Children's Well-Being: Indicators and Research 24

Tobia Fattore
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Children's Concepts of Well-being

Challenges in International Comparative Qualitative Research

Children's Well-Being: Indicators and Research

Volume 24

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Challenges in International Comparative Qualitative Research

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Foreword

Understanding Children's Concept of Well-Being: Challenges in International Comparative Qualitative Research

Children's lives are changing and recent years have brought a "new" childhood to the forefront of the social discourse. Those changes are built on a complex array of shifts and new trends; however, they are all moving in the same direction—toward a focus on children's proper development, well-being, and quality of life.

This "new" understanding of childhood is reflected, even if slowly, in the academic world and the research about children's well-being. The major change in that regard is the understanding that children are agents and that we cannot study or understand their well-being without incorporating their perspective.

While this change is happening and children are seen as active participants in research rather than objects to be studied, it is clear that much of this progress was done in local settings, thus not taking into account culture and context.

This has dramatically changed with the launching of the International Survey of Children Well-Being (ISCIWeB), which in its 3 waves to date has reached more than 200,000 children of ages 8–12 in more than 40 countries asking them about their daily activity, subjective well-being, and quality of life. However, something was still missing. ISCIWeB is an empirical quantitative study utilizing representative samples of children in different countries. What was missing is a qualitative effort to understand the concept of children's well-being through their own eyes.

The book presented before you is a summary of an outstanding effort to fill the gap. In a brilliant effort, a group of scholars, led by the editors of this book, launched an international research project: *Children's Understandings of Well-being: Global and Local Contexts.*

The various chapters included in this book which were all part of the abovementioned project demonstrate the importance of interpretive qualitative

research by case showing how children's well-being is multifaceted, culture contingent, and ambiguous in its experiences.

This book elegantly brings together chapters that deal with the need to document children's perspectives on their well-being and how they experience it, using qualitative methodologies. The book includes 14 chapters; all of them create a sum which is bigger than its different parts. Thus, it is highly recommended to read it as a whole. In the introductory chapter, the value of qualitative research methodologies and methods for understanding children's well-being is presented. Then the next four chapters create a section devoted to the theoretical challenges of qualitatively studying children's well-being. This section is followed by 4 chapters focusing on innovative methodologies. The book's last section is about social context and inequalities in children's well-being.

A brief look at the book's table of contents will also reveal that contribution came from at least 13 countries from 5 different continents—thus creating a real multinational context. That together with the quality of the contributions and the innovative approach presented in them makes this book a must-read for anyone truly interested in the current study of children's well-being across the world.

I applaud the authors and the editors for their excellent work and would hope to see many more such studies and publications.

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem
Jerusalem, Israel

Asher Ben Arieh

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Chapter 1
Introduction

Tobia Fattore, Susann Fegter, and Christine Hunner-Kreisel

This book brings together a range of contributions that grapple with the challenges involved in documenting children's perspectives on their well-being, using qualitative methodologies to provide an understanding of what children say about their well-being and how it is experienced. A focus on children's perspectives on their well-being has become an almost taken-for-granted norm in child well-being research and in well-being agendas promoted by various governments around the world. Yet, within research, the child perspective is mainly represented in large international studies which are quantitative and use standardized surveys to implement the principle of comparability, focusing on children's responses to subjective well-being measures or are limited to specific spheres, such as early childhood or school performance, as opposed to providing holistic or multi-faceted understandings of well-being (OECD 2009, 2020; Rees 2019; UNICEF 2013; Andresen and Ben-Arieh 2016). Taken together, these studies examine children's well-being along multiple dimensions, and are especially valuable in profiling differences in children's well-being within and across nations. However, what these findings mean, why these differences exist and how they relate to local and cultural contexts invite continuing discussion and analysis.

The chapters brought together in this volume respond to this interpretive gap. The contributions, which have been undertaken under the umbrella project *Children's Understandings of Well-being: Global and Local Contexts* (Fattore et al. 2019a;

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Fattore 2020) demonstrate the contribution of interpretive qualitative research to the field of child well-being, in demonstrating how children's well-being is highly context-dependent, multi-faceted, changeable, often ambiguous in its lived out experiences and sometimes contradictory—that is, those features of a social phenomenon which make it difficult to quantify. Furthermore, the empirical insights presented in this volume focus on methodological reflections linked to the challenges involved in undertaking qualitative child well-being research that aims at being internationally comparative.

In this Introductory chapter we provide an overview of the value of qualitative research methodologies and methods for understanding children's well-being, demonstrating that the value of approaches that use a more explicitly interpretive qualitative epistemology include concept development, the explicit inclusion of context as data and a focus on the meaning making processes involved in understanding social action. We then outline the study which provides the framework for the chapters collected in this volume, the *Children's Understandings of Well-being: Global and Local Contexts* project. The framework explicitly aims to collect information based in children's perspectives use participatory qualitative techniques. One of the objectives of this volume is therefore to confront some of the complexities involved in undertaking research on children's perspectives through a multi-national qualitative approach. This study and its epistemological framing provide the starting point for the contributions brought together in this volume. We describe how the project provides a methodological learning space, providing an opportunity for researchers to contribute their disciplinary expertise, pursue their theoretical passions and curiosities, draw upon the culture of qualitative research they were academically socialised within and which accommodates the context dependency of childhood research. We then provide an overview of the chapters, demonstrating their theoretical, methodological and empirical contributions to understanding children's well-being.

1.1 The Value of Qualitative Research on Children's Well-being

A large body of research now exists at a national and multi-national level that focuses on the subjective well-being (SWB) of children. While emphasizing subjective perceptions, this approach is methodologically characterised by the use of quantitative measures that include cognitive and affective evaluations of global and domain specific dimensions of SWB. These have been taken up in a remarkable number of contexts, with the flagship study being the *International Survey of Children's Well-Being*, otherwise known as the *Children's Worlds Study* (ISCWeB) (see http://www.isciweb.org/) (see also Ben-Arieh et al. 2014; Rees and Dinisman 2015). This study collects subjective well-being data from tens of thousands of children and has been conducted in approximately 47 countries. Ben-Arieh (2010)

has argued that the increasing use of SWB measures reflect the influence of the new childhood studies; the more general acceptance that children have rights, and the demands from government for measures of SWB to inform transparent and accountable decision-making. Despite focusing on children's assessments of subjective well-being, one of the critiques of this approach is that indicator frameworks do not adequately reflect children's evaluations on their own lives (Fattore 2020). The measures used are generally based on standardised measures identified as important to researchers and which reflect the specific theoretical and disciplinary perspectives of the researchers, to which individual children are asked to respond. Often this means adjusting adult scales for use by children, and consequently such approaches are unable to take account of the pertinence of the adult-determined items to children.

The subjective turn in child well-being research has however, established the critical importance of obtaining children's evaluations of their lives. In emphasising that children are best placed to assess their SWB, these studies have provided a foundation for qualitative studies of children's well-being. These qualitative studies on children's understandings of well-being work from children's narratives and practices to reconstruct how children perceive, experience and talk about what is important to their well-being. In so doing these studies provide insights into what constitutes well-being and the factors contributing to well-being for children. These studies confirm that children prioritize some areas of well-being similar to those used as domains in SWB studies. However, they also extend and provide alternative knowledge about child well-being (For example see Adams et al. 2018; Ahmed and Zaman 2018; Akkan et al. 2018; Brockevelt et al. 2018; Cefai and Spiteri Pizzuto 2021; Fattore et al. 2016; Fegter 2014, 2021; Fegter & Mock 2019; Hunner-Kreisel and Bohne 2016; Hunner-Kreisel and März 2018; Kutsar et al. 2019; McAuley 2019; Nadan and Kaye-Tzadok 2018; Stoecklin 2018; Tonon et al. 2021).

These studies demonstrate the value of qualitative approaches to help inform quantitative findings in research more generally. Both objective measures of well-being and SWB scales derive from a tradition in which an ideal-type of the hypothetico-deductive model is the main methodological model for social research. For much of the twentieth century, this model shaped what counted as rigorous investigation. Consequently, the value of qualitative research was questioned when judged against positivist criteria, such as external and internal validity and reliability. The absence of more interpretive approaches to understanding child well-being also reflects the genesis of the social indicators movement, of which the child indicators movement developed from, in program evaluation and social accounting systems used by Government administrations, as exemplified in William Ogburn's work for the Hoover Administration's Research Committee on Social Trends (1933), Raymond Bauer's publication of *Social Indicators* (1966) for the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and the Johnson Administration's publication of *Toward a Social Report* in 1969 (U.S Department of Health Education and Welfare 1969. See also Land 1983). Qualitative approaches, do not readily provide the types of data that can be easily translated into indicators. In a political context in which well-being

is defined through indicators, then the role of qualitative approaches is understandably quite limited. Within a positivist framework, the limited utility of qualitative approaches in contributing data for indicators, was further interpreted as meaning that qualitative research is of limited value. We see a more contemporary version of this critique in the evidence-based policy movement, where the gold standard for evidence is the clinical trial (Hammersley 2015).

Whilst SWB approaches do not self-identify as positivist, they do share some of the underlying premises of positivist philosophy, in emphasizing the knowability of the social world through the application of reason and the collection of data through sense-based observation. The application of standard definitions of well-being across time and place also bears some resemblance with the positivist objective that social research should proffer universal principles for understanding human behaviour. The interpretive turn in philosophy and the social sciences questioned whether aspects of the human social world could be known with the same degree of certainty as the study of the physical or natural world; and the degree to which the methods of natural science needed to be modified to research social phenomena. Phenomenologists and critical theorists argued that social phenomena had to be studied quite differently from physical phenomena—that social phenomena should be understood from 'within', drawing upon the psychological, cultural and social resources of the researcher, so that a deeper form of knowledge could be obtained. In particular, it was insisted that these meanings cannot be inferred from external behaviour (see for example Geertz 1973).

Alternative ways of accessing the meanings that inform people's behaviour are therefore required if we are to be able to describe and understand it accurately. Instead of seeing social behaviour as something that can be studied from an external vantage, research approaches that acknowledge that the human social world is different in significant ways have developed. These approaches acknowledge the centrality of meaning-making to human life and the centrality of understanding meaning making to understand social action (Weber 1949); that meaning-making is highly context-specific and therefore more than just empiricism is required to study social meaning—knowledge of cultural context is also required; that one implication of taking this context-specific view is that rather than the goal of social science being to uncover generalizable laws of human behaviour (Lyotard 1979), research has the potential for understanding the multiplicity of meaning, including that ambiguities in understanding any social problem arise because multiple interpretations of any social phenomenon is possible. Therefore, some of the strengths of qualitative research in general is that it:

- Occurs in 'natural' settings, usually involving collecting data in the field at the site of the participants. Therefore, qualitative research can take into account contexts as important data, whereas quantitative research attempts to control or exclude the influence of context.
- Often uses multiple types of data, such as interviews, observation and analysis of existing artefacts. This contributes to capturing a wide range of aspects of a

phenomenon through data on a topic, contributing to analytical richness of the research.
- Often attempts to understand the meaning that participants hold of a topic or social phenomenon that is being studied. In this sense, it contributes understanding of actor perspectives.
- Aims to develop a complex picture of what is being studied based upon understanding the multiple factors that are usually involved in a situation (Becker 1998; Creswell and Poth 2018; Yin 2018).
- While one of the strengths of quantitative research is that it involves large samples that allow statistical generalization, qualitative research aims to develop constructs or concepts that may be able to make sense of a broad range of social phenomena.

The ability to develop theoretical concepts from qualitative data (using theoretical heuristics as sensitizing concepts) is largely due to good qualitative research being richly descriptive of what it is studying. This 'thick description' within context, or reconstructions of patterns of the social, makes interconnections between concepts become more apparent. This interconnection then allows complex theories to be developed, where multiple connections between concepts, rather than linear cause and effect between two variables, are possible.

1.2 *Children's Understandings of Well-being: Global and Local Contexts*—Premises and Research Framework of a Multinational Comparative Study

The chapters presented in this volume have been undertaken as part of a larger research project that adopts a qualitative research approach to understand child well-being from a multi-national perspective—the *Children's Understandings of Well-being: Global and Local Contexts* (CUWB) study. The CUWB project examines how children conceptualise and experience well-being from a comparative and global perspective (Fattore et al. 2019b, c; Fattore 2020). The study aims to interrogate from children's perspectives the meanings of well-being and how children experience and conceptualize dimensions of well-being. The study explores the importance of local, regional, national and translocal contexts (e.g. social, political and cultural contexts) for these meanings and experiences, via a comparative analysis of findings obtained across different contexts.

The project involves a network of researchers across the globe who undertake fieldwork in their own national contexts, acting as hubs to undertake qualitative fieldwork within their country (see Fattore et al. 2019a). This also has the advantage that the researchers involved in the study have expertise of the local contexts in which they are undertaking the fieldwork. The central questions guiding the project are:

(a) How do children conceptualize and experience well-being? What dimensions of well-being are significant to children?
(b) What key concepts are most important for children's well-being from children's perspectives?
(c) How do these meanings and experiences relate to national, local and cultural contexts?

The main objective of the study is to determine the significance of different contexts for understandings and experiences of well-being from a comparative qualitative perspective. This includes assessing whether the nation-state is a useful organising framework. Related to this comparative aspect, the study also seeks to respond to the following research questions:

- What are the shared and different topics within and across the national groups?
- In which ways are the meanings/concepts that underlie these topics different or shared within and across national contexts? For example, do we find that the same topics, such as love or safety, have different meanings? Or do different topics reflect shared meanings?
- What is the relative significance of local, regional, national and/or translocal contexts (e.g. social, political, cultural contexts) for these topics and underlying concepts of well-being?

The study is designed around a core set of modules and principles that are replicated across the study sites. These include participation of children aged between 8 and 14 years of age; an ethnographic component documenting the fieldwork setting and completion of several fieldwork stages. These provide a baseline methodology utilized but adapted by all the research teams. It therefore provides a platform upon which the different research teams are able to engage in dialogue regarding the utility of this methodology across contexts. The research stages are summarized in Table 1 and discussed further below.

Stage One: Exploring Children's Concepts of Well-being
Stage One involves qualitative interviews with children about important places, important people, important activities and so on from their perspective. The purpose of this stage is to work reconstructively from children's narratives to identify key topics and concepts regarding what is important to their well-being, as experienced in their everyday contexts. In this stage, children are invited to draw a map of what is important in their life. The parameters of this exercise are kept open, but to illustrate, children can be invited to highlight on their map places, people and objects of importance to them. This then serves as a basis for an unstructured interview where children discuss their choices and through which the interviewer follows the child-led direction in the discussion.

Stage Two: Exploring Existing and Reconstructed Well-being Concepts
Stage Two aims to explore children's understandings of the concepts that have arisen in the first stage in a more detailed way and also children's understandings of some of the salient domains and concepts used in the Children's Worlds study.

Table 1 Summary of methodology: Children's understandings of well-being—global and local contexts

Stage One: Exploring Children's Concepts of Well-being	
Aim: • To gain narratives about what is important for children in their everyday experiences. • To determine the key topics and meanings/concepts central to experiences of well-being and which are most important. • To see how these topic and meanings/concepts relate to children's social and cultural contexts.	Method: • Interviews with children about important places, important people, important activities and so on from their perspective. • 'Map exercise' used to explore children's own experiences of well-being.
Stage Two: Exploring Existing and Reconstructed Well-being Concepts	
Aim: • To determine in more detail how well-being topics and concepts are understood and experienced within and across national contexts. • To understand in more detail the meaning of existing concepts of children's well-being from the perspectives of children.	Method: • Interviews with children based on the Stage One interviews. • Interviews with children on their understanding and experiences of existing well-being concepts.

Questions are developed summarising the key topics and concepts from the first stage and introduced as points for discussion in the second stage, allowing the participants to prioritise and elaborate on their Stage One discussions. This discussion of key topics and concepts can lead to further exploration of the significance of what children have discussed in the first stage. Researchers can point out particular sections of transcript from the first stage and prompt the participants for further comment and explanation. This serves the purpose of reviewing the transcript and providing opportunities to explore issues in greater depth.

Beyond this, there is significant scope for study partners to include methodologies and components, which are of particular relevance to what individual researchers wish to pursue within their local contexts. This has led to some innovative research practices, including the use of new technologies in the research process and development of a variety of child participatory techniques.

1.3 The CUWB Network as a Methodological Learning Space: On the Diversity of Analytical Approaches Within the CUWB Network

A central concern of the CUWB network is to learn with and from each other as an interdisciplinary and global network. It was deliberately decided not to define in advance—beyond the research protocol and the basic principles of the study—which epistemological, methodological and social-theoretical approaches within a

qualitative research paradigm should be used. There are several reasons why this approach was taken.

- Firstly, the interdisciplinarity of the researchers involved: Social scientists, educational scientists, psychologists, health scientists and social work academics work together in the CUWB network. Being able to adapt their disciplinary lenses and perspectives on a shared research subject, using a similar method, allows the network members to draw upon and contribute their disciplinary strengths. This has consequently provided a fuller picture (in the sense of contributing multiple perspectives) on children's understanding of well-being and its global and local contexts. In this respect our study attempts to document the multiple dimensions of the phenomenon and embrace how research findings are shaped by the circumstances of their production. This is in contrast to the idea of strict comparability.
- Secondly, the specific expertise of each researcher: From the outset, the network has systematically aimed to open up a scientific space for the participating researchers, in which they can introduce their preferred approaches, theories and expertise into the design of the study, for which they feel most passionate about and which they want to pursue (and to contribute these into an international, interdisciplinary discourse), which is also, at least partially, relieved of the logic of funding applications and the administrative logic of funding bodies. We believe that science needs this kind freedom and spaces for intellectual sharing to develop. Given the growing pressure to obtain third-party funding, spaces to pursue intellectual curiosities and passions are all the more important, to be able to decide how we want to do research and what we want to contribute with our research.
- Third, the different (inter)national cultures of qualitative research: teams from 29 countries on six continents are currently working together in the CUWB network. In addition to their different disciplinary backgrounds, they also belong to different cultures of qualitative research, which are more or less related to each other through national, linguistic and historical boundaries. Here, too, it was a matter of concern to signal openness to different approaches, positions and contexts and to enable dialogue.
- Fourth, the historicity and context-dependency of (childhood) research: The CUWB study's openness to a variety of analytical approaches also understands childhood research and its epistemological and analytical approaches as a component of asymmetric global relations of power and representation. One strategy we have used to deal with this is to support diverse analytical developments from different local contexts. We neither absolutize specific approaches nor detach them from their particular social contexts.

A central aim of the CUWB network is to share and facilitate the ideas and experiences of different analytical approaches used in the sub-studies within the CUWB network. Along with the objective of providing knowledge about child-well-being from children's perspectives, the CUWB network also pursues a methodological objective and concern: to give a voice to the diverse analytical perspectives in

the global field of qualitative research on child well-being and to bring them into conversation with each other.

This book is consequently a result of this commitment—that the researchers participating in the CUWB network are able to write about their specific studies with a special focus on the analytical approaches they have developed and/or used. The overall result of bringing these specific contributions together in one volume is that it showcases the wide range of epistemological, methodological and analytical approaches (e.g. in approaches taken to questions of diversity and inequality) that are currently being used in the field of qualitative research on child well-being. Furthermore, it demonstrates how these approaches are embedded in social and cultural (scientific) contexts and the historical and theoretical developments occurring in the qualitative child well-being research field.

1.4 The Volume and Its Contributions

The chapters have been organised into three sections, that structure this book: (1) Theoretical Challenges and Foundations; (2) Methodological Innovations; and (3) Social Contexts and Inequalities in Children's Well-being.

1.4.1 Theoretical Challenges and Foundations

The first four chapters of the volume explicitly address the theoretical challenges involved in undertaking research on children's well-being and propose theoretical models that can be used by analysts to address these challenges in their own research.

In 'Child-Well-being as a Cultural Construct: Analytical Reflections and an Example of Digital Cultures'. **Susann Fegter (Germany)** reflects on the *cultural dimension* of current debates on child well-being as a concept and children's perspectives in well-being research. Fegter critically points to the necessity to consider epistemological approaches more carefully as part of the cultural construction of child well-being, outlining how the positivist, child standpoint and praxeological approaches in Child Well-being research differ in their concepts of the subject, the social, of meaning making and knowledge production. The chapter then outlines a culture-analytical approach developed by Fegter and applied in the Berlin CUWB study, to investigate children's understandings of well-being as cultural constructs. The chapter reflects on the methodological background of this approach in discourse theory and 'theoretical empiricism' and defines 'discursive (evaluative) differentiations' as the unit of analysis for investigating 'norms, values and concepts of the self' as cultural practices that constitute children's understandings of well-being. The chapter demonstrates the potential of the culture-analytical approach by applying it to an analysis of findings on digital cultures as a relevant

context. The sequence reconstructs *how* the norm of 'translocal digital care for friends' constitutes a girl's statement about the value of her own room and thus how her understanding of well-being is part of digital youth cultures, performatively accomplished on the micro level of the statement.

The relevance of nation in children's understanding of well-being is highlighted in the contribution of **Christine Hunner-Kreisel, Rana Huseynova, Javid Jafarov, Stella März** and **Nigar Nasrullayeva (Azerbaijan/Germany)** ('The relevance of *nation* in children's understanding of well-being in Azerbaijan and Germany from an intersectional perspective'). They take a critical position toward one of the central methodological problems of current child well-being research: the problem of methodological nationalism. The chapter explores how different aspects of methodological nationalism are evident in current research on child well-being research—including that the nation state is often taken for granted as the unit of comparative analysis and that the nation state is reified and ontologized by using institutions like the family and the school, that are the result of nation-state policies. As the authors outline, this kind of methodological nationalism can be characterized as a typical mode of western knowledge production, risking the reproduction of a fundamentally Eurocentric notion of childhood which contributes to a 'westernization of childhood'. With the aim of developing an alternative for cross-border research on child well-being beyond methodological nationalism, the authors outline their approach consisting of a praxeological and intersectional multi-level analysis. Using qualitative data from their CUWB study involving girls in an urban setting in Azerbaijan and Germany, they reconstruct how and in what way 'nation' becomes relevant with regard to concepts of well-being, instead of using the category of 'nation' as a pre-defined starting point. They therefore ask, what relationship is the concept of 'nation' positioned in respect to other categories, like gender, race, class and generation. Based on their findings they suggest that as alternatives to the nation state, we could use generational relations and generational orders as starting points for an intersectional analysis of children's understandings of well-being.

Daniel Stoecklin's (Switzerland) chapter presents 'A new theoretical framework for the study of children's experiences of well-being'. Referring to Giddens' theory of structuration and Foucault's concept of regimes of truth, Stoecklin presents his "actor's system theory" which defines child well-being as deriving from the degree of integration of different modes of action into one's experience. The model defines five discursive categories that shape the subjective experience of well-being as broad "transactional horizons" (activities, relations, values, images of self and motivations) and different modes of action (entrepreneurial, relational, moral, identitary and motivational), which are "a reflection of socially constructed preferences, regimes of truth (Foucault 1976) that naturalize dominant discourses, and not the reflection of what people actually experience" (Stoecklin 2018). The framework offers heuristic concepts that can be used to reconstruct how transactional horizons structure children's experiences, which horizons and modes of actions are predominantly conveyed in children's discourses and to interpret these horizons and modes of action as part of social structures and regimes of power in which they are embedded. Stoecklin illustrates this approach by analysing data from his CUWB study in Switzerland with

twenty children aged eight to twelve years and empirically shows how their understandings of well-being are framed by activities and relations as the dominant transactional horizon; and by the entrepreneurial mode of action.

Gabrielle Drake, Jan Mason, Tobia Fattore, Lise Mogensen, Michel Edenborough, Jan Falloon and Rhea Felton (Australia) in their chapter, 'School and Well-being: Education, self-determination and adult-imposed aspirations' presents an analysis of data around children's discussion about well-being in relation to their experiences of school. Their chapter explores an ambivalent aspect of school life for children's well-being. Children identify that the opportunities education provides for them to pursue self-determined objectives is associated with well-being. Children also discuss how schooling places pressure on children to meet adult-imposed aspirations, which reflect structural imperatives of a marketized and outcomes-based education system. They describe how this pressure to meet adult-imposed aspirations, undermines children's well-being. They conclude by arguing that both opportunities for self-determination and adult-imposed aspirations reflect underlying social processes characteristic of post-industrial societies.

1.4.2 Methodological Innovations

The next set of contributions outline methodological innovations in qualitative research with children generally and research with and by children on their well-being.

Joana Alexandre, Vanessa Russo, Catarina Castro, Debora Fazenda and Maria Clara Barata (Portugal) ('The powerful combination of group interviews and drawings: how to give children a voice in the understanding of well-being') focus on how to give children a voice in the understanding of well-being. Pursuing this goal, the authors put major emphasis on the way of gathering data as an effective way to recognise children as capable agents in research about their lives. The combination of specific methods—in this case group interviews and drawings—which are applied from this ontological position are powerful for several reasons. The power of these methods, the authors explain, stems firstly, from children being comfortable and familiar with the process of discussing matters in groups. Secondly, group interviews allow for the collection of dense information on a topic. Theoretically, the authors characterize the concept of well-being as complex and multidimensional. Therefore, they demonstrate how group interviews provide a method through which children's feelings, opinions and reactions on subjects like, for example, the importance of family support for understandings of well-being, can be obtained through the exchange of attitudes and answers between group members. The authors also emphasise the critical function of group moderation that handles sensitive issues with psychological skills, which somewhat parallels the view of moderation promoted by González-Carrasco and colleagues (this volume—see below). Alexandre and colleagues argue that group interviews can be usefully extended through the use of drawings. This combination of methods allowed

children to discuss child's rights and school domains, and family and time use as central to their concept of well-being.

Carmel Cefai and **Sue Anne Spiteri Pizzuto (Malta)** ('The voices of young children experiencing difficulties at school') present their conceptual considerations and findings from a case study on nurture classes (special classes to address the unmet social and emotional needs of young children) in Maltese primary schools, that support the needs of young children experiencing social and emotional difficulties. The study explores the children's views, feelings, hopes and understandings of what it means to be a student in a nurture group. The epistemological approach is based on an understanding of children as actors, as having unique and insider knowledge of what it is like to be a student at school and consequently being able to provide an accurate account of their own experiences. This includes, like the contribution made by Alfaro and colleagues (this volume—see below), insights into how learning processes and relationships may be enhanced. The study contributes new approaches in developmental and social psychology and in educational research on two levels. Firstly, the promotion of mental health and wellbeing in school has increasingly become recognized as one of the major goals of education. Cefai and Spiteri Pizzuto also demonstrate the importance of well-being being appreciated as a meta ability for academic learning, particularly in view of the evidence underlining the relationship between social and emotional learning and academic learning. Secondly, most of the studies on nurture groups using this new perspective have been quantitative, outcome-based evaluations. The approach used by Cefai & Spiteri Pizzuto represents one of the very few qualitative studies that inductively explores the experiences of students of nurture classes from their perspectives and thus provides rich insights into the complexity of behaviours and relationships taking place within these groups. By including primary school children, the authors provide important information on how the CUWB study protocol can be adapted for younger children and that the inclusion of younger children in research on well-being and mental health in schools is a highly rewarding endeavour.

In their chapter 'Deepening in the use of Discussion Groups with children as researchers' advisers: strengths, challenges and applications', **Mònica González-Carrasco, Ferran Casas, Sara Malo and Cristina Vaqué**, reflect on a modified form of focus group discussion, the Discussion Group which they used in their CUWB study in Catalonia. Coming from a SWB perspective, they highlight Discussion Groups as a particularly useful approach for children's SWB researchers and the health sciences and social sciences in general. They show how Discussion Groups differ from traditional Focus Groups with regard to the role of the researcher and the children. González-Carrasco and colleagues describe Discussion Groups as involving a group dynamic where children are addressed as the experts on a topic and as advising the adult researchers from their own perspective, via discussion among them, about what adults should do or understand. The researcher plays a less active role, listening to the children and only intervening to ask for clarifications about the meaning of what is being discussed. The adults' major role in these groups is to introduce what González-Carrasco and colleagues describe as adult researchers' ignorance about a topic and to ask children to advise them, as the children are the

experts whose knowledge about the topic is being sought. The authors relate this approach, its characteristics and potentials to the methodological state of research regarding focus group discussions. They present several examples from their own research where they demonstrate the value of Discussion Groups for contributing to method development in SWB research, including questionnaire construction and administration. These examples demonstrate the strengths arising from researchers abandoning the traditional role by which being older necessarily means knowing more than the child.

The chapter by **Shazly Savahl, Sabirah Adams** and **Elizabeth Benninger (South Africa)** ('The Children's Delphi: A participatory methodological framework for conducting research on children's subjective well-being in South Africa') outlines an innovative methodology the authors have developed and implemented as part of their CUWB study in South Africa. The enforcement of child rights in their everyday lives and research on child well-being are closely linked in this approach. Savahl and colleagues present their approach as based in the sociology of childhood and its epistemological position that childhood is regarded as a valid structural feature of society and children's perspectives acknowledged as valid, their experiences as real, with the capacity to meaningfully reflect on their lives. With the associated shift from children being absent in social research, to being objects of research, to being subjects of research, they justify their interest in researching children's subjective well-being using participatory methodologies with children, thus involving children as participants in the research process. The chapter outlines and discusses the Children's Delphi as a participatory methodological framework that is premised on the notion that children are authentic knowers and authoritative experts on their lives and offers a structured framework for the meaningful inclusion of children's views in research. A special feature of the Delphi method, the authors emphasize, is the direct link to political action, which goes beyond the mere provision of opportunities for children's voices to be heard. The genesis of agency through the Children's Delphi is located both at the level of conceptualisation, foregrounding their intellectual input as programme designers, and at the level of practice as programme implementers. Insights into experiences with the Children's Delphi from research in South Africa deepen the theoretical and methodological considerations of the chapter.

1.4.3 Social Contexts and Inequalities in Children's Well-being

The final set of contributions to the volume demonstrate the rich potentials of qualitative child-centred research methodologies, for understanding the contexts of children's well-being, and how a focus on the meanings that children hold on what

well-being means contributes a complex understanding of well-being and the salient aspects of children's contexts which influence their well-being.

Başak Akkan, **Serra Müderrisoğlu**, **Pınar Uyan-Semerci** and **Emre Erdogan (Turkey)** ('Does Socioeconomic Status Matter? Exploring Commonalities and Differences in the construction of Subjective Well-Being of Children in the Relational Spaces of Home and School in Istanbul') explore children's subjective well-being, based on a qualitative study carried out in Istanbul with children between the ages of 10 and 12 years, from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. The starting point of their study is the epistemological understanding of children as knowledgeable social actors who construct their life in a reflexive way, rather than as passive becomings. Referring to the child standpoint approach, the authors highlight the importance of explicitly including the structural conditions of children's perceptions in analysis and the importance of using analytical concepts that take both subjective and objective conditions into account. For that reason, they refer to Amartya Sen's Capability Approach as a theoretical framework useful for examining child well-being, as this approach draws attention to personal differences, diversity in the physical environment and variations in social climate as contextual factors that help explain the conversion of resources into desired functioning that a person may value (see also Fegter and Richter 2014). In their child centred research framework structural boundaries are therefore an important component, conceptualized as the context within which children negotiate their constraints and opportunities in constructing their well-being. As a helpful methodological tool, they outline space as a relational construct that helps understand how children contextualise their well-being, in particular social locations as well as children's web of relations. They then demonstrate the analytical potential of their framework empirically by analysing how inequalities in the relational spaces of home and of school are significant for children's well-being.

Jaime Alfaro, **Lorena Ramírez**, **Carolina Aspillaga and Patricia Easton (Chile)** tackle the issue of well-being and school life in their chapter 'Continuities and discontinuities of experiences of well-being at school for Chilean adolescents of different socioeconomic statuses'. The authors focus on social relations and how these differ according to socioeconomic characteristics. In doing so, they highlight correlations between well-being, social-emotional development, social background and educational failure and success. This link, they point out, is neglected in the general field of educational research, as school success is still seldom connected to children's understandings of well-being especially the importance that children place in being heard and having a say (capability of voice), and more generally, to have agency and therefore contribute and have an impact on school matters. Epistemologically, the study aims at contributing to research on social inequalities, by showing how the school experiences of 68 Chilean adolescents aged between 11 and 14 are differentiated according to socio-economic background. They identify certain experiences where there are no differences—for example, the importance of the quality of interpersonal relationships for satisfaction with school—highlighting the importance of generational orders, as also argued by Hunner-Kreisel and colleagues in this volume. However, Alfaro and colleagues point out the salience of

socio-economic differences in other areas of young people's experiences of education. For example, the differences in experiences of teaching methods across socio-economic contexts clearly highlights their different needs and wishes and the necessity for different strategies for enabling better learning. Taking account of these differences, the authors argue, are important for rethinking pedagogic and social policies.

The epistemological starting point of **Ravinder Barn's (India)** research ('Conceptualising children's subjective well-being: A case study of Bhambapur, Punjab, India') is the children's rights discourse that positions children as a distinct social group with their own particular needs, rights and ideas about the good life (Andresen 2013; Fegter et al. 2010; Hunner-Kreisel and Kuhn 2010), which is a major focus of the CUWB project and of child well-being research in general. From this starting point, Ravinder Barn's research on children's conceptualisations of their well-being in rural Punjab, India, aims to give "an insight [that] is even more rare, and especially important in countries such as India which boast the second largest child population in the world". Her mixed-method approach that aims to engage children in participatory research adapts different components of the CUWB project fieldwork schedule, to elicit children's views and experiences, as well as the meanings they attach to their social and relational context (Fattore et al. 2016). The findings of her research point to three central themes (social and personal relationships, adversity and hardship and vulnerability and agency). Approaching these themes using an intersectional theoretical perspective, Barn sheds light on how these three themes are interrelated and shows their key significance in understanding the well-being of children, structured by caste, class, gender and age.

Safety is also a central category in the chapter by **Arbinda Lal Bhomi (Nepal)** ('Nepalese Children's Understanding of Well-Being from the Perspective of Safety'). The research presented in this chapter directs the reader's attention to the globalized conditions affecting the conditions in which children grow up and their understandings of growing up. Bhomi's paper provides an important example of the spatial dimensions of security and safety as significant dimensions of children's well-being. The importance of safety and security is a theme that arises in other contributions to this volume, for example the contribution by Tonon and colleagues for children in Buenos Aires and Hunner-Kreisel and colleagues for Azerbaijan and Germany. Lal Bhomi's chapter, along with these other contributions, focuses our attention on the influence of cultural and social contexts for determining similarities and differences in children's understandings and experiences of different dimensions of well-being, in this case of safety. The degree to which generational orders (which may be a factor that explains why an issue like safety and security is an issue for children in such different places like Germany, Azerbaijan, Nepal and Argentina) is evident in how children in Bhomi's study identify school as a safe place, but not the journey to and home from school—which is comparable to the findings of Tonon and colleagues. However, the reasons for why the journey to and from school is experienced as unsafe are highly localised.

In 'Children's Feeling of Security', **Graciela Tonon, Denise Benatuil, María Juliana Laurito and Damián Molgaray (Argentina)** give voice to children as a

societal group, representing their diversity according to social, cultural and religious differences**.** Their contribution demonstrates the value of designing qualitative research that has purposively selected heterogeneous samples. The sample in their study is composed of three groups of children, 9 to 12 years of age, living in different neighbourhoods in Buenos Aires. Using focus groups, graphic techniques and sentence completion methods the authors demonstrate security and insecurity as central experiences impacting children's understandings and experiences of well-being. Following one of the main principles of the CUWB-research (Fattore et al. 2007) the authors highlight that constructs of well-being are embedded in social and cultural processes that have to be revealed through research. With this methodological understanding their chapter illustrates how feelings of security are a result of private, public and political discourses that are deeply interwoven with children's daily experiences of insecurity in the streets of Buenos Aires.

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Part I
Theoretical Challenges and Foundations

Chapter 2
Child Well-Being as a Cultural Construct: Analytical Reflections and an Example of Digital Cultures

Susann Fegter

2.1 Introduction

Child Well-being research has developed significantly in the last thirty years and is facing challenges with regard to the concepts of child well-being and to the integration of children's perspectives into research (Fattore et al. 2019). The aim of this paper is to highlight the cultural dimension of both challenges and to reflect on *cultural approaches* towards child well-being and children's perspectives. Culture is defined in this paper as a symbolic order and as a "set of practices" (Hall 2009, p. 2) that produce meaning (Hörning and Reuter 2004; Reckwitz 2002). The chapter starts (in Sect. 2.2) by outlining the relevance of culture as a challenge in the context of developments in child well-being research (Fattore et al. 2019; Ben-Arieh et al. 2014a, 2014b). The chapter aims to summarize central points in the current debates and to reflect on cultural approaches towards child well-being, as well as on epistemological approaches as part of the cultural constitution of knowledge on children. Section 2.3 then outlines the specific analytical approach that the Berlin CUWB study has developed to investigate children's understandings of well-being as cultural constructs. It will reflect on the methodological background of this approach in discourse theory and on the methodological concept of 'theoretical empiricism' and then outlines the objects and units of analysis. Section 2.4 presents some finding on children's understandings of well-being in the context of digital culture as an example, based on published data from different teams that are part of the CUWB network.

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2.2 Culture as a Challenge Within Child Well-Being Research

2.2.1 Child Well-Being as a Cultural Construct

The international field of child well-being research differs in its theories and concepts of child well-being. Child Well-being is either conceptualized as a multidimensional objective construct (OECD 2009, 2015; Bradshaw et al. 2007), as a subjective construct such as happiness or satisfaction (Andresen et al. 2017; Casas 2019) or as a cultural construct, for example as the participation in activities that are socially valued in a cultural community (Weisner 2014). In the discussion about theoretical understandings of child well-being and that child well-being is still under-theorized (Raghavan and Alexandrova 2015), the cultural contingency and normativity of child well-being is increasingly important (Fattore et al. 2019; Betz et al. 2018; Andresen and Betz 2014; Fegter and Richter 2014; Camfield et al. 2013; O'Hare and Gutierrez 2012; Andresen and Fegter 2011; Fegter et al. 2010; Ben-Arieh and Frønes 2007).This can be seen, for example, in the critical reflection on the political contexts and implicit norms of child well-being research. Bühler-Niederberger discusses the phenomena of *middle class norms* as the implicit reference point for many theories of a good childhood (Bühler-Niederberger and Schwittek 2013; Betz 2013). Others highlight *Western-hegemonic norms and standards* as a challenge for child well-being research (Esser 2014, Savahl et al. 2015). Joshanloo (2014) for example argues that the emphasis placed on the connection between well-being and mastery in some developmental psychology concepts downplays the significance of other modes of interaction and self-identity, such as harmony or solidarity (Joshanloo 2014). A third concern concerns *adultist norms* and questions how far indicators and domains of child well-being often reflect an adult perspective on children instead of what children consider relevant (Fattore 2020, p. 149f). A shift in welfare politics has been identified as one of the central *political contexts*, which addresses children as a central target group as part of an 'activating' social policy and a 'social investment state' (Mierendorff 2011; Hübenthal 2008). Andresen and Richter (2012) demonstrate how the politicization of parenthood in this context affects concepts of a good childhood (Andresen and Richter 2012). Another political context for the growing field of child well-being research is the Children's Right Movement and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, with a strong normative foundation in a concept of universal rights (Stoecklin and Bonvin 2014; Doek 2014) as well as the UN Millennium Development Goals.

These contexts provide some background to the normativity and social embeddedness of Child Well-being Research. They demonstrate that the concept of child wellbeing has developed to a large extent in a non-university context, of policy programs and childhood politics (Bradshaw 2014; O'Hare 2014; Moran-Ellis et al. 2014). At the same time these policy and political contexts have been influenced by the academic field of the Sociology of Childhood, with its key concept

of 'children as social actors' (Corsaro 2017), connected to academic research on childhoods, education, and inequalities (Fattore et al. 2019; Ben-Arieh et al. 2014b). The next section will address the need to clarify the theories, norms and values that underlie child well-being research (Fegter et al. 2010). It explores theoretical approaches that conceptualize child well-being as "culturally contingent, value-oriented, a construct embedded in society and culture" (Fattore et al. 2007) and comment on such *cultural* theoretical approaches to child well-being.

2.2.1.1 Cultural Approaches Towards Child Well-Being

There are relatively few culture-theoretical approaches to Child Well-being Research. One of these is that developed by Kitayama and Markus (2000) who write that "just as people cannot live in a general way and must of necessity live in some set of culture-specific ways, a person cannot just 'be well' in a general way. The very nature of what it means to be well or to experience well-being takes culture-specific forms" (ibid: 114). In doing so, they emphasize the fundamental impossibility of a universal way of 'being well' and link this back to the context-dependency and historicity of all human modes of being and experience. As analytical approaches, Kitayama and Markus identify norms, values and concepts of being and self: "What counts as 'well-being' depends on how the concept of 'well' and 'being' are defined and practiced. (...) It is not just that different things make people happy in different cultural contexts—this is obviously the case. More significantly it is the ways of 'being well' and the experience of well-being that are different." (ibid: 114–115). For child wellbeing research, this results in the need for empirical research into how (differently) children conceptualize and experience *being well* in their daily lives and how this relates to social and cultural, local and global contexts.

Weisner—another cultural theorist—defines well-being as the "engaged participation in the activities that are deemed desirable and valued in a cultural community and the psychological experiences that are produced by such engagement" (Weisner 2014, p. 90). This definition highlights the *practical* nature of well-being, a 'doing well-being'—so to say—in the context of the norms and values of a community. This definition brings into focus the *procedural* nature of child well-being in which children participate. It also refers to *emotions and feelings* as part of well-being and conceptualises them also as cultural constructs, "produced by such engagement" in the valued activities of a cultural community. This opens up possible connections between child well-being research and studies which theorise emotions as deeply social and relational experiences (Nussbaum 2007; Archer 2000; Barbalet 2001; Neckel and Pritz 2016). It also opens possibilities to investigate class or gender orders as contexts for child well-being, e.g. by applying a class lens to understand children's *emotional expressions* (Fattore and Fegter 2019). Similar to Kitayama and Markus (2000), Weisner's definition highlights the relevance of norms and values for what is understood and experienced as well-being. How 'cultural communities' are understood analytically, as social groups, social practices, institutions or as

discourse, remain open for clarification through conducting concrete research projects.

Amartya Sen's *Capability Approach* (Sen 2000) represents another cultural approach that combines external conditions and subjective preferences and defines a person's capability to live a good life as a set of valuable 'beings and doings' to which one has real access. Both the orientation towards social justice, the connections to an Aristotelian ethics of virtue and the systematic value of freedom of choice contain strong normative premises (Schäfer and Otto 2014) Nevertheless, Sen's approach abstains from a concrete determination of valuable 'beings and doings' and defines them as context-dependent.[1] This suggests *exploratory* research designs that investigate how valued beings and doings look like from children's perspectives, how these preferences relate to social and cultural contexts, and which processes ultimately influence their realization, that is the transformation of objectives into real objects and ways of being. The Capabilities Approach has therefore, as a culturally sensitive perspective, significant potential for Child Well-being research (Fegter and Richter 2014).

Another framework comes from Daniel Stoecklin (*chapter in this book*). Referring to Giddens' theory of structuration and Foucault's concept of regimes of truth, Stoecklin has developed the "actor's system theory" and defines child well-being as deriving from the degree of integration of different modes of action into one's experience. The model defines five discursive categories that shape the subjective experience of well-being as broad "transactional horizons" (activities, relations, values, images of self and motivations) and different modes of action (entrepreneurial, relational, moral, identitary and motivational). The framework offers heuristic concepts that can be used to reconstruct how transactional horizons structure children's experiences, which horizons and modes of actions are predominantly conveyed in children's discourses and to interpret these horizons and modes of actions as part of social structures and regimes of power in which children are embedded.

The commonality between these approaches is that they provide formal definitions and frameworks of well-being but don't normatively define what counts as well-being. *What* the valued goods and practices are—as one core reference point of experiences of being well—and *how* relevant cultural and social orders look like, remain an object of *empirical* investigation and of a *context-sensitive and value-oriented* analysis. Such empirical studies have the potential to produce knowledge not just on the question of how similar or different children understand and experience well-being, but also how children's conceptualizations and experiences of well-being are embedded and part of social orders, their reproduction and transformation.

[1]Martha Nussbaum (2000) becomes more concrete and universalistic with an 'objective list' of fundamental possibilities and capabilities that she sees as the foundation for what she calls 'human flourishing.

2.2.1.2 Researching Norms as Cultural Contexts of Children's Understandings of Well-Being

The multinational qualitative CUWB study takes this as its starting point and asks how children conceptualize and experience well-being and how these conceptualisations and experiences are embedded in social and cultural contexts (Fattore et al. 2019). Some of the CUWB teams have been working on this question with a specific focus on norms and values. Arbinda Lal Bhomi (2015)—for example—investigates children's understandings of well-being in the context of religious schools that children attend in Nepal and demonstrates how their concept of well-being reflect the school's spiritual concepts of a good education and a good life (Lal Bhomi 2015). Makhtoom Ahmed and Muhammad Zaman reconstruct the self-concepts of children living in the neighbourhoods in Rawalpindi and Islamabad and highlight empirically how children's interpretations of their national and religious identities are part of their self-constructs of being a good person (Ahmed and Zaman 2019). Adams et al. (2019) work on concepts of nature and show how children in a community in Cape Town attach meaning to their neighborhood mainly through the lens of safety. The children refer to the ideal of a safe natural space to play, contrasting this with their neighborhood (Adams et al. 2019). Fattore and Fegter (2019) in their investigation of children, class and social practices, outlined a framework to analyze how children's emotional expressions of shame, pride or disgust reflect and reproduce socially distinguishing norms, for example around money, bodies and what is morally virtuous. Christine Hunner-Kreisel and Stella März (2019) have a similar interest, analyzing how social inequalities are relevant for children's understandings of well-being. They present a detailed analysis of how a child's narrative reflects class positions in differentiating between what is normal and what deviates. Using a relational concept of space, Fegter and Mock (2019) reconstruct 'children's emotional geographies of well-being' on the basis of interviews about important places. They show how self-constructions takes place through references to the country from where the children or their families have migrated; how 'belonging' is understood and experienced as trans local and transnational; but also how constructions of their 'home country' are part of (post)colonial and national discourses around norms of progress and development.

The chapters in this book provide more insights into norms as cultural contexts of children's understandings of well-being (e.g. the chapters from Stoecklin or from Hunner-Kreisel et al). What these empirical studies on norms as cultural contexts show is that children perceive and experience well-being differently according to their social and cultural contexts and how norms and concepts of well-being differ both between and across nation states. They also give insights into how different conceptualizations of well-being are part of social orders, including class or gender orders, and how children reproduce and shift these orders on a micro-level. A further empirical insight that some of these studies provide is how child well-being research itself—as a social practice—reproduces unequal childhoods and power relations through its implicit norms and constructs of child well-being. Altogether they

provide rich empirical evidence for the argument of a powerful cultural bias, especially in cross-national or cross-cultural comparisons of child well-being, if studies don't acknowledge the cultural contingency of child well-being and the unequal resources available for children and their families to match and fulfill hegemonic norms.

2.2.2 Children's Perspectives as Cultural Constructs

Culture plays a role not only in the discussions on child-well-being as a concept, but also in the discussions on children's perspectives as a methodological starting point for child well-being research. The following section outlines the cultural dimension of these debates, focusing on two main aspects: firstly, the cultural argument within current debates around children's voices and agency and secondly the epistemological dimension of children's perspectives in the context of meaning-making and knowledge production.

2.2.2.1 Children's Perspectives as Embedded in Cultural Contexts

The integration of children into research has become a central topic and challenge in child well-being research (Fattore et al. 2019) and is closely linked to the concepts of children as 'competent social actors', as 'experts of their lives', of 'doing research with children instead about them' and of 'giving children a voice'. These concepts derive from the Children's Rights Approach and from the New Sociology of Childhood and demonstrate again the close entanglement of political and theoretical approaches in the field of child well-being research. The attempt to integrate children's perspectives into quantitative and qualitative research has raised fruitful discussion on theoretical and methodological questions, for example about child participation (Stoecklin and Bonvin 2014), research steps in which children can take an active part (Ben-Arieh 2005) or about ethical challenges in doing research with children (Mason and Watson 2014).

An example of this "subjective turn" (Fattore 2020) is the growing field of Subjective Well-being Studies (e.g. Casas 2019) that investigate children's happiness or satisfaction on the basis of self-reported information (e.g. Rees 2019). A discussion of the *cultural contexts* of these subjective assessments is in its early stages. Van Hoorn (2007), for example, discusses the way culture and language may affect ratings on subjective well-being measures. The Capability Approach—as another example—works with the concept of 'adaptive preferences' to take into account how people adapt to social circumstances and adjust their preferences and expectations to 'objective' affordances in their life contexts. This concept helps explain how, up to an extent, people may experience happiness despite their exposure to objective maltreatment (Hunner-Kreisel and März 2019; Fegter and Richter 2014). Against the background of these considerations an exclusive

engagement with self-reported well-being, happiness or satisfaction risks overlooking the structural conditions underlying subjective well-being and maintains social inequalities and injustice (Hunner-Kreisel and Kuhn 2010; Otto and Ziegler 2007). These broader methodological discussions refer to debates in current childhood studies about the concepts of children's agency and children's voices (Esser et al. 2016). On the one hand, children's own views and perspectives were a crucial starting point of the New Social Childhood Studies in order to overcome the dominant adult-centered perspective on childhood (Albus et al. 2009, p. 348). On the other hand, this child-centered approach tends to essentialize children's perspectives and agency (Prout 2003; Honig 2009) and to (re)produce ideas of 'authentic children's voices' (Hunner-Kreisel and Kuhn 2010; Fegter and Richter 2014).

2.2.2.2 Children's Perspectives Within Epistemological Cultures

The discussion outlined in the previous section points to the need to include the cultural and social contexts of children's narratives and statements systematically in the analysis of children's perspectives and voices. Furthermore, the integration of children in research has also raised questions about the epistemological approaches in child well-being research and how they position children in the context of meaning making and knowledge production (Fattore 2020; Mason and Watson 2014). This discussion, which will be outlined in the following section, highlights the differences and similarities between positivist, child standpoint and praxeological approaches to children's voices and perspectives on their well-being, and varies according to their concepts of the subject, the social, and of knowledge.

One of the critiques of the Subjective Well-being-approach (SWB) is that the scales used to measure dimensions of well-being are not based substantially in children's own conceptualizations of well-being and of what is relevant to them (Fattore et al. 2016). Mason and Watson (2014) criticise that SWB studies have "counted children in, but, in doing so with a post positivist framework, it places the pursuit of measure as central and gives it a privileged status. By privileging measurement in this research, attention is focused on the adult-centered measurement activity" (Mason and Watson 2014, p. 2775). Further problems include the absence of consideration of the adult-child-relation as part of the research process and therefore part of knowledge production (Mason and Watson 2014).

A different epistemological approach used to frame research with children on child well-being is the *Child Standpoint Methodology* (Fattore et al. 2016). Research using this approach focuses on understanding children's own conceptualisations and experiences of well-being, using qualitative and participatory oriented methods. Standpoint theory explicitly considers the power dimensions in the research process between adult researchers and children. The starting point of Child Standpoint methodology is the assumption that children are a disadvantaged social group in the context of generational orders and that childhood research should strengthen children's position in society by giving them a voice. The epistemological premises of this approach include that knowledge is a social construct and produced "in the

interaction between the researcher and the researched" (Fattore et al. 2007, p. 13). The unit of analysis are therefore speech acts between children and researchers, conceptualized as acts of symbolic interaction which involves "a process of a transference of meanings which have been internalized in the mind" (Reckwitz 2002, p. 249)". It is this specific feature of symbolic interactionism—that it relates the symbolic order to the subjects and their internal minds[2]—which marks the difference to, for example, discourse analysis.

A strength of Child Standpoint methodology is its concept of the co-production of knowledge between the researcher and the child as well as the systematic reflection on power imbalances in the research process. As Fattore highlights, such approaches provide phenomenological insights into the importance of eudemonic concepts of well-being for children, usually through thick descriptions of concrete practices associated with well-being (Fattore 2020). A critique of Child Standpoint approaches includes their focus on the explicit, overt meaning that children give to well-being. Nohl (2019) for example raises the question "whether the explicit definitions and common sense concepts of children are all that we can reconstruct from interviews, group discussions, and observed activities of children" (Nohl 2019, p. 411). Further critical questions address the issue of reification through research and how far the presumption that children have a unique and disadvantaged perspective reifies generational difference as a social category (Esser et al. 2016).

It is in this context that *praxeological approaches* towards 'children's perspectives' emerge in the field of child well-being research. Praxeological approaches analyse *how* children talk and act, *how* they take up issues of well-being and *how* they talk about what is important and what makes them feel well. This *how* is analysed as an expression of social structures and orders and as their "modus operandi" (in the sense of a generating mechanism). The starting point of praxeological approaches is the assumption of an intertwined relationship between social structure and action and of its appearance in the way *how* children speak and act. Nohl (2019) for example applies the Documentary Method in the tradition of Mannheim (Bohnsack 2014; Nohl 2017) to reconstruct the tacit *frames of orientation* that underlie how children take up the issue of well-being in interviews. He suggests analysing these frames of orientation as the cultural modus operandi of children's accounts and activities of well-being. The Berlin CUWB study (see Sect. 2.3) applies a discourse analysis approach to reconstruct the *discursive practises of (evaluative) differentiation* that constitute the what and how children speak about important places, people and activities. The study analyses these discursive practices as the cultural *modus operandi* of children's understandings of well-being. A critique of the praxeological approaches within child well-being research is e.g. that they imply a "linguistic idealism that does not sufficiently attend to

[2]"It is agents endowed with minds who interact with one another: The agents internalize and use the contents and patterns of the over-subjective, 'objective' realm of meanings in their mutual speech-acts. Interaction is thus a process of a transference of meanings which have been internalized in the mind." (Reckwitz 2002, p.249).

economic and political dimensions of well-being" (Fattore 2020, p. 154). How the Berlin CUWB study deals with these challenges will be outlined in Sect. 2.3.

What this brief overview demonstrates is how current epistemological approaches in child well-being research differ in the ways they conceptualize "children's voices" and "children's perspectives", depending on their concepts of the subject, the social, of meaning making and knowledge production. In the tradition of a positivist understanding of knowledge and reality, children's understandings and experiences of well-being are an external or internal reality about which children can give information, for example through interviews. Within child standpoint theory meaning and children's knowledge are an intersubjective co-construction in the context of power relations. The praxeological approach focuses on children's perspectives and experiences as constituted through social and cultural orders which are present 'in situ', taking place in children's sayings and doings as their modus operandi. Based on the assumption that research on child well-being is constructing its subject in the use of theory and methodology, these epistemological approaches need to be reflected carefully in terms of their implicit norms and concepts of the subject and the social. Similar to the theoretical constructs of child well-being (which requires clarification about their underlying concepts of what constitutes a good childhood) these epistemological approaches are part of the *cultural constitution of knowledge on child well-being*, with their norms and underlying concepts of subjects and the social. It's not just that children are embedded in cultural contexts, but also the researchers with their epistemological approaches.

2.3 The Analytical Approach

In this section the analytical approach used in the Berlin Study is outlined. The methodological starting point is a concept of "theoretical empiricism" (Kalthoff et al. 2008) in qualitative research. In line with this approach, the section will outline the heuristic modeling[3] of the units of empirical observation and analysis:

- First, the conceptualisation of well-being as a cultural construct, which leads to *norms, values and concepts of the self* as cultural elements that constitute children's understandings of well-being
- Secondly, the epistemological approach of discourse analysis which conceptualises norms, values and concepts of the self as *discursive per formative practices* that take place 'in situ', when children talk about important places, people and activities
- Thirdly, the conceptualisation of *discursive (evaluative) differentiations* as the unit of analysis to investigate norms, values and concepts of the self as discursive practices.

[3]On the concept of modeling, which is also described as "co-construction", see Mecheril 2003, p. 32ff and Machold 2015, p. 102ff.

In summary the culture-analytical approach outlined here and used in the Berlin CUWB study defines ‘discursive (evaluative) differentiations’ as the empirical unit of analysis for investigating ‘norms, values and concepts of the self’ as cultural practices that constitute children’s understandings of well-being.

2.3.1 Theoretical Empiricism

Kalthoff et al. (2008) speak of “theoretical empiricism” in order to describe what Dausien calls a “spiral back and forth between theoretically guided empiricism and empirically gained theory” (Dausien 1996, p. 93, translated SF.) in qualitative research. Theoretical empiricism is proposed as an alternative to a naturalistic dualism of theory and empiricism emphasizing that empirical observations are pre-structured by theoretical assumptions and that theory development is also a practical process that is shaped by its examples—even if they are those of fictional empiricism (Wrana 2014, p. 619). With a focus on discourse research, Wrana describes a concept of theory, which understands theories as “tools” that “first produce a world as something that can be experienced” (2014, p. 619, translated by SF). In their “analytical reflection” (Arens et al. 2013, p. 25) on teaching practises in higher education, Arens and colleagues write e.g.: “We do not assume that the result of the analysis emerges from the data, but measure the value of the subsequent analyses solely in terms of their analytical stimulus for understanding teaching under the conditions that seem interesting to us from the perspective developed at the beginning on the idea of the university as a place of new ideas and on the consideration of de-ontologizing teaching and research. One could call this a pragmatic methodology” (ibid.: 24 f.).

Given these considerations, the practice of explicating and reflecting on the relationship between theory and empiricism gains particular importance. With reference to discourse-analytical studies, Wrana writes that a research design needs to produce “a methodological holism through methodological reflection, insofar as the connection between theory, methods and concrete practical implementation is to be made in a way that is logical in terms of justification and is oriented in its validity to criteria that are determined by the respective reference theories” (Wrana 2014, p. 625, translated SF). Against the background of the preceding considerations, the following sections aim to reflect on theoretical assumptions of the analytical approach used in the Berlin CUWB study.

2.3.2 *Well-Being as a Cultural Construct:* Norms, Values and Concepts of the Self *as Cultural Elements that Constitute Children's Understandings of Well-Being*

The Berlin CUWB study starts from the premises that well-being is a cultural construct, embedded in society and history and therefore takes a cultural approach on well-being, knowledge and the social. The heuristical concept of well-being refers to the reflections of Kitayama and Markus (2000), discussed previously in Sect. 2.2.2.[4] This implies that well-being depends on how the concepts of 'well' and 'being' are understood and experienced and that these are culturally contingent constructs that differ and change historically. The question of what well-being means thus becomes an empirical question that needs to take into account the relevant social and cultural contexts of children's understandings of well-being. The Berlin CUWB study therefore focuses on what it means to be well or to experience well-being from children's perspectives and how concepts of well and of being—specified as norms, values and concepts of the self—constitute what and how children talk about important places, people and activities.

2.3.3 *Researching Norms, Values and Concepts of the Self* as Discursive Practices*: The Epistemological Approach*

The specific epistemological approach used in the Berlin CUWB study involves a discourse analytical approach, which investigates norms, values and concepts of the self as discursive practices that take place in situ when children talk about what is important to them. The epistemological approach refers to Foucault's "Archaeology of knowledge" located within the praxeological approaches discussed in the previous section. Foucault's "Archaeology of knowledge" provides an epistemological standpoint that considers knowledge and truth as historically contingent and conceptualizes the relationship between language, power and subjects as embedded in historical and social orders. Foucault neither assumes a "mere intersection of things and words, (. . . .) between a reality and a language (langue)" (Foucault 2010/1972, p. 48), nor does he negate a connection between words and things. Rather, he situates discourse in this intermediate area (Sarasin 2003, p. 34) and characterizes them as "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (Foucault 2010/1972, p. 49)[5] This materiality of symbolic orders—which defines discourse beyond

[4]"Just as people cannot live in a general way and must of necessity live in some set of culture-specific ways, a person cannot just 'be well' in a general way. The very nature of what it means to be well or to experience well-being takes culture-specific forms" (Kitayama and Markus 2000, p. 114).

[5]"Of course, discourses are composed of signs; but what they do is more than use these signs to designate things. It is this *more* that renders them irreducible to the language (langue) and to speech" (Foucault 2010/1972, p.49).

linguistics—is the object of e.g. Foucault's historical research on surveillance and punishment in the context of political and economic developments of the modern society. The subject is decentered in his concepts of discourse and is conceptualized as both empowered and subjected through discourse. It is discourse that precedes the subject and all experience (Bublitz 2003, p. 46) and discourse analysis investigates how discourse produces knowledge, inscribes in bodies and psyche and forms society.

