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Child well-being at school, an introduction

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At the end of the 20th century, the notion of well-being became increasingly popular in public debate, particularly in criticism of GDP as a hegemonic measure of nations' development (the "go beyond the GDP" movement, D'Ambrosio, 2018). Used by international organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO) or the Organization for Economic and Social Development (OECD), well-being has also been the subject of considerable scientific debate, particularly concerning its measurement (Perron et al., 2019).

Well-being is a broad, polysemous concept that can cover a complex range of dimensions. Depending on the nature of research, it may refer to material comfort, good health, emotional stability, the well-being of a society as a whole, confidence in institutions, or sometimes all of these at once. The question is, at what level and with what emphasis are these different aspects articulated? How does the idea of well-being differ from relatively similar notions, such as happiness, joy, a good quality of life, or a general feeling of satisfaction with one's life? Should well-being be analyzed from an individual or collective perspective? Should we try to understand it through quantitative data (such as indicators of living conditions, of wealth, or the health status of populations), or qualitatively by focusing on its subjective aspects (like feelings or self-assessments of the sense of well-being, happiness or satisfaction with one's own life)? Should we also distinguish between well-being at different ages? Can it be measured in the same way for adults and children? There is no single, unanimous answer to these questions. They are still at the heart of many rich debates between, on the one hand, advocates of objective, material and more "collective" approaches to well-being and, on the other, those who favor subjective and more "individual" approaches, based on individual perception (Veenhoven 2007, 2009; Voukelatou et al. 2020).

In recent decades, child well-being has become a key political and academic issue that has gained importance both in public policy and in the social sciences. It has historically been associated with a number of social and political variables: parenting practices and parental investment; quality of home life; the development of digital tools; and, crucially, a child's school experiences, which form the core of children's daily lives. Initially defined negatively – that is, as an absence of health problems, illness, or feelings of failure or low self-esteem – well-being has come to be viewed as a more positive concept.

This more positive definition has also attempted to take better account of the child not just as an adult in the making, but as a being "in the present" with needs and expectations different from those of an adult, in light of the advances and findings of the new sociology of childhood (Corsaro 2014; James & Prout 2006). In this introduction, we will review the questions raised by the issue of well-being at school, before presenting this book's contribution to understanding it.

The role of school

The literature on the determinants of the subjective well-being (SWB) of children and adolescents emphasizes the central role played by schools, whether by analyzing children's relationships with various professionals, particularly teachers (teacher effect), the quality of peer relationships (bullying effect), or by exploring the "school climate," a particularly rich and promising area of research, whose contours and definitions have evolved over time.

The importance of strong student-teacher relationships

A large body of literature is devoted to student-teacher relationships, and has shown that the quality and frequency of these relationships not only have a positive impact on a child's academic success and development, but also on their self-esteem and level of well-being at school and in general. In their systematic literature review, Berkowitz et al. (2017) and Quin (2017) underscore that positive relationships or a good climate of relationships between students and teachers are associated with better academic results and success and, above all, that they can mitigate school inequalities and the strong association between working classes and academic failure, in particular by promoting self-esteem and attachment to school, its challenges and its rules. In this respect, the authors point out that positive student-teacher relationships – characterized by benevolence and an absence of conflict – reduce the use of exclusionary disciplinary measures, and increase students' sense of belonging at school, their pro-social behavior at school, as well as their feeling of recognition, which enhances their overall level of well-being. In particular, the effects appear to be especially positive for students living in the most precarious situations, and for those failing or dropping out of school.

However, numerous studies, such as those by Goddard et al. (2001, 2009) or Thrupp (1999), reveal that teachers are far from successful in establishing positive, and quality relationships with all pupils. Teachers find it more difficult to engage with students from working-class backgrounds or with a migrant background, since teachers have less confidence in these students and their academic abilities, viewing them as less "teachable" and behaving worse in classroom. These obstacles, mainly linked to the students' social and geographic origins, also hinder the formation of good student-teacher relationships with regards to teachers' interest in these students' lives and well-being outside of school, their availability both academically and socially, and the social and emotional support they can give their students. This research generally calls on teachers to become more culturally aware, by learning about their students' backgrounds, immersing themselves in their personal worlds, and actively integrating issues of race, culture, and power into their teaching. Researchers also stress the need for teachers to integrate their work with broader notions of family and community, going beyond the school itself.¹

The quality of peer relations

Alongside student-teacher relationships, the quality and frequency of peer relationships also play a fundamental role in children's well-being at school, and especially in their daily lives. Several studies (Dunn 2004; Goswami 2012; Holder & Colman 2009; Huebner 1991, 1994; Moreira et al. 2021) have found that the variables associated with child well-being are similar to those that have been shown to predict adult and adolescent well-being. More specifically, they stress that children who have positive social relationships with their peers and strong friendships tend to have higher levels of subjective well-being. These relationships offer children a stronger sense of belonging, acceptance, and emotional security, contributing to their personal growth and emotional development. Other surveys (McGregor et al. 2006; Saklofske and Yackulic 1989; Tkach and Lyubomirsky 2006) emphasize that boys and girls who behave "prosocially" or are rated as "social," i.e., who rated highly in extraversion and agreeableness, experience greater well-being insofar as their social relationships are stronger and more intense, thus increasing both the sharing of positive social experiences and the enjoyment from these experiences.

Some researchers (Antonucci et al. 1998; Rook 1984) argue that social interactions or relationships between children should not be equated solely with social support and a factor in well-being, since they may involve conflict, envy, invasion of privacy, broken promises, or other negative aspects that do not necessarily compensate

¹ For a more complete overview of the scientific literature, see Chapter 8 by Maia Cucchiara in this book.

for the positive emotions they can provide, such as affection, satisfaction, joy, and contentment. For these authors, it is crucial to take negative interactions into account when studying children's SWB, particularly the different experiences of harassment to which girls and boys may be subjected within schools.

