Multifaceted Concept of Child Well-Being

1

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Dictionary definitions of well-being emphasize a desirable state of being happy, healthy, or prosperous; that is, well-being refers to both subjective feelings and experiences as well as to living conditions. Well-being is also related to the fulfillment of desires, to the balance of pleasure and pain, and to opportunities for development and self-fulfillment. The concept refers to the qualities of life and to the many possible dimensions of a good or bad life. The breadth and heterogeneity of the idea of well-being is illustrated in human rights treaties, including the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Rights are implicitly understood as creating well-being or opportunities for well-being, referring to the quality of children's lives economically and emotionally; to their psychological states; to their material, social, and cultural environments; as well as to their development and to realizing their potentials.

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Perspectives on well-being provide a common ground for scholarly study and for diverse systems of indicators. The field bridges research and policymaking. These integrative functions are rooted both in the multidimensional character and in the normative core of the concept itself. The focus is on the level of well-being, the scale ranging from good to bad, involving implicit or explicit normative assessments. These judgments entail normative discourses – what is good or bad on the many dimensions of well-being – as part of analyses. The focus on children's well-being is also sensitive to children's vulnerability; children are especially at risk with regard to adverse trends and this risk factor is reflected in the number of organizations and institutions dedicated to the protection of children.

A look at some of the titles behind the nearly 1,000,000,000 internet hits for "well-being and children" illustrates the multifaceted nature of the concept. Articles and headlines brought up by such a search refer to material well-being, emotional well-being, families and well-being, upbringing and well-being, health and well-being, and to a myriad of subthemes like social capital in relation to well-being, unintended pregnancy and well-being, and sickness and well-being – in short a plethora of themes can be found related to well-being and children. This implies not only that the concept of well-being is regarded as fruitful from many perspectives but also that it is a valuable perspective on all aspects of children's lives. The heterogeneity of the concept not only makes it relevant to different perspectives but also gives a common direction to distinct studies in different domains.

In disciplines and domains related to the development of policies and treatments, improvement in well-being has always been the point of departure. The increased monitoring of children's lives through the development of indicators and the explicit relationships between indicators and policies has brought normative assessments into most studies of childhood and children. Well-being represents a conceptual framework that merges empirical studies and normative assessments as it also bridges policies and research.

As the perspective of GDP and "standard of living" were gradually recognized as too narrow to grasp desired societal outcomes of economic policies, well-being became the point at which political, theoretical, and empirical perspectives on welfare and development converged. As an analytical and normative point of departure, the concept of well-being represents not only a new perspective on the quality of life and on positive and negative developments on the macro or societal level but also a framework fulfilling what Fitoussi et al. (2010) refer to as the multiple purposes of measurements that may capture details on the microlevels of lived experience.

Well-being refers to individuals as well as to societies and to trends as well as to states. The concept as implemented in research and policy encourages not only measuring well-being but also reflecting on the very idea of what well-being is, on the different domains and related perspectives, and on the individual, group, and global levels. Well-being is the conceptual focal point for assessing the state of children and the discourses on their status.

1.1   The Meaning of Well-Being

The *Constitution of the World Health Organization* states that "Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social *well-being*, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." The WHO statement also illustrates that well-being does not refer primarily to the moment, but to something that lasts over time, even if there is some overlap with happiness and the subjective experiences of the moment. The boundaries of the notion of well-being are elastic; in spite of this, the fact that the concept can convey a reasonable précis, as illustrated by the WHO statement, made well-being a functional concept after the discourse on societal development and welfare transcended the perspective of GDP. The ability to work on different levels, themes, and perspectives, and the association with happiness as well as welfare, makes the notion of well-being functional for many purposes.

In philosophy the well-being of a person in general refers to what is good for the individual from their own perspective. The hedonist equation of well-being as the best possible balance between pain and pleasure makes intuitive sense at one level but is problematic at another. The sum of all subjective facets of well-being do not necessarily aggregate to what may be best at the macro level, as illustrated by the detrimental effect that consumption has in global considerations. The tensions among subjective and objective well-being and its indicators, between the moment and possible future consequences, and between the individual and the macro level illustrate the challenges of theorizing well-being.

This is even more complex in relation to children; well-being encompasses both children's lives in the present and how the present influences their future and their development. Children's development is not a delimited psychological issue but is related to characteristics at the societal level; various societies not only influence social and cognitive development in various ways but require different levels of competencies for members at different ages or of different genders. The emphasis of the CRC (a legally binding normative instrument setting the standards for children's well-being in a series of domains in life), which underlines that the child has a right to education and to "develop its personality and abilities to the fullest" (Article 29), is implicitly related to the evolution of the educational knowledge society. Such norms are not detailed prescriptions. For example, general agreement on the principle that children should not live in poverty requires an elaboration of what poverty for children implies; underscoring the child's right to develop his or her potential illustrates that poverty cannot be delimited by a purely material standard.

Ongoing considerations with respect to child development from a global vantage point require further elaboration of the understanding of well-being as related to multiple perspectives, positions, and domains. The evaluation of the distribution of well-being with regard to children is especially complex because children are developing and because they are dependent on caretakers on the micro level as well as on politics and economy at the macro level. Children's well-being is rooted in the interplay of a series of factors on the micro level, framed by the social structures of the wider society.

The CRC emphasized children's rights in general terms but did not go further into the relations between rights, freedom, and development. These relations are complex. For example, economic growth may be related to well-being not through subjective mirroring of wealth and income but through material standards that result in benefits to a population. Commodities are a means to an end; the point is to understand what one can achieve with resources, which is related to both opportunity structures and the agency of the subject (Sen 1999).

Freedom is related not only to the right to use one's resources in accordance with one's own preferences but also to the capacity to transform resources into valuable activities. Related to children, the development of capacities to transform resources into valuable activities is an essential part of well-being. Values are not only subject to variation among individuals or groups and between these levels of organization as well, but values vary with capacities for reflection. In regard to children this implies that the right to well-being involves the right to the development of capacities for reflection as well as the right to freedom of choice. At the macro level well-being will be related to freedom not only in an abstract way but to the fairness of the actual distribution of opportunities. The well-being of a nation is related to both the sum of well-being and to its distribution.

