Child Well-Being in Middle Childhood:

A Mixed Methods Cross-National Comparison

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Word count: 20,057

A thesis submitted for the partial fulfilment of the requirements for a

Masters of Educational Psychology

Massey University

New Zealand
Abstract

This mixed methods case study explores child well-being in middle childhood with the overarching goal of completing a strength-based, cross-national comparison. In order to develop an understanding of what child well-being means to local children aged between 9 to 11 years old, semi-structured interviews were held using an adjusted version of the interview guide developed by Fattore, Mason and Watson (2009). The main dynamic child well-being dimensions included relationships, emotional health and interests, with independent contributions from the themes of accomplishment, special events, safety, values and the environment. These findings respond to international requests for age-specific child well-being research (Dex & Hollingworth, 2012) and uniquely contribute to the national literature.

The limited cross-national research that includes New Zealand details our poor child well-being outcomes (Heshmati, Bajalan & Tausch, 2007). Using the Developmental Assets questionnaire, the current study identifies local children’s well-being to be in the good range, although at the low end. This is comparable to the well-being levels reported in the American pilot sample (Scales, Fraher & Andress, 2011). With one third of participants in both samples reporting fair but vulnerable levels of well-being, similar room for improvement is purported.

The integration of the assets data and thematic data presents a rich and pragmatic picture of local child well-being in middle childhood. With the Education Review Office (ERO, 2013) requiring all schools to develop well-being initiatives by 2015, the current case study identifies the children’s agenda and supports the design of ‘complete’ policies (Ben-Arieh, 2010).
Acknowledgements

I am extremely grateful to both of my academic advisors for their kindness and assistance. In particular I want to thank Associate Professor Jill Bevan-Brown for her guidance and wisdom which was central to crafting my thesis. I also want to acknowledge the support of Dr Hal Jackson who, throughout the administration of the study, regularly engaged in Skype meetings to offer advice and support.

To the Search Institute, who fathered the assets approach, thank you for allowing me access to the Developmental Assets questionnaire. The opportunity to use it and develop my understanding of strength-based practice has been enriching. In particular I would like to thank Justin Roskopf of the Search Institute. Your prompt and helpful communications throughout have been greatly appreciated.

To my family and friends, thank you for your love and support. The regular phone calls from my brother and the unfailing support and kindness of my mother, who continues to be an inspiration, were central in this journey. Last but not least, I want to acknowledge Julie Dockrell who has made such a difference in my life. Your advice and support throughout this process has been a consistent comfort and I thank you from the bottom of my heart.
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