
A conversation with Jean Annan – Author of *7 Dimensions: Children’s Emotional Well-being*



Mōrena Jean, and welcome. I’m Roger Phillipson. I am an educational psychologist, and I’ve known Jean for many, many years as a friend, and a colleague. It is a great privilege for me today to ask you some questions around your wonderful new book *7 Dimensions: Children’s Emotional Well-being*.

Jean, can you tell me – why did you write this particular book? And why now?

I wrote this book because, over the last 10 years, there’s been an exponential increase in the number of young people reporting challenges to their well-being. We’re fortunate that on the internet there is a lot of information about supporting children with challenges to their well-being. The problem is that there’s almost too much. I did a search on Google quite recently, and put in “children’s well-being”, and got over a billion hits. So, how do you know when you’re choosing the material from the internet or other publications if it’s relevant to your situation? How do you know if it’s good quality information or not?

Jean, why did you choose seven dimensions? Why not five, why not nine, why these particular seven dimensions?

I didn’t set out to choose seven, but seven emerged from my review of a wide range of academic and professional publications. I got to the point where, as I was reading, the material would fit within one of those seven dimensions.

Briefly, those seven dimensions:

At the core is a sense of **safety**. Supporting that sense of safety are children’s **alliances** – their relationships, their attachments. There is the extent to which their **experiences are positive**, mostly positive. **Consistency**: children like to see patterns, and to discern patterns in their environments and patterns of interaction. So, consistency within environments is important, but also consistency across various environments. They also need to experience what was called **optimal disequilibrium**. That is, sufficient novelty to create interest and to create new neural pathways and learning, but not to be so overwhelmed as to prohibit learning. Around the outside, children’s well-being is really encompassed by their sense of meaning. That can be looked at in two ways. The first is the **self-narrative**; that is, their story of their self that they get from their own observations and from the stories that others have of them. And also a **sense of belonging**, which is how that person relates to others around

them, and to other things, other beings. It's a sense of identity, contribution, a sense of purpose. It's whether or not a person has that sense of being valued by others. All of these together constitute children's sense of well-being. So seven, the number, just emerged.

They blend very, very well. How does your book align with the principles of Kairaranga?

I think it aligns closely with the principles of Kairaranga. It's based on contemporary neuroscience and the theories of development that are supported by that neuroscience, such as sociocultural theories and ecological theories. There are certain assumptions threaded through the book and one of them is that well-being is a dynamic state, not an inherent or static quality of a person. It's defined as the resources and supports that a person brings to a task in relation to the demands of that task. So, a dynamic notion of well-being. It assumes that children live in relation to others, not in isolation. It illustrates how there's a good cultural overlap between children's cultural experiences at school, and at home, and community, clubs, et cetera. It explains how that good overlap, but not necessarily exact overlap, but a good, solid overlap, supports children's learning and well-being. Also, I think that the book promotes a positive, optimistic and appreciative approach to practice and to learning and one that supports children to grow in their own directions, and at their own rates. So yes, most definitely I see it as fitting with a positive dynamic notion of well-being.

Thank you, Jean. It's a wonderful piece of work. And what I love about it is that it's accessible – accessible to parents, teachers, and everybody working with anyone that's connected with well-being, which everybody is. So thank you. It's been a privilege. Thank you.

AUTHOR PROFILE



Dr Jean Annan's *7 Dimensions: Children's Emotional Well-being* reflects the multiple perspectives she has encountered on children's development through her broad experience with young people. She has worked as an educational psychologist, university lecturer, researcher, teacher, leader and systems facilitator in educational settings. In recent times, Dr Annan has supported school staff to integrate positive psychological practices into their everyday school programmes. This facilitation has focused on the integration of pro-active, nurturing practices designed for all children as well as the establishment of additional support for those young people who are in most urgent need. *7 Dimensions: Children's Emotional Well-being* builds on Dr Annan's diverse publications in professional journals and books, the underlying theme of which has been the notion that if complex situations are rendered meaningful, they are easier to manage and positively redirect.

In the video, Jean engages in conversation with **Roger Phillipson**. Roger is a registered psychologist and counsellor with the Ministry of Education in Tāmaki Makaurau. He has a passion for supporting the complex and layered lives of children with a focus on their wellbeing.