Aristotle underlined the pursuit of happiness alone as shallow; the good life for humans is to be understood in terms of the virtuous activities of humans, aimed at meeting a worthwhile purpose. From this perspective, well-being comprises more than individual happiness or individual wealth; it is rather a measure of carefully considered productivity and engagement.

1.2   Complex Roots of Well-Being

Happiness is in general understood as a basic indicator of subjective well-being, yet one that is difficult to capture by measurement. The Easterlin paradox states that after reaching a level where basic needs are covered, increased income on a national level does not increase the general level of happiness. Others argue that there is a relationship (Hagerty and Veenhoven 2003). The discourses on quality of life illustrate the many dimensions of well-being and the complex relations between subjective and objective indicators of a good life; they underscore that well-being is not identical to the indicators of the standard of living. Poverty may engender a lack of subjective well-being, but poverty itself is not identical to negative well-being. Reasonable standards of living and freedom can be understood as prerequisites for positive well-being, but do not represent happiness. Even though studies indicate a complex relationship between happiness and contextual factors framing subjective experiences, objective indicators of living conditions such as GNP are often used as indices of a good life. These representational efforts may be rooted in tacit assumptions of a positive correlation between objective indicators and subjective experiences as well as in the availability of objective indicators. The composite "Human Development Index" measures quality of life through interrelated assessments of life expectancy, wealth and education, with well-being understood as the potential for a good life reflected by these indicators.

Studies of children's well-being in general focus on trends in different groups and on developmental foundations of well-being, addressing risk as well as what enables children to flourish (Moore and Lippman 2005). On the micro level, achievements seem to facilitate happiness (Howell 2009), and the level of well-being is influenced by the reference groups with whom one compares himself or herself (Carbonell 2005).

Further, studies of well-being, and the system of indicators tracking this concept, refer to specific areas of life and to the present as well as the future. In recent decades the development of longitudinal datasets has expanded the possibilities for studying the relationship between early childhood and later phases. Trajectories identified are related not only to the life courses of children but also to societal characteristics; for example, conditions in early childhood may predict unemployment in adulthood (Caspi et al. 1998), which is, in turn, related to the knowledge economy. Longitudinal studies also provide new opportunities for studying the relationship between biological and social factors and dynamics that through developmental processes reinforce initial inequalities among children.

Sen (1999) illustrates that well-being is related to opportunity, to the capacity to utilize distinct opportunities, as well as to the freedom to do so in correspondence with one's own preferences. As such, well-being is directly related to the perspectives and needs of the individual understood within their social milieu. In this arena, children's own perspectives and voices have often been forgotten. Children are both on their way to a future as adults, involving the rights to develop their abilities, and they are citizens of the present, with the rights to immediate well-being as children. This child-centered focus is one that must increasingly be incorporated in studies of well-being.

1.2.1 Domains of Child Well-Being

Any comprehensive attempt to look at children's well-being must balance the various socioeconomic and cultural domains of children's lives and be carefully constructed to include current but historically often excluded subpopulations of children, e.g., those with disabilities; indigenous minorities; very poor or isolated populations; those separated from families; and those who are homeless, refugees, or immigrants (Andrews and Ben-Arieh 1999).

Within each domain, preferences and values are socially based but they are not socially determined; well-being emerges at the intersection of agency and society's frameworks. Within these frameworks, well-being is differentially pertinent and must be differentially assessed. The complexity of the concept is indeed illustrated by the tension among domains: Good well-being in one sector of life does not immunize children from poor well-being in other domains. In part well-being is related to domains because policies are sectored themselves. Housing policies, for example, need information on children's housing as well as on their particular needs related to housing and these derive from different vantage points. When UNICEF emphasizes children's need for a place to do homework, the educational society and the knowledge economy are contributing to the assessment of specific

educational needs related to children and their home environments; citizenship as a domain is rooted in political ideology and rights.

Domains can be construed in various ways, based on differing perspectives and methodologies. Key national indicators on well-being for American children focus on indicators from seven domains: family and social environment, economic circumstances, health care, physical environment and safety, behavior, education, and health (Land et al. 2001). UNICEF's Innocenti Report Card 7 (Adamson 2007) refers to six dimensions of well-being: material well-being, health and safety, educational well-being, family and peer relationships, behaviors and risks, and subjective well-being (Bradshaw and Richardson 2009).

Domains can be assessed differently and that makes the process of measuring well-being more complicated. Educational well-being can be evaluated with subjective indicators such as children's levels of enjoyment at school or by objective indicators such as investment in education. In Report Card 7, educational well-being is indicated by an evaluation of scholastic performance. The set of indicators not only represents different vantage points or values within domains, but the domains themselves may be partly defined by an evaluative approach. Take, for instance, the Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index of US residents' health and well-being. This index refers to domains including life evaluation, emotional health, physical health, healthy behavior, and work environment. To this is added what is called "basic access": a component of well-being related to satisfaction with the community or area, economic situation, access to medical treatment, health care, and other basic necessities. Many measures on quality of life in the Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index illustrate that domains do not exist outside the realm of culture and ideology. Different societies and different periods construct domains in different ways. As a result, the assessment of well-being must be a culturally and historically particular process prior to comparative or global treatments.

1.2.2 Historical Development of the Study of Well-Being

Reflections on present senses of "well-being" may be explored throughout history, among philosophers, religions, literature, and so on. Different notions have existed in different cultures and historical periods. What is good for children? What are the qualities of a good life for children? How do standards of well-being change as children develop? What are the goals of children's development, education, and socialization? The answers to such questions are related to beliefs, stereotypes, values, "logics," and social representations and should be examined by researchers looking into how adults in a given society construct (1) childhood, (2) the social problems and social needs of children involving social policies and requiring social interventions, and (3) the best methods for solving children's social problems and requirements.

Studying the phenomenon of things going awry has been a major focus of interest for human and social sciences. For example, for centuries medicine

concentrated on illness/disease/sickness. However, a few decades ago interest in well-being began to complement the illness orientation: for example, through health promotion. This change of perspective, from negatively valenced challenges to positive constructs, is a silent but far-reaching revolution. Social and behavioral scientists have also long emphasized the emergence and development of social problems and only recently turned to studies promoting well-being or quality of life. While historically psychology focused on curing mental illness, in 1969, G.A. Miller, in his famous speech as new president of the American Psychological Association, proposed to redefine psychology as a "means to promote human well-being." In recent decades many researchers have taken up this charge and moved to focus on a new perspective, positive psychology, the psychology of positive human functioning (Seligman 2002).