Following this classic work, numerous surveys (Bradshaw et al. 2017; Card & Hodges, 2008; Ladd, 2005; Rigby, 2000, 2003; Salmivalli et al. 1999) have highlighted the negative effects of bullying on children's SWB. First, they have shown that physical and moral violence can affect the self-esteem of children who are direct victims of bullying, thereby increasing their levels of stress, anger, and, ultimately, unhappiness, both at school and in their everyday lives. They also highlight the fact that bullying can lead to children's maladjustment to their environment, insofar as negative experiences at school lead them to develop an aversion to the school and its representatives who are supposed to protect them. Finally, they reveal that situations of peer harassment, beyond psychological distress, can have physical repercussions. Girls and boys who are victims of bullying are more likely than others to develop severe physical and psychosomatic disorders such as rashes, sore throats, anorexia or bulimia, a feeling of chest tightness, vomiting, and wheezing. All in all, the negative interactions of peer harassment at school seem to have a greater impact on children's level of well-being than positive social relationships: not only do they drastically increase levels of stress, anxiety, depression, and somatic disorders, but they also have a negative impact on children's self-perception, their social skills, and on the perception of their own place in the world – even if they have positive relationships with teachers or other children outside of school.

The school climate

A final body of research on the links between school and children's SWB stresses the importance of the "school climate." This term is polysemous and has vague contours that can refer to different dimensions of children's existence or experiences, depending on the researcher and the historical and geographical contexts in which it has been studied (Benbenishty and Astor, 2005; Cohen et al., 2009; Debarbieux et al., 2012). Nevertheless, most researchers today agree on the same definition: *"The school climate refers to the quality and way of life at school, based on a person's understanding of their school experience. It reflects the norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, the teaching, learning, and management practices, and the organizational structure embedded in school life"* (Cohen et al., 2009, in Debarbieux, 2015: 13). In other words, school climate is made up of five main elements:

- the quality of relations with teachers and parents on school-related matters;
- the quality of teaching and learning (including the quality of instruction, the arrangements in place aimed at personal and professional development, and the degree of student participation in the organization of schooling);
- the level of physical and emotional security, which is fostered by tolerance of difference, conflict resolution and the handling of bullying;
- the quality of the physical environment in terms of cleanliness, available materials and extracurricular offerings;
- and, lastly, the sense of belonging, which refers primarily to a child's feeling of being connected to both teachers and other students, as well as the level of commitment and enthusiasm shown by both.

A great deal of research (Aldridge & McChesney 2018; Darling-Hammond & DePaoli 2020; Kutsyuruba et al. 2015; Newland et al. 2019; Thapa et al. 2013) has focused on the positive impact of one or more aspects of the school climate on child well-being. Regardless of the indicators used, they all emphasize that the school climate has an impact on student motivation, commitment, academic performance, and school satisfaction, all of which are factors linked to overall SWB. But most importantly, these studies have highlighted the importance of positive relationships between children and their teachers, peers, and parents, to the extent to which they connect children's emotional and academic lives. When children feel supported and respected by adults and their peers, they are better equipped to cope with the challenges and stresses of the school environment, as well as the various challenges that they encounter in their daily lives. Conversely, unbalanced, unequal and conflictual relationships can harm children's well-being, as they negatively impact their self-esteem, confidence, and need of recognition.

While these findings seem valid for most children, some researchers (Diter et al. 2021; Esposito 1999; WHO 2016; Young & Sweeting 2004) emphasize that the different variables involved in evaluating school climates do

not affect children equally according to their social profile and the social contexts in which they live: girls, working-class children, and children from immigrant backgrounds seem to be the most affected (positively as well as negatively) by the school climate insofar as they live in more precarious living conditions, and are more often the victims of bullying and physical and moral violence than other children.

The role of parental involvement

Beyond the school climate and experiences linked to the “pupil's profession” (“*métier d'élève*”), another important part of the research on children's SWB has focused on the family, and more precisely on the role of primary socialization by parents in forming the basis for inequalities and reproducing them from generation to generation. It is particularly in the relationship between family and school that this phenomenon of reproduction has been most extensively highlighted (see for example Bourdieu & Passeron's classic work (1970) for France, or the work of Diane Reay (1998) for the UK, and Lareau (2011) for the USA).

But beyond this initial observation of a well-established relationship between social background and school performance, due to the inequalities in capital transmitted and habitus incorporated as part of this primary socialization, many recent studies have attempted to explore the link between parental involvement, family education and support, and school performance, as well as the academic success and adaptation of the pupil more broadly. In the sociology of education, this relationship between human capital, social capital, and the quality of parent-child relationships is the subject of numerous studies, including those by von Otter (2013), Von Otter & Stenberg (2015), and, for the USA, Hill & Taylor (2004), and Lee & Bowen (2006).

But the literature on this subject is so abundant on an international scale that we are unable to give a systematic account of it here. As far as the English-language literature is concerned, Charles Desforges and Alberto Abouchaar compiled a synthesis of this literature, aimed at identifying the main evidence on the relationship between parenting and pupil achievement in a 2003 report submitted to the Department for Education in England (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003).² They used the concept of parental involvement, which can be contrasted with social investment and which has been widely used in academic literature on the welfare state and adopted by public policy-makers on a European and international scale (Garrizmann et al., 2022).

Desforges and Abouchaar distinguish several facets to parental involvement: good parenting at home, material conditions (in terms of a stable and secure environment), intellectual stimulation, the discussions and exchanges between parents and children, the “good” models of social and educational values proposed by parents, and even parents' aspirations regarding their children's personal fulfillment and citizenship. Parental involvement also manifests beyond the home in parents' interactions with the school, such as their participation in events and school life, contact with teachers, involvement in school governance, etc.

