The Making of Wellbeing Measurement: A (Kind of) Study Protocol

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Abstract

In this paper, we propose a 'study protocol' for researching the becomings of the Danish national wellbeing survey for schools. We engage with the idea of a published research protocol that originates from positivist research paradigms and medical research in particular. Within these paradigms, protocol serves the purpose of ensuring the objectivity and replicability of the research in question, and provides a sense of security to the researcher in terms of the quality of the research design. In contrast, with ideas of transmethodology in mind, we suggest a protocol that endeavours to support researchers to engage with ambiguity, uncertainty and singularity in research while still being attentive to quality. We suggest a protocol that helps de-stabilize the concept of wellbeing in schools and looks at how wellbeing as an object of measurement is (re)configured, who the human and non-human actors involved are, and what effects their assembling produces. These questions require research practices that acknowledge the complexities of the human condition and the richness of the social and material world. Instead of suggesting a "paradigm shift", we are inspired by Patti

Lather, who argues for a proliferation of paradigms, where proliferation refers to forming a pattern of interference. In other words, proliferation calls for reflection on the inconsistencies, confusion, disorganization of the research process, and both our need and caution to position ourselves epistemologically and ontologically. The protocol we suggest deploys diverse, sometimes complementary, sometimes contrasting methods, analytical strategies or theoretical perspectives in order to explore the problem at hand and engage with the ironies, tensions and uncertainties inherent to research.

Keywords: Wellbeing measurement, research protocol, theory

Introduction

Wellbeing discourses related to schoolchildren are on the rise in educational research, policy and practice (e.g. Spratt, 2017; Watson, Emery, Bayliss, Boushel, & Mclnnes 2012; Wright & McLeod, 2015; UNESCO, 2016). Often, wellbeing is used as a measure of quality of life referring to a wide range of phenomena, social dynamics, socioeconomic indicators or subjective experiences (e.g. Costanza et al., 2014; Nussbaum & Sen, 1993). These conceptualizations draw upon different disciplines – from psychology and philosophy to youth studies, economics, social welfare and political science. In recent years, wellbeing has become one of the central issues in educational reforms and related debates internationally and in Denmark (e.g. Aggleton, Dennison & Warwick, 2010; Ottosen et al, 2014; Thorburn, 2018). While it is difficult to disagree with the increased focus on students' wellbeing, the aspirations to measure and promote wellbeing in schools generate a number of tensions, particularly in terms of inconsistent and often contradictory use of theoretical perspectives, or a lack of theory altogether.

In general, wellbeing is defined as 'being well' or having an optimal psychological experience and functioning. Not many contest the importance of wellbeing, neither in everyday life nor for schools. It is also relatively uncontested that wellbeing is intertwined

with students' motivation, learning and school achievement (Adler, 2017; Bücker et al., 2018; OECD, 2017; WHO, 2016). Thus, it is natural that school policies and practices attempt to endorse the transformative potential of the concept – that is, its potential to stimulate school development that is conducive to the thriving, inclusion and engagement of students (e.g. McCallum & Price, 2016; Weare, 2004). However, the excessive use of the concept can easily swing from being transformative to being 'tyrannical' (Simovska 2016), excluding some students who differ from the norm, and entailing the dominance of simplified 'feel-good', 'positive thinking', 'mental health' and similar agendas in schools (cf. Dewar, 2016; O'Toole, 2019; Watson et al., 2012). Furthermore, the proliferation of digital technologies (for example digital apps like Mind shift, Mood tools etc.) that monitor and measure wellbeing, together with the public and private actors who develop these technologies, result in new, intermediate spaces between policies, practices and subjective experiences (Hartong, 2016). Digital technologies entangle with students' self-perception as subjects with wellbeing, and with professionals' perception of wellbeing as an object of educational intervention. While well intended, the different measurement agendas often assume an instrumental, individualistic and norm-producing character. Although such initiatives and related research usually include some discussion of how to conceptualize wellbeing and the constitutive components measured, there is a tendency not to question the notion of measurement and the questions themselves.

In Denmark, the latest wide-ranging reform of primary and lower secondary schools (student age 6-16) established wellbeing as one of the targets for school improvement (Danish Ministry of Education, 2013). Consequently, an annual wellbeing survey was developed and administered at all public primary and lower secondary schools in order to hold schools accountable for achieving this target. This has resulted in an increased workload for school leaders, teachers and other professionals working with schools, and has created

considerable confusion, frustration and public controversy (e.g. Juni, 2017; Ravn, 2019). This points to the need for researching not only the levels of wellbeing among students, but also what is actually measured by the survey, how the questions were assembled, and what the intended and unintended outcomes of the measurement are.

