



Lewis, A. (2019) 'Examining the concept of well-being and early childhood: adopting multi-disciplinary perspectives', *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, 17 (4), pp. 294-308.

Official URL: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1476718X19860553>

ResearchSPAce

<http://researchspace.bathspa.ac.uk/>

This pre-published version is made available in accordance with publisher policies.

Please cite only the published version using the reference above. Your access and use of this document is based on your acceptance of the ResearchSPAce Metadata and Data Policies, as well as applicable law:-

<https://researchspace.bathspa.ac.uk/policies.html>

Unless you accept the terms of these Policies in full, you do not have permission to download this document.

This cover sheet may not be removed from the document.

Please scroll down to view the document.

Examining the concept of well-being and early childhood: adopting multi-disciplinary perspectives

Well-being is generally acknowledged as a complex concept and leading discourses are rooted in disciplines such as philosophy, psychology and economics. Despite a wealth of theoretical explanations child well-being is largely under-theorised. Some argue it is unlikely that philosophical discourses of well-being will straightforwardly be extended to children because they were not originally written with them in mind. Therefore, this article firstly examines dimensions, domains and discourses of well-being and summarises the discussion with a conceptual framework in order to provide clarity about a complex concept. Secondly, the article discusses current research about the meaning of child well-being and finds that whilst there are different terms in use many discourses are similar in nature. Thirdly, the article shows how knowledge and understanding of early childhood relates to various well-being discourses and suggests that a theory of child well-being may not be needed. The article highlights the new development emerging between psychology, economics and sociology and concludes by discussing the value of adopting multi-disciplinary perspectives of well-being. The article is useful for policy-makers, practitioners and researchers in understanding the complex nature of well-being, particularly in the context of early childhood education.

Keywords: well-being; dominant discourses; early childhood; early years education; multi-disciplinary perspectives

Introduction

In the last decade or so there has been a fast-growing interest in children's well-being, particularly in education (Bailey, 2009; Coleman, 2009). In 2008, Wales introduced well-being as an area of its early years curriculum, in 2009 Australia introduced the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) with an outcome focused on children having a strong sense of well-being. In 2010, Scotland introduced health and well-being as an area of the Curriculum for Excellence. More recently, in 2015, world leaders adopted the 2030 agenda for sustainable development with goal 3 promoting 'good health and well-being' (United Nations, 2018). However, limited research focuses on understanding well-being in the context of education for young children (Soutter et al.,

2012; Amerijckx and Humblet, 2014; Raghavan and Alexandrova, 2015). Furthermore, well-being is generally reported as a complex, catch-all concept that is often misunderstood (Haworth and Hart, 2007; Ryan and Deci, 2001; Mashford-Scott et al., 2012) and there is a lack of consensus amongst cultures, languages and disciplines (Statham and Chase, 2010; Soutter et al., 2012). Gasper (2010) describes well-being as a vector concept with many ‘fuzzy and contingent’ (p.358) components.

Well-being is often conflated with other concepts, such as ‘happiness’, ‘life satisfaction’, ‘quality of life’, ‘emotional literacy’, ‘emotional intelligence’ and ‘positive mental health’ to name but a few (Pollard and Lee, 2003; Fraillon, 2004; McLaughlin, 2008; Awartani et al., 2008; Statham and Chase, 2010; Wigelsworth et al., 2010; Humphrey et al., 2011; Hicks et al., 2011; Mashford-Scott et al., 2012; Walker, 2012). However, Coleman (2009) asserts, ‘it has to be said that well-being is not quite the same as happiness’ (283). According to Morrow and Mayall (2009) conflating concepts makes defining well-being ‘conceptually muddy’ (p.221). One reason to explain these key issues is the numerous theoretical explanations of well-being that are rooted in leading disciplines such as philosophy, psychology and economics. However, child well-being is largely under-theorised (Pollard and Lee, 2003; McLaughlin, 2008; Statham and Chase, 2010; Mashford-Scott et al., 2012; Raghavan and Alexandrova, 2015).

It is important to remember that traditional discourses of well-being were constructed in the past when childhood was not viewed as a distinct life phase, and limited understanding existed about the concept of childhood. It was not until the end of the fifteenth century that a modern understanding of childhood started to emerge (Brockliss and Montgomery, 2013). The temporality of childhood provides one explanation as to why Raghavan and Alexandrova (2015) state that it is unlikely that philosophical

discourses of well-being will straightforwardly extend to children because they were not written with them in mind. This is a reasonable argument but this article sets out to explore their claim further. Firstly, the article draws upon a wealth of literature to examine the concept of well-being and is organised by discussing dimensions, domains and discourses of well-being. Secondly, the article explores how knowledge and understanding of early childhood relates to discourses of well-being. Lastly, the article concludes by considering the value of adopting multi-disciplinary perspectives of well-being.

Subjective and objective dimensions of well-being

The two most commonly reported dimensions of well-being are the subjective and objective kind but their differences are often communicated rather than their similarities. The objective dimension is usually conceptualised as a ‘concrete noun’ that can be quantified, and tends to have a fixed meaning; whereas the subjective dimension conceptualises well-being as an ‘abstract noun’ which is socially and culturally constructed, and tends to have an unfixed meaning and more difficult to quantify (Ereaut and Whiting, 2008). Mashford-Scott et al. (2012) suggest that practitioners working in the early years sector adopt both dimensions but the objective dimension is a more dominant position. They suggest the objective dimension is more dominant because ‘it serves to quantify wellbeing; making it more measurable’ (Mashford-Scott et al., 2012: p.239). The Innocenti Report Card series produced by Unicef reports subjective and objective dimensions of well-being and raises awareness of young people’s well-being amongst industrialised countries.