The Berlin CUWB study adopts a *praxeological reading* of discourse (Wrana 2015; Fegter et al. 2015). Different to approaches that conceptualize discourses as discrete formations consisting of a number of statements, the praxeological reading defines discourse as a *performative practice* that relates objects, concepts, subject positions and strategies: a "setting-up of relations that characterizes discursive practice itself" (Foucault 2010/1972, p. 46). A further characteristic is that discourse as practice exist only in the performance of the concrete statement: it is "not really given or constituted a priori; and if there is a unity (. . .) it is because it makes constant use of this group of relations" (ibid: 54). This 'constant use' does not follow an existing rule or routine, but takes place as a shifting iterability: a reference, similar to a quotation, but in a performative-transitory way (Wrana 2015, p. 128, translated SF).[6]

In regard to the relationship between discursive practices and what individuals say and how they speak Foucault points out that discursive practices "run through individual oeuvres, sometimes govern them entirely (. . .) but which sometimes, too, govern only part of it." (Foucault 2010/1972, p. 139). As this offers a framework to conceptualize statements of individuals and discursive practices as intertwined, discourse studies use this perspective increasingly to analyse interview data and other methodically generated qualitative data (Fegter et al. 2015, p. 32). Pfahl et al. (2015) work e.g. with autobiographical narratives and examine how actors relate to discourses. Jäckle (2015) on the other side analyses what people say and how they talk about it as "elements in the process of producing discourse" (Jäckle 2015, translated SF). The Berlin CUWB study adopts this second perspective by working with data from qualitative interviews with children (in which they talk about important places, people and activities) and analysing *what* children say and *how* discursive practices constitute these statements performatively.

The epistemological approach of the Berlin CUWB study belongs to the praxeological approaches in Child Well-being Research as outlined above: the interview data is understood as a source to reconstruct not only the common-sense knowledge of children but also the cultural *'modus operandi'* that differs from individual intentions or motives (Nohl 2019). Within the praxeological approaches the Berlin CUWB approach is distinguished by the analytical object and the concept of the subject. In Nohl's approach (2019) the modus operandi are 'tacit frames of

[6]Judith Butler developed the theoretical concept of iterability as a mode in which norms and orders of knowledge are constituted and shifted performatively. Butler develops the idea from the work of Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault and relates the concept to gender norms (cf. Butler 1993).

orientations', in the Berlin CUWB approach it is 'discursive practices' that cross statements of individuals. Furthermore, the analytical concept of 'tacit frames of orientation' is based on a social theory that assumes shared experiences evident in the practical knowledge of social groups which is *documented* in the ways how people speak and act (Bohnsack and Schäffer 2002, p. 226). The discourse-analytical approach on the other hand is based on a social theory that understands discourse as an epistemic pre-condition of experience, that produces subject positions. Foucault therefore speaks of statements as *monument*s rather than as *documents* of meaning-making and knowledge production. As a consequence, the I in the text and the I of the speaker are not seen as identical in a discourse analytical perspective. Object of the analysis is the construction of the self in the statement, whereas the connection to the self 'behind' the text, to his or her mind or prior experiences remains hypothetical. The analytical focus is on the *performative discursive practice* that takes place on the micro-level of each statement, understood as a local practice of discourse, as an iterative practice that produces norms, values and concepts of the self, that constitutes children's understandings of well-being as a cultural construct.

The advantage of this praxeological discursive approach is that it employs a de-ontological approach that deals with the challenges that are currently evident in Child Well-being research: on the one hand how to conduct research on children's perspectives in a way that takes into account the social and cultural contexts of their perspectives; on the other hand, how to address the risk of essentializing children's voices and agency; and of reifying generational differences through research. The outlined analytical approach responds to these challenges in several ways: It moves beyond common sense knowledge and reconstructs the cultural contexts that children enact *in* their sayings and doings. It provides the possibility to analyse both their explicit knowledge and preferences as well as the constitutive cultural contexts from the same empirical data (the interview transcripts) without predefining which social categories are the relevant context factors. Secondly, it conceptualizes agency and identity as relational and non-substantial: The praxeological focus on discursive *practices* conceptualises agency and identity as an effect rather than as the starting point of the discursive practices that children take part in with their statements. It therefore remains an empirical question *if* and *how* generational or other social differences and subject positions are part of their common concepts of well-being or part of the cultural practises that constitute their statements performatively.

2.3.4 Discursive (Evaluative) Differentiation: The Unit of Analysis and a Two-Step Approach

Discursive practices—as the unit of analysis—have been defined as the practices of setting-up relations between objects, concepts, subject positions and strategies (Foucault 2010/1972, p. 46). To investigate norms, values and concepts of the self as discursive constructions, the Berlin CUWB study looked for heuristic concepts of

what is good, what is moral and what is self that emphasize a *processual and relational character*. Helpful considerations can be found in the work of Charles Taylor (1994), especially his work on normative landscapes, where he writes about ‘evaluative differentiations’. Taylor describes ‘evaluative differentiations’ as a process and practise that defines something as important, valuable, preferable or good by differentiating and contrasting what is important or unimportant, what is valuable or worthless, what is fair or unfair. Following this idea from a discourse-analytical perspective, norms, values and concepts of the self can be conceptualized as a product of *‘discursive evaluative differentiations”* that take place when children talk about important places, people and activities. We can reconstruct discursive evaluative differentiations from the interview data, we can analyse them as performative iterative practises that establish relationships between objects, concepts and subject positions and that constitute children’s understandings of well-being.[7]

The analytical focus on ‘discursive evaluative differentiation’ makes it possible to include gender and other social differences in the analysis without preconceiving them a priori: as practices of (e.g. gender) differentiation that might occur ‘in situ’ as constitutive elements of what children say about important places, people and activities. This approach towards social differences and inequalities focuses on ‘processes of differentiation’ rather than ‘differences’ per se (for a discussion of this conceptual shift in Germany see Machold 2015; Diehm et al. 2016; Mecheril et al. 2013). Instead of starting the analysis with the assumption that the speaker belongs to a specific social group and interpreting what they say and how they talk as expressions of their social position, the analysis starts instead by reconstructing empirically, which ‘doing differences’ can be observed in the data as constitutive elements and how these practises produce unequal subject positions.

A risk of this de-naturalising and de-ontologising approach to social differences is that it overlooks structural conditions that do not appear as practises of differentiation ‘in situ’ within the data, but in which speakers are nevertheless positioned. This might concern for example material aspects of inequalities, as Fattore (2020, p. 154) highlights. For that reason, the Berlin CUWB study combines the discourse-analytical approach with a two-step approach outlined by Diehm et al. (2013) and applied for child well-being research by Fattore and Fegter (2019). It involves a first step of reconstructing practices of differentiation that can be observed empirically as constitutive elements of children’s constructions of important places, people and activities; and a second step of using additional context knowledge on the social positioning of the child for a further interpretation of the reconstructive findings (Fattore and Fegter 2019; Diehm et al. 2013). This leads to the following levels of analysis within the Berlin CUWB study:

[7]Another concept that Taylor develops that can be reframed and used heuristically is his differentiation between ‘strong and weak evaluations’. Strong evaluations are defined as those which refer to moral standpoints, weak evaluations are defined as those which weigh up alternatives but without moral claims.

- Reconstructing the construction of important places, people and activities at the analytical level of *what* children say (thematic analysis).
- Reconstructing *how* (evaluative) differentiations as cultural elements constitute what children say about important places, people and activities (discourse-analysis).
- Contextualising these constructions with additional knowledge about the social position of the child (theoretically informed comment) and about the situated interaction that occurs during the interview (understood as part of the situated conditions of what and how children talk about important places, people and activities).

The empirical design of the Berlin CUWB study is closely aligned with the CUWB research protocol (Fattore et al. 2019), collecting data with partially standardized interviews as well as situational interviews with children between 8 and 12 years at a children's leisure time centre. The interviews are embedded in phases of participant observations. The interview questions ask about important places, people, things and activities from the children's perspective, which follows the methodological principle of focusing on topics that are important for children in their everyday life and which also stimulate 'evaluative differentiations'. The following analysis of children's understandings of well-being *in the context of digital cultures* provides an example of the analytical approach. It is based on published data from various teams that are members of the CUWB network.

2.4 Children's Understandings of Well-Being as Part of Digital Cultures

Digitalisation has become one of the central contexts for children's everyday life, not just a technological but also social and cultural phenomenon that shapes our interactions, relationships and conditions of being in the world (Danby et al. 2018; Stalder 2016). In the field of child well-being research, studies on digitalisation, on the virtual space (Ben-Arieh et al. 2004), the virtual arena (Nadan and Kaye-Tzadok 2019) or the digital age (Livingstone 2016) are still relatively few (Kalmus et al. 2014).

2.4.1 Effects of Digitalisation on Children's Well-Being

Quantitative studies in the field show how the use of the internet and networked technologies, correlate with objective child well-being indicators such as health (Ferrara et al. 2017), sense of belonging and self-esteem (Collin et al. 2011) and fear and depression (Hoge et al. 2017). Some qualitative studies focus on the question of how children conceptualise the effects of digitalisation on their well-

being. One of the first studies was undertaken by Nadan and Kaye-Tzadok (2019) who explored subjective meanings of well-being among children aged 8–12 from diverse communities in Israel. A central finding from their inductive analysis is that the virtual arena is one of the major themes that arises when children talk about important places, people and activities. The children in their study conceptualized the virtual arena as contributing to feelings of risk (for examples as contributing to being exposed to cyberbullying), but also as contributing to feelings of safety and agency; for example, when discussing having a mobile phone as a valued item a 9-year-old girl states "I think there are advantages to being able to call if you can't find your way or if you get lost. I can call my mom and she'll direct me if I'm alone for example" (Nadan and Kaye-Tzadok 2019, p. 469).

In other qualitative studies from CUWB teams the virtual arena is made relevant as part of children's construction of their 'own room' at home as a special and important place. Many children highlight their own room as an important place where they can be for themselves, separated from other family members, but at the same time in contact with friends via digital devices. K, an 11-year old girl from Geneva (Stoecklin 2018) talks about her own room and explains: "I spend a lot of time using electronic devices (. . .) like the computer, the iPad, or the telephone. (. . .) I don't share too much with my family. I chat on WhatsApp with my friends (Stoecklin 2018, p. 14). Glenda, a 9-year-old girl from Sydney also talks about her own room and says: "I asked my dad to download Skype for me and set up an account and everything. And, he did and that is good, so I can go on Skype. So, I needed it, because my friend, L, is going to Bosnia permanently. So, yeah, she's going next year to Bosnia, so I wanted my dad to download Skype. And, he was really serious about it, he was, like, 'No. No. Don't—um, open any junk mail, or don't listen to those little ads.' 'Okay, dad, okay.' And, he was very—he kept on entering my room to see if I was doing anything" (Fattore et al. forthcoming[8]).

2.4.2 *Digital Cultures of Well-Being*

Using the discourse analysis approach, we can extend the *thematic analysis* of the interview from analysing *what* children describe and construct as positive or negative effects of digitalisation on their well-being, towards an analysis of *how* these statements are related to and part of digital cultures. By digital cultures we mean social practices, norms, values and concepts of the self that emerge under the current social, economic and technological conditions in relation to new digital technologies. That is the way how we relate to others, how we conceptualize what is normal or valuable, the logics which are brought into play by digital technologies and how they shape our self- and world relations (Stalder 2016). Using the discourse analysis

[8]The interview with Glenda is part of the fieldwork of the Australian CUWB Team (see also their chapter in this book).

approach, we investigate how these digital cultures are performatively accomplished at the micro level of the children's statements as *digital norms, values and concepts of the self*. We reconstruct which norms and self-concepts concretely constitute their constructions of important places, people and activities and finally how the digital norms and self-concepts change (or reproduce) established concepts of child well-being. The analytical questions we ask of the interview material are:

- How are digital cultures performatively accomplished in the statements?
- How are digital cultures interconnected with constructions of generational (and other social) differences in the statements?
- How do digital cultures constitute what children say about important things, places and people (as its cultural modus operandi)?
- How do concepts of child well-being (e.g. what makes a good room for oneself) are reproduced or changed through these accomplished cultural practises?

In the case of 9-year-old Glenda from Sydney (above), for example, we can use evaluative differentiations to analyze which norms and self-concepts constitute the value of her own room: a norm of translocal digital care for friends which is constructed as generationally differentiating, and which produces the subject positon of an independent moral self within inter-generational family relations.

The *generational* differentiation takes place in how Glenda talks about the interactions with her father: constructing him as supportive (downloading the Skype application on her request and thus enabling her autonomy), but at the same time acting overly concerned and intervening in a controlling manner (by coming into the room again and again and restricting certain uses of the application). Glenda herself—in relational differentiation—is constructed as following an independent moral norm: as wanting to use Skype to maintain her relationship with a friend who will be moving to Bosnia in a year's time. Part of this norm is taking care for each other already in advance (one year ahead) and to use technology as a way of adjusting to the territorial separation, which is constructed as highly important for herself ("I need it"). This norm is constructed as a generationally dividing norm as it is constructed as having no meaning for Glenda's father (who is constructed as acting according to very different norms), and is not even addressed to him by Glenda within the narrated interaction (only towards the interviewer). This further reinforces the norm as part of drawing generational boundaries and as part of constructing the position of an independent moral self within inter generational family relations. The analysis of evaluative differentiations thus helps to identify the norm of 'translocal digital care for friends' as part of a generationally divided digital youth culture and as constituting the value of Glenda´s own room.

The analysis can further show how these digital cultures and their accomplishment on the micro-level of Glenda´s statement reproduce and change generational orders and concepts of child well-being: The generational difference in the degree of authority over who decides upon installing Skype is, for example, not questioned. Also, the care practice assigned to her father, isn't rejected. Instead it is adressed with an attitude of paternalistic appeasement ("Okay Dad, Okay"). The construction of an independent moral self (via the norm of translocal digital care for friends) and the

appeasing attitude towards her father's practices of digital care can therefore be interpreted as discursive practices of sovereignty, that on the one hand acknowledge a relationship of care between parents and children, but at the same time shift the traditional order between adults and children within digital cultures.

We can further see how the generational differentiation via the norm of translocal digital care questions and shifts understandings of *being well* in digital cultures, for example in regards to what makes a good room or what is the value of children having their own room. The practice of care assigned to Glenda's father refers to her 'own room' as a safe and protective *interior* space, securing and maintaining the demarcation of borders in the face of invading negative influences that are located outside ("He was, like, 'No. No. Don't—um, open any junk mail, or don't listen to those little ads.'"). In contrast, the practice of care assigned to Glenda, assesses the value of her own room as being part of a translocal space in which she can practice friendship across spatial and national borders. Her own room is thus valued as a place that crosses digitally the physical boundaries of the inside and outside.

With contextual knowledge, we can see how these different concepts also have further implications for understanding spatial orders for a good childhood. Children's rooms have been—at least in in modern western societies—traditionally understood as a *local space* within the *inner sphere of the family*, producing some degree of separation and privacy whilst at the same time being surrounded and supervised. In that sense children's own rooms have also been part of a culturally specific idea of subjectivity and adolescence (Fegter and Andresen 2019; Fegter 2017). Conceptualising one's own room as part of a *translocal digital space* which includes friends and peers outside the house crosses the border between the physical inside and outside, between the private and the public sphere. This is in line with the findings of further analyses of children's understandings of well-being that indicate an erosion of the privatisation of childhood (Fattore et al. forthcoming) in the context of digital cultures, with opportunities and risks for children. By using a cultural and discourse analytical approach it is possible to analyse *how* this takes places on the micro-level of *digital norms, values and concepts of the self*, that children (re)-produce with their statements on important places, people and activities.

2.5 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to explore the systematic value of culture-theoretical perspectives for child well-being research. To this end, the chapter firstly took up current discussions in child well-being research on two levels: the discussion about the theoretical understanding of child-well-being and the subjective turn in child well-being research. We have argued that there are still few approaches that define and examine child well-being as a cultural construct and that there remains the need to pay more attention to the epistemologies as they contribute to the cultural construction of children's perspectives by different premises towards concepts of the subject, of meaning-making and knowledge production.

Then, the culture-analytical approach on children's understandings of well-being of the Berlin CUWB study was outlined. This approach applies a praxeological reading of Foucault's discourse analysis, to investigate how children talk about important places, people, things and activities, understanding this discursive how as a 'cultural modus operandi'. The presentation of this analytical approach included the theoretical understanding of norms, values and concepts of the self as cultural elements that constitute children's understandings of well-being. Further it outlined the epistemological understanding of discursive practises as cultural practices that take place 'in situ', when children talk about important places, people and activities; and finally the understanding of discursive (evaluative) differentiations as the unit of analysis to investigate norms, values and concepts of the self as discursive practices on the base of interview data. Following theoretical empiricism, the chapter aimed to reflect on the premises of this analytical modeling and to explain the decisions that have been made in the context of current positions in childhood studies and qualitative methodologies.

The aim of the analysis in the third section was to explore the analytical value of this culture-analytical approach for child well-being research, using digital cultures as a relevant context for current childhoods. In media and public discussion, the relevance of digitalisation for children and childhoods is often presented either in the form of a moral panic discourse (problematizing a decline of childhood) or in an idealization of the technological possibilities for children's education and well-being. One of the characteristics of these discussions is that they are often made *about* children and not *with* children. What children themselves describe as contributing or limiting to their well-being in the context of digital childhoods has been a topic of some initial studies in child well-being research. In this context the chapter used the discourse-analytical approach to children's understandings of well-being to investigate *how* and *which* digital norms and self-concepts constitute and change children's conceptualisations of good places, people and activities and their concepts of 'being well'. This was demonstrated by reconstructing and analysing the norm of 'translocal digital care in friendships' as part of a digital (youth) culture from a girl's interview sequence, performatively accomplished at the micro level of Glenda's statement; constituting the value of her own room and shifting traditional spatial orders of child well-being of and good childhoods. The empirical example raises further empirical questions—not at least in the context of the current COVID-19 pandemic that is increasing the significance of the digital. The statement from Glenda addresses e.g. not only the question of what makes a good room, but also what makes a good friend. The question becomes how relevant the norm of translocal digital care for friends is under conditions of a pandemic? Does this norm extend to other groups, for example 'digital care for grandparents'? And which unequal preconditions for such practices of care arise with the unequal distribution of technological and social resources in a global and local perspective?

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Chapter 3
The Relevance of *Nation* in Children's Understanding of Well-Being in Azerbaijan and Germany from an Intersectional Perspective

Christine Hunner-Kreisel, Rana Huseynova, Javid Jafarov, Stella März, and Nigar Nasrullayeva

3.1 Introduction

This anthology emphasizes methodological questions; in our contribution, we take a critical position toward the pitfalls of methodological nationalism in child well-being research, that aims at reconstructing children's understandings of well-being in local and global contexts (Fattore et al. 2018).

Using our own qualitative data that was collected from girls in an urban setting in Azerbaijan as well as one in Germany, we reconstruct how and in what way 'nation' becomes relevant with regard to concepts of well-being. We furthermore ask, taking into account contexts as well as situations, in what relationship nation is positioned in respect to other categories like gender, race, class and generation. To analyse our data, we choose an intersectional approach that we conceptualize as a theoretical and methodological starting point for cross-border research.

3.2 The Starting Point of Our Considerations: A Critique of Methodological Nationalism and Child Well-being Research

Since the 1980s, cross-border or transnational migration research (Amelina et al. 2012; Khagram and Levitt 2008) has critically engaged with the idea of 'nation'. It examines the problems that are inherent in an un-analytical, empirically closed frame

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of reference, with a nation-state focus and an undifferentiated understanding that equates society with nation (Amelina et al. 2012: p. 2). Wimmer and Glick Schiller (2003) coined the term 'methodological nationalism' and note three gaps in the social scientific research:

1. The potential significance and current relevance of nationalism for the analysis of daily life is overlooked and omitted, therefore nationalism remains invisible;
2. The nation state is reified and ontologized by using institutions that were the result of nation-state policies as analytical concepts, which then influence research questions;
3. In this methodological approach, empirical research concepts follow delineations based on nation-states.

This last point means that individual nation-states are the *tertium comparationis*.

There are several large, international studies on child well-being that are quantitative and that justify comparability based on standardized surveys (UNICEF 2013; OECD 2009). These studies examine child well-being along multiple dimensions and have illuminated differences in children's well-being within and between individual nations. In the field of international child well-being research important developments have taken place. The Child Indicator Research movement that emerged around the turn of this century has reorganized the field methodologically. For example, this has led to the development of indicators of child well-being. They acknowledge the fact that children as individuals in their own right have potentially different experiences from those of adults, or make different sense of similar experiences (Camfield et al. 2010: p. 403; 406). The developments pursued by the Child Indicator research movement originated in large part from a paradigm shift in Childhood Studies (Prout and James 1997). It led to a general prioritising of subjective well-being over objective well-becoming in Child Well-Being research. On this basis, indicators like daily activities and play, and in general *positively* connotated indicators have been included in measurements of well-being (Ben-Arieh 2000, 2008; Andresen and Ben-Arieh 2016). Asher Ben-Arieh (2000, 2008) summarizes five major paradigmatic shifts in the framing of child indicators:

- From survival to well-being
- From negative to positive
- From well-becoming to well-being
- From traditional to new domains.

This shift of paradigms in childhood research—together with the worldwide implementation of the CRC (Bradshaw et al. 2007)—also led to a change in methodological approaches in international child well-being research: The child was now taken into account as an expert of his or her own life and as capable to report on its own experiences, including the assessment of its subjective well-being (Casas 1997). Another methodological milestone has been the *actual* involvement of children in conceptualizing well-being (Rees and Dinisman 2015: p. 6; Ben-Arieh 2000). However, there are also critical questions raised in the field of child well-being studies about the extent to which these shifts are indeed being made, or

whether the prevailing perspective is of seeing childhood in terms of deficit and investment (see also Betz 2018).

Other challenges remain as a work-in-progress. One major goal of an indicator-based analysis is to enable representative comparisons of the quality of life in which children grow up. There is a very limited evidence base in respect to cross-national comparative data on Children's subjective well-being (Rees and Dinisman 2015). The major challenge cross-national comparative measurement is confronted with—and at the same time cross-cultural and cross-linguistic (Rees and Dinisman 2015: p. 9)—is that childhoods vary considerably and are heterogeneous in their conceptual and everyday expression (Rees and Dinisman 2015: p. 25; Camfield et al. 2010: p. 403).

Hence, an indicator-based analysis and its methodological approach is challenged by the fact that it includes some childhoods while excluding others (Liebel 2018; Rees and Dinisman 2015; Camfield et al. 2010). For example, the Children's World Study conducted its research through mainstream schools which inevitably led to the exclusion of children attending alternative educational establishments, as well as those not attending schools at all (Rees and Dinisman 2015: p. 10). This notwithstanding, a critical examination of specific indicators and the question if they ought to be used for analysis takes place. Nonetheless, it remains a major challenge defining representative indicators and if their comparison is meaningful in the first place (Rees and Dinisman 2015: p. 6; Camfield et al. 2010: p. 399). This concerns the basic question as to whether certain indicators are indeed useful to assess the concrete conditions of children's lives and their childhoods. Camfield et al. (2010: p. 406) highlights that the understandings of child well-being have to be examined closely using a participatory approach (see also Fattore et al. 2018), before they are included in international studies. Otherwise, culture, in the sense of different understandings of child well-being, remains invisible. This can lead to an ontologization in which notions of culture and nation take on statistical features and are not openly reconstructed from empirical data.

Manfred Liebel notes that the categorical distinction between children and adults is a specific, Western-normative approach, which measures the quality of childhood in terms of the degree to which children are kept from adult roles (Liebel 2018: p. 81). In this context, child well-being is based in a Eurocentric adult perspective that claims, in a universalizing manner, what should be considered a 'good life' or a 'good childhood' (see also Camfield et al. 2010: p. 402). Accordingly, research by UNICEF and the OECD (2009, 2015) aim to offer child well-being indicators that should contribute to political measures and interventions, and guarantee positive child well-being. However, because Eurocentric representations of childhood are considered to be the appropriate ones, intervention measures tend to aim only at meeting Eurocentric norms; the goal is to 'turn a western-type, long, sheltered childhood into a worldwide norm and reality' (Bühler-Niederberger 2011: p. 45).

The Children's Worlds (2015) study critically examines this normativity and implicit methodological nationalism (Rees and Dinisman 2015). For instance, its questionnaire considers family forms beyond the typical family and offers the following response options (see Children's Worlds 2013):

- I live with my family
- I live in a foster home
- I live in a children's home
- I live in another type of home (optional).

However, this study is not free from Eurocentrism either because modes of life that are not consistent with Eurocentric assumptions are considered 'other'. This initiates a process of *othering* (Said 1978/2009), in which specific modes of life are considered legitimate, while others are considered unintelligible (Butler 2015) or not worth acknowledging and naming.

Summarizing the argument thus far, current international child well-being research does not generally overlook or omit the potential significance and current relevance of nationalism. Efforts in this respect have been made in the context of the Children's World study. Although the relevance of socio-cultural aspects shaping children's life and experiences is part of methodological considerations, nevertheless empirical research concepts follow delineations based on nation-states. Furthermore, the nation state is reified and ontologized by using institutions like the family and the school that were the result of nation-state policies as analytical concepts, which then influence research questions.

This kind of methodological nationalism found in international studies on child well-being can potentially be characterized as a typical mode of western knowledge production (Mignolo 2000). Therefore, the research traditions discussed above always risk reproducing a fundamentally Eurocentric notion of childhood in which there is no room for other forms of childhood and which may contribute to a 'westernization of childhood' (Andresen and Neumann 2018: p. 53; Liebel 2018). This prompts us to reflect more generally on current research, transcending its approach, using critical examination, for example intersectional approaches that reflect on global and local hegemonic power relations inscribed in academic knowledge production (Hill Collins and Bilge 2016). In addition, we should critically analyse to what extent indicators reflect real childhoods and how they contribute to the construction of specific forms of childhood and the production of knowledge about childhood (see also Bühler-Niederberger 2016).

3.3 Knowledge-constituting Interest: How to Conceptualize Cross-border Research Which Takes into Account Nation as an Empirically Open Category?

This research is part of the multinational qualitative project *Children's Understanding of Well-Being: Global and Local Contexts* (www.cuwb.org). This project emerged from a critical engagement with the kind of quantitative child well-being research that compares different nation-states, of which we have detailed our critique above. Within the frame of this project, we have been looking for an alternative, qualitative approach to child well-being research (Fattore et al. 2018). In a critical

perspective on methodological nationalism, we did not want to take for granted the idea of nation as an obvious, given starting point and frame of reference when comparing countries. Instead, our aim was to handle nation as an analytical category and therefore as part of an open, empirical research process. Grounded in empirical data, we wanted to explore the relevance of nation for understandings of well-being of children Therefore, the framing knowledge-constituting questions were (Fattore et al. 2018):

- What are similar and different topics within and across national groups?
- In which ways are meanings and concepts that underlie these topics different or similar within and across national contexts?
  - For example, do we find that the same topics, such as love or safety, have different meanings, or do different topics reflect similar meanings?
  - What is the relative significance of local, regional, national and/or trans-local contexts (e.g. social, political or cultural contexts) for these topics and underlying concepts of well-being?

3.4 Rationale for this Chapter

With these questions in mind, the following chapter examines the ways in which nation could be conceptualized for cross-border research beyond methodological nationalism. To this end, we use a praxeological, intersectional multi-level analysis (see Winker and Degele 2009). We argue that it is a critical, analytical use of nation—rather than using nation as a given, preconceived category—that will serve comparative research (Amelina et al. 2012: p. 4). At issue is the reconstruction of relational connections between empirically meaningful categories and associated socio-cultural contexts and conditions (see also Gottuck and Mecheril 2014: p. 93; Reckwitz 2005: p. 93). To exemplify this, we will present empirical data collected in the national contexts of Germany and Azerbaijan. Because we used an open qualitative approach, it was not until the process of intersectional data analysis occurred that the possibilities for comparing these two national contexts emerged. Therefore, cross-border comparisons had not been postulated a priori but suggested themselves in context-specific comparison points that became visible through the reconstructive data analysis. Finally, we summarize the findings of our intersectional cross-border comparison with respect to children's understandings of well-being and draw conclusions for our methodological approach.

3.5 Vechta Project: Data Sample

To date, the research team at the University of Vechta (http://www.cuwb.org/researchers124partners/) has conducted interviews with 50 children between eight and twelve years of age in rural and urban places in Germany, Cape Town/South Africa

and Baku/Azerbaijan. The data come from interviews conducted in heterogeneous settings. Of the 34 interviews we conducted in Germany, five took place in a children's home in a rural area, four at a youth club for girls in a suburban area, seven at two all-day schools in rural areas, eight at an urban mosque, three in a well-heeled neighbourhood in a suburban area and five at a so-called 'Tafel' (food kitchen) in a rural area. In South Africa, four interviews have been conducted at a children's home in a township near Cape Town; in Azerbaijan, eight girls have been interviewed in an urban setting (Baku), and four girls, in a rural setting. Within our methodological approach we want children to participate in the research process (Fattore et al. 2015). Therefore, we also conducted several group discussions in which we presented the children our analyses and interpretive conceptualizations for discussion.

Data were collected using a map exercise, which is a method that can be adapted to meet the children's needs (see Fattore et al. 2015). In this exercise, children receive materials like blocks, play figures, crayons or playdough, and they are asked to use what they like to represent important places, people and activities. They then explain what they created. For this contribution, we will refer to the interviews with the eight girls in Baku (city and suburbs) and to three of the four interviews with girls at a youth club in a suburban settlement in Germany. The interviewees, who positioned themselves as girls, were between eight and twelve years of age. The interviews in Germany were conducted in German in 2015 by research associate Malissa Landsberg at the University of Vechta. The interviewer knew the girls from previously working at the youth club. The interviews in Baku were conducted in the Azerbaijani language in 2017 by Nigar Nasrullayeva and Christine Hunner-Kreisel, transcribed by Nigar Nasrullayeva and Javid Jafarov, and translated into English by them. The interviewees were girls from families known to the family of Nigar Nasrullayeva. The data analysis took place at meetings involving members of the research team (the collective authors).

For the girls in Baku, the data collection was considered an unusual situation; due to different reasons, girls visiting each other is not part of the organization of everyday family life. One reason is the challenging infrastructure of the city: often involving exhausting travel in overcrowded transport, and a reluctance of adults to send children that age out on their own given the amount of traffic 'outside', where being in the street is considered dangerous. Therefore, the girls were delighted that the interviews provided a reason for a visit. Interviews were always done with two girls at a time who were either sisters or friends. For all the interviews in Baku, invitations were provided and in two cases, not only did the girls come to the house of the interviewer, but their mothers and siblings attended as well. Thus, the interviews became social events, stretching over half a day, with shared meals and conversation. For two interviews, the interviewers visited the girls in their home.

The interviews at the youth club in the German settlement also constituted a break with daily routine. Fridays at the club were especially important for the girls because on Fridays, the club was for girls only, for their concerns and wishes. Like the *Qonaq gitmek* (visiting) in Baku, the interviews in the suburban settlement were a central social event that structured the week. Because of the isolated location of the

settlement, the girls had little to do outside of it. The youth club, and especially the girls' day, are an alternative to 'being inside' in the apartment and to 'being outside' in the settlement. The girls considered the club a safe space, and in the interviews talked about feeling threatened 'outside' by 'the guys'.

3.5.1 Context Azerbaijan

In the context of Azerbaijan, urban conditions are such that the entire city infrastructure and personal living conditions force even families and children with an average household income to live in close quarters; the amount of traffic and the near absence of green spaces keep children inside their apartments. The image below (Fig. 3.1) shows a backyard and a nearby 'playground' in front of the house of one of the girls we interviewed.

Azerbaijan has been an independent country since 1991, and together with Georgia and Armenia, it forms the South Caucasus. Azerbaijan is considered a post-Soviet, middle-income country (World Bank 2010) with a high human development index (UNDP 2013). Considering that the country has experienced seventy

Fig. 3.1 A children's playground in the backyard of the house of one interviewed girl in Baku (author's own photography)

years of Soviet rule, Azerbaijan has a post-colonial legacy (see also Agadjanian 2015: p. 33; see also Hunner-Kreisel 2016). The political system of Azerbaijan is considered authoritarian (Economist Intelligence Unit 2012). The capital of Azerbaijan, Baku, confronts major infrastructural challenges that are strongly connected to the political aims of establishing a market economy dominated by a parochial elite, who have purely business interests and are supported by governmental authorities. Consequently, housing affordability as well as the low quality of housing are major issues (Valiyev 2014). The eviction and displacement of homeowners and residents in the inner city have also been major issues. Since 2010, 80,000 residents have been forcefully relocated as part of a 'beautification' campaign that aims at establishing a new image of Baku (Gogishvili 2017; Darieva 2011). Therefore, aspects of spatial well-being are major issues for the children in Baku city, as many of them have to deal with restrictions on space in general and on housing in particular.

3.5.2 Context Germany

Urban areas in Germany are, in many cases, evaluated by social monitoring of the extent of social segregation as well as social inequalities in socio-spatial dimensions. As a result, the increase of social segregation in German cities has increased (see also Siebel 2015; Friedrichs and Triemer 2008). This increase includes both a growing number of poor areas and, at the same time, a growing level of poverty in areas already considered poor (Friedrichs and Triemer 2008: p. 34).

The settlement in which the interviewed girls live is supported and managed in part by a municipality in western Germany, and in part by a non-profit organization. The settlement consists of high-rise apartment blocks and is part of a social housing project. It is surrounded by roads, agricultural areas, woods and meadows. It is connected to public transport, but the girls would have to travel about 20 minutes by train or bus (and this would need to be paid) in order to reach the city. This makes the settlement the primary space for the girls and constitutes, in the sense of Muchow and Muchow (1935/2012), their space for playing and roaming. The places within the settlement where the girls can go include five playgrounds; in addition, there is a supermarket where the girls sometimes have permission from their parents to go together for ice cream. Because available space in the settlement for the girls is limited, especially because of the presence of 'the guys', the youth club and girls' day become even more important because it is seen as a 'safe place outside'. Activities with parents are mentioned rarely. The girls mention a twice-yearly fair. Rare events that are mentioned include visiting the pool, shopping excursions with a female relative or visits by relatives from Germany or abroad (in two cases relatives living in Lebanon) (Fig. 3.2).

Fig. 3.2 Typical German settlement. (Photo by Lienard Schulz 2011 High-Deck-Siedlung_14—taken from wikicommons)

3.5.3 Intersectional, Praxeological Multi-level Analysis of the Data: Agency in Unequal Societal Relations of Power

In our methodology, we follow the intersectional, praxeological multi-level approach of German sociologists Winker and Degele (2009). The intersectional multilevel approach is used to analyse social inequalities. Social inequalities within the intersectional multilevel approach of Winker and Degele (2009) are understood as a complex phenomenon, not only referring to socioeconomic status, but also to inequalities arising from lack of acknowledgement and belonging, or experiences of discrimination along normative social orders. According to this theoretical understanding, social inequalities are engrammed in subjects (Butler 2015). According to Butler there is no subject without subjectivation. Subjectivation refers to the process of being subjected by power and at the same time the process of becoming a subject. Consequently, the subject is discursively generated and is thereby constitutively dependent on cultural norms that precede and fundamentally condition it.

Social categories of difference, such as the designation as child/adult, girl/boy, poor/rich, and so on represent both the condition of subordination and that of the subject's own existence. We therefore assume that these engrammed social inequalities appear in the children's subject constructions and can be reconstructed using an intersectional approach.

Along these lines we analyse the interwoveness of symbolic representations (the norms, ideas and stereotypes representing the discursive level), structures (social

categories like class, race, gender, generation structuring society representing the structural level of society) and identity (relevant differential membership categories within subject constructions of the children).

We extend this intersectional approach in that we locate and analyse the concept of well-being as an integral and embodied part of the subjects (see in detail Hunner-Kreisel and März 2019). Thereby we hypothesize that the social positions of the children with reference to social inequalities are reflected in the concepts and understandings of well-being. We developed this approach as a result of our prior data reconstructions and resulting empirical findings, that highlight the relevance as well as interwoveness of generational orders with other social orders, that impact on the children's concepts of well-being and their perceptions of agency (Hunner-Kreisel and März 2019; März 2016). The presumption is that generational orders and other social orders constitute power relationships. These being, for example, adultism resulting from a process of adult and child social constitution in asymmetric power relationships (Wintersberger 2014: p. 1532; Alanen 2009; Qvortrup 2012; Wintersberger 2005: pp. 183f.; Qvortrup 2005: p. 26).

The aim of this article is to look at these interdependencies both in their national-local context and to show how specific categories of inequality—such as generation—attain effectiveness across national borders.

The political dimension of intersectionality[1] lies in its intention to make relations of power and hegemony visible and develop strategies to empower disadvantaged subjects (Hill Collins and Bilge 2016). Thus, we treat intersectionality as an analytical perspective that allows the reconstruction of context-specific and situation-specific interplay of the disadvantages and privileges in which subjects (in the understanding of Butler 2015) are positioned (see Hill Collins and Bilge 2016: p. 2; Choo and Ferree 2010: p. 133). One major analytical step in doing so is, to identify and delineate how specific societal circumstances and the specific workings of inequality dimensions influence how subjects perceive their own power to act (see also Winker 2012; Choo and Ferree 2010: p. 133 f.).

In the following text, we use our intersectional perspective to illustrate structural and discursive inscriptions into the social practices of the girls and put these inscriptions into socio-political and national-local contexts. Analytically, we distinguish three levels—social practices, discursive level and structural level—and integrate them with a view to important interactions. Following the intersectional method of Winker and Degele (Winker and Degele 2009: p. 63), we understand social practices in the sense of Bourdieu (1984) as 'action and activity based on body

[1]Intersectionality is both a critical, theoretical perspective aimed at social change and an empirical and analytical technique to make inequality relations visible. Thinking about interwoven inequalities is not new. U.S legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw named this phenomenon intersectionality in 1989, establishing a new concept and paradigm (see Crenshaw 1989) and launched a scientific engagement with methodological refinements and empirical analyses (see Choo and Ferree 2010). Crenshaw uses the concept of intersectionality as a sort of platform for articulating a societal critique, with the goal to draw political attention to the marginalized positions of Black women who suffer from multiple oppressions (Crenshaw 1991).

and knowledge, which includes speaking...This [embodiment of practice] includes incorporated knowledge and the performativity of action and goes beyond explicit cognitive rules.' (Winker and Degele 2009: p. 66).

In the praxeological approach, we understand children's perspectives as social constructions and view children's understandings as embedded in their practical accomplishments in life. With respect to our epistemological and theoretical concept of children's understandings, we do not reconstruct children's subjective understandings of well-being, but aim to reconstruct the social and moral orders in which the children are positioned and that shape their ideas and concepts of well-being. To illustrate this approach, we will use quotations from the interviews and the map exercise.

3.6 Children's Understanding of Well-being in (sub-)urban Places in Azerbaijan and Germany

3.6.1 Concepts of Well-being: Places and Spaces

For each of the two contexts—Azerbaijan and Germany—we reconstructed 'spaces and places' independently in relation to well-being at two levels of understanding. For each level, we reconstructed context-specific sub-codes. Following Michel de Certeau (1988: p. 218), we understand space as a location with which we do something; this implies a distinction between space and place, where space signifies experiences made in specific places. In our data, the suburban settlement in Germany and the urban setting of Baku, the playground or one's room are places that become spaces through the reconstructed experiences of the interviewees. The sub-concepts are so-called in-vivo-codes (Strauss and Corbin 1990), which means that they are words, terms or descriptions the interviewees used verbatim. They show the relationship between space and place made through experiences.

Concept Well-being: Places and Spaces (First Level of Understanding)

- Context Azerbaijan: 'gəzmək'
- Context Germany: 'being outside/inside'

The first level of meaning of the concept of well-being in terms of places and spaces has the sub-concepts of 'gəzmək' and 'being outside/inside'. In the Azerbaijani language, 'gəzmək' has connotations of 'strolling/running around; going out; driving; traveling; hiking; enjoying oneself, having a good time' (Rahmati 1999: p. 302). For the girls in Baku, it is closely related to 'interesting' (*maraqlı*). 'Gəzmək' implies something interesting beyond the daily routine, whether experienced or imagined. The actual experience here is the repeated social event of 'qonaq getmək' (visiting people).

- 'I like to go as guest. Because it is interesting there' (line 206; Defo & Nihan).
- 'When we go as guests, we experience funny things' (line 210; Guldan & Zivər)

The visits often hold the possibility of playing with other children, whether they are friends or relatives.

- 'You can play with other girls and with their toys' (line 361; Guldan & Zivər)

At the same time, 'gəzmək' is connected with imagination and desire, travel and imagined visits to places one longs to see, places that the children became aware of through social media (e.g. images of Turkey or of the Eiffel tower), or places they have been to and associate with interesting and valued activities. Thus, 'gəzmək' also connotes being mobile, traveling and 'seeing the world'.

- **Abroad (imagined):** 'One of the places in the world I love...is walking (gəzmək) in Turkey' (lines 23–24; Defo & Nihan)
- **Abroad (imagined):** 'I want to go (*gəzmək*) to Paris...I want to visit the Eiffel Tower' (line 30; Defo & Nihan)
- **Abroad (imagined):** 'The place I love most is Turkey and Istanbul as a city' (line 18; Aytaj & Gözel)
- **Real activities:** 'It is interesting for us to go *(gəzmək*) to the park and to the restaurant' (line 195; Guldan & Zivər)
- **Shows on TV:** 'There are actresses shown who visit (*gəzmək*) towns and countries, spend money and do sight-seeing' (*gəzmək*) (lines 297–298; Guldan & Zivər)

In the context of Germany, 'being outside/inside' also is an in-vivo-code (Strauss and Corbin 1990). It reveals spaces of possibilities the girls have in the settlement. These spaces of possibilities span from 'being inside' in the apartment to 'being outside' at certain locations in the settlement, but also include exceptional places like the yearly fair. The in-vivo-code of 'being outside' is comparable to 'gəzmək': it implies 'roaming' through the settlement and experiencing interesting things and people. 'Being outside' also includes the once-weekly girls' day at the youth club; similar to 'gəzmək', being outside means activities outside the daily routine.

- **'Being outside':** 'So, I'm always outside...: except when the weather is really bad, then not (*4*)'. (line 155; Valentina)
- **'Being outside' /playground:** 'Ehm, when I'm with my friends...well, the coolest was always when I go play with my girlfriends or walk around (...) Mostly we go to the third (playground, author comment)'. (lines 619–625; Fritzi)
- **'Being outside'/Youth club:** 'Yes, so we play there the whole day and...: we bake, make crafts, make different things ...: yes and for carnival everybody is in costume and we do makeup and bake and dance and play (*5*)'. (lines 180–186; Valentina)
- **'Being outside'/Youth club:** '[...] Ehm then I go here every Friday to [name of the youth club]'. (line 26; Laura)
- **'Being outside'/Youth club:** 'Yes, because of [name of the youth club] there, there you can do so many nice things, make crafts and so on (2*) It is also cool what they have during the vacation, the craft things they have'. (lines 682–688; Fritzi)
- **'Being outside'/Fair:** 'Well, there you can play a lot and you can eat, cotton candy and fries, sausages, hot dogs, and some people go there in the evening because everything looks so nice, so [...]'. (lines 472–490; Valentina)

Concepts Well-being: Places and Spaces (Second Level of Meaning)

- Context Azerbaijan: 'having space'; 'having a place for oneself'
- Context Germany: 'having space'; 'having a place for oneself'

In the context of Azerbaijan, 'having space' and 'having a place for oneself' is connected with the wish for places where one can move freely and that can be shaped according to one's needs.

- **'Having space'**: 'When I grow up, I want to have a place to run near my house' (line 272; Defo & Nihan)
- **'Having space' (magic wand question):** 'Big house' (line 126); 'I dream about it all the time' (line 118; Guldan & Zivər)
- **'Having space':** 'When we are grown-up, we will have a big house we will invite many guests' (lines 206–209; Guldan & Zivər)
- **'Having a place for oneself':** 'I want to have my own bedroom; we don't like our room, it is very small' (lines 202–205; Guldan & Zivər)

The wish to be able to move freely, to have a place for oneself where one can act as one pleases is particularly clear in the map exercise undertaken by one of the participants, Defo.[2] She paints a picture with the Eiffel Tower. When she is asked about her favourite place, she names the Eiffel Tower. She has never been to Paris or France, but, as turns out during the course of the interview, she saw a movie that turned Paris and the Eiffel Tower into her favourite place: 'There are some films for school children and they show pupils on excursion to Paris. Or they travel somewhere else' (lines 116–117; Defo & Nihan). The interviewer also asks the girls about places that are significant in their daily lives but does not get any answers; Defo points to her map with the place she longs for (Fig. 3.3):

Sitting in the moonlight is a space of desire; combined with walking the dog in the moonlight, these too are imaginations because Defo has no dog nor would she be allowed to walk alone outside in the moonlight. In this fantasy, even the imaginary dog is barely company as Defo walks alone. In real life, the two girls, whom we interviewed in their home, live with their parents in a very small, two-room apartment in which they share a room that has no window. In addition to their two beds, there is room only for a closet in which their mother stores her belongings. After school, the girls are at home and must not leave the apartment without their parents' permission (the parents are at work during the day). When asked what she would wish for if she had a magic wand, Defo says:

- **Magic wand question:** 'I would change my room. [...] There is mom's stuff. I would like a big wardrobe in which you can put everything. A big one with lots of shelves. I would like to change it. The whole furniture of the room. Then...the thing I love most is...and our room doesn't get the sun. So, I would swap pink with purple, everything purple' (lines 460–467; Defo in Defo & Nihan).

[2]The names are pseudonyms. The interviewees were asked at the outset to choose a name for themselves for anonymity.

Fig. 3.3 Walking with dog in moonlight/sitting in the moonlight: ‘I just sit alone and look’ (line 244; Defo)

More important than wishing for her own room is the need to redesign the existing room and add colour; in addition, she mentions the lack of sunlight.

In the context of Germany, ‘having space’ and ‘having a place for oneself’ are also connected with the wish for one’s own room, where one can move and which can be designed according to one’s needs. However, in the settlement the issue of ‘being able to be safe’ emerges, specifically being safe from the ‘guys’, and in this regard, the interviewees talk about ‘the adults’ not protecting them enough.

- **‘Having a place for oneself’/own room:** ‘So that I can sleep well. . .: that is comfy (*3*) and that I have my own room [. . .]. For example, when I, ehm, with my brother, ehm, have a room then. . .: then I cannot go to sleep because he sleeps next to me and always has his cell phone on’. (lines 399–407; Livia)
- **‘Having a place for oneself’/Own room:** Livia: ‘And in our old apartment we, me and my two brothers slept together in own room. Int: okay . . .: and is it better now? . . .: okay . . .: and that you are alone in the room is that good too? Livia: ‘Mhm (agreement) . . .: there I have my quiet and (unintelligible) and play nicely’. (lines 424–430; Livia)
- **‘Having a place for oneself’/Playground as a significant place:** ‘Yes and here we have these bars [. . .] There you can sit, there you can well—put something inside. . .you have to pay attention. Then there is a climbing, there you can spin in this thing [. . .] climb up and then you need to spin like this. Then. . .there is a swing [. . .] Wait (*2*) so (*1*) then there are swings and that’s it really and then there is another playground’. (lines 44–73; Fritzi)
- **‘Having a place for oneself’/Using a place as one likes:** ‘[. . .] when I’m all alone I look at the things in the garden [. . .] and sometimes I sing in my room’. (lines 27–28; Laura)
- **‘Having (secure) space’/Being outside/being bothered by the boys:** ‘[. . .] // well the stupid thing is the guys always come and bother us [. . .] and when they

are gone we play again we spin and yes play basketball and so and tennis (*3*)'. (lines 312–314; Valentina)

- **'Having (secure) space' Staying inside/being bothered by the boys:** '[...] Yes, well, the guys—most of the time I don't go outside because most of the guys here in the settlement bother you [...] They come right away and take you as their victim' (lines 120–125; Laura).
- **'Having (secure) space' Boys:** 'Yes most guys are outside the whole day and then they come with their stupid comments [...] sometimes I got really scared'. (lines 161–175; Laura)

3.6.2 Discursive and Structural Levels

In the spirit of the intersectional, praxeological multi-level analysis (Winker and Degele 2009) our epistemological motivation is to inquire into social inequalities and to analyse where, depending on context and situation, they are more or less pronounced. Because we assume that these inequalities are engrammed into subjects, we will now reconstruct the social practices in terms of such inscriptions. In this way, we reconstruct how individual subjects are formed in their respective contexts and hegemonial relationships, which we understand as discursively constructed socio-cultural orders. We will compare our findings with a focus on the two national-local contexts and examine how discursive constructions work under different societal conditions.

The Discursive Level in the Azerbaijan Context

In terms of the concept well-being: 'places and spaces', we reconstructed for the Azerbaijan context the normative significance of 'adults' (often referred to as 'they' in the interviews), as exemplified in the context-specific notion of 'gəzmək', as well as in 'having space' and 'having a place for oneself'. The term adults is significant in two ways. One, the children we interviewed referred to the state of 'being, respectively as becoming an adult' and anticipated the possibility of being able to make self-authorized decision-making and to act.

- **Having your own home (in the future):** 'We can do something like this when we grow up. We can do what we want' (lines 391–392; Defo & Nihan)

In another way, adults are positioned as 'the others' (see Fangmeyer and Mierendorff 2017), whose social positioning is different from that of children and is marked by a greater ability and power to act. The children themselves legitimize this positioning and 'more powerful others', for instance, in terms of the supposed greater knowledge they have. Besides this legitimation of adults' greater power to act (see also Bühler-Niederberger 2011), there is also the unquestioned authority of mother, father and teacher as adults.

- **Question: Do adults listen?** ‘Yes, when it is needed. We listen to each other. They do the things not that we want but the things that are important’ (lines 409–410; Guldan & Zivər)
- **The question whether adults should listen to children is answered by the rhetorical question,** ‘Should you listen to a person who is young/a child?’ (lines 404–408; Aytaj & Gözel)
- **In reference to visiting somebody *(qonaq getmək)*:** ‘If they let us’ (line 214; Guldan & Zivər)
- **Question: Why is it important to respect adults?:** ‘Because they are our adults. . .If we didn’t respect them, we would feel bad. . .Why have we done it?’ (line 481 f.; Aytaj & Gözel)
- **Mother:** ‘Mom says that your best friend is your mom’ (Defo); ‘I also think so’ (Nihan) (line 611; Defo & Nihan)
- **Father:** ‘My father never risks leaving me in a difficult situation. Never let me feel strange [. . .] And he always make sure that I feel good and never lets me feel bad. He always says that I’ve got to feel well and I always do feel well’ (lines 134–136; Elizaveta & Skipr)
- **Teachers/in school:** ‘I was afraid, they have first put me in the first desk’ (line 52; Elizaveta)

The Discursive Level in the German Context

In terms of the concept well-being ‘places and spaces’, we reconstructed for the German context the normative significance of ‘the guys’, as exemplified in the context-specific notions of ‘being outside/inside’, ‘having space’ and ‘having a place for oneself’. Similar to the impact of adults, in this context it is ‘the guys’ who restrict the (perceived) agency of the girls.

Int: ‘mhmhmh (*5*) okaay aaand then you also said that the boys sometimes bother you.’
GP: ‘Yes.’
Int: ‘Where on the playground was that?’
GP: ‘Well, ehm, a couple of times I came home from school in *name of a place* and Konstantin was there do you know him?’
Int: ‘Konstantin? Yes, I met him on the train today, blond hair, right?’
GP: ‘Yes aaand then ehm ehm he pushed me and hit me and then I told my mother about it.’
Int: ‘And what happened then?’
GP: ‘Supposedly he got house arrest, but he went outside anyway (*6*) und now he leaves me alone.’
Int: ‘Leaves you alone now?’
GP.: ‘Because I told him to stop.’
Int: ‘That’s good. . .: and now none of the boys bother you?’
GP: ‘Okay, yes Max and his buddy they bother me.’
Int: ‘And what do they do?’

GP: 'Well they say bad words and go into the street often and throw ehm rocks and then I run home because I'm afraid they also will hit me and well.'
Int: 'And can you tell me about the words they say?'
GP: 'Hm (*4*) asshole and so and stupid cow and...: and dance around in the street and once a car beeped its horn because ehm a car came and almost hit him and he was not afraid and once he laid down on the street' (lines 110–146; Valentina).

The girls' position 'the guys' as being more powerful than themselves, physically superior and also dangerous because of their verbal comments. The quotation shows that the situation could be different, as when Valentina says that Konstantin now leaves her alone because she told him to. Yet, protection from 'the guys' is ascribed to the adults, not to oneself. In this way, the girls in the German context also position themselves in a generational order in which adults (intergenerationally) and boys (intragenerationally) are seen as more powerful. From an intersectional perspective, we see how gender and generational orders are interwoven at the settlement, so that girls perceive themselves as less powerful than 'the guys' and 'the adults'. When 'the adults' do not protect the girls, then the girls see 'the guys' as even more powerful, and the generational order amplifies the specific local (intragenerational) gender relations in the settlement.

The interplay of generational and gender orders can also be noted for the Azerbaijan context, even though this cannot be reconstructed from the data.[3] It is taken for granted that girls have less freedom than boys or adults to 'go out into the street'; the girls do not explicitly mention this, but the mothers who are present at our interview meetings treat it as evidence of normality.

3.7 How Does Nation Become Relevant? Conclusions Regarding the Significance of Nation from an Intersectional Perspective

In both contexts, societal conditions structure the interplay of social practices and discursive constructions. Generational and gender relations that restrict girls' agency in terms of well-being in place and space ('gəzmək', 'being outside/inside', 'having space', 'having a place for yourself') are amplified by the specific urban and the suburban setting, which serves to justify these restrictions.

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[3]This was, however, not the case for the data presented in this article.

The girls tell us elsewhere, that being allowed to go outside, depends on 'if they let us'. For example, they state that on a school trip, this permission depended on 'good behaviour'. The statement 'if they let us' affects all children, but at the same time participation in the excursion is made dependent upon 'good' behaviour. 'Good' behaviour is something which boys may not have from the perspective of the adults (and also the girls). They are therefore excluded from the school trip, while the girls can go 'outside' because of their behaviour but under the supervision of the adult

The settlement in Germany as well as the urban setting in Baku constitute restrictions on agency through context-specific constructions of gender relations, which are amplified by adultism and hegemonial relationships. These function in two ways. First, in the context of both Azerbaijan and Germany, the girls need to ask their parents whether they can go out or visit somebody, and they need to get protection outside. Thus, the potential scope of using space depends on permission from adults (see also Benke 2005). Second, and relevant in both contexts, the hegemony of adults is also visible in the physical construction of places. Settlement and city are both characterized by the absence of self-authorized play spaces[4] (Muchow and Muchow 1935/2012). In the suburban settlement, playgrounds are specialized, functional spaces created by adults with the goal of social control over children (Jeske 2017). In the German context, the very concept of settlement implies normative ideas of standardized family life created through the physical construction of public space (see also Bühler-Niederberger 2005: p. 62).

In urban Baku, public places specifically for children seem to have been barely considered, and the few existing playgrounds are often neglected (see Fig. 3.1). An exception are the playgrounds used for representative purposes that are motivated by the political goal to present the new, post-socialist and post-colonial Azerbaijan (Darieva 2011) (see Fig. 3.4).[5]

Both examples show that nation-state policies influence the notion of well-being in relation to places and spaces. The relational significance of the category nation appears in the adultist German and Azerbaijani city planning policies; it is a shared feature that attempts to determine or restrict the agency of those positioned as children. It is also possible that the needs of children are not considered at all and that instead, only national and political interests drive the physical design of public places (see for an opposite example of urban building that reflects children as individuals in their own right in Sennett 2018, picture 51). Differences between the two contexts, as far as the room for agency and the specific disadvantages that children experience are concerned, emerge in the analysis of the interplay of relations and conditions.

Therefore, we analysed context-specific amplifications and ameliorations: in the context of Azerbaijan through the generational order (adults/ 'they'), and in the context of Germany through the gender order ('the guys'). In Azerbaijan, gender relations amplify the generational order in terms of 'gəzmək' for girls. In Germany, for the issue of 'being inside/outside', context-specific gender relations are amplified by the generational order in that adults do not offer sufficient protection from 'the guys'. Whereas in the settlement, there is the possibility of being outside because the

[4]Following Muchow, we think of self-authorized play spaces as those that children create themselves.

[5]With regard to the urban changes that have taken place in Baku and which is considered as exemplified by the Baku promenade, Darieva (2011: p.177) speaks of "a process of vanishing of a public space formerly characterized by egalitarian access and the free circulation of people".

Fig. 3.4 A children's playground in the New city park in Baku (author's own photography)

playgrounds are, at least, easily accessible, in Azerbaijan, the challenges of urban infrastructure make this nearly impossible.

3.8 Final Considerations: Intersectional, Cross-Border Research on Children's Understanding of Well-being

In our chapter, which comes from a critique of methodological nationalism, we did not use the category of nation as a taken-for-granted starting point for cross-country comparison; rather, we wanted it to be part of an open, empirical research process.

For the specific contexts reflected in our data, we used an intersectional analysis to demonstrate the relative significance of local-national, socio-political and cultural contexts for children's understanding of well-being. Following an intersectional, praxeological multi-level analysis, we reconstructed how the meanings that underlie the reconstructed concept of well-being 'places and spaces' are different or similar across these two national contexts. We found that in both national contexts, there are comparable levels of meaning. However, the intersectional analysis also shows how nation, in interplay with other dimensions—here in particular, gender and generation—impacts, enables or restricts the agency of girls in specific ways.

Thus, the analytical aim of our chosen approach was to identify and delineate how specific societal circumstances and the specific workings of dimensions of inequality influence how social actors perceive their own power to act (see also Winker 2012; Choo and Ferree 2010: p. 133 f.).

Our analysis of the empirical data shows how the interviewed girls' understanding of well-being with respect to space and place in a suburban and an urban setting in Germany and in Azerbaijan is engrammed through the conditions that govern their possibilities to move, to meet friends, to have a place of their own and to feel secure outside. Most importantly the intersectional analysis shows the girls embeddedness in social orders as (female) children. The generational order, in both its intergenerational and intragenerational formation, is most strongly and inextricably interwoven or even fused with further categories. In the data we presented this is particularly evident in the categories of gender and nation, in the sense of a national-communal building policy—which sets clear limits on (female) children in their possibilities for movement and thus action as children.

Mayall (2002) has suggested "that the study of childhood has to have the study of generational relations at its core, since the generational process that sets children apart from adults is what fundamentally unites children as a social category" (James and James 2012: p. 63). Reflecting our empirical findings (see also Hunner-Kreisel and März 2019) in light of this suggestion, we consider how far (trans-)national or cross-border research on child well-being and children's understanding of well-being should be conceptualized and framed by the nation state. Alternatively, one may consider generational relations and generational orders as an analytical starting point for an intersectional analysis. At the same time intersectional approaches can be used "as a theoretical framework for politicising childhood and children's agency" Konstantoni and Emejulu 2016: p. 2).

"[. . .] ..because children everywhere occupy a position of powerlessness, it is important to explore the nature of child-adult relations from the standpoint of children. Adopting such an approach not only enables researchers to get to know about children's experiences first-hand, it also allows them to identify the generational system of power that may often work against children's best interests" (James and James 2012: p. 63).

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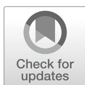
Chapter 4
A New Theoretical Framework for the Study of Children's Experiences of Well-being



Daniel Stoecklin

4.1 Introduction

In the field of social sciences, children's well-being has emerged as a central research topic over the last two decades. Several studies have been conducted on this subject from an interdisciplinary and international perspective (Veenhoven 2004; Camfield and Skevington 2008; Minkkinen 2013; Ben-Arieh 2008, 2014; Ben-Arieh et al. 2014). Child indicators represented a major trend in this set of research. Quantitative perspectives aimed at measuring well-being based on predefined notions and categories of well-being have been prioritized over qualitative research, and several large international studies on children's well-being used standardized surveys for the sake of comparing these "standards of living" (OECD 2011; UNICEF 2013). Yet, fewer studies have asked children themselves about *their* understanding of well-being and have underlined the necessity of studying well-being in a qualitative and socio-anthropological perspective, in order to grasp the social and cultural variability of children's concepts of well-being, that the other studies were often missing, or took for granted (Fattore et al. 2007; Savahl 2009; Betz and Andresen 2014; Andresen et al. 2017; Fattore et al. 2016, 2018). They have stressed the importance of researching well-being in local contexts and considering children's subjective understandings of well-being within specific social configurations through interviews, focus groups and observations. A phenomenological and comprehensive trend has therefore emerged in the field of child well-being research. This development is followed by a growing debate about the theorization and conceptualization of well-being. The data emerging from qualitative research is leading researchers to revise theories of well-being and develop broader theoretical approaches allowing us to

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grasp children's subjective concepts of well-being from a non-ethnocentric perspective.

From this perspective, the present chapter discusses Weisner's definition of well-being as "the engaged participation in the activities that are deemed desirable and valued in a cultural community, and the psychological experiences that are produced by such engagement" (Weisner 2014, p. 87). Although it implies cultural relativism as regards to which activities are a means for social actors to experience well-being, this definition also has its limits when it comes to the definition of a "cultural community" and the implied social conformity of its members that would be the only way to make allegedly positive "psychological experiences". This doesn't obviously account for the satisfaction that is obviously experienced through non-conformist or very selfish attitudes that many privileged people, and especially presidents of superpowers (nation-states but also companies), are able to claim and to actually impose. If pleasure might apparently be experienced in such non-conformist ways, then either you declare that the pleasure in non-conformist behaviors is ill and an indication of the madness of such people experiencing it, or you begin to question the conformist presupposition inscribed in Weisner's definition of well-being. Of course, narcissistic perversion is a form of ill-constructed well-being associated with domination. But how about the relative well-being experienced though non-conforming behaviors by deprived people? Among the many empirical examples of non-conformity which is associated to a certain level of well-being, the case of children in street situations is striking (Lucchini 1993, 1996; Aptekar and Stoecklin 2014; Stoecklin 2017; Lucchini and Stoecklin 2019). Some of these children experience more well-being in the streets, in illegal and dangerous activities, than by remaining in slums where they would be considered "deprived but still conform" . . . Therefore, we have to go beyond angelic visions of well-being whereby feeling well is always associated to positive and conformist attitudes, or what is also referred to as "good agency" (Stoecklin 2017).

