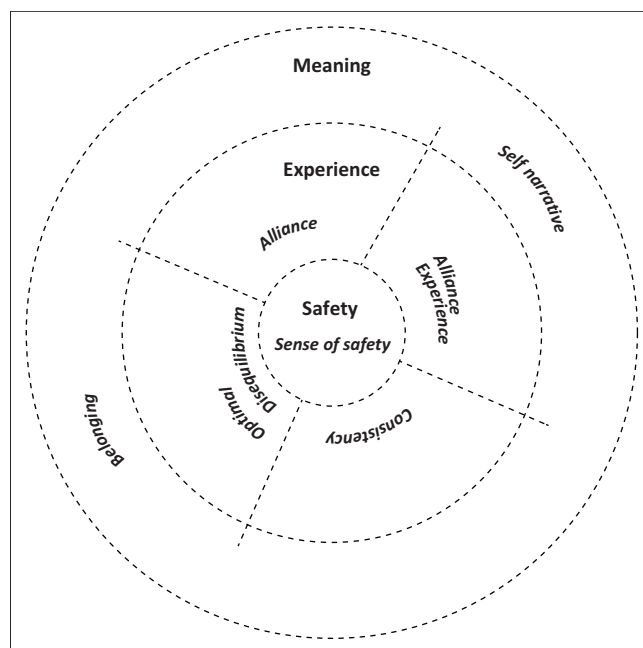
Identifying children's strengths, achievements and positive environmental supports is essential for supporting emotional well-being. The 7 Dimensions framework carries the assumption that positive aspects of children's lives are always present and, in every instance, even within a problem-saturated story, positive lights can be found. Denborough (2014) has referred to these positive aspects, often departures from problem-dominated accounts, as 'sparkling moments'.

Positive approaches bring to the foreground what is 'good' in a person's life (Gilman et al., 2014; Hoare et al., 2017; Scott & Armstrong, 2019; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Understanding young people's emotional well-being through the 7 Dimensions framework is approached from an appreciative viewpoint that seeks solutions from what is strong within dimensions rather than from a deficit stance that foregrounds shortcomings and challenges. Mapping a child's emotional experiences must generate a climate of optimism and hope to facilitate positive growth.

Findings

The 7 Dimensions framework, resulting from the analysis phase, is depicted as dynamic and interrelated, as illustrated in Figure 2.

The 7 Dimensions are: (1) sense of safety; (2) alliance; (3) valence of experience; (4) consistency; (5) optimal disequilibrium; (6) self-narratives, and (7) meaning; identity and belonging. The article continues with a brief discussion of each dimension.



Source: Annan, J. (2022). *7 Dimensions: Children's emotional well-being*. Mary-Egan Publishing

FIGURE 2: The 7 Dimensions of children's emotional well-being framework.

Dimension 1. Sense of safety

Children's sense of safety is central to their well-being. In every interaction, children assign the highest priority to emotional, social and physical safety, a process driven by their primary drive to survive. 'Am I safe?' is a question that all children ask at birth and one that they continue to consider throughout their lives (Cozolino, 2006; Van der Kolk, 2014). In keeping with the survival priority, children's brains and bodies are organised to keep them safe. For instance, the protective structures of the brain, including the amygdala, thalamus and the insula, interact to gauge the level of threat in a novel situation (Berntson et al., 2010; Cozolino, 2013; Kandel, 2018; Rossouw, 2014). Those children whose brains have adapted to safe, predictable and stimulating environments can tolerate greater pressure than those who have not (Perry, 2005) and more readily engage in activity in their learning environments (Côté-Lussier & Fitzpatrick, 2016). They sense a measure of control and are unafraid to exercise agency (cf. Kumpulainen et al., 2014). They can explore and learn, often with others, actively contributing to their experience. That is, they have the freedom within the clear, ever-shifting boundaries they negotiate with caregivers, who are keenly aware of their development, to choose how they respond to the demands of their environments (cf. Siegel, 2012; Steinberg, 2015; Wilson & Devereux, 2014).