The subjective dimension of well-being is usually understood as a concept that is complex in nature and fluctuates. This dimension is captured in the following quote: ‘well-being is subjective and varies by person, gender, age, relationships, status, place, culture and more’ (Chambers, 2014; cited in White and Abeyasekera, 2014: p.xi). This dimension is also closely associated with people’s values where they reflect and consider what is important to them (Gasper, 2010). Gasper (2010) suggests that nouns are typically reified and argues that well-being is not a ‘definite single thing, or just two things – ‘subjective well-being’ and ‘objective well-being’ – or any number of things’ (p.352). He further argues that well-being is about life and being human. Similarly, Ereaut and Whiting (2008) claim that ‘the meaning of wellbeing is not fixed - it cannot be. It is a *primary cultural judgement*; just like ‘*what makes a good life?*’ it is the stuff of fundamental philosophical debate’ (p.7).

In contrast, the objective dimension of well-being is adopted by Dodge et al. (2012) who appear to take a different perspective about the meaning of well-being. They draw upon Reber’s (1995) definition which is taken from a psychology dictionary claiming that well-being is a state of being stable. They suggest;

stable wellbeing is when individuals have the psychological, social and physical resources they need to meet a particular psychological, social and/or physical challenge. When individuals have more challenges than resources, the see-saw dips, along with their well-being and vice-versa (Dodge et al., 2012: p.230).

The explanation above highlights that some proponents believe that it is possible to define well-being and it can have a fixed meaning. Additionally, Dodge et al. (2012) recognise that ‘the concept of wellbeing is undeniably complex’ (p.229) likewise this is recognised with the subjective dimension. Dodge et al’s (2012) interpretation of well-being relates to a number of aspects, namely psychological, social and physical domains

as well as resources and challenges. They also describe well-being as a concept that fluctuates which is another similarity shared with the subjective dimension. To help reach their definition Dodge et al. (2012) reviewed three complex theoretical models of well-being drawing upon the work of Headey and Wearing (1989), Cummins (2010) and Csikszentmihalyi (2002) to develop a new model. Dodge et al's (2012) new, simplified model focuses on equilibrium which is described as a continuous state/set point of well-being without having to face life challenges or events. They explain the new model by using a see-saw and imply that well-being is the balance point (equilibrium) between how an individual uses their resources such as their skills to face life challenges. The ideology is that the see-saw dips either side acknowledging that well-being is a state of continual flux. The see-saw model would benefit from showing examples of how someone's 'resources', 'challenges' and 'equilibrium' interact and function, but this would be difficult to show on a model and might complicate it even further. Dodge et al. (2012) highlight the strengths of the model yet they avoid acknowledging any weaknesses. For example, they suggest one of the strengths 'can be applied to all individuals regardless of age, culture and gender' (Dodge et al., 2012: p.231) and this is a relevant point which indicates that they perceive the components of well-being to be the same for children and adults. Arguably, this is based on their values which is similar in nature to the subjective dimension. However, the new model that Dodge et al. (2012) propose only includes three domains namely psychological, social and physical and a broad range of other domains exist which are discussed next.

Well-being domains

Evidence shows that many domains or types of well-being exist. For example, over a decade ago Pollard and Lee (2003) conducted a systematic review of well-being and identified five distinct domains, namely (1) physical, (2) psychological, (3) cognitive,

(4) social and (5) economic well-being. More recently, in 2011 McNaught (2011; cited in La Placa et al., 2013) developed a framework for defining well-being and identified four broad domains, namely (1) societal, (2) community, (3) family and (4) individual. The framework shows that well-being is defined as a dynamic interplay of the four domains. La Placa et al. (2013) suggest that McNaught's framework for defining well-being acknowledges the multiple components associated with the concept. It shows how 'it brings together how people feel about their circumstances and assessment of how their objective circumstances affect them as individuals, families and societies' (La Placa et al., 2013: p.120). Furthermore, the framework highlights the two overarching dimensions of well-being - the objective and subjective.

Some research about the domains of young children's well-being under the age of eight years took place in 2009 by Fauth and Thompson (2009). They identified four domains, namely (1) physical well-being, (2) mental health, emotional and social well-being, (3) cognitive and language development and school performance, and (4) beliefs.

However, in 2010, Statham and Chase (2010) reported that child well-being usually relates to three domains, namely (1) emotional, (2) physical and (3) social well-being.

So the domains identified by Fauth and Thompson (2009) and Statham and Chase (2010) are different to Pollard and Lee's review (2003) and McNaught's (2011; cited in La Placa et al., 2013) framework, which may indicate that different well-being domains relate to different age groups. However, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) devised a framework for measuring well-being which includes ten domains applicable to all age groups (ONS, 2015) but it states that the ways in which the domains are measured vary for the age groups (ONS, 2014). It seems there is little consensus about the domains of well-being and there are mixed views about whether these domains apply to both children and adults.

Even though some research has focused on identifying well-being domains, very limited research explores domains within education policy. Erwin (2017) reports that despite not being a dominant discourse in the West, ‘ecological’ well-being is visible throughout Australia’s EYLF. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) International Early Learning and Child Well-being study refers to ‘overall’ and ‘general’ well-being (OECD, 2018). However, for the purpose of this paper, Wales is explored further because in 2008 the Welsh Government presented well-being as an area of learning in the early years curriculum for 3-to-7 year olds. Various policy documents produced by the Welsh Government relating to young children present well-being in the following ways:

1. Well-being/emotional development
2. Emotional well-being
3. Physical well-being
4. Health and well-being
5. Well-being and involvement
6. Health and emotional well-being
7. Child health and mental well-being
8. Personal child health and well-being

Arguably, well-being is presented rather inconsistently in various policy documents.

