CUWB Panel 2: THE SPATIAL ORDERING OF CHILDREN'S WELL-BEING

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Theme
- Cross-country approaches to child well-being and indicators

Subtheme
- Children's participation and voices

Summary of the panel

This session explores the multiple nested spatial localities of children's experiences of well-being, from the school and neighbourhood, to the nation-state and to the digital sphere. These spatial contexts are analysed in the papers, exploring how the intimate experience of well-being (the subjective and personal), which is often foregrounded in analysis of children's well-being, is a multi-scalar phenomenon, an expression of neighbourhood, regional, national and multi-national influences. In doing so, the papers unpack what qualities of relationships are important to well-being, from children's perspectives, and how these qualities, often understood at the level of individual attributes, are influenced by more distal social relations, including for example, the quality of social ties, education policy, structural racism and government support measures. Research from Chile, Germany, Australia and a comparative study of South Africa and the United States of America, is presented.

Paper 1
Title: School and Neighborhood Relationships that Affect Well-being Based on Chilean Adolescent's Understandings

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Abstract
Both from international organizations and from the academic world the relevance of the study of well-being in childhood and adolescence has been highlighted in recent decades. Likewise, the importance of generating studies that consider their own perspectives and subjective views has been highlighted, in order to provide a child-centred rather than adult-centered understandings. At the same time, it is important to consider well-being not only from an individual perspective but also from a relational and contextual view, which allows a broader and situated vision of the phenomenon. Considering that neighborhood and

school are environments in which children and adolescents develop daily, the general objective of this research was to study, from the understandings of Chilean children, which are and what characteristics have relationships that occur in their neighbourhood and school and which affect their well-being.

To carry out the study, a qualitative method was used, where 21 adolescents between 10 and 15 years old participated. Semi-structured interviews were conducted where they talked about the different life areas that impact their well-being. Data were analyzed through a thematic content analysis. As results of the analysis, five categories of central continuums of variability were identified. Three of these continuums refer to the school context, one to the neighborhood context and one to both contexts. The five variability categories are: (1) "Peer group belonging and integration vs rejection and bullying at school"; (2) "Closeness and trust vs indifference and distance from teachers at school"; (3) "Entertaining and motivating teaching relationships vs those that demand performance and obedience at school"; (4) "Closeness and coexistence with others in the neighborhood vs insecurity and fear of others"; (5) "Enjoyable and satisfying relationships within school and neighbourhood environments vs dissatisfaction with their physical and material conditions".

It is concluded that feeling a sense of belonging, closeness, support and safety both among peers and with adults in school and neighborhood contexts is pertinent to the well-being of adolescents. Another key finding is the importance of motivating and entertaining teaching-learning relationships in school settings, as well as feeling pleased and satisfied with the physical and material conditions of their neighborhoods and schools. These results show the relevance of relationships in children and young people's lives and allow thinking about strategies that could promote these areas.

Paper 2
Title: Visibility, audibility, presence and absence: Children´s reflections on 'the new normal' of online classrooms. Reconstructing features of educational well-being from children´s perspectives.

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Abstract:

Background: This study is part of the Children's Understandings of Well-Being (CUWB) network, aiming to reconstruct how social and cultural contexts frame children´s understandings and experiences of well-being in different parts of the world. In the context of developments in Child Well-being Research the CUWB network aims to address firstly the normativity and cultural contingency of well-being; secondly the challenge of

conceptualizing children as social actors without essentializing their voices; and thirdly applying an international comparative perspective beyond methodological nationalism. The Berlin study focuses on urban environments from an educational perspective.

Objective: To reconstruct features of educational well-being from children´s perspectives as social and cultural constructs, using as the basis for this reconstruction their reflections on the new normal of schooling during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Methodology: Semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted as video interviews with children aged 12 to 14 years, from different socio-economic backgrounds who attend secondary schools, asking about their everyday experiences during the pandemic in 2020.

Conceptual framework: Grounded in a child-centred approach, this study aims to reconstruct subjective perspectives as embedded and expressions of social and cultural contexts, using a discourse analytical approach and space an analytical category. Children´s reflections on 'the new normal' of schooling arrangements during the pandemic and how they felt about that are seen as analytical entry points for reconstructing structural features of school that children see as relevant to their educational well-being.

Preliminary findings and Conclusion: The results demonstrate how children talk about 'the new normal' of digital classrooms and home schooling during the pandemic, how they construct visibility, audibility, presence and absence as central features of learning environments from their perspectives, and how they link these to a sense of agency, security, power and self(-control) within educational processes. The results provide a nuanced look at the positive and negative experiences children lived through during the pandemic in relation to schooling and education and how these experiences become part of the educational process itself - understood as transformations of the self and of questioning what we take for granted. How social positions, e.g. of class or gender, are analytically relevant will be discussed.

Paper 3
Title: Connection, Disconnection and Uncertainty: Some preliminary findings from the Australian COVID-19 study.

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Abstract:

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, significant measures were put in place by the Australian government to control the spread of the virus, including the closure of places of business, areas of public congregation and schools, restrictions on international and domestic travel and the introduction of income and business support schemes to mitigate the economic effects that were resulted from dealing with the health crisis. As a result of these measures, Australia was one of the few countries in the world that up until 2022 continuously implemented a COVID-19 suppression strategy. These measures placed Australia in a relatively unique position with low virus transmission numbers. Yet, despite the scope of the measures taken, limited research exists exploring children's perspectives on the effects of these restrictions on their well-being in Australia.

This paper presents preliminary findings from qualitative, participatory research being undertaken with children and their carers on the effects of COVID-19 government interventions on children's well-being. The study examines transitions in experience during the pandemic through two phases: 1. Fieldwork with children and young people; and 2. Fieldwork with significant adults. Children were recruited by invitation through networks of NGOs and local council services in NSW. The children were asked to identify an adult of significance to them who was also invited to participate. To supplement interviews, children were also be invited to use graphical methods or existing artefacts they think useful to illustrate their experiences.

As well as discussing life during the pandemic, we asked participants to recall what aspects of life they enjoyed prior to social isolation; aspects of life that they miss during social isolation; their experiences during social isolation; and their expectations of life as social isolation measures loosen and end. De-identified interview transcripts were analysed thematically.

Two overarching themes will be discussed: firstly, children told us about their experiences of connection and disconnection, both during lockdown, and at other times throughout the pandemic. For some children, lockdown provided more opportunities for connection with parents, especially where carers worked form home, as well as an increased sense of solidarity with their local community. However, many of their children spoke about feeling disconnected from friends and family outside their home, including the impact of state and national border closures. The second theme captures the nuanced experiences of navigating uncertainty as a time of fear and worry, as well as a time of curiosity and discovery.

In conclusion we will consider the meaning of these findings for children's well-being in the context of our earlier findings on Australian children and well-being as well as the implications for children's well-being in a COVID-19 'normal' world.