

Central Tenets of Natural Learning Relationships

Josette Luvmour, PhD & Ba Luvmour, MA



Introduction

Every great civilization, from ancient India to Western Civilization, has studied and described the growth patterns of children. In our times there has been an explosion of interest in the field of child development. Developmental psychologists such as Mahler and Gessel, cognitive psychologists including Piaget and Kohlberg, humanistic psychologists such as Maslow and Rogers, transpersonal psychologists such as Wilber and Grof, anthropologists such as Bateson and Mead, and holistic educators including Dewey, Steiner, Gardner and Montessori have all led the way. There are many others of course, and their contributions are indelibly valuable.

Natural Learning Relationships is both a synthesis and extension of the great works in child development. Easy to assimilate and easy to apply, Natural Learning Relationships brings the world of the child into focus. It is a comprehensive whole-child view of child development. It asks two questions: “How do children perceive themselves and the world?” and “What is health for the child?” The Natural Learning Relationships view is that the child is inherently whole and worthwhile as they are at each stage of development.

Although Natural Learning Relationships refers to and draws from the authors and theorists named above, it has grown primarily through fieldwork combined with research. Every one of its tenets, applications and remedies has been first observed, and then reconfirmed from thousands of fieldwork experiences. More than a theory, Natural Learning Relationships is an easily assimilated and applied appreciation of the way children grow and learn that promotes their well-being. What follows are the basic tenets of Natural Learning Relationships.

Overview

1. Children grow in life-stages in the environment. These life-stages have had many different names in the various developmental models. Each human develops as part of the environment in which he or she grows. Development is adaptive in relationship with others.

- There is more to these developmental stages than the simply noting the behaviors of the child.
- There is a deep motivation for well-being at the core of each life stage. Natural Learning Relationships calls this force the inherent *organizing principle* toward well-being. The organizing principle takes the qualities, capacities and talents of the age and uses it toward the well-being of the child. Its nature changes developmentally.

- Natural Learning Relationships names each stage according to the primary locus of learning for the child.

2. Children are whole and worthwhile as they are. They are not incomplete because they are not yet adults. Natural Learning Relationships respects the child’s inherent wholeness by using the word *being* as a suffix to describe the developmental stages. “Being” means *nothing essential is missing*.

- Natural Learning Relationships has carefully articulated definitions for each of the terms and concepts used. These definitions are consistent with the standards of the profession and the fieldwork observations. They are available on the web site.

3. Each family (and educator) can adapt Natural Learning Relationships to their unique circumstances and organizational culture. Every child, no matter his or her learning style, predisposition, life-style and combination of multiple intelligences can be nurtured and empowered through developmental sensitivity.

- Thus, Natural Learning Relationships only finds its completion in the way each and every practitioner adapts and applies it in relationship with children.

- If the developmental needs of the child are not met then the child will bring attention to these unmet needs. Lacking adult tools, the child's behavior is often interpreted as *acting out* by adults. Were the developmental need satisfied, the acting out behaviors would diminish and then disappear.

- All successful communication with a child depends on understanding the *language* of the child's developmental stage.

- The organizing principle takes the qualities, capacities and talents of the age and uses it toward the well-being of the child. The nature of the organizing principle changes in each successive stage of the child's development.

- Maximum health is accessed when the child is supported to organize toward well-being.

4. *Adult and child develop together.* By providing for the stage-specific needs of the child, adults also come to greater health and contact their own well-being. Properly responding to the expressions of the organizing principle in young people can often precipitate a simultaneous development in adults. When adults went through childhood development, the environment had certain limitations. These limitations prevented full access to inner capacities and total well-being. As the adult engages the developmental moment of the child, the adult has the ability to self-reflect. With self-reflection, the past can be considered and then integrated with greater self-knowledge. Reflection and integration create an opening for something new to emerge. Usually, this integration precipitates a deeper, fuller, and more connected relationship with the organizing principle in the adult, as well as in the child. Through the act of nurturing development in children new-meaning, greater self-knowledge, and well-being can emerge in the adult.

This relationship serves the deepest development of both children and adults. It can be viewed as mutual development toward greater self-knowledge. It is a vital example of opportunities naturally built into processes of human developmental. Recognition of the mutual

development opportunities inherent in nurturing children can change chauvinism towards children.

The Developmental Process

There are four primary life stages in childhood.

- The first stage comprises approximately the first 7 years of life. For this stage, we coined the term *BodyBeing*.

- The second is from 8 thru 12 years old. We call this stage *FeelingBeing*.

- The third stage goes from the ages of 13 thru to 18. This stage is called *IdealBeing*.

- The last stage starts around 19 or so and ends around 23 years of age. We call this stage *ReasonableBeing*.

