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Self-description of the children's page



Switzerland – Zurich¹

Grüezi mitenand!

We are Catrin (Heite), Veronika (Magyar-Haas), Marion (Pomey), Morad (Salah) and Franziska (Schlattmeier) and we are all working at the University of Zurich, at the Institute of Education.



We have different professional, academic and biographical backgrounds, coming from the areas of Educational Science, Social Work, Sociology, Philosophy, Psychology, Law and Teaching, which allows us to reflect on research objects and questions from different points of view. Some of us have already been working with children in residential care, in the context of socio-pedagogical family support, in schools, nursery schools and sport clubs. Our experiences in the social and human sciences as well as in the practice showed us, how essential the perception of children as a participating subject is. Each child has to be taken seriously and is entitled to be heard. In our common research we are focusing on vulnerability, child's welfare and social pedagogical work with parents in early education and in early childhood. Within these interests and with a view to children's understanding of well-being we are striving for an interdisciplinary approach.

Our research is located in Zurich, the largest city in Switzerland. This town has over 400'000 inhabitants with almost one third of the population having migration background. Including the agglomeration, Zurich counts 1.3 million people from 169 countries. This setting offers a broad spectrum of multifaceted cultures and lifestyles and allows researchers to systematically take into account the highly heterogeneous population through their analysis of the empirical orientated topics in the field of cultural and social sciences. Within the territory of Switzerland there are different culturally unique and historically grown places and particularities which provide specific opportunities for comparative analysis: for example the differences in the lifestyles in the city of Zurich or in its agglomeration; the spatial conditions of living in the urban and the rural area or the heterogeneity of the (legitimated/official) languages and their usage.

¹ Picture source: <https://de.fotolia.com/id/77095254>; State: 22nd of November 2016.



For a first approach to the complex subject of children's understanding of well-being a research seminar for master students entitled 'Child-well-being' was held from September 2015 until June 2016 at the Institute of Education. A group of students focused on different perspectives to get broader information concerning the children's view on their own well-being. The whole research team was involved in this seminar with different areas of responsibility. This long and intensive work together with the students resulted in three research reports: referring to child well-being, the first report treated the meaning of sports for children's well-being, the second discussed the topic of well-being in relation to children's migration experiences and the third dealt with the relevance of friendship for the well-being of children. The first two groups were interviewing the children with qualitative methods; the third group chose a quantitative design and used questionnaires. This combination of different methods and topics enabled us to get a wide range of views on child's well-being. In all projects we focused on the question of what is important for children and their subjective well-being *from their point of view*.

To get answers to this research interest, children aged 8 to 12 years were interviewed. The goal was to find out how the children experience their daily life, what they value especially and what they define as important aspects in their lives. For these questions the students visited schools and sport clubs to find answers in different research fields. As an entry stimulus for the interviews, one group used drawings made by the children themselves, the other digital cameras. With the cameras the children could photograph what they felt important for themselves. This methodical focus on children's perspective allowed to get deeper information about what is meaningful for them and it gave them the opportunity to present their own perspectives: different places, times, situations, things, persons and activities were photographed.

Next to the seminar we created a database with over 500 references about literature concerning well-being. With this we gained a good overview on their different aspects. As a next step, we will try to systematize these references. Furthermore, in connection with the theoretical analysis, we are currently reflecting on the question, how far the term and concept «context» can be operated in a fruitful way. In many studies – also within child-well-being studies – this concept is used unquestioningly. Therefore, we would like to describe the figure and its different meanings more closely.

We are delighted about taking part in this international project and to have the opportunity to reconstruct, what children are experiencing in the different contexts and what they especially value. At the same time, it is important for us to take into consideration the heterogeneous social, political and economical backgrounds and contexts, that are producing different perspectives on the question, what it means to have a «good life». We are looking forward to the meetings with our colleagues from many different countries and to this great opportunity to exchange diverse points of view and methods.