This literature review confirms that the impact of parental involvement clearly varies according to social class, the mother's education level, household composition, and the type of family structure. It also shows that the younger the child, the stronger the parental effect. But these authors stress particularly the following key points:

- Parental involvement at home is the best predictor of children's achievement and adjustment at school;
- Parental involvement is evident in all social milieus, even if its effects vary according to social class;
- Parents' perception of their own role and their level of confidence in their ability to assume it are also determining factors;
- The co-production of this trust in parent-child interactions through the adjustment of their respective expectations of the child's future plays an important role and points to the major importance of communication between parents and children.³

² “The main aim is to produce a comprehensive literature review of reliable research evidence on the relationship between parenting and pupil achievement” (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003, p. 8).

³ The US National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS) of 1998, which was carried out on a sample of almost 25,000 pupils aged around 14, stratified from 1,500 schools, tested the relative impact of the effect of class membership, parental involvement, and communication between parents and children. It concluded that the effect of parent-child communication is particularly important in explaining variations in student performance in math and reading. “*Parental involvement made a significant unique contribution to explaining the variation in children's academic achievement over and above the effects associated with family*

Among the literature reviewed, Schoon and Parsons (2002) tested how some children manage to succeed academically despite unfavorable material conditions and environment. By calculating a social index (taking into account material conditions and class status) and a competence index (taking into account academic performance and behavioral dimensions), these authors identified four configurations, as shown in the following table:

		Social index	
		Bottom	Top
Competence index	Bottom	vulnerable	Underperforming
	Top	resilient	Multiple benefits

Several of the research studies listed in Desforges and Abouchaar’s literature review, and particularly those backed up by the NELS survey mentioned above, underline the decisive nature of these shared aspirations or expectations co-produced in the parent-child dialogue. High parental expectations, which result in increased support to face child workload, and the existence of learning opportunities at home or outside school, are particularly decisive factors for learning and are likely to compensate for inequalities in material resources. Many studies therefore stress the importance of the quality of relationships and dialogue between parents and children for the success of children’s trajectories. In any case, this relational effect seems far more important than the only dialogue between parents and school.

Based on secondary processing of the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) survey, Dimitra Hartas (2015) greatly refines the findings established in Desforges and Abouchaar’s literature review by testing the model of intense parenting, which refers to a significant investment of time and money by parents for the purpose of enhancing their children’s abilities, particularly academically. While it is undeniable that progress has been made in the learning of children of new generations thanks to the increase in parental time since the 1970s, and even to the narrowing of the gap between paternal and maternal time, Hartas highlights the importance of the quality of this parental involvement, irrespective of social background. She also reveals the different nature of this parental involvement, depending on whether or not it concerns the academic and school dimension. What her analysis shows is that while intensified parental involvement can have modest effects, including in terms of academic learning, it does not build self-esteem, agency, social skills, resilience, or emotional maturity.

Once again, Hartas stresses the major importance of interaction and conversation between parents and their children to reinforce children’s learning. But it’s not so much a matter of parents helping their children with their homework, as helping young people learn more generally about the world and forge their own point of view, thanks to these non-academic exchanges, i.e. interactions which don’t concern school or the school experience. As she notes: “Aspects of the ‘family habitus’ that encourage dialogic interactions and intellectual conversations between parents and children were found to be more effective in sustaining parental literacy support for 15 year olds than mere school-driven parental involvement, possibly because parent-child conversations and interactions can stimulate diverse intellectual interests in children and an understanding of the world and their place in it” (Hartas, 2015, p.192).⁴

This analysis provides a particularly promising avenue for interpreting the French situation, which is the particular focus of this book. Although France is not one of the countries analyzed by Hartas, we shall see in several of the book’s chapters that we can extend her analysis to the French case, where it would seem that a significant part of parental involvement and that parent-child interactions are geared towards school support, performance at school, extending the school climate and its tensions to the home. This culture of learning, which

background... The most significant factor was ‘home discussion’. Regardless of social class, the more parents and children conversed with each other in the home, the more pupils achieved school” (Desforges, Abouchaar, 2003, p. 21).

⁴ For a gender perspective on the subject, see Hamilton, 2016. In French, see the work of Isabelle Roskam (Roskam et al., 2009). For a parental time use approach that distinguishes between mothers’ time and mothers’ parenting time, see Esping-Andersen & Bonke (2007).

makes school performance the alpha and omega of parent-child interaction, could explain both reduced dialogue and under-performance in learning.

Other studies suggest that this component of the explanation should be taken into account. Napolitano, Pacholok and Furstenberg, for example, analyze the weight of parental expectations and the difficulties experienced by the middle classes in achieving them, given the economic difficulties (Napolitano et al., 2014). The gap between parental expectations and young people's expectations of their own future is an avenue worth exploring in a context where the generations concerned have, for the first, generally benefited from the post-war social elevator, while the second is faced with a context of weak growth, even recession and social downgrading.

This reflection on the potentially counter-performing role of parents who monitor, supervise and even over-supervise their children academically, or in their discovery of the world, has led to the development of another field of research: intensive parenting or overparenting. This research highlights the sometimes-devastating effects of parental over-investment. It is as much about the academic pressure generated by parents in their monitoring of their children's school activity and performance, as it is the aversion to risk that leads parents to excessively control the activities, movements, social relationships and experiences of their children and teenagers. There is not enough space here to give an account of this literature as it is so abundant, especially in the fields of psychology and psychiatry (see in particular Barber 2001; Munich & Munich 2009; Nelson 2010; Segrin & al. 2012; 2013; Schiffrin & al. 2015; Garst & Gagnon 2015).

Book structure and contributions

This book aims to address several aspects of the global issue of child and adolescent well-being at school, articulating several of the dimensions and factors involved. It takes an international perspective, with chapters devoted to countries as diverse as the United Kingdom, the United States, New Zealand, Australia, Belgium, and, more broadly, Europe, while giving a central place to France, which poses a series of original questions in this respect.

In the first section, we have grouped together the authors who approach child and adolescent well-being at school from the angle of public policy, be it educational policy in the UK or New Zealand, or early childhood care policy in Europe more generally. This first section provides the reader with an overview of the issues at stake in terms of public policy, from the ways in which governments in the UK and New Zealand have responded to what has been seen as a deficit in the well-being in newer generations, to the ways in which, on a European scale, an early childcare policy has been imagined as an equalizer of inequalities and an instrument for combating child poverty, the main obstacle to the well-being of the new generations.