Another example where well-being is presented in many ways can be seen in the Successful Futures report (Donaldson, 2015). The report reviews the curriculum for 3-to-16 year olds in Wales and presents well-being in the following ways:

1. Well-being

2. Personal well-being
3. Health and well-being
4. Mental and physical well-being
5. Physical and emotional well-being
6. Economic, environmental and social well-being
7. Health and well-being (ethical issues, diversity and equality)
8. Present and future well-being
9. Social and emotional well-being
10. Social, emotional, spiritual and physical health and well-being
11. Mental and emotional well-being
12. Social, emotional and physical well-being
13. Mental, physical and emotional well-being

Arguably, the diverse meanings in which well-being is presented demonstrates the complexity of the concept and may also present challenges in how well-being is practiced. Moreover, the diverse ways in which well-being is presented supports an argument made by Bailey (2009), who suggests that placing well-being in the curriculum should be considered with more caution because it is often misunderstood and the meaning is taken-for-granted.

Leading discourses of well-being

Well-being theories are generally rooted in philosophy, psychology and economics. Firstly, philosophical discourses of well-being have existed for centuries and are associated with the work of Greek philosophers Aristippus of Cyrene, Plato and Aristotle (Ryan and Deci, 2001; Raghavan and Alexandrova, 2015). Generally, there

are four different ways of understanding well-being within philosophy which highlights there is little consensus within a discipline. The four discourses are generally known as:

1. hedonism/mental states discourse
2. eudaimonism/flourishing discourse
3. needs-based/objectivist discourse
4. desire-based/preference satisfaction discourse.

The first two discourses broadly relate to feelings and functioning whereas the last two relate to contributing and determining factors of well-being. Clack (2012) suggests that to some extent the four discourses are all underpinned by happiness, but the way in which happiness is conceptualised varies. Brief explanations of the four discourses follow;

(1) Hedonic/mental states discourse is characterised by feelings of happiness or pleasure (Ryan and Deci, 2001; Thompson and Marks, 2006; Raghavan and Alexandrova, 2015) and Aristippus of Cyrene believed that the ultimate good life consisted of pleasure (McLellan and Steward, 2015). Jeremy Bentham, a British philosopher, argued that a good society is built on maximising pleasure for the greatest number of people (Ryan and Deci, 2001).

(2) The eudaimonic/flourishing discourse was central to ancient Greek ethics and identified by Aristotle (Walker, 2012) but it differs to the hedonic perspective. For example, the eudaimonic discourse encompasses ideas of human functioning and development, autonomy, self-realisation and fulfilment, having a sense of purpose and

meaning to life, living an authentic life, being true to oneself and fulfilling one's potential (Thompson and Marks, 2006; Ryan and Deci, 2001; Dodge et al., 2012; Hervas and Vazquez, 2013). Gasper (2004) suggests those who share an Aristotelian perspective believe that; 'human beings have more faculties than just feeling happiness, pleasure or pain; notably they are creatures of reasoning and meaning-making, of imagination, and of intra and inter-societal links and identities' (p.1).

Also, Huppert (2014) supports this perspective that well-being is not solely about feelings at a single point in time or how materialistic one feels, but it encompasses how human beings interact and communicate with others. Ryan and Deci (2001) cite the work of Waterman (1993) and claim 'eudaimonia occurs when people's life activities are most congruent or meshing with deeply held values and are holistically or fully engaged. Under such circumstances people would feel intensely alive and authentic, existing as who they really are' (p.146). To sum up, the hedonic and eudaimonic discourses of well-being can be described as 'feeling happy and good' and 'functioning well' with a purpose and goal in life (Huppert, 2014).

(3) Needs-based/objectivist discourse is characterised by a priori knowledge and proponents believe there are numerous underlying conditions, or 'necessary prerequisites' (Thompson and Marks, 2006: p.9) for well-being to emerge.

Prerequisites such as, 'health, income, education, freedom and so on' (Thompson and Marks, 2006: p.9) are considered to be contributors to well-being. Furthermore, the needs of a person are open to interpretation and could relate to happiness, fulfilment in life and/or positive relationships (Raghavan and Alexandrova, 2015). This reinforces Gasper's (2010) argument that concepts of well-being are entangled with values and the

needs of a person are closely linked to what people think are important, which is controversial. The needs-based perspective is reflected in the work of the OECD (2011) who suggests that well-being is about meeting a range of human needs.

(4) Desire-based/preference satisfaction discourse is often characterised by people satisfying their wants and desires. It means the more people do this, the more their well-being will increase (Thompson and Marks, 2006). Raghavan and Alexandrova (2015) explain that this approach is more than just being interested in how someone feels about their fulfilment; it is rooted in the actual fulfilment of the desire value or preference.

Despite there being four main discourses within philosophy which is complex in itself, the discussion of measuring well-being is not a strong focus in philosophy as it is within psychology. McLellan and Steward (2015) highlight that traditional eudaimonic discourses of well-being and the view of developing someone's potential is not a new idea, particularly for humanistic psychologists such as Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow, as well as leaders of the positive psychology movement such as, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Martin Seligman.

The second, more contemporary discourse associated with well-being is positive psychology, and Martin Seligman (2011; cited in Dodge et al., 2012) has contributed significantly to developing this movement. Seligman (2011; cited in Dodge et al., 2012) suggests that well-being constitutes five constructs which he calls PERMA - Positive emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning and Accomplishment. He

proposes that well-being is a combination of hedonic and eudaimonic discourses (McLellan and Steward, 2015).

