

Children’s Economic and Social Rights and Child Poverty: The State of Play

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Abstract

This article focuses on both economic and social rights (ESR) and child poverty. In doing so, it identifies and considers key developments and gaps in child rights scholarship (CRS) in these areas. The authors’ treatment of these issues together is logical (albeit certainly not inevitable) given the strong connection between ESR and poverty. Both are areas which have been under-explored in CRS: ESR have been historically under-theorised and marginalised in child rights research, whereas child poverty is an area that has received extensive academic attention but only a limited amount of this has been from a child rights perspective. The article begins by outlining the state of the existing theoretical child rights literature on ESR, before going on to consider the growing body of CRS focused on specific ESR-thematic areas. The authors make clear the historic dominance of law in terms of child ESR scholarship while flagging the increasing ESR focused/framed work emerging from other disciplines, arguing that this is evidence of an ever-wider and more multidisciplinary engagement with ESR. Moving on to the topic of child poverty, the authors note that, with some notable exceptions, there has been a failure on the part of child rights scholars to engage with child poverty, a fact that is at least partially attributable to disciplinary disconnects: while CRS (and ESR scholarship in particular) has come to be dominated by lawyers to a large degree, much academic work on child poverty originates in economics, development studies and social policy. There is, however, some recognition by child poverty scholars (and more so by practitioners) that child poverty is a “child rights” issue, albeit that there is an ongoing failure on the part of child poverty scholarship to really come to terms with the complexities of child rights in terms of the implications of such for the definition and measurement of child poverty. The authors conclude by flagging future avenues for academic engagements with child ESR and child poverty, considering both the ways in which existing scholarship may be enriched as well as the potential dangers that new directions may pose in terms of child ESR specifically.

Keywords

child rights – child poverty – economic and social rights – socio-economic rights – human rights – sustainable development – citizenship – multidimensional poverty – income poverty – social justice – budgets – economic policy – children’s rights – SDGs

Introduction

This paper will focus on both economic and social rights (ESR) and child poverty. In doing so, it will focus on key developments or gaps in child rights scholarship (CRS) in these areas. The authors’ treatment of these issues together is logical (albeit certainly not inevitable) given the strong

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The paper begins by outlining the state of the existing theoretical child rights literature on ESR, before going on to consider the growing body of CRS focused on specific ESR-thematic areas. In doing so, the authors make clear the historic dominance of law in terms of child ESR scholarship while flagging the increasing ESR-focused/framed work emerging from other disciplines, arguing that this is evidence of an ever-wider and more multidisciplinary engagement with ESR. Moving on to the topic of child poverty, the authors note that, with some notable exceptions, there been a failure on the part of child rights scholars to engage with child poverty, a fact that is at least partially attributable to disciplinary disconnects: while CRS (and ESR scholarship in particular) has come to be dominated by lawyers to a large degree, much academic work on child poverty originates in economics, development studies and social policy. There is, however, some recognition by child poverty scholars (and more so by practitioners) that child poverty is a 'child rights' issue, albeit that there is an ongoing failure on the part of child poverty scholarship to really come to terms with the complexities of child rights in terms of the implications of such for the definition and measurement of child poverty. The authors conclude by flagging future avenues for academic engagements with child ESR and child poverty, considering both the ways in which existing scholarship may be enriched as well as the potential dangers that new directions may pose in terms of child ESR specifically.³

Mind the Gap: Theoretical Perspectives on Child ESR

ESR are those rights that deal with minimum conditions for welfare and wellbeing (Veerman 1992: 25). Despite the centrality of ESR to children's flourishing as children in the short-term and as adults in the longer term, they have received relatively little attention within the very extensive literature on children's rights (Nolan 2011). There has been some work on theorising child ESR through, for instance, the employment of the capabilities approach (see, e.g., Peleg 2013; Dixon and Nussbaum 2012) or in terms of interests and will theory of rights or variants thereof (see, e.g., Liebel 2018; McCormick 1976; Feinberg 1976; Hollingsworth 2013). Still, this is a small body of work relative to the overall scholarship focused on critiquing traditional assumptions regarding the ontology of the child, such as competence, capacities and the implications of such for children's resultant status as (non)rights-holders in terms of different theories of rights (for a useful overview, see Freeman 2011). Furthermore, while there is considerable work on the status of ESR as rights in terms of moral rights theory (see, e.g., Sadurski 1986; Cranston 1973; Fabré 2000; Bilchitz 2007; Griffin 2008) or in the context of theories of justice (see, e.g., Waldron 2011), this has not addressed *children's* rights to any meaningful degree.