Kathryn Ecclestone examines the cultural shift towards “therapeutic ideas” in the UK between the 1990s and 2020, with the development of notions such as psychological vulnerability (or the “vulnerability zeitgeist”) and resilience in education. According to Ecclestone, the adoption of this lexicon is indicative of a form of moral panic about an epidemic of youth mental illness, that is, the deteriorating emotional and psychological states of children in the UK (depression, anxiety, self-harm, suicide). A positive mental health policy is supposed to tackle this “epidemic” by developing children's social and emotional learning skills and attitudes, as well as by implementing a myriad of wellbeing initiatives. Ecclestone approaches this conceptual and political turning point by focusing her analysis on “therapeutic cultures” and their dissemination among education and childcare professionals. She points out that these professionals are increasingly drawing on the ideas and practices dictated by these therapeutic cultures to promote children's psychological and emotional well-being. In her view, these concepts – imported from the USA and drawn from various branches of psychology, therapy, counseling, and self-help – permeate popular culture, politics, education, legal and welfare systems, institutional and everyday life. Ecclestone exposes these cultural therapeutic narratives, which accentuate the perception of human subjects as emotionally and psychologically vulnerable. More specifically, she addresses how cultural and political choices in favor of promoting vulnerability in educational settings are changing assumptions about the human subject, and discusses the question of the evidence that is defended by experts in evaluating their interventions. She concludes with a series of possible educational alternatives to these developments of well-being orientation that draw on ethical and moral understandings of well-being, as well as practical experience.

Grant Duncan questions whether well-being can be the subject of government objectives or public policies, starting with education policy. His chapter analyzes the New Zealand government's policy since 2019 to promote student well-being and address the disparities in school performance among children from Maori and Pacific Island communities (in 2015, one in four Maori children left school without formal school qualifications), as well as experiments with schemes to give preference to teachers from these communities. Drawing on the Hegelian dialectic to address issues of education and well-being, Duncan asks whether SWB has any cross-cultural validity to the point of constituting a statistical variable with measurable determinants. He criticizes the individualistic, utilitarian, and identity-based view of well-being, and defends a cultural, relational, and social vision that focuses on the way in which a series of values are culturally constructed and hierarchized. As he argues, "individual liberty, for example, may be valued more or less highly than family or community belonging, according to one's cultural norms and personal preferences." This leads him to conclude that "[f]or the well-being of students at school, and for their development in the future, we should regard teaching and learning in terms of developing relationships, or as a dialectic of mutual and transformative recognition. That will help I argue, to avoid instrumentalism and cultural essentialism."

Addressing the role of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) institutions and policies, **Michel Vandebroek** offers an overview of what is known about their ability to reduce the inequalities that are one of the main obstacles to children's well-being and success at school. In particular, he looks back at the cohort studies carried out in the United States from the 1960s to the early 1980s to assess the impact of these arrangements for children from poor families, which, to put it in today's terms, aimed to guarantee them a "better start" and evaluate the return on investment of their implementation. One of the conclusions drawn from this seminal work is that ECEC schemes represent "the greatest of equalizers." However, despite its well-established positive effects, formal childcare has failed to stem the rise in child poverty. In his chapter, Vandebroek attempts to identify the necessary conditions for the success of ECEC policy by looking back at the changes that have taken place in social welfare systems over the last few decades, particularly at the European level, with the promotion of an "enabling welfare state", notably through discussion of the different conceptions of justice conceived either in terms of equality of outcome or equality of opportunity. This assessment reveals the extent of the unfulfilled promises of ECEC policy, far from its stated aim of guaranteeing universal access to childcare. According to Vandebroek, in order for ECEC policy to achieve its objective of combating inequality, we must take into account three components: its quality (contrasting a meritocratic and competitive vision with one that favors the values of democracy and solidarity), its accessibility, and its affordability. As Vandebroek points out: "This is not to say that early childhood education cannot contribute to a fairer, more equal society. Of course it can. Especially when it is embedded into a broader political conception of a social welfare state that also invests in parental leave, gender equality, a minimum wage, and other forms of social protection."

The second section of the book shifts the focus to the French case, and takes a closer look at the environment, that is, the everyday context where children live their lives. It brings together contributions that examine the role of school-family relations on the well-being of girls and boys, both in primary and secondary school. The focus on France is particularly interesting here, as it is characterized both by a major investment of public funds in its education policy and by a level of pupil achievement far below this investment when compared on an international scale (particularly in the OECD's PISA surveys).

In the first text, **Sandrine Garcia** takes an indirect look at children's well-being at school, by examining the social conditions of two of its strongest determinants: namely, parental involvement and academic success. In other words, it shows the different cultural and social forces behind an effective parental involvement at school, which also contributes to a high level of satisfaction – with school and life – for girls and boys, by highlighting the social logics at the heart of a balanced form of parental involvement that is neither too full nor too light on expectations, nor too constraining from an academic point of view. After outlining the chapter's theoretical framework and use of the Bourdieusian concept of "transmission through osmosis" – whereby middle- and upper-class children can acquire knowledge of "the legitimate culture" conducive to academic success without the need for specific, direct transmission practices, but instead by contact with or exposure to the cultural universe of their highly capital-rich parents – the author sets out to describe empirically the different forms of parental intervention in schooling. Analyzing three individual case studies of three children, Garcia aims to highlight what in the parental interventions of middle-class families favors the academic success and well-being of girls and boys. She shows

that middle-class families, especially those with the most economic and cultural resources, are “proactive” in their children’s schooling: they anticipate their (academic) needs, organize their daily lives, and plan extracurricular activities (including meetings with teachers). They strive to create an “enveloping” emotional and educational environment, helping to develop their children’s autonomy, establish work habits, and instill in them a strong work ethic (“*le gout de l’effort*”). In the event of academic difficulties, they implement “catch-up strategies,” such as reading or extracurricular activities to (re)instill the pleasure of reading (and working) in their children. This support is all the more effective as it has “beneficial effects on their children’s sense of competence and self-esteem.” In the least affluent middle-class families, those closest to the working classes, parental intervention is not the same. It is characterized more by parents “handing over” their children to educational institutions or to health professionals (such as psychologists and speech therapists). Children’s difficulties at school are perceived in a fatalistic way by these parents, and so can only be managed by professionals. These parents simply make themselves available to their children, helping them on request, but do not take on a proactive role. No remedial or anticipatory strategies are put in place. In this way, the children’s difficulties are reinforced and accumulate over time, while their sense of enjoyment and self-esteem gradually disappear.