The contemporary history of the concept of well-being as linked to scientific research (both basic and applied) shows two completely separate trajectories, both of them starting in the twentieth century and developing independently for some decades. One contemporary tradition of studying well-being comes from the health sciences and the other one from the social sciences. The health sciences situate their beginnings in the WHO constitution, in 1946, which states that health is not only the absence of illness or disease but also the presence of well-being. This principle has been repeated in several WHO documents in the following decades and has promoted extensive research (Andelman et al. 1999; WHO 1946, 1978).

The tradition in social sciences was by contrast born in association with the so-called "social indicators movement" in the 1960s and appeared as an interdisciplinary approach involving economists, psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, geographers, and other disciplinary experts. Bauer's book on social indicators (Bauer 1966) is considered by many to be the starting point for the movement toward a new concept: "the quality of life (QOL)." By that period – the end of the 1960s – serious attempts to develop significant research about people's happiness, psychological well-being or satisfaction with life, or specific domains of life appeared and initiated important scientific debates (Casas 1989, 1991, 1996a). After decades in which this phenomena has been considered subjective and therefore "of no scientific value", researchers have moved to develop different theoretical conceptualizations and scientific models for QOL, trying to reconcile material ("objective") and nonmaterial ("subjective") aspects of the human and sociocultural environment.

Quality of life is defined as a construct articulating objective and subjective measures of people's conditions of living: It is a function of the material (Mcl) and the psychosocial (PScl) conditions of living, that is to say, $QOL = f(Mcl, PScl)$. Defining the material conditions of living is not new. However, defining psychosocial conditions of living (measurable only with subjective indicators) is relatively new and has initiated endless debates. Probably one of the more useful definitions for psychosocial conditions of living was presented by Campbell et al. (1976) when they proposed it should include *perceptions*, *evaluations*, *and aspirations of people on their own lives*. This also became one of the best-known definitions of *subjective*

well-being. Many authors consider subjective well-being as closely related or even synonymous with other psychologically positive constructs, particularly "happiness" and "life satisfaction."

Following Bauer's introductory discussions, the concept of "QOL" was taken immediately into health sciences research. Most authors working in this area started to use the phrase as synonymous with *well-being*, thinking that well-being was rooted in a much older tradition and, therefore, not a new concept. However, in social sciences quality of life has never been considered synonymous with well-being but is rather treated as a broader concept. During the last two decades, a new concept "H-R QOL" (Health-Related Quality of Life) has created a pathway along which a reciprocal understanding between the two disciplinary traditions may develop.

In the meanwhile, inside the social and behavioral sciences and particularly inside psychology, the humanistic tradition made specific new contributions to debates on subjective well-being developing a focus on "psychological well-being." By contrast with the mainstream hedonic tradition in social science relating *good life* to happiness and satisfaction with overall life, authors in the alternative *eudaimonic* tradition defend a *good life* as related to fulfillment, self-determination, and meaning.

The health-related tradition has contributed to the knowledge of child well-being mainly with research focused on clinical populations, before and after health interventions. The social sciences-related traditions began slowly focusing on adult subjects moving on to issues of child well-being only several decades later. Even with the move to studies of child well-being in the social and behavioral disciplines, there was a particular reluctance to study children's subjective well-being.

In recent decades, there has been an increasing amount of research on children's and adolescents' well-being in general (non-clinical) populations. Much of this involves developing and testing psychometric instruments, most based on the hedonic tradition with almost no instruments specific for children or adolescents provided by the eudaimonic tradition. Additionally, recent years have shown an increasing amount of qualitative research with children, related to their well-being.

With the number of indicators of well-being growing, it is notable that in many situations, subjective and material components of QOL are not correlated. "Objective" measures by experts and "subjective" satisfaction of users of services may not correlate at all. Years of debates have ultimately shown that what is scientifically relevant in this regard is not the question "who is right?" but "why different "observers" (i.e., social agents) disagree?" Sorting through the diverse measures of well-being may be a first step to answering this question.

In recent years, a broad consensus among researchers has arisen, considering psychological well-being a key component of QOL. Authors name this phenomena *subjective well-being* (Diener 1984; Huebner 1991; Huebner et al. 1998), *psychological well-being* (Casas 1998; Ryff 1989), *human well-being* (Blanco et al. 2000), *social well-being* (Keyes 1998), or *subjective quality of life* (Cummins and Cahill 2000). Starting with the 1960s (Bradburn 1969; Bradburn and Caplovitz 1965), most authors today agree that well-being has an important subjective dimension and that this dimension has an affective component related to the "happiness" concept.

Another important and more cognitive dimension of well-being is "satisfaction" with life domains and with life as a whole. Both the affective and the cognitive dimensions are considered indicators or outcomes of good psychological conditions of living. Additionally, there is accumulated evidence in localized and cross-cultural studies that well-being is correlated with other positive constructs such as self-esteem, perceived control, perceived social support (Huebner 2004; Casas et al. 2007), values (Diener and Fujita 1995; Diener et al. 1998; Csikzentmihalyi 1997; Coenders et al. 2005).

According to Diener's (1984) review, there is a broad consensus that subjective well-being has three basic characteristics: (1) It is grounded in each person's experiences, and in his or her perceptions and evaluations of such experiences; (2) it includes positive measures and not only the absence of negative aspects; and (3) it includes some overall evaluation of life, usually named "life satisfaction."

However, since Andrews and Withey (1976) proposed a one-item life satisfaction index, this has been widely used as a basic indicator of well-being although with different formats (i.e., Cantrils' ladder), and it has also been used with children and adolescents. Some authors consider this single item a higher-order measure of well-being (Cummins 1998) than the aggregated more focused measures, and it is frequently combined in questionnaires with other multi-items scales. Satisfaction with life as a whole is understood by many authors to be a global evaluation of life (Veenhoven 1994). Overall life satisfaction (OLS) is considered "more than" satisfaction with a set of life domains. On the other hand, life-domains satisfaction and OLS can be explained both through individual and cultural differences (Diener 1984).