In the 1960s, psychologists were very interested in measuring well-being and began investigating correlates of happiness in adults. They started using subjective well-being and happiness interchangeably (McLellan and Steward, 2015). Many psychologists believe that subjective well-being encompasses two discourses. Firstly, the affect discourse which is about positive and negative emotions and is also considered to be a hedonic/mental states discourse (Ryan and Deci, 2001; McLellan and Steward, 2015). Secondly, psychologists adopt the life satisfaction discourse where someone makes a cognitive evaluation of aspects of their life. This second discourse of subjective well-being is also considered to be an evaluation based discourse (Thompson and Marks, 2006).

The two main discourses within psychology (affect discourse and life satisfaction discourse) were further developed by Sen (1999; cited in Ben-Arieh and Frones, 2011), a Nobel Prize-winning economist who was interested in more than just feelings and functioning, and proposed the capabilities approach for understanding well-being. The capabilities approach relates to individual contexts, interactions and relationships and closely resembles the work of developmental psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner and ecological systems theory. Bronfenbrenner's theory shows that five different sub-systems interact (Ben-Arieh and Frones, 2011). These sub-systems emphasise the child's immediate environment as the micro-system, right through to the macro-system which emphasises political and cultural values. Ben-Arieh and Frones (2011) argue that 'the relationships between the family and the community, and between the community

and the wider society and its institutions, facilitates or obstructs the transactions that produce the level of well-being' (p.467).

Thirdly, in the last decade or so, economics is considered to have been the 'most vociferous in championing the importance of well-being...by identifying well-being as a key indicator of the state of the nation' (McLellan and Steward, 2015: p.308).

However, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was being overused as a standard measure for people's well-being, life satisfaction and quality of life. Therefore, economists such as Sen and Stiglitz recognised that another discipline such as psychology could help to conceptualise and gain a better understanding of someone's subjective well-being.

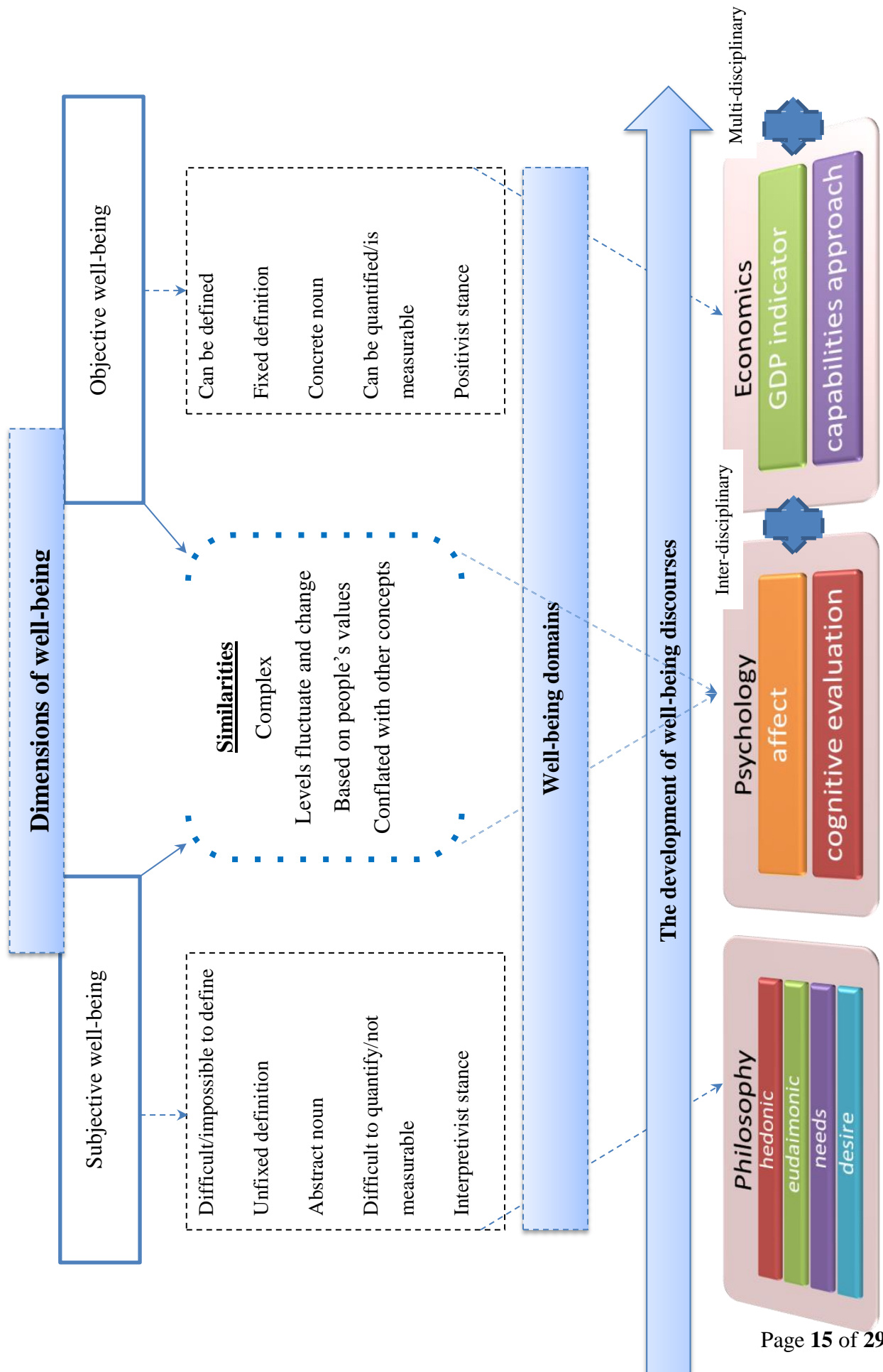
McLellan and Steward (2015) suggest that economists turned to psychology, as opposed to philosophy, because psychology focuses on 'the scientific study of human mind and behaviour' (p.308) and is more associated with measuring constructs. Clack (2012) suggests that this move towards science, rather than humanities, the arts or philosophy, highlights the cultural assumption that science is more effective, valuable and true. Overlooking philosophy may ignore 'the complex and often messy reality of being human' (Clack, 2012: p.507). Clack (2012) continues to argue that science seduces people to believe that it is a panacea to a range of problems.