Children's sense of safety is fostered in enriched environments where they enjoy secure relationships, positive experiences, consistent patterns of interaction and scaffolded learning (Arden & Linford, 2009; Flouri & Buchanan, 2002; Grawe, 2007; Rossouw, 2014; Siegel & Payne Bryson, 2012). Through children's early experience, they build up templates to help them understand and predict patterns of interaction and make sense of their worlds. These templates are replete with culturally specific ways of interacting (Kitayama & Park, 2010; Park & Huang, 2010). The strength of the alignment of children's learned and anticipated patterns of social interaction with those encountered in new environments impacts their sense of social and emotional safety (e.g. Durie, 2001; Macfarlane et al., 2015; Miller et al., 2020). Sense of safety, while strongly influenced by early experience, is a variable, adaptable state rather than a fixed condition (e.g. Siegel, 2012). It is a dynamic quality that changes in relation to the interaction between children and their worlds. This core dimension, Sense of Safety, is shaped by children's experience in each of the following dimensions.

Dimension 2. Alliance

Alliance refers to the need for 'someone at my side'. People are social beings, living interdependently, adapting in relation to one another as they create valued connections, even when they actively choose to spend their lives separately from others. The quality of children's relationships, including their attachments to caregivers, peer friendships, relationships

with nurturing teachers and connections with community members, has a significant impact on every aspect of their well-being (Arden, 2019; Arseneault, 2018; Blatchford et al., 2016; Cozolino, 2013; Shanker, 2017; Ziegler, 2008). Children are born with internal mechanisms to help them establish attachments, just as their caregivers are primed to connect with them. They are predisposed to creating valuable social connections that support them to make sense of their surroundings and the way people relate to them and others. For example, the simultaneous production of oxytocin by children and their caregivers helps them attach, as do the opiates that are released when a baby sees their caregiver's face (Max Planck Institute for Human Cognitive and Brain Sciences, 2019; Peltola et al., 2018).

The internal and external environments continue to interact as new connections are formed. This phenomenon is visible in interactions between caregivers and young people when more experienced adults support the learning and development of less experienced children. Caregivers become highly attuned to their children's development, gradually reducing their input on shared tasks as young people become increasingly skilled (McLeod et al., 2012; Widjajanti et al., 2019; Wilson & Devereux, 2014; Wood et al., 1976).

Dimension 3. Positive experience

Positive experiences are those associated with children's positive emotions. They occur in circumstances where children feel pleasure, freedom from pain and exciting stimulation. Positive emotions include those that are intensely pleasurable, such as joy, happiness, pride and excitement and those that are quieter, such as curiosity, caring, gratitude and hope (cf. Grawe, 2007; Nakamura & Seligman, 2005; Pekrun, 2014; Perttula et al., 2017; Seligman, 2002, 2011). When immersed in intrinsically rewarding activities, they may experience the positive emotion of 'flow' (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Of course, negative emotions, including disappointment and worry, have an important role to play in the way children make sense of and learn from events. However, their emotional well-being is enhanced when they develop responses that help them manage these negative emotions and when those who support them understand what is happening (Seif & Winston, 2014; Shanker, 2017; Siegel & Payne Bryson, 2012). In difficult times, negative emotions may dominate and become the default position. This happens because the survival priority of the brain and body guides children to notice what is 'wrong'. Fortunately, young people do not need to remain stuck in cycles of negative interpretations, feelings and interactions. They can be carefully and deliberately supported to reframe their views, discover and create solutions and take opportunities to learn and trust that their world can be a comfortable space.