On this ground, in this paper we delineate a 'study protocol' for researching the development of the Danish national wellbeing survey. Ereaut and Whiting (2008, p. 5) point out that wellbeing has a 'holographic' quality, that is, it looks like a solid construct, but when we approach it, it fragments or disappears. The question we raise is how do we measure the elusive or holographic quality of wellbeing? We engage with and challenge the idea of a study protocol that originates from positivist research paradigms and medical research in particular, where, among other purposes, the protocol serves the aspirations of objectivity and replicability of the research and provides a sense of insurance to the researcher in terms of the quality of the research design. In contrast, with the perspective of transmethodology in mind, we suggest a protocol that endeavors to support researchers to engage with ambiguity, uncertainty and singularity in research, while remaining attentive to relevance and quality. We propose a study protocol that helps to de-stabilize the concept of wellbeing in schools and looks at how wellbeing as an object of measurement is configured, who the actors involved are, and what the effects of their assembling are. The protocol employs different theoretical and conceptual perspectives with a view of layering rather than reducing complexity, generating new research questions, and identifying dilemmas, tensions and contradictions that are often silenced in conventional research designs.

In the following, we first present the structure, content and development of the Danish national wellbeing survey for schools. Second, we outline the key concepts constituting the alternative research protocol we propose with a view of researching the development of the survey. Third, we formulate the possible research questions inspired by these concepts,

accompanied by delineation of the main data generation methods and analytical strategies, emphasizing the entanglement of 'data', 'theory' and 'analyses'. We close the article with reflections concerning research quality.

Brief history of the Danish wellbeing survey

The Danish national reform of public schools (students age 6-16) highlighted the improvement of wellbeing as one of its main aims along with academic achievement and inclusion (Danish Ministry of Education, 2013). For the purposes of the reform, the ministry appointed an expert group in December 2013 with the task to advise the ministry on the content and form of the national measurement of wellbeing in schools. The expert group consisted of four persons, three University researchers and one researcher from the Danish Centre for Social Science Research (ViVe). The chair of the expert group was a professor of public health, two members were educational researchers, and one was a social science researcher. The expert group provided a number of recommendations concerning the conceptualization of wellbeing, its indicators, and the content of the survey. The expert group published their recommendations in two consultancy reports (Danish Ministry of Education, 2014).

Based on these recommendations, the Danish Centre for Social Science Research created the wellbeing survey in 2014. In addition to the expert group's recommendations, the survey included questions from other similar national and international measurement scales that demonstrated high validity with the same target group in similar research. These included: the WHO's HBSC (Health Behavior of School-aged Children), the Norwegian national wellbeing research, and the Danish Centre for Teaching Environment's (DCUM) school barometer scale. Six interconnected sections of questions constituted the final suggestion for the survey, following the established wellbeing indicators: 1) physical and psychological wellbeing; 2) experience of academic competences; 3) experience of support

and encouragement from the surrounding; 4) the psychosocial learning environment; 5) order and quietness, and 6) the physical learning environment. The total number of questions is 40. A shorter version of 20 questions is developed for younger students (0-3 grade).

The expert group recommended that the wellbeing survey be given annually to students from 0-9 grade, but that the results of the measurement of students from 0-3 grade, due to validity issues, should only be used as an inspiration for local school development processes. The results of the survey should be anonymized, although the recommendation was to connect the individual surveys with the students' social security number (CPR), to make it possible to research correlations between wellbeing, social background and other variables. The recommendation emphasized that the result reports should be communicated with different stakeholders, including the municipal school governance bodies, school leadership and school boards, as well as teacher-teams connected to a class (the latter with a view of involving parents and students). Further, the expert group suggested that the survey is voluntary for individual students but compulsory for the class. Finally, the expert group suggested that detailed guidelines should be developed for different target groups at a municipal and school level concerning the practicalities of the administration of the survey, addressing potential challenges and using the results for the development of school initiatives aimed at the promotion of wellbeing.

