

Ontario Association for
Infant & Child Development,
Windsor, ON
10/20/16

Engagement

A Promising Theory for Human Functioning

Robin McWilliam

The University of Alabama

Success

- Success at age 4... Not peeing in your pants
- Success at age 12... Having friends
- Success at age 16... Having a driver's license
- Success at age 20... Having sex
- Success at age 35... Having money
- Success at age 50... Having money
- Success at age 65... Having sex
- Success at age 70... Having a driver's license
- Success at age 75... Having friends
- Success at age 80... Not peeing in your pants

Outline

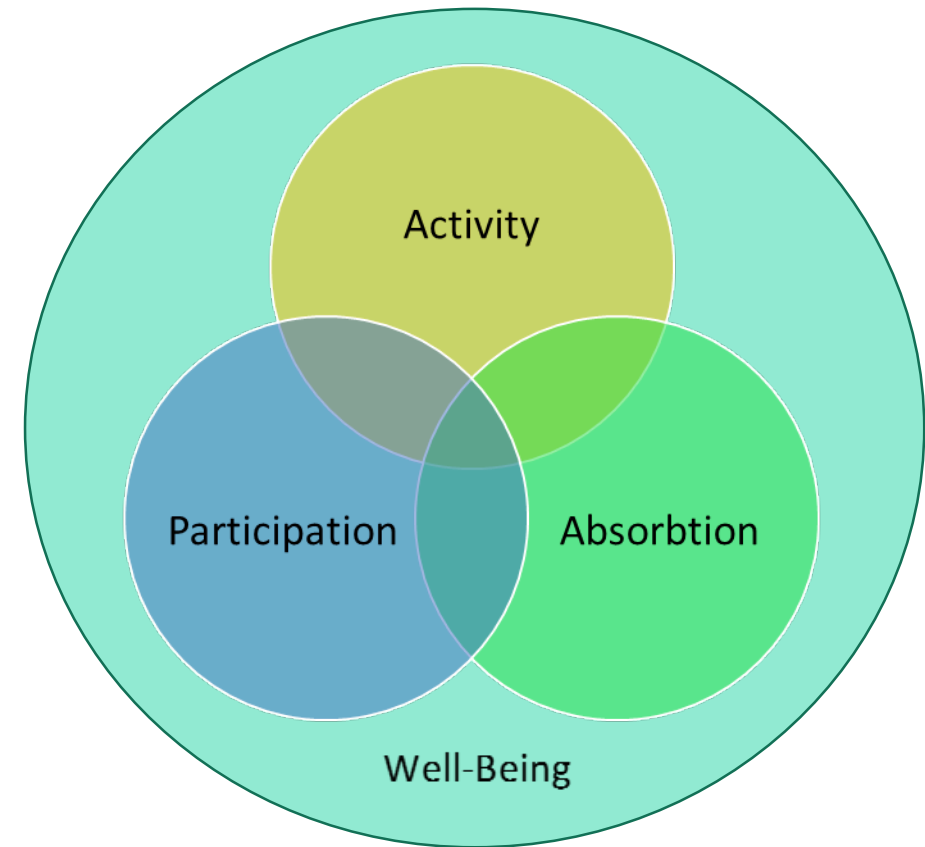
- Definition
- Importance
 - Theory
- Implications
 - Human ecological system

Definition

- Original: Young children
- The amount of time a child spends interacting with his environment in a developmentally and contextually appropriate manner, at different levels of competence