Positive experience is a subjective notion that centres around an individual's perception of pleasure. Notions of pleasure

have personal, social, cultural and historical bases and impact how children interpret and experience events, including their readiness to view interactions through a positive or negative lens. This variability underscores the need to ensure that children perceive a good, but not necessarily exact, alignment of the social interactions and their social knowledge in their everyday environments. There is ample evidence demonstrating that the quality of interaction in children's learning environments influences the trajectories of their emotional development. For example, positive experience during school years has been shown to increase children's self-esteem, school performance, social relationships, mental health and life satisfaction throughout the lifespan (Blatchford et al., 2016; Côté-Lussier & Fitzpatrick, 2016; Craig et al., 2019; Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018; Diener & Chan, 2011; Felitti et al., 1998; Flouri & Buchanan, 2002; Hoyt et al., 2012; Katschnig & Hastedt, 2017; Morris et al., 2021; Reynolds & Ou, 2010; Spengler et al., 2018; Tay & Kuykendall, 2013; Thomson, 2019).

Furthermore, several of the authors above observed that positive school experience affected people's health and well-being well past school days. People who had enjoyed their experience at school were more likely to enjoy better mental and physical health in later life. They also tended to make better choices throughout their life and reported greater life satisfaction.

Dimension 4. Consistency

Children make sense of their surroundings by searching for and discerning patterns of interaction. They feel safe and settled when sufficient consistency exists across their internal and external worlds. That is, they gauge the extent to which their mental models or schemata, socially constructed in lived experience, align with the patterns in the reality of their environments. Good overlaps of familiar social and cultural practices in children's multiple environments support young people to perceive important patterns, allowing their neuroplastic brains to build new learning on sound foundations (cf. Antoine et al., 2018; Bourdieu, 1977; Grawe, 2007; Harter, 2012).

Children seek to reduce any dissonance resulting from discrepancies between expectation and reality. When they feel safe in favourable social environments, they learn and adapt in ways that support their positive development. When the discrepancies are large in unfamiliar or compromised environments, the activities may be overwhelming and difficult to predict. Children may experience a degree of discordance that is difficult to reconcile, their protective systems activating high alert as they control the environment in counterproductive ways (cf. Grawe, 2007; Rossouw, 2014).

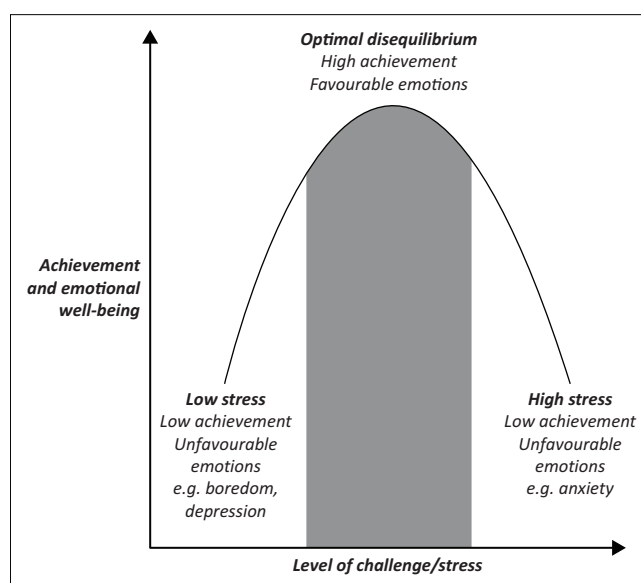
As noted earlier, the brain is neuroplastic and creates new connections as cells fire and wire together. Any two neurons repeatedly firing simultaneously at a synapse will become associated, forming increasingly stronger and enduring

connections. With experience and learning, multiple lateral neural associations form cognitive networks affiliated with concepts or bodies of knowledge (e.g. riding a bicycle or cleaning). Multiple neurons work as a group, the activation of one element supporting the activation of the others (e.g. Kandel, 2018).

The Hebbian principle, when applied to children's emotional well-being, suggests that children thrive when they have repeated positive experiences. When children's learning is coherent and consistent, they can build up robust networks of auto-associated neurons. These networks enable young people to make sense of and act on their worlds with confidence. With repeated positive experiences and consistency within and across settings, young people approach novel tasks expecting further positive experiences. They develop new cognitions that help them to look to their futures with hope and optimism.