The Danish Centre for Social Science Research piloted the survey in 2014 (Keilow, Holm, Bagger & Henze-Pedersen, 2014); the first national measurement of wellbeing in schools was conducted in the winter of 2015 with 470.000 students, of which 270.000 were in the grades 4-9. The method memo issued by the Ministry of Education following this pilot study described four (as different from the six indicators established by the expert group mentioned above) differentiated indicators based on factor analysis of the measurement from 2015. The indicators include *social wellbeing*, *academic wellbeing*, *support and inspiration*,

and *order and quietness*. A comprehensive indicator – '*general school wellbeing*' – is calculated on the basis of the four differentiated indicators.

Since 2015 the wellbeing survey has been implemented on an annual basis; the results are published in national reports and are also available online on different levels (class, school or municipality). The results are often used to justify educational interventions aimed at promoting wellbeing or addressing specific issues related to lack of wellbeing in school. However, to our knowledge, the measurement framework as such, the actors and knowledge interests involved in its development, and their mutual relations, have not been explored; this is what our protocol outlined below sets out to make possible.

Guiding tenets of the research protocol

The protocol we suggest requires practices of knowing that fully acknowledge the complexities of human thought, language and of the social and material world. Instead of "paradigm shifts" and "normal" and "revolutionary" periods in the changing research approaches and epistemological positions (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994), we are inspired by Lather (2001), who argues for the proliferation of paradigms, where proliferation refers to "forming a pattern of interference". In other words, proliferation calls for reflection on the inconsistencies, confusion, disorganization, and both our need and hesitation to position ourselves epistemologically and ontologically. In thinking with transmethodology – construed as taking different paradigms seriously through multiple engagements with data – we suggest that this research should deploy various, sometimes complementary, sometimes-contrasting strategies, methods, theoretical or empirical materials available in order to explore the development and the enactment of the school wellbeing survey in Denmark. This is done through a continuous process of interpretation, reinterpretation, configuration and re-configuration of meaning, as well as acknowledgement of tensions and uncertainties inherent to the research process. The product of this type of research is what Denzin and Lincoln (1994, p. 3) call a bricolage - "a complex, dense, reflexive, collage-like output that represents

the researcher's images, understandings and interpretations of the world of the phenomenon under analysis". Research problems and research questions themselves – existing within the ontology of postmodern, postcolonial and postindustrial subjects – belong to the arena of fluid subjects, ambivalent and polyvalent, open to change, continually being made, unmade and remade (Lather, 2001).

Onto-epistemological uncertainty and knowledge interests

If we move away from the objectivist position and decline to treat wellbeing as a "real" object of measurement that should be operationalized in indicators which are transformed into questions to capture and represent these indicators in scores, we need to be willing to engage with ambiguity and uncertainty. Foucault provided direction in this respect already in the 1970s; he called for assuming a "meta-epistemological" position characterized by an interest in learning to get to know again in the "process of disappearing" (Foucault, 1970, p. 355). In the study protocol we suggest, this entails treating the phenomenon of wellbeing, as well as the wellbeing survey, as "in the making", or "becoming" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1998) rather than as stable, predictable and measurable research objects. Instead of operationalizing wellbeing in constitutive dimensions and measurable indicators, we turn the focus to processes, practices and dynamics involved in the making of the wellbeing survey. As an alternative to fixed, formalized steps, this research protocol is underpinned by three categories of precautions put forward by Foucault (1998[1984]), also referred to by Ferreira-Neto (2018) as "methodological choices":

- *Resistance to providing fixed methodological principles and methods.*

If we treat wellbeing as a fluid, emergent and enactive phenomenon, when researching the wellbeing survey, we need to make methodological choices in the same way – dynamically over the course of the research process and in the encounter with the specific

empirical material in the specific time, space, and group of researchers. These choices are made explicit so they can be subject to scrutiny and (self)critical reflection.

- *Reversing the relationship between theory and method.*

Following Foucault, the analysis of the development and enactment of the wellbeing survey focuses on a thorough exploration of all the related social practices at the local level (where actors are), in a particular socio-historical moment or across time. The analyses ask the question "how" rather than "what", and are performed in an inductive, situated manner, from which theory is then developed. Moving a step further, this protocol treats data, theory, induction, deduction and abduction as mutually intertwined in a process of critical reflexivity, exploring fluidities, incoherencies, ruptures and contradictions, and continuously employing self-doubt.