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Research page

REPORT ON THE SWISS STUDY (2016)

In our pilot study, which was part of the research seminar «Child well-being – subjective well-being of children» at the University of Zurich, the following master students were intensively involved: Valentina Failla, Kathrin Gross, Valentin Mettler, Susanna Reinhard, Morad Salah and Sandra Schmid.



Children's Understandings of Well-Being in Local and Global Contexts – A Swiss Perspective¹

Oriented on the Interview Protocol and Notes of the Multi-National Qualitative Study of Children's Well-being – Stages 1 and 2 by Fattore, Fegter and Hunner-Kreisel (2015) – we started with our small research project in January 2016. First we translated the Interview Protocol Stage 1 into German as closely as possible to the original. We are now about to realize stage 1 and for this purpose we will interview children aged 8 to 12 in Zurich.

In the near future we want to implement both stages and present results in a research report. The following paper describes mainly our first steps to the research stages for the German speaking part of Switzerland. It reflects the process of a research seminar and the results of the master students' studies.

Aim of the studies

The aim of the research is to reconstruct children's understandings of well-being in their cultural and social everyday contexts. Well-being as well as childhood has been understood as social and cultural constructions and children as a social group.

In relation to children's well-being, different topics have been analyzed by three groups of students. With a qualitative perspective, group 1 (Valentin Mettler and Morad Salah) examined the meanings of sport for the subjective well-being of children and group 2 (Valentina Failla and Sandra Schmid) explored the subjective well-being of children with migration experience. Group 3 (Susanna Reinhard and Kathrin Gross) found relevant aspects of friendship for children's well-being by using quantitative methods. In all studies the main goal was to discover relevant aspects and meanings of well-being from the children's point of view.

¹ Picture source: <http://hometimes.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/world-in-our-hands.resize.jpg>; State: 22nd of November 2016.



Samples

The three small studies worked with different sampling strategies. The group exploring friendship went into a third degree school class in Zurich to carry out the survey with children aged 8 and 9. The group analyzing sport visited training sessions of a football club in St. Gallen with children aged 10 to 12. The group working with children with migration experience contacted a school class in the agglomeration of Zurich and interviewed two children aged 9 there.

The participation in the research project was voluntary. Children, who were interested in it received a permission letter for their parents which contained all the required information about the research as well as contact details. We had a separate permission letter for every project. These letters were approved by the ethics commission of the University of Zurich.

Methods

The group exploring friendship used quantitative questionnaires based on the study of Ladd et al. (1996). They oriented themselves on this study and changed only small details. The group had 24 items in their questionnaire and the survey was carried out with 36 children. The two other groups working with qualitative methods used individual guided interviews. As an entry for the interviews the groups formulated different stimuli. To get the children's perspective on the aspect of migration involvement, they were asked, before the start of the interview, to draw the important things for themselves during the migration experience. This drawing was used as an entry stimulus for the interview.

The children in the football team received a digital camera one week before the interview date to photograph important things, people, places and activities related to sport. These instructions were inspired by the Research Protocol and Notes of the Multi-National Qualitative Study of Children's Well-being by Fattore, Fegter and Hunner-Kreisel (2015). With the help of these pictures four individual interviews of approximately 30 minutes have been carried out. The interviewers were interested in aspects of sport in general and football specifically. The interviews of both groups were recorded, transcribed and analyzed based on the Grounded Theory methodology and method. The drawings and photographs were not analyzed specifically, but used as a stimulus to help children explain the relevant and important aspects from their point of view.

In the following sections the project, which examined the meanings of sport for the subjective well-being of children, will be presented more closely. The small project provides exemplary insight into the working process of the master students during the research seminar and gives small presentations about the subject of children's understanding of well-being. This description of Morad's research group has been chosen because he was getting involved in the project of children's well-being at the Institute of Education.

Procedure (example of well-being in sport)

After the theoretical examination of different questions concerning well-being and on the basis of indicator models, the group created a guide for the interviews. The interviewer had to choose an adequate language for the children connecting the main question. After completing the guidelines the students wrote a letter which had to be signed by the children's parents before participating in the interview. All the documents had to be proofed and authorized by the ethics commission of the University of Zurich.