There are hesitations within the developmental process. Evolving and growing is not one straight, linear process; like all of nature, human development runs in cycles. Natural Learning Relationships specifies the characteristics and signs of hesitations and when they occur. Also, there are three phases within each developmental stage. The phases are 1) *receptivity*, 2) *trial and error*, and 3) *competency*. At the end of the competency phase of each developmental stage, the child's perceptual ability radically changes. Thus, the child becomes available for new learning in the receptivity phase of the new stage.

Nature accomplishes this movement between developmental stages in the whole-child. Thus, there are shifts in hormones, physicality, brain development, emotional sophistication, and thinking. This yields shifts in all perceptions of self, other, family, community and society. Natural Learning Relationships (NLR) describes the over-arching context in which these changes occur. NLR also specifies exactly when and how the changes in perception occur throughout childhood.

In each developmental stage there is an organizing principle expressing itself through the child and guiding the child toward well-being and the actualization of their true nature. There are psychological and emotional nourishments which nurture the true health and wholeness of the child toward this self-actualization. Every family and learning environment can and must

find the way to supply the developmental needs and nourishments for the particular child in that particular environment.

In a much abbreviated form we will outline here the developmental stages, organizing principles and the psychological and emotional nourishments that nurture well-being in the child. Any family member that supplies the child with these nourishments grows in health, simultaneously gaining greater access to his or her own well-being.

BodyBeing

The first stage is called BodyBeing. This name reflects that learning occurs primarily through the body.

- The primary organizing principle of this stage is a developed sense of *rightful place*. It entails an exploration of their environment for anything which generates or supports safe and secure physical exploration.
- The secondary organizing principles are the ability to create *boundaries* and to develop *personal strength*. Everything in the child's experience organizes toward the exploration of physical, emotional and psychological boundaries in their environment, developing the ability to recognize boundaries and know themselves as strong and able.
- The psychological and emotional sensory-rich nourishments that nurture the child to access and develop these capacities are: *loving touch, security, flexibility, warmth, and physical nourishment*.
- The language of BodyBeing children is *sensation*. The language of sensation is the medium by which the child both receives and transmits information.
- The key attributes of this developmental stage include egotism, exploration of the physical world and an ability to make *sensory-based* maps of both the physical and psychological environment.
- All the *marvels* of this age (e.g., language, fine motor skills, the ability to make the body adapt to its social and physical environment) can be understood through appreciation of the organizing

principle toward well-being, the nourishments, the language for best communication, and the attributes.

- Ultimately, the proper developmental diet yields the child with direct experience of a sense of rightful place in his or her body and in the family. When children know they belong, they are strong and know their boundaries.

FeelingBeing

The second developmental stage is called FeelingBeing. This name reflects that learning is primarily through feelings.

- The primary organizing principle of this stage is developing the ability to *trust*. Everything in the child's experience is organized towards becoming aware of relationships in life which are based on feelings.
- The secondary organizing principle is *reciprocal cooperation* with people who are trustworthy. Everything in the child's experience organizes towards reciprocal cooperation, and if one is not trustworthy the child often resists cooperation.
- The nourishments that nurture these developing capacities are: *feeling mentors, honesty, fairness, adventure, adaptability, and justice* (a newly forming ability to discern whether people are emotionally engaging with others appropriately and whether situations are appropriately just to people.)
- The language of FeelingBeing children is *feelings*. It is the medium by which children this age both receive and transmit information.
- The key attributes of this stage are community relationships, searching the environment for anything which generates or supports information about feelings; an awareness of personal mortality with an increasing interest in metaphysical mystery which often expresses itself in the ability to experience *transcendent* feelings; the developing of values which correspond with feelings; a developing relationship to conscience; and seeking inspirational feelings (often through nature, drama, music, teaching stories, and myth).

- Ultimately the proper developmental diet yields a deep, trusting connection with self, family, community, and nature. This is a great gift and absolutely fundamental to future growth. When a child trusts, he or she has an excellent ability to easily perceive the feeling world of others in any given situation. When a child experiences trust, he or she is more likely to cooperate in the name of genuine relationship.

IdealBeing

The third developmental stage is called IdealBeing. This name reflects that learning takes place through the exploration of the teen's ideals in a variety of social environments.