- *Problematization of the universal and allowing for the transformative power of research.*

Inspired by Foucault (1998 [1984]), in this protocol we suggest that the critique of the universal and the focus on singularity is more a question of research strategy rather than ontology; the aim is to disentangle complexity and unsettle the relationship between the researcher as a "knowing subject" and the research object as the "truth". This relationship is conceived as mutually constitutive and transformative. By conducting research, we as researchers change what we think about the research object, but also, the experience of research is transformative in terms of our subjectivity. Similarly, the object of research is configured and reconfigured in the same process. The idea that the purpose of research is not only to describe, understand and interpret, but to change the world is not new – it goes back to the 19th century (Marx, 1834 [1992]) and was further developed by scholars within the continental critical theory tradition (e.g. Habermas, 1968/1971; see also Simovska, Primdahl and Jensen, 2020). To this idea, Foucault adds the transformative character of the research

experience for the researcher, and the interconnectedness of these trajectories or lines of transformation.

Thinking *with* multiple concepts

To follow through on the above-discussed methodological choices in the protocol, it is helpful to think of data, theoretical concepts and analyses as intertwined. To attain this, we deploy the following theoretical concepts/perspectives.

Dispositif: Foucault's concept Dispositif (apparatus) refers to the grouping of heterogeneous elements or lines into a common network consisted of "discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions – in short, "the said as much as the unsaid" (Foucault, 1977). Dispositif is characterized by continuous variations in the position of its elements, the multiplying modifications of its functions, and an overall articulated strategic intent, albeit a flexible one. Typically, strategic assemblages are established as responses to crises, urgent problems or perceived challenges to those who govern (Rabinow & Rose, 2003). The dispositif is a strategic response to a specific historical problem, which over time grows into a social technology of power that is more widely applicable to other situations. Unintended consequences also play a role in expanding the network of the apparatus. As researchers, we become a part of the dispositif and act within it.

To research the wellbeing survey through thinking with the concept of dispositif implies treating the practice of the measurement of wellbeing as an apparatus generated by the government's ambition to respond to what is presented as the crisis of lack of wellbeing among Danish students, or as desire to improve how students feel, and not only how they perform academically in school. The novelty of this apparatus in relation to similar social technologies aimed at school improvement is its actuality in a certain time. The "new" is not

what the apparatus is but what it is becoming when enacted through school measurement practices. Dispositif is a tangle, a multilinear ensemble (Deleuze, 1992); to think with the concept of dispositif analytically infers untangling the different constitutive lines, which not only make up the apparatus, but also run through it and pull at it. Deleuze calls this work drawing up a map, doing cartography, surveying unknown landscapes (p. 159). Among other lines constitutive of dispositif, Deleuze mentions *lines of forces*, that is, connections and dimensions which proceed from one unique point to another in the preceding lines; they fill in the space between lines, act as go-betweens between saying and seeing and vice versa, act as arrows which continually cross between words and things, constantly producing tension between them. Our research protocol aims at drawing these lines within the practices of creating the wellbeing survey and its implementation in schools.

Networks, Actors and Relations: More recently, building on Foucault but also emerging from a wide range of disparate philosophical, feminist, queer and other social theories, a range of perspectives emphasize a 'turn to matter', instead of, or in addition to, discourse, text and language. Although Foucault clearly characterized dispositif as both discursive and non-discursive, the 'linguistic turn', which grew strongly by using his work in the 1980s, undervalued the importance of the non-discursive material dimensions, which gave rise to a range of perspectives denoted as 'new materialism'. These perspectives are generally characterized as post-humanist and post-anthropocentric; materially embedded and embodied; relational and contingent rather than essentialist or absolute (Coole & Frost, 2010; Fox & Allard, 2015). In asserting the fundamental relationality of all matter, they cut across other social theory dualisms including structure/agency, reason/emotion, human/non-human, animate/inanimate (Braidotti, 2013; Coole and Frost, 2010). Equal concern is given to systemic and macro level social phenomena as to the micro level psychological processes of thoughts, desires, feelings, and how these contribute to social production. By drawing what

former theories consider as dualistic constructs into a single arena, new materialism offers a way to move beyond dichotomous positions that have not been particularly helpful in the study of wellbeing (O'Toole & Simovska, forthcoming). It allows holding multiple positions (e.g. systemic, material and psychological) in creative tension with one another.

