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# **CHILD-SENSITIVE ELEMENTS OF THE CONSTRUCTION OF WELL-BEING**

**Exploring the Narratives of Well-being of Children with a  
Russian background in the Ecocultural Context of South-  
Eastern Finland**

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## Background of my Doctoral Dissertation

Empathos (ESR, 2003-2007, Palmenia)

Empowerment of Families with Children (ENPI, 2011-2014, Palmenia)

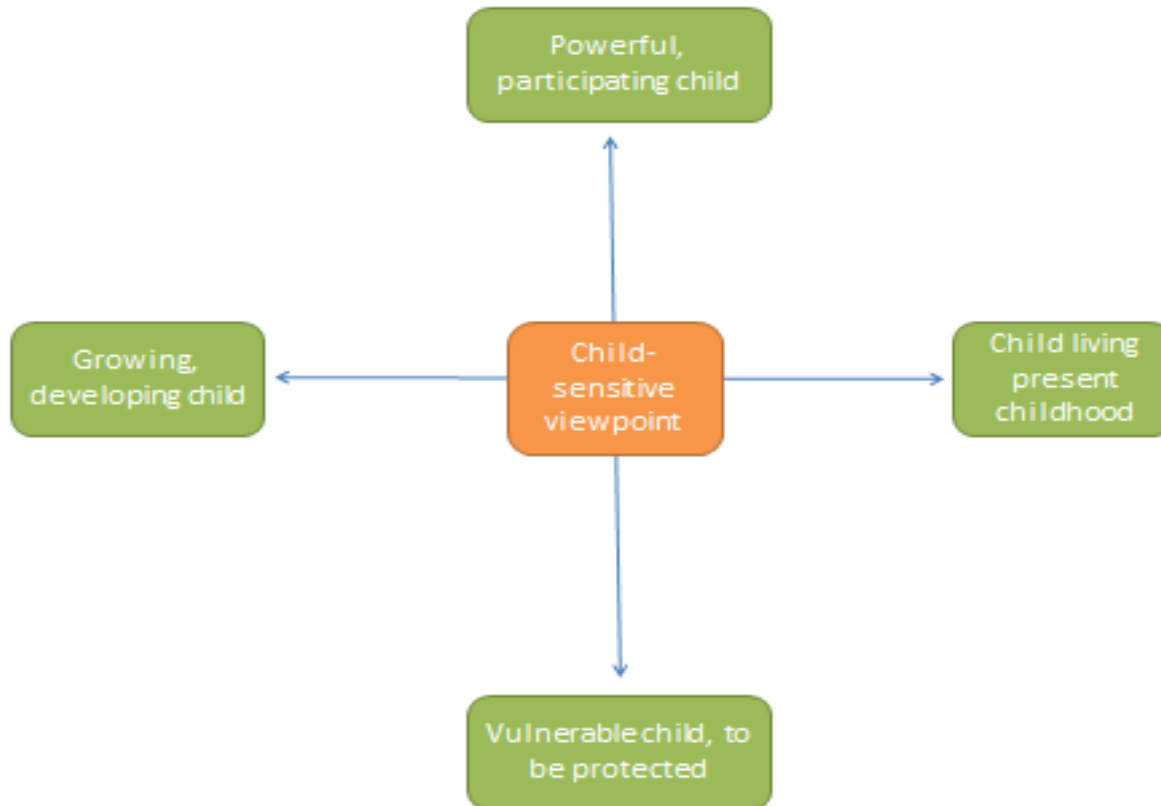
Reciprocal Relationships and the Construction of Well-being during Critical Periods of Everyday Life (Finnish Academy, 2012-2016, University of Helsinki)

Doing, directing, developing and teaching social work, learning family therapy and special social work with children and youth since 1990...