Dimension 5. Optimal disequilibrium

Optimal disequilibrium is the condition in which children experience what Grawe (2007) termed, manageable incongruence. It delineates the space between what children can already do and what is too difficult for them (Figure 3). It occurs when children have enough challenges to require new neural connections to be made but are not so unsettled that they are overwhelmed. The band of optimal disequilibrium is inconstant, changing with the varying demands of the environment, the perspectives of the young people involved and the skills they bring to the situation (Masten & Barnes, 2018; Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012). This means that the bandwidth of tolerated disequilibrium differs, not only from one child to another but for an individual as their circumstances change.



Source: Annan, J. (2022). 7 Dimensions: Children's emotional well-being. Mary-Egan Publishing, adapted from Yerkes, R.M., & Dodson, J.D. (1908). The relation of strength of stimulus to rapidity of habit-formation. *Journal of Comparative Neurology and Psychology*, 18(5), 459–482

FIGURE 3: The concept of optimal disequilibrium is transposed on to the Yerkes-Dodson law diagram to illustrate the optimal range.

The brain changes when it needs to change in response to disequilibrium (Arden, 2019; Folensbee, 2007; Kandel, 2018). Therefore, tasks set for children at home, school or in the community must include a measure of novelty and challenge, as well as opportunities to consolidate skills they have mastered. The occasional inconsistency in parenting or unintended changes in routine can offer children the opportunity to learn important life skills. Naturally, the usefulness of novelty and inconsistency depends on these instances being infrequent and not too consequential. If children's experience is too unfamiliar and complex, it is not likely they will acquire the knowledge or skill we intend them to learn. As the brain is always learning, under such circumstances, it may instead learn to avoid similar learning opportunities in the future. When the challenge is too great, children become stressed. They experience high anxiety and reduced reasoning because of impaired memory systems (Arden, 2023; Pittman & Karle, 2015; Siegel & Payne Bryson, 2012).

Dimension 6. Self-narratives

Children, as do adults, live in the narratives they construct from the stories of their experiences (Denborough, 2014; Tomm, 1989; White, 2007). Furthermore, they act consistently with these narratives. Stories differ from narratives in that they have structure, such as an introduction or beginning, a middle part where most of the activity happens, and an end. In contrast, the structure of narratives is not easily discerned. Although narratives comprise what children's minds have gleaned from surveying across the stories in their lives, they comprise largely implicit memories. Children may not be able to fully articulate these stories but can infer meaning from their accessible stories and interactions (e.g. Cattanaach, 2008; Madigan, 2019; White & Epston, 1989). While self-narratives are a powerful force, shaping children's perspectives on themselves and their worlds and guiding their interpretations and responses, they are negotiable. That is, the brain can change and children can rescript their narratives.

Positive self-narratives guide children to view themselves as good, worthy people and to envision their futures through hopeful, optimistic perspectives. Every experience a child has contributes to the narratives they hold about themselves. In turn, these narratives, comprising networks of implicit memories (cf. Arden, 2023; Siegel, 2021; Zimmerman, 2018), influence the selection of features to which children attend in subsequent events. They determine the interpretations children make of observed and directly experienced social interactions. This means that, while self-narratives are everchanging in relation to new experiences, they are somewhat resistant to new information that challenges existing understandings.

Those who work with young people invariably influence, consciously or inadvertently, the narratives of young people through their everyday interactions. For example,

for expediency, everyday language often embeds qualities within a person rather than in the interaction between the person and their world. In such circumstances, children come to believe that problems are inherent, immutable aspects of their being, unaware of their story-writing capabilities and rights (cf. Bird, 2004; Denborough, 2014; Madigan, 2019). It is difficult to progress from this position. The use of language that positions problems and solutions in the interaction between a child and their world helps them to recognise that their self-narratives are negotiable and to perceive the freedom they have to make choices and changes. This process is supported by neuroplasticity.