We deploy here one of the variants of new materialism, Actor Network Theory (ANT) (e.g. Latour, 1987; Law, 1992). Echoing Foucault's dispositif, ANT asserts that the world consists of networks that can include humans, things, ideas, concepts, all of which are referred to as "actors". The capacity for agency extends beyond human actors to the non-human and inanimate (Latour, 2005). The analytical take of the ANT perspective consists of tracing the associations, relationships, or lines of forces between network components, or actors. ANT assumes that the sum of non-social phenomena can account for something that is social as a result of constellations of actors constituting the network (Creswell, Worth & Sheikh, 2010). The central analytical strategy is to illuminate how networks come into being, to draw what associations exist, how they move, how actors are enrolled into a network, how parts of a network form a whole network, and how networks achieve temporary stability, or conversely why some new connections produce instability (ibid.). In this way, ANT provides the analytic tools for elucidating the processes by which the wellbeing survey comes to being and is continuously (re)configured.

Assemblage: Wellbeing, which the wellbeing survey should measure, from this perspective is not predicated on individual dispositions alone; rather, it is construed as a becoming or an emergence, a complex network that is made up of a constellation or assemblage (Deluze and Guattari, 1988) of human and non-human actors that coalesce around particular values. Thus, a wellbeing assemblage in schools might accrue around actions and events, such as attuned and responsive interactions and engagement with a meaningful curriculum. Similar to dispositif, such an assemblage is comprised not just of

social and intellectual encounters, but also of an individual's physiological processes, past memories and experiences, feelings, thoughts and emotions, as well as broader gendered and cultural norms of conduct, power dynamics, aspects of the social, emotional and material environment of the school and wider community, and diverse local, national and transnational policies. Further, it is not just these entities or processes in isolation, but the relations between them that is important. Assemblages are constantly shifting and thus are held 'in a kind of chaotic network of habitual and non-habitual connections, always in flux, always reassembling in different ways' (Potts, 2004, p. 19). Assemblages are relational, heterogeneous, dynamic and desired. They produce new territorial organizations, new behaviors, expressions, actions and realities (Müller, 2015). How can such a phenomenon be measured? We propose, along with Müller (2015), that this can be done by disassembling what we take for granted; by unpacking how the phenomenon came to be through centripetal forces (bringing diverse elements together), but also by illuminating how the phenomenon is subject to centrifugal (i.e. dividing) forces.

Considering the development of the Danish wellbeing survey and its dissemination to schools, thinking with the multiple concepts discussed above suggests not only that a number of actors are involved in the making of the survey, but also that the survey functions as an actor. When the practice of measurement of wellbeing is introduced into a network (school) then the functioning of the whole network will be affected. The survey plays an active role in shaping and mediating social relationships in schools, potentially influencing curricula and pedagogy, or contributing to, challenging or sustaining power relations. Depending on the prevailing educational policy and practice context, the survey might be considered to be yet another layer of (neo-liberal) accountability; yet another task on which students must achieve, and an unwanted audit of teachers' performance in the area of wellbeing. Alternatively, the measurement of wellbeing in schools could be viewed as a positive development, recognizing

the importance of moving schools beyond narrow definitions of academic achievement towards building meaningful learning communities where students thrive (Simovska, 2016). Either way, what is made possible by thinking with these multiple concepts is to acknowledge that many actors are involved in the making of the survey, but also that the survey itself becomes an actor capable of influencing the very domain it seeks to measure in unpredictable ways.

The research protocol thus shifts attention away from the researcher and her/his epistemological concerns, focusing instead upon the research assemblage of human and non-human relations within the research design (Fox and Alldred, 2014). Such an assemblage might be constituted of multiple qualitative and quantitative methods, which are assessed and selected not in terms of their compatibility or onto-epistemological consistency, but instead in terms of what uses, potentials or capacities for disentangling complexity they bring to the research.

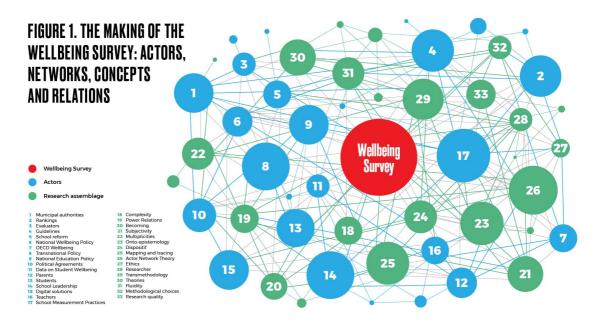## Possible research questions, data and analytical strategies

Our study protocol suggests the following questions that aim to provide dynamic direction and guidance for the research rather than a stable research focus.