## Conceptual Conversations

- Child, childhood: vulnerability / power, participation
- Well-being: construction, elements
- Immigration: "kotoutuminen", acculturation, transnationalism
- Ecocultural context: the border area of South-Eastern Finland

# Child and Childhood



# Well-being

Elements of well-being	Dimensions of well-being		
	MATERIAL	SOCIAL	MENTAL/SPIRITUAL
<b>HAVING</b> resources, welfare provision	financial security, housing, spending money	leisure activities, social capital, cosiness of neighbourhood	early education / day care, education, learning, study possibilities, language
<b>BEING/DOING</b> well-being, well-doing participation	housework, summer jobs, possibility to influence on the family's purchases, travelling	playing, organizational activities, use of media, friends, entertainment and recreation, experiences of participation	cultural activities, experiences in significance, ethical choices
<b>LOVING</b> well-? satisfaction of needs protection	received basic care, nutrition, clothing, health, appearance, physical well-being	family, friends, love, happiness, well-being in relationships, quality of early interaction, dating/sexuality	authenticity, faith, autonomy, self- acceptance, safety of growth and development

## Immigration, "kotoutuminen", acculturation, transnationalism

- a community- and individual level as well as (especially) family level process, which takes place when different cultural groups come to contact each other and this contact changes the original cultural model of the groups
- a power of change that influences the inner interaction models of the family, parenthood and the upbringing of children, well-being of all family members and the development of children and youth
- affected by the political decisions and attitudes of the host society, the immigrants' own human, economic and social capital and cultural distance but also family structure, the roles of different family members and family dynamics as well as the ideals and values of child development and upbringing children

(Alitolppa-Niitamo 2010, 46-61)

## Ecocultural context

- the living areas of a family and a community, health and demographic issues, safety threats, nature of employees, children's tasks and jobs, roles of fathers and older siblings, plays and playing groups of the children, the roles of women and girls in the community, the support they get, cultural influences, information available, the diversity of the community in care and the hobbies of children as ecological and institutional viewpoints
- Based on the theory of locally rational action. Local situation is understood as everyday routines and activities. They are often culture-based. Actors use complex, shared information in order to survive in the local daily routines. Children learn these ways of cultural surviving to be able to live in the community. Well-being is based on these activities and the children's experiences of them. (Weisner 2002, 277-279)



## Research Task and Questions

How is child well-being constructed in immigrant families with Russian background in South-Eastern Finland?

In order to be able to solve the problem answers to following four questions were looked for:

- 1) How do children construct their own well-being?
- 2) How do parents construct the well-being of their children?
- 3) What are the similarities and differences in these constructions?
- 4) What kinds of elements of child well-being do these constructions include?

## Data

- Five narratives of young people, ages 13-18, with Russian background
- 25 family interviews
  - 62 children, 44 living in the families, 19 present in the interviews
  - 21 mothers, 9 fathers, 3 grandmothers, 1 grandfather and 2 friends present in the interviews
  - 35 hours and 58 minutes of recorded material, 298 pages of transcribed text

## Narratives and thematic family interviews

All the data was written into child well-being narratives.

Narratives have, according to Gergen (2003) a valued endpoint, selected events, principle of organizing the events, causal linkages, steady identities of persons and demarcation signs. By using these conventions of narration one can generate a sense of coherence and direction in life events. These elements of narratives were used in order to define child well-being.

Types of narratives as well as model narratives of immigration, childhood, family and well-being were looked for.

(Hänninen 1999)

## Narratives

- Five young people, ages 13-18: self-written narratives of life and well-being
- 21 children and young people, ages 1,5-17 years: researcher-written narratives from the interviews of the families (children, parents, grandparents, friends)
- Four mothers: researcher-written narratives from the interviews about moving into Finland at the ages of 12-15

## Themes and tools of the Interviews

- family and relatives (geneogram),
- life- and immigration experiences (life line),
- networks and well-being (network map),
- Personal Well-being Index PWI,
- the most important things constructing family well-being, and
- service experiences.

## PWI

On a scale 0-10, how satisfied are you with the following things in your family life:

1. Your standard of living?
2. Your health?
3. What you are achieving in life?
4. Your personal relationships?
5. How safe you feel?
6. Feeling part of your community?
7. Your future security?
8. Your spirituality or religion?

Thinking about your family circumstances as a whole, how satisfied are you with your life?

## Findings and Discussion

- Assimilation/segregation as children's acculturation strategies, integration as parents' acculturation strategy. Survival stories.
- Social relations and local context, time and age/generation affected the construction of child well-being.
- All the nine elements of child well-being were present in the narratives, but most strongly the three elements of loving.
- Child well-being was as an ongoing process, constructed and negotiated by the families, where the children had plenty of power.

## Open Questions

What do the families think about these narratives and results?

→ narrative reflection, summer 2013

Do these families represent the Russian population in South-Eastern Finland?

→ questionnaire, 248 answers, paper in process