Agnès Grimault-Leprince, Lilia Le Trividic-Harrache, and Rozenn Nedelec continue this exploration of school and family relationships, this time looking at the unhappiness of high-school students and its various (family) determinants. Based on a quantitative survey of students from nine high schools in the Brittany region of France (n=1358), the authors take a close look at teenagers’ “negative school experiences,” detailing their contours, content, and their various causes. While the distressing dimension of school is only one of the four school experiences of these high-school students⁵, it accounts for almost a quarter of the respondents – mostly girls, who are dissatisfied with their educational program, and worried with their popularity. This dimension translates into feelings of stress regarding academic results, high levels of stress and anxiety about schooling, fear of disappointing parents and teachers, and a sense of injustice. The authors show that these negative feelings are primarily due to a mismatch between the priorities of teenagers in high school (not repeating a year and making friends) and those of their parents (focused on getting good grades or being top of the class). This pressure to excel at school is all the more acute for teenagers when parents neglect the sociability aspect of their children’s high school experience. Alongside this relatively expected explanation, two other discrepancies seem to have a significant impact on the “academic hardship” experienced by young people: on the one hand, the gap between the effort put in, the time invested in studying, and the actual results, which leads to a strong sense of injustice; and, on the other, the distance between the strong desire to be popular and poor sociability (including on social networks). In other words, these discrepancies lead to frustration and mark a poor integration. Lacking protection and recognition from adults and peers, high-school students develop feelings of injustice and humiliation, which results in “uncontrolled disorders” (physical and psychological). In conclusion, the authors return to the multidimensional aspect of malaise at school, reminding us of the importance of family, school, and peers, as well as the need to consider the different determinants of negative high school experiences simultaneously and all together.

Ghislain Leroy and Julie Pinsolle devote their chapter to alternative schools, and, more specifically, to the various reasons why some parents prefer to enroll their child(ren) in Montessori-type schools rather than “conventional” ones. Based on a qualitative survey of a dozen families (from upwardly mobile middle- and upper-class backgrounds), the authors begin by looking “behind the scenes” at the choice of an alternative pedagogy, highlighting the various arguments given by parents to justify their refusal of a “mainstream” school. They note that parents have an unfavorable perception of “conventional” schooling, considering it to be archaic, outdated, and physically and morally violent. Not only is it said to provide an old-fashioned education based on “training” and “molding” children, but it is also said to be incapable of considering the uniqueness of boys and girls, thus generating disgust and phobias about school. Montessori schools, on the other hand, personalize children’s learning to take account of their individual desires, and, in doing so, enable them to progress at their own pace and develop their full potential. In a nutshell, they promote academic performance (while) ensuring a “welcome for the child’s whole person (*accueil de la personne intégrale de l’enfant*.” This child-centered approach is all the more valued because it resembles the one provided at home (mainly by the mother), and has no negative impact on their own

⁵ The others are “confidence in school” (21%), “sociability” (22%), and “conformity to school standards” (24%), to which can be added the group of “students with no particular profile” (36%).

children's schooling. In the event of a problem (such as when a child is considered particularly difficult to manage), parents seem ready to renounce Montessorian "benevolence" and pedagogical and socio-affective personalization for a child deemed "atypical," so as not to harm their child's (autonomous) development. The authors conclude by underlining the "totalitarian traits of anti-authoritarian pedagogy" which, under the guise of rejecting coercion and valuing children's interests, forces them to constantly put into words, at school and at home, their emotions, activities and relationships, in order to better control and direct them.

The third section enters the school setting and looks more specifically at the (socially differentiated) way in which peer relations or student-teacher relations affect children's level of well-being, overall and at school, – and in doing so, their academic success. Despite the diverse geographical areas studied (USA, the UK, France and Portugal), the three chapters in this section underline the importance of the school climate, particularly for children from working-class backgrounds or in precarious situations. What's more, they highlight the unequal importance of peer sociability or relationship quality, which depends on the child's gender, social background, and geographical context, thus underlining the need for a multidimensional, contextualized approach to well-being or ill-being, whether in terms of research or public policy.

The first chapter of this section, written by **Kevin Diter and Claude Martin**, aims to measure the effects of school determinants on adolescents' low Overall Life Satisfaction (OLS), and, more specifically, to see which factor (or factors between the following) has the greatest effect on young people's well-being according to the context in which they live and their social profile: the (too) intensive parental involvement in young people's schooling, the quality of relationships with teachers, the quality of peer relationships, and/or the level of integration at school. Based on a secondary analysis of the PISA 2015 survey, Diter and Martin stress that there are strong inequalities in terms of SWB. Girls and 15-year-olds from working-class backgrounds (in UK) are not only far more likely than boys and children from higher classes to report low levels of OLS, but the effects of gender and class differ across countries. OLS levels are higher in the UK than in France and Portugal, so we can see that girls and middle- and lower-class children do not appear to be unhappier than boys and upper-class children in all places and contexts. So, for example, whatever their background, French girls are less likely to have a low level of OLS than the UK boys. Similarly, working-class children in France and Portugal are less likely to report a low level of OLS than upper-class children in the UK. Secondly, the authors reveal that these differences (of class and gender) within the difference (between countries) also concern the nature and impact of various school factors affecting OLS levels. Not only are boys and girls not equally likely to experience factors that negatively impact their OLS levels depending on their social background and country– such as having a low sense of belonging at school, a high level of school stress, or being subject to (intense) bullying by peers or teachers but these factors do not impact as negatively on OLS levels depending on whether the young people are girls or boys, from working-class or upper-class backgrounds, or whether they attend school in France or the UK. The authors conclude that this gendered and social variability in school determinants, their number, and the strength of their effects is, because of its pervasiveness, one of the reasons for the accumulation of inequalities in SWB over time and between countries.