In order to come to a closer understanding of what makes people feel well, this chapter seeks to provide a new theoretical framework for the study of children's experiences of well-being. The experience of children is especially important to study as it brings insights into how, later on, well-being is sedimented in routines in adult life. These routines are not yet as powerful in the early years, and this is why a processual study of the social construction of well-being during infancy is so important. In this chapter, the theoretical framing, the methodology and the findings of an exploratory study of children's understandings of well-being in Switzerland will be discussed. We have interviewed 20 children between 2015 to 2017, using the framework of the multinational study *Children's Understanding of Well-being – Global and Local Contexts* (Fattore et al. 2016, 2018). Our findings are analyzed along the framework of the "actor's system" theory (Stoecklin 2013) that heuristically entails new theoretical developments. These suggest that:

1. Routines are linked "modes of action" which mediate social interactions, and hence produce "forms" of well-being.
2. Well-being derives from the level of integration of the different modes of action into one's experience.
3. The process of integration (or non-integration) of modes of action is linked to three processes of structuration: namely signification, legitimation and domination (Giddens 1979).
4. Children are "negotiators" of their well-being.

All these elements will now be explored in the following sections.

4.2 Empirical Data

In this section, the theoretical framing, the methodology and the findings of our exploratory study of children's understandings of well-being in Switzerland will be outlined.

4.2.1 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical approach is informed by childhood studies, considering childhood as a social construction that varies in time and space (James and Prout 1990; Corsaro 1997; James et al. 1998; Oswell 2013; Leonard 2016; Esser et al. 2016a; b; Wyness 2018) and embedded in intergenerational relations, and hence a "generational order" (Qvortrup et al. 1994; Alanen and Mayall 2001). Childhood is an ambivalent concept as it represents both a structural form of society that is shaped by economic, political and social processes (Qvortrup et al. 1994) and an enactment of competent subjects, i.e. children's behaviors seen as instantiations of childhood, hence contributing to the functioning of society. This ambivalence is reflected in the duality of social practices, that are both constraining and habilitating, as underlined in structuration theory (Giddens 1984), and which is visualized in Fig. 4.1.

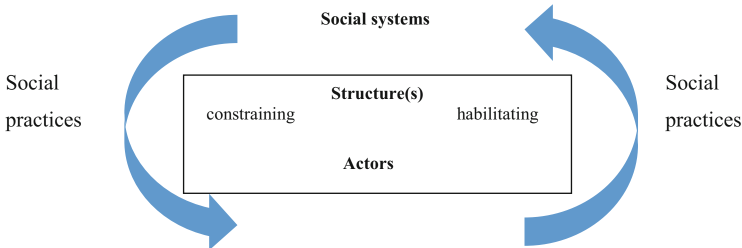

Fig. 4.1 The process of structuration (Giddens 1984). Adapted from Nizet (2007), p. 16, (translation from French into English), with the arrows representing social practices

There is no reason for not applying this framework to children as they are also social actors (with different levels of influence, as for any actor). Children are active subjects in the construction of their everyday lives and in the lives of those who surround them. The importance of meaning-making is especially important here. In opposition to classical theories of socialisation, researchers within the field of childhood studies have argued that children are not passive recipients of social norms and values, but participate in an active manner with their integration within society, through meaning-making, reflexivity and the appropriation of language in interaction with peers and adults. Authors like Corsaro (1997) showed that children possess their own peer culture that exceeds the world of adults. According to Corsaro, socialization is a form of interpretive reproduction, where children reproduce the norms and values of society, while also interpreting, appropriating and reinventing the social world. From a methodological perspective, the new sociology of childhood defends the idea that children are worthy of study in their own right and that they are competent informants about their lives. It is therefore central to know how children construct meaning around their everyday lives and how the process of meaning-making mediates their relation to social reality.

Childhood studies emphasizes children's agency, in opposition to deterministic and structural perspectives. Researchers efforts have been focused on showing how children operate within society as active subjects and how they participate in the definition of their own environment. In contemporary works about the concept of agency, the ontologization of children's status as actor has, however, been criticised. The relation between agency and structure has been subject to much debate within this field of research. While researchers recognize the importance of considering children as social actors, they also underline the danger of ignoring the influence of structures and reifying children's agency by assuming it beforehand. Agency is not a possession of the individual (Stoecklin and Fattore 2018). Accordingly, "the physical, material and emotional dependencies of children" and thus a "relational and dynamic connection between social actors and specific contexts"—as Anne Wihstutz (2016, p. 62–63) points out—should be systematically taken into account. Hence, the notion of relational agency (Oswell 2013) is better for understanding social dynamics that affect both children and adults. While children's vulnerability may be greater, as they are positioned in generational ordering leaving them dependent on their families (Qvortrup et al. 2009) and rather submissive to adult-dominated contexts, vulnerability in terms of social relations and economic conditions is also quite evident when speaking of adults. But what is it exactly then that makes actors vulnerable? Is it just a matter of the unequal distribution of benefits? Or is it more deeply linked to the valuations of different forms of capital, namely economic, social, cultural and symbolic forms of capital (Bourdieu 1992).

The results of the Children's Worlds survey (Rees et al. 2016) are very telling in this regard. Responding to a gap in information about children's lives and well-being around the world, it includes over 56,000 children aged around 8, 10 and 12 years of age in 16 countries, as part of the interdisciplinary development of child-centred and self-report indicators of child well-being (Ben-Arieh 2008). A striking result from the study is that the impact of economic capital on well-being is not clear-cut. The

survey found a quite high average levels of satisfaction with life as a whole (home and family, money and possessions, friends and other relationships, school, the local area, self, time use, other aspects of life and children's rights). However, the data indicate that the cross-national variations are not easily explained by macro indicators such as GDP per capita. A salient issue is therefore the role played by other forms of capital (social, cultural and symbolic) on the prevention and reduction of child vulnerability.

While pointing out the importance of "public policies regarding children and youth, institutions and procedures through which children can participate and be heard, and especially their accessibility and adaptability to different groups of children (age, gender, ethnicity, geography) possessing different kinds of capital (...)" (Stoecklin and Bonvin 2014, p. 134), I have also insisted on the necessity to take a closer look "at how the social actor perceives reality and gives meaning to his/her actions in relation with others" (Ibid.). If vulnerability is generally more acute with children, this is not only due to their young age and associated dependence on adults, but merely to specific combinations of resources they have or lack, notably economic, cultural, social and symbolic forms of capital (Bourdieu 1992). A lack or scarcity of economic capital is especially detrimental to children's participation in many fields. One must critically assess the supposedly linear progression of these different forms of capital accessible to children as they grow up. Some children may in fact lose more than they gain in terms of the different forms of capital. This is especially true for children experiencing crises in many ways (fluctuating market economies, war situations, diverse forms of marginalisation). Therefore, children's vulnerability must be analysed in systematic, structural and individual dimensions (Andresen et al. 2017).

But what exactly is "structure"? Giddens' criticizes the dominant approach associating structure with a kind of scaffolding that frames individual constructions. For him, this conception

> (...) is often naively conceived of in terms of visual imagery, akin to the skeleton or morphology of an organism or to the girders of a building. Such conceptions are closely connected to the dualism of subject and social object: 'structure' here appears as 'external' to human action, as a source of constraint on the free initiative of the independently constituted subject (Giddens 1984, p. 16).

Instead, Giddens writes that structure "can be identified as sets or matrices of rule-resource properties [...] recursively implicated in the reproduction of social systems" (Giddens 1979, p. 64). Structure hence has a 'duality': it is simultaneously a medium and an outcome of social practices. Giddens identifies structure as an abstract entity that is recursively constraining and enabling of practices, and as such people's agency is not only an outcome of structural features, but also a means for influencing social systems. But the "matrices of rule-resource properties" (ibid.) remain rather unclear as long as we do not address the symbolic nature of such matrices. This is why it is of utmost importance to insist here on a less developed strand of research, which is about the role of symbolic capital. According to Bourdieu, symbolic capital is

> any kind of capital (economic, cultural, academic, or social) when it is perceived according to the categories of perception, the principles of vision and division, the systems of classification, the classificatory schemes, the cognitive schemata, which are, at least in part, the product of the embodiment of the objective structures of the field in consideration, that is, of the structure of the distribution of capital in the field being considered. (Bourdieu 1998, p. 85).

In other words, symbolic capital frames through “categories of perception” or “classificatory schemes” all objects that are socially defined. We could say that institutions actually embody the sedimentation or the structure of “the distribution of capital” in given fields. The connections of the subjects (or social actors) with objects (or institutions) are therefore “symbolic”. I contend that these “symbolic landscapes” which channel social interactions are framed pragmatically through standardized questions such as “what do you do?”, “who do you know?”, “what do you think?”, “who are you?”, “what do you want?” that are asked universally. These questions are currently used in social interactions because they are pragmatic tools to situate the other and hence reduce margins of error in one’s own interpretations of the situation. They are pragmatic questions for inquiry (Dewey 1938) through which actors and observers can interpret transactions. These questions in turn construct *discursive categories* like activities, relations, values, images of self, and motivations (or similar concepts) serving as common *transactional horizons*. These *sensitizing concepts* (Blumer 1969) indicate directions to look at, are therefore quite efficient eidetic reductions of reality allowing for pragmatic trial-error procedures. The conservation instinct and hence strategies of self-protection that extend to the discursive abilities human beings, explain why *activities*, *relations*, *values*, *images of self* and *motivations* (hereafter ARVIM) become pragmatic *transactional horizons*.

With this specification of the connections with and between objects made by subjects (social actors), it is possible to highlight also the social construction of institutions which is not really considered by Bourdieu as he speaks of such “categories” as merely the “product of the embodiment of the objective structures of the field in consideration” (Bourdieu 1998, p. 85). Bourdieu’s objectivism, close to Durkheim’s determinism, whereby “the social explains the social”, tends to highlight only one side of the social process, namely the constraining nature of institutions. In my view, symbolic capital is both constrained and habilitating, closer to Giddens’ theory of structuration. As a consequence, ARVIM can be seen as the “structure” contained in Fig. 4.1 (above). This structure is of a symbolic nature and is made of the links between the most universal “transactional horizons” (ARVIM) as depicted in Fig. 4.2 (below).

These “transactional horizons’ (ARVIM) are reductions of the eidetic reductions that social actors use to name things or the objects about which they are talking. These “second degree reductions” (Stoecklin 2018a) are pragmatic because they allow for social interactions to be oriented in conventionalized ways, hence reducing the potential outburst of violence due to uncertainties that are always present in the course of interactions. Conventionalized discursive horizons are framing and hence control the behaviors of social actors who reciprocally decipher the attitudes of

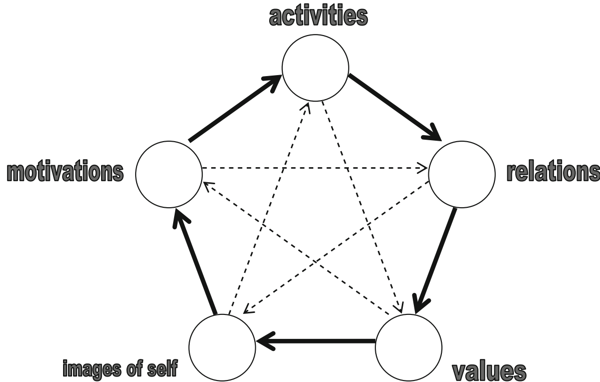

Fig. 4.2 The actor's system (Stoecklin 2013)

others during interactions in order to adapt accordingly. The links among transactional horizons are systemic, which is logical if we consider that pragmatic behaviours are necessarily recursively organized (otherwise they would not be practices in the full sense of the term, that is something that takes place and hence necessarily entails mutual adjustments of practices):

The systemic and recursive characteristics of this model rest on the assumption that the way one defines any of the five dimensions will influence the definition of the other elements. The plain arrows symbolise a habilitating force and the dotted arrows a constraining force, and therefore the model specifies Giddens' theory of structuration. The model can be viewed as the "structure" Giddens refers to in terms of resources and rules: the five dimensions are discursive resources to describe experience and their links (the arrows) are the rules (habilitating and constraining forces) binding these resources together. This model therefore represents a *structure of action*, composed of resources and rules that are not tantamount to the structure of language (Stoecklin 2018a).

Consequently, institutions are objects constructed through a language that enables fictional reductions of reality (eidetic reductions), hence constructing 'objects' seen as existing in the 'environment'. There are numerous institutions indeed, in the sociological sense: school, family, work, politics, economics, leisure, arts, etc. These "objects" are all reductions of reality into things we refer to as if they would exist per se. Yet they are all social constructions. But there is more: people use "reductions of these reductions" when they refer to even broader concepts, like activities, relations, values, images of self and motivations. This provides specificity to Max Weber's definition of social action by detailing what the symbolic space mediating reciprocal actions consist of: for an action to be social, the subjective meaning that "takes account of the behavior of others and is thereby oriented in its course" must precisely decipher the relevant "directions to look at" (Blumer 1969, p. 148). These *directions* function as common horizons for social transactions, hence "transactional horizons" (activities, relations, values, images of self, motivations) that are relevant in the situation being experienced.

The social nature of an action therefore lies in the reduction of the 'objects' that potentially enter into the course of the dialogue to one or more transactional horizon (s), by which reality needs to be reduced in order to be invested with subjective meaning and hence intersubjective cooperation around these objects. The actor's system therefore represents the dual structure contained in the theory of structuration (Giddens 1984): it both filters the existing constructed worlds and the further worlds in construction. The bi-directionality of this filter is what constrains but also habilitates subjective understandings of anything, including the subjective understandings of well-being. As the filter is bi-directional (from institutions to individuals and from individuals to institutions), any actor can experience to some extent the "agency" of one's own constructions. They may be considered as valid and hence modify the environment.

Children experience the habilitating nature of transactional horizons with quite heightened sensitivity: they are able and love to *invent* non-existing things, which is a specific characteristic of human reflexivity (Elias 2015). Children's desires or objectives may become phantasmatic objects. It is therefore possible to envisage that their ability to transform objectives into real objects is what presides over their feeling of well-being. But children also learn that their endeavour "to make one's dreams come true" is also countered by many obstacles, some of which are unsurpassable, namely physical constraints. For instance, you just cannot fly as you are not equipped with this ability. But what is central for well-being is the individual and collective treatment of obstacles that are social barriers towards reaching one's goals. And this is highly dependent on social positions. As has been underlined, the generational order and associated submissive position of children (Qvortrup et al. 2009) plays an important role. But the effective capability to transform objectives into objects varies between individuals, not only because of one's social position, as underlined by Bourdieu and many others, but also, and this is my suggestion, because some modes of action are prevalent in one's context to the detriment of other modes of action. It can be observed that the most prevalent transactional horizon, which has been globalised, is the one centred on "activities", evaluated as performances and entailing an instrumental-rational social action (Weber 1978), optimizing means towards a specific end. The early emergence of this disenchanted legal-rational world was identified by Max Weber a century ago (Weber 2013). Hence, the "entrepreneurial mode of action" can be seen as the predominant yardstick against which children learn to measure their degree of competence and consequently situate their level of well-being.

This allows us to consider the importance of different modes of action over subjective understandings of well-being. Modes of actions can be defined as typical ways of acting according to dominant transactional horizons that link together concrete items of perceived reality (Stoecklin 2018b, p. 561). There are five modes of action linked to the predominance of one of the five transactional horizons (ARVIM):

The entrepreneurial mode of action focuses on activities that produce objects exterior to oneself (*poiesis*) and strategies believed to be the most efficient to achieve one's goals (corresponding to Weber's "rationally-purposeful action"). The

relational mode of action puts emphasis on relational configurations (it is close to Weber's *traditional social action* when it favours habits and routines that reproduce the social status and position of actors). The moral mode of action is based on the belief in the inherent worth of specific values (Weber's *value-rational action*). The identitary mode of action is based on the intersubjective definition of self (it partly corresponds to Weber's *affective social action* as drives also inform subjective identity). The motivational mode of action is the most complex one. It has no correspondence in Weber's typology of social action, it is closer to inquiry (Dewey 1991)" (Stoecklin and Lucchini 2019). The acquisition and display of symbolic capital, in the form of shared modes of action, is what has been specifically observed in our exploratory study of children's understandings of well-being in Switzerland.

4.2.2 Methodology

The individual interviews where conducted guided by the protocol of the Children's Understandings of Well-Being study (Fattore et al. 2016), with open-ended questions about important places, important people and so on. This enabled us to work inductively from children's narratives to identify key concepts regarding subjective quality of life as experienced in their everyday contexts (Strauss and Corbin 1990; Ellis and Flaherty 1992). The study was mainly a methodological exploration and there is no claim of statistical validity. Following this protocol, we conducted two series of semi-structured interviews with 15 children in French-speaking Switzerland and five children in Italian-speaking Switzerland, covering a diversity of socio-economic backgrounds. Children were aged 10 to 12 years. Children were recruited within leisure centres and schools and the interviews conducted in these settings.

We decided to conduct individual interviews instead of focus groups or observations in order to obtain a deeper understanding of children's subjective experiences and to collect detailed information about their life course and personal histories. While interviews allow more direct access to the personal experience of children, they also have the inconvenience of putting children in a quite "artificial" situation, where they are separated from other children and their everyday practices (that focus groups and observations would allow us to analyse more directly). The narratives collected in the interviews must be considered as the result of a dialogue between children and the researcher, and hence a co-construction reality. Several biases may intervene in this context including social desirability and biographical illusion. The individual interviews that we conducted with children allowed us to get a deep insight into their experiences of their everyday lives and their subjective concepts of well-being. In the first series of interviews, we asked children to draw all the activities, people, places and objects that were important for them, and to construct a narrative around their drawings.

Studying well-being in a multilingual country like Switzerland attracted our attention to the importance of language. The issue of multilingual settings raised

awareness about the importance of the cultural context for the meanings conveyed to and through words or concepts people use. Switzerland has four linguistic regions (about 70% of the population speaks Swiss German, 25% French, 5% Italian, and 1% Romanche). As suggested before, a more phenomenological perspective on language, as a normative and cultural construct acting as a medium to and for experience, has been retained in order to observe how important discursive categories (ARVIM) mediate children's understanding of well-being. Children have been invited, in semi-directed interviews, to comment on their well-being according to different spaces (family, school). A mapping exercise showed that places, people and activities are linked together in different ways, demonstrating diversity in children's subjective experiences. It however remains difficult to interpret the meanings attached by children to their relations with people and places on the basis of drawings. Therefore, a complimentary technique was introduced in order to elicit the links children make among different aspects of their experience. Regarding language and culture, children typically use juvenile expressions and share a related set of cultural references (stemming from games, social networks, TV programs, etc.). The language used is merely that of children living in an urban environment. Their representation of well-being (things that are important to them) is strongly focused on their belonging to a local and regional context (the areas of their school, their family, friends, places to go out).

The "actor's system" has been included in this study on children's well-being in Switzerland in order to specify how children interpret their own experience. We have used a concrete tool, called the *kaleidoscope of experience*, that has the form of a double-disc with the five dimensions of the actors' system (ARVIM). These discs can be turned in order to encourage children to elicit the things they see through these transactional horizons and the links they make among them. Hence, the children who have been interviewed in Switzerland were encouraged to define the abstract notion of well-being through concrete elements, such as the things they do (activities), the people they know (relations), the things they consider important (values), the feelings through which they define themselves (images of self), and the things they wish (motivations). In this way, well-being became something that could be described in very pragmatic ways. This reduction of experience into five discursive categories was a relevant methodological tool as it allowed us to observe and control the reductions of experience already made by the actor. The respondents were asked to allocate their accounts (first reduction) into the five discursive categories of the *actor's system* (second order reductions). Respondents were asked to reflect on their ARVIM in different contexts. Using concepts like ARVIM, extracted from common-sense language, reduced the risk of ethnocentric or adult-centred categories. This methodological asset has already been confirmed in evaluations of child participation policies in Europe (COE 2011).

The application of this framework in the qualitative study of children's experiences of well-being has heuristic value for the interpretation of children's narratives as is reflected in our findings.

4.3 Findings

4.3.1 Modes of Action and Forms of Well-being

Thematic analysis was conducted using the *reduction of the reduction* technique: the citations of different elements of experience were subsumed into the five discursive categories (ARVIM). The dominant dimensions of experience are activities (212) and relations (206), while values (94) and motivations (58) are less often mentioned and, surprisingly, images of self (23) around ten times less than the two main dimensions.

This distribution of the modes of action tell us something about their relevance in children's lives. The prevalent modes of action signal that typical ways of acting according to dominant thinking horizons that link together concrete items of perceived reality (Stoecklin 2018b, 561) are mainly *entrepreneuria*l and *relational*. It is however important to be cautious and consider that the importance of these two modes of action maybe induced by the bias of social desirability, which is also present in the interviewer-interviewee relationship as an instantiation of larger adult-child relationships. It is uncommon to hear children, especially when they speak to 'outsiders', speaking a great deal of their values, motivations and images of self. This means that the modes of action that are less importantly portrayed during the interviews (identitary, motivational and moral) are not necessarily less important in children's subjectivities, but that they are less easily addressed than the dominant accounts that are currently made in the Swiss context in terms of activities and relations.

The methodological tool nevertheless suggested these other dimensions of social action (values, images of self and motivations). But even when less discussed modes of action are suggested, children tend to describe their daily life according to the dominant modes of action, hence reproducing the naturalization of *activities* and *relations* as the most relevant transactional horizons.

Meanwhile, when it comes to the concrete contents captured within these transactional horizons, we observe that these elements could also be attributed to the other less importantly mentioned dimensions of social life. Regarding the types of activities, play and free leisure activities come first (78), followed by organised leisure activities such as sports, dance and music (30), school (25) and information and communication technologies (19). Things less mentioned include elements that could be depicted as values—like talking, confiding in and helping (10), disputes and conflicts (29)—or related to images of self or/and motivations: mockery and harassment (7), punishments (5), homework (9). This suggests that, when asked about their activities, without implying specific issues, children evoke mostly rather free and mostly unproblematic activities that can be associated to a generally high level of well-being. The bias of social desirability is therefore quite high, even with a methodology that suggests transactional horizons that allow multiple attributions of concrete items or objects seen as 'reality': children tend to limit their accounts of daily life to what they do and who they know, and less to what they believe as being

important (values), how they see themselves (images of self) and what they want (motivations).

Regarding relations (206), children mention, another unexpected pattern is the predominance of friends (93) over parents (46), followed by brothers and sisters (27), teachers and mentors (24), being alone (12), cousins, uncles and aunts (3) and grand-parents (1).

Regarding values (94), the first place is attributed to friendship, love and solidarity (23), success and performance (16), money and material goods (13), trust (8), common interests (7), health (6), treason (5), pleasure (4), prudence and moderation (4), reputation and respect of others (4) and loyalty (3).

Regarding images of self (23), physical aspect (8) comes first, followed by behavior and character (6), shame and guilt (4), pride (3), being different (1) and age (1).

Regarding motivations (58), the distribution is more even: to have fun (10), to be successful (9), to meet people (8), to communicate (7), to learn (6), boredom, lack of motivation (5), fear, stress (5), future work (5) and altruism (3) were discussed.

It is therefore possible to suggest that subjective understandings of well-being are framed by dominant transactional horizons (activities and relations) and that the entrepreneurial mode of action, in particular, has become a 'regime of truth' (Foucault 1976). By 'regime of truth', Foucault means "the types of discourse society harbours and causes to function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true from false statements and the way in which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures which are valorised for obtaining truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true" (Foucault 1976, pp. 112–113). Of course, this regime of truth is hidden or at least it is not explicitly discussed. It is an implied inclination towards the formulation of some statements that are seen as valid. The description of one's life in terms of activities mainly, to the detriment of other important dimensions (relations, values, images of self, motivations) can be seen as an instantiation of the regime of truth that places the entrepreneurial mode of action and associated discourses in terms of activities and performances in a position of a 'natural' presentation of self. It goes without saying: when you present yourself, you are supposed to say what you are doing (and not, in the first instance, who you know, what you believe, how you see yourself or what you want). This regime of truth has pervaded all the institutions of late modernity.

Meanwhile, to derive children's subjective well-being only from their activities or relations would of course be short-sighted. As suggested by the pragmatic transactional horizons depicted in the *actor's system* (Fig. 4.2 above), experience encompasses other dimensions also and well-being should therefore be viewed as one's overall *system of action*. Whether one or two dimensions become prominent transactional horizons only means that they are socially valued, and not that the other dimensions are absent in people's lives. The focus on what is more concrete (activities and relations) is a reflection of socially constructed preferences, regimes of truth (Foucault 1976) that naturalize dominant discourses, and not the reflection of what people actually experience. Moreover, these other aspects of experience can also appear within dominant discourses based mainly on activities, or, reversely, the

concrete activities mentioned by children can also be viewed as reflections of other dimensions of their experience. One's actual experience of well-being depends on values, images of self and motivations, as much as on activities and relations. If the latter are predominantly conveyed in children's discourses, this means that their values, images of self and motivations are actually *translated* into concrete activities and relations because they believe in theses regimes of truth (Foucault 1976) as the most 'natural' ways to speak about themselves.

However, accounts become less superficial when the researcher is able to build a trusting relationship (Warming 2013), which was actually seldom the case even with our two-step methodology. When it happened, we were able to dig deeper into other forms of well-being (or the lack thereof). This is the case, for instance, with the interviews (phase 1 and 2) conducted with D., an 11 years old girl who lives in Italian-speaking Switzerland, which we present below, as the answers illustrate the idea that well-being is heightened when different modes of action can take place.

4.3.2 Well-being as Integration of Modes of Action

Excerpts from interviews with D., are used below, after some elements of her life context have been discussed, in order to allow readers to understand her situation in more depth. D. was born in Ukraine from Ukrainian parents with a low socioeconomic status. Her family has a complex history of migration. When she was 3 years old, D. migrated to Italy with her mother, after a parental breakup. In Italy they joined D.'s grandmother and other members of the family who had migrated previously. Her mother got back into a relationship and her boyfriend moved in with the family. After 5 years spent in Italy, the family moved to Italian-speaking Switzerland for economic and work reasons. They stayed for one year in a small village in the north of this region and then they moved again to another small village more to the south. Integration into Switzerland was not easy for D. and her mother.

According to D., they are always at risk of being forced out of Switzerland, since their residence permit is only provisional and her mother does not have an official job, but only an undeclared one. Her mother would like to marry her boyfriend, who is Swiss, but the wedding is being delayed due to the fact that the boyfriend is still married to his first wife:

> They (the canton) want to send us away. Because my mother and her boyfriend, they can't marry, because his first wife doesn't want to leave him. She wants money from him. (...) If they can't marry, they could send us away from Switzerland. We sent a letter to the canton. But since my mother is not married to him, we don't know if we can stay.

Integration at school was quite difficult for D., who lost a school year due to the migration process between Italy and Switzerland. The school decided to integrate her in a class with children younger than her age: "I started with the third year, since I have lost one year. I had to be in the fourth year, but I did the third year again instead. I'm born in 2004 and not in 2005 like the rest of the class." While she initially

suffered from this decision, D. has accepted it and provides her own justification for it: “It’s better like this. Because, I can learn more than the other kids. My mind will think a little bit more”.

Due to her newcomer status, D. also experienced exclusion and isolation at school, since the other kids did not want to play with her:

> At the beginning, when I arrived here, with my schoolmates it was difficult. . . It was almost like a bad dream. Because in Italy I used to stay with my best friend S., whereas here, without S. and everything. . . Everyone has his best friend. But now, little by little, after one year, I found new friends in my class. But the first year, everything seemed to go wrong, I felt really bad.

Today, she asserts feeling more integrated within her peer-group and has developed new friendships. Despite the fact that she experienced difficulties in terms of relationships with peers, D. constructed a very positive relation with schooling, since she performs very well in mathematics and would like to become a mathematics teacher. In her discourse, she legitimizes school work and emphasises the importance of going to school for learning:

> “I really like going to school. When people have to go to school, they say ‘oh no, school is boring”. But if you can’t go to school, you’re not doing well neither. It is a good thing to go to school, because if you don’t have school you can’t learn a lot of things.” She adds: “I really like mathematics. It makes me feel good. I like very difficult calculations. (. . .) When I grow older I would like to become a mathematics teacher, in high school, or do another job in mathematics.”

D. has developed a very positive representation of mathematics, since this discipline allows her to express her potential: “I like mathematics. Because I’m very precise and I like the order. (. . .) At home too, I like to be tidy with my stuff.”

In other disciplines, like Italian, she states that she experiences more difficulties. These difficulties are also due to the fact that D.’s mother tongue is Ukrainian and that she learned Italian later in her life. She is therefore disadvantaged compared to other students: “I don’t like Italian too much, because of the double letters. It’s quite difficult for me to read and write, especially long words.”

The importance of activities is apparent here: as her mother does not have an official job, her undeclared activity is problematic and certainly not a guarantee that they might stay in Switzerland. In addition, due to their complex migration process, D. has lost a school year and her integration with classmates younger than herself was full of difficulties.

However, it would be wrong to conclude from D’s, and her mother’s, experience in terms of activities that her level of well-being is definitively low. The picture is much more contrasted when we use the actor’s system to the analyse the child’s narratives in relation to the school context. We can see that the five dimensions of the system are problematized and that they are interrelated. The relations between the five dimensions involve some degree of agency as well as above average vulnerability. D. values very positively schooling (activities) since it allows her to construct friendships (relations). School also led D. to understand the importance of learning and education (values) that she emphasises in her discourse. Her identity

(image of self) is constructed around school work, since what she likes about herself is the fact that she is good in mathematics, precise and tidy. She likes to go to school because one day she would like to become a mathematics teacher and find a good job (motivations).

This example of the application of the actor's system to the analysis of the narratives of an individual child illustrates the heuristic value of the theory of well-being as a dynamic process involving all the dimensions of social life, although some pragmatic transactional horizons are discursively placed in the forefront. With the example of D., we can see this emphasis on some pragmatic transactional horizon, like in this case "activities", tend to become the "tree that hides the forest", as a result of over-adaptation to expectations that the child thinks are "deemed desirable and valued" in the community where the child is supposed to integrate. Defined in terms of lack of competence or weak performances at school (the fact that D. is older than her classmates), the child tries to catch up regarding the supposedly most important activity a child could have, namely succeeding at school.

Symptomatically, D. expresses a feeling of well-being about mathematics as she sees her potential in this activity, which can be seen as an instantiation of the "regime of truth" (Foucault 1976): the social desirability of the "good pupil", with high performances, especially in a field where there is no discussion or interpretation (mathematics). This is probably playing an important role in D's presentation of self, especially as she has had to catch up with school requirements. The child's over-adaptation to these requirements should therefore not be confused with true well-being. It corresponds more to a strategy for being accepted as someone competent. The child's accommodation to the dominant view entails reproduction of it, as the regime of truth "(. . .) is produced (. . .) by virtue of multiple constraints. And it induces (. . .) regulated effects of power" (Morris and Patton 1979, p. 45–46). In a way, the child takes on the role of the teacher in order to become one of "those who are charged with saying what counts as true" (Foucault 1976, p. 113): she develops a whole set of justifications about the centrality of school. This suggests that "the engaged participation in the activities that are in a cultural community, and the psychological experiences that are produced by such engagement" (Weisner 2014, p. 87) might not exactly reflect well-being but rather a need for conformity which surpasses and even might censor the child's justified claim for authentic well-being.

As we can see, school work (activities) was mainly a cause of suffering for D. during her first year in Switzerland, since she experienced difficulties in relating with others, she did not perform well in Italian and other disciplines, she felt excluded due to her newcomer status and had low self-esteem. However, over time, D. exercised her agency on her social context and was able to modify her situation, by performing well in mathematics, developing new friendships, and therefore reinforcing her values, image of self and motivations. If we analyse her situation in terms of capitals (Bourdieu), we realize that the migration process involved a loss in terms of capitals for D. Migration of D.'s family was motivated by economic and job-related reasons, which means that their level of economic capital was low. When she arrived in Switzerland, D. had no friends or relatives despite her mother and step-father. Therefore, her social capital was also low. In

terms of cultural capital, D. also suffered from a lack of recognition of her own knowledge in the new school context. During the 3 years spent in Switzerland, however, the level of these three forms of capitals increased, since the economic situation of her family stabilized, D. developed new friendships and performed better at school. Hence the integration of different modes of action seems to be raised by better socio-economic conditions. Additionally, to a certain extent, the progress made at school allows D. to dig more into the other modes of action, as if successful activities entail more room for other modes of action. Therefore the "regime of truth", and the over-adaptation it might entail, may also be conducive to other forms of "truth" that a child may discover for him/herself. This suggests that an "entry door" into social recognition (Thomas and Stoecklin 2018) might open up other doors. And hence, the study of subjective well-being should consider how different dimensions of experience, and corresponding modes of action, combine or are even integrated into one another. Considering the cumulative and recursive aspects of the "actor's system", it would be interesting to better understand the processual increase or decrease of well-being as something that might be linked to the transactional horizons that are prioritized from early infancy onward. It looks like the entrepreneurial mode of action is maybe not the best entry door for children: they predominantly attach importance to social relationships as is substantiated by international comparisons (Rees et al. 2016; Fattore et al. 2016, 2018). Meanwhile, to be someone "active" is very much valued in modern societies and this normative injunction has a tremendous impact on how children evaluate their well-being. The feeling of being performant and competent in some field (for D. in mathematics) therefore seems to play an important role for the realization of other dimensions of experience. This multiplying effect can be visualized in the cumulative and recursive dynamics reflected by the "actor's system" (Fig. 4.2 above). It also triggers the habilitation side of modes of action seen as pragmatic ways (social practices) to both accommodate and transform social systems and corresponding institutions (see Fig. 4.1 above). Therefore, a closer look at well-being as a process is necessary, and this leads us to the next section.

4.3.3 A Processual Approach of Well-being

Our findings suggest that well-being evolves (develops or shrinks) in a processual way, according to the integration (or non-integration) of different modes of action: entrepreneurial, relational, moral, identitary and motivational. The more integrated these modes of action are the more well-being is likely to be experienced. The opposite also holds, when a child's life context is limited by the predominance of a specific mode of action, insufficiently connected with other modes of action, then the child's possibilities to heighten his/her subjective feeling of well-being shrinks. The possibilities to assert agency through different modes of action become scarce and a general downward cycle is likely to be observed.

This allows us to critically assess classical approaches to "child participation" based on level of involvement, which itself corresponds to the entrepreneurial "regime of truth" that tends to put everything into measurable indicators. Therefore, tools such as the ladder of participation (Hart 1992) and concepts such as Weisner's "active participation" or "engagement" can be seen as already framed by a regime of truth that justifies the transformation of qualitative aspects into quantitative measurement, which is actually what "living standards" (OECD 2011; UNICEF 2013) try to achieve. Such classifications do not reflect the transversal and transformational effects of modes of action, at the individual level, but on the contrary break up individuals into tables measuring different "levels" of well-being according to specific items or life domains. Yet, subjective well-being cannot be captured by such procedures as tables do not make sense at an individual level but only on an observer's level (the scientist and the policy-makers making and using these tables). This disconnection between the measurement of well-being at a collective level and the experience of well-being at an individual level is a problem: the aggregated data is not necessarily significant for individuals and hence the corresponding debates and policies neither. The latter are actually framed by three dimensions of structuration, namely legitimation, domination and signification (Giddens 1979, 1984).

For Giddens "Signification refers to structural features of social systems, drawn upon and reproduced by actors in the form of interpretative schemes" (Giddens 1979, p. 98). Signification has been explored in the previous sections: we have depicted what children understand by well-being through the different transactional horizons (ARVIM) that have been used to stimulate their answers and linkages among different dimensions of experience, hence well-being. In the systemic approach to social experience suggested by the actor's system theory, activities are both causes and consequences of the other dimensions of experience. And so are all the dimensions of action: they are structured by the other dimensions and retroactively structure them. The actor's system theory allows us to understand children's subjective well-being through a systemic analysis of the actor's meaning-making and accounts of experience, while also considering the influence of social determinants on actor's experiences. It defines five discursive categories that shape subjective experience of well-being: activities, relations, values, images of self and motivations. These dimensions are very broad transactional horizons children use to describe their daily life. The actor's system theory starts from the assumption that the dimensions of children's daily life are interrelated and form "systems of action". Social relations among children are constructed along these five dimensions of daily life. In a pragmatic perspective, we consider that social relations—which are by definition power relations—are not static but evolve through the dynamics of social action, namely though interactions in daily life. Researchers in the field of childhood studies who have studied power relations in children have stressed the importance of language and social categorizations in the processes of identity formation, as well as the role of practice and material resources in differentiation processes (Ecklund 2012; Kwon 2015; Alanen and Mayall 2001; Konstantoni and Emejulu 2017; Rodo-de-Zarate 2017). Language and categorizations are also central dimensions in the construction of subjective well-being. The actor's system articulates material

and symbolic dimensions of children's lives. It allows us to understand how identities and power relations among children are constructed through specific sets of activities, relations, values, images of self and motivations. Several authors have already underlined the importance of peer relations and friendships in the construction of children's identities (Rysst 2015; Iqbal et al. 2017; Scholtz and Gilligan 2017). It is precisely through the act of sharing activities, relations, values, images of self and motivations with other children, or refusing to share, that children build significations, and hence explore identifications and distinctions with others. These processes shaping the subjective understandings of well-being of children, according to their privileges and deprivations, due to their position within the hierarchy of power relations in a given context, are therefore clearly linked to legitimation and domination.

Let's now see how legitimation works, before ending with domination. Legitimation of contexts and action therein has been addressed with the following question used in the protocol for the CUWB research: "What contexts are made relevant in children's narratives?". In their drawings and narratives about their everyday lives, children problematized various social contexts in which their experiences take place. The *home* appeared as a central place for them, where various activities could occur, like play and non-organized leisure; communication and bonding; learning (by doing homework and other pedagogical activities) and using technologies and social media. Home was often associated with freedom and intimacy. The main persons in this place where family members, but also friends, with whom children developed close relationships based on love, respect and trust. *School* was also very central in their accounts about their daily lives, since they spend most of their time in this setting. Within this space, children valued above all play, non-organised leisure, communication and bonding with other children, and to a lesser extent formal learning and school work involving interactions with teachers. School was problematized by children both as a space to have fun and pleasure, and as a space for achievement and success. Other *institutionalised contexts* were also important in children's narratives, like clubs and associations where their leisure activities take place. The neighbourhood, or the village (*non-institutionalised contexts*) were also considered by several children as a central space, where non-organised leisure could occur, and where they could meet their friends and develop spontaneous activities without adults' supervision. Shops, malls, restaurants (e.g. McDonald's) were also considered by children as important contexts to meet their peers without the supervision of adults, not only for consumption, but also to chat, bond and spend time together. Children's accounts about their everyday lives allowed us to understand that the different social spaces that they navigate are always interrelated. Children, as well as the social actors that surround them, evolve within multiple spaces and make connections between them. Children's capacity to conciliate the requirements of these various spaces allows them to be agentic and to experience well-being. On the contrary, the tensions and conflicts that arise between these spaces seem to generate suffering and vulnerability. The engagement of children in these different spaces varies depending on the opportunities that these contexts offer to them in terms of fulfilment of their values and motivations.

Domination was addressed by questions used in the protocol of the CUWB research whereby researchers tried to "identify other relevant contexts used in the analysis, whether derived from the children's statements; from ethnographic notes; or other sources/forms of data used by the researcher to reconstruct context". Our research allowed us to understand that the influence of context on children's experiences of well-being is not only related to the kind of spaces that they navigate, but also to the *social position* that they occupy within these spaces, namely their *place*. In the interviews, we collected socio-demographic information about children and their families (gender, age, SES, social origin), in order to understand how they are positioned within the social-structure. The analysis showed that children's conceptions of well-being are filtered by their social position and related to their sense of privilege/deprivation in comparison to other children. Their aspirations and preferences are always adjusted to their social position and mediated by the norms and values specific to their social group. Children's accounts about their everyday lives also showed that inequalities and differences between children are not only inherited due to their social background but they are constructed and reproduced within specific contexts and settings. Therefore, it is important to understand how different spaces and contexts—which are organized by different rules, codes and power dynamics—structure children's experiences of well-being and (re)produce social inequalities among children.

4.3.4 Children as "Negotiators" of their Well-being

The three dimensions of structuration—signification, legitimation, domination (Giddens 1979, 1984)—should be approached as things that are negotiated by social actors. Children can be seen, as any other social actors, as "negotiators" of their well-being. Here, the Meadian perspective of the Self is of high relevance when we come to realize that children's discourses on their well-being are not really "subjective", as it is impossible for an observer to fully understand social actors "in their own terms".

Any item exchanged in a conversation is already a situational account. This means that the words chosen by any social actor to "speak" to another are selected according to the actor's perception of the situation. This selection is even stronger when social actors are facing a researcher they don't know, moreover in a child-adult relationship, and according to perceptions about status distances (social position, gender, etc.). In other words, the presentation of self corresponds to a negotiation. According to Mead, this negotiation arises between the "Me" and the "I". The "Me" is the reflection of the attitudes of others towards an individual person, and the "I" is "the response of the individual to the attitude of the community" (Mead 1934, p. 196). The "Me" is the socialized self, learnt through interactions with significant others that are generalized in role-taking. The "I" is the active response of the person to these social prescriptions. In other words, the "Me" is the social self (made of our beliefs in how others generally see us), and the "I" is our personal response to the "Me". The actual Self is the balance of the I and the Me. The Self lies in a way

Table 4.1 The transformability of actors and institutional orders (Stoecklin 2018b, p. 572)

Structure (duality: resources and orders)	Resources with transformative capacity (ARVIM)	Institutional orders
Signification (communication of meaning)	ARVIM used for indexing (coding) experience	Symbolic orders/ modes of discourse
Domination (resource authorisation and resource allocation)	ARVIM used for representational power and terms of exchange	Political institutions Economic institutions
Legitimation (normative regulation)	ARVIM used for sanctions	Legal institutions

in-between the "I" and the "Me". The Self is the negotiated outcome of the tension between the "Me" and the "I". So, the accounts made by children correspond to this negotiated outcome. They are not "the subjective voices" (which is the "I") but discourses that are already socially shaped. But these discourses are also not the expression of the generalized other (which is the "Me"). The accounts made by respondents are "in-between" the "I" and the "Me"; it is neither the "I", nor the "Me" that is speaking: it is the "Self".

The centrality of the Self is underlined by Mead when he deals with the importation of the social process into the individual:

> I have been presenting the self and the mind in terms of a social process, as the importation of the conversation of gestures into the conduct of the individual organism, so that the individual organism takes these organized attitudes of the others called out by its own attitude, in the form of its gestures, and in reacting to that response calls out other organized attitudes in the others in the community to which the individual belongs. This process can be characterized in a certain sense in terms of the 'I' and the 'me', the 'me' being that group of organized attitudes to which the individual responds as an 'I'. What I want particularly to emphasize is the temporal and logical preexistence of the social process to the self-conscious individual that arises in it" (Mead 1934, p. 186).

So, if we follow Mead, we must consider that the child enters an already preexisting conversation (the social process) and gradually takes part in it. How this participation occurs along the life course has not been dealt with by Mead. He only considers an abstract individual, supposedly an adult. It is notably Jean Piaget who has conducted research on how the child is equipped with cognitive structures that are progressively acquired through social interaction (Piaget 1932). The stages of intelligence development end with abstract thinking, which is actually the point of departure of Mead's works: the adult is an individual who is able to understand and build abstract constructions. How these constructions are socially shaped is still a domain that is open to many concurring interpretations. I contend that the actor's system offers a framework allowing us to get closer to understanding this process, as transactional horizons (ARVIM) entail the transformability of actors and institutional orders (see Table 4.1).

The transformative power of transactional horizons lies in their centrality in the coding of experience (signification) and their practicality for representational power and sanctions:

> The dimensions of experience—activities, relations, values, images of self and motivations—are constitutive of experience precisely *because* they are discursive categories that are simultaneously reflecting and orienting practical consciousness. The links between these discursive categories, both structured and structuring, offer a view of agency as transformability of signification, domination and legitimation (Stoecklin 2018b).

If we now consider that the dimensions of the actor's system (ARVIM) are discursive categories (transactional horizons) through which actors express themselves and exchange meanings, we can envisage, in Meadian terms, that the "I" is situated at the centre of Fig. 4.2 (above), the Self is in every circle (ARVIM) and the "Me" is the social pressure surrounding and constraining the "actor's system". The subjective view (the "I" placed at the centre of this system) is never apparent: what is expressed by the actor is already a negotiated self, expressed in different modes (entrepreneurial self, relational self, moral self, identitary self, and motivational self). Modes of action can also be viewed as "modalities of the self": we can express ourselves in entrepreneurial ways (what we do), in relational ways (who and what we relate to), in moral ways (what we believe in), in identitary ways (what we consider ourselves to be) and in motivational ways (what we would like). These "ways" are the negotiated dominant transactional horizons that are currently used by social actors to make themselves "understood" by others". Hence, the themes that were most important to the children we interviewed are not only "institutional" topics (corresponding to the institutional or "administrative" definition of reality). Children's accounts must be seen as "significations" attached to experience: they start from practical experience and try to find the words corresponding to their inner feelings about their experience (the "I"). They have to find the appropriate words, and so they express "socialized accounts" (the Self) that is the outcome of a negotiation between the Me (what society expects them to say) and the I (what they feel). We must therefore understand children's discourses in terms of experiential dimensions of reality: their experience is communicated through socially shaped transactional horizons (ARVIM). It is these transactional horizons that give "meaning" to "institutional categories" (family, school, etc.). Children can relate spaces (like family, school, leisure centres, etc.) by means of transactional horizons (ARVIM). These are pragmatic ways to reconstruct contexts and the theory is coherent with the Deweyan notion of inquiry (1938), the Meadian notion of the Self (1934) and the Giddensian theory of structuration (1984).

4.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have suggested that the subjective feeling of well-being is bound to modes of action that mediate social interactions, that these modes of action are more or less integrated thanks to negotiations around the signification, legitimation and domination of things that "count" for children. This puts emphasis on the social construction of reality (Berger and Luckmann 1966) and allows us to critically address the fact that the subjective assessment of well-being makes the field of

well-being still seem much closer to psychology than to other social sciences. Meanwhile the bi-directional translations of modes of action into institutional arrangements is a social process which gets lost when one situates well-being as subjective process that would be devoid of social negotiation. If "the very lynchpin of developmental psychology, the 'developing child', is an object premised on the location of certain capacities within 'the child' and therefore within the domain of psychology" (Walkerdine 1984: 154), the risk of losing touch with the social conditions of the child's development is heightened. But, genetic epistemology (Piaget 1932) is not at all concerned with intrinsic development, but quite on the contrary it focuses on how intelligence develops through the exchanges between individuals and their environments. Hence, modes of action is a perspective that is close to genetic epistemology, questioning the hidden regime of truth, that we may call the "ideology of growth" that has even pervaded a large portion of psychological development. This ideology, stemming from economics and constantly reaffirmed by the neo-liberal obsession with economic growth, has led the social sciences to embrace all too uncritically the perspectives of "levels", "ladders" and "percentages" to measure things that are actually incommensurable, like well-being. Together with Jean-Michel Bonvin, I already took a critical position towards "child participation" measured in terms of degrees:

> The epistemological break requires that we question the dominant evaluative categories with regard to child participation: why has "levels of participation" become a relevant category? We suggest that this attitude of measuring or evaluating something as "big" or "small", "high" or "low", has become the dominant habitus (Bourdieu 1992) because the regime of truth underlying everything we do is a mathematical view of the world (more, less, growth, decline). As "more" and "growth" are positively valued we may call this an "ideology of growth". It pervades fields where numbers can easily be produced, notably the economy, and the market-oriented globalisation is only a proof of this powerful narrative which also stretches to the field of rights and moreover children's rights: the claim for indicators in this field can be seen as a "normalization", because the regime of truth, the ideology of growth, calls for comparable data (Stoecklin and Bonvin 2014, p. 145).

The same is valid for well-being. What is "missing in the existing models, ladders, measures and theories of child participation" (Ibid.) is similar to what is missing in theories of well-being, "namely the causal factors that explain the very variations of child involvement over time" (Ibid.). The findings above suggest that these factors are systemically linked together, with cumulative and recursive effects, that can be grasped through the "actor's system". The variations then come mainly from changes in legitimation, domination and signification of specific modes of action and their combinations.

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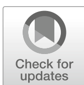
Chapter 5
School and Well-being: Education, Self-determination and Adult-imposed Aspirations



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5.1 Introduction

Schools, as diverse communities where children live much of their daily lives, are significant for their impact on children's well-being. The chapter is a nuanced exploration of how the children we talked with in our research project, respond to the potentially contradictory expectations school poses for experiences of well-being in the present and well-becoming in the future. We move beyond describing the tensions between well-being and well-becoming by framing our discussion around what children told us about their experiences of well-being at school, in terms of opportunities to pursue agency and competency, defined in our discussion as self-determination, and the requirements to prepare for a future, what we refer to as adult-imposed aspirations. We argue, from our findings that, while the opportunities school provides children for self-determination promote their sense of well-being, the pressures from adult-imposed aspirations, particularly for secondary school children, can undermine well-being in the present.

The children's discussion informs us that opportunities for self- determination can develop internalised competence, provide opportunities for meaningful social recognition, and that practical achievements and learning outcomes emerge from the process. On the other hand, adult-imposed aspirations as described by children, in situating them as society's human capital, in a system of marketised education, impose expectations on children, associated with credentialism and instrumental

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rationality. These expectations emphasise a formal achievement orientation and pre-determined outcomes. We extend the discussion of some of our findings by drawing on earlier child participatory, qualitative research, by two of the authors of this chapter (Fattore et al. 2016). We conclude by arguing that both the opportunities and the expectations that characterise children's experiences of school, contribute strong demands on children in terms of the constitution of the self, and thus have contested implications for their sense of well-being.

5.2 Child Well-being Research

School features widely in discussions of child well-being both as an area of research (such as UN's Innocenti Report 2018; OECD 2019; Tobia et al. 2018) and as a site for implementing and evaluating child well-being strategies and policies (for example, the NSW Well-being Framework for Schools 2015). This is unsurprising given that, as Qvortrup (2009) points out, the 'scholarisation of childhood' has meant that children living in industrialised countries spend much of their daily lives in schools.

Over the past two decades there has been an increased focus on children's well-being in research, policy and practice (Ben-Arieh et al. 2014; Fattore et al. 2019). However, what constitutes well-being remains contested both across and within disciplines and debated by researchers, policy makers and practitioners. While there is no universally accepted definition of the term 'well-being', there is broad agreement that child well-being is best conceptualised as a 'complex and multi-faceted construct' (Hernández-Torrano 2020, p. 2) which is 'culturally contingent, value-oriented, a construct embedded in society and culture and prone to change and redefinition over time' (Fattore et al. 2019, p. 389).

Within psychological approaches, well-being has largely been understood and measured through two main approaches; the *hedonic* with a focus on subjective constructs such as happiness, life satisfaction, avoidance of pain; and the *eudemonic* with a focus on psychological aspects of well-being and functioning, such as flourishing and self-actualisation (Ryan and Deci 2001; González-Carrasco et al. 2019). Drawing on these approaches, adult researchers taking a Subjective Well-being approach have sought to classify and quantify (often through indicators across diverse domains) children's well-being to inform social and public policy, most notably in the areas of education, health, child protection and welfare (see, for example Ben-Arieh et al. 2013; UNICEF Innocenti Report Cards on children's well-being in OECD countries 2018).

But what do children say about well-being? How do children understand, construct, define, measure and communicate what well-being is? Research studies that focus on children's understandings of well-being have emerged as a field of study (see, for example, Adams et al. 2018; Andresen and Fegter 2009; Fattore et al. 2016; McAuley and Rose 2010; Savahl 2009; Tonon 2013). Historically, children have been silenced in research and positioned as passive objects, with their perspectives and experiences mostly translated by adults, such as parents and teachers (Mason

and Watson 2014; Fegter et al. 2010). Research that centres children's perspectives on their own well-being represents a significant shift in positioning children as agents in well-being research. Fattore et al. (2019) and others (see, for example, Andresen 2013; Bohne and Hunner-Kreisel 2016) identify a number of factors that have both enabled and created this shift including, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child; the emergence of social constructionism and new sociology of childhood; and the children's rights movement. It is within these frameworks that children have been repositioned as social actors with rights; challenging the construction and preoccupation of children as 'becoming'; and has 'provided impetus for research that places more weight on children's voices in research on child well-being, to the extent that a shift from an adult perspective to a child perspective has been posited' (Fattore et al. 2019; 389). The multinational Children's Understanding of Well-being project (CUWB), the forum in which the Australian research described in this chapter, was undertaken, characterises this shift acknowledging the inherent tensions, contradictions and limitations of child well-being research by adult researchers. In the Australian research, as in the CUWB research more generally, school was a key element in children's understandings and experiences of well-being.

5.2.1 Research Literature on Schools and Children's Well-being

The acknowledgment, in much current research on child well-being, of the importance of children's voices has been reflected in research on school and child well-being. In this research there has been a shift away from approaches, that typified the early child indicators research, where the focus was on children as 'becomings' to be measured against standards of adult-determined positive outcomes, to a recognition by adult researchers of the need to 'ask' children about what is important to them. However, most of this research continues to be informed by pre-determined parameters constructed by adults (Fattore et al. 2019). For example, in much of the literature on children's well-being and school drawn from indicator research, adult researchers ask children what is important to them, using selected indicators such as, satisfaction with peer and teacher relationships, safety and belonging (PISA study; Ben-Arieh 2005; González-Carrasco et al. 2019; Bradshaw and Richardson 2009). Even where a number of qualitative and mixed methods studies explore children's well-being at school; presenting rich, deep data that highlights cultural, social and relational contexts (such as Anderson and Graham 2016; Littlecott et al. 2018), these studies mostly use pre-determined questions where well-being has been defined using categories or domains of well-being as identified by adult researchers.

There is considerable variation both within and across studies about children's well-being and experiences of learning at school (Suldo et al. 2016; Huebner and Alderman 1993; Datu and King 2018). For example, some children identify the significant stress and pressure they experience as they navigate learning and skills

acquisition, particularly in cultures where academic achievement is prioritised (Skattebol et al. 2013; Suldo et al. 2016). The value and emphasis placed on academic success and pressure to 'do well at school', particularly for future economic and social participation, weighs heavily (Suldo et al. 2016). Conversely, children have described the positive impact of learning; feeling a sense of accomplishment and mastery; and the pride and enjoyment experienced from being recognised and rewarded (Tobia et al. 2018).

In the school environment researchers have found that having a voice and access to opportunities to participate and express or assert self-determination are associated with children reporting positive well-being and conversely for the absence of these opportunities (Anderson and Graham 2016; de Róiste et al. 2012). Anderson and Graham (2016) noted that 'increased opportunities for student participation at school result in substantial wellbeing benefits, such as improved academic achievement, an increased sense of agency, better communication, greater self-esteem and confidence, increased community engagement, and reduced exclusion from school' (p. 350). More recently, there has been a focus on whole of school climate and culture (see Aldridge et al. 2019), as well as the spatial aspects of school and impact on children's well-being. For example, a study of French middle schools extends 'place' beyond the classroom and explores the temporality of subjective well-being based on location within the school (Joing et al. 2019). Within this study, children identified how their well-being, particularly related to aspects of safety and security, changed depending on their location within the school.

Notwithstanding the rich literature in this area, there are limited studies that focus on how school influences children's well-being as defined and described by children (Fattore et al. 2007; Littlecott et al. 2018; Anderson and Graham 2016). Some exceptions are beginning to emerge, for example Kutsar and colleagues, who use children's perspectives to develop what a 'school for well-being' from children's perspectives would look like (Kutsar et al. 2019). In this chapter we explore what children told us about well-being in relation to school from the data collected from the Australian team of the CUWB study.

5.3 Methods

The CUWB is a qualitative, multinational study which seeks to examine how children conceptualise and experience well-being from a comparative and global perspective. The participating teams are guided by a protocol and overarching framework:

- Children are seen as social and moral actors who can provide narratives about their experiences of well-being and of everyday life. Our aim is therefore to capture the richness of experiences of well-being, how well-being is conceptualized and how it is constituted from children's (different) perspectives.

- Children's perspectives must be understood within the social and cultural orders which they are part of. While the child is the focus of data collection, analysis situates the child and children's narratives within complex relations, networks or ecologies, of actors, discourse and institutions.
- This also means being sensitive to values and norms and explicitly analysing how values and norms are part of enacting cultural contexts.
- Researchers are co-constructors of meaning along with participants, requiring that the research process and the social relation between the children and the researchers need to be reflected upon carefully (Fattore et al. 2019).

Drawing on both a children's rights framework and the sociology of childhood approach, the study aims to position children as social actors and as a distinct social group with their own particular needs, rights and ideas about a good life (see Andresen 2013; Hunner-Kreisel and Kuhn 2010).

The Australian CUWB study utilised child-centred and participatory techniques, including the use of task-oriented methods, such as drawing, photography, making a digital movie and mapping. Stage One of the field work involved focus groups and individual interviews with children, where children were asked about what makes them feel good; what is important to them; and the everyday contexts in which concepts of well-being are experienced. Children made a map and/or a movie to capture their views. Stage two of the field work involved an individual interview where the children explained the concepts captured in their films and maps. These interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. Researchers also made reflexive field notes about the process and fieldwork context throughout both stages of data collection.

The study focuses on 'middle' and 'late childhood'; including 106 children between 8 to 16 years of age living in New South Wales, Australia. Children were recruited from six different locations featuring broad socio-demographic characteristics, including areas with high levels of urban and rural populations, diverse socioeconomic status and distinct ethnic groups. The sites included children in a private play group, two council after-school care centres, two catholic schools and one government secondary school. The time available to engage with children in these different sites varied. In the private play group setting times for the research were organised with one of the parents, who then coordinated with the other parents to arrange times suitable for the children to participate. Consent was obtained from the children and parents, with all but one of the contacted parents agreeing to participate in the study. The sessions were open-ended, lasting for as long as the participants were engaged in the process. However, sessions typically lasted 3 h with the length of interviews lasting between 20–40 min. In the after-school care centres, the days available for research were, for practicality, those where all the children with parental consent would be attending. The length of research time was limited to the time each child would be at the centre. Children would arrive around 3.30 pm, but the time a parent or carer would pick them up varied, which meant that the length of individual participation differed significantly between children (20 min–2 h). In the two Catholic school settings, a particular period was set aside for the researchers

to engage with the children and the data collection had to fit within the set time, which was challenging with a large group of participants. In the government secondary school, an afternoon was set aside to work with Grade 9 students. The afternoon was organised into two sessions. Session 1 involved focus groups with approximately ten students in each. Five focus groups were held. Session 2 involved small group or individual interviews about 'well-being places'.

5.3.1 Briefing the Children

In this research, as typically with research with children, children are only able to participate in situations controlled by adult gatekeepers. Consequently, differences in gatekeeper approaches to facilitating child participation can impact on the manner in which children engage. The way that the children were informed about the study and the instructions for activities varied a little from site to site. For example, while on most sites the adult gatekeepers asked the researchers to introduce themselves and the project, on one site the adult gatekeepers introduced the researchers as 'visiting teachers' with emphasis on the significance of school, which likely influenced the way the children focused on the importance of education.

5.3.2 Customising the Data Collection Methods

The face to face engagements sometimes differed according to the number of children in the group, and the fact that in some sites engagements were characterised by very noisy spaces. For example, children attending an after-school care centre, but not directly participating in the research, would sometimes be interrupting the flow of researcher to child interactions, while other sites with a dedicated research space made quieter, more structured engagements possible. With some of the older participants, facilitating focus groups with art activities were very successful in establishing insightful discussions on well-being topics within a limited timeframe. Younger children often preferred shorter activities and more focused attention from the researchers.

The extent to which researchers decided to augment verbal interactions with other methods of communication, varied in the provision of art tools, such as crayons and glitter, glue, stickers, figurines and magic sand. In the case of children with intellectual disability, some of the tasks and questions were simplified and broken down to components of tasks and augmented with visual cues or physical activities. Where children were unable to articulate their views verbally, the wording of questions and conversations from the researchers were developed more specifically to allow them to agree or disagree. The data gathered from children's participation at some of these sites was complemented by video productions by individual, sibling or friendship

groups of children, on aspects of their lives. On one site, disposable cameras were introduced as an option for children to bring visual data of their choosing to discuss at the follow up visit.

5.4 School as a Site of Co-existing Expectations

5.4.1 School as Promoting Self-determination

In our research some children, particularly primary school children, told us about school's importance as 'the gateway to the future'. This construction of schooling accords with the discourse on childhood described by Uprichard (2008) as 'explicitly future oriented' in that children are regarded as 'becomings'. In this construction school, as children in our research described it, is the site that guides and monitors them in attaining developmental milestones towards goals of adulthood (see, for example, Uprichard 2008). Mayall (1994) argues that the discourse which constructs children's experiences of school as 'becomings' is shaped by the research of educationalists, that characterise childhood as the period of instability, of becomingness and growth, when adult generations necessarily exercise their influence to develop children to fit the demands of social life. In our research many primary school children generally appear to accept this ordering of their experiences at school.