Dimension 7. Sense of belonging

Sense of belonging refers to the meaning children ascribe to their lives. It includes the purpose of their living and learning and the quality of their social connections. Frankl (1970) proposed that human's search for meaning propelled their lives. The principal driver was the desire to be part of and contribute to something greater than themselves. The entities to which people belong are various and particular. For example, children may view themselves as part of their wider family, a community group, a school group or an order that shares a particular interest.

Dimension 7 concerns children's views of how they fit in the world and beyond. It represents children's understanding of the reasons for their activities and the extent to which they hope and dream. The view of their fit or belonging is influenced by every experience they have. Commenting on the impact of adults' interactions with young people, Seligman (2011, p. 122) noted that they influenced children's narratives of 'the way the world works'. Through social interaction, children develop their identities, their views of the way they are linked to their social worlds and the reasons for their activity. In favourable times, this sense of purpose supports children to experience fulfilment in their days. In less favourable periods, it helps them to endure and make sense of their journeys (Kushner, 1970).

The two components of the Meaning circle, Self-narratives and Sense of belonging are inextricably linked. They gauge the meaning children ascribe to their lives as they consider the following questions:

- Am I connected?
- Am I wanted and chosen?
- How do I fit?
- How do I contribute?
- Where am I going?
- What is the purpose?
- Do I matter?

Discussion

Configuration of the 7 Dimensions framework

This article has, to this point, considered each of the 7 Dimensions of children's emotional well-being in isolation.

However, in practice, the 7 Dimensions interact with one another. For example, strengthening alliances can support children to feel safe and increase their sense of belonging. Similarly, when children have dominantly positive experiences, their observations and interpretations of these experiences are likely to contribute to positive self-narratives, greater senses of safety and connection. The 7 Dimensions framework has been configured to help practitioners understand these interactions further so that support programmes for young people can involve relevant activity, build on positive foundations and focus assistance on pivotal points.

The set of 7 Dimensions initially emerged as a simple list of domains, each supported and justified by the neuroscience and psychology research that underpinned it. In the initial stage of the development process, the dimensions are presented in no exact order. They were then mapped in relation to their role in emotional well-being, and from this map, a dynamic framework was built (cf. progression in Figure 4).

The map of emotional well-being was generated by examining each dimension and its research-supported theoretical links with other dimensions. For example, Immordino-Yang (2016) noted that positive early experience is associated with children's ability to interpret others' actions and to infer their intentions. This example linked Positive Experiences with Alliance. In another example, the ChildFund Alliance (2016) considered children's Sense of Safety in educational settings in 41 countries across the world. The researchers' findings indicated that views of safety at school were associated with factors such as school feeling like home and freedom from the risk of abuse and violence (Positive Experience), positive teacher-student relationships (Alliance), students and teachers who followed school rules (Consistency) and a place where children can get a good education and learn (Optimal Disequilibrium). The linking process allowed each dimension to be positioned on the map in accordance with its role in children's emotional well-being. Figure 5 illustrates the map from which the dynamic framework was developed.

The organisation of the 7 Dimensions involved two phases. The first involved searching for patterns in the dimensions. Two categories of dimensions emerged in this process: goals and mechanisms. The second phase of the analysis involved

layering of the dimensions to illustrate the generative or emergent nature of each.

Goals and conditions

Four of the 7 Dimensions were placed together on the map because they represented a set of goals that closely aligned with Epstein's (1993) basic human needs (orientation, attachment, pleasure or pain avoidance and self-enhancement). The four dimensions on this map were labelled: Safety, Alliance, Positive Experience and Self-narratives and were placed on the left hand of the map.