Maia Cucchiara builds on these findings and extends the study of school-based determinants of children's well-being by focusing on student-teacher relationships (STRs). Her chapter provides a comprehensive and detailed overview of the association between the quality of student-teacher relationships, children's SWB, and academic success. She points out that strong relationships between students and teachers (i.e., those that evoke positive emotions) have a positive effect on the development, academic success, and overall well-being of both boys and girls. More specifically, she suggests, on the basis of an extensive literature review, that this association is mediated by one important factor: mutual trust between educators and their students. The better the relationship between students and teachers, the stronger the mutual trust, and the greater the cognitive, social, emotional, and academic benefits for the children, especially those from low-income backgrounds. Most importantly, the author demonstrates that the quality of STRs can help reduce social and racial inequalities at school: strong personal bonds with teachers improve the school engagement of working-class, African-American, and Mexican children, as well as their sense of belonging to the school and academic success. Secondly, Cucchiara clearly identifies the conditions for establishing good relations between students and teachers, and a sense of mutual trust. She highlights the central role played by the social profiles of children and teachers, as well as the importance of the school climate and organizational structure. In other words, she demonstrates that the quality of STRs depends not only

on individual characteristics, but also and above all on structural factors. In this respect, she concludes by stressing that the behavior of teachers and students, as well as the quality and nature of their relationships, cannot be detached from the social, cultural, and economic context in which they take place, and, in particular, from the school environment and the children's family universe.

After highlighting the diversity of approaches and conceptions of what well-being means in the literature, **Dimitra Hartas** turns to the situation in the UK to look at the level of young people's psychological and **mental health** well-being in relation to the way young people interact with their peers, as well as the world around them more broadly, particularly in terms of the social and economic constraints they face. Taking care not to reduce well-being to the absence of mental health problems, she also avoids the pitfalls of an individualistic, psychological approach by instead looking at mental well-being and mental health in relation to how young people interact with their parents and peers, and more extensively the world around them, and the social, economic and gender inequalities they face. As Hartas points out: "We live in an era where social problems are individualized and poverty is seen as moral failure. Some young people internalize the causes and effects of disadvantage, feeling shame for being poor" Drawing on the UK Household Longitudinal Survey which started in 2009, Hartas presents the findings on the mental health and well-being of 10-15 year-olds and young people between 16 and 21. She highlights several important findings: firstly, the data confirms and clarifies gender inequality, with a significant gap between girls' levels of well-being and psychological/subjective well-being compared to those of boys. Secondly, communication with parents plays a major role in the mental health and well-being of these young people. Being able to talk to one's parents, especially one's mother, about what's worrying these young people is particularly decisive. In peer relations, the survey also clearly highlights the very negative effects of bullying, particularly verbal and symbolic violence. The author also stresses the specific difficulties of entry into adulthood for 19-31-year-olds in a context marked by high youth unemployment rates and increasing precariousness and poverty, as well as by a reinforcement of a discourse of responsibility, giving young people the impression that their failure is largely due to their lack of mobilization or capacities (internalizing failure). The successive economic and health crises have only amplified these negative effects, leading Hartas to defend the idea that mental health problems among young people are not just increasing, but changing in nature. To combat this, she calls for the development of a genuine "political economy of mental health" to replace within-the-individual explanations or bad parenting (which largely blame women).

The final section of the book offers an account and understanding of the notions of child well-being and ill-being from the child's point of view. More specifically, it brings together two contributions that both aim to demonstrate the (political and scientific) value of giving a voice to children on a subject that primarily concerns them: their well-being at school.

Based on two large-scale mixed-methods studies (interviews, a corpus of local and state policies on well-being, and online questionnaires) carried out in Australia, **Nigel Thomas** seeks to understand well-being at school from the child's point of view, and, to a lesser extent, from the perspective of their teachers and the school administration. Not only does Thomas highlight the plural and multifaceted definitions of well-being, as well as their different components, but he also takes up a new and relatively little discussed issue in the literature on children's well-being: the role of recognition. Using Axel Honneth's theory, Thomas shows that the three modes of recognition – 'love,' 'rights,' and 'solidarity' that were presented to the children as 'cared for,' 'respected,' and 'valued' – are the key determinants of their conceptualization of well-being. Specifically, he points out that the quality of student-teacher relationships is central to their recognition, and thus to children's level of well-being at school. Children identify caring, supporting, encouraging, mentoring, and respectful behaviors by teachers as helping their well-being. Adversely, children feel not listened to, treated unequally, disrespected, yelled at, forced to comply with too many rules, and not liked when teachers do not display those positive behaviors. The second research continues the first one and underlines that the children's recognition also depends on their (active) participation in school life. More precisely, he emphasizes the direct and indirect effects of children's involvement at school on their subjective well-being. On the one hand, children's involvement at school has a positive effect on their quality of life by involving them directly in school life, its functioning and organization. On the other hand, it indirectly increases their recognition, which also helps increase their overall SWB. He concludes his chapter by stressing the need for schools to develop a culture of inclusion, connection, and recognition that allow

children to “work together” with teachers, to have their voice recognized and taken into account so that they can “having influence” and “have a say with influential people”.