Despite there being an inter-disciplinary shift between psychology and economics in understanding well-being, McLellan and Steward (2015) argue that positive psychologists focus too narrowly on feelings and functioning and highlight the importance of sociology as a discipline in understanding well-being. They claim that 'sociology in particular has a specific contribution to make...the social networks that an individual possesses are valuable not only to that individual but also to the community

and wider society' (p.5). Therefore, it could be argued that a new development seems to be emerging which encompasses a multi-disciplinary perspective of well-being. Axford (2009) suggests that adopting more than one perspective of well-being is beneficial in gaining a clearer picture of its nature. A brief discussion of the value of adopting multi-disciplinary perspectives concludes this article.

The following conceptual framework (see figure 1) highlights key points from the discussion so far and aims to provide some clarity about well-being. It can be followed vertically and represents the order in which they have been discussed in this article.

Figure 1: Conceptual framework for well-being



Current research about child well-being discourses

Child well-being is reported to have a weak theoretical underpinning (Pollard and Lee, 2003; McLaughlin, 2008; Statham and Chase, 2010; Mashford-Scott et al., 2012; Raghavan and Alexandrova, 2015) and the reasons for this are unclear. However, Raghavan and Alexandrova (2015) suggest that child well-being is under-theorised because 'it stems from the dominant and longstanding view of children as merely future adults, who, as a result, do not require a theory of their own' (p.893). They also state that 'the deficiency model of childhood, according to which a child is defined as an incomplete or immature adult, is a natural companion to this view' (p.893).

Despite the lack of reported child well-being theory there is a general consensus that children's well-being is a multi-dimensional, holistic concept that encompasses many different aspects of a child's life (Axford, 2009; NEF, 2009; Statham and Chase, 2010; Moore et al., 2012; Amerijckx and Humblet, 2014). In other words it is viewed as an 'irreducible holistic totality' (Ereaut and Whiting, 2008). However, a tension arises between this perspective and with the 'reducible to components' perspective because 'there is still limited agreement on what the constituent components of child wellbeing are, or how they should be weighted in terms of importance or priority' (Statham and Chase, 2010: p.6). Similarly, Raghavan and Alexandrova (2015) are in agreement and suggest 'there is neither consensus, nor much discussion on what constitutes child well-being' (p.888). Amerijckx and Humblet (2014) agree with Raghavan and Alexandrova (2015) and report that even though well-being is an appealing concept particularly at policy level, there is virtually no consensus about a definition and literature which specifically focuses upon young children's well-being is limited.

This article suggests that Amerijckx and Humblet (2014) and Raghavan and Alexandrova (2015) have made a significant contribution to understanding and developing a discourse of child well-being. In 2014, Amerijckx and Humblet (2014) decided that some sort of consensus was needed about young children's well-being and conducted the following study which involved searching five databases from biomedicine and the human and social sciences. The outcome involved reviewing 209 papers on child well-being. They found that 3% of papers focused on theoretical discussions of well-being and were dominated by measures or indicators of well-being, 15% focused on methodological issues, 82% focused on empirical papers which mainly consisted of determinants of well-being. The extremely low percentage of papers which focuses on theoretical discussions is alarming (Amerijckx and Humblet, 2014), particularly when there is a fast-growing interest in child well-being. The low percentage of papers that focuses on conceptualising well-being may explain why Desjardins (2008) argues that too many taken-for-granted truths are associated with well-being. In other words, assumptions about well-being are made because there is a paucity of empirical evidence to draw upon. This might also explain why well-being was presented in diverse ways in various Welsh policy documents as demonstrated earlier in the article.

An important contribution is made by Amerijckx and Humblet (2014) in understanding the concept of child well-being. On reviewing the scientific literature they identified five dominant discourses which they call structural theoretical axes that contain two binary positions. The five discourses identified by Amerijckx and Humblet (2014) include the following:

1. Positive (strengths) versus negative (deficiencies)
2. Subjective versus objective

3. State (meaning a hedonic, present position) versus process (meaning a eudaimonic, future position)
4. Material versus spiritual
5. Individual versus community

Their study also revealed that the positions on the left-hand side (such as positive, subjective, state, material and individual) tend to be under-represented for young children, whereas the positions on the right-hand side (negative, objective, process, spiritual and community) are often privileged and more dominant positions.

What is noteworthy is that there is evidence in other explanations of child well-being that strengthen two arguments, firstly that dominant discourses of child well-being exist (Amerijckx and Humblet, 2014), and secondly, that a theory of child well-being may not be needed. For example, Statham and Chase's (2010) explanations about a children's rights perspective which focuses upon children's attributes and strengths and is positive in nature, versus a developmental perspective which focuses on difficulties and deficiencies and is negative in nature, bears a resemblance with Amerijckx and Humblet (2014) discourse (1) positive versus negative.