Many other authors have underlined how important satisfaction with specific life domains is for personal well-being. In the scientific literature long discussions have ensued about which are the most relevant life domains for an assessment of global life satisfaction. Cummins (1998) considers life-domains satisfaction a second order level and proposed the Personal Well-Being Index to evaluate life satisfaction with only seven different primary life domains, which he hypothesizes are the most cross-culturally relevant.

When the concept QOL was defined in the 1960s, its political implications were "obvious": Any society or any social group changing "for the better" would improve the quality of the lives of its citizens. Any valuable service will improve the quality of life of their clients or users. This implied that by improving material conditions of living, the psychosocial conditions of living and QOL would improve. However, while the meaning of "improving material conditions of living" is often clear, it has never been easy to specify how to improve the "psychosocial conditions of living" of a general population, particularly when subjective well-being is included. Today we know that the quality of public services and relative wealth *do* contribute to subjective well-being but less than expected, particularly for people at median levels of QOL or above, as is typical in more industrialized countries. Additionally there are external factors related to interpersonal relationships that contribute to subjective well-being and may be difficult to measure. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the primary scholarly debate is focused on two significant dimensions of subjective well-being – happiness and life

satisfaction. The crucial point can be formulated with a question mark: Should governments develop policies aimed to increase citizens' happiness or satisfaction with life? What would such policies be like? (Veenhoven 2001).

1.2.3 What is Quality in Children's Lives? And from Whose Perspective?

Developmental psychologists as well as pedagogues, pediatricians, and other professionals have invested a great deal of energy in understanding what is good for children and for child development. Parents usually also want the best for their children. In addition, organizations such as UNICEF and legal documents such as the CRC may represent children's best interests.

What different people or institutions define as *good* or *best* for children may be considered standards or indicators of quality in young people's lives. However, experts often do not agree among themselves about such standards; they may change their minds, parents may disagree with them, and the cross-cultural validity of such standards is often doubtful. This diversity is not to be discounted. In fact, there are important cultural (and individual or perspectival) differences about what is good for children (Childwatch International 1995; Ennew 1996; Casas 1997b, 2000a).

Scientists often conceptualize childhood at least as a starting point by referencing typical representations from within their own sociocultural context (Chombart de Lauwe 1971; 1984; 1989; Casas 1996b, 1997a). Yet, social representations of childhood are biased by societal norms in the ways one perceives and conceptualizes what is good and what is bad for children, in perceptions of what social problems (as opposite to "private" matters) are particularly relevant for children, and in deciding what counts as a "good life" during childhood (for children themselves) (Casas 1998).

In social science as well as in social life, qualitative and quantitative measures, as have been mentioned, often complement one another in measuring well-being for children. To identify a good quality of life in some domain, it is essential not only to have subjective and objective measures for conditions of children's living but also to achieve some consensus about what constitutes "good quality," that is, a normative standard to compare with "reality." However, at present there is no clear agreement about such standards. To date, the definitions of "social problems" and "good quality" for children are strongly influenced by the way society implements social intervention programs (and social policies) to deal with children's problems (and the problems of families with children) and/or to promote children's quality of life (Casas 1998).

In fact, an overview of the research on children's quality of life studies finds few publications that include children's own perspectives. The most usual research focuses on the attribution of needs or the perceptions of quality from adult (experts' or parents') vantage points. In many instances, this is a misuse of the concept "quality of life," because it betrays the basic definition of the concept: people's *own* perceptions, evaluations, and aspirations. Therefore, in practice, what has been referred to over decades as research on children's quality of life does not truly

address the quality of young peoples' lives but of others' perceptions or opinions about their lives.

Traditionally what is good or best for children has been decided by parents or by experts who "know" about children's needs from their own perspectives. Yet, step by step, the perspective of the child, which may indeed differ from that of adults, has become important in research. However, even though this change is often discussed in the scholarship on children today, it is still often taken for granted that children need not be asked, because they do not know (are not yet capable or competent to know) what is good for them. Who is right and who is wrong has been decided on beforehand. If we compare this situation with the recent historical process of studying quality of life, we may suddenly wonder about the best perspective from which to carry research forward. Perhaps if asked, children may sometimes agree and sometimes disagree with different groups of adults. Having data from multiple perspectives at hand would allow investigation of the reasons for such disagreements or consensus and promote learning from them.

Disagreements between children and adults regarding aspects of children's lives can be an important dimension of social life and of interpersonal and intergenerational relationships. For example, adolescents and youngsters in general are more often "risk takers" than are adults; having new and amusing experiences is important for them. For adults, "security" for youths is often more important. As a result, security measures imposed by adults from an adult perspective on what is best for young people may be considered by the youths themselves as a reflection of an adult desire to control their lives or limit their freedoms. Such disagreement might be better understood and more often mitigated if both children's and adult perspectives were considered in research.

The psychosocial context in which such disagreements occur is based in both adults and youngsters considering each other as opposed social groups or categories. Their interactions occur in what social psychologists call processes of intergroup categorical differentiation (Tajfel 1978; Casas 1996a). Adults appear to be vested in their differentiation from adolescents and younger children. Yet, it is a challenge to understand why adults are "interested" in this categorical social differentiation. When policymakers urge an increase in children's participation and responsibility in society, adults are often reluctant to agree (Casas 1998). An alternative is to think in supra-categories (i.e., human beings, with universal human rights) instead of thinking as juxtaposed age-based categories perhaps – that thinking has more potential to encourage mutual understanding of perspectives and dialog and to stimulate the effort to build up social consensus between the new generations.

1.2.4 Global Perspectives on Children's Well-Being

There is a remarkable diversity in the experiences of children and of their childhoods around the world. This diversity poses a challenge to conceptualizing well-being and demands a contextualized perspective along with any consideration of the more universal needs of children. While there has been a call and a moral stance

taken toward looking for the optimal child situation, there are multiple pathways toward well-being each suited to particular cultural contexts. While globalization has led to improvements in child well-being in some domains, such as education, it has also increased disparities between those children who benefit through access to education and those who do not.