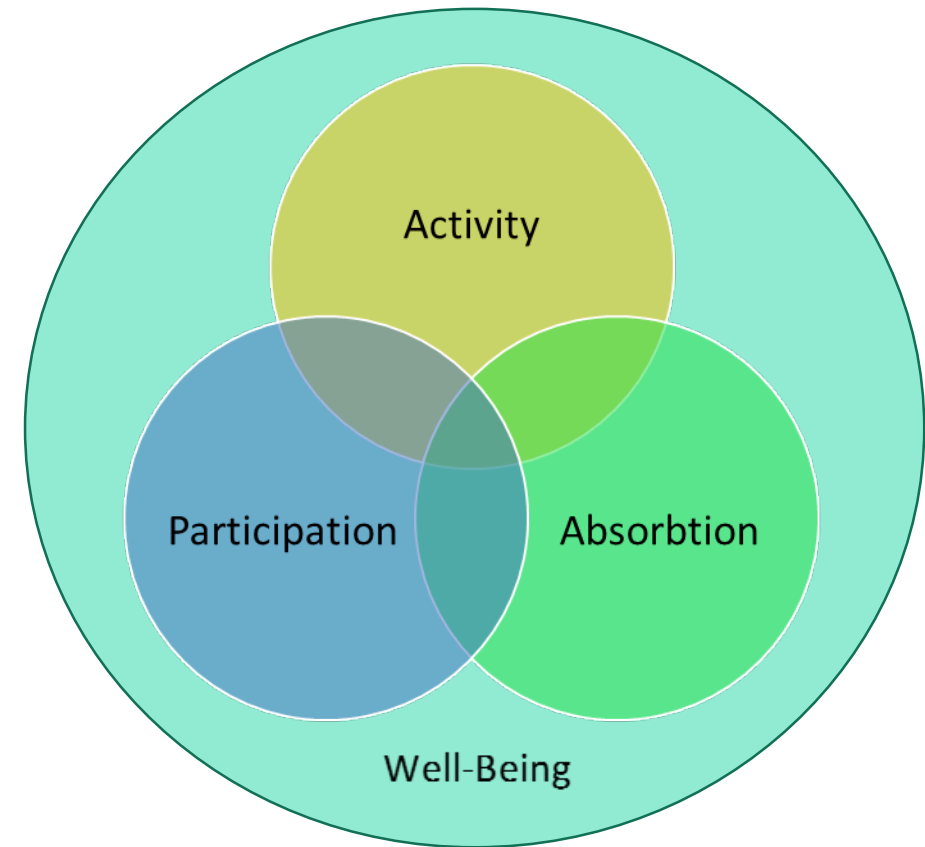
Lifespan Definition

To be engaged means to be active—actually doing something, not necessarily mobile but busy.



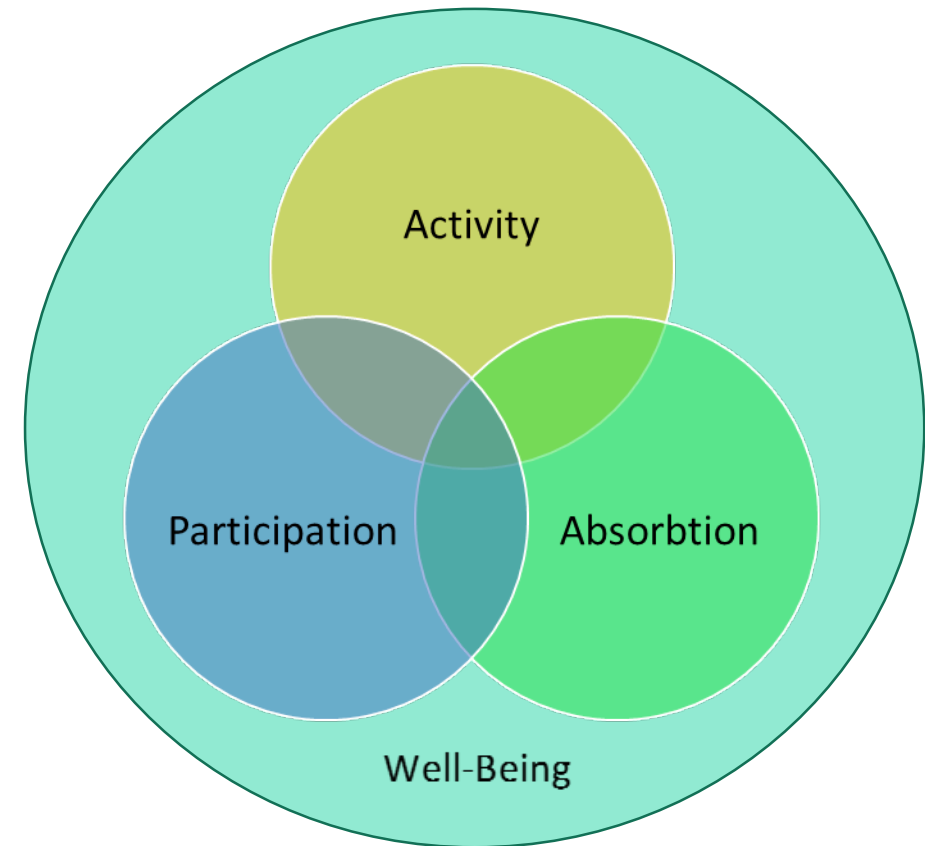
Lifespan Definition

It also means to be absorbed—deeply interested and focused.