Another example of a dominant discourse is the 'two sources theory' which is proposed by Raghavan and Alexandrova (2015). In 2015, they set out to explore three existing philosophical theories and claim they have constructed a theory of child well-being which is extremely useful for early childhood theorists. However, in essence, the two sources theory closely resembles discourse (3) state versus process identified by Amerijckx and Humblet in 2014.

Another example, by sociologists Morrow and Mayall (2009) resembles discourse (3) state versus process when they discuss the notion of being and becoming. They suggest that the government privileges a child becoming something in the future which resembles the process position, and pays less focus on the being which resembles the state position. They conclude that if more emphasis was placed upon the being position this would help to move away from a focus on outcomes and the expectation of children becoming something in the future. Ben-Arieh and Fronès (2011) further explain that the process position is associated with well-becoming which is often understood as the unfolding of development and a focus on life chances in becoming future citizens.

Also, the process position is defined as ‘a future oriented focus...in preparing children to a productive and happy adulthood’ (Ben-Arieh, 2005: p.8). Uprichard (2008) and Ben-Arieh (2005) state that adopting a being and becoming discourse helps to increase child agency and claim that both positions complement each other. Uprichard (2008) recommends that ‘sometimes it will be better to be more present orientated than future orientated, and vice versa’ (p.311). It seems that progress is needed within the field of early childhood to ensure that both positions within the dominant discourses identified by Amerijckx and Humblet (2014) are acknowledged and recognised more equally. In terms of early childhood education, Erwin (2017) explains how Australia has made a significant shift in placing well-being as a top priority for their youngest children and called their EYLF - Belonging, Being and Becoming.

Linking knowledge and understanding of early childhood and well-being theory

The following discussion examines a claim made by Raghavan and Alexandrova in 2015. They suggest that a theory of child well-being does not currently exist and it is unlikely that philosophical theories for example, will straightforwardly be extended to

children because they were not originally written with them in mind. Therefore, the following discussion critically draws upon some of the leading well-being discourses previously discussed in this article to address the following question - to what extent can leading discourses of well-being relate to young children when they were not originally written with them in mind?

In relation to philosophy and a hedonic/mental states discourse, very young children as young as two months show emotions including happiness and pleasure by smiling, (Neaum, 2010) despite being able to articulate their feelings verbally. Moreover, from around the age of 12-months children start to 'recognise other people's emotions and moods and express their own' (Neaum, 2010: p.56). Whitebread (2012) reminds us that research 'probably under-estimates the level of understanding of young children about others' psychological states and characteristics' (p.46). At around the age of four years children usually reflect upon and talk about their feelings or they might show happiness and pleasure through non-verbal cues such as gestures and facial expressions (Neaum, 2010). Also, children may associate feelings of happiness and pleasure in different contexts, such as the classroom or home environment. Therefore, it could be argued that even though hedonic perspectives were not originally written with children in mind they relate to children in some way. It could also be argued that relating philosophical understandings of well-being is closely related to how one conceptualises young children which for the purpose of this article is capable, competent and confident.

Some proponents might not associate a eudaimonic/flourishing discourse with young children because some of the broader components such as, purpose in life, being true to yourself and living authentically are abstract ideas which younger children might find

difficult to comprehend (NEF, 2009; Wigelsworth et al., 2010). However, according to Neaum (2010) young children at around the age of five years 'have a good sense of the past, present and future' (p.49) and children aged around seven years start to think in the abstract (Neaum, 2010). Dodge et al. (2012) cite the work of Ryff (1989) and suggest that eudaimonic well-being constitutes autonomy, environmental mastery, positive relationships with others, purpose in life, realisation of potential and self-acceptance. Therefore, it could be argued that going to school in general contributes to fulfilling a child's potential. Soutter et al. (2012) highlight that a traditional schooling model involves preparing young people for work and transmitting knowledge, but he describes a more contemporary model and states 'today, education is seen as a key factor in developing capacities not only for work and civic engagement, but also for experiencing a flourishing life, making wellbeing a topic of widespread interest, and modern importance' (p.112). Waterman (1993; cited in Ryan and Deci, 2001) suggests that eudaimonic well-being involves a person feeling intensely alive and existing as whom they really are. However, it is questionable whether schools provide the opportunities for this to happen, particularly when curriculum frameworks and assessment processes are closely tied to pre-determined criteria (Basford and Bath, 2014). Basford and Bath (2014) suggest that practitioners are working within a highly regulated framework, which to some extent forces them 'to undertake strategic rather than authentic manoeuvres in order to satisfy those demands' (p.120). Perhaps eudaimonic well-being does not comfortably fit current curriculum frameworks.

Eudaimonia is defined as 'excellent functioning in accordance with the organism's nature' (Raghavan and Alexandrova, 2015: p.895) so in relation to young children this could be interpreted as their ability to playfully engage and actively explore. In other words, if a eudaimonic discourse of well-being was enacted in the classroom, children

might be given more opportunities to play. Eudaimonic well-being is generally associated with the way someone functions and the Leuven Involvement Scale (LIS) could be a useful tool for assessing children's engagement and assessing the meaningfulness and purposefulness of what they do. However, the LIS does not capture children's subjective well-being and Fauth and Thompson (2009) remind us that 'accurately assessing children's internal states is quite difficult' (p.5). It is clear that hedonic discourses of well-being which focus on 'feeling happy and good' and eudaimonic discourses which focus on 'functioning well', construct well-being differently. But this raises the question whether 'feeling happy' and 'functioning well' can be explicitly taught as an area of the curriculum.