Cath Larkins continues the challenge to the adult-centered view of children’s well-being (at school) begun by Thomas in the previous chapter, by exploring the perspectives of marginalized children. Based on Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum’s capability approach, she questions “the universal distinctions between children and adults” and suggests that children should be regarded as agentic and citizens as opposed to being passive, incompetent, dependent, incomplete, and “not-yet-citizens.” Through a reflective analysis of eight studies she co-led, Larkins discusses six recurring themes related to education and well-being that were mentioned by the children participants: peer relationships, supportive teaching staff, respect for diversity, punishment and privacy, the school curriculum and assessment, and participation. First, she highlights that while peer relationships are crucial to children’s well-being, experiences of violence and bullying related to ethnicity, social class, disability, and gender remain prevalent in school. Since teachers do not consistently intervene in this area, the formation of friendships can become extremely difficult for marginalized and victimized children, even though friendship can be a protective factor against peer violence and other negative school-related determinants. After demonstrating the importance of the impact of teachers’ behaviors on students’ well-being, as well as the need for supportive relationships – where the teachers are fair and kind, and understand students’ gender, ethnic or class identities – Larkins underlines the concerns expressed by children about unfair punishment in schools. This includes the punishment of the entire class rather than just individuals, degrading treatment such as locking children in cupboards, physical abuse, or disrespecting their privacy. These actions impede children’s ability to feel positive, valued, and respected, and like they are making a positive contribution to the world. She also notes that, for marginalized children, it is important that there are a variety of learning pathways, which are accessible to everyone and which move away from the dominant view that all students should be tested in the same way, and that their voices are taken seriously and taken into account in designing solutions to problems in schools. Finally, Larkins recommends engaging children in public debate, working in partnership with them, and challenging the denial of structural inequalities in order to promote a new conception of social justice that is developed by children, teachers, and parents alike.

Main themes and contributions

The book’s originality lies in bringing together works of different disciplinary, theoretical, and methodological perspectives that allow us to challenge and **go beyond the three oppositions**, which, generally speaking, tend to structure the basis of research on young people’s (subjective) well-being and its various determinants:

- Firstly, we can identify two opposing research approaches: on the one hand, there is research that places itself on the side of adults and focuses on the importance of the conditions of existence and coexistence of families and/or on the level of parental involvement with children. On the other, there is research that places itself on the side of children to capture the factors or constellation of family-related, school-related or friend-related factors that act most on children’s level of well-being (for a more detailed discussion of the differences between these two perspectives, see Ben-Arieh, 2005 ; Bradshaw, 2019; for a critique of the adult-centric approach, see Larkins in the book; Prout & James, 1990)
- Secondly, we have the opposition between research on objective well-being and subjective well-being. Research on objective well-being is primarily concerned with reporting on the economic, material, and cultural resources of families, in order to highlight the different living situations of children, being more or less privileged or more or less precarious. On the other hand, research on children’s SWB and its determinants particularly focuses on the role of the frequency and quality of the relationships between children and their loved ones or significant others. This opposition is reminiscent of the one that has long prevailed (and is no longer as clear-cut today) between research in economics, epidemiology, and public health, and research in psychology and sociology. While the former emphasize the importance of wealth and health as indicators and/or causes of children’s well-being (Feeny & Boyden 2003; Gordon et al. 2003; Singh & Sarkar 2015), the latter focus on the experiences and feelings of individuals whatever their age, since in their view, no one is in a better position than the individual to assess their quality of life, morale

and mood, repeating over and over again that “no man is happy who does not think himself so” (see Diener et al. (1999) and Veenhoven (2011) for the contribution of psychological and sociological perspectives.

- Thirdly and finally, we can identify two strongly opposing strands within research on SWB. On the one hand, we have research on SWB that focuses primarily on school determinants, such as the school climate, sense of belonging at school and/or the frequency and quality of relationships with peers and teachers. On the other hand, we have research that focuses on family determinants, which examines the material, economic, and cultural resources of the home, the involvement of the parents (or parent) in the child’s daily and school life, and the frequency and quality of parent-child relationships. Little research offers a multidimensional approach to the various determinants of children’s SWB, despite the fact that such an approach would enable us to understand how these determinants articulate and combine, and what effect(s) they would have on children’s quality or satisfaction of life, and also to highlight which of the school or family determinants plays the most in which social, cultural and political context(s), for which child(ren), with which social property(ies) and trajectory(ies) (Diter & Martin, 2021; Sarriera & Bedin, 2017). This relative lack is all the more astonishing given that a large body of literature has reflected on and proposed highly varied and precise indicators to define, characterize, and measure children’s (subjective) well-being levels (see Ben Arieh 2005, Bradshaw et al. 2007, and Buzaud et al., 2019 for a list of these indicators). In other words, while well-being indicators are plural and multidimensional, the analysis of the determinants of the type of well-being measured by these indicators tends to focus rather on one type of logic or mechanism: relational/affective; material/cultural; family-based; or school-based.

Reading across the chapters in this book has several advantages: not only does it provide an opportunity to read recent and geographically diverse empirical investigations into the links between school, family, and children’s (subjective) well-being, it also brings the different perspectives presented above into dialogue – even to the point of reconciling some – which are still too often arbitrarily and artificially opposed by the literature.

The work of Duncan, Vandenberg, and Garcia, on the one hand, and that of Thomas and Larkins, on the other, shows what a comparison of “top-down” and “bottom-up” approaches to children’s (subjective) well-being can contribute to our understanding of its different determinants, and the social conditions that make it possible. By first highlighting the various measures put in place by public policies and/or parents and childcare professionals to promote or maintain children’s living conditions, and then by revealing the expectations and needs expressed by children themselves, these texts highlight the sometimes large discrepancies between the one and the other, while at the same time offering interesting explanations for the failure of certain measures. They also reveal the various levers that teachers, parents, and government or public policies could use to improve the standard or quality of children’s lives, by taking greater account of their “voice” and inviting them to “participate as peers” (Fraser, 2011) in the design of schools or in the educational schemes that directly affect them. Finally, a comparison of the results presented in these different texts invites readers (and researchers) to consider both aspects in order to gain a global, multidimensional, and heuristic vision of young people’s well-being and its determinants.