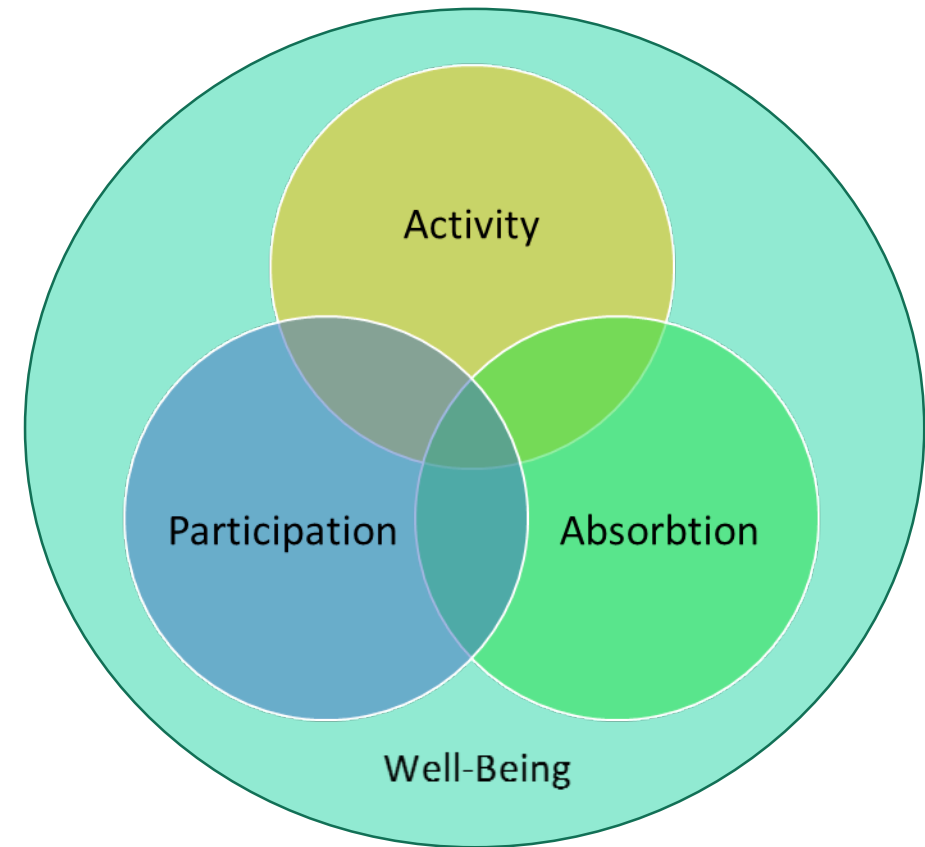
Lifespan Definition

And to participate, which is related to goodness of fit: the extent to which a person's abilities and interests match the demands of his or her environment.



Lifespan Definition

Finally, to be engaged means to have a sense of well-being—of contentment with one's activity, absorption, and participation.



Importance

- Vulnerable children
- Diverse families
- Professionals



Father and Child Foundation, NZ

Importance for Vulnerable Children

- Child cannot learn if a child is nonengaged
- Environments tend to discourage engagement
- Passive & active nonengagement



The Telegraph, UK

Importance for Diverse Families

- Families in poverty
- Families with mental health problems
- Families lacking knowledge of child rearing



© John Partipilo/AmericanPoverty.org

Daily Mail

Importance for Professionals

- Professional growth
 - Professional associations
 - Reading research
 - Avoiding faddish, non-EBPs
- Geeking out on the profession
- Knowing what happens elsewhere
- Pushing for implementation of best practices
- Developing COPs



Newberry College

Table 1. Dimensions of Engagement by Developmental Stage

Developmental Stage	Activity	Absorption	Participation	Well-Being
Young Children	Sensorimotor levels	Fixed eye gaze; practice	Independence in routines	Meaningful participation in routines
Children/Youth	Play, exploration, high activity levels	Screens, intense interests	School, sports, religion, family	Change from external to internal definition
Young Adults	Driving, independence, leaving home	Relationships, including friendships, work	Groups and pairs, finding niches	Doing as well as everyone else; fulfilment
Middle-Aged	Work, recreation, travel	Work, pastimes, family	Work, religion, community, family	Financial security, family, fulfilment
Elderly	Mobility, health	Family, pastimes	Independent activities, community	Health, family, security

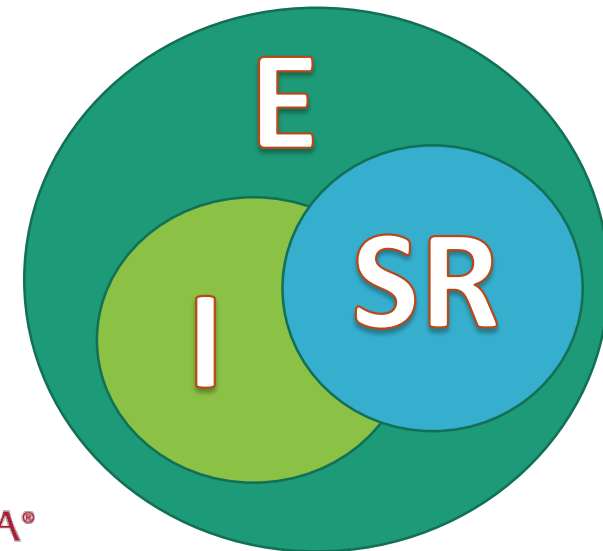
Theory

- Social-emotional development
- Mental health
- Learning
- Functioning
- Resilience
- Caregiving
- Teaching styles



