

Panel proposal: Child Participation and Co-Production as essential ingredients of meaningful change

Presenters: Dr Annie Smith (McCreary Centre Society, Professor Sharon Bessell (Crawford School of Public Policy, Australia), Mr Pablo Cheyre (University of Leeds, UK), Ms Diana Skelton (ATD Fourth World, UK), Professor Gill Main (University of Leeds, UK)

Summary: This panel will include presentations on the topic of co-producing knowledge about child poverty and children's subjective well-being, drawing on a wide range of study contexts (Australia, Chile, the UK, and international), and study topics (understandings of child poverty; child poverty and education; conceptualising child well-being in contexts of high inequality; and the well-being of care experienced children and young people). What ties the presentations together is the centring of experiential expertise, and the development of child-centric methodologies in the development of evidence.

Themes: This panel speaks to many of the themes of the ISCI conference. Our primary focus relates to the themes of child poverty, inequality and child welfare research; child-focused indicators of social trends, policies, and child well-being; and innovations in research design and measurement. Regarding sub-themes, the panel addresses issues relating to subjective well-being; the rights of children and adolescents; children's participation and voices; and poverty, deprivation, material well-being and inequality.

Presenters: The panel presents research conducted in Australia, Chile, the UK, and internationally; and includes presenters from academic and civil society backgrounds, and ranging in career stage from PhD candidate to Professor.

Narrative: While the research presented draws on a range of topics and contexts, the common thread which brings these presentations together is the centralisation of expertise by experience (that is, the expertise of children and young people in their own lives); the co-production of knowledge drawing on experiential, practitioner, policy, and academic ways of knowing; and a rights-based approach, with a particular focus on participation rights as providing an essential underpinning to successful protection and provision. Our conclusions emphasise a shared focus on the need to disrupt and deconstruct hierarchies of knowledge in order to develop better understandings of children's lives, and design policies and interventions which are flexible and effective in creating improvements.

Presentation 1: Capturing the changing picture of deprivation among Canadian adolescents

Annie Smith, McCreary Centre Society

Thematic importance: Themes: children's rights indicators; child poverty, inequality and child welfare; innovations in research design and measurement. Sub-themes: subjective well-being; rights of children and adolescents; children's participation; poverty, deprivation, material well-being and inequality.

Introduction and objectives: The 2020 BC child poverty report card showed 1 in 5 children and adolescents in BC were living in poverty – the highest rate in Canada. However, increased supports and services provided during the first year of the pandemic helped some of BC's most vulnerable families out of poverty (albeit potentially temporarily) whilst others experienced additional hardships. Supports to adolescents included smartphones, WiFi access, and increased school food programs.

In 2018, the population-level provincial BC Adolescent Health Survey (BC AHS) included a Youth Deprivation Index which was created with input from over 800 of the province's adolescents using a methodology developed in the UK. The 2018 Youth Deprivation Index asked respondents whether they lacked items or experiences, and if so, whether they wanted these or not. The finalized Index included 10 items: smartphone, pocket money, space of their own to hang out, clothes to fit in, access to transportation, lunch/lunch money, access to the internet, equipment for extracurriculars, money for school supplies/events, and a quiet place to sleep. The Index has been used widely by policy makers and program planners. However, the province's most financial and resource deprived youth are experiencing very different environments to their peers in 2018.

The 10 item 2018 Youth Deprivation Index is being revised with the input of 1,000 adolescents (aged 12-19) to reflect the current realities of youth experiencing deprivation across BC. The Index will be finalized following piloting in Spring 2022 and included on the 2023 BC Adolescent Health Survey.

Methods: Forty youth in Grades 8-11 have been recruited and trained to host dialogues with their peers in schools and communities across the province. A diverse mix of youth in urban, semi urban, and rural centres are consulting with 1,000 of their peers through March 2022, using interactive and visual activities to establish the 10 items BC adolescents consider 'necessities' and which the majority of their peers possess or participate in.

Results: Results of the changing picture of material deprivation, due to the pandemic and associated policies and practices, will be available in Spring 2022 and will be shared at the conference.

Conclusion and implications: Based on the model developed in the UK, BC's 2018 Youth Deprivation Index supported the value of a youth-derived measure of children's material deprivation. The Index must continue to evolve and adapt to remain relevant to the lives of young people and continue to reflect their needs.

Presentation 2: Three dimensions of deprivation: What children say about material needs, opportunity, and relationships in contexts of poverty in Australia and Indonesia

Sharon Bessell, Crawford School of Public Policy

Thematic importance: Themes: children's rights indicators; child poverty, inequality and child welfare; innovations in research design and measurement. Sub-themes: subjective well-being; rights of children and adolescents; children's participation; poverty, deprivation, material well-being and inequality.