For example, when the researcher questions Mary (11 years) about a map, on which she had drawn her school in the centre, asking "Is school important to you"? Mary responds, "Yeah, it's important to me, school is there so you have a future. Like I don't love school but, it's like a gateway...to something else, to further education". Responses from other children draw attention to the link between achievement in school subjects and getting and succeeding in jobs as an adult, identifying themselves as actors in this process. Anna (10 years) told us that:

> School is really important to me because it just, it helps us to, like, if we want a career, we can get that through learning. . . Like I want to become a teacher, I need to pay attention to what the teachers are saying and all the math problems and everything like that. If I want to be a teacher, I'll have to follow that and go to university, I'm pretty sure. . .If you want to become builders and all that... you have to measure how much cement goes there. And if you don't then you might just fail it. . .And you will get fired.

Anna, in telling us that she needs to succeed at school in order to 'become a teacher', emphasised that she is able to use her agency in the school setting by applying herself to learning. This is consistent with Uprichard's argument, that the child as a becoming person can co-exist with the child as a social actor constructing her everyday life and the world around her, 'in the present and the future' (2008, p. 311).

Katarina (13 years) also made clear how the child in the school setting exists as both a becoming and a being when she told us that it is important to work hard at school 'because it leads you up to what you want to do when you are older . . . [so you will] have a job', she drew attention to a link between well-being and

education while at school and the well-being of 'females' in contributing to a better future:

> Well really education is a fundamental, has a fundamental role in the wellbeing of children across the world. Particularly with females because they're more aware to actually step up for what they think is right and receive the knowledge that you need to in order promote equality in the future.

For Katarina knowing that what she was doing in school was important for her future contributed to her experiencing well-being, by linking her present well-being with a hoped-for well-being in the future. 'Well I just love the aspect of learning and developing skills ready to be applied in the future. And, so in terms of my wellbeing I think that's really imperative'.

Similarly, when Josie (12) in response to a question, that followed her assertion about the need to go to school, "Why would you need to go to school"? replies "So, you can learn things, like I learned to read at school". But she told us that not only did she need reading skills, but she enjoyed, in her present, reading and also art lessons. Cassie (11 years) explicitly described school as a 'place that makes her happy'. When asked by the interviewer, "What is it about school that makes you happy"? Cassie replied, "doing work . . . but I just hate maths. . .My favourite session is mindfulness, you all lay down on the ground and close your eyes and listen to the man, we do what the man tells us to do" [listening to a meditation exercise].

Cassie's focus on reading, art and mindfulness as favoured aspects of school, points towards the significance of school subjects where children are focused on their internal states and/or express them through creativity. Here we draw on the 2016 Fattore, Mason and Watson research:

> Interviewer: Tell me about this. You've sort of done a different style here of illustration. A wonderful, beautiful vase of flowers.
>
> Apex (12-year-old boy): What happened on this day was that I was reading this art book. I read a lot of books. And I was reading the Impressionists and yeah and then I got the shades and stuff.
>
> Interviewer: That is cool. So, what do you think of the Impressionists?
>
> Apex: They are cool. They make you think, the colours are blended but they are not. See. These colours are not blended at all. You can see it looks like glass or something. That is crazy. Just the art. You know. So, I'm doing a couple of these.

In this discussion Apex clearly loves the Impressionists not only because in engaging with the work he has developed his capacity as an artist, but also because of the aesthetic wonder he experiences from studying Impressionist art.

Aesthetic wonder and enjoyment of art, like mindfulness practice, is associated with pleasant changes in internal/emotional states. In addition, these children made clear the benefits they obtain, from developing new skills. They indicated that developing new skills and competence, can also enhance well-being where this competence gains social recognition from others. Children's discussions (Fattore et al. 2016) indicate that this recognition can be experienced in institutional form (such as institutionally granted awards or qualifications), as is the case with Eve winning a medal for doing gym:

Interviewer: Can you think of other times when you've felt really, really happy?

Eve (12-year-old girl): Well, when I was doing, when I was little I won a medal, well I got a medal from doing gym and that was something that I felt really happy.

Or for Goon, from getting a trophy because of his involvement in public speaking:

Interviewer: [Discussing photos associated with well-being] And what else did we have? Let's have a look. What is this one?

Goon (11-year-old boy): This was another one. Another type of public speaking.

Interviewer: Oh, was it. You look like you are getting a trophy or something.

Goon: Yep. I think that was that one there. One on the top left [showing trophy in cabinet]. The one at the back with the red and black. The Young Directors Club.

Interviewer: Oh. Okay. So, tell me what was that time? What is the Young Directors Club?

Goon: A place where like you have to practice. Yeah, we go there to practice and yeah, practice and then come back.

Part of this social recognition involves processes of supported learning, in the Vygotskian sense, where children are challenged to extend their knowledge and skills with the support of someone in a teaching role. This is illustrated in a discussion with Angel about piano lessons:

Interviewer: What is it about piano and music that is important?

Angel (10-year-old girl): Cause other people teach you and then you can teach other people. Some people like music and you can make them happy.

Interviewer: You can play to them. And teach, who do you teach?

Angel: No one yet, but maybe I'll be a musician. [Piano lessons] give me a chance to learn something that I might be able to use later. . . . Earn money by teaching.

This social recognition of children's emerging skills underlines the importance of relationships in the educational context for children's well-being. Our findings suggest children experience well-being when their efforts are responded to with affection and pride from people who are important to them.

5.4.2 School as Promoting Adult-imposed Aspirations

The above extracts, where children told us that school is significant in terms of them as 'becoming' adults, accord with an acknowledgment of school as providing them with what Oldman (in Mayall 1994) describes as 'the human capital they will require for investing in their own adult labour' (p.155). While many (but not all) primary school children described experiencing a degree of well-being in the school system, through using agency to gain competencies, for achieving an internal state of well-being by, for example, gaining recognition or, as a pathway for improving the world for 'females'; many older students indicate that well-being in their present is undermined by the stress associated with an emphasis on them as 'becomings'. Here, they are referring in particular to stresses reflected in school practices of grading, examinations and the generationally structured nature of schooling.

Adam (14) told us that 'a lot of my stress is exam related'. He made clear the connection between his stress and the negative social consequences in his present life of not succeeding when he says, 'School is where you get stressed out and you know like you might get in trouble or like something might happen', while Carl (15) told us that what contributes to his stress at school is 'the work and stuff, grades'.

Matthew (14 years) also told us about the pressure he felt from a teacher to make decisions about his future:

> Like they ask you. . .like Mr X came for career experience and he said like "what you want to do or like what?", you've got to be thinking like now what you to be doing as an occupation . . . but it's hard. . .it's like I'm fourteen. . . he [MrX] said like "what do you want to be?", it's like what, I don't know what there is to be, you know and that's true for any fourteen year old, especially now, I mean like, we don't even know what jobs are going to be there by the time we come out of uni, so it's like you can't accurately answer that question.

In his emphasis on, what he considered an inappropriate stress, to make career decisions at the age of 14, Matthew told us something about his status in the present, as a young person in his interactions with the teacher.

A similar concern with the pressures adults put on her to do well at school was articulated by Alison (15 years). When she told us about how the focus on her future by her parents interferes with her experience of well-being in her present childhood, she was challenging the way an emphasis on her 'becoming' contradicted her understanding that childhood is a period of life where she expects to be 'a child', in the romanticised conceptualisation of childhood as a stage of development of fun and happiness, of herself as a 'being' child rather than a 'becoming' adult:

> Everything would have been a bit better if we had more time to be kids. I don't know, I feel like school takes such a massive portion out of our childhood and I mean like I'm going to grow up and I'm going to be like eighteen in two and a bit years, and then that's my childhood, it's gone and I can't get it back. And I spent a good portion of that childhood studying and being stressed by wanting to please my parents.

It is these stresses, the pressures put on young people, both those who 'fail' and those who 'succeed', that Lucy Clark explores in relation to the 'purpose' of education and of childhood in her book *Beautiful Failures* (2016). In it, Clark discusses how Neoliberal education regimes, through their emphasis on testing, assessment, gradation and monitoring, create anxiety in students, even those who 'succeed' according to conventional standards.

Some students in a group discussion refer directly to the structuring of schooling in terms of its disciplining milieu, what Bowles and Gintis (1975) have referred to as the 'repressive nature of schooling' a description, which contradicts it as a site of well-being, but is inherent in the human capital approach to schooling that Bowles and Gintis describe as schooling's 'essential role in the reproduction of the capitalist order . . . in the production of "good" workers' (p.82), which some students told us subordinates their expressions of agency.

In this group discussion Casie (14 years) responded to the researcher's question 'what are your thoughts on school' with the comment 'its compulsory' and another

'it's an educational jail'. When the researcher questioned this student 'how do you see that' the student said,

> Kind of like how, what I'm kind of thinking of is like forced to do, like work, and forced to strive for excellence and how, yes we learn things, but we may not want to, so it's like we're being imprisoned in making sure we actually strive for excellence.

The idea of forced learning and imprisonment as an obstacle to agency, is reinforced by one participant who says

> like we just sit in classrooms all day, we don't really go outside, we don't really actually explore and do things, we don't actually do the things that the teachers are telling us because we don't have that opportunity because we're stuck inside all day (Oliver, 13 years).

One of these students told the researcher that, where she values the opportunity to exercise her agency in choosing subjects, "I really like [electives] because you'll actually learn what you want to learn and not what other people want you to learn, you're actually, because if you learn something that you actually want to learn then you actually, like participate, and you'll engage in it (Leon, aged 14 years)'. Another student told us how the process of choice contributes to well-being 'because you've got like, you can choose drama' and 'learning about different cultures' (Sam, 13 years). She responds to the question 'what is it about making the choice yourself that seems to be make you feel better about school?' with the answer 'You can express yourself even more doing it. Like if you like doing woodwork or sewing, you express yourself to doing more of it... then use it for the rest of your life, it's a good idea'.

It is in the obstacles to expressing the self as an actor, using agency, in the school setting that both primary school and older students find repressive, that is in the monitoring not just of their performance but of their behaviour, within a bureaucratised system which rewards and punishes behaviours in directing children towards a social norm of maturity. These obstacles occur in a context of generational relations in which adults and children are organised according to specific norms that provide only limited opportunities for negotiation and voice (see Mayall 1994; Alanen 2009).

5.5 Discussion

One key aspect of our findings is that children identify the importance of human capital development for their well-being. They recognise the value of education for developing skills so that they have better future prospects. Whilst our research demonstrates that the emphasis placed on school success weighs heavily on children, children's discussions of the importance of developing skills also becomes a dimension of well-being for them. For example, Anna's discussion of aspiring to become a teacher. So also, children told us, are the skills required for internal states, whether aesthetic, such as art, or cognitive, such as mindfulness, important for well-being.

In accord with the argument that cultural capital (such as aesthetic skills) is also human capital (see Lareau and Weininger 2003) social expectations of education include that schooling should develop children's individual talents and interests, so they can express their 'unique self' (Lareau 2003; Vincent and Ball 2007). Moreover, as well as imparting topic knowledge, schools are expected to develop children's skills and dispositions to, for example, negotiate and question overt authority structures; be responsible, motivated, independent and self-reliant; show responsibility toward others, be respectful and able to appreciate the importance of team work and fair play; but nonetheless to be self-confident and self-aware. The emphasis on 'critical thinking', analytical abilities, being versatile, developing research skills and so on conform with the socially valued attributes required of individuals to be employable in a post-industrial service economy, such as Australia. It is therefore understandable that our participants, being socialised within these post-industrial conditions, where individual autonomy, expressiveness and the pursuit of self-determined aims are socially valued, also identify attainment of these characteristics as important to their sense of well-being.

Such a valuing is evidenced in our findings for example, where students talk about the importance of experiencing a sense of internal satisfaction when attaining a new skill, or where Cassie and Josie describe the embodied pleasure they experience from learning. In these discussions, children do not see themselves as being socialised or developed. Rather, the internalised sense of well-being is autotelic (Trilla et al. 2014), experienced as something of value in and of itself. Psychologists would describe this as developing a sense of mastery (Pearlin and Schooler 1978), which involves practical achievements that occur as part of everyday interactions. As practical achievements, they are something earned by children (objectification in the Marxist sense), rather than something that is bestowed upon them by others, for example through formal assessments, even though the two may overlap. Thus, Angel's aspirations to become a piano teacher would presumably also be recognised through formal grading.

Nonetheless, a sense of internal satisfaction can occur even where the achievement falls short of educationally mandated standards of competence, involving a different quality of competence than that which is used in formal educational assessments, where the measure of competence is codified and subject to passing a formally administered assessment. We have identified this in children's discussion of the importance of learning contributing to their self-determined aims. While children's identification of learning as important to well-being reflects the importance of development and 'becoming', this nonetheless conflicts with the standardisation of education, which characterises most schooling in Australia, in particular the use of standardised testing, school metrics, competency-based learning and education systems which rank students on the basis of whether they have achieved system-defined educational imperatives.

It is these tensions that we can identify as arising from the way learning is organised, as foregrounded in children's discussions of well-being. These tensions reflect different ways of constituting competence and the degree to which learning is organised so that children are supported to pursue their self-determined aims; or

whether learning reflects the pursuit of adult-imposed aspirations and outcomes for children. While, on the face of it, these educational aims appear to be similar (learning to develop skills for the future), they are different in at least two crucial ways:

- *An emphasis on practical or formal achievement*: The pursuit of self-determined aims involves, at least to some degree, the practical achievement of competence in everyday interactions, as opposed to the display of competence as a final outcome, through formal assessment that occurs at fixed time-points. This involves competence being experienced as an individual property of the child. Knowing that you have achieved something is enough. It does not require that the competence is demonstrated. In contrast adult-imposed outcomes require formal assessment, as without this assessment children cannot be evaluated as to whether they have achieved the outcome or not. It must be demonstrated and judged. Education is geared towards the formal achievement of qualifications as a marker of success. Because competence has to be measured, testing regimes exist for the external assessment of competence with a system of formal rankings, ranging from the local, to the national and international level (see Clark 2016).
- *The value placed on emergent or predetermined learning*: The pursuit of self-determined aims involves displays of emergent competencies, that is 'learning by doing'. The doing of the activity itself determines what skills, if any, are developed and these skills cannot entirely be predicted in advance. As adult-imposed outcomes require some degree of predictability and generality in curriculum (everyone should more or less be learning the same thing at the same stage of their learning), learning outcomes must be specified in advance. A system that links what is taught with *what should be learned* requires that curriculum is standardised for all students. Learning outcomes specified, modes of pedagogy are usually specified in advance, with learning processes and activities designed to achieve predetermined learning outcomes.

The distinction between school as promoting self-determined aims, in our research associated with well-being and school as promoting adult-imposed aspirations reflects the importance of children's agency and self-actualisation as outlined in democratic theories of education, whether they be informed by Dewey (1916), Friere (1968) or the Enlightenment concept of *Bildung* (Horlacher 2016). These democratic theories of education emphasise the shaping of the human being with regard to their own humanity as well as their innate intellectual skills. Children's discussions of the value of education to develop self-determined aims emphasises the importance of the *process* of development and the potential of a state of emergent learning, that not only involves intellectual development, but a unification of self and identity as a lifelong process—through, for example the emergence of innate skills. However, they also point towards the ambivalence inherent in this pursuit of self-making as a normative ideal, especially in the context of the marketisation of children's identities. There is a danger of a colonisation of the individual's intellectual and cultural capabilities where the development of the self is oriented towards reproducing social orders. This is what our participants seem to be responding negatively to when they

describe the anxiety they feel when they talk to the career's counsellor, their desire to preserve their childhood and being 'forced to strive for excellence' in a context that at least one student likens to a 'jail'.

5.6 Conclusion

Our chapter has outlined the importance of a future-orientation for children's well-being. In demonstrating the importance of learning for the future, we have found that the distinction between well-being and well-becoming, which has characterised much research on children's well-being, takes us only so far in understanding the importance children place on learning for the future to their *current* well-being. Similarly, human capital theories, which are highly utilitarian, overlook the needs of the subject, individuals being mere putty to be moulded into something of value. Instead, we have proposed that assessing whether education promotes self-determined aims or adult-imposed aspirations, is a useful starting point for understanding whether children associate learning with well-being or not. As such, children's agency is a critical dimension and democratic theories of education seem most apt in helping us understand what dimensions of education are associated with well-being. We have made a modest contribution to these literatures by suggesting two sensitising concepts, the emphasis on practical or formal achievement and the value placed on emergent or predetermined learning.

Children's emphasis on the importance of learning also points towards the broader social implications of our findings. As analysts of well-being we often emphasise the importance of children's well-being in the present as of most importance, or at least point to the fact that it is overlooked in favour of well-becoming. As noted, our results suggest the importance of well-being as well-becoming, in particular, where learning provides opportunities to discover and enhance their interests, develop self-esteem, and moral qualities like commitment and helping behaviours (Fattore et al. 2016). We have argued that these values reflect the social orders that children are part of, of developments in the spheres of intimacy, work and consumption, of which the former two are most relevant here. The transformation of intimacy has emphasized openness, negotiation and differentiation of forms of intimacy, central to the democratization of family life (Giddens 1991). We can see the democratisation of intimacy related to the importance placed on self-actualisation of children's discussions of self-determination. Changes in the labour market no longer favour command and control mechanisms. Employees are apparently no longer expected to be obedient to managerial authority structures. Rather the human capital qualities favoured by employers in their employees include flexibility, risk-taking, mobility and adaptability. The emphasis on qualities associated with self-adaptability that are favoured in the labour market, provide the broader normative framework for children's discussion of the importance of working in an area that interests them.

Nonetheless, these values also reflect anxieties about children's future and specifically children's abilities to manage social risks (Beck 1992), evident in the choices and decisions families make around education. These are a rational response to the increasing marketisation of school choice and the importance of credentialism that are central characteristics of the Australian education system. This has been taken on in quite an extreme form in New South Wales, in the 'My School Website' (https://www.myschool.edu.au/), which allows anyone to compare schools on the basis of how well students have performed on standardised tests. The result is immense pressure on children to perform well on these tests and for teachers to 'teach to the test', so as to raise the profile of the school and attract new parents in the modern market for schooling. We therefore conclude on a cautionary note. Whether it be through education that promotes self-determined aims or adult-imposed aspirations, children are nonetheless expected to discover and assert their unique individuality and pursue their authentic self. The pedagogy promoted concerns itself with the development of what Jordan et al. (1994) describe as 'self-making' and what Vincent and Ball describe as the '"renaissance child"—a child with intellectual, creative and sporting skills and experience' (2007). Even where learning promotes self-determined aims, it nonetheless makes strong demands on children in terms of the constitution of the self. Within an education system founded on 'choice', the implications for children's sense of well-being is highly ambivalent.

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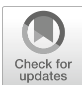
Part II
Methodological Innovations

Chapter 6
The Powerful Combination of Group Interviews and Drawings: How to Give Children a Voice in the Understanding of Well-being



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6.1 Subjective Well-being, its Importance and Study in Adults and Children

The study of subjective well-being is of great importance as it has been related with health and longevity (Diener and Chan 2011), income, productivity, organizational behavior (e.g., performance, absenteeism), educational outcomes (Gutman and Vorhaus 2012) and individual and social behaviors (e.g., increased sociability, reduced risk-taking; De Neve et al. 2013). Subjective well-being is also an important indicator of positive development throughout the whole life course, including early and middle childhood (Park 2004; Pollard and Lee 2003).

There is not a single, unique definition of subjective well-being. The term was introduced by Diener (1994), and can be defined as the "person's cognitive and affective evaluations of his/her life, including both emotional reactions and cognitive judgments of satisfaction" (Diener et al. 2002, p. 63).

Children's subjective well-being is an equally complex and multidimensional concept (Ben-Arieh et al. 2017); it can be defined as a set of individual characteristics underlying a positive state, a continuum of positive and negative emotions and the evaluation of significant contexts of children's lives (Rees et al. 2010). Such

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definition of subjective well-being points to a human ecology approach that postulates that child development occurs as an interaction between biological and psychological elements of the child, with the influence of significant contexts (e.g. family, neighborhood, school, community, culture, society; Garbarino 2014).

Given the complexity of the concept, it is not surprising that the literature is unclear when describing and defining domains of subjective well-being in children. The choice of those domains depends on theoretical perspectives, data availability (e.g., indicators are sometimes collected from different surveys; the sample is not always from the same child age group) and policy focus (e.g., quality of life, child poverty, social exclusion, children's rights; Lee 2014; Statham and Chase 2010). A review by Fernandes et al. (2011) on the measurement of child well-being across studies identified four common dimensions of children's subjective well-being: Material situation/Socio economic context; Health/Physical health, Education/Cognitive achievement and Social relationships/Social Health.

Overall dimensions considered vary greatly across studies, even when we look to some of the most cited studies in the literature (Fernandes et al. 2011). Using the literature on adult well-being, Land et al. (2012), for example, in an effort to build an index on children and youth well-being in the US, used seven domains: material well-being, health, social relationships, safety/behavioral concerns, productivity/educational attainment, place in the community, and emotional/spiritual well-being.

Comparative studies have shed a new light on the domains of child subjective well-being. In a survey of child well-being developed in the 27 countries of the European Union existent at that time (i.e. 2006), in addition to Norway and Iceland, Bradshaw and Richardson (2009) described seven domains: some of which are common to Land et al. (2012), for example—health, personal relationships, material resources, education, behavior and risks—besides housing, the environment and what they call subjective well-being (e.g., personal well-being). The Innocenti Report Card 11 (UNICEF 2013) separated for the first-time subjective well-being from more objective domains (material, health, education, behaviors and housing; Klock et al. 2014) identifying, in turn, life satisfaction, relations with family and friends, school and health. Also, the worldwide research survey on children's subjective well-being—the International Survey of Children's Well-Being (ISCWeB)—includes a cognitive subjective well-being dimension (evaluations of life as a whole) as well as particular aspects or domains of life: living situation, home and family relationships; money and economic circumstances; friends and other relationships; local area; school; time use; self; and children's rights (Rees and Main 2015).

More recently with the increasing complexity of family structure, some studies demonstrate the utility of also including family structural themes when studying children's well-being (Brown et al. 2015).

6.2 Giving Children a Voice in the Understanding of Well-being

The 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child helped to give and increase recognition of the importance of children's own point of view (Ben-Arieh 2006). This recognition was an important path to establishing a culture of democracy and citizenship (Correia et al. 2019) in addition to informing parents, communities and policy makers about children's point of view on different aspects related to their lives.

Knowing children's point of view promotes evidence-based decision-making and consequently the development of more coherent and effective policies (UNICEF Spain 2012) aiming to address the UN sustainability goals for the 2030 Agenda. As Fattore et al. (2009) have pointed out, when given the chance, children have both the capacity and ability to participate in research about their lives.

The traditional focus given to parents or expert proxies for reporting on behalf of children (Hendershot 2004; Ben-Arieh and Shimon 2014) has since given way to the emergence of an increasing number of studies conducted with children assessing their points of view (Ben-Arieh 2012; Casas et al. 2004; Casas 2011). After a decade of work on child well-being adult-centered indexes, such as the Index of Child and Youth well-being from the US, Child Well-being Index for the European Union, the Microdata Child, Well-being Index, and the Deprivation Index amongst others (Fernandes et al. 2011), a set of survey-based comparative multinational studies with children have emerged in more recent years accessing directly children's point of view about their lives and well-being.

For example, the first comparative child well-being study developed by the OECD was first presented 10 years ago, and involved 30 countries (OECD 2009); whereas the International Survey of Children's Well-Being (ISCWeB) involved more than 56,000 children from 21 countries for the second wave of data collection (2013–2014; Rees and Main 2015). More recently, using a Portuguese sample of 914 responses from children and their caregivers, Fernandes et al. (2013) developed a child well-being index in which children's views on their well-being assumed a central role.

6.3 Survey-based Research on Children's Subjective Well-being in Portugal

Most of the studies that measure subjective well-being in children (and adolescents) that consider their views are survey-based (Fattore et al. 2018; Lima and Morais 2018); and Portugal is not an exception.

Early in 2005, Portuguese children and adolescents (mean age of 12) provided their views regarding their subjective well-being in the KIDSCREEN European project. The aim of the project was to build a standardized cross-cultural

questionnaire to estimate the subjective quality of life of children, adolescents and their parents (Gaspar et al. 2010). The KIDSCREEN-52 instrument was translated and piloted for the Portuguese population in 2005 (Matos et al. 2006) and included ten dimensions (e.g. physical well-being, psychological well-being, moods and emotions). Overall, results showed that the domain “Autonomy” was related to both “Parent Relation and Home Life Context” and “Social Support and Peers”, indicating that autonomy is an important feature in children’s life, and parents and friends are relevant actors providing emotional, personal and social support (Matos 2005).

In 2009, Bastos and Machado carried out a study that evaluated child poverty as a state of deprivation based on specific child indicators of well-being. In this study, Portuguese children (from the third and fourth grade) answered a questionnaire in which indicators translating children’s own views about well-being were included (e.g. the child’s positive perception of school or positive perception of the neighborhood). Results showed that children’s deprivation was particularly affected by issues related to education, health, housing and social integration (Bastos and Machado 2009).

Recently, Tomyn et al. (2015) carried out a comparative study with a Portuguese and an Australian sample, in which they used a measure to evaluate subjective well-being that asked respondents to indicate their level of ‘happiness’ with seven life domains (e.g. Standard of Living, Health, Achieving in Life). The authors found between group differences on the domains of Standard of Living, Safety and Future Security, with Australian adolescents scoring significantly higher, and in the domain of Community, which correlated more strongly with the other domains in the Portuguese sample. The authors concluded that economic factors, such as differences in average family yearly earnings and employment opportunities, may explain the differences observed for the Standard of Living and Future security domains, and that community connection might play a stronger role in the construction of subjective well-being in Portuguese adolescents.

6.4 The Contribution of Qualitative Methodologies to the Study of Well-being

The use of multiple methods (quantitative and qualitative) in research of children’s experiences has been seen as a valuable approach that offers complementary insights and understandings that may be difficult to assess through reliance on a single method of data collection (Darbyshire et al. 2005), such as surveys. Thus, used independently or in combination with quantitative methods, qualitative methods can help to interpret and better understand the complex reality of the subjective well-being of children, and in some cases, the implications of quantitative data.

Qualitative methods are especially effective in obtaining culturally specific information about the values, opinions, behaviors, and social contexts of particular

populations. The strength of qualitative research is the ability to provide complex textual descriptions of how people experience a given research issue—they literally give participants a voice (Mack et al. 2005). Qualitative methods are also effective in helping describe more complex constructs (Mack et al. 2005), such as subjective well-being (Fattore et al. 2018).

Although it is increasingly common to find qualitative-based research used to study subjective well-being in children (e.g. Camfield et al. 2009; Coombes et al. 2013; González-Carrasco et al. 2018; NicGabhainn and Sixsmith 2006; Navarro 2011; Navarro et al. 2017; Malo et al. 2012; September and Savahl 2009), fewer studies have used a qualitative or combined methodological approach to subjective child well-being than survey-based approaches. This is true in Portugal and elsewhere.

For example, in a mixed-methods study Freire et al. (2013) found that the definition of happiness amongst adolescents derived from open-ended written questions, included both psychological dimensions and aspects related to life domains (personal life, interpersonal relations and family), integrating hedonic (i.e. more related to subjective well-being, such as positive emotions) and eudaimonic (i.e. psychological well-being, like self-fulfillment) components. The quantitative results allowed for further understanding that happiness and meaning contributed in different but complementary ways to well-being. The authors showed that Family, Standard of living, Personal growth, Leisure time, and community, corresponded to important components for happiness.

Recently, Nico and Alves (2017) conducted interviews with children aged 10 to 13 and adolescents/young adults aged 16 to 24 years old in order to analyze how they defined well-being. Their results showed that it is more complex for younger children to define well-being than for adolescents and young adults. Younger participants distinguished between an inner well-being (i.e. feeling relaxed, freedom of action) and an external context-related or social well-being (i.e. family, friends, being loved, having support). Older adolescents related well-being with economic reasons and their significant contexts, but also with happiness. Similar results were also found by Gonçalves (2015) in a qualitative study (individual interviews); family was seen by children (8–12 years old) as a source of support and love; school was also seen as a context of well-being related with the enthusiasm of learning and of promoting self-efficacy feelings. Friends were perceived as a source of positive well-being as they were seen as an emotional support group.

6.5 A Combined Qualitative Approach for Studying children's Well-being

The two most common qualitative methods used to study subjective well-being in children are group interviews or focus groups, and drawings. The types of data these two methods generate are notes, audio (and sometimes video) recordings, and

transcripts. We argue that each method—or combination of methods—is particularly suited for addressing important questions in the domain of children's subjective well-being.

Group interviews in particular have been increasingly used in research with children (Davis 2001; Doswell and Vandestienne 1996; Darbyshire et al. 2005; Hoppe et al. 1995; Hurley 1998; Morgan et al. 2002; O'dea 2003; Vaughn et al. 1996) as children are generally comfortable and familiar with the process of discussing matters in groups.

Group interviews allow for the collection of children's feelings, opinions and reactions through the attitudes and answers of group members; this, in turn, may provide us with new information on the subject under study (Ritchie and Lewis 2003), allowing us to more deeply discuss and clarify other eventual quantitative data (Galego and Gomes 2005). For example, in a study by González-Carrasco et al. (2018), the researchers divided children into two different focus groups according to whether they had a high or low level of subjective well-being measured with a quantitative measure of well-being (i.e. the Satisfaction with Life Scale or SWLS; Diener 1994). Focus group data highlighted that the most important differences between the two groups of children were related to family relationships, i.e. children with high levels of subjective well-being mentioning the importance of receiving support from parents, and children with low levels of subjective well-being highlighting the negative impact on well-being of not having any relative to turn to for help when needed (González-Carrasco et al. 2018).

Usually, groups interviews employ an interview technique with discussion taking place under the guidance of a moderator. The moderator facilitates the discussion in a non-directive and unbiased way, using pre-determined questions (Kingry et al. 1990). A second moderator is often present, acting as note taker, observing group interactions, supervising the recording equipment, but not participating in the ongoing discussion.

Group interviews or focus groups require considerable preparation and skills to run. When conducting focus groups with children, it is extremely important that the moderator(s) of the focus group have experience in children's group interactions (e.g. in decreasing performance anxiety) and are flexible and creative to the demands of gathering data with children. For example, in a study by Darbyshire et al. (2005) the moderators incorporated activities into the groups (e.g. asking children if they would like to jump and talk) to provide variety and interest for the children, and to stimulate their thinking and discussion about the focus on physical activity and its associated people, places and spaces (i.e. the theme of discussion).

During focus groups, moderators can also provide young children with complementary ways for them to express their ideas so that researchers access children's meanings, especially in areas of sensitive questioning (Morgan et al. 2002; Thomas and O'Kane 2000). For example, in a study by Morgan et al. (2002) with children who have asthma, aged 7 to 11, the authors found that some aspects of the focus group discussion (e.g. talking about bulling or feeling afraid) were potentially distressing for some participants. In this case, sensitive wording of questions helped to give participants maximum flexibility regarding whether to divulge information

and in what way (e.g. instead of asking “Have you ever been bullied because of your asthma?” the authors asked: “Have any children in your school been bullied because of having asthma?”).

Group interviews give the researcher the opportunity to deepen the discussion with the informants which other qualitative methods such as open-ended, written questions cannot provide (Bengtsson 2016).

The inclusion of exercises and activities in combination with group interviews is an excellent strategy to maintain children’s concentration and interest as well as enabling participants to work together (Hennessy and Heary 2005; Darbyshire et al. 2005). In some studies, a happy-sad face exercise or a secret box exercise has been used (Pannilage 2017), but evidence indicates that drawings are usually well received by children because no extensive linguistic ability is needed, and they are a useful way of making children’s ideas and concerns visible and concrete (Mitchell 2006; Racheli and Tova 2011). Also, some children consider it to be easier to express through drawings than through verbal language (Santos 2013), particularly verbally shy or inhibited children. Two additional advantages of using drawings are that children with limited literacy may also be given a voice and provide input to the research (Clark and Moss 2001); and that children usually are familiar with drawing in other contexts, such as school, and consider it a pleasurable activity (Dolidze et al. 2013).

In order to illustrate the contribution of qualitative methods in the research of subjective well-being in children, our goal in this study was to explore the perception of Portuguese children’s well-being through two different qualitative methodologies: group interviews/focus groups and drawings, analyzing the meanings attributed both to the concept of well-being and to the domains underlying it. Using group interviews and drawings simultaneously allows a methodological triangulation process to be conducted, i.e. seeking to recur to different methodologies which provide a greater comprehension of the results obtained (Bakhet and Zauszniewski 2012).

6.6 Method

6.6.1 Participants

The study was designed as part of the “Children’s Understandings of Well-Being: Multinational Qualitative Study” (Fattore et al. 2018). The larger study aimed to comprehend how children understand well-being using a locally oriented, culturally contextualized and multi-national approach.

Matching the age-inclusion criterion of the broader study (i.e. between 8 and 12 years old), participants included 19 children, all Portuguese, 70% were female ($N = 13$), with a mean age of 10 ($SD = 1.2$), and an average of two siblings ($M = 2.1$, $DP = 1.62$). Approximately 68% of the children were recruited from community centers, making the sample socioeconomically diverse.

6.6.2 Instruments

A script derived from the "Children's Understandings of Well-Being: Multinational Qualitative Study" protocol (Fattore et al. 2018) was used for the group interviews. The first part of the protocol corresponds to a set of open questions about important places, important people, and important activities from children's perspective, facilitated through the use of (individual) drawing, with the purpose of identifying key concepts regarding well-being as experienced by children in their everyday contexts. The first two questions were designed as ice-breakers and were added to the script with the aim of setting a more relaxed environment (e.g.: "Before we begin, I would like to know you better and that you tell me a bit about yourselves. What are your favorite things to do?"). Two questions were also added to the script and were used during the drawing period. The first question regarding the drawing itself (e.g.: "Now I would like to ask you to make a drawing of something or someone that is the most important to you and that makes you happy") and the second question regarding the comprehension of these drawings (e.g., "What did you draw?").

The second part of the script included questions which aimed to explore children's comprehension of key concepts and domains in the Children's Worlds Study (Rees and Main 2015, namely in the domains of "School" (e.g.: "What's the best thing about school?"); "Economic Well-being"—things owned and money (e.g.: "Is it important for children to have their own money?"); "Being heard" domain (e.g.: "Can you tell us about the times you felt like your opinion mattered?"); "Safety" (e.g.: "Are there particular places where you feel safe?"); "Action/Activity" ("e.g.: "Are there particular places where you wish you had more freedom?"). Moreover, specific questions were added from previous qualitative studies on subjective well-being conducted with Portuguese children (Gonçalves 2015) (e.g.: "When we talked with some children your age, they identified . . . as being important to them and making them feel good. Are these important things to you as well?").

Finally, the script included feedback questions on study procedures which were part of the international study script (e.g. the child's opinion on the previously posed questions).

6.6.3 Data Collection Procedures

A first contact via e-mail and telephone was made with potential participating institutions (two schools, two children's after-school activities centers, one community center), inviting them to take part in the project. After a positive response by three of the institutions (the two children's after-school activities centers and the community center), informed consent forms were personally made available in order to be handed to children's legal tutors; the informed consent provided information regarding the purposes of the project and the ethical aspects considered in the project, including privacy, confidentiality and anonymity of the collected data.

This document also included the permission to audiotape children's voices, and left the researchers' contacts for further information.

After informed consent forms were signed, the group interviews were scheduled. Prior to the beginning of each interview, children's assent was also requested, i.e. children were given the option of not participating in the interview. Four group interviews (N = 7; N = 6; N = 4; N = 2) were conducted. A calm and quiet environment was established allowing for data to be collected more thoroughly, systematically and without background noise. The data collected from the interviews consisted of recorded audio, which allowed the researcher to focus solely on the children—as well as in their drawings—during the interview. Interviews lasted 41 min on average.

For the drawings, children were provided with materials (i.e. A4 white sheets, crayons, colored pencils, rubbers) with children taking on average 15 min to complete their drawings.

6.6.4 Data Analyses Procedures

Group interviews were transcribed and data were analyzed using a content analysis technique (e.g., Erlingsson and Brysiewicz 2017; Ritchie and Lewis 2003), with the same technique being applied to the drawings.

For the content analysis of the interviews, all the material gathered, i.e. sections of the participants' answers (paragraphs), was considered valid and used as registered units (RUs) or units of analysis, with the exception of responses to the question "What is it like to be a child in Portugal?", and to the feedback questions on study procedures which were part of the international study script. After identifying these RUs, a mixed category system was developed, i.e. all the main dimensions in this study were theoretically grounded on the literature review (e.g., Rees et al. 2010; Rees and Main 2015), and the categories and subcategories were mostly data driven or bottom-up (both use inductive and deductive reasoning). A category dictionary was developed to operationalize the definition of the dimensions, categories and subcategories. A manifest analysis was conducted as results show what informants actually said (vs. latent analysis) (Bengtsson 2016).

In order to figure out what were the more frequent dimensions occurrence analysis was also used (Vala 1986). Finally, only the dimensions, categories or subcategories with at least two RUs were considered. The attribution of a given RU to a category or subcategory was not mutually exclusive, i.e. sometimes the same paragraph was considered in more than one category or subcategory since it made reference to more than one subject. For example, a child said: "One of the most important things about school I think is classes, every class, and I also think that the best thing is also recess. . . Recess too, and I also like the education they give us." This particular RU was included in the "School" dimension, both in "Learning/ Stimulation" and "Play time/Interaction" categories.

Regarding the drawings, each child made one drawing except for two participants who asked for a second sheet of paper, hence making a total of 21 drawings. However, two of those were left out of the analysis because, during completion time, the children drew an abstract form, which did not allow use of the questions of the script for the drawing period.

For analytical purposes, 19 drawings were considered, with each sheet of paper counting as a registered unit. Using content analysis, each drawing was analyzed and, together with the explanation the child provided of their own work, some main dimensions of child well-being were identified (data-driven). In order to figure out what were the more frequent dimensions an occurrence analysis was performed, allowing quantification of how often a given domain came up in the drawings. Similar to the coding of the group interview content, each RU could refer to more than one domain.

Regarding data reliability, a set of procedures was carried out with the aim of minimizing bias and increasing reliability in coding. This categorization process was discussed often with another researcher. First a dictionary of categories was created; second, before the final stage of the content analysis, the body of transcriptions was read several times for the researcher to be more familiar with the data; this reading was discussed with another researcher, on several occasions, as suggested by Hill et al. (2005).

Throughout the rest of the chapter, each dimension, category and subcategory will be exemplified by quotes from the interviewed children in order to better illustrate some of the RUs. Moreover, and in order to provide a better understanding, dimensions will appear in italics, categories will appear underlined and subcategories as both italicized and underlined.

6.7 Results

Content and occurrence analysis of children's interviews, including 778 registered units (RU), indicated 8 dimensions, 27 categories and 27 subcategories of children's subjective well-being (see Table 6.1).

Table 6.1 Theory-driven dimensions of children's subjective well-being and frequency of registered units per dimension

Dimensions	RU (%)
Children's rights	38.81
School	22.23
Material goods	16.45
Economic aspects	13.62
Family	3.72
Free time usage	2.69
Helping others	2.05
Health	0.43

Table 6.2 Categories in the children's rights dimension, and frequency of registered units per category

Categories	RU (%)
Safety	34.09
Freedom	30.46
Being heard	30.46
Basic needs	1.98
Relational aspects (friendship and love)	0.99
Education	0.99
Family	0.66

The dimension that included more registered units (RU) of children's subjective well-being was *Children's rights* (RU = 302). The *Children's rights* dimension referred mostly to the categories of *Safety*, *Freedom* and *Being Heard* (Table 6.2).

The category *Safety* (RU = 194) was mainly related with *Safe Elements/Contexts* (60.57% of the RU), which included the child's home, school, neighborhood, family and friends (J2: "At home because I know that it is my place, it's the place where I live and I really like to be there, I feel much safer"), although they also reported *Unsafe Elements/Contexts* (30.65% of the RU) which were mainly related to the presence of ethnic diversity in the neighborhood and at school ("M2: At my school there's a group of I don't know what. There are a lot of people there... there are more bad people than good people and they're always picking on me and I don't like that. I feel less safe"). In a less expressive way, *Safety* also included *Protection and Support from Others* (6.7% of the RU; "M1: To always having someone supporting us and stuff.").

Under the category *Freedom* (RU = 92) children identified home, school and after-school programs as *contexts of freedom* (55.43% of the RU) ("C2: At home I also feel free because I have my things, and outside it is because I have plenty of space to do whatever I want") or *contexts of no freedom* (27.17% of the RU; "R: (...) There are some things that I can't do (...) [at the after-school program]"). Children also reported *Desirable Elements*(18.47% of the RU), that is, aspects that they would like to have as a right in their significant contexts such as school, the outside environment, neighborhood, home and after-school programs ("S5: I wanted it in my neighborhood, I mean it... in my neighborhood we don't have a playground, we only have a bit of space for kids to play but nobody does because there's really nothing there, just dogs, we get in there and the dogs start barking and biting and so children can't be there, they play on the road.").

Under the category of *Being Heard* (RU = 92) similar to the previous category, children mentioned home and school contexts as being simultaneously *Contexts/Audiences that listen* and *Contexts/Audiences that do not listen* (C2: "From my part I've had many people wanting to listen to what I had to say, like my uncles for example, when I'm like alone they do like this... they interview me as if we were on TV, and then they enjoy listening to me and I enjoy listening to them because they also give me a lot of attention, and I like people who give me attention."). Under this category, children also reported *Desirable Contexts/Audience* (10.86%), with answers relating, for instance, with stressful situations: M2: "I think I should be

Table 6.3 Categories and subcategories in the school dimension, and frequency of registered units per category

Categories	RU (%)	Subcategories
Relational aspects	24.27	Positive relations Negative relations
Evaluative component	22.54	Positive evaluation Negative evaluation
Learning/stimulation	17.34	
Representation of a good teacher	12.71	Support Flexibility/freedom Type of school work Discipline
Support	6.35	
Emotional component	1.73	Positive emotions Negative emotions
Playing/interaction	1.15	
Negative structural aspects	1.15	

more listened to in places where I am more concerned. In places where I am more concerned, more stressed or have some type of problems. And I would also like to be more listened to at school".

The *School* dimension (RU = 173) included eight categories (see Table 6.3).

School is the dimension of children's subjective well-being with the most derived categories. For interviewed children, school referred to *Relational Aspects*: Friends and teachers are perceived either in a *Negative* way or in a *Positive* way ("A4: My teacher is bad. And my classmates tease me so that I hit them, and I don't know what to do."). The *Representation of a Good Teacher* included that he/she was mostly perceived as a source of *Support* ("A2: He has to know how to listen to his students, to not judge their opinions even if they're wrong."), being simultaneously a figure related to *Freedom/Flexibility* ("R1: A good teacher lets us do a lot of things."), but also to *Discipline* almost exclusively associated with punishments and grounding ("J2: I think that a good teacher should ground his students when they misbehave.").

Overall, from the interviews, children assessed school (*Evaluative Component*) both positively and negatively, as they talked about teachers, not liking school, homework and school's administration issues. Simultaneously school was perceived as a place for *Learning/Stimulation* ("J2: I really like school because I basically really like to learn new things.") as well as for fun (*Playing/Interaction*; "C4: The best part about being at school is recess."), triggering *Positive Emotions*.

The third dimension, *Material Goods* (RU = 128) included two categories—an *Evaluative Component* (65.62% of the RU) where two data-driven subcategories were included (*Positive evaluation; Negative evaluation*), and *Types of materials* (38.28% of the RU). When talking about material goods, children mentioned all sorts of items and *Types of Materials*, with answers referring mostly to clothing and house items, school supplies, a house, money, food, cars, cell phones, videogame devices and laptops.

Table 6.4 Categories and subcategories of the economic aspects dimension, and frequency of registered units per category

Categories (% of RU)	RU (%)	Subcategories
Evaluative component	44.33	Positive evaluation Negative evaluation
Economic difficulties	36.69	Concern Unconcern
Emotional component	18.86	Positive emotions Negative emotions

The reference to material goods mostly regarded its assessment (*Evaluative Component*), with children reporting a *Positive Evaluation* of material possessions and with their answers mostly referring to the importance and value of items such as books, cell phones or computers ("S5: Because we're home, we don't have anything to do and that stuff [cell phones and computers] is very cool."), although some materials such as electronic devices, were also perceived negatively (*Negative Evaluation*: "J2: I don't think any child under 18 years old should have a cell phone or a computer because they are not old enough.").

The fourth dimension, *Economic Aspects*(N = 106) included three categories—*Evaluative Component*, *Economic Difficulties*, *Emotional Component* (see Table 6.4).

Reference to *Economic Aspects* emerged mostly associated to its assessment [*Evaluative Component* (44.33%)], as more often negative [*Negative Evaluation* (27.5%)] relating to the downsides of children having their own money ("J2: I don't think children should have money at their disposal because they are not mature enough for it.") compared with more positive evaluations [*Positive Evaluation* (15.6%)], although the importance of children having their own money was also mentioned ("A2: I think children should [have their own money] so that they can learn how to manage their own money and how to buy things."). Monetary/Economic Aspects was also related to *Economic Difficulties* (35.80%), with children mostly displaying *Concern* (74.4%) towards a lack of money ("M2: I think it is concerning, because when a child doesn't have any money they also can't buy food and then they starve, they don't have money for school, for their own house, for college, for. . . the stuff they need. I think it is concerning because parents get stressed and children even more so.") than *Unconcern* (RU = 10, 25,6%) on this matter. The Monetary/Economic Aspects dimension also related to an *Emotional Component* (18.4%) with children perceiving how they spend their money as promoting mostly *Positive Emotions* (75%) rather than *Negative Emotions* (25%).

Under the *Family* dimension (RU = 29), three categories emerged—*Work*, *Emotional Support* and *Instrumental Support*. *Family* was mostly associated with *Work* (48.3% of the RU) as a source of wealth ("C2: If we work, we can ensure that we have more things, that we have more money to do more things."), but also with a source of *Emotional Support* (37.9%).

The Free Time Usage dimension (RU = 21) emerged associated with several sets of activities, mostly related to sports ("L5: I like to go to the pool, to ride my bike, to ride my skateboard"). The *Helping Others* (RU = 16, 2%) dimension regarded

Table 6.5 Children's subjective well-being domains from drawings, and absolute frequency of registered units per domain

Dimensions	RU (%)
Family	57.9
Free time usage	31.58
Friends	10.53
Pets	10.53
Friendship	5.26
Health	5.26
Happiness	5.26
Safety/protection from parents	5.26
Freedom	5.26

Fig. 6.1 Drawing addressing the *Family* dimension

helping both significant and non-significant others, but mainly significant others such as parents, siblings or other kin ("G4: If I had [a lot of money] I would share with my brother, I would give some to my aunt to take care of her baby, and the rest I would share with my mom to buy food."). Finally, the *Health* dimension (RU = 5, 0.6%) was one of the least expressive dimensions for children (A4: "We need medical care assistance").

From a total of nine dimensions that emerged from the content analysis of the drawings, *Family* and *Free time usage* emerged as the most expressive domains related with child subjective well-being (see Table 6.5).

Drawings about the family domain most frequently included parents and siblings (36%). Drawings about free time usage most frequently included sports activities (e.g., rugby, skating). Figures 6.1 and 6.2 illustrate these two dimensions.

Figure 6.3 illustrates a drawing addressing different dimensions simultaneously.

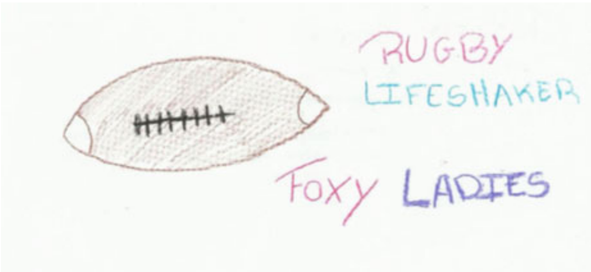

Fig. 6.2 Drawing addressing the *Free Time/Leisure Time* dimension

Fig. 6.3 Drawing addressing *Family* (parents), *Friendship* and *Pets*

6.8 Discussion

The purpose of this study was to identify key concepts regarding well-being as experienced by children in their everyday contexts, and their own understanding of these concepts, through the use of two different qualitative methods—group interviews and drawings.

Overall, results from group discussions and drawings showed that children perceived well-being as a multidimensional concept, which is in line with previous data from other countries (e.g., Rees et al. 2010; Rees and Main 2015). Well-being is a concept that is difficult to assess, particularly with younger children (Nico and Alves 2017). In order to achieve these results, this study illustrated how a combination of different qualitative methods can enrich the research and analysis of children's understanding of complex concepts. Different methods can offer complementary insights and understandings that may be difficult to assess through the use of a single method of data collection (Darbyshire et al. 2005). As Flick (2004) pointed out, a triangulation of methods can be helpful to increase rigor and depth to any investigation.

Throughout the four group discussions, Children's Rights were the most expressive dimension of children's well-being from children's point of view. These results might be explained by the focus that the Portuguese curriculum and teachers have given to the topic of Children's rights in their discourses and activities during the most recent years of schooling (Direção-Geral da Educação 2013).

Second to Children's Rights, the School domain also gained some expression. School context appears as a complex system, where peers and teachers assume positive and negative roles illustrating the complexity of the impact of school for positive adjustment. Some studies showed that children and adolescents' perception of psychological school involvement are very important for their wellbeing. Furthermore, children's individual experiences, such as bullying, friendships, and interactions with teachers, affect their well-being more than the type of school they attend (e.g., Gutman and Feinstein 2008).

Through the use of children's drawings, this study further clarified and made visible children's ideas about well-being. For example, in their drawings, children made visible some dimensions of child well-being that were less expressive through group interviews, in particular family and free time usage. These results pointed out that the use of different qualitative methods in research of children's experiences can be seen as a valuable approach that offers complementary insights. Through group discussion the use of pre-determined questions helps to discuss topics initiated by the researcher (Kingry et al. 1990), whereas drawings are a useful way of making children's individual ideas and concerns more visible (Mitchell 2006; Racheli and Tova 2011), enriching and complementing data derived from the former.

Overall the results presented in this chapter show that family represents an important context for children's well-being, which is in line with previous studies that point out that parents and friends are relevant actors in children's lives, providing emotional, personal and social support (Matos 2005), and augmenting

well-being. Evidence is clear in showing how children's interactions with those around them—and the way in which children make sense of those interactions—are fundamentally important to how they feel about themselves and their lives (Levin and Curry 2010; Matos, Dadds and Barrett 2006; The Children's Society 2018). Children in their own understanding acknowledge family's important role.

Free Time Usage, together with Family, have been pointed out as important components for happiness (Freire et al. 2013; Gonçalves 2015). In Western countries sports activities for children have been a widespread leisurely pursuit (Ommundsen et al. 2014). Recent data have shown that children's well-being and their emotional and behavioral difficulties were associated with frequency of physical activity (The Children's Society 2018). The *Longitudinal Study of Australian Children* has also showed that children's use of time was associated not only with their social and emotional wellbeing but also with temperament. So, activities can act as a protective factor for children and adolescents' health.

In addition to emotional support, more evident through the drawings, family is also associated with work, and its function as a source of wealth, emphasized in our results from group discussions. In parallel, children also displayed concerns regarding lack of money. According to Yuan (2008), economic hardship decreases children's well-being and ongoing high-level economic hardship is most detrimental for children's well-being. At the same time parenting stress and parental well-being substantially explain these associations. Future studies can combine qualitative data gathered from children and their families and compare such information.

In order to develop effective policies to improve children's lives, it is important to understand the various domains of child well-being and their causes and consequences. Research should continue to focus on children's own conceptualization of well-being, and their understanding of dimensions and categories to properly identify and meet the needs of children, which contributes to put in practice children's rights (UN General Assembly 1989). This goal is best addressed by the continuous development and improvement of a combination of methods, such as group interviews and drawings, which give children a voice.

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Chapter 7 The Voices of Young Children Experiencing Difficulties at School

Carmel Cefai and Sue Anne Spiteri Pizzuto

7.1 Introduction

There appears to be an increased interest in various countries in Europe and other parts of the world, in the role of nurture groups in supporting the needs of young children experiencing social and emotional difficulties in their development. Nurture groups have been developed as special classes to address the unmet social and emotional needs of young children and providing them with the necessary competences required to engage in the academic and social experiences at school. Drawing on attachment theory (Bowlby 1975), they seek to provide a safe base where children can learn in a nurturing small group facilitated by two caring adults who work collaboratively to facilitate their successful reintegration into their mainstream class (Bennathan and Boxall 2000). Pupils engage in specific social and interpersonal experiences that encourage the development of their sense of emotional security, self-awareness and socio-emotional competence (Cooper and Tiknaz 2007).

The increased interest in nurture groups may be the result of the increasing concern about children's social, emotional and behaviour difficulties and the need for schools to support the mental health of children and young people (Adelman and Taylor 2010; Layard and Hagell 2015; Weare and Nind 2011). The promotion of mental health and wellbeing in school is not only becoming increasingly recognised

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as one of the major goals of education, but it is also being appreciated as a meta ability for academic learning as well, particularly in view of the evidence underlining the relationship between social and emotional learning and academic learning (Corcoran et al. 2018; Durlak et al. 2011; Taylor et al. 2017). Secondly various evaluations of nurture groups have found that they have a positive impact on children's mental health, wellbeing, social behaviour, and academic learning (Binnie and Allen 2008; Cheney et al. 2013; Cooper and Whitebread 2007; Grantham and Primrose 2017; Hughes and Schlosser 2014; Reynolds et al. 2009**;** Scott and Lee 2009; Seth-Smith et al. 2010; Warin and Hibbin 2016). A longitudinal group study with 300 students reported significantly greater improvements in social, emotional and behavioural functioning amongst nurture group students when compared with the control group (Cooper and Whitebread 2007). The study also found no significant difference between the effectiveness of nurture groups functioning on a full time basis and 'part-time' nurture groups operating from half to one third of the week. In another study of 32 nurture groups, Reynolds et al. (2009) reported that nurture groups had a positive impact on the both the students' social and emotional needs as well as their academic learning. In a review of 11 studies on the effectiveness of nurture groups, Hughes and Schlosser (2014) concluded that there was evidence that nurture groups improved the emotional wellbeing of children, while in another systematic review on the effectiveness of group-based interventions in social and emotional learning and wellbeing in UK schools, Cheney et al. (2013) reported that nurture groups had a positive impact on the social and emotional wellbeing of children and young people, and that it was the intervention with the strongest evidence for effectiveness.

Most of the studies on nurture groups however, have been largely controlled, outcome-based evaluations, making use of instruments measuring student progress, such as the Boxall Profile and academic achievement (Billington 2012; Farrell et al. 2009**;** Koller and San Juan 2015; Taylor and Gulliford 2011). Quantitative studies on their own would not capture the processes taking place in the nurture group and would significantly underestimate the complexity and the individuality of the students' experiences. Qualitative studies exploring the experiences of students and staff are essential to examine, and provide insights into, what occurs in nurture groups, and capture the complexity of behaviours and relationships taking place there (Billington 2012; Cooper and Tiknaz 2007; Koller and San Juan 2015; Taylor and Gulliford 2011). Children have unique and inside knowledge of what it is like to be a student at school are thus able to provide an accurate account of their own experiences and suggest how learning processes and relationships may be enhanced (Cefai and Galea 2016; Fielding and Bragg 2003; McAuley and Rose 2010; Cefai and Cooper 2010; Rees and Main 2015; Robinson and Taylor 2007).

This study aims to contribute to this area by exploring the students' own views, feelings, hopes and understandings on what it means to be a student in a nurture group. While some studies explored the perceptions of staff (eg. Billington 2012; Binnie and Allen 2008; Cooper and Whitebread 2007) and parents (eg. Binnie and Allen 2008; Stone et al. 2017; Taylor and Gulliford 2011), very few studies investigated the perceptions of students in nurture groups (eg. Cooper et al. 2001;

Sanders 2007). This study is based on capturing the views of children on their experiences as nurture group pupils (rather than simply interviewing them about their progress). It is construed within a rights-based approach to children's voice which underlines the need and value of gaining entry into the conceptual world of the child to understand how they make sense of events in their daily lives (Bogdan and Biklen 2011; Fattore et al. 2014). This chapter presents the findings of a qualitative study with two nurture classes in Malta exploring the views of the pupils on their experiences through semi-structured focus group interviews.

7.2 Methodology

7.2.1 Background

Nurture classes were introduced in Malta about fifteen years ago to support schools develop effective systems to prevent and respond to students with social, emotional and behaviour difficulties (SEBD). They were opened as early intervention centres and as resource centres to increase the schools' capacity to accommodate the needs of students with SEBD within an inclusive setting (Cefai and Cooper 2011). While they retain many of the characteristics of the classical nurture group, Maltese nurture classes have been adapted to the local educational context. They operate on a part time basis, with pupils spending only a relatively brief period in a nurture class, with most the time being in their mainstream classroom with their peers. Secondly they are largely focused on the development of social and emotional learning, with little time dedicated to academic learning. Thirdly, they consist of more than one group at the school, with a number of groups during different parts of the week. They operate both as an early intervention strategy for young vulnerable children as well as a resource centre for social and emotional learning for older primary school pupils.

The Nurture Class at Blossom Hill Primary School (a state primary school, not real name) consists of one teacher and one Learning Support Assistant, and two early years' groups. One group (group 1) consists of ten children (six boys and four girls) from Kindergarten 2 and Year 1 (4–6 years old), and the other group (group 2) has eight pupils (five boys and three girls) from Year 2 and Year 3 (6–7 years old). Each group attends the nurture class twice a week for two hours per session. Each session consists of a number of basic routine activities which help to ensure predictability to make the pupils feel safe and secure. These include Circle Time (social and emotional learning such as emotional literacy, communication skills and self-esteem enhancement), main activity, related to the week's topic such as crafts, cooking, and art, breakfast/lunch time, playtime (free play or structured play, emphasising good behaviour and practising the Golden Rules for behaviour), storytelling (social stories and situations related to the week's topic) and carpet time (rewarding good behaviour, celebrating success, winding down to go back to mainstream class). Each pupil has an individual educational programme (ILP) based on classroom observations and information provided by teachers, parents and pupils themselves. The nurture

class staff are in constant contact with the mainstream classroom teachers and offer their support with individual pupils as needed. On most occasions especially during the reintegration phase, the nurture class LSA provides in-class support to help facilitate the reintegration of the pupils in their mainstream classroom.

7.2.2 Participants

This is a case study of one of the nurture classes in Maltese primary schools. The case was chosen on the basis of convenience in terms of access to the participants, but it is representative of a nurture class in a relatively socially disadvantaged area and is coordinated by one of the first nurture class teams to be set up in Malta more than a decade ago. The two groups at Blossom Hill Nurture Class (groups 1 and 2 as described above) participated in this study, with a total number of 18 nurture class pupils (see Table 7.1). The nurture class teacher and LSA completed a number of tasks as part of the nurture class' schedule of activities. Though this was an evaluation exercise carried out by the nurture class staff as part of their reflexive classroom practice, all data has been treated with strict confidentiality and anonymity and there were no objections from the school, parents or children themselves to the publication of findings as long as these were to be strictly anonymous.

7.2.3 Instrument

Semi-structured focus group interviews consisting of five tasks were held with each subgroup, making use of an adapted qualitative research framework developed by Fattore et al. (2014) to assess children's wellbeing. This framework has been developed as a child-friendly, child-driven, emancipatory research tool to empower the student voice in research. The focus of the activities has been adapted to evaluate the nurture class pupils' views about their experience in the nurture class.

The tasks included mapping important aspects of the various aspects of the participants' experience in the nurture class. Through drawing, colouring or pasting pictures, they had to produce together a map illustrating their views on what it means to be a nurture class pupil at Blossom Hill, what they like and what they would like to change. The group interviews consisted of various tasks, namely, mapping important aspects of the pupils' experience at school and in the nurture class,

Table 7.1 The participants in the study

	Group 1	Group 2
Number	Six male, four female pupils	Five male, three female pupils
Age	4–6 years	6–7 years
Total	Ten pupils	Eight pupils

changing important aspects of the nurture class, designing a poster to show what it is like to be a pupil in the nurture class, and summary and feedback. The activities were carried out by the nurture class staff as part of their practice; the staff received training and guidance on how to carry out the activities by a researcher from the University of Malta.

During tasks 1 and 2, each group was divided in small groups of 3 or 4 and through drawing, colouring or pasting pictures, they had to produce one Map which illustrated their experience at the school and the nurture class based on the following questions: How do you feel being a pupil at this school and nurture class? What do you like doing? What do you learn? What don't you like doing? Once they finished their map, they were asked to talk about it.

In the third task, the pupils were asked to imagine they had a magic wand and they had the power to change anything which they did not like in their nurture class. This was intended to explore the ideal life through the eyes of the children. For this exercise, the pupils went back to their small groups and were asked to draw a magic wand on their Map and make a red circle to mark the things they would like to change.