The needs-based/objectivist discourse, according to Raghavan and Alexandrova (2015), are the closest in nature to children's well-being because pre-requisites or underlying conditions provide opportunities for children to be able to thrive and make progress. The importance of forming attachments and positive relationships and nurturing children are essential for healthy learning and development and this view is widely accepted (Page et al., 2013). The longitudinal study of Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) found, that 'where staff showed warmth and were responsive to the individual needs of children, children made more progress' (Sylva et al., 2004: p.3).

Desire-based/preference satisfaction discourses also relate to children in some way. For example, this perspective is often characterised by people satisfying their wants and desires in order to increase well-being. But an adult may need to intervene if they feel that a child was for example, increasing their well-being (desires) by biting other

children. Another example might be to intervene if a child was increasing their well-being by eating excessive amounts of unhealthy foods.

Lastly, the two discourses within psychology which encompass positive and negative emotions and a cognitive evaluation may also relate to children in some way. For example, at around the age of four years children are very capable of showing a wide range of positive and negative emotions about school and about their home, despite having a vocabulary that is developing and increasing. According to Neaum (2010) the vocabulary of a three year old child is rapidly developing and by the age of five years 'children have a wide range of vocabulary and can use it appropriately' (p.52). Making a cognitive evaluation of their life might be more challenging for younger children because they would have limited experiences to draw upon and limited memory capacity to recall and make a judgement. Nonetheless, young children at around the age of three years are capable of using language to report on what is happening (Neaum, 2010). As previously mentioned, by five years of age children have the ability to understand and report on the past, present and future so it is possible for children to make cognitive evaluations of their life and make a judgement about aspects that matter to them. Once again this view is closely related to how someone conceptualises young children.

This discussion shows that many of the leading discourses of well-being within philosophy and psychology relate to young children in some way which raises a different point. If existing knowledge and understanding about children's learning and development relates to existing discourses, then a theory of child well-being may not be needed. This raises an important question about what would be beneficial and useful in

terms of research about young children's well-being in education. According to Soutter et al. (2012) the current challenge for well-being scholars and educationalists is to 'establish a wellbeing discourse that is relevant to and resonates with the schooling sector' (p.112). This is important particularly when well-being in the last 20 years or so has started to appear as an area of the early years curriculum in various countries such as, New Zealand, Australia, Scotland and Wales.

The value of adopting multi-disciplinary perspectives of well-being

Acknowledging and adopting multi-disciplinary understandings of well-being is important particularly when certain disciplines as previously explained, such as psychology, philosophy and more recently economics, are privileged when discussing well-being. Therefore, this has implications on the way it is operationalised (e.g. delivered and assessed) in early childhood education contexts (Coleman, 2009). Sociology and particularly the new social studies of childhood movement (Gallacher and Kehily, 2013) are not dominant discourses when discussing young children and well-being. When disciplines are privileged, well-being is viewed in a certain way, with a different purpose and outcome and thus requires different approaches to measurement. Focusing on discourses within a discipline such as psychology influences the direction of how well-being is supported and understood and this potentially has limitations. Arguably, if the new social studies of childhood movement became the dominant discipline then children's subjective well-being would start to be recognised as a valuable source of information. In addition, acknowledging and adopting a multi-disciplinary understanding of well-being would help to achieve a balance in capturing children's objective and subjective well-being. Lastly, adopting multi-disciplinary perspectives of well-being would contribute to valuing young children as social actors and agents of change.

References

- Amerijckx P and Humblet G (2014) Child Well-being: what does it mean? *Children & Society* 28(5): 404-415.
- Awartani M, Whiteman C and Gordon J (2008) Developing instruments to capture young people's perceptions of how school as a learning environment affects their well-being. *European Journal of Education* 43(1): 51-70.
- Axford N (2009) Child well-being through different lenses: why concept matters. *Child and Family Social Work* 14(3): 372-383.
- Bailey R (2009) Well-being, happiness and education. *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 30(6): 795-802.
- Basford J and Bath C (2014) Playing the assessment game: an English early childhood education perspective. *Early Years* 34(2): 1-14.
- Ben-Arieh A (2005) Where are the children? Children's role in the measuring and monitoring their well-being. *Social Indicators Research* 74(3): 573-596.
- Ben-Arieh A and Fronesi I (2011) Taxonomy for child well-being indicators: a framework for the analysis of the well-being of children. *Childhood* 18(4): 460-476.
- Brockliss L and Montgomery H (2013) *Childhood: a historical approach*. In: Kehily, J. *Understanding childhood: a cross-disciplinary approach*. Bristol: The Policy Press.
- Clack B (2012) What difference does it make? Philosophical perspectives on the nature of well-being and the role of educational practice. *Research Paper in Education* 27(4): 497-512.
- Coleman J (2009) Well-being in schools: empirical measure, or politicians' dream? *Oxford Review of Education* 35(3): 281-292.
- Csikszentmihalyi M (2002) *Flow: The Classic work on how to achieve happiness*. London: Rider Books.
- Cummins R (2010) Subjective wellbeing, homeostatically protected mood and depression: A Synthesis. *Journal of Happiness Studies* 11(1): 1-17.

Desjardins R (2008) Researching the links between education and well-being. *European Journal of Education* 43(1): 23-35.

Dodge R, Daly A, Huyton J and Sanders L (2012) The challenge of defining wellbeing. *International Journal of Wellbeing* 2(3): 222-235.

Donaldson G (2015) *Successful Futures*. Cardiff: Welsh Government.

Ereaut G and Whiting R (2008) *What do we mean by wellbeing and why might it matter?* London: DCSF.