Then the researchers contacted the coach of a football club, who is training children aged eleven to twelve. After hearing about the subject and method of the research, the coach gave his consent to the upcoming procedures. During a training session the students explained the children their project and the assignment. The children received a digital camera and had the opportunity to take pictures of places, people, activities and things related to sport, that are important and valuable to them. In the next training session, the interviews were carried out with the children, who had gotten the written permission of their parents.

As a result of the first interviews, the students decided to insist on the method of interviews. Additionally, they took notes of the observations and the context related to the interviews. In the following, aspects will be discussed, which children often have thematised in the interviews and which – against this background – the researchers interpreted as important and meaningful for the children.

Comparison of results and findings

The results of the four interviews and a summary of the empirical process are summarized in the research report written by the master students. Inspired by Bradshaw et al. (2013) the subjective well-being of children was reconstructed by their point of view. In relation to sport and well-being of children several findings were analyzed:

Individuality: Although in team sports the group is important for the success, it was of great importance for the children to be seen as an individual human being and therefore get individual attention. The individuals' goal is to position themselves, to be known as an individual and to get attention and recognition as a single person. With individual success – to obtain a trophy by the most valuable player for example – the children felt to acquire recognition. To be known and estimated as an individual competent human being had high priority in well-being concerning sport.

Collectivity: The collective, team or group had a high relevance by the interviewed children, but on a different level than individuality. To make sport together with other children is valuable on a social and emotional level. It seemed to be essential for children to share positive and negative emotions with colleagues. Especially in bad moments, the children formulated, that they can help each other to solve problems and difficult emotional situations. In training sessions and matches they like to have fun with each other and to share positive moments, which make them feel good and happy during these phases. Besides these positive aspects, collectivity can – from a theoretical point of view – also generate negative effects. Group pressure and punishments for example can lead to negative experiences within the group.

- In relation to *individuality* and *collectivity* a paradox arises on the analytical level: Famous and popular women and men in sports may make themselves to an own trade. They shine as a singular human being, to whom children are looking up to and try to imitate their behavior, style and skills. But to be successful as a single player, the collective is a main condition to reach the individual goals.

Achievement oriented: To perform well and receive recognition for doing well in sports was a relevant topic for all children. They get feedbacks from their team colleagues, coaches, families, and friends. Every interviewed child aimed at giving the best and being recognized as a team player with individual



skills. The success of the team should be above the individual goals, but the interviews showed, that for children the personal success was more important than the success as a team. The recognition is higher when for example a trophy is given to the best goal scorer during the tournament. With this trophy the child can show other people the reached level of skills during a certain period. The good performance makes them feel pride and the material expression of the artifacts of recognition (like medals, trophies, etc.) helps to make the achievement visible and public. To shape one's own activities or goals and being successful as a child, is a good opportunity for children to reach agency.

Relation oriented: It was often told by the children that they appreciate to have good relationships inside the team. They like sharing emotions with each other and treating each other fairly. In this context, in which children seem to be among themselves, they enjoy much space without the feeling of being controlled by adults. This aspect helps children to feel their own agency.

Different places, activities, persons and things affect on the well-being of children, but the altering context and situations change the level and intensity of the influence.

Health: In relation to sport and well-being many indicator models (for example UNICEF 2007) have listed health as a main factor for well-being. Also in the students' report health was the basis for the research. But in the interviews the children haven't mentioned this aspect by themselves. It could be that they take it for granted.

The stages 1 and 2, which are listed in the Research Protocol of the Multinational Qualitative Study, will be carried out in the near future with children aged 8 to 12 in Zurich. The research will take part in a community center in Zurich. With this choice, extracurricular conditions can be analyzed. We are asking for children's understanding of well-being in an urban context. The content and methodological findings from these three initial projects will be used as basis accessing the stages 1 and 2.

The stage 1 results - will follow.

The stage 2 results - will follow.

References:

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