A Child’s Sense of Well-being: Developing Well-being Indicators from a Child Standpoint

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Outline

- Overview of child well-being indicators
- Children’s Understandings of Well-being Project
- Indicators from a child standpoint

- Features of children’s well-being
  1. Children’s understandings of well-being differs from popular, scientific and policy discourses
  2. Well-being as social and relational
  3. ‘Well-being‘ and ‘well-becoming’ for children

- Some implications for service provision
Approaches to measuring children’s well-being

• **Objective approaches** adopt material indicators to measure the social conditions of populations.

• **Subjective approaches** rely on an individual’s assessments of their quality of life.

• Most monitoring frameworks combine both. For example OECD 2017:
  - **Objective indicators**- child income poverty, living in a home without basic facilities, infant mortality rates, PISA reading scores and homicide rates
  - **Subjective measures**- self-reports on health status, quality of relationships and overall life satisfaction

• Frameworks have mainly focused on child development outcomes in which knowledge is sought *about* children’s well-being. Emphasises deficits and problematic behaviours.
Children’s Understandings of Well-being study

Based on children’s perspectives of what they consider important to their well-being and their experiences of well-being.

Investigators:
Tobia Fattore, Jan Mason, Elizabeth Watson

Research participants:
• 126 children, aged 8-15 participated in up to 3 stages
• Rural-Urban dimensions
• Stratification across aggregate income levels

Stages
• Stage 1: Explore children’s ideas about meanings and experiences of well-being in everyday life.
• Stage 2: In-depth explorations of themes raised in Stage 1.
• Stage 3: ‘Well-being Projects’.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain / Theme</th>
<th>Indicator Concept</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Agency</strong></td>
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| **Agency as self-determination** | • Children have the opportunity to engage in decision-making about day-to-day interactions in which the child is involved.  
• Children have opportunities to influence, organize, coordinate and control aspects of their everyday life.  
• Children have opportunities to express opinions in public discussion and in formal decision-making. |
| **Agency as making a difference within relational contexts** | • Extent to which significant adult–child relationships, are characterised by respectful engagement, which provide a basis for negotiating everyday decisions.  
• Opportunities are available for children to exercise individual capabilities as relevant to everyday contexts.  
• Children have opportunities to develop individual capabilities in everyday contexts, as an expression of becoming competent. |
# Indicators from a child standpoint:
Some examples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain / Theme</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Security and Safety</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Ontological Security</strong></td>
<td>• Children have opportunities to access physical environments that facilitate freedom and enjoyment.</td>
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<td>• Degree to which local environments are experienced by children with a fear-free disposition and sense of inclusion.</td>
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<td><strong>Safety at Home</strong></td>
<td>• Degree to which care relationships are safe.</td>
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<td>• Degree to which the physical features of the home facilitate a sense of safety.</td>
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<td>• Children have personal spaces within the home that foster a sense of security.</td>
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<td><strong>Safe Public Spaces</strong></td>
<td>• Degree to which public environments facilitate opportunities for children’s autonomous exploration.</td>
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<td>• Children have the opportunities deal with risks as encountered in everyday situations, in a supported manner.</td>
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## Indicators from a child standpoint: Some examples

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| *Moral Self*                                | • Children have opportunities to develop their capabilities as moral agents.  
• Degree to which children are supported in the moral dilemmas they encounter. |
| *Families as sites of dialogue, affective solidarity* | • Degree to which families are experienced as a site of trust and intimacy.  
• Degree to which children engage in ‘other-oriented activities’ in the family that are associated with a sense of belonging. |
| *Friends, mutual acceptance and belonging*  | • Children have some close friendships in which they experience a sense of intimacy and closeness, in which they can trust to share their inner thoughts and feelings.  
• Children have some friendships in which they experience a sense of belonging and in which they can gain validation of their sense of self. |
Some features of children’s well-being

i) Children’s understandings of well-being differ from popular, scientific and policy discourses

• *Children’s agency*: formal participation v practices of agency in everyday life.

• For example:
  • Having the opportunity to engage in decision-making about day-to-day interactions important to the child.
  • Children have opportunities to influence, organize, coordinate and control aspects of their everyday life.
  • Children have opportunities to express opinions in public discussion and in formal decision-making.
Some features of children’s well-being

i) Children’s understandings of well-being differ from prevailing popular, scientific and policy discourses

- **Children’s safety:** child protection and risk aversion v ontological insecurity, trust, negotiated engagement with risk and structural inconsiderateness towards children.

- For example:
  - Children experience a sense of ontological security, based on trust in and dependence upon those tasked with their care.
  - Opportunities to access physical environments that facilitate a sense of freedom and enjoyment.
  - Local environments are experienced by children with a fear-free disposition and sense of inclusion.
Some features of children’s well-being

i) Children’s understandings of well-being differ from prevailing popular, scientific and policy discourses

- *Children’s sense of self*: developmental milestones vs processes of identity-construction that centre on the self as moral, purposeful and authentic.

- For example:
  - Opportunities to develop their capabilities as moral agents.
  - Children are supported in the moral dilemmas they encounter.
  - Families are experienced as a site of trust and intimacy in which children feel their self-identity is given recognition.
  - Families provide a site in which negotiations around children’s changes in self-identity can occur in a fear-free manner.
ii) Well-being as social and relational

• Importance of emotions for well-being. Consistent with hedonic well-being (e.g. fun, pleasurable activities, health).

• However, also emphasis on an interweaving of complex emotions – such as joy with frustration or sadness with happiness.

• These emotions act as a reaffirmation and expression of the importance of close social ties.
  • Extent to which significant adult–child relationships, are characterised by respectful engagement.
  • Children have opportunities to develop individual capabilities in everyday contexts, as an expression of becoming competent.
  • Children have opportunities to negotiate with their carers the boundaries of ‘safety’.
  • Children have the opportunities to deal with risks encountered in everyday situations, in a supported manner.
Some features of children’s well-being

iii) Well-being and well-becoming
Children distinguished between:

- Practices that enable them to experience well-being in the present (well-being)
- Practices that contribute to well-being in the future (well-becoming)
- Practices associated with children’s own aspirations, imaginings and definitions of their future.

Tension between these three concepts. For example *moral self*, premised on the development of capabilities and the *authentic self*, which relates to children developing a sense of themselves as being a unique and worthy individual.
Children’s understandings differ from current discourses
• Current policy and service frameworks do not adequately reflect children’s understandings and experiences of well-being.
• Potential to reframe policy guidelines, service frameworks and outcome measures to include children’s understandings of well-being.

Well-being as social and relational
• Importance of developing and maintaining significant relationships.
• Relationship-centred practice, where relationships are characterized by experiences of trust, respect and inclusiveness.

Well-being and well-becoming
• Service frameworks should be mindful of how children experience the provision of the service and how service delivery factors impact on children’s quality of life in the day-to-day.
• Include the significance of children’s own aspirations and sense of purpose for their well-being.
Thank you!

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