Four major points should be remembered in considering child well-being in a cross-cultural or global perspective. (1) Childcare practices vary widely around the world and those that are taken for granted as normative or positive in any one society may be regarded as negative in others. Too often discrete practices are compared across cultural contexts without regard for their larger embeddedness within particular social settings. (2) For the most part, there is limited empirical evidence on the outcomes, positive and negative, of most cultural practices. Understanding the consequences to child well-being in particular cultural and contextual settings is a matter for empirical study rather than for judgments measured against a presumed universal standard. (3) The available evidence relevant to causes and consequences of well-being is largely limited to Western cultures (Henrich et al. 2010). "The study of child development has been largely confined to children in North America, Europe, and other Western countries, who comprise less than 10 % of all children in the world" (LeVine and New 2008, p. 1). (4) Differences in children's experiences thought to lead to well-being may be highly contested both across and within cultural contexts.

1.2.5   Measuring and Monitoring Children's Well-Being

The use of statistical data and indicators to specifically study the well-being of children is not new. Pioneering "State of the Child" reports were published as early as the 1940s (Ben-Arieh 2008; Ben-Arieh et al. 2001). Nevertheless, most researchers would agree that the current attention to child well-being indicators has its substantial origins in the "social indicators movement" of the 1960s, which arose in a climate of rapid social change, and in the sense among social scientists and public officials that well measured and consistently collected social indicators could provide a way to monitor the condition of groups in society at a particular moment and over time, including the conditions of children and families (Land 2000).

Indicators of children's well-being, in particular, are used by child advocacy groups, policymakers, researchers, the media, and service providers for several purposes (e.g., to describe the condition of children, to monitor or track child outcomes, or to set goals). Although there are notable gaps and inadequacies in existing child and family well-being indicators (Ben-Arieh 2000), there also are literally dozens of data series and indicators from which to form opinions and draw conclusions (Bradshaw et al. 2007). The rapidly growing interest in children's well-being indicators stems, in part, from a movement toward accountability-based public policy, which demands more accurate measures of the conditions children face and the outcomes of various programs designed to address those conditions. At the same time, rapid changes in family life have prompted an increased demand

from child development professionals, social scientists, and the public for a better picture of children's well-being (Ben-Arieh and Wintersberger 1997; Lee 1997).

In addition to the growing policy demands for accountability, the birth and development of the child indicators movement can be attributed to the emergence of new normative and conceptual theories as well as methodological advancements. Broadly speaking, three major normative or theoretical changes have contributed to the creation and evolution of the child indicators field: (1) the normative concept of children rights, (2) the new sociology of childhood as a stage in and of itself, and (3) ecological theories of child development. Similarly, three methodological issues gave rise to the child indicators movement: (1) the emerging importance of the subjective perspective, (2) the child as the unit of observation, and (3) the expanded use of administrative data and a growing variety of data sources. Finally, the call for more policy-oriented research also played a role in the evolution of attention to indicators.

As efforts to measure and monitor children's well-being have expanded in recent years, so has scholarly interest. This growth was evident in numerous joint projects by government, nongovernment, and academic institutes and in numerous "State of the Child" reports (Ben-Arieh et al. 2001; Land et al. 2001). State of the Child reports are published documents (not necessarily academic publications and definitely not scholarly papers) typically authored by academicians and advocates that address the status of children with the goal of monitoring their status in a given region or area (Ben-Arieh and Goerge 2001; Bradshaw and Barnes 1999).

A quick look at the number of these reports published recently reveals children's well-being and attention to indicators to be a growing field. Much of this new and enhanced activity can be accounted for by UNICEF's *State of the World's Children* annual report as well as the Annie E. Casey Foundation's *Kids Count* initiative in the United States. The UN's CRC, through its global ratification and its reporting and monitoring mechanism, has also played an important role in increasing interest in these reports (Ben-Arieh 2012).

This growth has enabled scholars to use the reports to examine whether any specific patterns or trends are emerging in the indicators field in general or in the production of the reports themselves. A number of reviews (Ben-Arieh 2006, 2012; Ben-Arieh and Goerge 2001; Bradshaw and Barnes 1999) as well as several other studies (Hauser et al. 1997; Moore et al. 2004) concluded that the field of children's social indicators has evolved through several major shifts in the past 30 years. We outline this trajectory below.

The evolution of child indicators has occurred in four, sometimes concurrent, stages noted as the first four items in the following list. Researchers have argued that the current field of child indicators can be characterized by these and additional features as follows. (1) Indicators, their measurement, and use are driven by the universal acceptance of the CRC. (2) Indicators have broadened beyond children's immediate survival to their well-being (without necessarily neglecting the survival indicators). (3) Efforts are combining a focus on negative and positive aspects of children's lives. (4) The well-becoming perspective – a focus on the future success of the generation – while still dominant, is no longer the only perspective. Well-being – children's current status – is now considered legitimate as well. (5) New domains of

child well-being have emerged, fewer efforts are professionally- or service-oriented, and many more are child-centered. (6) The child as the unit of observation is now common. Efforts to measure and monitor children's well-being today start from the child and move outward. (7) Efforts to include subjective perceptions, including the child's, are growing. Recent efforts acknowledge the usefulness of both quantitative and qualitative studies, as well as multiple methods. (8) Numerous efforts to develop composite indices are underway at all geographic levels, local, national, and international. (9) The shift is evident toward a greater emphasis on policy-oriented efforts. A major criterion for selecting indicators is their usefulness to community workers and policymakers. Policymakers are often included in the process of developing the indicators and discussing the usefulness of various choices.

Clearly, the child indicators field has evolved. The various reviews of the field support this claim. The volume of activity is clearly rising, and new indicators, composite indices, and State of the Child reports are emerging. These and the above-noted changes are occurring widely, although at different paces (Ben-Arieh 2000, 2006, 2012). As new indicators are developed across additional domains, the field will continue to expand (Bradshaw et al. 2007; Lippman 2004).

1.2.6   From Survival to Well-Being

Much attention has been paid to children's physical survival and basic needs, focusing often on threats to children's survival. In fact, the use of such social indicators has spurred programs to save children's lives (Ben-Arieh 2000; Bradshaw et al. 2007). Infant and child mortality, school enrollment and dropout rates, immunizations, and childhood disease are all examples of areas where data on basic needs has improved child survival broadly. However, a fundamental shift occurs when the focus shifts from survival to well-being. Both Aber (1997) and Pittman and Irby (1997) argued in the late 1990s for indicators that moved beyond basic needs of development and beyond the phenomenon of deviance to those that reflect the promotion of child development. These efforts in turn moved the field from efforts to determine minimums, as in saving a life, to those that focus on quality of life. This shift was further supported by efforts to better understand what QOL entailed and its implications for children (Casas et al. 2000; Huebner 1997, 2004).