- The primary organizing principle of this stage is *autonomy*, which is self-governance that involves social ability and skill in relationships. It is not about isolated individualism.
- The secondary organizing principles are: *identity construction, freedom and personal power*. These powerful tools are in the service of the development of well-being and organization of a healthy self.
- The nourishments that nurture these developing capacities are: *sensitive respect, the opportunity to express and act upon ideals, peer contact, respect of personal space, and challenges within the realm of success*. Sensitive respect means that we support the teen's search for environments that support his/her core nature. It also means that we respect the identities that are *tried on* during this search. Sensitive respect calls for engagement that serves the exploration of many identities so the teen can develop an identity that is an expression of their core nature.
- The language of this stage is *inquiry into the teen's ideals* and the language *of their ideals*. It is the medium by which IdealBeing teenagers both receive and transmit information. Inquiry is the best tool elders have for understanding the teen's ideals.
- Key attributes include an unceasing exploration of individualization, an intense insecurity that creates friction when asserting and a growing awareness of

personal responsibility. IdealBeing teenagers often surprise themselves as they try on many identities and experiment with identities until a match with the teen's core nature is satisfied. An identity naturally drops away when the teen decides it is not serving his/her core nature. Teens often swing between freedom and responsibility, between ideals and shadow exploration, between assertion and insecurity, between risk-taking and the need to experience success, between individuation and peer conformity.

- Ultimately, the proper developmental diet yields a solid sense of self, which provides the power and freedom to forge ahead in the now recognizably uncertain world.

ReasonableBeing

The fourth and last developmental stage of childhood is ReasonableBeing. This name reflects that learning takes place through an ability to step into another's perspective and then re-organize in relationship to that.

- The primary organizing principles of this stage are: *substantive values, interconnectedness, humor and humility*.
- The secondary organizing principles are: *intentionality, incisiveness and systems creation*.
- The nourishments that nurture the developing capacities in this stage are: *mature recognition*, which has four aspects: 1) *Recognition of commitment*—the individual thrives on recognition for the capacity to commit, which arises when their eternal values are touched. 2) *Recognition of equality*—the mystery cannot be defined by anyone. Therefore any reasonable inquiry should be seen as valid and honored. 3) *Achievement recognition*—to discover the values behind ideals and become more complex in their expression through systems is a sparkling achievement. Recognition of this ability feeds ReasonableBeing. 4) *Recognition of recognition*—this refers to the ability to self observe and to accept ourselves as responsible for the

meaning that we perceive. It is the basis for a comprehensive self knowledge.

- The language of this stage is *dialogue into meaning*—the medium by which ReasonableBeing individuals both receive and transmit information. The dialogue is toward whole-systems logic and often has informed research as a basis. (Research can be into anything, i.e., travel, relationships, academics, etc.)
- Key attributes include a fully mature relationship to both past and future and the ability to know and monitor the health of the capacities developed in the previous three developmental stages. ReasonableBeing individuals also have the ability to crunch data into systems and through those systems operate on and change the world. This age individual explores all forms of knowing, from the scientific to the artistic to the spiritual. Genuinely reasoned action is in accord with the developed capacities and organizing principles of the three previous stages. It is not merely intellectual.
- Ultimately, the proper developmental diet yields self-knowledge that is interconnected with all aspects of the known. This both provides self-confidence to create systems and leaves the individual humble and aware of how extraordinary life is.

The Applications

Natural Learning Relationships differentiates between conflict resolution and *reunifying* families. Conflict resolution refers to in-the-moment difficulties that need relationship to resolve. Reunification refers to long-term lifestyle changes for the whole family to restore health and well-being.

Natural Learning Relationships offers many, many conflict resolution tools. These tools include developmentally appropriate choices for pre-prevention, prevention, and in the *heat-of-the moment* action.

- Reunification requires an understanding of how to describe and diagnose dysfunction. Natural

Learning Relationships provides a cutting edge diagnostic approach consonant with the fields of holistic medicine. Many MD's, RN's, chiropractors, naturopathic physicians, pediatricians and acupuncturists, as well as many therapists and social workers have endorsed the Natural Learning Relationships approach.

- Reunification also requires a concise view of the family system. Based on excellent research in family systems and fieldwork, Natural Learning Relationships allows lay people to gain insight into their families and educational environments.
- Given developmental knowledge, skillful diagnoses and appreciation of the family system, literally hundreds of reunification options appear. Of the greatest importance, most people are able to create their own re-unifiers. They find new lifestyle choices that serve the entire family and are possible in their own family systems.
- Thus, whether it is conflict resolution or reunification of out of balance family systems, Natural Learning Relationships creates a medium in which people can stay connected in the face of difficulty. NLR allows problems to be approached without adversarial posturing.

Other applications of Natural Learning Relationships

Communication only makes sense within developmental guidelines.

- Natural Learning Relationships offers developmental guidelines with precision. Adults are then able to make communication choices appropriate to the moment yet within the child's developmental capacities.
- All meaningful pedagogic discourse depends upon understanding the capacities and information processing modes of the developmental stage. When the pedagogic relationship falls within developmental guidelines, learning is much more enjoyable and enduring.