A comparison of the texts by Hartas, Cucchiara, and Ecclestone provides an opportunity to put psychological, sociological, epidemiological, and public health research on child well-being into perspective, by highlighting the contributions and respective limitations of each of these approaches to understanding - the various sources of - children’s (subjective) well-being. Above all, their work invites us to consider the individual factors (internal causes) and the collective/social factors (external causes) of SWB together at once. In other words, for these researchers, the dualistic oppositions between objective and subjective determinants, or individual and collective determinants, are meaningless as they are all intrinsically linked together. Like Norbert Elias (1991), who challenged the individual/society opposition by showing that the individual cannot exist without society, just as society cannot exist without the individual, the authors show that material conditions and subjectivity or mental dispositions act reciprocally on each other, just as social relations affect the individual’s cognitive schemas or interiority as much as they are affected by them. A final point of common ground: each of these texts proposes to articulate psycho-sociological and public health approaches by decentering the questions usually posed by biomedical and cognitivist research. Rather than focusing on idiosyncratic and internal factors (such as temperament, resilience, etc.) and assessing how they are or may be affected by the “external environment,” they shift the perspective to consider the conditions for the existence and coexistence of individuals, and their role on

children's SWB. In doing so, the authors are able to bring together inter- and intra-individual approaches. Finally, all of them – in the text or in their approach of the issue – invite us to adopt a reflexive and critical perspective that draws on and discusses the achievements of the various disciplines in order to propose a multidimensional approach to well-being.

Finally, a comparison of the work of Leprince and colleagues, Diter & Martin, and Leroy & Pinsolle gives us an idea of the involvement and impact of peers, parents and education professionals respectively on the (low or high) level of well-being of children and adolescents at school. Not only do they demonstrate the value of thinking together the various domains of young people's lives - school, friends and family - insofar as they are linked and interact with each other (both inside and outside school), but above all, they emphasize that, depending on the geographical, social or cultural contexts in which boys and girls live, it is not the same determinants that act positively or negatively on the level and quality of life of adolescents, whatever the indicator taken, whether the level of well-being is measured on the basis of subjective criteria such as satisfaction with life, or on the basis of more objective criteria, such as negative school experiences, or the existence of uncontrolled psychological and physical disorders. For girls and middle- and upper-class children, it would seem that it is more the (low) quality of relationships with parents and teachers that negatively affects their level of SWB (not least because of the level of stress and anxiety these relationships can bring), whereas it is rather the low frequency and intensity of peer sociability that plays a role among working-class boys (insofar as it is a sign of social isolation and difficulties in having fun and enjoying one's youth, which are at the heart of the definition of the "child's roles" ('métier d'enfant') in these regions of the social space).⁶

In addition to calling into question the three (arbitrary and artificial) oppositions in research on children's well-being, this collective book presents two other major points of interest: on the one hand, it considers the determinants of children's well-being together with ill-being (without necessarily making the effects of one the reciprocal inverse of those of the other); and on the other hand, it invites the reader to consider the role of cultural and institutional contexts in the importance of certain factors or situations rather than others.

Through these different sections, this collective work brings together both empirical-based texts that examine the children/adolescents' SWB (Cucchiara, Hartas, Pinsolle & Leroy, Thomas and Larkins), and research that seeks to understand ill-being – its definitions and determinants (Ecclestone, Leprince et al. and Diter & Martin). By putting them in dialogue, we can see that the main factors influencing children's and teenagers' level of well-being are not necessarily the exact opposites of those influencing their level of ill-being. Conversely, we can see that the determinants of ill-being are not necessarily the opposite of those driving well-being. In fact, while high levels of stress or anxiety about academic success contribute significantly to the increase in young people's (especially young girls') level of ill-being, low levels of stress do not result in high reported levels of well-being. In other words, not being stressed by the challenges of school is not a *sine qua non* of well-being, but a key factor in understanding the level of teenage malaise.

Another interesting point is that the different determinants do not have the same role or the same effects, depending on whether we are looking at what causes high levels of well-being or high levels of ill-being. The constellation of factors at play in one case is not the same as that at play in the other. This finding may have major implications for public policy, childcare and education professionals, and parents, namely that addressing young people's unhappiness does not necessarily mean addressing their well-being, and vice versa. The drivers of well-being are not the same as those that reduce malaise or ill-being. So, not only do we need to take into account the variability of determinants according to the social profile of children and their living contexts, but we also need to bear in mind what we want to study or address: well-being or ill-being.

Finally, while there are no systematic international comparisons, by juxtaposing the chapters on different cultural and institutional contexts, we can gain an overview of the similarities and differences between the different countries studied (France, the UK, Australia, Belgium, Portugal, and New Zealand) in terms of the legislative and/or regulatory measures in place to promote child well-being at school, the practices of parents and teachers,

⁶ The importance of juvenile sociability among working-class boys can also be explained by the protective role it can play against the school and social vexations to which they may be subjected (Coquard, 2019).

and the role and impact of different family or school determinants on child well-being. For example, there are a number of “invariants,” such as the (political) importance attached to children’s well-being at school, the gender and class inequalities related to well-being (even if these are not expressed in the same way and to the same extent in all contexts), and the central role played by relationships with teachers and caregivers more generally, including parents. But there are also contextual and institutional specificities: the attention paid to the epidemic of youth mental illness in the UK, the role of early childhood institutions in Belgium and France, or the role of parental pressure at school more generally.

The juxtaposition and discussion of these national variations fuelled the discussions that took place during the seminar sessions, which formed the basis for this book. So, while we cannot speak of controlled comparisons of the national differences involved, we believe that these nationally situated contributions enable the reader to take stock of what is a globalization of the issues tackled, in the sense that they concern all the countries studied, and of what corresponds to relevant angles of reading and analysis from one country to another.

Lastly, we would like to once again thank the authors for joining us on this long adventure, the editors for accepting our manuscript and giving us feedback, and the reviewers who helped us improve it. Now it is up to readers to make up their own minds about child’s well-being, a major issue of our time: a social problem to be better understood.

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