Engagement and Social-Emotional Development

- “Appropriate behavior” means no challenging behaviors
- Components of engagement (EISR):
 - Independence
 - Social relationships
 - Communication
 - Getting along with others



Engagement and Mental Health

- Activity in young children helps prevent internalizing problems
- By definition, it helps prevent externalizing problems
- In older children and adults, can serve as a distraction
- Promotes healthy functioning

Engagement and Learning

- Typically developing: Children learn from participation & from independent trial and error
- Children with disabilities: Same + incidental teaching
 - Engage
 - Follow
 - Elicit
 - Reinforce

Engagement and Functioning

- ICF-CY
- In early childhood, participation = engagement
- Minor controversy:



Engagement and Resilience

- Resilience is overcoming a bad situation
- Surviving through nonengagement is survival
- Surviving while being engaged/participating is resilience

Caregiving

- Being present with children
- Balance between presence and indulgence
 - Promote EISR
 - Teach self-regulation

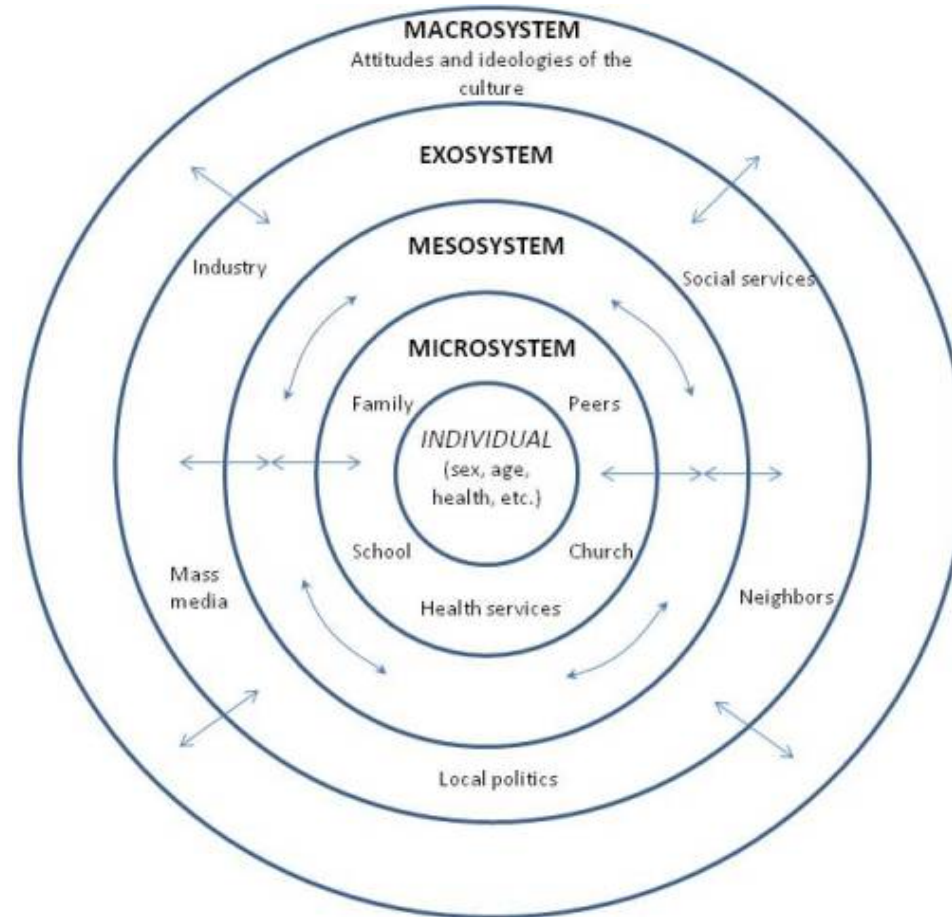
5 EB Parenting Practices

- Talking
- Reading
- Playing
- Teaching
- Teaching to behave

Engagement and Teaching Styles

- McWilliam, Scarborough, & Ho
- Affect was a better predictor of engagement than were specific teaching behaviors
 - Responsiveness
 - Physical contact
 - Tone of voice
 - Facial expression

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory



Implications

1. Macrosystem: Society has strengths (e.g.,) and weaknesses (e.g., insufficient play spaces for poor children,
2. Exosystem: Address drivers (leadership, training, coaching, policies) to implementation of an engagement focus
3. Mesosystem: Focus on EISR, instead of dev domains, diagnoses, or disciplines (the dastardly Ds)
4. Microsystem: Provide rich social and physical environments
5. Individual: Teach to be engaged and from engagement

Take-Home Messages

- Promote infants', toddlers', and preschoolers' meaningful participation in their daily routines
- Support caregivers to enjoy their routines with their children—from waking up to the goodnight kiss
- Organize services to maximize intervention and minimize complexity