In task 4, each of the two groups had to produce a poster to show what it is like to be a pupil in the nurture class. They were asked to imagine they were a teacher and had to explain to children from other countries what it like is to be a pupil in the nurture class at Blossom Hill School. Each pupil had to write down thee keywords, then they had to share the keywords with the other members of the group. In the case of the younger group (Group 1), the pupils were asked to say the keywords verbally and the staff helped them to write these down on their poster. They were left free to choose any format and materials they liked to do the posters.

In Task 5, the pupils were asked to express their feelings about the whole activity, with the prompting of the following questions: How did you find the questions/ activities asked today? Which questions/activity did you like particularly? What do you suggest doing differently in the future studies?

7.2.4 Analysis

By the end of the interviews, the participants had produced, with the researchers' assistance, six Maps and two Posters, (three Maps from each group and one Poster from each group). The Maps and Posters were then analysed thematically by the two researchers to identify the common themes across the data. An essentialist (reporting the experiences and meanings of the participants) and inductive (bottom up, seeking to capture the participants' own meanings, with themes emerging form the data) framework was used to identify patterns across the data set (Braun and Clarke 2006). The researchers first examined the maps of the two groups, and then the two posters and process questions respectively. The thematic analysis sought to capture the participants' views on the various aspects of their experience in the nurture class, with various themes identified though an iterative process of transcription and visual

inspection of data, generating initial codes, grouping codes into themes, reviewing of themes, until the final themes were formulated for the maps and posters respectively. These were then discussed with the other 'outside' researcher in the project who was not involved in the data collection as part of the verification and validation process. Since the data was collected and analysed by the two members of the nurture class, the researchers sought to be reflexive during both data collection and analysis so as to avoid bias and ensure data fidelity and trustworthiness. Strategies included bracketing own experience to take the role of a researcher, seeking to keep pre-suppositions and experience in check so as to maintain objectivity, expecting both positive and negative accounts from the pupils, and peer cross checking.

7.3 Findings

7.3.1 The Maps

An analysis of the six maps (see sample in Appendix 1) led to the identification of various common elements as illustrated in Table 7.2.

These common elements were grouped into common themes through the process of coding, grouping, reviewing and formulating themes as described above. The four main themes identified from the six maps and from the participants' responses to the maps-related questions (Table 7.3) included toys and play, relationships (including caring teachers and friends), food and breakfast, and feel good activities such as arts and crafts and Circle Time. On the negative side, the participants indicated that that they wanted more well-behaved peers and less bullying and fighting (referring mainly to the mainstream class/whole school). When asked what aspects of the nurture class they would change in the nurture class, the pupils suggested more food (map a), more well-behaved peers (maps b and f), more toys (map e), or no change at all (maps c and d). The older group gave also some verbal responses such as having a bigger class with more toys, that more children attend the nurture class, and no change as they felt understood by the staff:

> I wish we had more toys to play with
> More children in our class
> I would like peers to behave more in the nurture class
> No change

Table 7.2 Pictures and drawings in the six maps

Map/Group	Pictures and drawings
a/1	Art and crafts, fruit, friends, nurture class staff
b/1	Children cooking, toys, friends, fruit, heart, fun
c/1	Breakfast, toys, bus and happy people, bus and a teacher
d/2	Art and crafts, toys, bus and food, heart, bus, room and teachers
e/2	Food and drinks, people running, heart and 'love', toys, cooking, teachers
f/2	Fruit, toys, teacher and angry child, pupils doing things in class

Table 7.3 Participants' responses to the questions

Group 1	Group 2
• I feel happy because I play and do crafts. • We play and eat and do nice things. • I feel happy. • The classroom has more toys and more colours. • I don't like it when they hurt me and we argue. • I don't like it when we don't play. • I learn to be gentle and help others. • I like circle time because I always have fun.	• I like everything we do here. • Sometimes we cook and eat together like a family. • The teachers understand us and love us. They teach us a lot. They do lots of different things. • I meet my teachers and friends. • Nothing bothers me here. • I like to do circle time. • I don't like the classwork we do in my class and sometimes the teacher and the children in my class don't like me and bother me. • They pick on me in my class. • I don't like it when we fight.

7.3.2 The Posters

When analysing the two posters (see sample in Appendix 2), similar themes to the ones developed from the maps were identified. Group 1 poster shows the difference that the pupils find between the nurture class and their mainstream class, including breakfast and food, happy people and positive relationships. It is interesting to note that a bus is drawn on this poster. The theme of the bus has been present in most maps and may be representing some kind of transitional experience such as moving between the nurture and mainstream classrooms. In this poster, one can also notice the importance of toys, play and singing which all form part of the daily routines in the nurture class. Another interesting picture which they chose is that of a sleeping boy, conveying a sense of calmness and tranquillity.

Group 2 poster has more words and phrases which are directly expressing positive emotions and experiences.

- It's different, fun and calm!
- You do Circle Time, crafts, breakfast and lots of play.
- You eat.
- You feel good.

There again the participants are referring directly to food and fun activities that they experience in the nurture class. They are also saying that 'it is different', 'fun' and 'calm'. Play is also mentioned as one of the children's favourite activities.

7.3.3 The Process

In the final activity on the pupils' experience in the focus groups, the general response from the younger group was that it was 'fun' and enjoyable experience ('nice', 'liked it'); they particularly liked the pictures and drawing' and 'working together'. This group were rather limited in verbal expression, not only because of their age (4–6 year old), but also because of their social, emotional and behaviour difficulties, such as communication difficulties, short attention span, restlessness). The answers of the second group, included the following:

- I enjoyed talking about the Nurture Class.
- I like telling others how much I enjoy coming here and I wish that more children can come.
- I wish that they ask us more on what we like doing
- I liked all the questions because I like coming here.
- I do not know how the activity could have been different.

7.4 Discussion

The findings from both the maps and the posters, suggest that the participants had a very positive experience as nurture class pupils. They particularly liked activities such as cooking and having breakfast together, toys and play, and other activities like drawing and art and crafts. Breakfast is an important part of the nurture class, providing an opportunity for pupils to learn and practice social and emotional learning skills, such as communication, sharing, turn taking, collaboration, and acting responsibly (Bennathan and Boxall 2000). It also facilitates the development of attachment and is regarded as a very positive and rewarding experience by the pupils (Cooper and Tiknaz 2007). The participants also suggested that learning in the nurture class was fun, with learning adapted to their needs and making use of hands-on and play-based activities with a high level of individual attention by caring adults. This contrasts with more crowded and less adapted mainstream classrooms, where the chances of individualised support is less and the chances of failure higher (Cooper and Tiknaz 2007). It is interesting to note that the participants were attending the nurture class on a part-time basis and could thus compare their learning experiences in the nurture class with that of their regular classroom. It appears that the pupils are calling for learning contexts, including mainstream ones, characterised by experiential, play-based activities and adequate individualised support (Cubeddu and MacKay 2017; Warin and Hibbin 2016).

Another theme which emerged from the data was the importance of caring and understanding adults as well as supportive peers. The participants frequently referred to the teachers and friends as an important aspect of their nurture class experience, while some underlined the need for less fighting and bullying by peers in the mainstream classes. One of the key principles of nurture groups is for a caring

environment created by the nurture group teacher and the LSA to enable the young learners feel safe and become attached to school, and to facilitate the development of the requisite skills the children need to function effectively in mainstream classrooms (Bennathan and Boxall 2000; Cooper and Tiknaz 2007). The creation of this nurturing climate is not only made possible by the smaller number of children in the classroom and the consequent individualised support, but the caring approach of the specially trained staff working in tandem to provide and model caring relationships. In their review of eleven studies on nurture groups, Hughes and Schlosser (2014) reported that one of the most important processes for effectiveness was that the nurture group teachers used more positive verbal and non-verbal behaviours than mainstream classroom teachers. Similarly, in an in-depth qualitative research in seven schools practicing the principles of nurture groups, Warin and Hibbin (2016) found that the three most successful settings had social relationships as their core value.

The nurture class staff also ensure that the pupils are protected from bullying and other exposure to peer behaviour problems which are more likely to occur in bigger mainstream classroom or during break time, as suggested by some of the participants. Such a nurturing climate supported by rewarding, enjoyable, play-based learning experiences provide pupils with the opportunity to develop their learning skills as well to understand and manage their feelings and build better relationships with their peers. It also enables them to become 'attached' to school and their teachers and find meaning in their learning experiences. As a result, they hold more positive views about themselves, their schools, teachers, peers and learning (Cooper and Tiknaz 2007).

Maltese nurture classes operate on a part-time basis, and one of their main priorities is the development and improvement of social and emotional learning amongst pupils manifesting social, emotional and behaviour difficulties. In view of the limited time spent in the nurture class, little time is addressed to academic learning, with the staff seeking to enable the relatively young pupils to understand and manage their feelings, build better relationships and enhance their communication skills. The participants in this study underlined that in the nurture class they feel happy, relaxed, and engaged; some also mentioned Circle Time as one of their favourite activities where they are given the opportunity to express their feelings in a supportive environment. A nurturing environment coupled with explicit learning of social and emotional skills is a very powerful process for the development of social and emotional learning in young pupils (Cefai and Cavioni 2015; Cefai et al. 2018; Denham et al. 2012).

One issue here relates to the potential 'opportunity cost' of the nurture class, with pupils losing out to academic learning and social experiences when they are separated from their peers in the mainstream class (Howes et al. 2003). Scott and Lee (2009) reported that there was no basis for the claim that pupils attending nurture groups may have less access to the formal curriculum, as the evidence indicated they 'kept up' with the academic achievement of their peers, while 'catching up' with their social and emotional learning. Close coordination between the nurture class staff and the mainstream classroom staff including continuity of support in the

mainstream class, helps to prevent or reduce any such potential 'cost'. It also needs to be mentioned that pupils only attend the nurture class for about four hours per week and only for about two scholastic terms with full reintegration in the mainstream being the long-term goal of the nurture class.

When asked about the process of the data collection, the main message from the participants was that the data collection exercise was a positive experience with an opportunity to talk about themselves, their feelings and their learning experiences through enjoyable hands-on activities and games. The younger pupils found it hard to verbalise their thoughts and feelings but they did mention that they particularly liked the drawings, pictures and working together (the maps and posters tasks). The older pupils, who were more elaborate in their responses, similarly appreciated the opportunity to talk about their experience in the nurture class, with some participants also mentioning that they liked telling others about it and that they wished for similar opportunities in the future. This may not be surprising when opportunities for students with SEBD to express their views are rather scarce (Cefai and Cooper 2010; Davies 2005); usually these are the least liked, listened and empowered group of students with individual educational needs (Lewis and Burman 2008; Kalambouka et al. 2007).

Research shows however that pupils, including those with SEBD, can provide helpful and innovative suggestions on how to improve teaching and learning, having unique, insider information of what may work or not work for children (Cefai and Galea 2016; Fielding and Bragg 2003; Rees and Main 2015). Furthermore, pupils with SEBD may lack the competence and confidence to express themselves clearly, particularly in disempowering contexts, and would thus need support to make their voices heard. For instance, in two of the more verbally-mediated tasks in the study, the younger children found it difficult to express themselves. Child-friendly and emancipatory approaches to elicit pupils' views to ensure authentic representation of their reality, such as drawings, pictures, posters, story-telling and balloon completion, coupled with active listening, empathy and probing, are thus essential in seeking to capture the views of pupils, especially young ones and those with individual educational needs such as SEBD (Cefai and Cooper 2010).

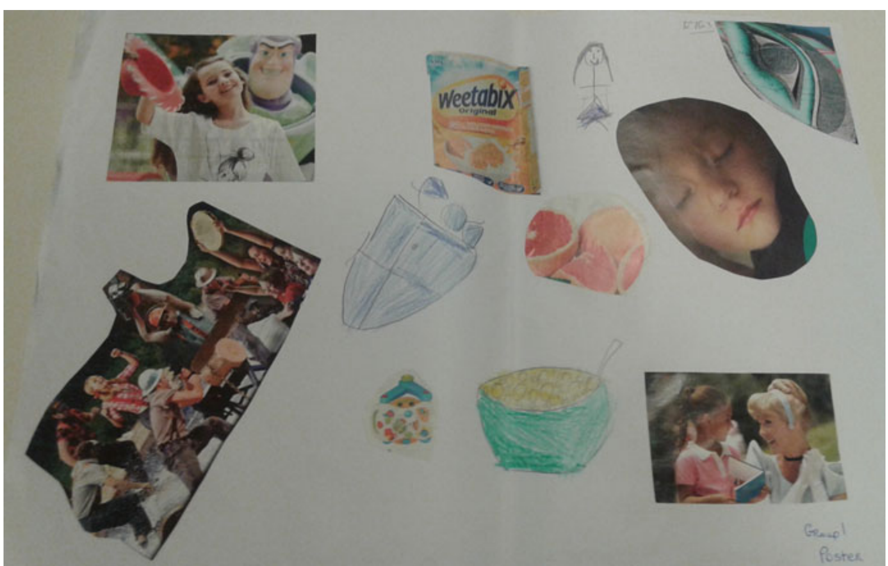
Finally, it is equally important that besides being empowered to express themselves, pupils are also included in the decisions about their learning and are active partners in the process of putting their suggestions into practice in the classroom (Davies 2005; Holdsworth 2006). This may differ somewhat from the classic nurture group where the teacher-pupils relationship is construed as being more adult-directed, with the staff taking the role of caring loco parentis (cf. Boxall 2002). One role does not exclude the other however, and nurture group staff can operate as caring educators providing both care and nurture while seeking to empower their pupils to take a more participative role in their education.

7.5 Conclusion

This was a relatively small-scale study based on two groups in a nurture class in Malta, which cautions against making generalisations across contexts. Furthermore, the data collection was carried out by the nurture class staff themselves, with potential bias despite concerted efforts to prevent such bias. Despite these limitations, however, this study helps to draw our attention to the need for more active participation by pupils in their education through approaches where the pupils themselves are active partners rather than objects in research and practice in schools. It sought to give vulnerable young children a voice about their education and wellbeing through a child-friendly, participative approach. The participants appreciated the opportunity to express their thoughts and feelings about their educational experiences, and made valuable recommendations on how their education may be improved, particularly in the mainstream classroom. They underlined the relevance of hands-on, play-based learning as well as the importance of the relational and emotional dimensions of learning for pupils experiencing social, emotional and behaviour difficulties, suggesting how mainstream classrooms may be organised to be more SEBD friendly. By listening to what the pupils themselves have to say through non-hierarchical, emancipatory and accessible approaches, we may be better able to provide them with a better quality and more relevant education.

Appendix 1: One of the Maps Produced by the Participants

Appendix 2: A Poster Produced by the Participants



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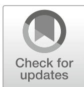
Chapter 8
Deepening in the Use of Discussion Groups with Children as Researchers' Advisers: Strengths, Challenges and Applications



Mònica González-Carrasco, Ferran Casas, Sara Malo, and Cristina Vaqué

8.1 Why Is it So Important to Take into Account Children's and Adolescents' Opinions in Qualitative Research?

Much has been written about the various approaches adults take in exploring the lives of children and adolescents, and about the policy implications of how we socially represent them as particular social categories (Casas 2006, 2010). Punch (2002) reviews some of the main issues that researchers encounter when working with children. One of the most relevant is the attitude of adults as investigators undertaking research with children in terms of power status. The differences in power is critical in determining aspects such as the protagonism that will be allowed to children in the context of a research, the way in which children are going to be heard using diverse techniques, and the interpretation of the data provided by children (Morrow 1999; James et al. 1998).

As stated in one of our studies (Casas et al. 2013), the growing interest in carrying out research about children has gone through different phases, from research models with an adult-centred approach to others that consider children and adolescents as social actors and as co-researchers (see Christensen and Prout 2002; Liebel 2007; Kellett et al. 2004; and Mason and Danby 2011). The study by Casas et al. (2013) is an example of how researchers recognize the relevance of listening to and understanding the opinions and assessments of the population of these ages, equating them

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with those of adult experts, and enabling them to assume a role as advisors to the researcher.

In this same vein, Gaitán (2014), questions the position of the child in the theory of socialization, moving from considering children only as an instrument to reproduce social order to accepting an active role that reflects the importance of horizontal relationships, this being aligned with the new sociology of children (see a revision of the concept in Platt 2016). These ideas are also supported by the so-called methodological approach to children's rights (Geidenmark and Karlsson 2002).

From this last perspective, Navarro (2011) refers to the key concept of "protagonistic participation" of children and adolescents, previously defined by other authors (i.e.: Cussiánovich 1997), according to which society should recognize their active character, which implies reviewing relations between adults and non-adults in terms of power relations (Alfageme et al. 2003; Cussiánovich and Márquez 2001; Gaytán 1998). This protagonism can also be assumed for their participation in spaces in which they establish their own norms, and make decisions, without the intervention of adults (Shier 2001), and also for the role that children and adolescents can have in the development of research projects (Gaitán and Martínez Muñoz 2006).

8.2 Different Contributions from a Qualitative Methodology that Allow us to Obtain Data from Children

The choice of using a concrete technique or another will depend to a great extent on the objectives of the research. Thus, the use of the individual interview as opposed to group techniques may be more appropriate in a context in which we explore more personal phenomena of one concrete child or adolescent that will be unlikely to arise among discussions amongst a group of peers (see as an example González-Carrasco et al. 2019). In this sense, Punch (2002) considers that the combination of traditional research techniques used with adult populations (such as interviews, FG, observation, etc.) with more child-friendly ones (such as the use of photographs) would be an efficient way to carry out research with children and adolescents.

Researchers have to decide which qualitative technique is more adequate to understand the opinions of children and adolescents according to the objectives of each study. For example, in some studies participants have been asked, within FG, to help develop research instruments, e.g., to construct the items of a questionnaire (MacMullin and Loughry 2000). Other authors have used FG as a technique to validate instruments in order to have comparable results across cultures (Moller et al. 2014). In the line of Savahl et al. (2015), DG have been used with the aim of listening to children in order to assess adults in one concrete subject of research.

In a similar manner, other authors also recognize that although FG have important advantages in terms of the dynamics they favour, it is not always the most appropriate nor should it be the only method used, especially when exploring more personal and sensitive issues (González-Carrasco et al. 2019; Hoppe et al. 1995; Michell 1999; Morgan et al. 2002).

8.3 Conceptual Delimitation of Group Qualitative Techniques: Focus Groups, Discussion Groups and Group Interviews

There is a great variety of qualitative techniques that allow us to approach the study of the perceptions, evaluations and aspirations of children and adolescents. We conceptually distinguish three specific kinds of group qualitative techniques that are commonly used in doing research with children and adolescents: Focus Groups (FG), Discussion Groups (DG) and Group Interviews (GI).

FG refer to any group technique which aim to obtain relevant information from children's perspective on any concrete topic. FG have been defined as a qualitative technique where a group of interacting individuals, conducted by a moderator, discusses a specific topic of interest rather than general issues (Boddy 2005; Masadeh 2012). When a FG is organised with children, it should allow in depth understanding of the representations that children have about certain complex social realities. However, in the Spanish and Latin-American literature, the most frequently used terms in qualitative methodology are probably DG and GI, rather than FG. An important amount of research in relation to the applications of DG has been developed in Spanish-speaking countries, although there is not a clear consensus about its definition. Ibáñez (1979) was one of the pioneer researchers in using the concept of DG, in Spain. For this author the DG dynamics is considered "more than the sum of its parts" since each participant generates both changes in his/her own discourse and in the group's, conceiving the discussion as the minimum unit of social interaction. Under this conception, it is considered that the group addresses itself, once the moderator has offered the topic of discussion to the group (Ibáñez 1994).

On the other hand, Vallés (2001) understands that a DG can be defined as a modality of GI that is situated between the techniques of individual interview and participant observation because, without being equivalent to either the individual interview or participant observation methods, it has elements of both. Garay et al. (2002) proposed that the GI can be defined using the same terms as the individual interview, although the latter takes place in an inter-individual context and, the first, in a context of group discussion, since it is a question of interviewing the group and not a group of individuals. These authors point out that the basic difference between FG and DG lies in the fact that, in the first, the focus is on a specific topic of

interview in a group context, while, in the second, the dynamics of the group tries to reproduce a specific social context. As Merton et al. (1946) pointed out, in FG the moderator asks participants such as a GI, whereas in DG, the most important question is the interaction among group participants, with the moderator having a less directive role (see Morgan 1997).

Our definition of a DG with children and adolescents is: *a group dynamic where participants assume they are experts on some topic and advise adults from their own perspective, via discussion among them about what adults should do or understand, while the adults involved listen to them and only ask for clarifications about the meaning of what they say.* Only in some cases, an adult may act as a moderator, but that is not usually necessary. The adults' *major role in these groups is to introduce adult researchers' ignorance about a topic and to ask children/adolescents to advise them as experts about the topic.*

In sum, we adopted the concept of DG as an adapted technique to understand the different perspectives of children and adolescents, giving the protagonism to the group members, listening to them and learning from them, since they are the experts on their own lives.

8.4 Strengths and the Challenges of Using Discussion Groups with Children and Adolescents

It is a challenge for researchers to decide which qualitative technique to use when listening to children and adolescents, because this implies aspects relevant to the positioning that the adult is going to have in relation to the participants, and even the credibility that is going to be given to their opinions.

There are several aspects that must be taken into account for the DG to function and allow data to be collected in the direction of the objective to be investigated, such as, for example, the composition of the group, the context in which it is carried out, the material support available for the discussion, among others. However, the *attitude that the adult researcher has* towards the group will be a key element in guaranteeing the kind of interaction among children that allows them to arise as protagonists of the discussion.

In the various guides that currently exist on how to carry out qualitative research with children and adolescents, most authors highlight the role of the moderator as one of the core elements for obtaining quality data (Kennedy et al. 2001). For instance, different authors point out that the moderator must strike a balance between directing and facilitating children to express their own opinions. Hennessy and Heary (2005) stress the importance of the moderator not taking an authoritarian role to children and adolescents, but rather presenting themselves as a figure who is there to listen to their life stories and understand their feelings.

However, we defend a slightly different approach in order to obtain quality data. For us, data quality is more related to children assuming their protagonistic role, than

to the moderator activity. We think that the attitude of the adult should be centred on giving protagonism to children and adolescents, explicitly telling them from the commencement of the research that we need and want to learn from them, since nobody knows more than them about the phenomena we are going to investigate, such as, for example, their own SWB. Therefore, the main role of the adult researcher is as a 'careful listener', and should only act as moderator *in extremis,* e.g., in the case of a serious conflict between participants. For this reason, when we collect data by means of DG, the first message conveyed to them is that researchers DO NOT KNOW something and need their help to acquire knowledge—we need them to explain to us how a phenomenon works, and, in some cases how, at their age, we should ask, explore, open new discussions, etc. on the topic we are interested about.

8.5 Research Applications of DG with Children and Adolescents in Health and Social Sciences

In areas such as health and social sciences FG have been commonly used as a research tool with children and adolescents. Most of the literature in English refers to the use of FG in a general manner however, and we can identify very different uses of the technique, some being rather similar to how we define DG, and some others which are quite different in its characteristics. Some studies emphasize that this technique allows the investigation of specific health problems from the perspective of the children (Padmanathan et al. 2018; Sylvetsky et al. 2013), while others allude to more methodological considerations in relation to the use of this technique at these ages (Gibson 2007, 2012; Horner 2000; Kennedy et al. 2001). By way of example, Morgan et al. (2002), when applying FG to children between 7 and 11 years old, recommended taking into account aspects such as the size of the groups, the role of the moderator, the preparation of the context where it is to be carried out and the way in which children are asked.

These researchers highlight, on the one hand, that important methodological adjustments at these ages must be done if rigorous data collection is to be carried out and, on the other hand, that scientists have progressively incorporated children and adolescents into research on the issues of their own lives.

Different methodologists have reviewed the most appropriate designs when aiming to obtain quality data from children and adolescents—including qualitative and quantitative one (e.g. De Leeuw 2005, 2008; De Leeuw et al. 2004). Nevertheless, the application of DG has allowed us to observe that some of the suggestions made by children and adolescents go in the opposite direction to those proposed by methodologists (see Table 8.1). For example, in the discussion of the use of questionnaires with children and adolescents, these ones consider that detailed and long explanations on how to answer a question, instead of being able to clarify their

Table 8.1 Different points of view from methodologists and children in relation to the design of questionnaire administration (elaborated by the authors)

Methodologists	Children/Adolescents
At the ages 7–10—Maximum 3 response options. At 11–15 years of age—4 to 5 response options. At 16+ − 5 to 7 response options.	Many children as young as 8 state they understand and can answer 11 response options—They simply need more time to answer.
Clearly detailed introductions make a questionnaire easier. Complexity of wording, negations, and logical operators makes a questionnaire more difficult.	Having to read more makes a questionnaire more difficult. Do not repeat headings or questions.
Scales with a label at the mid-point are easier to understand.	Scales with a label at the mid-point are "more difficult" to understand.
Completely labelled scales produce better-quality responses from children. Verbal labels are more easily understood than numeric.	End-labelled scales using numbers are very easy to understand (i.e.: 11-point satisfaction scales).

doubts, contribute to a superficial reading due to the cognitive effort it entails for them. We detail some of the differences in research experience from the adult researcher and child participant in relation to questionnaire administration in Table 8.1, as a way of demonstrating a more general point that assumptions about some adult researchers are questioned by children as participants in the research process.

8.6 The Use of Discussion Groups to Explore Children's and Adolescent's Subjective Well-being (SWB)

According to Ben-Arieh et al. (2014), research into children's well-being cannot be separated from consideration of children's perceptions, evaluations, and aspirations regarding their own lives. In this sense, we understand that SWB refers to how people evaluate their lives, both generally and for specific domains (family, friends, leisure time, etc.) (González-Carrasco et al. 2017a; b). When how children and adolescents define SWB was explored, findings showed that they generally include both positive and negative elements in their definitions and also referred to both affect (being happy) and attitudes (being optimistic) and relationships with family and friends were underlined as key factors for their SWB (Navarro et al. 2017).

In the context of children's and adolescent's SWB studies, DG have been mainly used for two purposes: identifying potential factors contributing to SWB in different cultural contexts according to children's and adolescents' point of view; and as a way to improve and better design questionnaires. This has allowed researchers to increase their knowledge about the impact that different contexts and variables may exert on SWB, and reduce the number of unanswered questions or wrong answers in

quantitative approaches due to the difficulty in understanding or in misunderstanding questions.

Several of the developed studies that used the DG examine how children and youth assign meaning to different areas of well-being: for example, personal safety, infrastructural deficiencies, psycho-social functioning (Savahl et al. 2015) and engagement with natural spaces (Adams and Savahl 2017). Other studies apply DG to understand perceptions of well-being in a specific population, for example children and young people who live in care (Selwyn et al. 2017) or children who live with disabilities (Foley et al. 2012).

In our own experience researching the well-being and quality of life of children and young people, we have also used DG to capture their understanding of other related constructs, such as values. Specifically, we asked children and adolescents what qualities they would like to be appreciated for when they turn 21, what we call 'aspired values'. The degree of agreement or discrepancy between the qualities to which children and adolescents reported they aspired to and those their parents aspired to for their children was analysed.

The quantitative analyses in this study showed that there were often discrepancies between the qualities the child aspires to for his or her own future and the qualities their parents aspire to for the child's future (Casas et al. 2007). However, these discrepancies were more evident when we asked parents in DG about their opinion of the value preferences shown by boys and girls of their children's age. The adolescents pointed out that the two most important values for which they would like to be appreciated for in the future were kindness and sympathy. The majority of adults responded incredulously to this result, claiming that adolescents, at these ages, are neither kind nor sympathetic, and that what had probably happened was that they had not understood the question and their answers were wrong. This result, beyond being merely anecdotal, indicates the depth of interpreting the psychological world of the participants using the DG, beyond what the quantitative data indicates.

In the following sections, we present two case examples in which DG was applied with two different objectives. In the first example, the aim was understanding different conceptualizations of SWB from the perspective of children and adolescents. In the second example, the focal point was to obtain advice to inform the researchers design two kinds of questionnaires (online and paper) without asking the group of children to reach a consensus.

8.6.1 Example 1: Contributions of DG at a Conceptual Level: A Qualitative Longitudinal Study on the Well-being of Children and Adolescents

González-Carrasco et al. (2019) identified factors influencing well-being reported by children and adolescents (9–16 years old) from their own perspective, in the context of DG and individual interviews, and variations in their answers at two different

points in time, according to their higher or lower SWB levels -previously measured through questionnaires- and their age. The total participants in the study were 940 students from primary and secondary schools in Catalonia (north-east Spain), and 100 of which also participated in 10 DG for two consecutive years.

In general, for all of the participants, well-being was related to interpersonal relationships, health, leisure activities, school, and personal aspects. Depending on previous SWB scores, some differences emerged to describe their well-being. The most important differences between the higher and lower scoring groups were about family relationships, indicated by mentioning the importance of receiving support from parents (highest SWB-score participants) and the negative impact on well-being of not having any relative to turn to for help when needed (lowest SWB-score participants). Leisure time and personal aspects were also more commented upon among the highest SWB-score participants.

Collecting information from a longitudinal perspective is unusual among qualitative studies focused on understanding children and adolescents' well-being and it allowed observation of some factors emerging in the second year, especially regarding the interpersonal relationship with parents and other people. Besides expressing that they receive support from parents and other people, they complained about parents controlling them too much. Perceptions regarding relationships with friends, health (i.e. eating a balanced diet and doing physical activity) and the school domain (i.e. learning new things) also changed from fairly negative to rather positive between the two points in which data was collected.

This example has allowed us to show that the use of GD is unusual in the field of children' SWB longitudinal studies. The comparison of the discourses that emerged between the first and the second year and between those participants with higher and lower SWB scores suggests the benefits of using GD to understand concepts as complex as SWB at these ages and how SWB evolves with time.

8.6.2 Example 2: Contributions of Discussion Groups with Children and Adolescents at a Methodological Level: Comparing Paper Based and Online Questionnaires

The methodological designs have transformed with the evolution of the information society, or what some authors have called "media ecology" (Scolari 2018), in which old technologies (such as paper) must coexist, compete and have often been replaced with new technologies (Internet, mobile telephones). There are several studies that identify new formats based, above all, on the use of computers as opposed to the usual paper format (De Leeuw and Nicholls 1996), as well as more recent technologies such as smartphones or tablets (Lugtig and Toepoel 2015). In spite of this, there is a gap in the literature regarding the comparability of the answers provided by children and adolescents when they answer questionnaires in traditional (paper) and

Table 8.2 Children preferences for online *versus* paper questionnaire (number and % of children)

Question options	3rd primary	5th primary	1st secondary	Total
Online questionnaire	29 93.55%	20 71.43%	27 84.38%	76 84.44%
Paper questionnaire	2 6.45%	6 21.43%	5 15.63%	13 14.44%
Indifferent	0	2 7.14%	0	2 2.22%
Total	31 100%	28 100%	32 100%	90 100%

online formats, and to a lesser extent those in which they are asked about how to design online questionnaires appropriate to their age.

The example presented here aimed to identify the pros and cons of online and paper questionnaires administered to children of their age, and to obtain advice about the best online format for them. Specifically, we wanted to know: (1) the comparability between online and paper formats for the same questions, and (2) what online formats are considered the most appropriate for different age groups (8, 10 and 12) in relation to SWB questions.

The results were obtained from the DG conducted with students of third and fifth grade of primary education (8 and 10-year age-groups, respectively) and the first grade of secondary education (12-year-olds). The DG took place in three public schools (a primary, a secondary, and a primary-secondary) in the province of Girona (Catalonia). A total of 91 students of primary and secondary education took part voluntarily. Each group was composed of 7/8 participants (4 girls and 4 boys).

The general results show that the vast majority of the three age groups would prefer an online questionnaire. In this case, around 84% of the participants preferred the online version. Children in the third year of primary education justified their preference for the online questionnaire by referring to these questionnaires being more sustainable and cheaper. They also considered this mode of administration as being more convenient because they could respond to it anywhere and any time. Some fifth year children said that the paper questionnaire was more boring than the online questionnaire. One group out of four said it was very difficult to compare a paper questionnaire with an online questionnaire as they have very different formats. Children in the first year of secondary education preferred the paper questionnaire and argued that it was more practical. The preferences for paper as opposed to online questionnares across the three groups is presented in Table 8.2.

The three age groups expressed some proposals for improving the online questionnaire. They are as follows:

Background colour: All three age groups considered white to be a suitable colour for an online questionnaire; however, all of them thought a coloured questionnaire would be better. They all agreed that soft colours like light blue or light green would be best. Children in the third year also commented that they would like each screen to be in a different colour. As for fifth year students, one group out of four said that they would like the online questionnaire to be white because it is

clearer and that they are used to this colour. They also preferred not having images because they can be distracting.

Images/special effects: In general, fifth grade and first year secondary school students agreed that the questionnaire should be more child-friendly and entertaining. They would like it to have some images related to the questions asked (for example images of family, friends, children's rights, etc.). In most cases, they agreed that it would be more fun if the questionnaire had some special effects (for example the use of motion…).

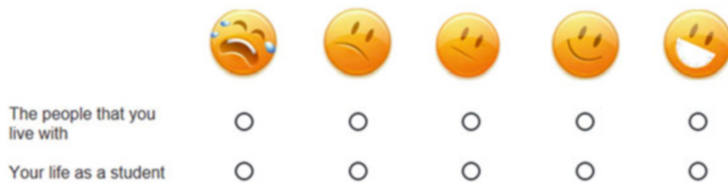
Questions to be on the same page or not: We also asked participants whether they would like to have all the questions on the same page or on different pages. One out of four third year groups and one \ out of four of fifth year student groups considered the best option to be having the questions on the same screen so they do not have to click so much. They would like to scroll down and find more questions on the same page. Children in the fifth year also said that they would like to have a motion effect when changing pages. Some first year students agreed that they would prefer to have all of the questions on the same page and not have to change screen. Two groups out of four noted that it is better to have the questions one after the other so they do not have to click so much. They would also like to scroll down and find more questions on the same page. In this case, they preferred to have more questions on one page and change screen fewer times. One group of fifth year students said that they would like to have a final question with a single textbox to add their personal comments.

8.6.2.1 Items on Domain-satisfaction: *How Satisfied Are You with Each of the Following Things in Your Life?*

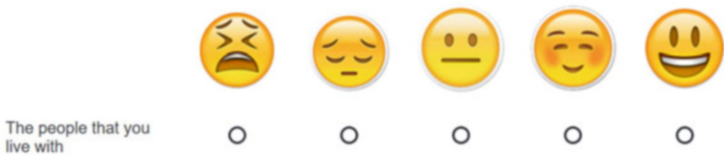
Two items from a multi-item domain-satisfaction scale were presented in two different versions: A version for third graders, and a version for fifth graders of primary education and first graders of secondary education. The main difference between the two versions is that the third graders version was formulated with emoticons (faces) and rating stars and offered four alternative options, while the fifth and the first grade of secondary education version was formulated without emoticons and offers three options.

Third grade primary school version: Four different options were provided to the third primary schools graders, as follows.

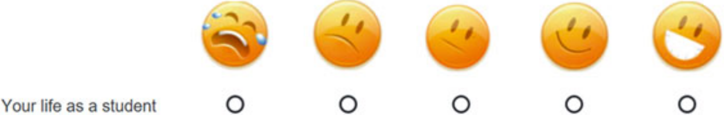
Option 1. Matrix/rating scale with emotions



Option 2. Rating scale (separated options with emotions in big faces)



Option 3. Rating scale (separated options with emotions in small faces)



Option 4. Rating stars format

More than 80% of the participants considered that Option 2 was best, because in this case emoticons are bigger and they can see them better. All children that preferred this option considered that the second and third emoticons were very similar. Approximately 12% of the children preferred Option 4, as it seemed to them to be similar to a funny game, and less than 7% considered Option 3 as the most understandable one.

Fifth Grade Primary School and First Grade Secondary School Version

Three different options were provided to children in the fifth grade of primary school and first grade of secondary school**:**

Option 1. Matrix/Rating scale format

1. How satisfied are you with each of the following things in your life?

	0 = Not at all satisfied	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Completely satisfied = 10
The people that you live with	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Your life as a student	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Option 2. Rating scale (separated options and scale repeated for each question)

2. How satisfied are you with each of the following things in your life?

	0 = Not at all satisfied	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10 = Completely satisfied
The people that you live with	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

	0 = Not at all satisfied	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10 = Completely satisfied
Your life as a student	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Option 3. Slider graphic format

3. How satisfied are you with ...

The vast majority of the two age groups preferred Option 3 (graphic slider) (Table 8.3). In both cases, they preferred this option because they considered it convenient and fun to move. They also considered the slider graphic as an original way to respond to satisfaction questions, and they liked the fact that it was different from the other question formats. One group of fifth grade students considered that they do not need to have the values repeated for the different sub-questions because it is comprehensible without this. The secondary school participants also made some suggestions for improvement: they would like the different items to be in bold and some would like to have the labels on each question. They also considered the option of putting the labels above each graphic slider with more spaces so they can understand it better.

Table 8.3 Format preferences in relation to the question on how satisfied are you with each of the following things in your life (number and % of children) **[Single-item scale on general satisfaction: *How satisfied are you with your life as a whole?*]**

Question options	5th primary	1st secondary	Total
1. Matrix/rating scale	0	2 6.25%	2 3.33%
2. Rating scale (separated options and scale repeated for each question)	1 3.57%	0	1 1.67%
3. Slider graphic	27 96.43%	30 93.75%	57 95.00%
Total	28 100%	32 100%	60 100%

Three different options were presented to the children and adolescents of the different age-groups as follows.

Option 1. Rating scale question (with the question at the beginning and the values above the circles)

	0 = Not at all happy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Completely happy = 10
1. How satisfied are you with your life as a whole?	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O

Option 2. Rating scale question (with the question above and the values next to circles)

2. How satisfied are you with your life as a whole

0 = Not at all satisfied Completely satisfied = 10

O 0 O 1 O 2 O 3 O 4 O 5 O 6 O 7 O 8 O 9 O 10

Option 3. Rating scale question (with the question above and the values above circles)

3. How satisfied are you with your life as a whole

0= Not at all satisfied	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Completely satisfied = 10
O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O

Table 8.4 shows the diversity of opinion regarding the format of the question on general satisfaction. Results show that a little more than a half of the participants would like this question to be formulated as a rating scale question with the question above and the values above the circles. Regarding the other participants, around 34%

Table 8.4 Format preferences in relation to the question on general satisfaction (number and % of children)

Question options	3rd primary	5th primary	1st secondary	Total
1. Rating scale question (with the question at the beginning and the values above the circles)	7 22.58%	1 6.25%	0	8 10.13%
2. Rating scale question (with the question above and the values next to the circles)	5 16.13%	7 43.75%	15 46.88%	27 34.18%
3. Rating scale question (with the question above and the values above the rounds)	19 61.29%	8 50%	17 53.13%	44 55.70%
Total	31 100%	16 100%	32 100%	79 100%

would like it to be formulated as a rating scale question with the question above and the values next to the circles. Only about 10% would like this question to be formulated as a rating scale question (with the question at the beginning and the values above the circles).

The results for the three age groups show both similarities and differences. In this case, the highest percentage of third graders considered Option 3 as most suitable; the next preferable Option 1 and then Option 2.

The results of fifth graders and first graders of secondary school show some with regard to third graders (primary). The highest percentage of the former stated that they liked Option 3 best, with Option 2 being the next considered more understandable.

Children of the three age groups reported they preferred Option 3, considered that they could understand it without the mid-values. They chose Option 3 because they would prefer the statement to be above the circles. Some children suggested placing the values below the circles. When asked if they would like this question to be formulated as a graphic slider, most of them said yes. However, five of the first year participants suggested that if the question was above they would not need the slider. Some children who preferred Option 2 preferred this because in Options 1 and 3, having the numbers just above can be a little bit confusing.

According to third grade participants Option 1 is the most similar to the paper questionnaire but they preferred to formulate the question as in option 3.

8.7 Discussion

As we have argued in this chapter, FG is a frequently used technique in qualitative approaches to gather data from children and adolescents aimed at understanding their psychosocial reality (Merton et al. 1946). However, there are important variations in the procedure and goals when using this technique (Hoppe et al. 1995; Michell 1999; MacMullin and Loughry 2000; Savahl et al. 2015). We have given particular attention to one variety of FG, which is distinct from the others because of

the explicit attitude of the adults involved, what we have referred to as "discussion group" (DG).

When in a group technique the participating adult or adults explicitly and actively state that children are the protagonists (main characters) of the discussion and of the resulting conclusions, and the adult/s only listen, the group dynamics become very different than in usual situations where the adult in the group represents or is assumed to be the 'authority' and/or to have the 'knowledge'. For that reason, this specific group dynamic within DG has shown impressive potential to obtain new enlightening information from children's perspectives, provided most children become immediately motivated to participate and respond to undertaking the requested task in a responsible manner—and the influence of the adult or adults in the group is minimized.

From our understanding of DG, adults' attitude must be made clear to the participant children from the commencement of the data collection. The researcher must *report his or her ignorance about the topic to be discussed and must explicitly recognise that children have the knowledge* and state therefore that he or she is ready to learn from them.

Besides this emphasis in the researchers' attitudes, this technique differs from other techniques in other aspects also: in the DG a consensus among participants is usually not necessary, the role of the moderator is minimised, and instead the tools used may be very relevant. For example, in Casas et al. (2013), children were provided with copies of 14 different formats of a concrete set of items from a psychometric scale, and were informed all the items were made by adults, but that the researchers were unable to reach a consensus about which format was the best for children of their age. Children in DG may also be provided with previous research reports, tables summarising research results, different possible formats of a questionnaire (like in our example discussing paper and online questionnaires), or a list of examples of things that may contribute to increase or decrease their SWB and so on.

The examples that have been here discussed in this chapter illustrate the interest in applying the DG technique, and we expect this chapter may stimulate its use among children's SWB researchers. We have experienced the strengths arising from researchers abandoning a traditional role by which being older necessarily means knowing more and being more right than the child, and adopting instead a role in which it is openly recognized that the child has the relevant knowledge about things happening in his or her own life. This premise being totally aligned with the postulates of the "new childhood studies" or "new sociology of childhood" (Fattore et al. 2017).

Applying the DG with child and adolescent populations has allowed us to accumulate new knowledge by learning from children and about their lives from their own experience and perspective, i.e.: about their SWB, but also beyond. For example, guidelines offered in the methodological literature to collect quality data from children have displayed notable discrepancies with what children told us when we ask them in DG, as we have seen in the examples provided in Table 8.1. Concretely, we have learned that the preferences of children and adolescents in relation to the design of a questionnaire change according to age, the kind of question and the question options offered. However, many other things can still be

learned, because DG have a very important potential to allow children to express their thoughts and aspirations.

This technique has been especially useful in discovering aspects not always obvious from an adult point of view and to realize that children can see things in a different way than adults. Moreover, it can be easily used—and in fact has already been successfully used—in multi-method approach research designs (Huebner et al. 1999; Crivello et al. 2009).

DG also can create scenarios that make it possible to involve social actors with heterogeneous characteristics, as Corbetta (2003) suggests,—e.g., children from different cultural backgrounds—because they can facilitate cooperative dynamics between children with diverse characteristics to advise adult researchers (Sherif et al. 1961).

In our opinion, within the qualitative approach to children's SWB research, the DG has already played, and has a significant potential to play an important role, because it allows deeper insights into children's and adolescents perceptions and evaluations on different facets of their lives from their own point of view, with less adult interference compared to other techniques. Moreover, it highlights that children may have different ways of understanding their surrounding world than adults. The contrast of these different perspectives being crucial to realize that children's well-being is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon in which many social agents are involved, SWB as understood and evaluated by children themselves being crucial (González-Carrasco et al. 2017a; b).

In their attempt to construct a child standpoint on well-being, Fattore et al. (2017), highlight the importance of giving children feedback on the analysis carried out by researchers within a process of co-constructing interpretations with them. A pending task for the future is that we should use DG reports to discuss with children on children's SWB derived from adults' researchers understanding of children's discussions in previous DG.

When the DG technique is applied to methodologically improve a process of data collection (as was the case when we explored the best ways, from the point of view of children and adolescents, to formulate certain questions in an online questionnaire), children's proposals have already been used in several research projects, i.e. to build new questionnaires according to their contributions.

Despite the fact that our use of DG goes beyond *research focused on children*, and of *research with children,* we recognize that the approach we have explained using DG does not involve the *research by children* approach that has been defended by some authors (see Fattore and Mason 2017) who consider it the highest level of children's participation within scientific research. In our approach children are not the leaders of the research, but *researchers' advisers*. Even though it does not correspond to the highest participation level, we think it is a step forward in comparison with other approaches used by the scientific community and by potential sponsors of scientific research.

We think DG provides an important way to advance the advantages provided by children's participation in research, increasing confidence about information provided by children for scientific purposes, and therefore contributes to accumulating

evidence-based information crediting children's points of view. For children, adopting a role of advisers to the researchers, the use of DG provides a key opportunity, because it allows not only a way to grasp children's opinions but also to contrast and compare them in order to create the best possible instruments for deepening understanding into children's SWB.

To conclude, and because there is an important amount of research dedicated to understand the point of view of children and adolescents, we recommend that researchers be more explicit with the modality of FG used in each research project with children, according to the objective of data collection specific to the research being undertaken. We need to highlight that the DG technique, as we understand it and have described it, implies that: a) the aim is to listen to children; b) the means to do so is a researchers' attitude that allows a climate where children feel they are real protagonists from the very beginning; c) children need to assume they have a knowledge that the adults do not have; d) the procedure does not involve a concern about obtaining consensus within the group, e) the role of moderator is not relevant; and f) facilitating adult produced documents to be examined, criticized or improved by children can be relevant tools for stimulating group discussions.

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Chapter 9
The Children's Delphi: A Participatory Methodological Framework for Conducting Research on Children's Subjective Well-being in South Africa

Shazly Savahl, Sabirah Adams, and Elizabeth Benninger

9.1 Introduction

A considerable body of evidence exists in the international literature emphasising the notion that high levels of well-being are associated with a range of positive psychosocial outcomes in children (Holte et al. 2014; Moore et al. 2004; September and Savahl 2009). Similarly, programmes to increase children's level of well-being have shown to have a significant positive influence on their development trajectories, and ultimately a direct impact on the socio-economic success of nations. This rapidly developing area of empirical, theoretical, and social policy research, along with a committed and sustained advocacy agenda, has become known as the Child Indicator Movement (Ben-Arieh 2008). The Movement has its genesis in the progression of children's rights legislation (most notably the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)), and the epistemological shift encapsulated in innovative epistemological and theoretical advancements in studies of children and childhood initially proposed by James and Prout (1990).

With early impetus in the Geneva Declaration on the Rights of the Child, which was drafted in 1924 and adopted by the League of Nations in 1934, children's rights legislation has advanced through a number of versions culminating in the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child in 1959, and eventually in the

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UNCRC in 1989. The UNCRC consists of 54 articles guaranteeing children socio-economic and participation rights, which confirm their position as rights' holders and valid members of society. The ratification of the treaty places an obligation on States parties to ensure its enactment. Governments are then bound in international law to put children first and develop legislation and policies to ensure that the rights enshrined in the Convention are actioned.

South Africa ratified the UNCRC on the 16th of June 1995, and has subsequently enacted a range of legislations reflecting this commitment to children's rights. These include the Bill of Rights in the Constitution, the Children's Act of 2005, and the Child Justice Act of 2010. The UNCRC has four overarching guiding principles that have implications for conducting research with children:

- Non-discrimination
- Best interests of the child
- Survival and development
- The right to participation

It is from this epistemological position that childhood is regarded as a valid structural feature of society and children's perspectives acknowledged as valid, their experiences as real, with the capacity to meaningfully reflect on their lives. The methodological upshot is that children transitioned from being absent in social research, to being objects of research, to being subjects of research. The focus on understanding these subjective positions ignited the interest in researching children's (subjective) well-being. Ultimately, this provided the momentum for the advancement of child-centred research, which gave rise to participatory methodologies—it is now widely accepted that children should be regarded as *participants* in the research process.

In this chapter we put forward the *Children's Delphi*, a participatory methodological framework that is premised on the notion that children are the authentic knowers and authoritative experts on their lives, and offers a structured framework for the meaningful inclusion of children's views in research. The framework, however, goes beyond the mere provision of opportunities for children's voices to be heard. Rather, the notion of *agency* is located both at the level of conceptualisation, foregrounding children's intellectual input as programme designers, and at the level of practice as programme implementers. We consider the application of the Children's Delphi for conducting research on children's subjective well-being (SWB). We are guided by the notion that in contemporary society, even though children are bestowed with rights and privileges in law and policy, they still constitute a vulnerable population. Special care and attention is therefore necessary when conducting research with children. The chapter proceeds with a consideration of child participation, and transitions to a discussion on children's SWB, including a consideration of the methodological advances in research on children's SWB. Thereafter, it shifts to a more focused deliberation on the use of the Children's Delphi for conducting research on children's SWB.

9.2 The Vagaries of Child Participation in Contemporary Research with Children

Child participation provides a critical framework for the inclusion of children in research, challenging previous models of children's research controlled by privileged and powerful adults (Fattore et al. 2017). It places the child centrally in the research process, with the aim of gaining a detailed understanding of their subjective experiences and meaning-making processes, while taking into consideration social, cultural, and historical contexts (Fattore et al. 2007). The researcher's role in child participation shifts from the adult-centric perspective, working instead as a collaborator in ways that enhance the power children have over their own lives (Langhout and Thomas 2010). Grounded in the theoretical and methodological assertions of the 'new sociology of childhood', child participation research has its genesis in international legislation on children's rights, including the UNCRC. Article 12 of the UNCRC states that children have the right to freely express their opinion, to be heard, and have their opinions taken seriously on all matters that affect them (United Nations General Assembly 1989). Article 13 further supports child participation in the form of freedom of expression—this includes the right to seek, receive, or impart information and ideas through the child's preferred form of communication. Through the collaborative methodologies of child participation research, children have contributed valuable knowledge around issues relating to their lives, including children's experiences of the natural environment, self-concept, labour, schooling, play, gender, sexuality and spirituality, and developing indicators of children's well-being (Adams and Savahl 2017a, b; Adams et al. 2017; Benninger and Savahl 2016a, b, c; Mason and Watson 2014; September and Savahl 2009).

However, Fattore et al. (2019) warn that even though children's rights in general, and participation rights in particular, have become accepted within larger social discourse, the broader meaning and implications of these rights and enactments of participation are somewhat ambiguous. Furthermore, they raise the concern that if used without due consideration of context, then child participation runs the risk of being culturally insensitive and colonising. Similarly, Harcourt and Einarsdottir (2011) note that social context and social relations are often overlooked in child participation initiatives. The concept of child participation could then be perceived as a normative construct rooted in a position of adult-child relations; which could potentially marginalise and alienate children who do not engender the 'norm'. Part of these concerns raised by Fattore et al. (2019) could in some way be located in how early theoretical frameworks and conceptualisations of child participation were developed, without a contextual grounding in and consideration of the diversity of childhoods, children's experiences, and the socio-political 'lifeworlds' of children.

As Cuevas-Parra et al. (2016) note, the wealth of literature on child participation literature affords a number of models of child participation. Among these are Hart's Ladder of Participation, Treseder's Degrees of Participation, Shier's Pathways to Participation, Lansdown's Model of Participation, and Lundy's Model of Participation. More recently, McKendrick (2014) put forward a model, Factors contributing

to child well-being: A conceptual framework to situate place in context. This model is 'context-focused' and provides a conceptual framework to understand the influence of neighbourhood on children's well-being. He developed a tool to expound the influence of place on children's overall well-being, in addition to his conceptual framework of place well-being. His tool, 'The impact of places on the well-being of children' is analogous to Hart's (1997) ladder of children's participation. It comprises a continuum ranging from 'damaging' (lowest rung) to 'transforming' the (highest rung). Further, relevant to the South African context, Häkli and Kallio (2018) argue for the focus on children's 'political agency', by focusing on the 'phenomenologies of political action' rather than more complex ontologies of the political.

Participation is considered necessary for citizenship, and alternatively is employed as a method to attain 'full citizenship' (Hultgren and Johansson 2018). Lundy (2007) critically avers that acknowledging and venerating children's views is not only a legally binding requirement (for States parties that have ratified the UNCRC), but also good pedagogical practice. In recent years there have been contentions in relation to the operationalisation of child participation in varying cross-cultural contexts that have adopted the UNCRC (Ansell 2016; Lundy 2007; Rye and Vold 2018; Skelton 2010). The key premise of these debates is the delineation of 'authentic participation' across different spheres that affect children's lives. The specific wording of Article 12 of the UNCRC has been a point of concern given that the emphasis on children's participation is associated with their age, "Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child..." (United Nations General Assembly 1989). Clark and Richards (2017) thus note that participation is oft considered to be enacted by individuals that are competent, responsible, reflexive individuals; essentially well-becomings (Ben-Arieh 2008).

A critical deliberation is made by Fattore et al. (2019) in terms of the dearth of empirical endeavours exploring the challenges in incorporating children's participation within the research process, particularly for children's well-being. Drawing on the work of Ben-Arieh (2005), Fattore et al. (2019) put forward crucial considerations regarding children's participation, such as identifying when within the research process children should participate, and the manner in which children should be included in research regarding their well-being. They assert that children should be actively engaged and involved in every aspect of the research process, namely: the design of the study; as participants; co-researchers (data collectors); data analysis; and dissemination. Hultgren and Johansson (2018) propose an alternative to the ladder-based models of participation. They put forward a model of participation comprising three interdependent levels: an ontological level; an ideological level; and an implementation level. The consideration and integration of 'empowering research' (Holt 2004) in this regard is critical, as it emphasises the processual and collaborative nature of participation. This reflects the definition of child participation put forward by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comments No.12 (2009) that focused on the 'right to be heard'.

Prior to the UNCRC, children were generally considered to lack agency and the capacity to participate in the 'adult' or public domain (Carroll et al. 2019; Lansdown 2000). Carroll et al. (2019) note that there are continuing debates regarding children's competency in being able to participate, and the role of their views and 'voices' in the policy sphere. The appraisal of knowledge propagated by child-led research has been delineated in terms of being 'scientific', 'practical', or 'situated research' (see Carroll et al. 2019; Hammersley 2000) that empowers children by being involved in the decision-making dialogue and processes. There are, however, legally binding requirements to ensure and uphold the rights of each child as enshrined in the UNCRC. As indicated, Article 12 of the UNCRC advances children's right to be heard on the matters that affect them. The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child emphasises the implementation of the right of the child to be heard in various settings and situations namely:

- in the family;
- education and school activities;
- in situations of violence;
- alternative care;
- healthcare, play recreation, sports, and cultural activities;
- in the workplace;
- in the development of prevention strategies;
- in immigration and asylum proceedings;
- in emergency situations;
- and in national and international settings.

In this regard, Lundy (2007) put forward four steps that should be followed in order to attain 'Respect for the views of the child' (Article 12), namely: space, voice, audience, and influence. Using these steps as a critical point of departure, Kennan et al. (2018) conducted a systematic review focusing on an evidence-base of effective practices in supporting children's participation in the child-welfare, child-protection, and alternate-care contexts. The findings identified four key processes that were effective in enhancing children's participation, namely advocacy, attendance at meetings, family welfare conferences, and recording a child's views. A limitation identified in the literature is the dearth of research on the effectiveness of various processes to afford children's perceptions to be fully considered (Kennan et al. 2018). Consequently, Carroll et al. (2019) note that despite the advancements in the field, marginalisation of children in research and policy-making persists. They conducted a study exploring two projects on children's participation in Auckland, New Zealand, focusing on urban planning. The first explored a child peer research study on living in the city, and the second focused on the consultation with children on the redevelopment of an urban space in Auckland. The authors conclude that the studies represent children's genuine participation within the public sphere, reflecting children's views, and thereby enhanced children's participatory skills (Carroll et al. 2019).

Within the South African context, there are a number of legislative advancements that have been enacted to further solidify children's rights, particularly to be heard in matters that affect them. The further advancement of children's participatory rights

and decision-making that directly enhances children's citizenship is thus essential (Carroll et al. 2019). However, continued exorbitant levels of crime, violence, and inequality that children face impacts upon their rights in general. More specifically, there is a need for further focused research that advances the 'authentic participation' of children as a process, resulting in the veneration and acknowledgement of children's views. This should result in implementing children's views to improve policy and legislation that maintain and advocate their rights. A number of participatory studies have been conducted over the last decade in South Africa that incorporates and values the voices and views of children in research on aspects affecting their lives. Research by Savahl and colleagues (Adams and Savahl 2015, 2017a; Adams et al. 2019; Benninger and Savahl 2016a; Savahl 2010; Savahl et al. 2015a, b; Savahl, Adams et al. 2015; September and Savahl 2009) exploring children's perspectives of their well-being and quality of life across various contexts in South Africa have contributed to the literature on children's understandings from the developing South. These studies engaged children in research using a child participation framework and focused on understanding children's subjective perceptions on their well-being. Acknowledging the epistemological standpoint that children are knowledgeable experts on matters affecting their lives, Benninger and Savahl (2016a) put forward the Children's Delphi, a technique developed to engage children in the research process on aspects affecting their well-being.

Considering the 'basic requirements for the implementation of the right of the child to be heard' advanced by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (General Comments 12, 2012), participation should be not only effective and meaningful but ethical. It is noted that child participation processes should be: transparent and informative (the information should be age appropriate to express their views, venerating and detailing their participation); voluntary (participation should be voluntary with the express right to discontinue without consequence); respectful (those who work with children should have the requisite training and respect the child's views); relevant (the focus of any participation work should be relevant to the child, and children afforded the space to engender discussions about things important to them); child-friendly (this should be linked to children's diverse and evolving capacities); inclusive (children from marginalised groups should be included, should be culturally-sensitive and discrimination should be avoided); supported by training (adults working with children must be appropriately trained to effectively engage children in a participatory manner—this could extend to training children in programmes to promote effective participation); safe and sensitive to risk (this requires adults to ensure children are protected from violence and exploitation, with a clear child-protection strategy delineated); and finally, accountable (this includes monitoring, evaluation, and follow-up with children). Therefore, "Achieving meaningful opportunities for the implementation of article 12 will necessitate dismantling the legal, political, economic, social and cultural barriers that currently impede children's opportunity to be heard and their access to participation in all matters affecting them. It requires a preparedness to challenge assumptions about children's capacities, and to encourage the development of environments in which children can build and demonstrate capacities. It also requires a

commitment to resources and training." (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child 2009; General Comment No. 12, p. 85).

It is therefore key to accurately capture and reflect children's voices and perspectives to effect appropriate policy change to better the everyday lives of children. This is in essence linked to the notions of representation and responsibility and the 'ethic of respect' for children's 'subjecthood' (Beier 2018). Further, this aligns to the Capability Approach (Sen 2005) that highlights the role of children's capacities to contribute meaningfully to all spheres they are involved in and that affect them (Fegter and Richter 2014; Savahl et al. 2019). Valuing children's experiences, perspectives, and views as valid is necessary to cultivate a culture of acknowledging and respecting their perspectives on the issues affecting them. It is therefore crucial to ensure that children are engaged in decision-making at home, school, and community. Political processes are therefore a way to maintain and protect the rights and interests of children and guarantee that it is accurately reflected. It is key to note that children must be aware of their rights and the implementation thereof, as it dovetails with their ability to exercise that right (Granlund 2013). Given children's rights as 'internationally acknowledged benchmarks', Lansdowne and Karakara (2006) argue for the right for children to be heard, and for children's well-being in general to be enhanced, particularly in countries where children are victims of abuse and crime and to ensure appropriate measures to prevent future occurrences of threats to children's safety.

9.2.1 Child Participation and Subjective Well-being

Along with the considerable focus on the operationalisation of children's participation has been the engagement, critique, and revision of the various models of child participation (see Matthews 2003; Thomas 2007). A number of criticisms have been made of both the theory and practice of children's participation. In the last decade there has been a departure from earlier models of child participation that encompassed a hierarchical structure (Arnstein 1969; Hart 1997; Thomas 2007). A comprehensive critique and consideration of child participation is evident in the work of Thomas (2007). Thomas (2007) notes that the use, interpretation, and intention of Hart's ladder was to provide a tool for conceptualising and thinking about participation. However, his ladder has been widely used instead in a practical manner to ascertain the level of 'authenticity' of children's participation. A synthesis of literature on various models of child participation thus present two divergent traditions in thinking; thus, those where 'power' is shared between adults and children, and those where power must be given over to children (Thomas 2007). This is reflected in debates around participation being solely 'child-led' or 'child-led' with the assistance of adults. Skivenese and Strandbu (2006) in fact argue for a focus on language and communication as the core aspects that encompass shared social values and an 'intersubjective understanding' among individuals. The increasing focus in recent years has therefore been on the processual nature of child

participation, and not merely an outcome. Chawla (2001) noted two decades ago that child participation is contextual and is influenced by age, gender, culture, political circumstances, setting, and resources available; which is still relevant. This further points to the role that the 'developmental status' of a country has on the engagement and type of participatory research children are involved in.