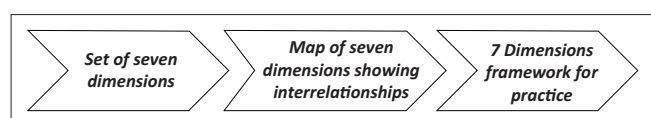
The three remaining dimensions, namely, 'Consistency', 'Optimal Disequilibrium', and 'Meaning', represented conditions observed to impact the achievement of the goals. They are shown on the right side of the map. Control, one face of the safety dimension, was also included on the right because the condition of perceived control is a necessary condition for Sense of Safety. Perception of Control comprised young people's beliefs about their freedom to respond in ways they chose and the liberty afforded them to exercise agency.

Generative and emergent dimensions

The bilateral map was then divided into three levels: 'Safety', 'Experience' and 'Meaning'. Sense of Safety formed the map's core as it was fundamental to children's well-being, a basic need emerging from the fulfilment of other basic needs (Dahlitz & Rossouw, 2014; Grawe, 2007). Similarly, 'Meaning', including the sense of self and belonging to something bigger than oneself as an individual, was positioned as the encompassing outer circle of the map. Meaning was considered to be a higher-order construct that emerged from experience. The other four dimensions, namely 'Alliance', 'Positive Experience', 'Consistency', and 'Optimal Disequilibrium', were placed between safety at the core and meaning on the outer layer. This intermediate circle was named the 'Experience' layer to emphasise the pivotal role each of these mediating dimensions played in supporting young people's senses of safety and meaning. The dimensions in the intermediate 'experience' layer were viewed as the most amenable to direct modification with indirect effects on the core 'safety' and outer 'meaning' layers.