Introduction and Objectives: Poverty is a violation of children's human rights and has long been an issue of global and national concern. Over several decades, there have been important developments in the conceptualisation and measurement of child poverty, including a shift towards multidimensionality. The presentation is based on two studies, undertaken in the vastly different contexts of Australia and Indonesia, to co-construct with children a child-centred conceptualisation of child poverty.

Method: Each study adopted a rights-based approach, seeking to position children as both partners and stakeholders in the research process. A range of participatory activity-based methods were used to co-construct knowledge and explore a child standpoint. 108 children aged between seven and thirteen years, across six communities, participated in the research

in Australia. 130 children aged between seven and fifteen years, across five communities, participated in the research in Indonesia.

Thematic analysis was undertaken separately for each country. Within each country, thematic analysis was undertaken for each community and across all communities. In each country, a gendered analysis was undertaken.

Results: Not surprisingly, the results highlight the different issues facing children in Australia and Indonesia. Yet, they also highlight striking similarities in the dimensions of poverty that impact most significantly on children's lives and the matter most to them. While children raised a wide range of issues, and often described different experiences and priorities, three broad dimensions emerged as defining poverty: the absence of material basics; the lack of opportunities; the existence of stresses and pressures that undermine strong and supportive relationships. The findings show that not only material lack, but shame and stigma undermine children's opportunities.

Conclusions and Implications: The co-construction of knowledge with children led to a multidimensional framework for conceptualising and responding to poverty that takes account not only of material deprivation, but of opportunities and relationships. In both Australia and Indonesia children highlighted the interactions between material poverty and opportunities not only to engage in high quality education, but to participate in co-curricular activities, to play, and to participate fully and without stigma in their communities. Children also highlighted the ways in which poverty creates stresses and pressures that are difficult for children and their families to counter. Children spoke of the ways in which such pressure, which arise from patterns of discrimination, shame and stigma, and systemic failures, impact on relationships. This has important implications for the indicators used to measure child poverty and for the development, implementation and evaluation of services, programs and policies.

Presentation 3: What is the life we value? A vision of well-being from a variety of young people's viewpoints: a Chilean perspective

Pablo Cheyre, University of Leeds

Thematic importance: Themes: Child poverty, inequality and child welfare research; Innovations in research design and measurement. Sub-themes: subjective well-being; rights of children and adolescents; children's participation and voices.

Introduction and objectives: The interest in conceptualising and measuring young people's well-being has increased drastically over the last decades. Nevertheless, these studies are primarily based on adult-centred and Global North constructions. Consequently, in Chile, theorisation and measurement of young people's well-being are not contextualised, impacting the effectiveness of policies and programs and limiting young people's right to influence the decisions that affect them. Therefore, this research aims to integrate young people's viewpoints from different socioeconomic backgrounds in the theoretical conceptualisations of well-being in the Chilean context. The purpose is to identify the dimensions that comprise well-being and analyse how current policies effectively provide all young people with the possibility to achieve the life they have reason to value by promoting the participant's voices as the key input to design policies.

Method: Six focus group sessions were held by four groups of students (32 in total) from various socioeconomic backgrounds. This study adopts a participatory approach, with participants contributing to the data collection and with a preliminary analysis of the dimensions that affect their well-being. Data from focus groups was analysed thematically

through the framework approach, which enabled the creation of a list of the different aspects of young people's lives that have the greatest impact on their well-being. Finally, a social policy analysis based on this data allowed for an examination of current understandings of well-being in Chile and its effectiveness in providing all young people equal possibilities to live the lives they have reason to value.

Results: results will be co-produced with children and young people, and will comprise contributions to theoretical debates about the nature of child well-being in the majority world, and practical recommendations for policies to improve child well-being in the contexts of the study.

Conclusions and implications: This research discussed the importance of including young people's voices in theorising their well-being as well as policy decision-making processes. This project is also based on the UNCRC, a normative framework that can enhance persuasive power in childhood studies research and beyond academia by influencing both public institutions and non-governmental organisations. As a result, it contributes to the study of well-being in Chile by promoting a participatory culture in which young people can exercise their right to be heard and be agents of change in their lives.

Presentation 4: Protection without participation doesn't work: reflections on our contribution to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child Day of General Discussion (DGD) on the Rights of Children in Alternative Care

Diana Skelton, ATD Fourth World

Thematic importance: Themes: Child poverty, inequality and child welfare research. Sub-themes: subjective well-being; rights of children and adolescents; children's participation and voices.

Introduction and objectives: This presentation describes the process and outcomes of our consultation with care experienced children, young people and parents, which fed into the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child Day of Discussion on the Rights of Children in Alternative Care. This project built on a recurrent theme in the work of ATD Fourth World: the importance of participation and respect for human rights in anti-poverty policies and practices. Families living in poverty are more likely to face child protection interventions and child removal than better-off families, and often this is because of a conflation of poverty with neglect in social work practice.