Erwin E (2017) Transparency in Early Childhood Education: What the West Can Learn from Australia's Focus on Well-Being. *Global Education Review* 4(3): 56-69.

Fauth B and Thompson M (2009) *Young children's well-being: indicators and domains of development*. London: National Children's Bureau. Highlight no. 252.

Frailon J (2004) *Measuring student well-being in the context of Australian schooling*. Australia: Ministerial Council on Education.

Gallacher L and Kehily M (2013) Childhood: a sociocultural approach. In: Kehily M *Understanding childhood: a cross-disciplinary approach*. Bristol: The Policy Press, pp.211-266.

Gasper D (2004) *Discussion paper: Human well-being: concepts and conceptualisations*. World Institute for Development Economic Research.

Gasper D (2010) Understanding the diversity of conceptions of well-being and quality of life. *The Journal of Socio-Economics* 39(3): 351-360.

Haworth J and Hart G (2007) *Well-being: individual, community and social perspectives*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.

Headey BW and Wearing AJ (1989) Personality, life events and subjective well-being: Toward a dynamic equilibrium model. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 57(4): 731-739.

Hervas G and Vazquez C (2013) Construction and validation of a measure of integrative well-being in seven languages; the Pemberton Happiness Index. *Health and Quality of Life Outcomes* 11(66): 1-13.

Hicks S, Newton J, Haynes J and Evans J (2011) *Measuring Children's and Young People's Well-being*. Wales: Office for National Statistics.

Humphrey N, Kalambouka A, Wigelsworth M, Lendrum A, Lennie C and Farrell P (2010) New beginnings: evaluation of a short social-emotional intervention for primary-aged children. *Educational Psychology* 30(5): 513-532.

Huppert F (2014) Moment's notice: Enhancing well-being through the practice of mindfulness. Available at: <http://upclose.unimelb.edu.au/episode/286-moment-s-notice-enhancing-well-being-through-practice-mindfulness> (accessed 21 August 2014).

La Placa V, McNaught A and Knight A (2013) Discourse of wellbeing in research and practice. *International Journal of Wellbeing* 3(1): 116-125.

Mashford-Scott A, Church A and Tayler C (2012) Seeking children's perspectives on their wellbeing in early childhood settings. *International Journal of Early Childhood* 44(3): 231-247.

McLaughlin C (2008) Emotional well-being and its relationship to schools and classrooms: a critical reflection. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling* 36(4): 353-366.

McLellan R and Steward S (2015) Measuring children and young people's wellbeing in the school context. *Cambridge Journal of Education* 45(3): 307-332.

Moore K, Murphey D and Bandy T (2012) Positive child well-being: an index based on data for individual children. *Maternal & Child health* 16: 119-128.

Morrow V and Mayall B (2009) What is wrong with children's well-being in the UK? Questions of meaning and measurement. *Journal of Social Welfare and Family Law* 31(3): 217-229.

Neaum S (2010) *Childhood Studies for Early Childhood Studies*. Exeter: Learning Matters Ltd.

New Economics Foundation (2009) *A guide to measuring children's well-being*. London: New Economics Foundation.

OECD (2011) *How's Life? Measuring well-being*. OECD Publishing.

OECD (2018) Early Learning Matters: findings from Findings from the International Early Learning and Child Well-being 2017 Field Trial
<http://www.oecd.org/education/school/publicationsdocuments/brochure/IELS-Field-Trial-Report.pdf> (accessed: 19 February 2019)

ONS (2014) *Measuring National wellbeing – Exploring the wellbeing of Children in the UK*. ONS.

ONS (2015) Available at:
<http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/HTMLDocs/dvc146/wrapper.html>
(accessed: 21 December 2015).

Page J Clare A and Nutbrown C (2013) *Working with Babies and Children*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Pollard E and Lee P (2003) Child Well-being: a systematic review of the literature. *Social Indicators Research* 61(1): 59-78.

Raghavan R and Alexandrova A (2015) Toward a theory of Child well-being. *Social Indicators Research* 121(3): 887-902.

Reber A (1995) *Dictionary of psychology*. 2nd ed. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Ryan R and Deci E (2001) On happiness and human potentials: a review of research on hedonic and eudaimonic well-being. *Annual Review Psychology* 52(1): 141-166.

Soutter A, O'Steen B and Gilmore A (2012) Wellbeing in the New Zealand curriculum. *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 44(1): 111-142.

Statham J and Chase E (2010) *Childhood Wellbeing: a brief overview*. Childhood Wellbeing Research Centre.

Sylva K, Melhuish EC, Sammons P, Siraj-Blatchford I and Taggart B (2004) *The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project: Technical Paper 12 – the Final Report*. London: DfES.

Thompson S and Marks N (2006) *Measuring well-being in policy: issues and applications*. London: New Economics Foundation.

Uprichard E (2008) Children as 'Being and Becomings': children, childhood and temporality. *Health Education* 22(4): 303-313.

United Nations (2018) *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2018*. USA: United Nations.

Walker P (2012) Wellbeing: meaning, definition, measurement and application. In: Walker P and John M *From public health to wellbeing: the new driver for policy and action*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, pp.21-46.

White S and Abeyasekera A (2014) *Wellbeing and Quality of Life Assessment: a practical guide*. Warwickshire: Practical Action Publishing Ltd.

Whitebread D (2012) *Developmental psychology & early childhood education*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Wigelsworth M, Humphrey N, Kalamouka A and Lendrum A (2010) A review of key issues in the measurement of children's social and emotional skills. *Educational Psychology in Practice: theory, research and practice in educational psychology* 26(2): 173-186.