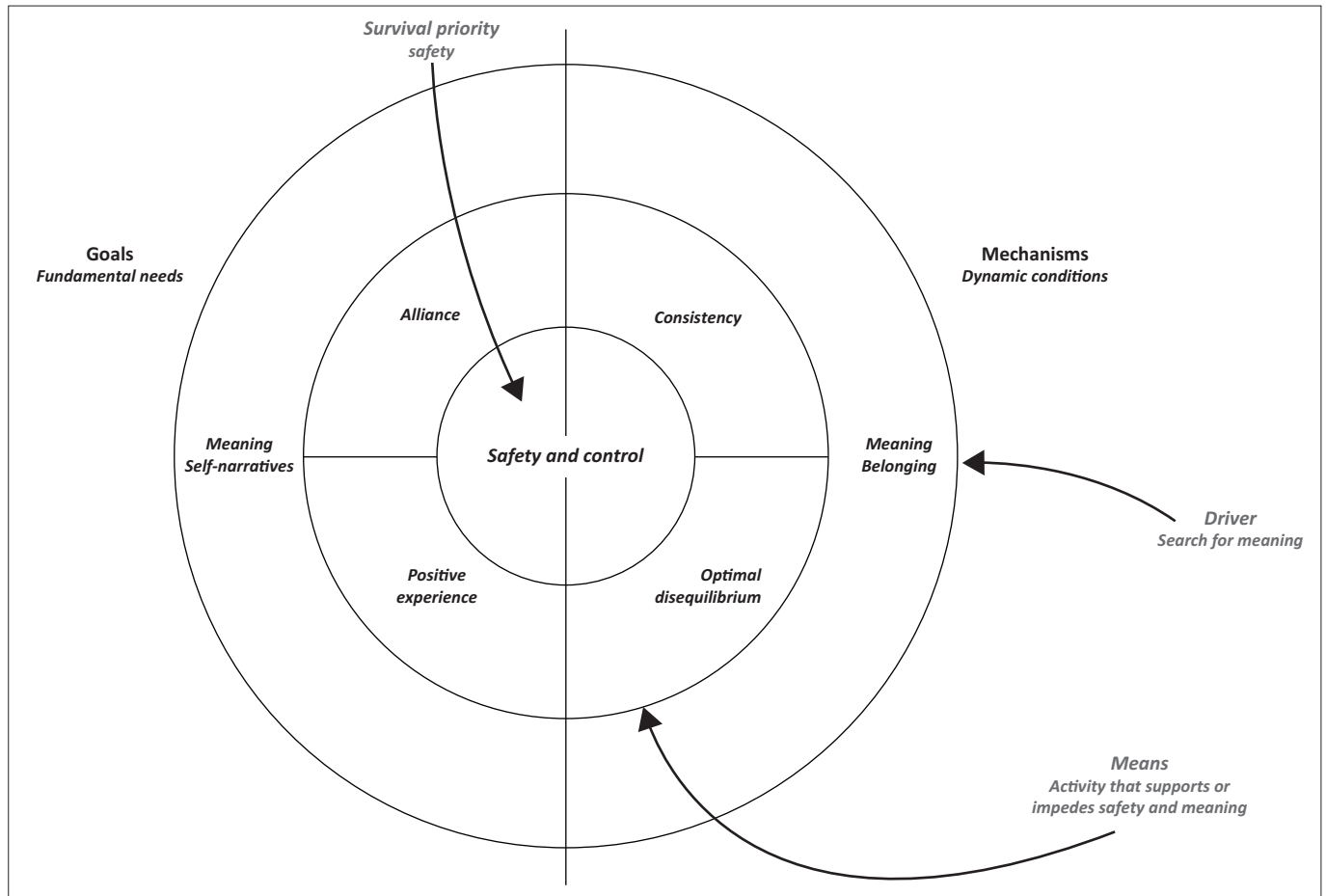
Implications for practice

The dynamic 7 Dimensions framework is intended as a guide to help practitioners attend to the most relevant aspects of children's well-being, to understand the interactions between children and their various environments and to build new developments on existing supports. It functions as a backdrop for understanding and enhancing children's well-being, whether the work involves responsively supporting individual children in context or pro-actively creating environments that support the healthy emotional development of young people in schools, families and communities. The framework depicts emotional well-



Source: Annan, J. (2022). *7 Dimensions: Children's emotional well-being*. Mary-Egan Publishing, adapted from Yerkes, R. M., & Dodson, J. D. (1908). The relation of strength of stimulus to rapidity of habit-formation. *Journal of Comparative Neurology and Psychology*, 18(5), 459–482.

FIGURE 4: The progressive development of the 7 Dimensions of children's emotional well-being practice framework.



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FIGURE 5: Map of the seven dimensions in relation to their role in emotional well-being.

being as a construct that is constantly changing as young people respond to events in the world around them. The three layers of the 7 Dimensions framework are continually interacting, moving interdependently with one another (cf. Figure 2).

The greatest understanding of young people's emotional experiences can be achieved when practitioners work alongside the children involved and with those who nurture and care for them. Together, they can discover existing strengths and supports and build on these to create new everyday opportunities to enhance children's emotional well-being. Collaboration helps to ensure that understandings in each dimension make sense to those closest to children and reflect the cultural knowledge, perspectives and practices of children's familiar environments.