In this regard, Matthews (2003) contends that inadequate 'participatory mechanisms' foster a culture of non-participation. Children's participation is a prerequisite for successful strategies in working with children at every level of society. Through participation, children and young people are no longer deemed passive receivers of services, or victims of resolute social and political forces. They should be perceived as stakeholders possessing specific and genuine interests in policy-making and the creation of child-friendlier cities (Sener 2006). The impact of the countless challenges that children in South Africa are exposed to on a daily basis demands theorisation of children's participation to be mindful of the manner in which socio-economic conditions shape, and hinder the degree to which children are able to participate (Moses 2008). A major challenge is that many children are unaware of the rights that they possess as active participants in their communities. Another challenge is that a large proportion of children in South Africa reside in informal settlements face inadequacies of education, sanitation, basic services such as clean water sources, refuse removal, transport, and access to food (Statistics South Africa 2018).

A key consideration that has been put forward in the empirical literature is whether children's participation in research brings about any demonstrable change in their lives (Thomas 2007). A discussion about children's participation usually entails a consideration of children's agency and competency. Tobin (2019) asserts that meaningful participation results in developmental advancements across various domains, and enforces Article 6 (*Right to survival and development*) and Article 29 (*Right to education*). While the denotation of children's participation in research is contested, there is consensus among key scholars that Article 12 (*Respect for the views of the child*) cannot be viewed in isolation (Lundy 2007; Skelton 2007; Lundy et al. 2019). In this regard, Skelton (2010) notes that a rights-based approach is expedient, as it acknowledges the child-adult power dynamic. In tandem with the advancement of the UNCRC, there has been the focus on advancing children's well-being as it relates to children's rights (Bradshaw et al. 2007; Lloyd and Emerson 2017). The substantial increase in research on SWB in particular has emphasised and contributed to policy and strategic development by imbuing children's subjective perspectives to improve their lives. In defining SWB, Diener (1984) put forward that it comprises three distinct components, namely life satisfaction, positive experiences, and negative experiences. He conceptualises these components as fitting on a 'tripartite' hierarchical structure that are conceptually aligned, moderately correlated, and with each making a unique contribution toward SWB. Theoretically, this model represents the first level deconstruction if regressed onto the single-item on life satisfaction: "How satisfied are you with your life as a whole"? (Cummins 2000).

Recently, some authors (Savahl et al. Forthcoming) have offered further commentary on Diener's (1984, 2000) model, proposing that the cognitive component presents with two separate components—conceptualised as domain-specific and context-free components. They put forward an overall Quadripartite Model of SWB, consisting of domain-specific and context-free cognitive components, and positive and negative affect.

Over the past decade there have been substantial methodological advances in the measurement of children's SWB. Researchers have proceeded in two directions. The first and most dominant is the development of standardised scales and measures, often adapted from adult versions. Many of these instruments have demonstrated appropriate psychometric properties for use with specific populations, and some even showing evidence of cross-cultural comparison (Casas and Rees 2015) (see also Proctor et al. 2009, for a review of life satisfaction measures developed for use with children and youth).

The second approach is founded on and promotes the theoretical and methodological stance of the 'new sociology of childhood' (see Adams and Savahl 2017a; Fattore et al. 2012; Savahl, Malcolm, et al. 2015b). The emphasis in this approach is in locating the child centrally, (Fattore et al. 2012, 2016), with a focus on an in-depth exploration of what children think and feel about various aspects of their life. This is encapsulated in a range of qualitative research initiatives (see Adams and Savahl 2017a; Fattore et al. 2007, 2012; Savahl, Malcolm, et al. 2015b; September and Savahl 2009). For example, this mode of inquiry has been used both to solicit children's advice on improving subjective measures of well-being (see e.g. Casas et al. 2012), as well as to determine children's perceptions of SWB, the nature of well-being domains, and how they make sense of and assign meaning to well-being (see e.g. Adams et al. 2019; Fattore et al. 2007, 2012; Savahl, Adams, et al. 2015a). The Multinational Qualitative Study on Children's Understandings of their Well-Being (CUWB) that encompasses a large-scale qualitative exploration between over 20 countries is further testament to the importance afforded to conducting qualitative research with children directly (Fattore et al. 2016). Notwithstanding this dichotomy, these two approaches advance a shared aim of including children in research as valid actors, possessing agency to reliably convey their subjective perceptions of their well-being.

Considering the fledging nature of research into children's SWB (Bradshaw 2015), a greater investment in empirical research is required. Calls for large-scale population-based surveys are apposite and would allow much-needed standardised data. However, the challenges related to cross-cultural measurement is heightened in the multicultural context of South Africa. Epistemological advancements and legislation foregrounding children's participation has fostered a greater interest in developing innovative participatory methodological frameworks. The Children's Delphi is one such framework.

9.3 Introducing the Children's Delphi

The Delphi method was initially established by Gordon and Helmer (1964) with the intent of using an expert panel to address forecasting issues, operating under the assumption that experts were the most likely to correctly answer questions in their fields. The original Delphi report describes the methodology as an experimental trend-predicting exercise with experts. The experts in this case were representative of the six broad areas of scientific 'breakthroughs', namely population growth, automation, space progress, probability and prevention of war, and future weapon systems. The process included the administration of a series of questionnaires to elicit predictions, followed by convergence, and critiques of the predictions until consensus was reached by the group. Anonymity and feedback were established as central components of the methodology, which encourages a true debate while minimising the influence of personality dynamics in a group setting (Gordon 1994).

Since the initial publication, the Delphi method has been consistently used across a wide range of disciplines as an iterative process with experts, with the ultimate goal of obtaining consensus on a particular issue. Participants are selected to provide expertise and opinions on a specific research topic, prediction, policy, or program. The five key features of the Delphi typically include anonymity, iteration, controlled feedback, statistical group response, and stability in response (Hanafin and Brooks 2005). In particular, the Delphi methodology has been utilised by researchers exploring children's quality of life. For example, Ager et al. (2010) implemented the Delphi method with 30 specialists in humanitarian work with the goal of defining best practice in care and protection of children in crisis-affected settings. Similarly, Lee et al. (2009) administered a Delphi panel survey to provide evidence for the development of a children's psychological intervention protocol for use after natural disasters in South Korea. The Delphi panel in this study consisted of a variety of experts in child and adolescent mental health, professionals providing disaster psychological support, and related practitioners with experience in disaster management. Schoeppe et al. (2014) utilised a Delphi panel of 27 international experts in the fields of child-related behavioral health to present successful strategies for the recruitment and retention of children in studies focusing on behavioral health-risk factors. These and other similar studies have contributed significantly to the field through the provision of unified recommendations for research, policy, and programmes that have an impact on children. However, the vast majority of the Delphi studies focusing on various areas of child research exclusively comprised panels of adult professionals who are considered 'experts' in their various disciplines. A gap in the Delphi literature is therefore the inclusion of children as experts on their lives. This gap is ontological rather than methodological. We are advocating for the use of a *Children's Delphi* to address this gap.

The Children's Delphi was initially established and piloted through a study focus on developing recommendations for intervention programmes aimed at improving the self-concept and overall well-being of children residing in two urban communities in Cape Town, South Africa (Benninger and Savahl 2016a). The overall design

of the study was grounded in the principles and values of child participation, premised on the notion that children are experts of their lives and experiences. The researchers followed the traditional steps of a Delphi study as outlined by Hasson et al. (2000). The first step included the purposive selection of participants to form a panel of informed experts. Ten children between the ages of 10 to 12-years-old were selected from the participating communities, and were considered the best-suited for the expert panel given the focus of the study. This age group was chosen owing to the limited research available on self-concept amongst children between these ages (Benninger and Savahl 2016c). This is further supported in the child development literature as a period where children experience rapid increases in cognitive and psychosocial capacities (Erikson 1953; Piaget 1952; Coll and Szalacha 2004). Given the importance of children as competent informers on issues related to their lives (Adams and Savahl 2015; Benninger and Savahl 2016b; Casas et al. 2012; Fattore et al. 2012), this age group was an apposite cohort for the study. The study participants participated in all stages of the larger child participation research project that provided them with substantial in-depth knowledge with regard to the subjective experiences of other children within their respective communities. This included them being engaged as co-facilitators during the focus group discussions (Benninger and Savahl 2016b), as well as through the use of photovoice and community mapping activities (Benninger and Savahl 2016c) with the 40 participants from their communities. The participants were informed about the purpose of the study and the expectations for participation. Informed consent was obtained from the participants and their legal guardians.

The next step specified by Hasson et al. (2000) is to identify the resources and skills of the participants and the appropriate means of communication to use throughout the process. Traditionally, the Delphi technique has followed a paper-based or electronic format. Owing to the varied levels of school and educational quality in Cape Town, and the socio-economic background of the participants, literacy levels varied. It was therefore decided to use a variety of techniques to elicit discussion among the Children's Delphi panel. This included the use of verbal response, writing, and drawing.

Thereafter, the number of rounds for the Delphi process were established. As an iterative multistage process, the number of rounds may vary based on the research questions, availability of resources, and time constraints. Prior Delphi research has used between two to four rounds (Ager et al. 2010; Hanafin and Brooks 2005; Sharkey and Sharples 2001). It was decided that three sessions would be sufficient to meet the research aims. The sessions followed a structured format, however, an informal atmosphere of engagement was encouraged to allow the participants to feel comfortable. The content of the initial session was informed by the qualitative data collected in the prior child participation stages of the larger research project, including a series of open-ended questions related to the study themes. These questions engendered a discussion exploring how the perspectives of children in their communities could contribute toward the design of interventions aimed at promoting a healthy self-concept. The following questions were included:

- How do children think and feel about themselves in your community?
- What makes them think or feel that way?
- What barriers did our research discover that prevented children from viewing themselves in a positive way?
- What is needed for children to develop a healthy self-concept in your community?
- What should a programme aimed at improving children's self-concept look like?

The second session included a review of the content discussed in the prior session while providing opportunity for amendments. The themes from the prior session were listed on a white board for all of the participants to see. The participants then had the opportunity to add items by verbally explaining or writing their responses in the appropriate category. This process continued until consensus was reached among the participants. Once consensus was reached by all of the participants, data were synthesised using qualitative content analysis and thematic analysis. A report was then compiled and distributed to the participants during the third session for review and comments. The report included the thematic categories and themes that were identified by the participants in the previous round. The participants had the opportunity to anonymously amend the report. Once the participants approved the report, a final draft was written and distributed to each member for final approval. The final recommendations emphasised that intervention programmes must include a focus on safety, the provision of social support, the creation of opportunities for learning and for play, and the provision of basic material needs. This information was presented and distributed amongst community stakeholders and decision-makers who were involved in programmes, interventions, and policies related to children in this context.

The study provided a valuable contribution to gaining a deeper understanding of the childhood experience in the participating communities, and considerations for the development of intervention programmes and policies aimed at promoting children's self-concept and well-being. It is suggested that further research utilise the Children's Delphi as a means of meaningfully engaging young people about issues pertaining to their lives. This methodology offers a structured framework for the meaningful inclusion of children in research that requires the flexibility to cater to the developmental level and resources of children, while maintaining the rigor of a traditional Delphi design. The following stages were used by Benninger and Savahl (2016a) in the initial Children's Delphi process:

- Step 1: Identification of the problem (in collaboration with children and stakeholders),
- Step 2: Selection of Delphi Panel: (Purposive Sampling: Children are specifically selected in relation to the contribution that they can make: for example, if you are interested in understanding children's perceptions of safety in low SES communities, then one would select children from those communities),
- Step 3: Identification of children's resources and skills: (Consider different languages and literacy levels), and
- Step 4: Delphi Sessions:

- Session 1: Open-ended discussion groups (Prepare document)
- Session 2: Review of the discussions (Review the prepared document and reach consensus)
- Session 3: Data analysis and report writing
- Session 4: Post analysis reflection (Revert to the Children's Delphi participants for final validation—*Is what we found and how we presented the findings accurate?*)
- Step 5: Dissemination (Children's Delphi Panel to be part of dissemination)

9.4 Using the Children's Delphi for Conducting Research on Children's Subjective Well-being

The Children's Delphi provides a felicitous framework for conducting research on children's SWB. While Benninger and Savahl (2016a) used the Children's Delphi as a participatory technique to meaningful include children in the research process, it should be perceived as more than a data collection technique. Rather, it finds resonance in the children's rights movement (in particular the key concept of authentic participation), theoretical and epistemological assertions encapsulated in sociological theories of childhood, and the Child Indicator Movement. The nature of the Delphi allows for its application as a stand-alone technique, as a distinct method in a multi-method study, as an overarching framework, or as a research design for the meaningful inclusion of children's authentic perspectives.

As a stand-alone technique, the Children's Delphi can be used as a data collection technique for studies where the aims and objectives require children's subjective perceptions, knowledge, or experiences to be fairly and accurately captured and reported on. It provides a structured framework for engaging with children, ensuring depth, and accuracy of interpretation. The original conceptualisation of the Children's Delphi was as a distinct method in a multi-method study (see Benninger and Savahl 2016a). In this application, child experts were solicited to make sense of, and validate the findings of other sub-studies. In essence this drew the findings together and offered a level of interpretation that was beyond the capacity of the researchers—*nobody knows childhood better than children*. Using the Children's Delphi in this manner allows for more than a validation of findings; rather it allows for a deeper level of interpretation. The Children's Delphi participants and the researchers worked in a collaborative capacity to unpack more nuanced meanings and interpretations. The focus is on developing an understanding and reaching consensus, with the ultimate purpose of contributing to meaningful positive change in children's lives.

As an overarching framework or research design is where the greatest potential of the Children's Delphi can be leveraged. Here the Children's Delphi should be seen as the overarching framework that guides the research process from conceptualisation to dissemination, to action. There will likely be resistance to this

use of the Delphi from the scientific community. For example, Adams et al. (2014) used an earlier version of the Children's Delphi in a research study on alcohol consumption and risky sexual behaviour among young adults in an impoverished community in Cape Town. The Delphi participants in this study were adolescents who were involved in the conceptualisation, implementation, and dissemination phases of the study. One of the reviewers of the journal questioned the capacity of the 'child experts' claiming that the 'science' was questionable. Ironically, the Delphi participants both questioned the authenticity of the adults' responses on the questionnaires; and further argued that the standardised scales that were used to collect the data was not developed well enough to capture the complexity of the constructs under consideration. They essentially questioned the 'science' behind the psychometrics.

Research into children's SWB has substantially advanced over the past decade. The Children's Worlds Study and the Multinational Qualitative Study on CUWB have distilled large amounts of information on children's SWB. The discipline has moved beyond questioning the competence of children, and there is an acknowledgment that the more relevant concern is the extent to which adults are competent enough to obtain information from children (Casas 2016). Therefore, while advancement in psychometric instruments and innovative qualitative methods of data collection has proliferated, researchers are still handicapped by the lack of first-hand insight, both at the level of theory and method. Accessing the 'lifeworlds' of children, and understanding how they negotiate these worlds, still remains beyond the realm of contemporary scientific inquiry. It is therefore axiomatic that we partner with children, to assist us to know what to ask, how to ask it, to help us interpret the information we obtain, and finally to develop strategies to transfer the data to action. The Children's Delphi provides this overarching framework.

In using the Children's Delphi as a design or framework, we recommend that the study is firmly located in children's rights discourse, consider the developing field of child participation, and draw on innovative theories of children and childhood. To that end, it may be useful to reconfigure Benninger and Savahl's (2016a) initial structure of the Delphi as detailed below. The focus should be on the full immersion of the Delphi participants into the research study, not merely into single facets of the research process.

- *Step 1: Selection of Delphi Panel:* (Purposive Sampling: Delphi participants should be specifically selected in relation to the contribution that they can make to the study. However, while it is important to ensure familiarity with the context and constructs being investigated, researchers need to ensure the fair selection of participants and that certain cohorts of children are not excluded).
- *Step 2: Identification of the problem* (In collaboration with Delphi participants and other stakeholders).
- *Step 3: Identification of children's resources and skills:* (Consider different languages and literacy levels).
- *Step 4: Developing capacity in researchers and Delphi participants* (The researchers should be well-trained in child participation research, children's

rights and theories and methodologies related to research on children's SWB. The Delphi participants should receive similar training. This is an essential step as it helps promote an effective working relationship between researchers and the Delphi participants.).

- *Step 5: Delphi Sessions:* We recommend that the actual Delphi sessions consist of a number of iterative rounds of working meetings where different phases of the research process are interrogated and executed. The Delphi participants and researchers should strive to work in a synergistic manner to ensure the authenticity of collaboration. The Delphi sessions should include the following:
- The conceptualisation of the study including the specification of the aims and objectives of the study.
- The development of data collection instruments and protocols.
- Data analysis and interpretation.
- Enactment of dissemination and practice strategies

Over the past 10 years South Africa has made substantial advancement in the collection of objective indicators of well-being. There has also been some progress made in researching children's SWB and a steadily increasing child participation research agenda. However, it is pertinent to note that commentators lament the lack of, or the quality of available services for children, regardless of the extent to which rigorous data has been used to inform social policies or legislation. However, what obfuscates this further is at which point in the process this disjuncture takes place -is it located between data and social policy; or between social policy and service delivery? While child participation research leads to improved quality of data, the active role of children usually terminates once data collection has been completed.

The Children's Delphi provides a framework that fosters meaningful insight beyond the collection of data. The application of the Children's Delphi could assist researchers and policy-makers determine: What does the data really mean? Have the social policies that have been developed based on this data accurately taken the data into consideration? Have the services been appropriately aligned to reflect the social policies? Are the services reaching children, and to what extent are services actually benefitting children? How can these services be improved? These are essential questions that the Children's Delphi could help address. By way of illustration, at the time of writing the South African government, as part of their commitment to the UNCRC, were in the final stages of developing the second National Programme of Action for Children (NPAC). While the NPAC reflects a consideration of evidence-based research (using both objective indicators and children's SWB), its successful application will ultimately be contingent on the extent to which it appropriately captures the 'lifeworlds' of children. If the process of development and enactment does not include an authentic engagement with children, there is bound to be a disconnect between data, social policy, and service delivery. To emphasise the point, if children's participation and collaboration in the research process is to result in improved quality and interpretation of data, it is axiomatic that their involvement in the process of policy development and service delivery strategies is imperative. The application of the Children's Delphi in social policy research

could therefore prove an invaluable framework for contributing to the development of social policies, which reflect the authentic experiences of childhood, and design and deliver services that are of benefit to children and improves their overall quality of life.

9.5 Conclusion

When using the Children's Delphi, researchers should caution against perceiving the participants as part of a reference group, who through their involvement in the project are required to provide a 'rubber-stamp' of validity. Another cautionary note is to ensure that the study does not adopt top-down theories of childhood, which are inconsistent with the Children's Delphi. Finally, the power dynamics inherent in the research relationship need to be brought to the fore. Early commentators on child participation research (O'Kane 2000; Morrow and Richards 1996) noted that how to negotiate the power imbalance and create space and opportunities for children to engage in a meaningful way is the most pressing methodological challenge in childhood studies. That concern is still relevant in contemporary childhood studies.

The Children's Delphi sessions are more than sites of collaboration; rather it creates the spaces for the intersubjective creation of meaning. It takes the notion of child participation beyond the quest for a 'valid voice' and even beyond the oft-cited gold standard of 'authentic participation'. Rather it engenders a further repositioning of the subject (children and childhood) at the level of methodology.

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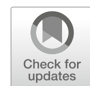
Part III
Social Contexts and Inequalities in Children's Well-being

Chapter 10
Does Socioeconomic Status Matter? Exploring Commonalities and Differences in the Construction of Subjective Well-Being of Children in the Relational Spaces of Home and School in Istanbul



Başak Akkan, Serra Müderrisoğlu, Pınar Uyan-Semerci, and Emre Erdoğan

This article explores children's subjective well-being based on a qualitative study carried out in Istanbul with children between the ages of 10 and 12, from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. The study dwells on the growing body of knowledge in the literature on the theoretical understanding of childhood as a structural category that has contributed to the sociological studies of children's lives and status in society (Prout and James 2005; Qvortrup 1994, 2007, 2009; Prout and James 2005; Qvortrup 1994, 2007, 2009). Such conceptualisation is built on the idea that childhood is socially constructed at a specific time and space (James et al. 1998; Jenks 1996; Prout and James 2005). Such theoretical work displays an epistemological understanding of children as active agents shaping their lives (Holloway et al. 2000; Prout and James 2005). This has a twofold implication that, children actively construct the structural form of childhood but also children's lives and experiences evolve within this form.

The idea of children's agency as a capability (See Oswell 2013, 2016) agrees with the new epistemology of childhood that position child as a knowledgeable social actor that constructs his/her life in a reflexive way rather than a passive becoming. In this respect viewing children as the experts of their lives, as the agents of their own well-being, "means studying their expert status in a way that links together structural and subjective dimensions by asking about positive freedoms to decide how one

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wants to live one's own life" (Fegter and Richter 2014, p. 24). In this respect perception of children's status in the society as *active beings* rather than *passive becomings* has shaped child well-being research in the last decade (Ben-Arieh 2010a; Fattore et al. 2007, 2012; Prout and James 2005).

The theoretical, normative and methodological developments in the area of childhood have played an essential role in the development of child well-being indicators that prioritise the understanding of the living conditions and quality of life of children in different contexts (Axford 2008; Ben-Arieh 2008, 2009, 2010a, 2010b; Ben-Arieh et al. 2001; Ben-Arieh and Frønes 2011; Bradshaw et al. 2006; Casas et al. 2013; Richardson et al. 2008; Uyan-Semerci et al. 2012). The new paradigm of childhood puts children as experts in the research process and as 'knowledgeable informants' that recognized the conceptual autonomy of children (Fattore et al. 2007, 2012, 2016). The standpoint of children (Fattore et al. 2007) provides contextual reference points of happiness and unhappiness. However, recognising children's subjectivity in research processes still needs to tackle the structural framework within which children's well-being is constructed (Fattore et al. 2016; Hunner-Kreisel and Kuhn 2010). 'The structural conditions of growing up' and 'institutional and societal boundaries' (Hunner-Kreisel and Kuhn 2010, p. 116) are important parts of the child-centered research framework. The boundaries at different levels define the context within which children negotiate their constraints and opportunities in constructing their well-being. Children's socio-economic class, gender, ethnic identities, migration and other backgrounds are important parts of the analysis to understand 'the structural conditions of growing up' (Hunner-Kreisel and Kuhn 2010, p. 116). Construction of their well-being is negotiated within the societal boundaries that are established at different lines of social stratification and access to resources in society. Therefore, understanding children's well-being necessitates taking both subjective and objective conditions together.

Children's attribution of meaning to their everyday life experiences provides insights into their subjective understanding of well-being. However, as Fattore et al. (2007, 2016) demonstrate, the context and the social relations that children build in these contexts are significant. Therefore, the spatial aspect that also encompasses the relational aspect emerges as a methodological tool for us to understand how children contextualise their well-being in particular social locations along with the web of relations. We deal with space as a relational concept that is socially constructed along the lines of generational and intergenerational relations.

The concept of space as suggested here which goes beyond the physical space that children live in, indicates a social space with its social networks (Barker and Weller 2003; Elsley 2004; Holloway et al. 2000; McKendrick 2000). The space with its web of relations and available resources shapes the boundaries of opportunities and constraints through which the child contextualises her/his well-being. Children attribute meaning to these relational spaces qualified by the features of their generational and intergenerational experiences. Thus, positive and negative aspects of such relationality from children's standpoint are significant in understanding their subjective well-being. In this respect, the spatial aspects of child well-being where children negotiate the opportunities and constraints in the realms of childhood spaces

are explored in the article to understand *space and time-bound* well-being of children. As stated by Fattore et al. (2016) the biggest contradiction negotiated by children is that posed by the distinction between them as *being* and *becoming*. This is also discussed.

In Sen's *capability* approach, capability refers to the substantive freedom to achieve actual *functionings*, or various things a person may value doing or being (Sen 1999, p. 75). Here Sen draws attention to personal differences, diversities in the physical environment and variations in social climate, which determine the different opportunities to translate resources into the desired functioning to achieve alternative lifestyles. In Sen's approach, therefore, freedom acquires a different meaning than it has in conceptualisations of justice that exclusively consider the resources available to people to pursue their valued ends, and it takes into account the differences in the ability to use these resources in a way to have freedoms, which contribute to the general capability of a person to live more freely (Sen 1999, pp. 36–40).

The consideration of capabilities rather than the resources draws attention to certain conditions that define individuals decision making and choices; hence such an approach takes into consideration "human diversity; complex social relations; a sense of reciprocity between people; appreciation that people can reflect reasonably on what they value for themselves and others; and a concern to equalize, not opportunities or outcomes, but rather capabilities" (Walker and Unterhalter2007, p. 3) that allow individuals to take decisions, make choices that matter to them for a "valuable life" (Walker and Unterhalter 2007).

10.1 The Method and the Fieldwork

Within this conceptual framework, this empirical study explores children's subjective well-being based on a qualitative study carried out in Istanbul with 31 children between the ages of 10 and 12 years, from diverse socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds. Thus, in the particular social location of Istanbul; the categories of gender, class along with religiosity, ethnicity and spatial segregation (gated communities, slums, etc.) are taken as an integral part of the analysis to understand to what extent they define childhood experiences. The qualitative study is part of the qualitative *Children's Understandings of Well-Being* project that focused on *time use, school, safety and material well-being*; and data is being collected on these areas under a research protocol. Considering the distinctive features of each context, the research framework is re-visited and adapted to the needs of the research launched in Istanbul.

We conducted in-depth interviews with children between 10 and 12 years of age[1]. In these in-depth interviews, our target was to understand how the concept of

[1]The research received approval from the Ethics Committee of the Bogazici University, Turkey. The consent of the parents and the informed consent of the participant child were obtained.

subjective well-being with its subdomains are internalized and interpreted by children from different gender, socio-economic status-SES and ethnic backgrounds in different social locations. Regarding gender; our previous research demonstrated that the definition of a happy child differs according to the gender of children[2]. Girls and boys have different conceptualizations of happiness; hence their self-evaluation also differs. We also observed that socioeconomic differences between children are among the leading factors determining children's expectations of how they evaluate their situation. For example, our previous research showed that children from lower socioeconomic classes have different priorities such as "having three meals per day" whereas being strong and fit and having a positive mood is important for children from high socioeconomic status. In our research, we integrated socioeconomic status with spatial segregation. There is significant spatial segregation in Istanbul.[3] Hence, we believe that this spatiality has to be considered as an indicator of socio-economic differences.[4]

Apart from these main categories, children from different backgrounds like Roma, secular and religious families who participated in our research also helped us to re-visit our concepts of well-being and analyse the relevance of how other identities possibly intersect with socio-economic class and gender. Our sample consisted of 31 narratives: we recruited 12 children (6 girls, 6 boys) from low SES families who had significantly low means of surviving in the city; living in dangerous neighbourhoods, going to impoverished schools. We also recruited nine children from middle SES families (5 girls, 4 boys), which reflected somewhat more stable daily lives and parental job status, however with significant debt, mostly attending public schools. Lastly, we recruited 10 children from high SES families (6 girls, 4 boys) attending private schools to complete our analyses related to the subjective well-being of children.

We are aware of the limitations of in-depth interviews in terms of generalizability or external validity of findings and drawing broad conclusions for all the children living in Turkey based on this small number of interviews. However, we believe that it is possible to reflect differences in interpretations of children by incorporating structural and environmental variables (about local and national context) to our

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Participation was voluntary and the consent form stated that the participant could end the interview at any time and did not have to answer any of the questions if they do not want to answer. Participants were guaranteed anonymity and assured that their data would not be used for non-academic purposes. The names of the children were kept confidential (pseudonyms are used in this article).

[2]P. Uyan-Semerci and E. Erdoğan (2017) "Child Well-Being Indicators through the Eyes of Children in Turkey: A Happy Child Would be One Who. . . ." Child Indicators Research, 10, 267–295.

[3]Candas, A., et al. 2011. *Devlet İlkogretim Okullarında Ucretsiz Oğle Yemegi Saglamak Mumkun Mu?*. İstanbul: Acik Toplum Vakfi.

[4]Emre Erdoğan, The Poverty Map of Istanbul: How is the Picture Like? Presented to the World Bank-IMF Meeting in Istanbul, 2009.

research and analyses. Comparison of different interpretations across gender, age, socioeconomic status and environmental factors may give some important insights about the effects of these micro and meso level variables on the conceptualization of subjective well-being and help us to improve our research designs in future qualitative and quantitative data collection efforts. Within the limits of this chapter, we will focus on socioeconomic status.

As part of the *Children's Understanding of Well-Being* study, the Istanbul study focused on children's understanding and experiences about domains and concepts of well-being derived from the Children's World Study and explored the everyday contexts in which these concepts are experienced. Thus, within the comparative perspective of the project, the spatial aspect where children construct their well-being is the crucial part of the analysis for the discussion of children's "agency"-as reflecting "autonomy" and "self-determination" (Fattore et al. 2016, p. 63). Agency, even for adults, is hard to elaborate. According to Fattore et al. (2016, p. 63), children's experience of agency is even "more complex and multifaceted". Hence, understanding agency both as autonomy and freedom to be able to make choices, as well as agency as self-determination is vital. Extension of agency as self-determination refers to "agency as children's ability to organise and control aspects of their everyday life- as an ability to exercise choice in decision making and also as freedom of action in everyday life especially with respect to time use" (Fattore et al. 2016, pp. 63–4). The neglected importance of self-determination over concrete practices in everyday situations is crucial for our research.

We wish to present themes that capture the relational experiences within home and school, which we will elaborate on for each socio-economic level. Home and school are two crucial relational spaces that children construct their subjective well-being. The significance children gave to the emotional content of relationships can be understood in terms of "embeddedness" in social relationships and "relatedness" (Fattore et al. 2016, p. 52). The qualitative study explores the meanings children attribute to their generational and intergenerational relations in these childhood spaces at the micropolitical level of family and home. We will first focus on the home as a relational space for three different socio-economic groups by first underlining common points and then discuss differences. We will elaborate home as a site of intergenerational and generational relations; a place of in/security and support and a place where the child controls aspects of her everyday life-particularly as freedom of action in everyday life, especially with respect to time use. Secondly, we will elaborate on school as a relational space which plays a crucial role in children's subjective wellbeing: school as a site of generational and intergenerational (horizontal/vertical) relations by focusing on teachers and peers; opportunities and constraints about school with, respect to these three SES groups.

10.2 Home as a Relational Space

Home as a contested space with its positive and negative intergenerational and generational relations is significant for all children regarding their sense of security and support. The agency that defines their subjective well-being differs according to socioeconomic status as the narratives of all the research participants reveal.

Home as a secure place pertains to being close to a family member or being next to a family member as children attribute a relational meaning to the sense of being secure. The research participants frequently refer to their family/home, particularly their mothers, when they are asked where they feel most secure: "Near my mom. I feel like she protects me; "most secure near my mom", "feel most secure at home. Home is like no other place. I feel secure near my family". Mothers are presented as anchors for their sense of felt security and closeness, even the place of the mother's room is important for closeness and for the value of spending time together. Fathers are also named as the source of felt security, and a fun partner to hang out with, despite limited contact due to their father's work schedules. Going to matches and workplace are stated as activities children do with their fathers. Siblings are frequently part of the narratives, as can be expected.

Sense of support is another dimension that is stated. It is an important component of subjective well-being that is articulated as a good quality of parent-child relations by the participant children. Sense of support as it is revealed in the study provides freedom for children to engage in the activities that they find valuable, particularly those are non-school activities that they see as important to their well-being (Fattore et al. 2016, p. 147). Although different socio-economic backgrounds limit the available options for children, still support within the family and its impact on the freedom of the child to engage in certain activities that she values is crucial. It is not just a matter of what resources or opportunities that children have in life, but how these opportunities are negotiated within the boundaries of their relationality at home. The features of such relationality are a defining feature of a child to feel free to engage in childhood spaces that she finds meaningful and she values.

The sense of support or the sense of pressure that the child experiences and feels are perceived as important aspects of the intergenerational relations that define their feelings of agency, freedom and security to pursue the things that they value in life. The sense of support is perceived as a good feature of their relationship from the standpoint of children. Getting pressure from their parents to achieve things in life is perceived as a negative feature of their relationship. To what extent parents decide in the name of children-even how they spend their leisure time (Fattore et al. 2016, p. 147) and to what extent they support their children in their engagements are contested issues yet, are essential in understanding children's well-being. Here the opportunities the child has in life turns into freedoms and capabilities in cases where children feel support from the family in the degree of freedom to choose the activities that they find valuable in life.

Use of time at home also provides insights on how it is important to children to be able to talk to their parents, through spending time together at home (as well as

outside of home). Spending time together or lack of time with parents is an essential aspect in this respect as such time-use at home provides the child the opportunity to communicate her thoughts and choices:

> We do not talk to each other much within the family. I do not think they give importance to what I think . . . . As soon as I arrive home, I start doing my homework. My mom does housework. My brother watches TV, we do not talk to each other much. Begum, 13, Female, High SES[5]

On the other hand, spending time with the family is a happy routine for Suna:

> We do not watch TV a lot. We chat, talk to each other. Sometimes I tell myself that I wish the electricity is gone and we can chat in the moonlight. Apart from that we go out together, we go to the Lunapark . . . Suna, 12, Female, Low SES.

Tuğba feels happy when she spends time with her mom in the kitchen. Tuğba's narrative also reveals that spending time together doing an activity helps develop manners to deal with possible conflicts.

> I like helping my mom with cooking. When things go wrong, we laugh at it. I like my mom's attitude. Sometimes something splashes, my mom gets agitated. I clean it right away and laugh, then my mom laughs. I like cooking with my mom. She taught me how to cook. I feel happy when I spend time with my family. I like spending time with my family. Tuğba, 10, Female, Middle SES

While Tuğba spends more time with her mother, spending time with her dad is also important for her. She arranges her Sundays accordingly:

> I usually do my homework and do tests over the weekend. Only on Sundays, I do not study. Because my father is at home. I try to spend more time with my dad. We watch a movie with my dad, sometimes we go out. My father takes me out to a park.

Relationships with parents can become an insecure space for children, which definitely affects their subjective wellbeing. An authoritarian father is a source of insecurity for children, particularly for girls that define the negative aspects of the home as a relational space, as Berna's narrative exposes:

> I send messages to my friends (communicate my friends) through messenger, and Facebook. I think my father follows me and keeps track of my messages. He had an older phone. I got connected to my messages through that phone. He got that phone and he sees all the messages that I send and receive. This really annoys me. I am scared. I always have in mind: When he will get angry, when he would say something? Does he really follow? He told me that he broke his phone. I am not sure if he really broke it or he hides it. I am really scared. Berna, 12, Female, Middle SES

The narratives of research participants also reveal that agitated relations among children and parents do not have to manifest through restriction of their freedom but also when children expose themselves to their parents, they expect respect for their personal life. The child could choose to shut herself off from the family.

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[5]Pseudonyms are used throughout the text.

I do not share them with my mom for instance. If I share it with her she asks lots of questions. That is why I don't share with her. Sema, 10, Female, High SES

Sibling solidarity and rivalry is also an important part of the relational space of the home. Conflicts with siblings are a routine of the home, yet the features of these conflicts are very much in relation to the intergenerational relations and meanings that children attribute to these conflicts. For Suna, for instance sibling rivalry can be resolved as she enjoys her sister's company:

I like spending time with her. Sometimes we fight, she gets angry with me. But I find her right. I miss her a lot [her sister is studying in another city] I am glad that she is here for the summer vacation. Suna, 12, Female, Low SES

Begum on the other hand has an agitated relationship with her mother and her brother where the daily conflict becomes a matter of unhappiness for her as she states:

My brother laughs at me when my mom gets angry with me. He films it when my mom is scolding me. I have a "great" brother [said in a cynical way]

She further states that her mother does not believe her and that is why she states she wishes that there is a camera:

Usually she does not believe me, but sometimes she believes in me, as she knows what kind of person my brother is . . . I get sad, sometimes I get angry, in real, I get angry all the time. My brother threatens me all the time. If I do not do this, then this happens. . . He blames on me all the time for the wrongs that I did not do, but he has done.

Living conditions at home are the most important difference between the three different SES groups. Almost all children from lower economic means report that they live in overcrowded conditions with extended family members such as grandparents or uncles, aunts and their children. The overcrowding means that there are no personal spaces for the children, including not having their own beds or spaces for their belongings, such as wardrobes. Unstable work conditions, lack of sufficient income and frequently needing to borrow money from others are mentioned in the children's discourses. There are public feelings of shame associated with this lack of funds, as in Ayse's case, when her family can't afford to buy her the school uniform and the whole school donates money and goods to her family.

Similarly, Bulut's rather reticent narrative, whose father is incarcerated, only reveals his concerns at the very end of the interview when he explains the reason of his wish for "endless" money:

Because mom has to take money from others when it finishes. Bulut, 10, Male, Low SES

As stated in Fattore et al. (2016, p. 53), the family does not only "care *about*" but also "cares *for*", but this is mostly reflected by the children in the low SES group. Children (especially girls) with the lowest means talk about internalizing a *"carer"* position, which is not as obvious in the other two SES levels. Care is a part of their daily routine, indicating that they take on the role of a parent in household chores, described in an almost-adult language:

> When grandma is ill, she cannot do housework. I do the dishes, clean the carpet and hang it... Emine, 10, Female, Low SES

> We wake up early and cook. Then we go out with other kids. Lale, 10, Female, Low SES

Boys, equally seem to have a money-making role in the family. İzzet's discourse throughout the narrative alluded to grown-up positioning, having dropped out of school in fifth grade upon his father's incarceration, upon which he started selling flowers in the street. Similarly, Furkan at age 12, talks in a much older voice around his understanding of minority ethnic identity issues throughout the interview as well as issues of relative economic disempowerment within the society. Thus, vulnerable conditions extend financial insufficiencies as children are impacted by their societal position that surpasses economic means. Although Furkan stated that he is happy that he does not have more money, he still underlines that he will be happier if his "father's debt situation changes." Children of low SES group experience the difficult living conditions their families in. They are aware of the hardship their parents are experiencing and cannot isolate their subjective wellbeing from that of our families. Across the narratives of children of low economic means, we see themes of *feeling vulnerability and uncertainty* and differing levels of experience of unstable life circumstances. Child labour both in and outside the home is one of the major risks that also lead to dropout from education, which endangers overall wellbeing and well becoming of children. Interestingly, with these limitations on their capability sets, children of low SES families are freer to engage in informal activities and play without parental and/or institutional control, similar to Lareau's findings (2011).

The narratives of children from low SES also varied in terms of how close and secure they felt in their relationships with their parents or siblings. It is noteworthy that the discourses around family relations do not include typical sibling rivalry issues that are dominant in the narratives of children with higher means. Rather than sibling rivalry issues, narratives reflect either an assumed-caregiver-to-younger-siblings role or somewhat "lacked" any mentions of siblings, as if life is lived in a "to each his own" manner.

Narratives of resilient children are firstly built around *strong, caring relationships with their mothers*. The strength of this relationship as the primary force behind the resilient children is evident in the narrative of Suna, a 12-year-old girl from a low socio-economic family, living in a slum neighbourhood. She is the youngest of three children. Her father's presence in the family is not obvious and it appears as though the parents are separated, but the father comes home from time to time. Suna attends a religious all-girls secondary school. After school, she attends a community centre run by an NGO where she takes violin classes. She is interested in music and she chooses to take the violin class. Her decision is supported by her mother, which gives the child both freedom and a sense of security to engage in an activity that she chooses to do. She reports very close ties with her mother, that appears to act as a protective factor in her life:

> If I am afraid, if I lay down in darkness and I cannot sleep, if I think bad things, if there is a voice, I hug my mom and all the fears disappear.

> Not much I feel I can't do... Because when I tell my mother (what I want to do) she wants me to be able to do those... want me to participate in social activities. For some of the things, I say "I wished I could" and when I tell my mother, she understands. If it can't be, I say "I wished it was possible" but if it is something possible, my mother does it with all her heart, she sends me with love.

Socio-economic constraints on low SES families have an impact on the subjective well-being of children. Still the resilience of the children is evident in their capacity to make very good use of the resources available. A good example is Suna as discussed above. Income definitely matters but "it is the use of direct and indirect resources by and for children's sense of economic wellbeing" (Fattore et al. 2016, p. 209). Many children with lower means in our sample reported that they attended such centres, but not all made use of and internalized the capacity building aspects of such spaces. Again, those with a more resilient pathway, appear to form a much deeper relationship with such centres; and intentionally make use of such centres to feed their relational, intellectual and emotional growth needs. Supportive parents should also be mentioned as they play an essential role in this resilient pathway.

While families of children from the middle SES in our research still struggle with debt or some significant financial issues, the mechanics of life in these families do not revolve around basic survival, or involve a struggle to obtain bare essentials. Many of the children live in the same building with their extended family members. While we also see frequent contact with extended family members in the lower SES group, the qualitative difference in the middle SES group is reflective of less chaotic life circumstances. More regular time with extended family means more play time with cousins and grandparents. What could be considered an orthodox and dependable life is maintained, so that the children can afford to think of things beyond survival. Supporting examples of this observation can be found in the descriptions of the children's rooms, beds and belongings as well as the availability of summer homes to stay in during summer breaks, even if the houses belong to their grandparents.

Middle-class children's daily activities at home mainly revolve around doing homework or preparing for entrance examination tests, a concern that we do not hear in the low SES children's narratives. Almost all children make several references to finishing their homework in a timely fashion and using their "free" time to practice "tests" that prepare them for the entrance exams. This internalized goal of becoming successful is very central, as implicitly children are telling us of their awareness of the competitive hoops they have to jump through to get a good education and become successful:

> Yesterday I tried to finish my homework at school as I planned to study for the exam in the evening. I changed my clothes when I got home as always. I played with my baby sister and then I went to my room and I took all the books and notebooks that are related to math. I found my math book, and did that book. I also plan to do Morpa Kampüs but there was no time left and I needed to sleep. Tuğba, 10, Female, Middle SES

What is present in a more central way in the high SES group is the role of their mothers in guiding and directing children's choices for the sake of helping them to "succeed" in a competitive world. Children in the higher SES group, tell us about

many activities they are routinely part of. Arts classes, and competitive sports training are examples which are, on the whole, mostly chosen by parents for children, and are considered as rich opportunities for growth that other children in our sample do not have a chance to participate in. However, children in the higher SES group tell stories of burden despite being surrounded by opportunities. The burden of heavy investment by parents and schools mean heavy expectations related to *"proving themselves as successful*". Fattore et al. (2016) also underline the same point stating that children's leisure is also burdened with expectations of performance and achievement. This fact lays a heavy burden on their shoulders not to disappoint those invested in them, as Eda states even during the summer holiday, her mother wants her to study daily for 1 h.

It is noteworthy that all children in this group, participate in extracurricular activities related to arts and/or team sports. We did not hear of a similar density of involvement in such activities in the other groups, other than a few who have been participating in NGO-based community centres that provide these activities for free in more impoverished neighbourhoods. These extracurricular activities are also seen as part of "being successful". Weekends are filled with these activities across the board for the children in this group. Children in the upper classes are expected to participate in numerous structured activities over the weekends: "piano, flute and chess"; "theatre"; "volleyball" and "swimming".

The opportunities can become a burden for the children from high SES backgrounds who are pushed to get involved in activities that they do not feel like doing.

> He used to show off to me. I was playing worse then. I still can't play very well. I am trying to improve. I was not chosen for the team. I don't want to go there because of that, but I go anyways.
>
> – Did you not think of switching to another activity or place?
> – Never
> – Why?
> – Because it took me so long to get used to this place. It has been 4 years and only now I am starting to play better. I didn't have any friends, now I have some friends. I couldn't even speak. I think I didn't even hear myself speak back then. So, I don't want to go to a new place. Ali, 12, Male, High SES

> There was art club, thus I thank my mom, she made me choose volleyball. Gizem, 10, Female, High SES

This raises the question when an opportunity becomes a burden for the child, is it a capability building experience, or an experience that damages the child's self-perception and eventually, the child's well-being. It is noteworthy that none of the interviews with children from lower or middle class backgrounds contain statements made by the children about their mothers' direct or indirect prescriptions about what the children should do in their free time or what activities they should participate in. "The exercise of autonomy according to adult priorities" (Fattore et al. 2016, p. 81) is more observed in the high SES group interestingly, which limits children's agency with respect to daily activities and time use.

Furthermore, many affluent children talk about their daily practices of spending more time alone in their rooms with their electronic gadgets, and somewhat fewer opportunities for spending time regularly as a family during the week. Most of the households have both parents earning an income, thus making daily sustained contact somewhat more scarce. Even at dinner time, for some of the children, their family does not meet:

> Mother and father, they eat when they come, we eat separately. Sema, 10, Female, High SES

Begum, provides a case in point of these findings. Begum who states spending more time with her family is something she longs for, lives in a gated community. She is the older of two siblings. She attends a competitive private secondary school. She receives piano, flute and chess lessons from private tutors after school. On Saturdays, she attends privately tutored courses as a preparation for the high school entrance exams-TEOG.[6] She is a kid loaded with school tasks as well as after-school activities. In her competitive environment, she articulates that she wants to be appreciated by her mom, yet does not get her appreciation and support as she tells:

> Our school has 2 types of awards. Pride award for good grades and good behaviour/effort displayed. Honour award for doing well above your level. For someone who can set a very high target. I won the Honour award. I was the first to win it, so I had aimed for it. Because I wanted to be appreciated by my mom. I like being appreciated by my mom. That is what I aimed for. I succeeded. She was not surprised.

Therefore, home as a space with its intergenerational and generational relations holds importance for children in building their subjective well-being. The sense of support, sense of security and respect for children's agency are essential for children in their intergenerational relations. Thus, the time spent with family at home contributes to trust relations among the generations. Particularly the stories of children of the high SES group show that the features of intergenerational and generational relations at home define their freedom to choose to do the things that they value in life and freedom to speak for themselves. This also demonstrates that it is not only a matter of the scope of resources that children have access to; but how children are free to make use of the resources that they negotiate in their relational spaces.

10.3 School as a Relational Space

Despite the chasms that exist in the lives of children from different social classes, significant commonalities exist in children's relationality at school with peers and teachers. What is described as a good, supportive, caring and honest relationship with a friend or a beloved teacher share significant similarities across all children.

[6]This very competitive universal exam which determines whether students obtain a place in private high schools or state high schools of good quality education.

Hence, the importance of school as a site of socialization cuts across class, gender and other differences among the children. This relates not only to the opportunities, resources or constraints that school provides but the network of relations at school, which are also the determinants of children's subjective well-being. Hence, school serves a double task; it does not just emerge as an academic unit, but it is also a site of socialization for children where they build their generational and intergenerational relations with peers and teachers.

When we asked children 'What do you like the most at school? What makes you happy at school?', unstructured play at school that pertains to "having fun out of class", "hanging out with friends" and "chatting" was the most frequently named theme. For example:

> At school, apart from the classes what I like the most is to play with my friends. I thought for a minute why I like the school, I realized that I like school because my friends are there. Cihan, 10, Female, Middle SES

The unstructured space of school is important for all children. Such spaces seem to give children a sense of freedom at school where they can build their social relations. To what extent the school environment provides such spaces for children is an important aspect that defines children's well-being at school. Generational relations, in this respect, are a significant feature of *school as a relational space.* The positive attributes of school friends that the children share manifested around three areas, *feeling supported and cared for*; *sharing secrets* and *getting along well.* For children, particularly for girls, feeling supported and cared for by close friends emerge as a positive attribute of generational relations.

> Generally, we play at school, sometimes we talk, if there is something upsetting us.
> – Why do you like those close friends the most? Is there a reason?
>
> Because they understand me better. Others... How should I say, I find them fake a little bit. Eda, 10, Female, High SES

Sharing secrets with friends is another theme that emerges as a component of good relations with friends. Being able to share secrets depends on the closeness of friendship and are built on a trust relationship: *"knowing all the secrets"; "sharing secrets".*

> I can share my secrets with her, she is someone I can trust. She takes me as I am. Belma, 12, Female, High SES

> Actually, he is considerate, shows good empathy, He can keep secrets well, he is a good friend. Levent, 12, Male, High SES

Being accepted by their friends without any judgemental attitudes/prejudices and empathic relationships are good qualities of generational relations. Even for kids who do not have a larger network of friends, getting along with one friend can determine their well-being at school.

> Like, mmm, I have one friend. I love him a lot because he always hangs out with me. Bulut, 10, Male, Low SES

Hence, lack of friends emerges as one of the main reasons for unhappiness:

> We were friends, when she left the school, I had no friends left. My main problem is that I don't have a friend. Sema, 10, Female, High SES

Lack of friendships can be accompanied by drastic negative experiences with peers like being mocked or bullied and experiencing a conflictual climate:

> They did it so many times in the past. They used to make fun of my weight. I lost weight but I am used to it. Nothing would happen. Ali, 12, Male, High SES

> He called me names. He even tries to hit me in sports classes.... He does it specifically to me, he rarely does it to others. It doesn't even have a reason. Serdar, 10, Male, High SES

> Psychological pressure, whenever we are angry... when we enter from here, he shoulders, and just wants to start a fight. Furkan, 12, Male, Low SES

The school has a meaning for children as a site of intergenerational relations where they attribute positive and negative features to their relations with teachers. Teachers' positive features mostly articulated by the research participants are: "*Treating students well*"; "*feeling valued*" and "*cared*".

> I love Math. The teacher is nice to us. Usually, if the teachers see a mistake, they shout at you. My math teacher does not make trouble out of it. Belma, 12, Female, High SES.

Being valued and feeling cared for is particularly important for children coming from a disadvantaged background. For Roma student who come from a community that experiences social exclusion in society, being valued and cared for also means being treated equally with other students.

> My favourite teacher is Esra teacher and Gülden teacher. They are so kind and concerned. Teachers do not care about students in the classes. Esra Hoca and Gülden Hoca do care for each of us. There is also Sinem teacher, a Math teacher. She is concerned about us. Some teachers have favourite students and have them study. Sinem Hoca cares for each of us and engages with all of us. Emine, 10, Female, Low SES

> He is so kind. He does not shout at anybody. I like him because he does not shout, he does not hit any students. Baran, 12, Male, Low SES

The positive attributes of teachers identified by the participants include aspects like *speaking the same language, having fun together* or being like a friend. These factors are also highlighted by the research participants, which demonstrates that the children give importance to non-hierarchical relations with the teachers.

> Technology design teacher. She is like a friend to us. In recess, she spends time with the students, plays with them, rather than going to the teacher's room and spend time with her friends. Berna, 12, Female, Middle SES

> She is such a nice person; she likes to chat with us. She is like a sister or friend rather than a teacher. Suna, 12, Female, Low SES

Non-caring behaviours of some teachers are discussed in relation to teachers' tendency to put pressure on students and enforce non-favoured restrictions.

> She *restricts* us. I have drawn a beautiful painting. She said to draw the background pink. The painting turned out to be ugly. Eda, 10, Female, High SES

Fair treatment by teachers holds importance for our research participants. Although negative, non-caring treatment by teachers was stated by participants as a common reason for unhappiness at school, unfair treatment as a negative attribute is especially raised by the children from a disadvantaged background, as an unnamed explanation for experiences of discrimination.

> She gives importance to being clean. We come to class clean. But she says; why are you dirty? If she sees a tiny bit of a tear in my notebook, she throws it away. She interferes with us a lot. Emine, 10, Female, Low SES

> If there are students that she likes, she treats them well, she does not care for students she does not know well, she is cold to them. I do not like her attitude in this case. Suna, 12, Female, Low SES

Not surprisingly, children also experience yelling and shouting of teachers as a negative attribute in their relationship.

> The teachers yell at us, I do not like that. Furkan, 12, Male, Low SES

> The teacher that I dislike most is Fatma teacher. Because, she yells at us a lot, she gets angry with us all the time. Lale, 10, Female, Low SES

> The teacher that I dislike most is the math teacher. For instance, we play with football cards. He takes them away and throws them in the trash. Hüseyin, 10, Male, Middle SES

School emerges as a relational space, where children build their solidaristic or conflictual generational and intergenerational relations. These relations are a determining aspect of their subjective well-being. While their experiences are not the same, the importance of these relationships is stated as important to their well-being by all the children. The positive and negative attributes of teachers emerge as a common element for children from different backgrounds. Fair treatment by teachers, however, becomes more critical for children who come from a disadvantaged background.

Schools remain as the primary social spaces in low SES families' children's lives for connecting with peers, away from the family. In general, it is mostly this socializing aspect of school that is mentioned as the reason for liking school. Close friendships are enjoyed at recess – playing, talking with friends are the highlights of their day at school. While schools provide a chance to meet up with friends, much direct or vicarious bullying is also evident in children's narratives of their school experience.

Compared to the narratives of the middle class or upper middle-class children, it is striking that the school's children go to are not conveyed as institutions that make academic demands on them. Schools have teachers, instruction etc., but are not geared towards preparing these youth for the rigorous exams that they will need to face for entering higher education. Thus, schools can be considered as daily stations for children, with semblance to preparing for the future, but the reality is far from that of a system that is meant to create equalizing opportunities for children. Children of lower means seem to pick up these subtle messages, as they rarely link their future aspirations with their current learning opportunities.

School, how shall I say, we have fun friends but actually our school is not that well. Furkan, 12, Male, Low SES

Many children talk about the violent climate among the students as well as between teachers and some students. This discourse of violence in the form of either yelling, the punishments given by teachers/administration or humiliating students are much more infrequent in the narratives of students of high SES backgrounds. Still, children greatly value good teachers who try to reach out to them and treat them with respect.

The role of school for the well-becoming of children is limited in the narratives provided by and in the worlds of children from low SES backgrounds. Only a few resilient children can or have a future expectation of breaking the vicious cycle of poverty. The strategies mentioned by these children for positive youth development within the low SES group reflect the use of both academic and non-academic resources to the fullest in order to create social and intellectual capacities that will help them make it in this tough and competitive world. Suna is an example of these resilient children who, as we discussed previously, finds resilience in part in her mother's support. The following striking quote shows how it affects her overall well-being:

I love being a student, going to school makes me happy. I am happy living with my family. Living with them without problems make me happy. However sometimes I feel this way… I feel too much responsibility. Sometimes all the problems are piled up and although I try to solve each, they will never end and I feel so tired. In those contexts, I fall into unhappiness. Suna, 12, Female, Low SES

The school's middle-class children attend are also public schools, similar to the low SES children. However, these schools are much more demanding of their students, and appear to invest more in their academic progress. They do not come across just as way stations for children to spend their time, but evidence more structure and less chaos. Children seem to be more engaged with their educational institutions, having internalized goals of becoming academically successful. The resultant more competitive environment with peers is perhaps inevitable, when grades are taken as the primary measure of success. "To excel" means to be better than others. Işık, a 12-year-old female student, states that because of competitiveness and the related language that is used in her class, she changed her class. An example of this language is evident in Kemal's story regarding how he plays chess with the following words: "I succeeded", "I won"; "I excel" and "then passed to finals".

Families and schools unequivocally have set expectations of these children. The children are very aware of the high bar set for them by their families and at school. It is a mixed bag. On the one hand, they are psychologically invested in by others, they matter. On the other hand, the high demands create a fear of failure, where failure would lead to an intense drop in self-esteem:

Teachers put lots of pressure on us, our Turkish teacher forces us… for instance if we cannot solve one question, she complains and then she says next year these topics will be part of TEOG, and she will not repeat it. … It can be said that I am afraid a little, sometimes I am worried. Işık, 12, Female, Middle SES

The way middle SES schools operate with increased attention on grades and preparation for middle school exams feeds children's sense of awareness of the real competitive environment "out there" that accentuates their achievement motivation and success orientation. These schools are also becoming visible through the "success rates" they can demonstrate in the entrance examinations, competing with other schools. Thus, investment in and expectations around success quickly translate into towering demands that feed the children's recognition needs while threatening them with potential failure.

In these expectant environments, it becomes harder to tease apart whose voice we are hearing. Is the need coming intrinsically from the child or is it ubiquitously absorbed by the children, not giving them a choice to step outside of the race? Again, the emphasis on "doing well" serves very different purposes compared to the narratives of the resilient low-income children. There are many ways in which parental expectations and demands are in synch with the teachers/schools demands.

For the children from middle-income backgrounds, the awareness around competition is present in all their relationships. Thus, as a whole, the sense of self portrayed by the middle-income children who have much more access to resources and opportunities sound more confident about their burgeoning capacities, albeit that their narratives are taking place in a much more demanding, success-oriented family and school systems. There are some similarities and some differences in the discourses of children from the high SES group compared to their middle SES counterparts. One significant similarity is the way they portray themselves in their stories. Themes of *being successful, competent* and *better than others* are frequently observed in the narratives of the higher SES group, as is observed for the children from middle SES backgrounds. Similar themes of *self-competitive peers* are also abundant.

> I already learned literacy before I went to school. Eda, 10, Female, High SES

> I am the most sporty person in the school. Selahattin, 12, Male, High SES

All of the children in the higher SES group are attending private schools. These schools not only offer "excellence" in academics, but also offer many opportunities for arts and sports training through clubs, and extra courses or after school activities. These additional opportunities are not seen in the public schools to which middle-class children are attending: "Art, drama and musical instrument"; "Drama, music and dance".

> Weekends. Saturdays I have courses in my school, actually our school is six days. This is why I do extra homework after school. Also, we read books. Sundays if I have time left and if there is no exam, we go out. However, if I have exams, I will stay at home. Belma, 12, Female, High SES

Schools make extreme demands on the children around their academic success. Increasing levels of such demands force children to equate their self-worth with being successful. Nearly all of the children in this group talk about academic stress and those who are about to enter the national exam for high school placement appear

overloaded with preparation for the upcoming exam. In sum, these children have little free time away from the need to work on prep-tests:

> Often they give tests as punishments, if it is 100 questions, they add and say 300. Belma, 12, female, high SES

"The inherent adult-centrism with ideas of the child as an adult in deficit putting the emphasis on children as "becomings", rather than the focus on them as experiencing "well-being" (Fattore et al. 2016, p. 11) can be observed in the words of these children. Child well-becoming overrides child well-being (Fattore et al. 2016, p. 238). Belma, for example, internalizes the existing current situation with the words "we know it is for our sake" and accepts the importance of "well-becoming" by endangering her current "well-being".

A number of children also talk about losing their close friends at school when these children get placed into even more competitive schools. This is a rather common practice of highly ambitious and "academically successful" children, as getting into one of the most prestigious schools is a guarantee for future academic opportunities in Turkey as well as abroad. However, this also shows the importance of relativity for subjective well-being. Although Sema attends one of the most prestigious and expensive private schools which provides different activities and academic excellence, she is unhappy and wants to change her school:

> Not only because my friends went there but also I think that school is a better school and my mom says if you want you can take the exam.

For Sema, having her friends, particularly her closest friend to go to "that school" creates an inferior position for Sema, a position of relative deprivation which is very interesting to elaborate upon. Although the school she attends is known as one of the best, she states that there is nothing in the school that makes her happy or nothing that she likes.

10.4 Conclusion

The accounts of children who participate in our study in Istanbul, Turkey as part of the "Children's Understandings of Well-Being" study reveals that although there are common indicators that affect the subjective wellbeing of children, how a child experiences her childhood is definitely shaped by their socioeconomic status. Similarities and differences are evident in the subjective experiences of children across the three socio-economic levels. Differing realities shape their relationality as well as their negotiations of their sense of self when engaging with their daily lives. The narratives of the children from middle SES backgrounds reflect different discourses compared to the children from lower SES backgrounds, in that the narratives resonate a sense of *self-as-an achiever* along with their acute sense of the competitive world around them. Their narratives are full of volunteered success stories and lists of after-school activities they are spending their free time on. Both the middle

class and more affluent children are very cognizant of the competitive world around them and the expectations that are placed on them. Two glaring differences between middle and high SES background children are related to parents' planning around children's extracurricular activities and the selection of private schools for the children to attend. These differences are tightly embedded in the competitive race to be part of the "successful" in-group.

Socio-economic constraints on low SES families have an impact on the subjective well-being of children as opportunities for these children to improve their current and future capabilities are very limited. Differing levels of experienced unstable life circumstances and the risk of child labour endangers the overall wellbeing and well-becoming of these children. Thus still, with all these limitations on their capability sets, children of low SES families have more agency with respect to control over their daily activities.

Although socioeconomic conditions definitely affect the wellbeing of children, generational and intergenerational relations within the home and the school play a crucial role in determining children's subjective well-being. The importance of relations is common but a close look at how for each SES group these relations are shaped and reshaped provide us with valuable insights and new avenues for research.

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Chapter 11
Continuities and Discontinuities of Experiences of Well-Being at School in Chilean Adolescents of Different Socioeconomic Statuses

Jaime Alfaro, Lorena Ramírez-Casas del Valle, Carolina Aspillaga, and Patricia Easton

11.1 Introduction

Over the last decades there has been a growing interest and progress in studies of subjective well-being in childhood and adolescence (Savahl et al. 2015), according to the guidelines of different international bodies (OECD 2013; UNICEF 1990) which emphasize that for the development of policies and programs directed towards the child and adolescent popula tion, it is necessary to expand the well-being and life satisfaction knowledge levels of the subjects of these policies. It is encouraged that nations consider children and adolescents as rights holders, protected by the International United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (UNICEF 1990). Declared as part of this Convention are, amongst others, the rights of children to be heard and taken into account, as well as to be able to participate in the decisions that affect their lives. This breaks away from concepts of the child having no voice

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and the adult being the only interpreter of his/her needs; and moves towards concepts that assign increasingly more importance to the voices of children and adolescents as a valid expression of their interests and opinions (Vergara et al. 2015). Due to this, it is important to generate new knowledge, taking into consideration children's own experiences and subjectivities (Fattore et al. 2007; Gómez and Alzate 2014) as a way to prioritize and promote their well-being (Ben-Arieh and Goerge 2001).