1.2.7   From Negative to Positive

Measures of risk factors or negative behaviors are not the same as measures that gauge protective factors or positive behaviors (Aber and Jones 1997). The absence of problems or failures does not necessarily indicate proper growth and success (Ben-Arieh 2006; Moore et al. 2004). Thus, the challenge has become developing indicators that hold societies accountable for more than the safe warehousing of children and youth (Pittman and Irby 1997). As Resnick (1995, p. 3) states, "children's well-being indicators are on the move from concentrating only on

trends of dying, distress, disability, and discomfort to tackling the issue of indicators of sparkle, satisfaction, and well-being."

However, children's positive outcomes are not static. They result from an interplay of resources and risk factors pertinent to the child, his or her family, his or her friends, his or her school, and the wider society. These resources and risk factors are constantly changing, and children, with their evolving capacities, actively create their own well-being by mediating among available supports and impinging risks. Antonovsky (1987) describes this process in his concept of "salutogenesis," which he suggests captures the movement of people on a continuum between health and disease, balancing stress and resources.

1.2.8 Well-Being and Well-Becoming

The sociology of childhood underscores two dimensions, or axes, in the understanding of childhood and children. Each has its origins in the Greek philosophy that conceived the concepts of *being* (object or state) and *becoming* (change or development). These concepts refer to life as it is experienced in the present and life as it develops toward adulthood. Children's rights refer both to their rights here and now and to their right to develop and "become," as illustrated by the CRC emphasis on children's rights to realize their potentials. We may view *being* as a state at a given point in time and *becoming* as the unfolding of the life course along trajectories shaped by social structures and the agency of the actor. An emphasis on becoming – as in the modern society – may entail that the state of being is intensely in focus *because* of the emphasis on becoming. Being may represent the cultivating of factors that are understood to influence future being. The investment in children's futures may represent an important part of children's well-being but may also imply a structuring of childhood that exploits the life of the present. The sociology of childhood, as well as modern advocacy of children's rights, underline rights for children as citizens of the present, not only as beings on their way to adult positions.

The relationship between being and becoming is, in itself, a part of children's well-being. The child who spends countless hours on schoolwork may lose out on leisure activities of play but may gain in the future, while the child who invests little in schoolwork may enjoy the moment but weaken his or her future well-being. Similarly, a child who spends long hours practicing sports or music may lose on his present well-being but may gain affluence and achievements as an adult. The status and position of children have to be understood within the framework of the present, as description, and within a framework of life course and development, as predictions. Total well-being includes them both.

In contrast to the immediacy of well-being, well-becoming describes a future focus (i.e., preparing children to be productive and happy adults). Qvortrup (1999) laid the foundation for considering children's well-being in claiming that the conventional preoccupation with the next generation is a preoccupation of adults. Anyone interested in children and childhood should in this view be interested in present as well as future childhood. In other words, children are instrumentalized by

forward-looking perspectives in the sense that their "good life" is postponed until adulthood. As such, perspectives on well-becoming focus on opportunities rather than provisions (de Lone 1979). Accepting the arguments of Qvortrup and others to concentrate on the well-being of children does not deny the relevance of a child's development toward adulthood.

In addition, focusing on preparing children to become citizens suggests that they are not citizens during childhood, a concept that is hard to reconcile with a belief in children's rights. It is not uncommon to find in the literature reference to the importance of rearing children who will be creative, ethical, and moral adult members of a community. It is harder to find reference to children's well-being and immediate creative social participation during their childhood. Indeed, both perspectives are legitimate and necessary for social science and for public policy. However, the emergence of the child-centered perspective, and its focus on children's well-being, introduced new ideas and energy to the child indicators movement.

1.2.9 Children's Own Perceptions of Well-Being

Children's well-being should take into account: (1) children's conditions of living and "objective" measures of their well-being; (2) children's perceptions, evaluations, and aspirations regarding their own lives – including children's subjective well-being; and (3) perceptions, evaluations, and aspirations of other relevant social agents (stakeholders) about children's lives and conditions of living, i.e., the opinions of their parents, teachers, pediatricians, educators, social professionals, and so on.

Studies of children's well-being have seldom been conducted with children or adolescents, particularly if we compare these with similar research on adults' well-being (Huebner 2004). Many of the preliminary studies with children 8 years old or older use the Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale (MSLSS) (Huebner 1994), which functions well in different cultural contexts (Casas et al. 2000). Cummins' (1998) Personal Well-Being Index has also been used successfully with adolescents 12–16 years old in Romania, Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Spain, and Australia (Casas et al. 2011; Casas et al. 2012; Tomyn and Cummins 2011), and longer lists of life domains have been explored at least in Brazil, India, South Africa, Norway, and Spain (Casas et al. 2004).

In fact, throughout the last decade, subjective well-being in childhood and adolescence has flourished engendering productive discussions (Ben-Arieh et al. 2001), even while different authors use different concepts and approaches. Researchers have taken an interest in asking children about their own life evaluations, with the result that children's answers may be unexpected and surprising for adults.

Huebner (2004) reviewed correlations found by different authors between life satisfaction measures in children and adolescents and other measures of adaptive and positive functioning. Among his conclusions, it is worth pointing out the following: (1) Although the development of life satisfaction scales appropriate for children and adolescents has only recently been undertaken, there is support for convergent validity of diverse life satisfaction measures and (2) there is

a developing support for discriminate validity. Life satisfaction appears to be related to, but separable from, a variety of psychological constructs, such as self-esteem, positive affect, and negative affect.

Traditionally there has been reluctance among social scientists to accept children's self-reported information as reliable in agreement with adults' social representation of children as "*not yets*," i.e., not yet competent (Casas 1999; Verhellen 1992). This attitude has recently started to change. A number of publications are now available recommending how best to communicate with children (Richman 1993), how to listen to children's points of view in different contexts (Garbarino et al. 1989), and how to develop research with the children (Mason and Danby 2011). As Garbarino and colleagues (1989) stated, it is adult's orientation and competence when relating and listening to children that raises the difference of children's competence.