• How is the urgent issue/challenge/problem that the wellbeing survey helps respond to framed, and what are the lines of forces in its framing?

• Who are the (human and non-human) actors and how are they involved in the making of the survey, what are the lines they draw, how are the lines intertwined, how do they change direction, how and when are new lines introduced, what are the ruptures, fractures and contradictions in the process of development?

We will engage with these questions in multiple ways and through analytical thinking with the concepts, ideas and perspectives outlined above. Figure 1 depicts the multiplicities the research protocol enables us to put to work.

Data generation processes with a view of addressing these research questions include, but are not limited to the following: (a) identifying and selecting political agreements concerning the school reform, policy documents and public statements about wellbeing in schools by decision makers and/or experts, newspaper and other media articles; (b) mapping of all involved actors such as expert groups, evaluators, school leaders, teachers, students, but also digital and material formats, meeting agendas, statistical solutions and graphic or other representations of results; c) conducting interviews with diverse stakeholders (including students); (d) participatory observation of meetings and of the administration of the survey in schools, as well as of the communication of the results; (e) analysis of the digital and material solutions for the administration of the survey, the rationales and processes of their development, as well of the statistical procedures for making sense of the scores; (f) tracing the routes of the survey – from its inception, development, through dissemination and administration, to the results and how these are responded to, up through specific practices. Following the ANT perspective, we begin in the middle, tracing the actors and networks that are activated, and highlighting which actors are linked to the wellbeing survey through which roll-in strategies (i.e. persuasion, coercion, subjectivation, or prospects for better wellbeing in schools).

Figure 1

The making of the wellbeing survey: actors, networks, concepts and relations

FIGURE 1. THE MAKING OF THE WELLBEING SURVEY: ACTORS, NETWORKS, CONCEPTS AND RELATIONS

● Wellbeing Survey
● Actors
● Research assemblage

1	Municipal authorities	18	Complexity
2	Rankings	19	Power Relations
3	Evaluators	20	Becoming
4	Guidelines	21	Subjectivity
5	School reform	22	Multiplicities
6	National Wellbeing Policy	23	Onto-epistemology
7	OECD Wellbeing	24	Dispositif
8	Transnational Policy	25	Mapping and tracing
9	National Education Policy	26	Actor Network Theory
10	Political Agreements	27	Ethics
11	Data on Student Wellbeing	28	Researcher
12	Parents	29	Transmethodology
13	Students	30	Theories
14	School Leadership	31	Fluidity
15	Digital solutions	32	Methodological choices
16	Teachers	33	Research quality
17	School Measurement Practices		

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The analytical strategy consists of drawing a narrative concerning the making and enactment of the wellbeing survey in schools over time in as much detail, nuance and complexity as possible. Attention is given to the processes of translation (Callon, 1986), both discursively and materially, for instance from international to national to local policy and practice, through expert recommendations, the guidelines for diverse stakeholders, meeting agendas, digital solutions and representations (Nordin, Jourdan & Simovska 2019). Fluidity and complexity are favoured over causality and linearity. The analytical ambition is to elucidate contingencies that are often overlooked in traditional research by portraying the multiplicity of meanings, interests, power dynamics and priorities (Nordin, Jourdan & Simovska, 2019) linked to the wellbeing survey, but also to unsettle the narrative itself by pointing to different lines of forces and their interconnectedness, and by amplifying other possibilities, those that are ignored or silenced. Further, the analyses aim to portray how the wellbeing survey affects the domain under investigation (wellbeing in school); how it

interacts with the ways in which teachers and students engage with each other; what knowledge biases it produces; what possibilities for understanding of subjectivity and/or school development it opens up or closes down. In other words, we aim to illuminate what wellbeing measurement does, rather than solely what it is. The focus on fluidity and multiplicity also implies acknowledging that reality is not predictable and that multiple realities can coexist, being actively shaped and enacted by different actors. As Cresswell, Worth, and Sheikh suggest (2019, p. 4), social effects do not necessarily have a specific origin, but emerge from multiplicities.