Method: Initially broad invitations were issued to both care-experienced individuals and groups representing care-experienced people. Four conversations over Zoom were held with about 25 of these people to give them information on how to contribute to the UN DGD and to offer support for group contributions. With those who were interested, consultations were held: in person in a Birmingham residential centre for care-leavers; and via Zoom with teenagers located across the UK and also in Canada. In all cases, the care-experienced children and young people were given complete control over how their quotations would be presented and contextualised in the group contributions. Following the finalisation of the written contributions in June 2020, all participants were invited to meet one another in person in September. This session ended up as a hybrid with several participants using Zoom to talk to those who attended an in-person residential. The children and young adults began by deciding among themselves the main issues they wanted to highlight for the UN. Next, they were joined by a member of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child who was interested in having a conversation with them to prepare the UN DGD. The following week, three of those who had contributed to these group contributions were invited to

address the UN DGD directly. At present, follow-up dialogues between the young people and the UN Committee member they met are continuing.

Results: Our project highlighted the importance of centring the perspective of children and families in how poverty is understood by social workers, to avoid the unnecessary removal of children which causes lasting trauma to all involved parties. Children, young people and parents all reported trauma caused by the interventions designed to protect them; and in most cases this related to unaligned perceptions of what constituted risk, and how risks were balanced against each other in coming to decisions about children's living arrangements. Children and young people described harms both in relation to the absence of information about their lives, and the provision of information in a manner which was not appropriate to their needs and preferences. 'Participation' in the processes of alternative care were experienced as often tokenistic at best and frequently as actively harmful, indicating that the systems of participation are vital and require rebuilding from the ground up.

Conclusions and implications: In situations where children's safety is perceived to be under threat, professionals frequently focus on protection to the detriment of attention to children's rights to adequate provision and participation. This has harmful effects on children's lives, and is in contravention of the UNCRC which places an equal emphasis on all kinds of rights with participation as a principle underlining the entire suite of rights. Radical reform, which embraces the complex interactions between poverty, participation, and provision; clearly differentiates between poverty and neglect; and places meaningful participation at the centre of interventions, is necessary.

Presentation 5: Barriers to Education: What children can tell us about how poverty prevents school engagement in the UK

Gill Main, University of Leeds

Thematic importance: Themes: children's rights indicators; child poverty, inequality and child welfare; innovations in research design and measurement. Sub-themes: subjective well-being; rights of children and adolescents; children's participation; poverty, deprivation, material well-being and inequality.

Introduction and objectives: Children's right to education is enshrined in the UNCRC, and for the vast majority of children in the UK this is via attendance at mainstream schools. Yet poverty presents a huge barrier to attendance and engagement with education, further reducing the life chances of children who are already at risk of social exclusion. This project examines secondary school aged children's perspectives on how poverty prevents them from engaging fully with education. We address the questions of what children living in poverty see as the barriers to school engagement; and how the experiences of these children compare to those of better-off children.

Method: Six focus groups were held including 48 children of secondary school age in four schools in a UK city. Focus group data informed the development of survey instruments. The survey was offered to all secondary schools in the city, with eight schools and 1,200 children participating. Focus group data was analysed thematically, using the framework approach; survey data was analysed using descriptive and multivariate statistical tests.

Results: Children living in poverty experience exclusion on a wide range of domains within schools, and analysis on an individual level (on the basis of the child's poverty status) is more valuable than analysis on a school level (on the basis of the school's overall deprivation status). Poor children in better-off schools may have worse experiences than poor children in deprived schools. A range of experiences – relating to access to resources

at school and at home; access to transport; responsibilities outside of education; exposure to discriminatory structures; and teacher attitudes and awareness of poverty are important in explaining the differential levels of engagement between poor and better-off students. Punitive teacher responses to children's expressions of deprivation (e.g. lack of access to clean or fitting uniform; inability to bring resources for lessons) indicate a lack of awareness of and sensitivity in how schools respond to poverty.

Conclusions and implications: The research highlights that children and young people are essential co-producers and co-designers in research intended to understand how their rights (to education and to adequate resources) are experienced in practice; and that adult-centric notions of how poverty impacts education can only offer a partial picture. Teacher behaviours are identified as a key site of interventions to reduce the stigma experienced by children living in poverty. Ultimately, anti-poverty interventions must be central and geared towards ensuring that all children and families have sufficient resources to live a decent life. This is unlikely in the current UK political climate. Therefore, we produce recommendations for what policy makers and practitioners can do at a local level to ameliorate the impacts of poverty on children's education.