



The Flourishing Children Project

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Highlights of Positive Indicator Development at Child Trends

- **1990s:** Articles by Moore on need for positive indicators
- **1998:** Forum on Child and Family Statistics identifies need for positive indicators in *America's Children*
- **2003:** Child Trends conference commissioning papers on rigorous measurement of key constructs
- **2005:** Publication of *What do Children Need to Flourish?*
- **2005:** Cognitive Interviews conducted in DC
- **2008:** Flourishing Children Study Funded by Templeton
- **2009:** UNICEF/OECD paper reviewing theory and creating conceptual framework for generating positive indicators

WHAT DO CHILDREN NEED TO FLOURISH?

*Conceptualizing and Measuring
Indicators of Positive Development*



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Measurement Issues with Positive Indicators

- Strengths are more prevalent than deficits
- Cut-points on positive indicators can be arbitrary, since everyone has some
- Need consensus and research on how much is enough to tip outcome
- Upward bias in reporting of positive behaviors
- Need for high threshold items
- Combining negative with positive items
- Predictive validity is variable

Youth Views on Flourishing from Interviews: First Round

- ***Relationships:*** stable and supportive relationships with parents, friends, siblings, teachers, counselors
- ***Behaviors:*** staying in school; maintaining good health through nutrition and exercise; avoiding alcohol, smoking, and sex; extracurricular activities; controlling anger; speaking English correctly, contributing financially to family
- ***Attitudes:*** religion or faith; being respectful and responsible

Constructs

Helping Others to Flourish

- Altruism
- Generosity

Flourishing in School and Work

- Diligence & Reliability
- Educational engagement
- Entrepreneurship
- Trustworthiness & Integrity
- Thrift

Flourishing in Relationships

- Positive friendships
- Parent-Adolescent relationship

Relationship Skills

- Empathy
- Social Competence

Personal Flourishing

- Gratitude
- Forgiveness
- Hope
- Goal Orientation
- Life satisfaction
- Purpose
- Spirituality

Environmental Stewardship

Flourishing Children Project

- **Years 1-2: December 2008 – April 2011**
 - Reviewed literature to define constructs and sub-elements
 - Scan of extant measures
 - Development of items for cognitive interviews
 - Advisory Board input
 - Finalizing items, protocol development, IRB approval
 - Three rounds of cognitive testing conducted in-person and over the phone across the country

Development of Items

- **Measures were developed or reworded:**
 - Based on findings from previous cognitive interviews
 - Other cognitive interviews with populations with low education
 - Drawing from research on question wording for youth
 - With an eye for simple, concrete language
 - Sub-elements of each construct were defined

Flourishing Children Project

- **Planned this year:**
 - Fourth round of cognitive interviews, if necessary
 - Review cognitive interview findings from all rounds
 - Finalize items
 - Develop and administer pilot test in national sample
 - Psychometric analyses of pilot data
 - Advisory Board to review analyses
 - Compile and disseminate results through web, journal articles, research briefs, meetings

Sample

- **Completed 90 interviews**
 - 68 teens and 22 parents of teens
 - In 15 cities across the country
- **Recruited:**
 - Craigslist, youth programs, flyers, word of mouth
- **Over-sampled low-income and ethnic minorities**
 - 1/3 male
 - Equal number of Hispanic, White, & Black teens
 - 40% 12-13-year-old teens
 - 2/3 house hold income < \$45k
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Methods

- **Conducted 3 iterative rounds of cognitive interviews to test:**
 - Item wording
 - Response scales and answer options
 - Appropriateness of items for teens and their parents
 - Applicability of items and language for diverse groups
- **Tested all 19 constructs in the first 3 rounds**
- **Interviews were conducted in-person or via phone**

General Construct Findings: Good News

- **Most items were understood and worked well**
- **Examples of the constructs that worked well are:**
 - Life Satisfaction
 - Gratitude
 - Thrift
 - Diligence and Reliability
 - Entrepreneurship
 - Educational Engagement
- Items captured constructs as intended
- Respondents' interpreted construct as intended
- At least moderate variability in response scales was observed
- **Although these constructs worked well, they posed some problems:**
 - Some were hard for parents to report (e.g. gratitude)
 - Some were positively skewed (e.g. life satisfaction)

Examples of Items that Worked

- **This item measuring ‘thrift’ was interpreted as intended:**
 - “There are things I put off buying today so I can save for tomorrow.”

I: ...What do you think this question is asking, in your own words?

R: You know, if I stop buying things like I don't know...shoes and stuff like that so that you have enough money that maybe your parents need the next day or if you're trying to pay to save for something important.

13-year-old Hispanic male

- **This item measuring ‘entrepreneurship’ worked as intended:**
 - “I am willing to risk failure to pursue my goals”

I: In your own words, what is this question asking?

R: If I'm willing to lose to win.

13-year-old African-American female

General Construct Findings: The Bad News

- **Some constructs and items presented problems**
- **Examples of challenging constructs include:**
 - Spirituality
 - Altruism
 - Forgiveness
 - Purpose
 - Goal Orientation
- **Constructs may be challenging for younger teens because they are abstract, require reflection, self-awareness, and thinking beyond the self:**
 - Teens thought about constructs in concrete terms
 - Some thought about the construct in present terms or focused on certain situations

Examples of Items that Didn't Work

- The following items did not work well from the 'spirituality' construct:

- “I am touched by the wonder of creation.”

R: I don't really understand that question. It is talking about the creation...creation of what?

17-year-old African-American male

- “How close do you feel to a Creator, God, or divine source of life?”

I: What does it mean to you—a creator?

R: Um, it means...uh, I don't know!

13-year-old Hispanic Female

Examples of Items that Didn't Work

- The following items did not work well from the 'purpose' construct:

- “My daily life is guided by a long-term calling”

R: I don't really understand what that means.

I: So, could you tell me which part you don't understand?

R: The last part.

17-year old White female

- “I am doing things now that I feel called to do”

I: I am doing things now that I feel called to do in my life.

R: I don't understand what it is asking.

I: Is it one part or the entire thing?

R: The entire thing.

16-year-old Hispanic female

Key Overall Findings

- **Negatively worded items lead to mapping errors**
 - Items that include: not, no, etc
- **Problems with double barreled items**
 - “I have a strong sense of meaning and purpose in my life”
- **Developmental differences in ability to answer and interpret items**
- **Focus on different time periods and reference groups**
- **Preferred scale was “a lot like me” over “strongly agree”**
- **Parents are not good reporters for some constructs**
 - environmental behaviors, spirituality, purpose, friendships

Key Suggestions from our Findings

- **Include clear, concrete items**
 - Make clear reference groups and time
 - Consider developing items for specific domains in life (e.g. school, work, family, friends)
- **Use behavior items whenever possible**
- **Carefully consider response scale**
 - “A lot like me” scale seems promising
- **Use a mixture of positively and negatively worded items without the use of words: not, no, etc**



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See our positive development page on our website and watch for
posting of measures

See: UNICEF Paper on Positive Indicator Framework

http://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/iwp_2009_21.pdf

www.childtrends.org

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