Closing reflections

In this paper, we have engaged with the notion of a research protocol alternative to the idea(l)s of epistemological consistency of paradigm-driven methodology that characterize (post)positivist research designs, also in the field of educational research. We proposed a different protocol inspired by the concept of transmethodology. We associate the idea of transmethodology with the notion of 'driving the paradigm' suggested by Wolgemuth (2016) as opposed to paradigm-driven research. Rather than essentialising, ontologizing or idolizing research paradigms and methodologies (p. 520), and even identifying our research identities with a particular paradigm, driving the paradigm entails approaching research in courageous, flexible and ambiguous ways. Accordingly, the alternative research protocol we proposed endorses thinking about methodologies without methodology (Koro-Ljungberg, 2015), engaging with messy designs and epistemological inconsistencies, as well as taking different paradigms, theories and concepts seriously through multiple engagements with data.

Thinking research protocols *with* transmethodology does not imply that the issues of research ethics, quality and rigour become less important. On the contrary; while we argue that the strategies of discomfort and informed ambiguity are indispensable in research, we underline the importance of considering what spaces transmethodology opens or closes for

reflecting upon research quality and ethics. In this respect, we acknowledge the proliferation of quality criteria and research excellence, which move beyond simple translation of (post)positivist criteria such as objectivity, reliability, validity and generalizability into interpretivist research. In line with Tracy (2010), we argue that the risk of connecting quality criteria to epistemology supports a foundationalist thinking, which much of the research inspired by transmethodology attempt to avoid (e.g. the other articles in this special issue). In an effort to combine the diversity of criteria discussed in the literature into a more comprehensive list irrespective of the specific research paradigm and epistemology, Tracy (2010) proposes eight generic criteria, which include: (a) worthy topic (e.g. relevant, timely, significant), (b) rich rigor (e.g. theory, context, data), (c) sincerity (self-reflexivity and transparency), (d) credibility (multiple perspectives, tick descriptions), (e) resonance (aesthetic, evocative representation), (f) significant contribution (theoretically, conceptually, methodologically, and practically), (g) ethics (situational ethics), and (h) meaningful coherence (interconnectedness and logical coherence). We join her in encouraging scholars to reflect on these, as well as on the variety of other similar criteria, to transcend narrow paradigmatic practices, disentangle end goals from mean practices, and develop their own approaches to quality while respecting and learning from the practices of other scholars. In the protocol we suggest, the notion of research quality requires careful consideration of what the wellbeing measurement *does* rather than simply asking how was it implemented and what students' wellbeing score is on the survey. Quality also implies that the research following this protocol is sensitive to and can unpack the capacities that are embedded in a particular wellbeing measurement assemblage: whose capacities are privileged and developed and whose are neglected, marginalized or ignored? Who benefits from the wellbeing survey and in which ways, and who does not?

Further, we reiterate Tracy's (2010, p. 893) call for discussing and identifying a generic marker of quality in research, analogue to her concept of "mouthfeel". Mouthfeel is an indicator of high quality cheese that both chefs and food scientists agree upon, and which is independent of specific preparation processes or the final texture of the cheese. The rationale is that the criterion of mouthfeel allows cheesemakers to aim for this quality independent of the cheesemaking tradition they follow, the manufacturing method they deploy, or the final texture of the product. "The right texture can vary: brie cheese melts, blue cheese crumbles, and cheese curds squeak" (p. 839). Regardless of these features, cheesemakers can aspire towards the generic criterion of a good mouthfeel. The question we ask is whether such generic criterion is necessary, possible and desirable in educational research in general, and in research of wellbeing measurements in particular.

Finally, we raise a few matters of (self) doubt; while transmethodology can be viewed as a resistance to the dominant research discourses, as well as an interference into the discussion of what is allowed to be considered as research, the question remains whether the claims about complexity and simplicity are assumptions, or truths about the phenomena we are researching. Can complexity be considered a criterion for quality in research? Furthermore, echoing Biesta (2017), transmethodology raises a set of questions concerned with the values and purposes of research; questions like, whether it is desirable to construe research as knowledge generation and transformative practice, and if so, what are the politics and power dynamics in this respect? Who has the right to know, to speak, to think? Does this make knowledge arbitrary or relative? What do we do when the research is completed? Who benefits from it? Do we have an obligation as researchers to act on the findings or try to influence key actors involved? We acknowledge that by developing new methodologies and research protocols, we may be on the path of failing; however, change does not happen in

research by playing it safe. Embracing uncertainties and taking risks seems necessary if we

are to achieve greater success in our research endeavours.

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