This has also gained momentum within the educational field where different orientations have been developing which aim at formulating educational policies that favor the promotion of the well-being of children at school. These shifts acknowledge that this is a dimension of great relevance which has not been sufficiently considered in regards to the impact on the living conditions of childhood and adolescence, as well as in regards to the educational success or failure (UNDP 2012). Considering this background, this chapter aims to contribute to the field by presenting results from our study of the experiences of well-being at school for Chilean adolescents of different socioeconomic status, delving into variation in continuity and discontinuity of their well-being at school, according to the characteristics of the relationships they experience on a daily basis in their school contexts.

11.2 School Reality in Chile

In Chile, there exists great socioeconomic inequality, which implies and generates conditions of great diversity in the child population. There are significant inequalities in economic and sociocultural terms, that are replicated in the educational system in structural and operational terms (OECD 2010) as well as in social relations and daily existence. In this regard, an important characteristic to point out is that there coexist three types of school establishments in the country: (a) Municipal Establishments (ME), which are of a public nature and are financed by a *voucher* system provided by the State; (b) Subsidized Private Establishments (SPE), which up to 2015 (derived from the Inclusion Law 20.845) had a mixed provision but which, since the enactment of this law, must gradually stop demanding co-payment from families and thus will only be financed with contributions from the State; and (c) Paid Private Establishments (PPE) which do not receive any type of contribution from the State (Ascorra et al. 2015).

This tripartite system has had multiple effects, amongst which is educational segregation. Educational segregation manifests in a marked concentration of students of low socioeconomic status (SES) in the ME, whilst students of medium SES usually attend the SPE, and students of high SES are concentrated in the PPE, thus producing "a homogenization of students' according to sociodemographic characteristics" (Ascorra et al. 2015, p. 66). This is an issue that generates inequalities in educational quality, and it maintains and reproduces important degrees of social segregation (Murillo and Martínez 2017).

At the same time, there also exists segregation within the schools, between the classrooms and between the groups of students within the same classroom (Treviño et al. 2016). This segregation is produced by grouping students according to their

learning abilities and their performance, with consequent implications on students' social-emotional development (Braddock and Slavin 1995; Mizala et al. 2007; Treviño et al. 2014). This differentiated distribution of students based on socioeconomic conditions, together with the practices of internal segregation, indicates that life at school is not the same for all children and that therefore it is relevant that the study of their well-being, and of the conditions associated with it, be addressed by considering these particularities.

11.3 Subjective Well-Being of Boys and Girls at School

Subjective well-being is defined primarily as a general concept that includes the cognitive and affective evaluations that people make with respect to their lives, the events that affect their lives and the circumstances in which they live (Diener 2006). The cognitive element refers to perceptions and evaluations of overall satisfaction and life satisfaction in specific areas, whilst the affective element refers to positive and negative affect (Petito and Cummins 2000).

At an international level, quantitative studies point to a significant relationship between satisfaction with school and overall satisfaction with life (Do Santos et al. 2013), an issue that makes this area very relevant in the lives of children. However, the study by Huebner and colleagues (2014) shows that children's satisfaction with their experiences at school has a statistically significant, yet modest, correlation in comparison with other areas such as family and friends. These results are consistent with the findings of another study of well-being in childhood in Chile, by Alfaro and colleagues (2016). On the other hand, a study by Navarro and colleagues (2015) with Spanish children found that the perception of the educational system is more related to a feeling of dissatisfaction, which is possibly related to stress and pressure.

Regarding the relationship between the school and the students' well-being, the literature highlights that the participation of parents, the behavior of the student, the school context and atmosphere, and relationships with teachers and amongst peers, are all associated with well-being (Huebner et al. 2014; García et al. 2014). In the same way, the findings of studies suggest that adolescents who perceive more social support, from teachers and classmates, have a greater perception of school competence, which in turn is related to greater subjective well-being at school (Alcantara et al. 2016; Cuadros and Berger 2016; Tian et al. 2015).

In Chile, a study carried out with children aged 8, 10 and 12 years, showed differences in overall satisfaction with life and satisfaction at school, by school vulnerability (measured using the School Vulnerability Index—SVI),[1] gender and type of school dependency (Alfaro et al. 2016). Considering this, children with a

[1]The School Vulnerability Index shows the condition of children at school, which results from the interaction of a multiplicity of risk and protective factors of a social, economic, psychological, cultural, environmental and/or biological nature (JUNAEB 2005).

medium SVI present greater overall satisfaction with life than those with low SVI; girls show greater satisfaction at school; and boys and girls from municipal establishments show a higher level of satisfaction at school in comparison to those from Subsidized Private and Paid Private Establishments (Alfaro et al. 2016). These findings provide a basis for the importance of beginning to understand the differences in the conditions associated with well-being between each of these school contexts.

11.4 Relevance of the Voices of Boys, Girls and Adolescents

Sociology of childhood emphasizes that children should be subjects and not only objects of study, with the right to participate on topics that concern them (Gaitán 2006; Gómez and Alzate 2014). Studying children and adolescents as rights holders implies analytically recognizing and acknowledging that childhood is "…a socially constructed reality, which as such presents historical and culturally determined variations through a set of mandates, guidelines and rules of behavior that match the way of being a child at a specific moment in time…" (Gaitán 2006, p. 10).

Within this framework, qualitative methodology has, in recent years, become relevant as a research approach in the field of childhood, in which a prominent and shared aspect has been the recognition of children as valid informants and active participants in the research process, acknowledging the importance of considering their knowledge, opinions, attitudes and perceptions regarding the issues that affect them. This methodological framework is also used to ask children for advice regarding the improvement of subjective measures of well-being (for example, see Casas et al. 2012). Doek (2014) states that participation itself in these instances contributes to the well-being of the child, considering that it stimulates and promotes the development of participation skills in individual and collective decision-making processes. At the same time, the recognition of the child's right to be heard can reinforce their sense of self-esteem and empowerment.

This methodological framework has also led to research in the area to be increasingly focused on the study of perceptions, assessments, and/or the meaning of well-being, as well as on the understanding of the dynamics that affect it (Fattore et al. 2007, 2009). Along these lines, Casas and Bello (2012) point to the importance of qualitative research as it allows for a more comprehensive understanding of child and adolescent well-being. In line with this approach, this study recognizes the importance of qualitatively studying the subjective well-being of boys, girls and adolescents, considering their own cultural and socioeconomic conditions as well as their micro school contexts.

11.5 Experience as an Object of Study

According to Larrosa (2011), experience is that which "happens to me" and which is linked to the presence of events external to the subject but which at the same time happens to it; the subject itself being the place which observes and which is being observed. Thus, to understand experiences it is necessary to understand the meaning that the actors attribute to their lived events (Guzmán and Saucedo 2015); these being central to the process in which lived events become shaped into experiences (Sánchez and Renzi 2012).

Within the tradition of the sociology of experience of Dubet and Danilo (1998), interest in experience as an object of study is linked to the epistemological decision to incorporate the subjective dimension of actors and subjects, in order to go beyond the external analysis of the system's functions (Sánchez and Renzi 2012). Dubet also highlights the importance of considering the social and contextual correlates from which experiences arise (Guzmán and Saucedo 2015).

In the field of education, through the study of school experiences, one can ask what it is that the school produces. Given that at present in school there are a multiplicity of relationships unfolding amongst individuals and within the institution, the study of school experiences allows us to account for how actors, in this case adolescents, construct their experiences and, at the same time, as part of these constructions, both the system and the actors themselves are reproduced (Sánchez and Renzi 2012).

The study of experiences, lived events and meanings related to school, allows us to understand children's and adolescents' subjective links with school, considering the former as subjects of experience and not only as receivers of the educational system (Guzmán and Saucedo 2015). Based on this background, this research investigates the continuities and discontinuities of adolescents' satisfaction and dissatisfaction experiences at school, considering the particularities of the participants' socioeconomic status.

11.6 Method

11.6.1 Methodological Approach

The present study is of a qualitative nature (Denman and Haro 2002), being descriptive-exploratory research. This work is aimed at describing the experiences of well-being (satisfaction and dissatisfaction) and associated relational dimensions, placing focus on the interpretations made by the subjects, in so far as they account for the relationships that they have established throughout their lives (Arcila et al. 2010). The use of a qualitative method in this study allows for approaching reality from the voices or perspectives of those who produce it, considering subjectivity as a valid instrument to understand life and human practices (Gurdián-Fernández 2007).

Table 11.1 Sample characterization

School no.	Type of establishment	SES	Geographic area	Group interviews	Female	Male
1	Municipal	Low	Coquimbo	2	6	6
2	Subsidized private	Low	Santiago	2	6	8
3	Subsidized private	Medium	Valparaíso	2	5	6
4	Subsidized private	Medium	Santiago	2	6	6
5	Private	High	Santiago	2	3	5
6	Municipal	Low	Temuco	2	6	5
Total				12	32	36

Source: Own elaboration

11.6.2 Participants

This study involved 68 adolescents between the ages of 11 and 14 years, belonging to 6 educational establishments located in different geographical locations in Chile. The sampling strategy was of an intentional type (Patton 1990). The sample criteria were:

(a) Boys and girls studying in the sixth and eighth grades, whose ages ranged between 11 and 14;
(b) Boys and girls belonging to the different types of school establishments indicated earlier, and who are also from different socioeconomic statuses, determined by use of the vulnerability criteria defined by SVI-SINAE (JUNAEB 2005); and
(c) Equitable participation of male and female participants was sought.

The number of participants by sample characteristics is presented in Table 11.1.

A total of 12 two-hour group interviews were carried out with the participation of 5–8 children in each group. The groups were segmented by SES (according to the SVI of each school) and by locality, with 6 low SES group interviews, 4 medium SES interviews and 2 medium-high SES ones, with students in the sixth and eighth year of Primary Education from schools in Santiago and in region areas of Chile.

11.6.3 Fieldwork Procedures

An authorization to carry out the study was requested from all the directors of the school establishments, whilst at the same time active informed consent was requested from each of the parents and guardians of the participating children. Also, a presentation was made to these children about the objectives of the study, at which time they were invited to participate voluntarily by letting us know if they wanted to attend the group interviews. Only children who had the informed consent of the father, mother or guardian participated. The letter of consent and text of the

informed assent were previously approved by the Ethics Committee of the Universidad Central de Chile, the sponsoring institution of the study.

11.6.4 Fieldwork Tools

Fieldwork involved the group interview technique in which 5–8 students participated in each group. Group interviews allow for an environment that is less artificial than a one-to-one interview, resulting in the information collected having a high ecological validity (Willig 2008).

As a data production tool, a methodology was designed based on a guideline to investigate experiences of satisfaction and dissatisfaction at school, including group performances which were incorporated in order to facilitate the boys' and girls' expression. For the performances, the procedure used was to subdivide each group into pairs or trios and then ask them to act out to the rest of the participants situations they like and dislike about their experience at school (Ramírez-Casas del Valle and Alfaro-Inzunza 2018; Ramírez et al. 2018). After each performance, using a semi-structured interview, a subgroup conversation was encouraged around two questions: what situation did they act out and why did they feel good/bad in that situation? Based on their comments we encouraged conversation with the rest of the group, considering the following questions: (1) Have similar or very different things happened to you?; and (2) How did you feel when this happened? All the interviews were recorded using a digital dictaphone and were subsequently transcribed.

11.6.5 Data Analysis

The analysis of the information collected in the group interviews was carried out according to the thematic analysis method (Mieles-Barrera et al. 2012). Firstly, an initial revision of the texts produced and transcribed was carried out without a distinction made by SES, which allowed for the first analysis of emergent topics in relation to the experiences that the participants considered satisfactory and unsatisfactory concerning their school life. Afterwards, coding separated by SES were carried out, which allowed for the information to be organized into groups of the same meaning. In the third phase, searches were conducted for categories-themes that were similar and different between SES groups, which allowed us to generate information in regards to the research questions. After these initial analyses, re-coding was done in order to construct the dimensions, categories and subcategories differentiated by SES, which detailed in the results.

11.7 Results

The results have been organized in four dimensions which include: the participants: interpersonal links at school; the teaching-learning environment; physical space; and adolescents' agency. Categories and subcategories differentiated by socioeconomic status are described in Table 11.2.

11.7.1 Interpersonal Links at School

For participants of all socioeconomic statuses, the quality of interpersonal relationships is an important element associated with their experiences of school satisfaction

Table 11.2 Summary dimensions, categories and subcategories by socioeconomic status

Dimension	Categories	Subcategories		
		High SES	Medium SES	Low SES
Interpersonal links at school	Link with classmates	To meet and share	To meet and share	To meet and share
		Support and companionship	Support and companionship	Support and companionship
			Loyalty	Loyalty
			Absence of violence and mistreatment	Absence of violence and mistreatment
	Link with teachers	Emotional support and teacher commitment	To be understood by teachers	Teacher support and help
				To be respected and not mistreated by teachers
Teaching-learning environment	Teaching methods	Participatory classes	Respect for the learning pace	Fun and entertaining teaching
	Good working atmosphere in the classroom	No references	No references	Absence of being told off and shouted at
				Absence of disorder in class
Physical space	Recreation and sports equipment	No references	No references	Recreation and sports equipment
	Good infrastructure conditions			Good infrastructure conditions
Adolescents' agency	Autonomy and freedom	Respected in their decisions	Absence of uniformity	Surveillance at school

Source: Own elaboration

or dissatisfaction. Both the link with classmates and with teachers are of specific relevance. However, the particular dimensions which differentiate these links show variations amongst adolescents belonging to the different socio-economic groups studied. The categories of links with classmates, links with teachers and subcategories differentiated by socioeconomic status, are described below.

11.7.1.1 Links with Classmates

In regards to the links amongst classmates and their experiences of well-being, it is possible to observe both common elements amongst the participants of different socioeconomic status and experiences that are only highlighted in the stories of adolescents of middle and lower socioeconomic status.

To Meet and Share

Having the opportunity to meet and share with friends and classmates is a relevant element for all the participants of the study, in all socioeconomic contexts. The possibility provided by the school space, as a place to meet, perform activities and have fun with classmates, is valued positively. The following quotes illustrate this by showing that when consulted about positive aspects of their school life, the importance of meeting and having fun with classmates and friends emerges:

> P: I like the part that you meet new people, you make new friends and new experiences and you have a good time. (Medium-high SES, 8th grade, Santiago)

> I: What is the best part about school? In regards to school, what do you like most about school?P: To play with classmates. (Medium SES, 6th grade, Santiago)

> I: What do you like about school or about coming to school?
> P7: Being with my friends.
> I1: Ok, what else?
> P7: To see my other friends that I have in other courses. That's it. (Low SES, 6th grade, Temuco)

Support and Companionship

Another element shared by adolescents of all socioeconomic statuses for their experiences of well-being, is the support and companionship amongst their classmates and friends. For the participants it is important that there is support and companionship in daily school life, reflected in the following quote:

> P2: There are also some people from higher courses who are nice and help you when for example you are new at school, to get oriented, there are some basketball people for example who have helped me to know where everything is. (Medium SES, 8th grade, Santiago)

At the same time, they consider important to receive support from their peers when facing problems, sadness and joy. These are some of the qualities which constitute "friendship", which is understood as encounter, communication and companionship, as demonstrated in the following quotes:

> P1: Well, for me a good friend is one who supports you when you are sad or when you are happy. That is, who supports you in everything and who [like] listens to you and helps you in the difficult moments of your life and who defends you, obviously, that is, if they are hitting you . . . Because before coming here, a classmate was fighting and we came running and kicked him [the attacker]. So, [like] he defends you, because that's also good, to know that he who is next to you can defend you in any situation and can help you. (Medium-high SES, 8th grade, Santiago)

> I1: Why are friends important?P4: . . . they help.
> I1: They help, in what do they help?
> P3: They help with tasks.
> P5: Sometimes when a friend is being hit, sometimes the kids got his back . . . when they [the attackers] hit him.
> P1: That we can share what we want and we can trust that person who we know is special for us, who has been with us in the good times and in bad times. (Low SES, 6th grade, Santiago)

Loyalty

In the stories of the participants of medium and low socioeconomic status, loyalty appears as a relevant element of friendship. A loyal friend is a person who can be trusted and who accompanies you in different circumstances. This is shown by the following quotes:

> I: And what does a good friend do?
> P2: Mmm . . . a good friend. . . doesn't speak badly of you behind your back, he's with you in the good times and in the bad times . . .P3: He's loyal . . . (Medium SES, eighth grade, Valparaíso)

> P6: Yeah, there are acquaintances who are [like] false but the other friends are the ones whom one can fully trust, they've always been with you. (Low SES, 8th grade, La Serena)

Absence of Violence and Mistreatment

Adolescents of middle and lower socioeconomic status also refer to the importance of not being mistreated, or having fights or aggression, elements that when present generate discomfort and dissatisfaction. The following quotes illustrate this:

> P3: What makes me feel bad is that . . . they bother me . . .
> I: What bothers you and why do they bother you?
> P3: For being . . . chubby . . . (Medium SES, sixth grade, Santiago).

> I: What are the things that are important to you?
> P2: That they stop bothering . . .
> P3: That they stop saying nicknames . . .
> P4: That they don't say swearwords . . . (Low SES, sixth grade, Santiago).

By way of synthesis it is possible to point out, in regards to the links amongst classmates, that the importance of meeting and sharing with peers in the school space, and the role of feeling supported and accompanied by them, transcends the different socioeconomic status levels. The same does not occur with the relevance of loyalty, which is mentioned only by participants of medium and low socioeconomic status. This is related to the role played by mistreatment and violence in their school experiences, which also marks a difference since in the case of the participants of medium-high socioeconomic status no reference is made to these types of situations, whilst in the case of adolescents of medium and low socioeconomic status the absence of mistreatment and violence does emerge as an important issue.

11.7.1.2 Links with Teachers

In regards to the links that adolescents develop with teachers, even though in all of the cases the importance of being able to count on teachers is highlighted, this takes on different nuances depending on socioeconomic status.

Emotional Support and Teacher Commitment

The participants of medium-high socioeconomic status, when referring to their satisfactory experiences in the relationship with their teachers, allude to being cared for, supported and attended to in relation to their affective needs. They value that the teachers genuinely care about what happens to them and that they have a link that is not limited to the function of teaching. This can also be manifested in the availability, capacity and commitment of the teachers to accompany students and help them when they need it; for example, in situations of sadness or in relation to homework. The above is illustrated by the following quote:

> Well, I feel that if you put yourself in a certain situation, they [the teachers] help you (...). For example, if I am crying and a teacher sees me, (s)he will help me. (Medium-high SES, 8th grade, Santiago)

To Be Understood by the Teachers

For young people of medium socioeconomic status, the positive aspects of experiences with teachers relate to having teachers who know them and understand them, and who are committed to their students, both in general terms and in regards to their learning. This can be noted in the following quotes:

> P4: (...) There are differences and differences, it is not the same having a head teacher who gives her all to the course and having one who really ...P3: Who also understands us ...
>
> I: Ah, okay, what makes a good teacher?
>
> P2: To be able to understand your students ...
>
> I: Anything else? What else do you consider a good teacher?

P: She taught me to read . . . [she should also] worry about the grades that her students get, although it is not entirely her responsibility, because one also has to take responsibility, but we also need a dedicated teacher. (Medium SES, 8th grade, Valparaíso)

I1: Why is teacher Carla good?
P2: Because she knows us.
P: She understands us.
I1: She understands you . . .
P2: Yes (Medium SES, sixth grade, Santiago).

Teacher Support and Help

In the case of adolescents of low socioeconomic status, it is positively valued that teachers show a closeness and willingness to help and support them not only in the school setting.

I: And in what things does she [the teacher] help you?
P7: When we need something, advice, in all things . . .
I: Has anyone else had any experience like that?
P5: I have, with her . . .
I: Tell us, let's see.
P5: When I had problems with an ex friend, I asked her for advice so I wouldn't have problems and she told me that I just don't have to pay attention to what they tell me. And I have always felt supported by her, because she supports the children a lot when they have problems and especially me . . . (Low SES, 8th grade, Temuco)

Being Respected and not Mistreated by Teachers

Likewise, this socioeconomic group emphasizes that in the relationship with teachers and their satisfaction with it, the importance of teachers respecting them and treating them well.

It seems that in this group it is more common for teachers to shout at the students or simply to not worry about their learning, which is why these children highlight the value that not feeling mistreated by their teachers has for them. They explain this in the following quotes:

P7: [Referring to the teacher] It's like one doesn't do anything, but she starts on her own "to search for us" [she tries to provoke the students]. Like for example, one day she tried to [like] insult us, she told us that we were the worst course, and she brought a branch [to the classroom] for good vibes, do you remember F? And she told us that it's to give us good vibes and so that we never again become the worst course. She did it [like] to make fun of us. (Low SES, 6th grade, La Serena)

As can be seen, although there are nuances amongst the different socioeconomic statuses in regards to what is valued as satisfactory in relationships with teachers, the importance that they give to teacher support, both to support within the academic context and especially outside of it, appears as transversal. It should be noted that to be respected and not mistreated by teachers also emerges as important for participants of low socioeconomic status.

11.7.2 The Teaching-Learning Environment

Well-being experiences of adolescents of different socioeconomic statuses are also related to the atmosphere generated in the classroom, which facilitates their teaching and learning processes. A finding consistent for all of the adolescents is that satisfaction and dissatisfaction are associated with the methodologies used by the teachers, and with the place which they as students occupy within this process; as well as with the classroom atmosphere, especially in regards to relationships that are established amongst classmates, and between teachers and students. Additionally, a respectful atmosphere inside the classroom was also raised by participants as important. Reflecting on these findings, we identify two categories: teaching methods, and a good working atmosphere in the classroom, with differences according to socioeconomic status.

11.7.2.1 Teaching Methods

Adolescents of different socioeconomic status value, as relevant for their satisfaction or dissatisfaction at school, the teaching methods teachers use to guide their learning. In general terms, experiences vary according to the presence of teaching strategies which promote their participation in classes and allow them to be visible and active in their own learning process. There are also experiences in which satisfaction is associated with the existence of entertaining didactics that allow them to have fun and get out of the exclusive space of the classroom. Each of the subcategories is described by different socioeconomic status below.

Participatory Classes

Young people of medium-high socioeconomic status value teaching methods that encourage students' participation in classes, giving them the opportunity to express their opinions, considering that otherwise they feel unrecognized. For instance:

> I: What do you like to do in class?
> P2: I like to be made to participate a lot in classes, like go to the blackboard...
> P1: That we can express our opinions.
> P3: The thing is that by only writing [what the teacher dictates], I am invisible. (Medium-high SES, 6th grade, Santiago)

In the same way, students also found it satisfactory if teachers, as part of their teaching strategies, remained attentive to the requirements and inquiries of their students, as pointed out by one student when talking about the teacher:

> P2: I like that the teacher explains something more general and then one can ask questions about what one doesn't understand, and in that way we can solve the doubt in front of everyone, and clarify it also for others, for the ones who didn't dare or who forgot to ask. (Medium-high SES, 8th grade, Santiago)

Respect for Learning Paces

Young people of medium socioeconomic status associate their satisfaction with teaching experiences where teachers show respect for the different learning paces of the students. To account for this, adolescents of medium SES point to an experience of discomfort associated with low respect for the differences in the learning paces on the part of their teachers, who want to teach everyone in the same way without taking into account the individual characteristics of the students, as is expressed in the following quote:

> P3: That teacher only sees defects in the students, (s)he does not see the good things that each one of them has, (s)he only criticizes . . . besides, (s)he does not understand, (s)he believes that we all go at the same pace, that we all learn in the same way. (Medium SES, 6th grade, Valparaíso)

Fun and Entertaining Teaching

For young people of low socioeconomic status, satisfaction is associated with the existence of fun teaching strategies, especially those classes in which the teacher allows them to move, talk, and even carry out activities outside of the school, such as is expressed in the following passages which illustrate what adolescents associate with fun teaching:

> P4: He taught us things, not like in English class where they teach in a fast way and erase the blackboard quickly just to keep writing. He made us talk and made us pick out a piece of paper with all the names and told us to go in front, and one had to talk about things, and he made us laugh, even taught us to dance, he even took us for a walk. (Low SES, 6th grade, Coquimbo)
>
> P7: In English class, I remember that one time he made us look for a song in pairs, with a program we had to look for the lyrics of the song, and that was fun as well. (Low SES, 8th grade, Temuco)

In the same way, it was valued positively to use other spaces to learn, and to connect teaching with technology or music, as expressed by this participant:

> P9: For example, the long recess comes and we all run around and then after we enter the room feeling hot, and the teacher makes us work. One day in music class he made us make a video that we had to do in a group, and he made us go out. (Low SES, 6th grade, Santiago)

Conversely, adolescents of low SES mention that their dissatisfaction is associated with directive types of classes in which the teacher only makes them write in their notebooks and does not answer their questions:

> P2: There are some teachers who, just to be difficult, teach you in only one way, and if we ask questions they say no, I already explained once.
>
> P6: And they only make you write. (Low SES, 8th grade, Coquimbo)

In the same manner, adolescents of different socioeconomic statuses consider relevant to their satisfaction or dissatisfaction at school the methodologies that the teachers use for promoting learning. However, differences by socioeconomic

statuses are also noted. Young people of medium-high socioeconomic status value the teaching experiences that allow and activate the participation in classes, through which they can express their opinions and be recognized and cared for in their needs. Young people of medium socioeconomic status associate their satisfaction with teaching experiences where the teachers respect the students' different learning paces. Also, experiences of discomfort are associated with low respect for differences in learning paces and abilities. In contrast, for young people of low socioeconomic status, satisfaction is associated with the existence of fun teaching strategies, showing that they value classes in which the teacher allows them to move, to speak, and to integrate activities outside of school, or to use technologies, noting as well that their dissatisfaction is associated with directive types of classes in which the teacher only makes them write in their notebooks.

11.7.2.2 Good Working Atmosphere in the Classroom

Another relational aspect that the participants associate with their experience of well-being at school concerns the environment and the working atmosphere inside the classroom. This dimension is only highlighted by participants of low socioeconomic status and is associated with the absence of being told off and shouted at; the possibility of having patient teachers and the absence of disorder in classes.

Absence of Being Told off and Shouted at

One important aspect highlighted by adolescents of low SES is their dissatisfaction associated with being told off and shouted at by teachers, as they indicate below:

> P5: When we are up there, and sometimes when I am with P. or M. or J., the teacher tells us all off and, what's more, with the ruler everyone gets scared. (Low SES, 6th grade, Coquimbo)
>
> P3: And I don't like it when they shout because they shout in all of the classes and it gets boring. (Low SES, 6th grade, Temuco)

Absence of Disorder in Classes

In the same way, a classroom environment in which classmates do not bother each other and where there is less disorder inside the classroom is also valued. This allows students to be able to pay attention, and emerges as relevant for adolescents of low SES status, as expressed in the following quote:

> P5: When one is more calm in the classroom they begin to disturb or, I don't know, to bother. (Low SES, 8th grade, Santiago)
>
> P3: What we don't like is that they [the classmates] are very disorganized when they play in the classroom, so I don't hear the teacher and I don't understand. (Low SES, 8th grade, Santiago)

11.7.3 Physical Space

Another dimension that adolescents consider as an experience of well-being is that the school has adequate spaces and equipment, both inside and outside of the classroom, and that these facilities be in good condition. This dimension is only highlighted as relevant by the participants of low socioeconomic status. We identified two categories in their discussions- recreation and sports equipment, and good infrastructure conditions, which are described below:

11.7.3.1 Recreation and Sports Equipment

For adolescents, it is important to be able to have equipment to facilitate doing sports, such as a soccer field or a swimming pool, as well as to have games that allow for recreation, as indicated in the following quote:

> P1: That a court be made [to play soccer], and that they put a swimming pool.
> P3: That games be put here, because there are no games. Like those swings. (Low SES, 8th grade, Metropolitan Region)

11.7.3.2 Good Infrastructure Conditions

At the same time, they point out elements of an aesthetic and health-related nature within their school as unsatisfactory, highlighting the importance of having a school at a satisfactory level of upkeep, without mold and which is aesthetically pleasing. For example, some participants raised the colour of the school walls as an issue, as indicated in the following quote:

> P6: Ah, the color, because the school doesn't look good, on the walls. It looks bad.
> P8: And it's full of mold.P6: Yes, up on the ceiling, everything [has mold]. (Low SES, eighth grade, Temuco).

In the same way, relevant for their experience of well-being is that the school has the necessary conditions and maintenance to face the cold of winter and the heat of summer, as mentioned in the following passage when referring to the classrooms:

> P6: They don't have good maintenance.
> P9: In winter, it was cold and we were not allowed to use a stove.
> P2: The plugs were bad.
> P9: And there were no curtains, nothing. There are no curtains.
> I: In other words, you feel cold in the winter?
> P: Yes.
> P2: And in the summer, we feel hot. (Low SES, sixth grade, Temuco).

Our findings demonstrate a diversity of issues raised by adolescents of different socioeconomic statuses regarding the experience of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the physical space of the school. Adolescents of medium-high and medium socioeconomic status do not mention the physical space, passing for them as

unnoticed or as not being significant for their experience of well-being or discomfort at school. For adolescents of low socioeconomic status, the experience of having adequate spaces and equipment, and that these spaces and equipment are in good condition, in terms of maintenance, operation and aesthetics, is of great relevance for their satisfaction.

11.7.4 Adolescents' Agency

Another relevant dimension of the adolescents' well-being experiences at school is related to the possibility of being active and autonomous agents, including the possibility of being able to express their opinions and ideas, to be respected in them, and in turn, to be able to be taken into consideration by adults in the decisions that affect their daily life at school. We describe this category of Autonomy and freedom, with its subcategories, by socioeconomic status below.

11.7.4.1 Autonomy and Freedom

Adolescents indicate that they feel satisfied if they have the possibility to make their own decisions and to feel respected in their right to have an opinion regarding different topics about their school life. Additionally, they would like to be able to express their likes and interests without the constant coercion of school norms and constant surveillance of their actions, both inside and outside of school. Differences are noted between socioeconomic statuses, ranging from the importance of feeling respected in their decisions, to not feeling constantly monitored.

11.7.4.2 Respected in Their Decisions

For adolescents of medium-high socioeconomic status, the experience of satisfaction at school is associated with feeling that they can have the right to decide themselves about issues in their lives and to be respected in these decisions, even if they are not shared and even if they are wrong, as long as it is not just the adults who, without explaining the reasons, make the decisions for them:

> P2: That they support us in our decisions.
>
> I: Who?
>
> P2: Well, it depends. Because in certain decisions it could be a friend, in others it could be your dad or a teacher. (Medium-high SES, 8th grade, Santiago)
>
> P3: Because I find that that's how one learns, making his own decisions, making mistakes, so, when you make your own decision.
>
> P2: Yes, that's what I mean, that it's your decision, but that the others don't tell you, no, no, don't do it because I don't like it. (Medium-high SES, 8th grade, Santiago)

11.7.4.3 Absence of Uniformity

For young people from medium socioeconomic backgrounds, when referring to their experience of well-being in on this topic, they point instead to the discomfort generated for them by the fact that others try to standardize them to an extreme level, demonstrated by the fact that the school defines both the clothes and how their uniform should be worn, in addition to what they can or cannot do, even outside of school, as indicated in the following:

> P3: At the exit, when we leave, for example, we are young and we scream, and we are also crazy when we leave school, and they restrict that from us, that is, they tell us off for making a disorder outside of school. (Medium SES, 8th grade, Valparaíso)
>
> P4: In this school they are very strict, they tell us to fix our uniform, they tell us how to comb our hair, if it is loose they tell us to tie it. (Medium SES, 8th grade, Valparaíso)
>
> P5: What I don't like is that they criticize our shoes a lot, if one comes with certain shoes they tell you off immediately and, I think, that the shoes don't make the student. (Medium SES, 8th grade, Metropolitan region).

11.7.4.4 Surveillance at School

Adolescents of low socioeconomic status report that their dissatisfaction on this issue is associated with the experience of feeling surveilled, associating the school with a prison. However, they also value this aspect to the extent that it makes them feel protected from the risky situations that exist around the school:

> P4: And now they put surveillance cameras as well. (Low SES, 8th grade, Temuco)
>
> P3: Because it seems as if [in school] we are locked up in a prison . . . [laughs] (Low SES, 6th grade, Temuco)
>
> P5: Yes, here in this area many robberies can occur and also murders, especially in the summer. Even though it happens every day, not one day passes without it. It is also good [that there are cameras] because this way they have more control in the school and they can be more aware of what is happening in the environment, and also in the hours that we are not at school and the weekends, they can observe what is happening. (Low SES, 8th grade, Temuco)

These quotes indicate that a relevant dimension of the experience of adolescent well-being at school is related to relationships that allow freedom and autonomy. In the medium-high socioeconomic segment, the experience of autonomy is related to having relationships of the type which respect their decisions. In the medium socioeconomic segment adolescents report discomfort and dissatisfaction with school norms which make them uniform to an extreme level, losing the freedom to express what they feel as young people and not feeling accepted as individuals. For adolescents from the low socioeconomic segment, the experience that has the greatest relevance for their satisfaction is to not feel supervised to such an extent that they feel like prisoners in school. However, they also expect the school to allow them to feel safe and protected from risky situations that exist outside of the school.

11.8 Discussion

The purpose of this research was to understand the experiences of well-being of adolescents in Chile within the framework of the relationships that they experience within the school context, with a focus on variation according to different socioeconomic statuses, which allows us to identify continuities and discontinuities around experiences.

Our interest has been to advance the studies of adolescent well-being, in this case at school, to transcend perspectives that address the adolescent development stage as a single and homogeneous category (Sandin 2014), acknowledging that adolescents and the constructions of their experiences of well-being are contextually situated, thus it being relevant to consider their different socioeconomic conditions as well as the school context.

In general terms, the experience of well-being at school is associated with interpersonal links; with the teaching-learning processes; with the characteristics of the physical space; and with the opportunities of agency that are granted to adolescents.

What stands out is that for all participants, the experience of well-being and satisfaction at school is associated with the quality of interpersonal relationships. Thus, it is noted that the experience of satisfaction is related to having opportunities to meet and share with peers, and to have experiences of support and loyalty with friends, without showing great differences in the socioeconomic statuses studied. Considering what the participants have expressed, it seems that the meaning attributed to these relationships is shared by adolescents from different social and school contexts.

This is consistent with results that show that friendship is a relevant indicator of satisfaction with the school, fulfilling a moderating function and having a protective effect on the mental health of adolescents (Cuadros and Berger 2016). Conversely, children who are subject to harassment and teasing by their classmates, or who are excluded from groups of friends, experience significantly less frequent positive emotions at school, and have a lower overall satisfaction with life (Martin and Huebner 2007). This is why it is a relevant dimension to be considered in order to promote well-being within the school.

It is also evident that teaching methods are associated with their experiences of satisfaction in school; however, differences of emphasis are noted amongst adolescents of different socioeconomic statuses. Adolescents of medium-high SES emphasize the importance of feeling like active participants in their learning processes; adolescents of medium SES emphasize that their satisfaction is associated with respecting different learning paces; whilst the adolescents of low SES emphasize the importance of having fun and entertaining classes, referring to them as the best strategies for enabling better learning.

In this regard, Ramírez-Casas del Valle and Alfaro-Inzunza (2018) point out that for adolescents the role that they themselves play in the teaching and learning process is very relevant for their experiences of well-being, noting that adolescents

in Chile reject the figure of the explanatory teacher who only uses the expository method, which positions them as passive students and mere receptacles of content; an important element to consider in making decisions regarding methodologies and pedagogical practices within the school.

There are also substantial differences amongst adolescents of the highest and lowest SES, specifically in the satisfaction experiences associated with interpersonal links with teachers, the working atmosphere in the classroom, and the physical space of the school. In regards to relationships with the teachers, even though for all participants satisfaction experiences are associated with the possibility of feeling supported and understood by the teachers, it is noted that adolescents of low SES also associate their satisfaction with experiences of not feeling mistreated by teachers. This difference is also evident for the working atmosphere in the classroom, in which only adolescents of low SES indicate that their satisfaction is associated with the absence of being told off and shouted at by the teacher, as well as with the decrease of noise and disorder in the classroom, the participants stating that these factors hinder their learning. These adolescents are also the ones who discussed the importance that having sports equipment and good hygienic and infrastructure conditions has for their school satisfaction. We consider that this is relevant to take into account in order to promote both the well-being of all adolescents and to avoid school dropout, which as the data points out (Research Center MINEDUC 2013), affects mainly children and adolescents of lower socioeconomic statuses, with one of the main causes of school dropout being poor relationship with their teachers, especially physical and psychological mistreatment by teachers (Espinoza-Díaz et al. 2014).

It should be noted that the results are not generalizable to other populations or sociocultural contexts, considering that what we have sought to do is to investigate a socio-cultural reality in a particular educational context, such as the case of the school in Chile. However, we believe that the results contribute to studies that appropriately address the theme, considering that the well-being experience is constituted within the framework of social practices in which they are inserted (Wyn et al. 2015); therefore, this way of approaching the phenomenon can provide schools with relevant information for making pertinent decisions related to strengthening their students' well-being.

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Chapter 12
Conceptualising Children's Subjective Well-Being: A Case Study of Bhambapur, Punjab, India

Ravinder Barn

12.1 Introduction

An understanding of subjective child well-being is increasingly deemed to be an important area for social research. By drawing upon a qualitative study, carried out in a small village in Punjab, north India, this chapter gives recognition to the voice of children, from the Global South, to formulate a conceptualisation of their perceived well-being. In discussing the findings from this participatory research involving narratives of a total of 50 children, aged 11–14, three key questions are explored: How do children experience and construct a sense of well-being? How can we understand child well-being through children's lived experiences? How might children's narratives of well-being be useful in effecting policy, practice and provision? Four main themes are discussed, namely conceptions of good childhood/child well-being, social and personal relationships, adversity and hardship, and vulnerability and agency. In its consideration of child perspectives on child well-being, and the policy implications of key findings, this chapter makes an important contribution to help advance the rights of children at the margin of society.

Although the well-being of children is considered to be of the utmost importance in contemporary times, we still lack good evidence into what children themselves regard as key facets of this, from their own life experiences. The notion of child well-being is closely related to child rights (UNICEF 1989). Arguably, the emergence of civil rights and feminist movements in the twentieth century led to a consideration of the rights of children in modern times. Although child liberation theorists for example John Holt (1974) *'Escape from childhood'*; Richard Farson (1974) *Birthrights;* and Howard Cohen (1980) *Equal Rights for Children,* were prominent in communicating their ideas; it was not until 1989 that we witnessed the introduction

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of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF 1989). This convention was built on the principles of welfare and social justice for children, and stresses the so-called three Ps—Provision, Protection and Participation. India adopted the convention in 1992. Crucially, the adoption of the convention in itself is insufficient in promoting the rights of children. The introduction and implementation of domestic legislation that can help ensure the well-being of children is a necessity. How the subjects of these rights understand their own lived reality in the context of child rights and child well-being remains an important area of concern. One of the key criticisms of the UNCRC 1989 is that it has given birth to a global children's rights industry that is 'tecnocratic' and positivistic; and obsessed with implementation and measurement rather than a reflection on the legitimacy and relevance of children's rights as the new norm in dealing with children (Fernando 2001; Pupavac 2001). Also, it is argued that there is a decontextualisation. In other words, insufficient account is taken of living conditions, the social, economic and historical contexts in which children grow up (Reynaert et al. 2009; Velez 2016).

Since the 1980s, there has been considerable change in the way children are studied within the discipline of sociology, and other social sciences. The notion of child agency and child competence are being given greater recognition in contemporary times (Mason and Danby 2011). So, in the discipline of Sociology for example, where the family as a unit was largely studied within a framework of socialisation; we are now witnessing a greater focus on women and children as social actors and bearers of rights.

Today, children are conceived as occupants of the conceptual space of childhood, which is in itself widely regarded as a social construction (James and James 2001). Thus, whilst childhood is considered to be common to all children, it is also recognised as fragmented by the diversity and intersectionality of children's everyday lives (Purkayastha 2010; Liebel 2017). The temporal and contextual nature of lived reality is regarded as crucial in understanding individual views and experiences.

Increasingly, there is an upsurge of research within sociology that incorporates child perspectives in a range of areas including risk and safety, gender identity, and men's violence against women (James and Prout 1990; Harden et al. 2000; Van der Burgt 2015; Lombard 2013, 2016). Moreover, a myriad of empirical and theoretical studies, amongst others, in health, education, social work, anthropology, and geography have helped enhance our understanding of children's lives. The notion of childhood as a structural category, and an axis of difference alongside that of childhood as a social construction, has helped identify key questions around child agency, universality of childhood, and the locality and diversity of childhood (James et al. 1998; Holloway and Valentine 2000). Such areas of focus frame and inform theoretical and empirical understandings, and serve to influence policy, practice and provision in relation to children's lives.

Significantly, the study of subjective well-being is a recent development in social research (Fattore et al. 2009). Indeed, and in the framework of one of the UNCRC 1989 'P's, and Article 12 (Right to be heard), scholars have consistently argued for the participation and inclusion of children in the process of research and policy-

making to help understand their perspectives to effect child-friendly approaches (Ben-Arieh et al. 2001; Lansdown 2001). In an effort to help focus on children's subjectivities, a key criticism that has been drawn is that developmental paradigms in psychological research have tended to privilege an indicators framework from an adult-centric perspective to the detriment of a consideration of children's views and experiences and 'knowledges' (see James et al. 1998; Qvortrup 2005; Mason and Urquhart 2001). In a climate of epistemic violence where there is a dearth of research into children's perspectives, particularly from the Global South, it is imperative that this shortcoming is addressed (Invernizzi et al. 2017).

This chapter now proceeds to document the aims and methods employed in our study, and the ways in which children's perspectives were held to be of central importance in this empirical study from the Global South. I specify the research questions to be addressed in this chapter together with the mixed-methods framework adopted in this study. An understanding of the research site is also provided to help the reader contextualise the study findings. Children's understandings of child well-being are presented and discussed within the extant literature. Policy implications are also drawn to suggest areas of concern.

12.2 Study Aims and Methods

This chapter explores children's own views and experiences and understandings of child well-being. **The key research question** addressed in this paper is:

- How do children experience and construct a sense of well-being?

Sub-questions include:

- How can we understand child well-being through children's lived experiences?
- How might children's narratives of well-being be useful in effecting policy, practice and provision?

The study draws on empirical data collected in Bhambapur, a fictional name of a village in Punjab, in north India. A mixed-methods approach involving a mapping exercise (that included an exploration of children's views on important places, people and things/objects/hobbies), a 7-day diary (about home, leisure and school activities), focus group discussions, and 1-1 interviews was used to elicit children's accounts of their everyday life (Fattore et al. 2016a). A total of 50 (23 boys and 27 girls) children participated in the written exercises, and in small group discussions. The 7-day diary was completed by 48 children, and in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with 21 children (10 boys and 11 girls). Children between the ages of 11–14 were selected to participate in this study for reasons of comparison with studies being undertaken in 24 other countries on the theme of subjective child well-being. Informed consent forms were sent to the parents of children to help recruit volunteer participants for the study. An informed consent form was also administered to the children whose parents had granted

permission to help ensure they were taking part in the study of their own volition. Care was taken to ensure the children were aware of their rights regarding participation in the study. The school demonstrated exceptional hospitality in making a large room available to the researcher for the duration of the fieldwork. The mapping exercise, focus group discussions and 1-1 interviews were all conducted in this room. The researcher was also provided with tea/coffee and meals by the school. This provided a safe space for interaction with the pupils, the teachers, and ancillary staff including the chief cook and the cleaners. The study included an ethnographic element of participant observations, and interactions with teachers, cooks, and cleaning staff. Permission to undertake the study was obtained from the author's university ethics committee, and the stuy adhered to the British Sociological Association ethics code of practice (BSA 2017).

Stage one: This stage involved the completion of the written mapping exercise, and focus group discussions as participatory methods designed to elicit children's subjective experiences. Whilst the mapping exercise worked as a useful engagement tool to build initial rapport, and obtain children's responses to a systematic set of questions about key aspects of social relations and social spaces in children's own context, the focus group method proved to be useful in helping children to identify key themes relevant to their context, and to think through the importance of these to their well-being. In particular, this method allowed for a good discussion of the commonalities and differences in their experiences (Darbyshire et al. 2005).

Stage two: This involved in-depth interviews with a selection of children, and the written exercise of a 7-day diary. In-depth interviews were particularly effective in generating a deep understanding of children's subjective experiences, and the meanings they attach to their social and relational context (Fattore et al. 2016b). The 7-day diary provided further context to children's everyday lives and the importance they attach to key aspects of their lives (Punch 2002; Thomson 2009).

12.3 Brief Description of Bhambapur

Bhambapur is a historic old village in the northern state of Punjab in India. The village witnessed an almost complete de-population following the partition of British India into India and Pakistan. Many of its Muslim inhabitants left for the then newly created Pakistan, whilst Sikh and Hindu refugees from Pakistan settled here after their displacement in 1947. The village is home to about 600 households and it has a population of about 3000 inhabitants. Bhambapur has undergone changes in its boundary as new houses, shops, and other amenities including a gymnasium, hospital, and places of worship have been built on what was formerly arable farmland. Philanthropic Non-Resident Indians (NRIs), from the British Indian diaspora, continue to make an important economic contribution to the development of their former village (Chanda and Ghosh 2012). Many of the families belong to the Jat Sikh caste, and the Hindu baniya group, respectively embedded in agriculturalist and commerce activities. Today, a sizeable number of the affluent families have

migrated to the nearby city, and new families have moved into the village. Bhambapur has a culturally mixed population and boasts two Gurdwaras, two temples and two churches. The village has had a twinned primary and secondary school for some decades which currently educates to pre-university level. Notably, the village has a lower than average literacy rate at 71%. It is also home to a sizeable scheduled caste grouping that comprises about a quarter of the population. Crucially, the vast majority of the children (86%) who attend the village school belong to what are described as lower castes in the Indian census—scheduled caste/backward caste. Affluent high-caste families, on the whole, send their children to private schools in the nearby city. I utilise the commonly employed word Dalit in this paper, to refer to these children and their families, (a politically activist and self-empowering term used by these communities themselves). It is important to note that Dalits have endured historical discrimination and oppression (including social segregation) and continue to do so at the hands of non-Dalits throughout India (Jodhka 2017).

Children from three surrounding villages attended this government school with its pupil population of almost 500 pupils, aged 11–18. The school employs 17 full-time teachers (both male and female). Under the current educational policy regarding child welfare and schooling, children up to class 8 (generally age 14) are entitled to a free school meal, free uniform, and the requisite school books.

12.3.1 Researcher Positionality

Crucially, it is important to understand my positionality as the researcher in this study, and consider the situated reality of the children and the power dynamics in the process of research. Through my introduction as an 'outsider', as a 'foreigner', to the school and the school children, it is likely that my status was regarded, by the child participants, as one of authority and on par with the teachers. The possibility that the children were selective in what they shared, and what they withheld has to be recognised. Given my own ethnic background as an Indian-born Punjabi, and my extensive experience of undertaking social research over the last 30 years, I was mindful of my position as a researcher, and as an 'insider'/'outsider'. To gain acceptance from the children and build a rapport and a situation of trust, my ability to speak the same language/dialect as them (*Punjabi*), and my own primary school experience in a *'similar village'* setting were key bonding factors. Giving children a platform to express their views to help an adult, 'insider'/'outsider', 'foreigner' understand Indian childhood in a contemporary village setting is a powerful activity. Children reported not only their excitement and their enjoyment in being involved in this study, but they also conveyed it as an experience which had enhanced their own learning and knowledge:

> I had a fabulous day today. A professor from London visited my school. And I had the opportunity to interact with her. I felt good, and I really learned a lot from the discussions with her. She talked with us with such warmth and love. I think she was also very happy (Kuldeep, 13-year-old girl).

12.4 Sample

A total of 50 children aged 11–14 contributed to the data collection.

- There were slightly more girls (27) than boys (23) in the study group. The vast majority of the children were Sikhs (32), followed by Hindus (15), and a few Christians (3).
- The vast majority of the children reported that their parents had little or no formal education (up to class 6 or 7).
- Poverty was a strong feature of the group (low paid/casual jobs held mostly by fathers).
- Punjabi was the dominant language spoken by the children.
- Children's home geographies included the village in which the school was located, and three neighbouring villages.
- The most common family form was an extended family. In a few cases, the father had died due to alcoholism, or a work accident, and the children lived alone with their mother, or with their mother and grandmother.

12.5 Data Analysis

The study used and adapted different components of the CUWB project fieldwork schedule (Fattore et al. 2016a). The *'About You'* Questionnaire provided the demographic context for the study. The '*Mapping Exercise'* and the *Focus Group Discussion (FGD), and the 1-1 interviews* were subjected to a thematic analysis. This included three stages. Firstly, I applied the preliminary coding frame to each mapping exercise, and FGD. Secondly, a case study approach was employed for each 'About You' and mapping exercise data for each participant. And finally, I developed an integrated analysis which drew together themes from across the range of participants. All interviews (1-1), and focus groups were transcribed in full. This helped the analysis of this qualitative narrative accounts to generate codes and categories using the thematic analysis approach (Braun and Clarke 2006).

12.6 Findings

In this study, and following the written mapping exercise about 'important people, places, and things', I began by asking the children, in focus group discussions, to tell me about their understandings of a good childhood and what is most important to them in relation to life and well-being. Below, I discuss children's understandings of a good childhood/child well-being (see Fig 12.1), social and personal relationships, adversity and hardship, and vulnerability and agency.

Fig. 12.1 Children's understanding of a good childhood, and child well-being

12.6.1 Good childhood/child well-being

Using the study children's own words, the wordle below shows, at a glance, their own understanding of a good childhood, and child wellbeing, and what is considered to be important to them in their lives. This information was obtained through focus group discussions.

The wordle depicts the following themes:

1. Physiological needs (food/diet, clothing),
2. Emotional/social needs (love, affection, company/friends),
3. Importance of family and relationships (parents, company/friends, relatives)
4. Social values (respect, cleanliness, clean air),
5. Education (study, qualifications, teachers)
6. Masti (fun)/leisure/play

One can seek to make sense of these narratives through the prism of Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow 1943; Tanner 2005). Crucially, for the children in our sample, where poverty was a strong feature, we can see that basic physiological needs such as food and water are given a pronounced significance. For some of the children in our sample, such economic adversity was an everyday experience. I discuss this below. Using the Maslownian framework, we can see the importance

of opportunities, needs, and subjective-well-being. In another paper elsewhere, we discuss how the sense of love, affection and belonging is given precedence over other needs such as self-esteem and self-actualisation which may be considered ‘individualistic’ (Barn and Chandra forthcoming). This is particularly the case when children discuss their ‘future self’, and the extent to which filial piety of the collectivist culture, and fulfilling parental dreams is paramount (Barn 2018). How the collective and the individual are intertwined is an important area of understanding.

12.6.2 Social and Personal Relationships

Our interviews with the children reveal a sense of the importance of key facets—belonging, love, affection, attachment, nostalgia, and temporality. These facets were invariably experienced through social and personal relationships. The most prominent family members were those close to the child. In many cases, the parents (especially the mother) were deemed to be the most important people in the child’s life. In other cases, siblings, grandparents, aunts/uncles were held in high regard and as core to the child’s sense of their well-being. Children expressed feelings of happiness in the company of their family. They also talked about the importance of positive social and personal relationships in helping them to feel safe and secure. Loving and being loved were also identified as an important facet of belonging and well-being. Equally, having time for fun and frolics was considered crucial in growing up. The social and personal relationships that were generally linked to this pastime, invariably called ‘masti’ (Punjabi / Hindi word for fun) were siblings, friends, and grandparents. The narratives below help capture the meaning of personal and social relationships in the lives of children, particularly around sociality, affect, and materiality. We can sense the importance of affect through the act of story-telling as 12 year old Preet expresses her appreciation of her paternal grandfather. It is evident that through being and the act of doing, social and personal relationships are expressed, by the study children, to promote belonging, love, and affection. The significance of materiality, in the form of pocket money, sweets and chocolates, and basic household provision, also serves as an important indicator of sociality, love and care.

> My dadaji (paternal grandfather) is very important for me for story-telling, for pocket money, and for sweets and chocolates (Preet, 12-year-old girl).

> My mum and dad are very important for me. They love me very much, and they understand my happiness and grief (Diljeet, 13-year-old boy).

> My mother is very important for me. My life would be in darkness without her (Sukhbir, 12-year-old boy).

> I love my mother because she looks after me; my father because he gives us money to run the household; my dadaji (paternal grandfather) for roaming around and playing; and my siblings and friends for masti (fun/unstructured peer leisure) (Jovan, 13-year-old boy).

The influence of parents and teachers as moral guardians was also a common theme. In a climate where children heard daily stories of problematic drug use, the role of parents and teachers as key individuals who helped steer them away from harm was regarded as crucial.

> In my life, teachers are very important to me because they teach us; they are like my parents because they help to put us on the right path (Randeep, 13-year-old girl).

> Parents and teachers are both important because they protect us from drugs (Jaspreet, 14-year-old boy).

In summary, children defined a 'Good life' as one where they lived with their family, were in receipt of good guidance and a sense of the 'right path' (morality), had adequate food, shelter, and clothing, and where there was respect for elders, and plenty of time for play/leisure.

12.6.3 Adversity and Hardship

In their narratives of child well-being, these children who were invariably from Dalit and poor backgrounds raised concerns about adversity and hardship. In doing this, they were emphasising a good life that could be possible if these difficulties were not present. Many children stressed the importance of basic physiological needs of food, clothing and shelter. Indeed, lack of food and poverty in the home setting were real concerns for these children. Our findings contest the supposed universality of the western model of childhood and children's experiences; and suggest that an intersectional understanding that seeks to integrate social identity with systemic discrimination and oppression, is crucial (Etherington and Baker 2018). Children from a Dalit background experienced the disadvantage of their lower caste through parental under-employment/low income, ill-health, poor housing and sometimes lack of food (Jodhka 2017). The account below from 12-year-old Preet whose family belong to the Dalit grouping explains her extended family set-up, and her main concerns:

> I live in an extended family house—with my parents, brothers/sisters, my aunt/uncle, and my parental grandparents. There are six of us who share one room (mother, father, brothers and sisters). It's very difficult. Sometimes there is little food in the house. Yesterday, we couldn't make any tea (Indian tea) because there was no sugar in the house. Our room is made of wood and yesterday there was an earthquake, and we were really worried. Sometimes, there are no onions, garlic in the house. We sometimes borrow from my aunt to cook vegetables (Preet, 12-year-old girl).

In the interview accounts of their family life, many children stressed the spatial aspects of their home and surroundings. It was not uncommon for children to be sharing a bedroom with the entire family, as shown in the quote above—that is with parents and siblings. At times, this also included a grandparent. Interestingly, it was not the sharing of this space that was highlighted as a major concern but other key issues of low income, lack of food, and the poor quality of the housing, and its

associated risks for the safety of the family. Children talked about their family's lack of money to build a better house. Living in cramped, poor quality housing also generated conflict between extended family members as the account below suggests:

> I am sad when there is a problem in our house. Sometimes, there is no money. We can't afford to build a better house. My grandmother and my aunt fight with my mother (Anisha, 13-year-old girl).

Another important dimension of adversity and hardship that had a direct bearing on children's well-being was ill-health in the family. Access to good healthcare, as well as the relationship between ill-health and employment was also identified by children as a serious concern:

> My 10-year-old brother has a stunted growth problem that is thyroid related. I heard my mum talking to my grandmother that my father has an excess growth on his foot. I didn't know why he walked with a limp until I overheard this conversation. We can't afford an operation. Also, my father would have to be off work for about 4–6 months; and he is the only breadwinner and he can't afford to be off work as we will not have any income during this period of time (Manpreet, 13-year-old girl).

Ill-health of one or both parents was a common theme among lower-economic background children. Such concerns were almost invariably related to parents' growing inability to work and earn a living. Such harsh circumstances were also reportedly linked to drink/drug misuse, and domestic violence.

The home is generally considered to be a place of safety, security and comfort. Crucially, as we learn more about family violence, there is also an increasing interest in developing an understanding about child perspectives about the home as a place of violence (Mullender et al. 2002; Etherington and Baker 2018).

> There is strife in my home. My father takes drugs, sometimes there is no food in the house, but he makes sure to get his drugs; and he beats my mother, sometimes in the middle of the night. I usually call on my Dadi (paternal grandmother) to come and stop it, but he sometimes hits me and prevents me from calling my Dadi. He threatens to take me out of school if I intervene" (Anisha, 13-year-old girl).

The much-known problem of drug misuse in the state of Punjab was a recurring theme among the children in our study (Sharma et al. 2017). Children's everyday experiences and narratives about this helped to understand how they themselves were impacted by this. An extract below from one of the focus groups with 13–14-year olds illustrates this:

> Girl1: Some children's parents who are drug users don't give any money to the family. And some of these children might eat food from the dust bin, and become ill.
>
> Boy1: Adults should not drive a car if they have consumed alcohol.
>
> Girl1: In our village, a woman's son drank and did drugs (injections) and he died today. He was 25 years old.
>
> Boy2: One boy from our village (class 3) uses Bhola Manakka (a drug derivative, tablet), and smokes cigarettes.
>
> Author/Interviewer: Where do you think he learnt to do this?

Boy2: His father is a user. I think his father sends him to collect the tablets for him from the shop; and I think what probably happened is that one day he decided to try it for himself. So—he is now addicted.

Children also talked about how their brother or cousin had almost been entrapped in such drug misuse; stories of drug addicts turning to theft were again not uncommon. Children's narratives of adversity and hardship reveal the impact of structural inequalities on personal and social relationships. Invariably, the accounts conveyed by children were located in poverty, poor housing, and low-paid casual jobs. The tensions and difficulties caused by such adversity were felt at a personal and social level by the children. There was little in the way of formal support for children, and families. The negative consequences for children's well-being were palpable. Our study confirms previous research which showed that children in India were able to 'provide detailed and wide-ranging indicators of wellbeing and ill-being, which were embedded in local environments' (Crivello et al. 2009, p. 62). Next, we focus on children's sense of agency and autonomy in the face of adversity.

12.6.4 Vulnerability and Agency

A strong theme that emerged to help understand children's sense of child well-being was located in their vulnerability, social identity, agency and ideas and aspirations for social inclusion through future job aspirations. There were numerous and varied examples to evidence this including in children's accounts of their caring responsibilities, their efforts to boost their household income through paid work, and through their future aspirations to support their family, community and country.

It was not uncommon for children, but particularly Dalit children, to report an array of caring responsibilities from a young age. Children reported a range of skills within the household domain from cooking, cleaning, looking after younger siblings, and also as peace-makers. The latter point is mentioned above in Anisha's narrative of familial conflict and her efforts to secure the engagement of her grandmother to help diffuse these situations. Notably, children (both boys and girls) described their household skills with pride, and considered such responsibilities as agentic and crucial to their well-being; they perceived these as fundamental skills for life. Generally speaking, many children reported assuming household duties as the norm; whilst others shared that they helped out when their mother was ill:

My mother was unwell, and the house was really untidy—so I helped to clean it (12-year-old boy)

Once my mother became ill, so I had to do my school work and do all the housework until she was better. My mother was really happy (11-year-old girl).

When my mother and father have not returned from work, I do the household work (12-year-old girl).

I generally help my mother, but when my mother is unwell, I do all the cooking and cleaning (12-year-old girl).

> I can make tea, sevian (sweet vermicelli with milk), but I can't make roti (Indian bread) yet (12-year-old boy).

As mentioned above, undertaking household duties was not perceived by the children as a burden but as a process of the acquisition of key skills. Similarly, paid work was also described as affording agency and skill that enabled children to help their families. In a question that focused on 'What do your parents do'?, one young woman explained that her parents were day labourers. She then went on to say that with the impending 4-day holiday weekend, she was also going to be joining them:

> This holiday weekend, I'm also going to join my mother and father to work in the potato field. I'll get 200 Rupees (£2.20) per day, and I'll give the money I earn to my family (Anisha, 13-year-old girl).

In the future, Anisha's ambition was to be a police officer. Arguably, the familial conflict, and the controlling behavior of her father, described in her narratives above could be understood as the impetus for her vulnerability but also agency and resilience. She explained that due to her social identity as a girl, she did not feel she could be rude to her father or exert control over him as she feared what the community would say about their family. She explained that through her ambition of being a police woman, she hoped to help people in difficult circumstances.

Interestingly, many children's career ambitions demonstrated a sense of their perceived future self, and their desire for a particular social identity and quest to help others. Social problems in their community were a source of inspiration for some to be tomorrow's teachers, and police officers. There was a gendered dimension to some job aspirations, for example, it was not uncommon for some boys to talk about joining the army whilst some girls wanted to join the teaching profession.

12.7 Discussion and Conclusion

The above findings have focused on four themes considered to be important to children—namely their understanding of good childhood / child well-being, social and personal relationships, adversity and hardship, and vulnerability and agency. Through the narratives of their lived reality, it is possible to understand children's conceptions of what is deemed to be of value to them, and how they live their lives. More importantly, we can also have a glimpse of children's projected vision of their future through their sense of vulnerability and agency.