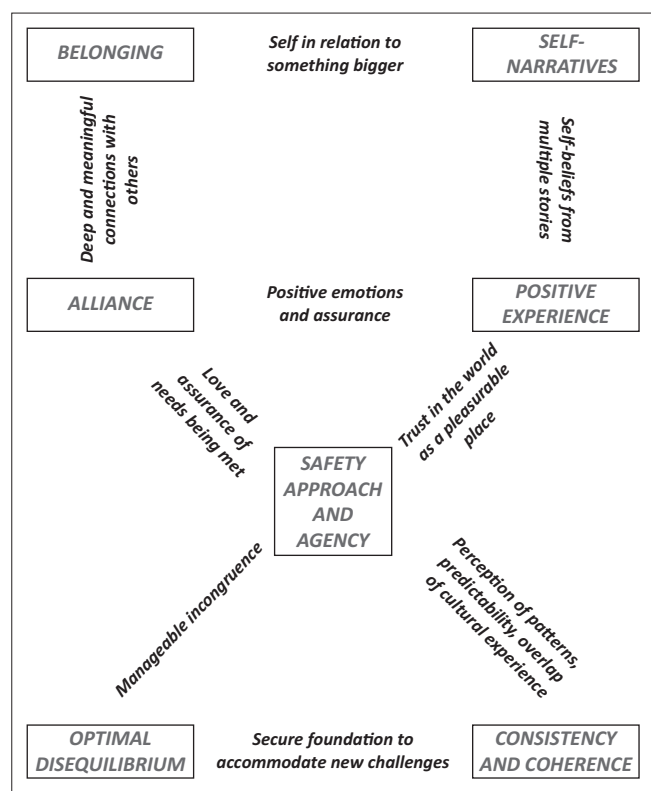
Analysis of information across the framework involves examining the links or relationships among the dimensions. By mapping the dimensions, practitioners can identify hubs or pivotal points at which deliberate support would be most effective. As mentioned, awareness of the positive aspects of children's emotional experiences allows new learning to be built on supportive platforms. Knowledge of positive

moments is critical to designing interventions that are engaging, are minimally intrusive and do not encroach on aspects of children's lives that function to protect them.

Naturally, all seven dimensions are related to one another, and, in effect, these interrelationships are constantly changing (Figure 6). Although all dimensions may be targeted for direct support, in practice, it is generally advantageous to focus on the mediating dimensions in the Experience layer in order to indirectly and most effectively support increased Sense of Safety and Meaning. While Safety and Meaning can be directly supported, they may also be considered indicators of emotional well-being, reflecting the quality of children's alliances, the valence of their experience, the degree of consistency in their lives and the extent of experience within their optimal disequilibrium range.

In sum, the 7 Dimensions of emotional well-being framework has been designed to support professional practice that:

- Maintains an overview of children's emotional well-being.
- Identifies relevant dimensions for particular situations.
- Is understood within the cultural contexts of those involved.



Source: Annan, J. (2022). *7 Dimensions: Children's emotional well-being*. Mary-Egan Publishing

FIGURE 6: Figure showing ways in which dimensions are interrelated.

- Ensures new solutions are built on positive foundations.
- Focuses directly on pivotal or mediating dimensions and indirectly on emergent dimensions.
- Ensures that intervention activity is minimally intrusive in children's lives.
- Preserves children's existing supports and strengths.

Conclusion

The 7 Dimensions conceptual framework is proposed as a navigational tool for understanding children's broad emotional experiences. It is designed to help practitioners who work with young people to map and enhance emotional well-being in relevant and pivotal areas. The framework, founded upon neuroscientific and psychological research and the interactive theories of human development that they support, carries several assumptions that shape the way it is used. Well-being is located not within individuals but in the interaction between each child and their world. In this way, well-being is not viewed as a static quality but a dynamic, context-dependent condition. The framework is positively oriented, with new solutions invariably built on existing strengths and supports.

This article considers the content of each dimension and the rationale for its placement in the framework. The set of dimensions comprises both goals and conditions for meeting these goals. It depicts well-being as operating at three levels. At the core level is Sense of Safety with Perception of Control. Enveloping the framework in the outer layer is Meaning,

which comprises self-narratives and sense of belonging. Between meaning and safety is the experience layer, the mid-layer that contains the dimensions that primarily mediate the emergence of safety and meaning. The Experience dimensions are 'Alliance', 'Positive Experience', 'Consistency', and 'Optimal Disequilibrium'. These four dimensions are the most amenable to direct support.

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Author's contribution

J.A.A. has declared sole authorship of this research article.

Ethical considerations

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Data availability

This is a conceptual article resulting from the review of multiple texts over time. References to the principal works that have contributed to the framework are available.

Disclaimer

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