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Flourish Project
The Ecology of Wellbeing

ESF Evaluation of the OECD Education for Human Flourishing: A Conceptual Framework

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Origin: OECD, 2025

Primary Focus: Reframing education beyond human capital toward flourishing, purpose, agency, ethics, AI-readiness and system transformation.

ESF Score: 17/20

Introductory Context

This is a highly significant international education report. It moves strongly beyond narrow attainment and labour-market preparation, arguing that education should develop adaptive problem-solving, ethical competence, understanding, appreciating and acting in the world. It also recognises AI, ecological crisis, social fragmentation and loss of meaning as core educational challenges.

Domain-by-Domain ESF Assessment

ESF Domain	Assessment	Score
Natural Environment	Strong recognition of planetary limits, interspecies responsibility and future generations, but not yet a fully ecological or bioregional education framework.	4/5
Circular & Regenerative Economies	Critiques human capital theory and gestures toward regenerative economic models, though practical economic redesign remains underdeveloped.	4/5
Cultural Values & Identity	Very strong on worldviews, meaning, ethics, Ubuntu, Confucianism, Buddhism and reconciling belief systems.	4.5/5
Human Capacities & Potential	Excellent treatment of agency, purpose, wellbeing, adaptive competence, creativity, ethics and teacher leadership.	4.5/5

Total: 17/20

Developmental Levels Assessment

The report aligns especially well with the higher ESF levels: meaning, contribution, agency, ethical action and collective flourishing. It is weaker at the foundational levels of security, emotional safety and belonging, which are acknowledged but not yet sufficiently developed as the conditions from which deeper flourishing emerges. Early childhood, trauma-informed practice, relational safety and embodied development would need strengthening.

Core Strengths

The report's greatest contribution is that it brings flourishing into the mainstream of global education policy. It challenges the inadequacy of the human capital model and gives education systems a stronger moral, ecological and existential purpose.

It is also unusually strong in linking flourishing to AI. Rather than treating AI as merely a technical issue, it frames it as a challenge to human agency, meaning and security.

The inclusion of worldviews, beauty, awe, ethics and purpose is highly significant. These are often missing from major education policy documents and make the report much more aligned with whole-person and whole-system flourishing.

Key Gaps

The report still remains partly within an OECD competency architecture. Its language is transformative, but its implementation logic may still be drawn back toward assessment, measurement and system performance.

Nature is recognised, but not yet treated as a living, relational, pedagogical field. Indigenous and non-Western traditions are included, but could be more deeply embedded as epistemological foundations rather than complementary perspectives.

The report also needs a stronger account of early years formation, relational development, trauma, attachment, spirituality, embodiment, play, family life and community ecology. In ESF terms, the roots of flourishing need as much attention as the competencies of flourishing.

Recommendations

The OECD framework would be strengthened by adding a developmental foundation that shows how security, belonging, agency, engagement, fulfilment, contribution and growth unfold across childhood and adolescence. It should also ideally include a clearer ecological learning model, where children learn not only about sustainability but through direct relationship with place, land, living systems and interdependence.

Finally, the implementation model should be careful not to over-assess flourishing. The danger is that a living vision becomes another dashboard. Flourishing needs indicators, yes, but also trust, culture, practice, relationship and time. Otherwise the butterfly gets pinned to the spreadsheet.

Concluding Assessment

This is one of the strongest international education frameworks currently available from a mainstream policy institution. From an ESF perspective, it represents a major step beyond attainment, employability and wellbeing toward a fuller account of human and planetary flourishing. Its score of **17/20** reflects its conceptual strength, global relevance and strong alignment with ESF principles, while recognising the need for deeper ecological, developmental, relational and spiritual grounding.

The Flourish Project potentially offers a valuable complementary framework by helping translate this already powerful OECD vision into a more ecosystemic, developmental and practice-based model for schools, communities and education systems.