Almost three-quarters of the child population, in India, is located within rural settings—the focus of this chapter. As mentioned above, at 39% of the total national population, India boasts the second largest child population in the world (Childline in India 2018). Poverty, malnutrition and its impact on children's physical and psychological development remain important concerns (Bajpai 2018). In 2012, A Law Commission report ranked India in 112th position in the child development index (Law Commission of India 2012).

The intersectionality of caste, class, gender, and age is also of key significance in understanding the well-being of children. In this chapter, I have highlighted

adversity and hardship experienced by our rural sample where social divisions intersect with systemic power structures to reproduce social and economic inequalities. The poor background of some of the Dalit children in our sample demonstrates everyday hardships about the challenges of housing, employment, nourishment, income, health, and family functionality. Needless to say, children growing up in such circumstances are likely to experience physical and psychological development challenges mentioned above. Bajpai (2018) notes that in the period between 2008 and 2013, 43% of India's children were underweight, and 48% had stunted growth. In addition to the more obvious physical effects in the development of children, there are of course negative emotional and psychological harms as a consequence of the violence of poverty and hardship. Although the children in our study presented themselves as ambitious with key future aspirations, it is questionable how many will be able to face the challenges of adversity as time goes on. Indeed, how many will be able to enter their preferred occupations such as teaching, and the police service remains to be seen. The former requires graduate level qualifications; whilst the latter has strict fitness tests including height requirements. Only a longitudinal study can reveal how in 10–15 years' time, these children may adapt to their situation over time, and their likely social and economic outcomes.

What is interesting about the accounts of these children is their conception of their vulnerability, but also a glimpse of their agency and determination through their belief in a better life. As evident in other studies, the importance of social and personal relationships is of the utmost importance to children (Fattore et al. 2016b). For the children in this study, this was also the case. A sense of relationality within their family, friends and community networks provided children with belonging, and social connections. Such links served to help promote their sense of well-being, and served to affirm their place in their family and community setting. For many of these children, growing up in adverse circumstances, their sense of resilience in their everyday lives was remarkable. Thus, although the adverse circumstances serve to amplify the vulnerability of these children, in many cases, their reportedly strong personal and social relationships, arguably, cushion them to be resilient, agentic and autonomous.

The openness with which these children shared a sense of their lives demonstrates that eliciting child perspectives in school settings can be a useful exercise to help shape policy, practice and provision to promote child well-being. Such insights can be potentially useful in the design and delivery of intervention programmes in school settings (Chhabra et al. 2017).

Indeed, in terms of policy formulation and implementation, it is important for children's perspectives to be given full consideration in decisions that impact them in educational and domestic spaces. There are crucial lessons here for the active participation of children to help effect positive change.

Study findings shed important light on children's understandings of relationality and attachment; social identity; risk, safety and security. The findings should be of interest to policy makers, child welfare practitioners, educationalists, and research scholars; and may well inform key policy and practice in a range of areas including home/school liaison, education curriculum, and school policies on discipline and punishment.

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Chapter 13
Nepalese Children's Understanding of Well-Being from the Perspective of Safety

Arbinda Lal Bhomi

13.1 Introduction: The Global Context

Child well-being experts have suggested several indicators to measure the well-being of children. Lippman, Moore, and Mcintosh (2009) presented those indicators in four domains. These include: (1) physical health, development and safety; (2) cognitive development and education; (3) Psychological and emotional development; and (4) social development and behavior. The Multi-National Project for Monitoring and Measuring Children's Well-Being identified nearly 50 indicators, which were categorized in 13 sub-domains. These sub-domains are further grouped into five domains: (1) safety and physical status; (2) personal life; (3) Civic life; (4) children's economic resources and contributions; and (5) children's activities (Lippman et al. 2009). In both studies, safety is considered as the most important domain.

A safe environment at home and at school is essential for students of all ages for effective learning. School safety is important to protect students and school personnel from violence such as bullying, assaults victimization, theft, classroom disorder, fights, robbery, use of weapons, sexual attacks and other violent crime. Cowan et al. (2013) suggested that in order to create safe, orderly, warm, and inviting school environments, schools must work towards integrating academic, behavioral, social, emotional, and mental health services. Violence whether it is at home or at school affects students learning and development. Though a child may not be the actual victim of violence at home or at school, he or she will witness violent acts which create disturbances in his/her learning. Research continues to illustrate that children who feel unsafe at school perform worse academically and are more at risk for exhibiting delinquent behaviours and having substance use problems (Savage et al. 2017). In a Case Study of School Security Efforts and Their Impact on Education Reform conducted by Garver and Noguera (2012), students were asked what actions

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were taken by their school to make them feel safe in the past 12 months, in the context of exploring the consequences of expanding security procedures in response to an incident involving interracial conflict at a high school in the United States. They found that almost a quarter of students believed that the introduction of security officers and 15% of students cited the introduction of security cameras were measures that made them feel safe. Whilst almost 35% responded that nothing the school did made them feel safe, these were the two interventions deemed most effective from the students' perspective. This study reveals that increasing security officials and security cameras might be able to contribute to students' perception of safety.

Concerns for child safety are an important issue in the public sphere, with various stakeholders advocating for a range of measures to support child safety. School safety initiatives have been developed by various state instrumentalities in India and Pakistan, which provide an important model for policy interventions in Nepal. In India, foremost amongst these initiatives are the 'Manual on Safety and Security of Children in Schools', developed by The Indian National Commission for Protection of Child Rights developed. This manual provides a comprehensive Child Safety Checklist for Schools (National Commission for Protection of Child Rights 2017), which takes into consideration different dimensions of child safety and provides indicators under five important sections. These are: (1) Physical Safety; (2) Emotional and Personal Safety; (3) Social Safety; (4) Emergency Preparedness; and (5) Cyber Safety. Similarly, the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) suggest a holistic approach to ensure children's safety in schools, which include five factors to ensure student safety and school security. Those five factors are physical safety, psychosocial safety, school transport and safety, background verification of staff and visitor management system (for example see CBSE 2018). The CBSE is strict in maintaining student safety and well-being in schools. In September 2017, it issued a circular stating that any violation or lapses with regard to student safety and well-being of children in school campuses may result in disaffiliation of the school (CBSE 2017).

In Islamabad, Pakistan, different safety and security measures cover both public and private school at secondary level. These guidelines extend beyond areas normally associated with 'student safety' to encompass areas associated with occupational health and safety measures, thus recognising that student safety includes creating a physical and workplace environment that is conducive to student learning. These include regulations regarding flooring and lighting; the amount of furniture according to the number of users, stable portable equipment i.e. TV and computers, good practice of computers among students; fire-fighting equipment, fire evacuation procedures; testing of water samples, remedial actions against exceeding limits for bacteria, cold water used for preparing foods; emission inspection stickers; natural disasters, fires, chemical or hazardous material spills, transportation accidents, incidents of violence, bomb threats and acts of terror (Ali and Fatima 2016).

Non-government actors have also recommended strategies for improving child safety. An example of this is the statement made by the National Association of School Psychologists (2012) which includes six specific statements on school safety. These include that, safety and learning go hand-in-hand; that genuine security

encompasses both physical and psychological safety; that student access to mental health supports is essential to ensuring school safety; that, school-employed mental health professionals are critical to school safety and student learning; that, effective school safety addresses prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery; and that schools, families, and communities must partner together to create safe, supportive schools.

The corporate sector has also taken an interest in promoting student safety, recognising the human capital that can be promoted via investing in education. For example, a Report on Child Safety and Security in K-12 Schools, published by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI-ARISE 2018). This report sought to build a common platform of safety standards across four areas. First, it established safety measures which set minimum standards of safety that all schools should have. Second, the report set out implementation approaches and methods for the safety measures. Third, safety measures were linked to objectives and expected outcomes associated with the best interests of the child. Fourth, the report outlined the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders, including the legal rights and responsibilities of core stakeholders—the student, the school (including teachers and support staff), and parents (FICCI ARISE 2018). The report also presented eight main indicators of safety (1) infrastructural safety, (2) health safety, (3) transport safety, (4) personal, social and emotional safety and sexual safety, (5) child protection mechanism, (6) response mechanisms, (7) emergency preparedness and disaster management and (8) cyber safety.

At a global governance level, the Child-Friendly Schools framework developed by UNICEF has three elements in child development that are essential for child-friendly school design—safety, health and nutrition. These three must be adequately addressed if the school is to become an inclusive, holistic learning landscape that provides a safe, enabling learning environment where children can thrive (UNICEF 2009).

The various positions of these diverse stakeholders differ on various specifics but converge around the seeing the critical links between safety and educational outcomes. The work provides an important framework for the Nepalese context.

13.2 The Nepalese Context

The practice of making schools a safe place is an expectation of all students and their parents. However, this expectation is jeopardized by two factors in Nepal. First, geological hazards including floods, landslides and earthquakes are unpredictable factors which significantly disrupt social life in general and make schools unsafe. Second, schools in Nepal are often unsafe because they are made unsafe by various acts of social groups and individuals. There were the reports of arson and vandalism in schools especially between 1996 and 2006, as part of the armed civil conflict between the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) and the Nepalese Government. During that time, schools in Nepal were the most unsafe place for students. In this

context, the study of safety and security of children in Nepal is linked with the declaration of the Government of Nepal on safety and security in schools. An excerpt from this declaration states:

> In May 2011 the Government of Nepal endorsed a directive declaring all schools, (including school buses) as Zones of Peace. This Schools as Zones of Peace (SZOP) directive was issued to ensure that schools remain a safe haven for children and where teaching and learning could continue unhindered in an atmosphere free of violence and interference (UNICEF 2012).

The violent events in schools go against the basic principles of children's right to education in a protective environment free from fear (UNESCO 2009). Nepal is a signatory nation to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and should therefore ensure that every child be provided their basic rights to grow, to learn and to play in peace. It is relevant to restate the views of National Association of School Psychologists (2012) that safety and learning go hand-in-hand. Their charter further states:

> Students who feel that they are not adequately supported and safe at school, both physically and psychologically, cannot learn to their fullest potential. It is the responsibility of the schools to ensure that the students: (1) come to school feeling safe, and welcomed, (2) have a trusting relationship with at least one adult in school, (3) understand academic and behavioural expectations clearly, and have access to mental health services.

The Government of Nepal adopted the Child Friendly School Framework in 2010 which helped to establish a child friendly learning environment in schools against a number of dimensions such as Teaching and Learning, Inclusion and Gender, School Health, Safety and Security, Children's Family and Community Participation, School Governance and Management, and Monitoring and Evaluation (MoE 2014). It shows that safety and security are considered an essential dimension of child friendly schools.

13.3 Rationale of the Study

Children's well-being has been measured at the national and international levels for several years. Self-report measures of children's well-being are considered as the gold standard (The Children's Society 2018). In the same way, the *Children's Worlds Survey: International Survey of Children's Well-Being* includes children's self-assessment of different dimensions of well-being such as children's home and family life, money and possessions, children's friends and other people, school, the local area, self, time use, children life and their future, children's rights, and overall subjective well-being (Rees and Main 2015). This Children's Worlds Survey Nepal National Report has also used the Children's Worlds questionnaire, including four items related to safety (Bhomi 2014). Both studies presented findings on the status of children's safety at home, in schools and on the way to and from school in quantitative terms. The findings of these two studies did not explain how and why

the results observed. For example, Bhomi (2014) found that most of the children surveyed as part of the Nepal study feel safe at home but feel dissatisfied about places to study at home; that most children like going to school but are dissatisfied with the outdoor spaces in their locality. The *Children's Understandings of Well-being: Global and Local Contexts* study, of which the author is the Principal Researcher for Nepal also emphasized safety as one of the important elements in assessing children's well-being (Bhomi and Shrestha 2015). Hence, the findings of Rees and Mains (2015), Bhomi (2014) and Bhomi and Shrestha (2015) prompted me to delve into this area in Nepal by using a qualitative approach.

13.4 Research Questions, Methods and Procedures

This study seeks answers to two main research questions:

- What are the understandings of the children aged 12–14 on their own well-being regarding safety at home, in school and on the way to and from school?
- What are the children's own assessments of how their lives are going in schools and how satisfied are children with their life at school in terms of physical safety, emotional safety, health safety and cyber safety?

  The methodological elements of the study, including the method of selecting samples, developing data collection tools, data collection and analysis procedures, are presented below.

13.4.1 Sampling

Three schools were selected from the capital city. The first school is located in the central part of town. The second and third schools are located in that part of the town near the highway from the first district which is situated in the hill region of Nepal. The fourth school was selected from a mountain district which is far from the capital city. All schools are community/public (Government-aided) schools. Students aged 12–14 irrespective of the grades they were studying in were the key informants in this study. In each school, one girl and one boy were selected from children of local inhabitants and additionally an equal number of girls and boys were selected from the children of migrants. In this way, two girls and two boys from each sample school were included in this study making a total of eight girls and eight boys. In consultation with the head teacher/teacher of the sample school, students were selected who could provide ample information in relation to the research questions of the study, on behalf of the students with similar characteristics. In this respect the students could be considered key informants.

13.4.2 The Research Tool

Semi-structured interviews were undertaken using the CUWB interview protocol. The interview protocol was initially piloted in a school and feedback for improvement obtained. On the basis of this feedback, the protocol was amended for qualitative data collection.

13.4.3 Data Analysis and Interpretation Procedures

Content analysis was used to analyze the data in this study. The content was analyzed at two levels: (1) at the manifest level of analysis which focuses on the descriptions of what the children said and (2) at the latent or interpretative level of analysis through which the meaning of what was said by the children is extracted (Hancock 1998).

13.5 Results

In this study, two categories of sample children were found in the three public/community (Government-aided) schools situated in the hill region of the country. One category includes native children who are living in their own houses while the second category includes those children who migrated from different parts of the country and are living in rented rooms. In both groups, equal numbers of girls and boys were included. However, in the fourth public/community (Government-aided) school located in mountain region of the country, all children are living in the same area: two from near the school and two from up to 1-h walking distance from the school. All children in this school are living in their own houses.

In relation to safety at home, at school and on the way to and from school, the analysis and interpretation of responses of children are presented below.

13.5.1 Safety at Home

School One: All children said they felt safe. The female child at the first school, who is a local resident, said that she was safe as she was living in her own house with family members. The female child at the same school living in rented rooms said that she, along with her family, was safe and stated that she was living on the ground floor where rain water could enter and caused dampness. The toilet was also not appropriate in terms of safety. On the other hand, a boy living in rented rooms in the

first school described that they are safe regardless of whether the house is new or old. The next boy said that he is fully safe in his own house.

School Two: One of the children living in her own home expressed that she was fully safe at home because she was the youngest daughter in the family, she was fully cared for by her parents and seniors who provide food, security and information about she should or shouldn't do to remain safe. The other girl living in rented rooms said that she was safe because of parental care but she had to work at home as she is the eldest daughter in the family. They both also referred to the use of nick names or different names for fun and that there is no quarrel at home, factors which make them safe at home. Similar responses were given by the boys who also said, they are safe at home because of parental care and love. They also stated however that they are safe as there is peace in the locality where their houses are located—there is no problem with wrongdoers, there is no fights/quarrels and no noises in their locality.

School Three: Both girls at the third school stated that they were very safe at home. Their perception of safety is different however from the children in Schools One and Two. They said that they were safe from any misdeeds of wrongdoers and safe from external disturbances. Nobody can enter their houses without their notice. One of the children said that her house is quite strong and it has safe toilets and would be safe even during an earthquake. The most important reason for being safe at home as they stated, is that they are fully cared by their parents. They had good relationships with brothers and sisters and were not beaten by them. These children also stated that safety at home involves caring for their health whenever they are ill in addition to be cared for in a routine way, such as having routine meals and adequate clothing. These factors are evident in the following quote:

> School is over at 4:15 PM. My parents expect that we should be back within 15 minutes after school time, that is by 4:30 PM. My house is near school and I used to go on foot. Whenever I was late to reach home after school, my parents would be eagerly waiting for my arrival at home. If I did not reach home by 5 PM, my parents came to school to pick me up from school. (Source: An interview with sample children).

The quote implies that the child is quite safe at home. It also shows the admirable care provided by the parents towards their child's well-being.

However, these children also discussed how their parents chide them for doing wrong. They internalized this by saying that it was for their own safety and it did not affect their emotional safety. This implies that messages about permissible behaviour given by the parents are instrumental in bringing about positive changes in the children's well-being. Both boys stated that they are safe at home but not entirely safe as they are living in rented houses, and feel a little isolated because there are not enough houses nearby. The rooms they are living in are also on the ground floor and are affected by dampness which is not good for their health. In terms of parental care, they feel quite safe.

School Four: One girl stated she was not entirely safe although her house is quite near the school, the reason being is that she frequently needs to live without her parents. The native girl in this school stated that she was safe at home and had freedom to do things she likes. This was quite different for one of the boys who

stated that he is not safe at home as his parents could not reconstruct his house which had been destroyed by the earthquake. His parents were having financial problem and difficulties in maintaining an adequate livelihood for their family. The other boy however expressed his feeling of safety at home in this way: “I am fully safe at home. My house is my house. I can do everything that I like. I can have the things I need.”

Considering these responses, most of the children except those attending School Four expressed feeling safe at home whether they live in their own houses or rented rooms. However, there were two notable exceptions, one girl who occasionally had to live alone and a boy whose safety was compromised because of damage caused to his family’s home by an earthquake. This in the context of his family’s poverty compromised his feeling of safety. However, the extent of safety differed between native children and children living in rented rooms. On the basis of their responses, the native children—both boys and girls—are safer than the children who are living in rented rooms. In addition, living with parents who provide proper care is a major factor which the children raised which is associated with safety. Parental care and love on the one hand, and peace at home and in locality are essential for their safety. The safety of children at home has an emotional impact depending on the locality where the children’s house is located.

I will now outline some more specific findings from the study.

13.5.2 Feelings About Life Satisfaction at Home

The children stated that their life was going well in terms of the extent of safety at home. This notion of safety was embedded in daily routines. They reported their well-being as, to a great extent, ensured by spending a normal life: waking up in the morning, taking a light breakfast, studying, taking lunch (In Nepal, students of community schools have a meal before going to school), going to school, coming back from school, taking tiffin if necessary, playing, studying, taking dinner and going to sleep. While they are at home, they are spending their life comfortably with the support of their parents and senior family members. The exception was the boy whose house was damaged. His experience reveals that importance of having a permanent house (made of strong construction materials, not thatched houses) as being essential for safety.

13.5.3 Safety at School

13.5.3.1 Physical Safety

The importance of physical infrastructure and caring teachers were raised by children as important to their physical safety. Both girls at the first school said that school compound and classrooms are safe in terms of their physical facilities.

However, as the school is near a rivulet, almost every year flood waters enter the school compound and classrooms on the ground floor. Hence, during the rainy season, they are not sure about being safe. However, the school appointed two staff to stand guard at the main gate, which students expressed as contributing to them feeling safe as they are not allowed to go outside and unwanted people are not allowed to enter the school during school hours. However, they also raised that the lack of a school canteen meant that students needed to buy food in the local market, which may not be good for their health. Hence, it is hard to ensure students' health safety. The boys at the school had a similar assessment of physical safety as the girls, but they also raised that their classrooms are congested because of the number of students.

Girls and boys at the second school also emphasised the importance of physical infrastructure and expressed that they are safer at school than at home as the school is enclosed by a safe compound wall, has separate toilets for boys and girls, and clean drinking water.

Girls and boys at the third and fourth school emphasised the connection between relational aspects of well-being and physical infrastructure of the school, stating that school is as safe as home in that they are cared for by the teachers and that they receive simple treatment when they are injured. As in the first and second schools, the third school has a good school compound with five staff for safety of students. As both girls at this school informed, students are not allowed to go outside school during school hours and nor are unwanted people allowed to come inside the school without the permission of the school authority. However, students at the fourth school noted that their safety at school is slightly jeopardized by construction materials as a new building is under construction.

We can conclude on the basis of these of responses that physical safety has been ensured to a great extent in these public schools. The children seem to be satisfied with the physical infrastructure maintained by the school although there is much room for improvement. In addition, they are also satisfied with the care the teachers provide for their safety as well as learning.

13.5.3.2 Emotional Safety

Girls at School One mentioned that bullying is not a problem at their school. They are called by nicknames just for fun, which normally does not hurt their feelings. However, they noted that not having CCTV cameras in their school is a serious deficiency meaning that physical and psychological accidents cannot be minimized. Boys at the school also said that nicknames are used for entertainment and not to harass students, and they do not tease girls as well. Hence, there is no quarrel among students. It has ensured the emotional safety of children.

Girls at School Two say they are safe emotionally owing to the fact that teachers care for them regularly and they are safe from sexual harassment and bullying. This school has CCTV camera surveillance to support the safety of the students. Because of feeling emotionally safe, the girls expressed their willingness to attend school

every day. Both boys at School Two believed that CCTV surveillance has ensured the security of their personal belonging and reduced quarrels and fights among students. Bullying was also raised by the boys in Schools Three and Four, who said that although there is no CCTV cameras in their schools, emotional safety is maintained by minimizing bullying activities. Nicknames are only used for fun.

Again, these findings suggest that the children are safe emotionally. The reason behind this may be that in these schools all the teachers are required to have a teaching license and have teacher training in the form of academic qualifications such as a B.Ed. M.Ed. or short or term training. The requirement for teacher training, goes some way to teachers being well informed about teaching with dignity and avoiding the use of corporal punishment in teaching.

13.5.3.3 Cyber Safety

Concerns with mobile equity and cybercrime were topics when the children discussed mobile phones. Although mobiles are useful for instructional purposes, girls at School One are not allowed to bring mobiles to school. Both girls expressed that because of this policy there is no problem of cybercrime at their school. Furthermore, it avoids that children who cannot afford to have a mobile phone, avoid feeling inferior. Similar responses were given by the participants, both girls and boys, at Schools Two, Three and Four in regards to cyber safety.

These findings suggest that children at public schools have limited access to information and communication technology at home and at school. Children studying at public schools may be from a socio-economic status that they are unable to afford purchasing and running a mobile phone. Though they may lag behind in the use of information technology for instructional purposes, they are safe from its misuse and cybercrime.

13.5.3.4 Health Safety

The girls at School One and Two did not mention their health safety at school. However, the boys at these schools differed from the girls, stating that they had health check-ups including having their height and weight measured. They participated in Red Cross Training and Disaster Preparedness Training occasionally. Specifically, as stated by girls and boys at School Three they experienced health check-up programmes and took deworming tablets and iron tablets. School Four has taken further initiatives in regards to the health safety of children by providing services to students through a school health programme funded by the Government of Nepal (Ministry of Education and Ministry of Health and Population) and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA).

These findings suggest that the health safety of children in schools receives attention sporadically and is not at a satisfactory level. The main reason behind the inadequacy in health safety is that the schools no longer have a school health

programme. They are reliant on the provision of health services made available through government and non-government organizations.

13.5.3.5 Feelings About the Life Satisfaction of the Children at School

The girls at all the schools stated that their life is going well in terms of the extent of safety at school and they are satisfied with school life in general, specifically because they experience emotional safety to a great extent. The girls at Schools One and Three mentioned that the almost non-existence of corporal punishment is one of the main reasons they feel safe at school. Similarly, the girls at School Two and Four also did not mention corporal punishment. Furthermore, all the girls expressed the view that their life would be boring if they did not come to school. The boys at all the schools provide similar responses to the girls in relation to their feeling of life satisfaction at schools in terms of safety. The boys at School Two expressed a similar view expressed in regards to the importance of school for making their life more enjoyable: "If we need to stay at home, we will be bored. At school, we enjoy and learn a lot of things." Similarly, the boys at Schools Three and Four said that their life was going fine and they are satisfied with the safety measures made in school. According to these children's responses, two conclusions can be drawn: That, school life has been good for the children in regards to learning and safety and second, improvements could be made in these schools to raise the life satisfaction of boys.

13.5.4 Safety While Going to and Coming from School

For children who attend public/community schools, children have to organise their own means of transportation to and from school, as public/community schools do not run school buses.

In this study, two groups of children were purposively selected from the first sample district to elicit their experiences of safety while going to and coming from school. The first category includes those students who need to cross a highway to get to school and the second category are those students who do not. From School Four, which is located in the rural area of the second district, students were purposively selected in such a way so that two children live nearby the school and two need to travel almost 1 h to get to school.

The girls and boys who do not need to cross the highway are native residents. They reported that they feel safe while going to and coming from school. However, they felt unease while coming to and going from school because of narrow and congested roads with a lot of traffic. Two boys at School One said that they obtained minor injuries when they were hit by a scooter. They further discussed the problem of hygienic safety on the streets, because waste materials deposited on the roads are not cleared in time. Its smell can make them ill.

The girls of the Schools One, Two and Three in the first district who need to cross the highway expressed that they were not safe while coming to and going from school. Because of the lack of traffic lights, pedestrian bridges and adequate traffic police services, they felt that it was very difficult to cross the highway. Although the distance between school and the residence of the girls from School Three to school is quite close (it takes then just 5–10 min to reach school), their parents frequently escort them to school because of this problem.

Two girls at School Two travel by bus to school. Both girls share similar experiences as to feeling unsafe going to and coming from school because of the threats they experience on public transport. They state:

> While walking on the road from home to the bus stand, we feel a problem of safety. We feel a mild sexual harassment such as boys who follow us to our houses and ask for our telephone number. While getting on the bus, sometimes, we are embarrassed in that the conductor does not allow us to get on the bus. Sometimes, the driver and the conductor say unpleasant words which are difficult to hear. Inside the bus, sexual harassment increases. Some male passengers touch our hands. In Nepal, there are traffic jams in capital city or whole country caused by political activists who protest against the government. Because of that we face much difficulty. In those situations, we need to go on foot to school or stay at home. In the capital city, traffic jams are a common phenomenon and we feel we are fully unsafe to travel on crowded buses.

The two girls who travel by local buses to attending school suggests that they expect nobody to tease or harass them on the way to and from school. If there was a school bus, this would mean these girls would not have to experience these kinds of experiences and face such insecurity. They wish that their family had a vehicle to drop them to and from school.

The experience of the boys from School Four located in the second district is also worth mentioning. It takes them up to 1 h to reach school from their house. To get to school they need to pass through a jungle/forest and they say this is not safe for several reasons. During spring, strong wind causes them to be unsafe. In the rainy season, the trails through the forest are wet and slippery. There is the possibility of falling down. Furthermore, they said that they have encountered snakes several times while coming to and going from school.

These responses indicate that children understand the meaning of safety and encounter difficulties and challenges on the way to and from school. For girls this includes sexual harassment on public transport and walking in public, and for children who live far from school, hazards posed by having to travel through extreme natural environments. They realized that they are not safe on the way to and from school and felt the need for safety. This is the ontological perspective of Nepalese children on safety.

13.5.4.1 Feeling About the Life Satisfaction of Children While Going to and Coming from School

Perhaps unsurprisingly, and in contrast to the other areas, all the children expressed low life satisfaction while going to and coming from school. They criticized the condition of roads and public buses in terms of safety for school children. It means that roads and buses are not child-friendly. Despite the unsafe journey to and from school, one of the boys in School Two, interestingly, said that he enjoyed the journey to and from school. He said that he got the opportunity to experience the sufferings of life and learnt lessons from these sufferings while coming to and going from school.

13.6 Discussion

These findings have revealed the significance of safety for children and demonstrated areas where children discussed where their safety was compromised and consequently children's well-being and their learning were also jeopardized. It is relevant to reiterate the views of the National Association of School Psychologists (2012), that safety and learning go hand-in-hand. As the children understood in the present study, in order to ensure the safety of children, there should be no fights, quarrels or loud noises in the locality where they live. It means there should be peace at home, at school and on the way to and from school to ensure the well-being of the children. Considering the importance of safety and peace for children's well-being, in May 2011 the Government of Nepal issued a directive declaring all schools, as Zones of Peace. This Schools as Zones of Peace (SZOP) directive was specially prepared to make schools a haven for children. This guarantee of peace aims to ensure the continuity and effectiveness of teaching and learning, unhindered in an atmosphere free of violence and disturbances (UNICEF 2012).

Another important finding is related to the meaning of safety presented by the children. The children in this study understood safety as being free from difficulties and dangers in life, and living in an atmosphere of peace and tranquillity from the depth of the heart. In a separate but related study conducted in Nepal by Bhomi and Shrestha (2015), children described safety in terms of being free from diseases, accidents, cuts and wounds, dangers, being safe from smoke and smoking and dirt. The findings of both studies are somewhat similar. The present study found that children felt safe at home whether they live in their own homes or in rented rooms. Similar findings were found by Rees and Main (2015) who found that the highest level of agreement was for feeling safe at home on five agreement and satisfaction questions related to home and family.

Similarly, Bhomi's (2014) contribution to the *Children's Worlds* study revealed that Nepalese children score highly on safe at home measures, with the means for both boys and girls being above 3 on a 0–4 scale for 'safe feeling at home', where

0 was unsafe and 4 was very safe. A similar finding was found for safety at school, with a similar mean above 3 on the 0–4 scale for 'safe feeling at school' (Bhomi 2014). Among the four agreement and satisfaction questions about school, the highest level of agreement was for feeling safe at school (Rees and Main 2015). These findings are similar to those of the present study as children expressed that schools are as safe as home. In addition, for some children, schools are safer than home, a somewhat different finding from the study of Rees and Mains (2015).

This study also found that children who study at public schools have limited access to information and communication technology at home and at school. Though they may lag behind in the use of information technology for instructional purposes, they are safe from its misuse and the threats of cybercrime. The children in the present study also discussed how CCTV can be helpful in safeguarding the life of the children in schools.

The Child-Friendly Schools scheme developed by UNICEF states that safety, health and nutrition must be adequately addressed to provide a safe, enabling a learning environment where children can thrive (Wright et al. 2009). However, as understood by the children in this study, health safety has been addressed to a limited extent only, which should be a major point that education policy makers and practitioners must give utmost consideration to.

13.7 Conclusion

Major conclusions derived from this study include that children understood that peace and tranquillity at home, in schools and on the way to and from school is necessary for having a safe life and for their well-being. The native children who are living in their own house felt safer than those children who live in rented rooms, as the former have the opportunity to live in safe rooms with parental care and love. The children who migrated from different parts of the country had to stay in the rooms whether it is safe or not and sometimes needed to stay without their parents. The children at school with CCTV surveillance felt safe in the sense that they experienced little harm from their peers and no disturbances from unwanted persons coming from outside the school. This is a point policy makers and practitioners should take into consideration to improve children's safety and well-being in schools. Another major finding is that children were unsafe while travelling to and from school because of unsafe traffic in urban areas and unsafe roads in rural areas. Girls also experienced forms of sexual harassment on the way to and from school, which compromised their safety. Strategies need to be considered about how girls can be encouraged to face such challenges, or be protected from these threats in the first place.

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Chapter 14
Children's Feeling of Security

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14.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the authors' work as a research team participating in CUWB (Children's Understanding of Well Being) since it was first created, based on a project registered with the CICS-UP, School of Social Sciences of the Universidad de Palermo, Argentina. The chapter focuses on a key aspect of their findings: children's feelings of security. The general objective of the project is to understand the social, cultural and political dimensions of the life experiences of children living in different geographic contexts in the Buenos Aires Region, Argentina, taking account of the children's own words. This is a qualitative study that recognizes the importance of the contexts and the meanings for the actors. The sample is composed of three groups of children, 9–12 years old, living in different neighborhoods of the Region of Buenos Aires, including both urban and semi-urban neighborhoods. The techniques used for the study were: focus group, drawings and sentence completion. The chapter shows that security is an important topic in children's lives and streets represent the place children fear, where they feel insecure and afraid of being robbed in urban areas.

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14.2 Access to the Children and the Places

14.2.1 The Children

When we started the project in Argentina, we engaged in a discussion as a research team about the best way of gaining access to the children. We also assessed the characteristics that the children's groups should have and how we would contact them. The children taking part in the groups come from lower, middle-lower and middle-upper class backgrounds. Aside from the fact that such different backgrounds would in all likelihood give rise to diversity issues, diversity was one of our guiding principles. The project sought to give a voice and a place to as many children as possible, not only in terms of numbers but also of representation in the selection of the groups. The selection and recruitment of each group was conceived, analyzed and defined by the team on the basis of this guiding principle. For this reason, the focus groups were organized in country clubs with weekend houses, in low-income neighborhoods and in semi- urban areas. As a team, we started from the premise that children coming from different socioeconomic, cultural and religious backgrounds would have different ideas about what gave them satisfaction and security. On that basis, we sought to make visible the different discourses and situations the children go through in their daily realities and contexts.

14.2.2 The Places

The sample is composed by groups of children, from 9 to 12 years old, living in the Metropolitan Region of Buenos Aires and in a city of the Province of Buenos Aires, Argentina. We agreed that it would be important to show the different realities that children live in Argentina, and for this first stage in particular, we chose to limit our scope to the province of Buenos Aires, which is the most densely populated province in the country.

As a research team, we agreed on the following points: we would seek access to children from different socioeconomic backgrounds, with different cultural realities and religious beliefs. We aimed to recruit groups living in urban and semi-urban areas. Another issue that we defined as relevant was to contact the children in their daily contexts and, as far as possible, to try not to hold meetings with the groups at school or in the presence of their parents or guardians. These decisions were intended to give the children as much freedom as possible to express themselves, avoiding the types of constraints created by a context such as school, where children can feel that they are being assessed or judged, or that there are right and wrong answers or topics that should not be mentioned. Based on these premises, we began the process for the recruitment of the groups.

For the first group, one of the researchers recruited children aged between 10 and 12 that might be interested in taking part in a focus group. Information was passed on

to the children and parents about where and when the meetings would be held. Although the focus group was held in Tristán Suárez, a town in Greater Buenos Aires, all the participants live in the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires (CABA). The meetings were held in the club during weekends in rooms allocated to recreation activities. It was agreed that the meetings would start after the children finished their activities with their non-formal educators. As a condition for their participation, the children had to bring an informed consent signed by their parents. The activities consisted of hour-and-a-half meetings and were preceded by an afternoon snack. In order to foster the children's expression and protect their confidentiality, the member of the team that had recruited them did not take part in the meetings. We chose to hold the meetings in a setting that was familiar to the children as this would boost their confidence and favor candid responses. Confidentiality was also preserved by taking care that no adults known to the children were present. This first group comes from an upper-middle-class background, lives in an urban area, the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires (CABA), and belongs to the Jewish community.

The second focus group was held in Chivilcoy, a city in the Province of Buenos Aires. The meeting was held on a Saturday, in the context of a literary workshop. The children, between 9 and 10 years old, that joined the workshop were informed that this would be a special meeting and their parents were requested to provide an informed consent so that the children could take part in the meeting. In order to fulfil the primary goal of the "literary workshop" activity, an adaption to the group was made, and the meeting began and finished with story-telling. In addition to the team members, a teacher—who is also a story teller and is in charge of the literary workshop—took part in the meeting. The activity took place in the private area of a bookstore. Some of the children were participating in the literary workshop for the first time, while others were regular attendees. For this reason, the children were informed at the outset that the workshop that day would be special. The workshop lasted for 3 h, and in order to keep changes to the structure of the meetings to a minimum, the focus group was held in a single meeting. This group comes from an upper-middle-class background and lives in a semi- urban area.

The third focus group was held in Grand Bourg, a town in Greater Buenos Aires. In order to recruit the children, a member of the team contacted a person she had known for a long time in this town. This person invited children of the neighborhood aged between 9 and 12, and the meeting was held in the backyard of her house. Prior to the meeting, she was provided with informed consent forms so that she could hand them out to the parents, and she was asked to inform them that whatever doubts or queries they might have about the activity could be talked over on the phone. The activity was carried out on a Friday afternoon during the winter holidays, and it was presented as an afternoon of games, at a time when the children had little activity. Special care was taken that no parents or other adults were present during the activity and it was agreed that all present parents and adults would wait inside the house. Despite this, the backyard was filled with music and noise, and people went in and out throughout the entirety of the activity. However, this did not seem to disrupt the children. This group comes from a middle-lower to lower-class background, and lives in an urban area of Greater Buenos Aires.

Further information about each group is included in the Section 'The Groups'.

14.3 Methodology

This is a descriptive study that draws on qualitative methods which consider the person as a protagonist of research processes and at the same time recognizes the importance of the context and meanings for actors (Tonon et al. 2017). "The qualitative methodology is a kind of approach essential to understanding people's experiences of well-being and discovering new issues related to quality of life" (Tonon 2015, p. 8).

A variety of techniques were used for the study: focus groups, drawing techniques and sentence completion. In those groups in which the children had difficulty speaking spontaneously or responding to the questions or topics brought up by the coordinators, different approaches were used to encourage the children to speak about certain topics. The inclusion of other resources in all the groups was intended to foster different modes of expression and elicit more information. In the second meeting—or in the second part of the meeting in the case of longer meetings—other resources were used, including play and/or graphic techniques and sentence completion.

Focus Groups: The focus groups began with a guided dialogue, which included topics that had been previously agreed upon by the members of the network. In addition, other resources were used in order to elicit more information. In the case of those children that were not able to express themselves in a fluent manner; other techniques were employed in order to obtain more data through the use of drawings and other triggers. In keeping with the modality of work implemented and our conception of children, the children were at all times allowed to express themselves and treated as active subjects.

Graphic techniques: The activities included collage making, which allowed us in particular to collect data about pleasant and feared places. Arts-based methods have increasingly been widely used in research with children (Boydell et al. 2012; Bagnoli 2009). They offer the advantage of bringing the researcher closer to children, as children feel more comfortable and familiar with visual and graphic languages. Working with languages that are familiar to children gives them a sense of empowerment and agency (Bagnoli 2009). Especially, in the era of technology, visual language has become increasingly more meaningful for children and young people than verbal language (Prosser and Burke 2008). In using these techniques our aim was to facilitate children's agency. We refer Amartya Sen's (2000) definition of agency. According to Sen (2000, p. 35), the concept of agency refers to a person that acts and causes changes, whose achievements can be evaluated according to his/her own values and objectives, independently from the evaluation of external criteria. In this sense, Sen (2000) explains that the term agent is used in its oldest sense. It is not the term used in the traditional field of economic literature, in which an agent is someone that acts on behalf of another.

The sentence completion technique: This technique consists of a set of sentence stems that a person must complete using his/her ideas, beliefs, and feelings. The sentences are selected in accordance with the objectives of the research. For this Project, a list of sentences was prepared on the basis of the topics proposed by the international CUWB network. The technique comprises 19 items, and the children complete sentences about what they think and feel, what they like, what makes them angry, afraid, or happy, in addition to the meanings they ascribe to school, their family, the neighborhood, the club, and religion. As the children worked on an individual basis and provided written and anonymous responses, answers were elicited that were different from those given orally in front of the group.

With respect to the methodological strategy of analysis used in this research project, it is worth pointing out that in our approach to qualitative analysis, analysis is the process through which the researcher transcends the information in order to gain access to the comprehension/interpretation of the phenomenon under study; it is the process through which the researcher expands the data beyond the descriptive narrative (Mieles Barrera and Tonon 2015).

In this project the analysis was produced using Braun and Clarkes Thematic Analysis Strategy defined as:

> a method for the processing of information in qualitative research, which allows the identification, organization, and detailed analysis, as well as the report of, patterns or themes based on a careful reading and re-reading of the information obtained, in order to infer the results leading to the proper comprehension/interpretation of the phenomenon under study (Braun and Clarke 2006, quoted in Mieles Barrera and Tonon 2015, p. 136).

14.4 The Groups

We worked with three groups in different geographic places: The Autonomous City of Buenos Aires (CABA), Grand-Bourg and Chivilcoy.

14.4.1 CABA

The children in this group and their families are members of a Jewish social and sports club in Tristán Suárez, a city of Greater Buenos Aires, where they come every weekend. During the week, they live in the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires (the capital district).

The club was set up in 1977. It offers sporting facilities and it also works as a country club. Members can choose to stay overnight if they own or rent a house or apartment in the club. It is a large institution, with a membership of over 900 families.

The children belong to the Jewish community and only a few of them come from mixed families. Only one of the children in the focus group has a Catholic mother.

The club promotes Jewish values and traditions. Therefore, the children are identified with the tradition of the Jewish religion, although they are not extremely religious, or orthodox. In addition, the club fosters feelings of belonging and close identification among its members. For example, they represent the club in sports events and in occasional community-oriented or cultural events. Most of the children play sports such as football, tennis, hockey, and basketball, and they participate in community-oriented campaigns or projects held at the club or at school. The children in this focus group know each other, given that, as they are around the same age, they play together on the sports teams representing the club or share non-formal education activities, both of which take place in the club.

Most of the children come from middle-class and upper middle-class households and have a good level of access to healthcare and education. With respect to their cultural and educational background, most of the children come from households where both parents are university professionals. In virtually all cases, both parents work. All of the children in the group attend private schools. Except for two of them, they all go to full-day trilingual Jewish schools. They all attend extracurricular workshops. The boys play football three times a week and represent the club in competitions while the girls play hockey. Only one of the boys plays tennis instead of football. All of the children in the group have a good cultural level: they read books, go to the cinema and theatre, etc. They all had information on political and economic current affairs and stated their views on those topics.

With respect to family make-up, all the children live with their families—parents and siblings—with whom they state they have a good relationship. Only one of the children comes from a family with remarried parents. All of them have at least one brother or sister. They appear to be highly motivated by their families. All of the children have at least one brother or sister. Their parents are present figures in their lives and they have broad access to information and spaces for dialogue at home. As to their cultural and educational background, most of the children come from households where both parents are university professionals.

The focus group consisted of eleven children—three girls and eight boys—aged between 10 and 12 years that already knew each other, given that, being around the same age, they are on the club representative sports teams. The focus group was organized in two meetings. In the first meeting, a dialogue format was used, while the second meeting included graphic techniques and sentence completion technique that fostered other forms of expression. Both meetings were held in a small room allocated by the club.

14.4.2 Chivilcoy

The participants live in a small city (population of 55,840) located in a rural area in the Province of Buenos Aires. The city is the administrative center of the district and it is located some 160 kilometres from the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires.

The urban horizon, which can be characterized as 'flat', is dominated by the towers of the parish church, with no other high-rise buildings. The city stands out for its large number of green spaces. There are 10 squares and a number of smaller squares, parks and other green spaces. The largest square is the *Plaza Mayor* (Main Square), around which all the administrative buildings, the Municipality, the main parish church, and shops, bars and restaurants are located. It is a quiet city with hardly any incidents of crime and insecurity.

In the focus group, 6 children between 9 and 12 years old participated; four of whom were girls and 2 boys. From a socioeconomic perspective, all the participants come from middle-class households and have a good level of access to healthcare and education. Four of the children attend private schools, and all the children take part in activities after school, in particular sporting activities such as football, swimming, volleyball and artistic activities. All of the children come from two-parent families, and live with both parents and their siblings. At the meeting, all of them wore clean and tidy clothes. The children reported that they have a TV set at home, and that they go on holiday, to the cinema and eat out. As to the cultural and educational background, most of the children come from households where both parents are professionals and work.

The children in this group know each other because they attended a literary workshop event organized by the local bookstore, which is free and open to everyone. Most of the children were taken to the bookstore by one of their parents and picked up when the event finished.

The meeting was held in a place awarded for the bookstore.

14.4.3 Grand Bourg

The participants in the third group live in Grand Bourg, a town in the central northern area of the Greater Buenos Aires, some 36 km. away from the City of Buenos Aires. It is an area of low-rise constructions, with some paved streets and several other dirt or limestone roads. Many of the houses are made of zinc sheets or unplastered brick walls. The residents of the neighborhood are low-income families. Most of the children go to state-owned schools and they do not report taking part in extracurricular activities.

With respect to family make-up, all of the children live with their families. One of the children lives with his grandparents; his parents are separated and live in other towns with their other children. Two of the children live with their mother and father and the other three have parents who have separated. Only one of them has contact with his father; the other two barely see their fathers. Most of the children also reported living together with their extended family including grandparents, siblings, cousins, aunts and uncles.

The six children that participated in the group included three girls and three boys of 9–12 years old, who live in the same neighborhood. They know each other since

they often meet to play together in the neighborhood. They usually play in the street or in the backyard of one of their houses.

The focus group was held in a roofed patio with no walls. There was a long table and some chairs and, as each child arrived, he or she sat at the table. It was noted that they chose to sit beside those children they were most friendly with, even to the point that they were so close together that they seemed not to have enough space to do the activities. It was suggested to them that they sit in other chairs that were free so that they could have more space, but they did not find it necessary and rejected the suggestion.

The patio was situated at the back of a house, and it overlooked a garden and low partition walls. Some of the homeowner's neighbors and family members went into the house or used the right-hand side of the patio to enter. In the background, dogs were barking, there were noises of people talking and someone in the house next door was listening to loud *cumbia villera* music (a type of cumbia music that originated in Argentine shantytowns).

14.5 Analysis of the Children's Discourse of Insecurity

A theoretical analysis of security involves reflecting on what it means for people to feel safe, secure, be certain about the near future, or feel protected. Castel (2015) draws a distinction between two main types of general protections: social protections, which guard against the risks of deterioration of biological life or of contingencies in life, and civil protections, which guarantee fundamental liberties, safety of goods, and physical integrity. Bauman (2015) defines the term "protection" as an element (among several) that can be condensed in the Freudian term *Sicherheit*, (which conveys the meaning of security in a broad sense) and which contains the specific ingredients for safeguarding against threats to one's body and its extensions (one's home, property, etc.).

Although a link can be traced between the existence of social insecurities and the emergence of civil insecurities, it is worth noting that the discourse of the children that took part in the research contains explicit references to feelings of civil insecurity, that is, feelings that their and their family's physical integrity, safety of goods and personal belongings are at risk.

In many cases, a close association can be found between the civil insecurity experienced by the children and the environments or situations they perceive as insecure. Indeed, their own discourse provides "signals" of —in the words of Castel (2015)—multiple "previous" or latent social insecurities in the communities where they live.

The children that made more explicit reference to instances of civil insecurity were those in the focus group held in the CABA group and the Grand Bourg group. When asked about what made them feel secure, the children of the CABA focus group did not hesitate to say they felt secure with the police. On the other hand, when asked about what places or things they found insecure, the children —coinciding

with the Grand-Bourg group— mentioned the street as a dangerous place. Many children added that they did not feel secure in the street because the police were not always nearby and that was perceived as a risk of robbery. The Grand Bourg group reported several incidents and situations that made them feel insecure in their town and stated that they found the street a risky place because of behavior such as drink driving, fights and shootings with the police.

These responses are even more interesting when they are contrasted with the responses provided by the children from the city of Chivilcoy, who did not identify any places that made them feel insecure. This was the case even for the street, which was perceived by the children as a routine place of transit where they could walk alone (unaccompanied by an adult) in order to, for example, go to the park in their neighborhood or have fun with friends.

When asked what differences they found between the capital city (the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires) and their own city, the children from Chivilcoy stated that they thought Buenos Aires was larger than Chivilcoy, but also more dangerous. One of the children reported that he likes visiting the capital city, but that he would not live there. According to Kessler (2015), fears vary among the different groups of individuals that make up a society. The social and communal capital of the Chivilcoy group appears as an antidote against fear in a community that still shuns urban anonymity.

In her historical analysis of the genealogy of the police institution, L'Héuillèt (2010) explores the shift, beginning in the 17th and 18th centuries, of Nation-states into states of government, whose main concern was the population and, in particular, the population of the large cities. This specific form of government was intent on maintaining an orderly common life for people in the large cities. Such political interest brought about by urbanization gave rise to the police institution at the dawn of modern age. According to L'Héuillèt (2010), the fact that the police had experience maintaining order in cities meant that it had experience handling the street. The street thus becomes a common space for the cause of order, a space that intermittently ignores the distinction between public and private (p. 128).

Understanding the origins of the governmental technique of civil security and the emergence of the police as an eminently urban institution sheds light on this scenario presented by the children's responses, in which the large cities (Grand Bourg in the Buenos Aires conurbation and the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires) are perceived as more insecure environments, with "demands" of an increased police presence in the streets. "The street" is thus perceived by the children as a collective, non-private space, which is outside of their intimate sphere, but which —in their view— is violent and insecure.

When specifically asked what could happen to them in the street, the children from the CABA club gave the following responses:

> I don't know, I'm afraid that a thief may appear and shoot me.

> I'm also afraid of the police, because I fear they may be the bad guys, the thieves.

As stated by Lechner (1990), fears are closely connected with order as the political question par excellence. Fears and security are always a social product (Lechner 2002, p. 220). What the children express is their manifest fear and distrust, first, distrust of the other that walks near them in the street and, second, distrust of the police, whose duty to afford (them) civil protection seems to be corrupted.

The two responses above expose a political question in its crudest form. Since early times, the essence of politics lied in creating a sense of living together and, with the advent of modernity, contractualists such as Thomas Hobbes (2007) advocated for the need of a contract or *fiat* among men in their natural state, in order to found a political society ruled by a supreme power that could guarantee the safety of life in community. In analyzing Hobbes' political philosophy, Strauss (2006) states that "it is the fearfulness of death rather than the sweetness of life which makes man cling to existence" (p. 173), protection being precisely where individuals' ultimate security lies, under a State whose primary aim is to achieve and guarantee peace. Thus, as pointed out by Castel (2015), being protected is not a natural accident but a deliberate social construction created to that end.

The testimonies of the children from Grand Bourg abound with personal feelings of insecurity in their neighborhoods. They are more aware of the daily episodes of civil insecurity that take place in their communities, some of which perhaps reflect their own experiences:

> My mum says that if a car follows me, I must walk the opposite way. It will take a while for the car to turn round.

> Once my sister was going to school and a boy called her and pointed a gun at her. She was with my cousin.

> We were once returning home with my mum. We live across from the railway tracks, and we were walking in the street by the tracks when we saw a man pointing a gun at another's head.

> I'm afraid when my aunts go to the gym because I feel that certain things can happen, for example, you can be robbed, so I always watch them leave just in case.

> My grandma always tells me not to leave bed when we hear gunfire. Just in case there is an errant shot that may hit us, so she tells me not to leave bed.

> My grandma says that when I see something weird (. . .) I should scream "Fire!". Because no-one comes forward when you ask for help. (. . .) You say "help. . . help", but people are afraid and no-one comes out.

The usual shootings that the children hear at night or the risks they face when they leave school have led them to adopt a series of strategies and recommendations from their families in order to successfully deal with their life experiences in a harsh environment of social insecurity.

According to L'Héuillèt (2010), the feeling of insecurity is a sign of a rupture in the political bond. When the political bond projected by the State is a healthy one, it is taken for granted. However, when feelings of insecurity arise, the bond begins to break. The feeling of security lies precisely in forgetting about injustice, in the absence of threats of aggression and in the remoteness of being a victim of crime. Security, therefore, means forgetting about risks (p. 159).

According to Lechner (1990), the counterpoint to the discourse of order in Latin America is a history of invasions, an ongoing and reciprocal "occupation of the terrain" (p. 91). No frontier or limit can afford security. Everyone lives in terror that their property may be infected or taken away by what is alien. The children seem to live in an immediate environment of hostility in the two towns mentioned above, where the street—as previously discussed— reveals itself as an adverse territory. Such climate invariably leads people to withdraw to more intimate settings. In this sense, one of the girls from the club in Tristán Suárez reported that she did not feel insecure in the street only because she went everywhere by car. Another child was categorical in stating that:

> I feel secure at school, I feel secure at home, I feel secure here [in the club], but I don't feel secure in the street —and I would never do— in any street, whether it is near home or in Cabildo. (a popular avenue in the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires).

In Grand Bourg, one of the children provided a similar response when asked about other places where he felt insecure or that he found dangerous. Framing his response in the opposite way, he stated that he found his school a secure place:

> School, because when you get out, there are people waiting for you in a van and that stuff.

The children's opinions evidence the trend for people to prefer enclosed spaces for interaction, and to enjoy being with others when the environment of contact is secure and under control (Lechner 2000).

As discussed by Castel (2015, p. 15), social and civil protections operate in a paradoxical way as the proliferation of risk makes the modern individual never feel completely secure. Following Lechner (2002), we can state that the children's fears are obviously caused by specific instances of urban violence, but they are also mingled with vague fears that often "have no names or motives" (p. 193) and evidence, in the words of Castel (2015, p. 78), a contemporary inflation of risk, where risk is confused with danger. As pointed out by Bauman (2015), modern times seem to be dominated by an "overload of protection" (p. 58) that creates nothing but a profound frustration at the (impossible) task of combining more security with more freedom. This leads to a still deeper feeling of insecurity.

This situation is reflected in the words of one of the children from CABA, when he spoke about what he watched on television, especially in the news:

> You watch on TV that someone robbed someone else, that someone crashed his car, you see those ideas and then you go out into the street in a terrible mood, and if you don't know, then you go out and feel more secure.

This response, in addition to evidencing the impact of the media on people's mood and social perceptions, sheds light on the media's power to fuel collective feelings of security and insecurity in a given community. Kessler (2015) argues that the feeling of insecurity is always a phenomenon that is built and modified through people's daily interactions and negotiations; at the same time, fear of crime can sometimes increase regardless of the number of crimes actually committed. This phenomenon can be explained by mass media representations of crime.

In addition, it is worth pointing out that, in response to the question of which public figures they could associate with insecurity, several children from CABA mentioned Argentine politicians. In addition to reflecting the television consumption habits of the children's families or the conversations that may take place in their homes, the children's opinions reveal a clear link between political power and feeling insecure. Unlike the Grand Bourg and Chivilcoy groups, the children from CABA are the only ones that referred to political figures and corruption in the management of public funds to account for their feeling of insecurity. Their opinions somehow evidence an awareness of the public drama of insecurity and of the political roots of the feeling of security. Added to this, when the group was asked what they thought was a good government, one the children provided an opinion that might serve as a conclusion to these considerations; a good government is: *one that worries about people.*

Along the same lines, fear of crime seems to spur a widespread fear of the other, a feeling of distrust of what is alien (Lechner 2002). In this sense, the children from the CABA club—as members of a social sector with a higher purchasing power—stated that shantytowns and poverty made them feel insecure and liable to be victims of robbery. In addition, one of the children from the CABA club found a link between feeling insecure and a footballer, as this footballer was brought up in a low-income neighborhood.

The idea of poverty as a source of insecurity, as described by many of the children from the CABA group, is not new. It dates back to European pre-industrial societies where individuals disaffiliated from the labor system or a stable territorial inscription were seen as latent threats to public order and were the focus of police surveillance. 'Vagabonds and the rabble' caused the State to implement a series of repressive measures in order to contain what was conceived as an internal threat (Castel 2015).

In addition, as discussed above, the concept that poverty is a source of insecurity requires an examination of the overlap, or feedback, between social and civil insecurity. It is social insecurity that has a demoralizing effect, disrupting the social bonds of communities, and giving rise to, in the words of Castel (2015), the emergence of sensitive neighborhoods rampant with idle young people who engage in drug-related criminal practices and where clashes with police are common.

Unlike the children from CABA, the children from Grand Bourg seem to describe a landscape of civil insecurities that are more closely linked with instances of social insecurity, and where the children have contact with social groups situated in the margins of society. In addition to the episodes of violent insecurity they described and the more profound feeling of fear that seems to surround their daily lives, the children from Grand Bourg are well aware of the fact that drug abuse among young adults in their neighborhoods is a common practice:

> [Speaking about a group of young people] They meet up in the corner of a street. Once I was here and they came to buy, and there was a man in the church and they knocked him down.

According to Kaminsky (2005), the issue of violence and citizens' safety cannot be duly dealt with in the absence of an examination of the problems caused by economic growth and inequality in, for example, access to work or to basic education and health services. Sain (2004) argues that a crime not only supposes a violent act against the legal system, but also the manifestation of a concealed social conflict.

The above considerations show how the children's opinions about their feelings of civil insecurity reveal the frameworks offered by their communities for personal well-being. It would be impossible to reflect on the personal well-being of the children that took part in the Tristán Suárez and Grand Bourg focus groups without knowledge of the fears and threats presented by their environments of belonging. It is worth recalling that the community is a significant component of personal well-being, as personal well-being has an impact on the community's quality of life, while at the same time community well-being expands or constrains, as the case may be, interactions in daily community life.

The demand to end insecurity is at the core of the pact on which the political society is founded (Castel 2015). The children's opinions about insecurity shed light on the limited opportunities provided by the community for each individual to attain his or her personal aims and objectives.

The identification of civil insecurities at an early age is an alarming sign of how the social value of "us" has weakened, as a consequence of disrupted social bonds (Lechner 2002). As stated by Bauman (2006), no group of individuals can have a real experience of community without the existence of a social fabric based on shared biographies, with a long-life history and a solid expectation of interaction in the future. When the community, in a singular sense, ceases to produce such shared understanding of comfort, it fails in its primary purpose of providing protection also.

As pointed out by Kessler (2015, p. 51), closeness to local life, close-knit interpersonal and intergenerational bonds and a positive perception of the community are the elements that account for the reduced feelings of fear among the group of children from Chivilcoy.

As already discussed, Tonon (2009) suggests speaking of communities, in the plural, considering the logics of networked sociability in smaller social groups, in a contemporary time characterized by de-territoriality and informal bonds. The children's fears evidence the difficulty to build a society when the public environment becomes threatening and "pushes" the children and their families to seek enclosed and intimate settings for interpersonal exchanges. Nevertheless, the threat found by the children in what can be called the public sphere community—which is associated with the street—finds its contrast in confined communities, associated to the club, school, or the family, which are described by the children as small secure support settings.

A question that remains unanswered is whether the children's distrust of the "unknown" other that "threatens" them in the street does not erode the essence of life in society described by Arendt (1993) when she reflected on the traditions of the Greek polis, where precisely politics involved acting together and living united. Sharing words and actions was the root of the real power of cities in ancient times. Such power allowed keeping the public sphere vital and actualizing security. It might be stated that the fear of the street described by the children, as potential citizens, sends a sign of alarm to a political system that shows itself unable to achieve its aim of guaranteeing security and that, in turn, seems to be bringing about the fragility of its own progress.

14.6 Conclusion

Our conclusions relate to two dimensions - methodological aspects of our research and findings on security.

In regards to the methodological aspects of our research, our main priority was to make the children in all the groups comfortable and confident so that they could express themselves freely. Sufficient time was allocated to the presentation of the project and for the children to ask all the questions they wanted.

For all the groups, we sought to preserve the characteristics of the activity or the space attended by the children. As a team, we engaged in extensive discussion of this issue, as preserving the structure of each space would necessarily give rise to differences between the groups. Nevertheless, our objective all along was to make the children feel comfortable and familiar with the meetings and the activities. They were given a leading role at all times and, while the interventions were guided by adults, the children always occupied a central role.

The techniques used included phrases that worked as triggers and encouraged children to speak as spontaneously as possible. As the different topics were addressed, each child was given an opportunity to speak, and care was taken that as many of the children as was possible had a chance to express themselves.

The inclusion of non-linguistic dimensions, such as graphic methods based on drawing and art, is highly relevant in the field of research with children (Bagnoli 2009). The use of different techniques allows children to make contact with their past and future lives. Visual methods provide an opportunity for eliciting multiple dimensions of experience, favoring divergent thinking and avoiding clichés (Bagnoli 2009).

Some children find speaking in public intimidating; others feel more comfortable working with non-verbal resources. Moreover, non-verbal resources help to counter social desirability, that is, the trend for individuals to show a socially acceptable image and say what is expected from them. It should be noted that children are more prone to behave in a socially desirable manner, as they usually attempt to present an improved image of themselves in order to please others (Lemos 2006).

These techniques offer the advantage of bringing the researcher closer to children, as children feel more comfortable and familiar with visual and graphic languages. Working with languages that children feel close to gives them a sense of empowerment and agency (Bagnoli 2009).

The children's views on the issues they identified as fearful experiences or that made them feel insecure reflect a political question related to the political bond as a guarantee of community security. By way of conclusion, we summarize the most important empirical findings of our research as follows:

- Those children living in large urban centers such as Grand Bourg (Greater Buenos Aires) and the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires (CABA) reported clear feelings of insecurity and, in particular, a fear of walking in the street. This was not the case with the children from Chivilcoy, who did not even mention the topic.

- The children from Grand Bourg seemed to have more knowledge of episodes of insecurity in their neighborhoods. Their accounts revealed their families' strategies and recommendations to deal with such episodes. In turn, this group described a landscape of civil insecurities that was far more closely connected with social insecurity issues. However, the children from the CABA reported more general fears of the suspicious "other" walking in the street, who they are afraid of because he or she may be a thief.
- Both the CABA and the Grand Bourg groups stated their preference for intimate settings over public spaces such as the park or the street, to be able to have interactions in quiet environments.
- The children from the CABA were able to make a connection between public figures and their feelings of insecurity, and even linked well-known politicians to the issue of insecurity in Argentina. These children were more straightforward in reporting their fear of marginalized low-income settings.
- The children from the CABA gave their views on the media's influence on people's mood and feelings of insecurity.
- Close-knit interpersonal and intergenerational bonds and a positive perception of the community are some of the elements that account for the reduced feelings of fear reported by the group of children from Chivilcoy.

This project was highly satisfactory for the team. We believe that knowledge of what gives children pleasure and satisfaction, what does them good and what does not, can contribute to, and provide input for, the design of public policies, the implementation of interventions and the promotion of programs aimed at enhancing the well-being and quality of life of children, who are the future of every community.

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