Developmental psychologists have tested instruments over decades for successfully interviewing children in order to understand their cognitive capacities and other skills. Following the psychologists, probably those more interested in knowing children's points of view have been publicists and professionals involved with the media: Children are consumers and media audiences, so their preferences are significant in market research. A couple of decades before the end of the twentieth century, publications began to appear in which children were asked what they think about something. A number of studies asking children for their opinions on the family (Van Gils 1995), about their own rights (Melton 1980; Cherney and Perry 1994; Ochaita et al. 1994), about their neighborhoods (Casas 1996c; Spilsbury et al. 2009, 2012), and so on, promoted international debates. This research transcends limitations on sample sizes posed by traditional studies using children's compositions or designs and reduces the reliance on adult interpretation bias.

The issue of whether children are able to answer appropriately or not to questionnaires exploring their overall life satisfaction or their satisfaction regarding particular life domains is critical. Huebner (1991) first tested both a one-dimensional and a multidimensional questionnaire of satisfaction adapted for children. The multidimensional scale included measures about family, friends, school, living environment, and self. The complementary one-dimensional scale was simple (seven items) and was tested successfully with children 8–14 years old. From his findings, Huebner (1991) concluded that "the notion of children's global life satisfaction can be reliably and validly assessed in children as early as 8 years old." Parents' and children's perspectives and evaluations about widely ranging topics are increasingly being explored (Megías 2002; Barge and Loges 2003; Luk-Fong 2005). Values and audiovisual media are two examples of interesting fields for such comparisons (Coenders et al. 2005; Casas et al. 2001).

Audiovisual media studies during the 1990s provided evidence of stereotypes that adults use to explain children's lives. For example, many adults said that the preferred activity of their children was watching TV – some children never voluntarily moved, adults suggested, from sitting in front of a television set. When children started to be asked about their preferences, a different landscape emerged: Children and adolescents most preferred being with friends; television watching,

children indicated, is useful for collecting information to talk about with friends, but only of interest as a focal activity when friends are not available (Casas 2011). Another documented difference between adults and children is their comfort levels with technology. While many adults feel incompetent with information and communication technologies (ICTs), children are adept and even enthusiastic in using them. In fact, in Europe, it is clear that "children in the household" is a variable that influences the level of ICTs at home (Süess et al. 1998).

It has become obvious that many adults miss a lot of relevant information about children's activities and interests with respect to new technologies, and they wrongly assume that children's perspectives must be the same with that of adult's. For example, in a research on video game use (Casas 2000b, 2001), questions were asked of children and then, in separately, parents were asked about their own ideas and their ideas about their children's thoughts on exactly the same topics. Parents and children shared a number of ideas, for example, that video games are useless as a mean for learning. However, statistically significant discrepancies appeared between parents and male children about three topics: when children were asked whether video game playing is lost time, whether they prefer video games incorporating fighting and war, and whether they play video games to forget their problems. In relation to these topics, parents' ideas about their child were related to their own desires, not to the children's feelings.

Last, but not least, traditional research on children often assumed that socialization is a one-way process, mainly related to parents' skills – those with knowledge about life and about the world socialize those without knowledge, i.e., the children. However, a bidirectional model of socialization has been assumed among experts by the second half of the twentieth century (Kuczynski et al. 1997). Two main consequences arise from that new model: (1) Adults also learn and can learn from children. In fact they often do, although a general tendency is observed to undervalue the importance of such learning (these are "childish" things). (2) Adults have often attributed intergenerational relationship problems to the behavior of the younger-generation members. Aristotle, in his time, voiced his worries about young people losing and changing traditional values. On a tablet dated around 2800 BC similar thoughts appear: "Children no longer obey their parents, every man wants to write a book, and the end of the world is evidently approaching" (Layard and Dunn 2009, quoting information from David Piachaud about a tablet in the Istanbul Municipal Museum).

Throughout history Western cultures have looked at youngsters without confidence in their emerging status and responsibility. Young people are often said not to "explain things to adults." However, at present, research evidence in Europe suggests that adults are also changing traditional values on how to raise children (Commission of the European Communities 1990) and that adults are often the ones who avoid talking to younger people, particularly about topics where children show greater interest (Casas 2001).

If one truly assumes that well-being and quality of life include perceptions, evaluations, and aspirations of people about their own lives, then research on children's quality of life is at its very beginnings. Researchers are only starting to

"listen to children," to "discover" their opinions and evaluations, to recognize that children's points of view may be different from adults,' and to understand that it is no longer clear who "is right" or perhaps that the question of "rightness" is not the most useful focus for investigation. This allows a new question mark: Why do adults and children differ on the perceptions and evaluations of the important aspects of everyday lives?

In order to develop well-designed intervention programs, a better understanding of conditions to be changed is essential. The present state of the art of well-being and quality of life research establishes crucial findings, not specifically researched for children yet, but that would appear to be valid for children's populations:

1. Improving the quality of public services has a positive impact on people's quality of life, including subjective well-being.
2. Participation of users of services in the design and functioning of those services has positive effects on users' perceptions and evaluations and other positive consequences. For example, participation in the design of urban spaces has an "appropriating" effect and, as a consequence, the spaces are respected and those who have engaged with the process actively ask respect for these spaces by others. The same impact has been observed on children when they participate in the design of city open spaces for playing. In the general population, political democracy (respect for political and civil rights) has been shown to contribute to higher happiness levels (Veenhoven 2001).
3. Improving material conditions of living has a positive impact on people's quality of life. The lower the material conditions of living are, the higher the impact when they are improved.
4. It is difficult to improve the subjective well-being for people who are happy or well satisfied with life. However, it is easier to improve the subjective well-being of those who are unhappy or unsatisfied with their own living conditions. An important political recommendation rises from such evidence: In order to have a clear impact on the mean quality of life of any population globally, it is most effective to focus action on those living in the worse conditions.
5. In order to understand the quality of life of any population, one needs to know the point of view of all social agents involved. This includes children's points of view. Improving satisfactory interpersonal relationships is probably the best way to have a positive impact in people's subjective well-being.

Recall that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1948, in its article 25.1, states that "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care, and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control."