- Natural Learning Relationships specifies how to meet the developmental needs of children. The school or family is then able to create a curriculum that honors that unique child in his/her unique world so that connection and communication can be maintained.

- Academic mastery, within the child's blend of his/her native intelligences, is easily accomplished when pedagogic discourse is offered within a context of developmental sensitivity.

- Likewise, interpersonal learning, so fundamental for healthy relationship, is also easily accomplished within a context of developmental sensitivity.

More applications are available. Here are a few instances:

- Teachers use it to help students become ready to learn by establishing healthy, viable relationships with their students with developmental acumen.

- Parents use it to raise healthy well-balanced children and rediscover the joy in parenting.

- Recreation teachers use it to choose age-appropriate activities for their groups.

- Divorcing couples use it to mitigate the traumas of separation and divorce.

- Those families blending children from previous marriages use it for creating opportunities for positive bonding.

- Therapists use it both for diagnosis and for creating opportunities for integration and remedy.

- Extended families use it to reestablish intimacy.

- Storytellers use Natural Learning Relationships to choose story, vocabulary, and context for their audiences.

- Educators of all kinds use it to design curriculum that meets the developmental imperatives of the child.

Conclusion

This, then, is the Natural Learning Relationships portrait of health in the child:

- First, a sense of rightful place in the body, in the family and in the environment;

- Building on that foundation comes ability to trust in relationship to self, family and community;

- Following these two comes autonomy and the ability to self-govern in the individual and as an ideal for society;

- Last, interconnectedness, humor and humility, through dialogue, activation of substantive values, and systemic comprehension.

The insights of Natural Learning Relationships that address the organizing principle in each developmental stage toward well-being and self-actualization are in close accord with all the great workers in the fields of Humanistic Psychology and Holistic Education. It is entirely supported by the research of cognitive and developmental psychology, physical and cultural anthropology, general semantics, and all the hard sciences, including brain research.

The capacities developing in each of these four stages are inherent. They come to consciousness in the child when they are supported and carefully nurtured in the child's environment. Children with full access to their developmental well-being are able to and often do experience that which is most meaningful, beautiful and true in their developmental stage and in their lives. Children then have all that they need to embrace their moment in life and their destiny.

Thus, Natural Learning Relationships is a seminal understanding. It is non-dogmatic, nonsectarian, and non-pejorative. As it only reaches completion when it is applied, it is useful in all situations with children, families, and education. It is for this reason that child development has been called the Rosetta Stone of cultural evolution. When properly understood, child development brings not only the child to health, but also the whole family. It is people who comprise society and it is healthy people who will make a healthy society. Natural Learning Relationships is a significant step in that direction.

About The Authors

Josette Luvmour, PhD

Specialist in Human Development, author, consultant, educator, and public speaker

As an educator, writer, developmental consultant, and public speaker, Josette specializes in the fields of child and adult development, adult transformational learning, sustainable family relationships, and how adult and child grow together. She is also a speaker on positive relationships with children; and has worked with children, parents, and whole families in seminars, family programs, and in schools since 1985.

In addition, she teaches graduate courses at Self-Design Graduate Institute and Antioch University—teaching adults since 1985.

She is the author of *Grow Together*, as well as the co-author of six books and numerous journal articles and chapters that focus on building positive relationships with children.

Josette has extensive independent school experience from all vantage points: parent, program director, facilitator/teacher, parent-educator, teacher trainer, founder, and board vice-president and secretary.

Geoffrey “Ba” Luvmour, MA

Mentor to professionals in all matters relating to children, families, and education, meditation facilitator, family consultant, educator, writer, and podcast host about holistic education.

As an educator, public speaker, author, seminar leader, program developer, and consultant Ba has worked in just about every phase of life with children and families. He enjoys training educators (including administrators) and teaching as faculty in graduate school. He is a pioneer in reinstituting Rites of Passage and currently mentor staff for the Raven Weekend Rite of Passage. Ba has been a non-profit executive since the beginning of his career and founded three schools and a large learning center.

The foundation for all his work in is an abiding inquiry into the nature of consciousness. This has led him to engage science from physics to brain research), philosophy, meditation, all branches of psychology, education, anthropology and all contiguous subjects.

Together, Josette Luvmour, PhD and Ba Luvmour, MA created and developed Natural Learning Relationships (NLR) – a whole-child understanding of child development that supports optimal well-being in children. They have been using NLR with children, families, educators, and therapists since 1993.

Josette and Ba are advisors to public and private schools as well as authors specializing in whole-child development, education, and family dynamics.

Josette and Ba live together in Portland, Oregon and close to their children and grandchildren.