More than two decades ago, Williams (1993) discussed the importance of quality of life in policy decisions and concluded that quality of life measurement, as a way of measuring the relative value of the benefits of different interventions, has a tremendous future at all levels, from the monitoring of individual performance

to the establishment of social priorities. However, he argued that it will probably take several decades before we can expect to see this kind of data used for policy decisions on a regular basis.

Children's perspectives are opening up access to "a different interpersonal and social world." The idea of "children's cultures" makes sense when we know that children and adolescents have their own opinions, experiences, evaluations, and aspirations, which are not only constructed in their interactions with adults but sometimes independently. In fact, many different researchers have suggested that experiences, values, and perceptions are much less shared between parents and children than once presumed (Kuczynski et al. 1997). That becomes particularly evident with research on audiovisual media use and on the interpersonal relationships related to or mediated by these technologies. After initial promising results, further advances require creative research replicating and improving designs and instruments for data collection.

1.3   Discourses on Well-Being

The concept of well-being is complex, encompassing problems of subjective well-being and happiness, Aristotelian perspectives on the good life, and the rights of the subject to a voice and to freedom of choice. The interplay of the dimensions of well-being and of well-becoming particular to childhood produces a special complexity related to children's quality of life. Some families and cultures may focus on becoming and academic achievements, while others may argue that this focus on becoming overshadows the well-being of the present. Many of the most famous artists of the world spent their childhood with intensive rehearsals, realizing their potentialities and shaping fantastic adult lives, but perhaps losing the play of childhood. A prominent Western middle-class style of socialization, conceptualized as *concerted cultivation*, underlines parents' obligations to guide, support, and push their children through educational systems, while a complementary working-class upbringing termed *natural growth*, implies less parental involvement in children's development (Lareau 2003). The modern version of concerted cultivation also represents the development of children's voices; the voice of a child as an adult is a fruit of learning and discursive reflection. Perspective and wisdom do not emerge solely out of social positions. There is an ongoing debate in many countries about the possible overburdening of children in educational systems and through organized activities, weakening their well-being and also weakening play, which has been the primary context for children's learning and development through human history.

The discourses of children's well-being relate to the Aristotelian challenge, entangling individual well-being with the development of the reflexive subject and the greater good. The ideas of well-being are rooted in ongoing discourses of well-being. The position of the concept in politics and research encourages discursive and ideological reflections on its meaning in various domains, illustrating that the well-being of individuals and their societies is related to personal as well as social frameworks and global as well as to the local perspectives.

1.3.1   Structure of the Handbook

This multivolume compendium on child well-being takes as its starting point that child well-being is best understood within a multicultural and multidisciplinary framework, encompassing a wide range of approaches and contexts. The organization reflects the project of exploring the multifaceted nature of child well-being. More than 110 chapters reveal wide-ranging interest in child well-being around the world through its conceptualizations, its topic areas, its policy implications, its context, its expression, and the myriad of components that comprise the well-being of children. The compendium also reflects broad geographic and global interest in child well-being with chapters representing nations and cultures around the world, not limited, as is often the case, to North American and European perspectives. By encompassing these diverse perspectives, the Handbook hopes to broaden discourses and their scholarly and policy relevances.

In the first section of the handbook, contributors explore the history of well-being, the cultural context, and gendered and intergenerational perspectives. These orienting frameworks are then followed by a diversity of disciplinary approaches to well-being represented by the 15 chapters in ▶ Sect. II. The authors of these 15 chapters consider approaches that multiple disciplines have taken to understanding child well-being within their own disciplinary frames. ▶ Section III continues to set parameters by including various theoretical approaches to child well-being.

In ▶ Sect. IV authors give consideration to children's well-being in the context of activities that shape their lives and are shaped by their participation: well-being in school and in after-school activities, at play and at work, engaging in sports and artistic endeavors, volunteering and engaging in civic and political activities, and in the use of time. In ▶ Sect. V, attention is turned specifically toward children's artistic activities in relation to well-being, and ▶ Sect. VI centers on the impact of religious and spiritual life.

The importance of an ecological perspective on child well-being gives shape to ▶ Sect. VII in which scholars consider the child embedded in families, schools, communities and neighborhoods, and social networks. In ▶ Sect. VIII contributors focus on children's material conditions: poverty and social exclusion as well as affluence, children as consumers as well as producers, the costs of a child as well as the intergenerational distribution of wealth, and costs and effects of child welfare interventions.

Children's well-being considered in a life course perspective is the frame for ▶ Sect. IX in which authors attend to the periods of infancy through early childhood, adolescence, and the transition to adulthood. The section also includes a consideration of how life course perspectives and the importance of changing contexts influence understandings. Interpersonal relationships, so critical to child well-being, are considered by those writing for chapters in ▶ Sect. X, where approaches encompass relationships with peers, siblings, and allomothers and include a consideration of children as caregivers themselves.

In a globalizing world, the role of the media takes on increasing importance. In ▶ Sect. XI authors consider the influence of various aspects of the media on

child well-being including television, news media, advertising, and the role of the internet.

▶ Section XII has a focus on the family and parenting, considering parental labor, parenting styles, and issues of adoption and children without permanent parents. ▶ Section XIII includes attention to a range of health issues as they relate to children's well-being, from mental health to HIV and AIDS, from body image to how neuroscience is related to child-rearing practices.

▶ Section XIV moves to a consideration of children's rights, particularly the role of the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child. Children's participation in their own rights is a component of this section. ▶ Section XV focuses on scholarship identifying the roots of children's aggression as well as children's vulnerabilities to bullying, maltreatment, crime, and life in the streets.

In ▶ Sect. XVI scholars draw attention to issues of methods and measures to understand child well-being and consider the indices that have been developed. Methods include considering children's perspectives, subjective and objective indicators, and the use of mixed methodologies and multiple sources of information. Issues involved in international comparisons and the ethics of research on children's well-being are included.

Contributors to ▶ Sect. XVII explore the strategies and policies that have been aimed at enhancing child well-being including early intervention, prevention, and the use of advocacy to promote child well-being. The concluding section of the book, ▶ Sect. XVIII, includes the work of authors who bring forward global issues related to child well-being such as child soldiers, migration, self-determination, and the impact of globalization itself.

The editors hope and anticipate that the project of this Handbook is but a beginning for more work by scholars and practitioners, policymakers, and child advocates on the issues that surround child well-being.

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