² That is not to ignore the relationship between poverty and other child rights. See, e.g., UNICEF 2005; OHCHR 2012)

³ It should be noted that this review of child ESR and child poverty literature is inevitably incomplete due to the authors' linguistic limitations. Given that some of the most expansive child ESR standards and significant case-law originates in Latin American jurisdictions, including Colombia, Brazil and Argentina, it is a serious shortcoming of this paper that it does not engage with the non-English academic literature related to these domestic experiences.

Child rights theorists, perhaps unsurprisingly, have concentrated much of their attention on the conceptualisation and justification of those rights that are most controversial in terms of traditional understandings of children – for instance, rights closely related to the exercise of autonomy (e.g., participation rights).⁴ This contrasts with the relative neglect of theoretical work focused on those rights that can be more directly viewed as corresponding to (apparently) uncontroversial needs and/or interests, the satisfaction of which is commonly regarded as necessary for ensuring child survival and development. Such rights can be viewed as relatively unchallenging in terms of paternalistic or welfare attitudes towards children (see, e.g., Brighouse 2002). The under-theorisation of children’s ESR is consistent with the under-theorisation of ESR under international human rights law scholarship,⁵ where recourse is often had to vaguely defined concepts of dignity or personhood as the basis of right-holder status.⁶ This latter under-theorisation has undoubtedly contributed to the conceptual doubts that have historically operated to undermine ESR under international human rights law (IHRL) and beyond – in terms of the status of ESR as rights imposing binding obligations, their scope and content, and the appropriate mechanisms for their legal and political enforcement. It can be assumed that under-theorisation has played a similar role in a child rights-specific context.

Child ESR Scholarship: From the Legal to the Multi-disciplinary

Moving beyond the theoretical literature, existing child ESR scholarship is predominantly academic work focused on fleshing out child rights standards in the context of specific ESR or ESR-related areas. These include work on the right to health (see, e.g., Spronk-van der Meer 2014; Tobin 2019; Reinbold 2014), the right to food (Ó Cathaoir 2017), the rights to social security and social protection (see, e.g., O’Brien 2019; Simpson 2018; Sloth-Nielsen 2001; Langford & Khaliq 2019), the right to survival and development (Mahgoub 2015; Peleg 2019), the right to an adequate standard of living (Nolan 2019; Redmond 2008; Eide 2006) the right to play (See, e.g., Lott (forthcoming); Lansdown & Tobin 2019), work rights/child labour (Liebel 2015; Alston 2019), and the right to education and aims of education (Veryheyde 2008; Lundy and Tobin 2019; Zinga and Young 2008). Predictably, given the linkage between discrimination and the failure to secure ESR, academic work focused on socially vulnerable, marginalised and disadvantaged groups of children has often had an ESR component (see, e.g., Byrne 2019 on disabled children;; Pobjoy 2019, Smyth 2018, and Ceriani Cernadas 2015 on refugee/migrant children; Mwambene 2016 and Croll 2007 on girls; Kange’the & Nyamutinga 2016 on street-connected children and child-headed households). Indeed, this academic approach is consistent with that of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, which – in addition to recognising the particular vulnerability of

⁴ In their 2009 review of children’s literature since the adoption of the UNCRC, Reynaert et al described ‘autonomy and participation rights as the new norm in children’s rights practice and policy’ (Reynaert et al 2009; 518). The same remains largely true today. It is thus perhaps unsurprising that some of the more interesting work around the theorisation of children’s as ESR-bearers is in the context of children’s economic rights and engagement in work and work-related activities that are regarded as associated with adulthood in many national contexts. For more, see Hanson & Vandaele 2013; Liebel 2019 (forthcoming).

⁵ It should be noted that this dearth of literature on the theoretical underpinnings and justifications of ESR stands in sharp contrast to the very extensive body of literature on the scope/content of ESR and the obligations they impose.

⁶ For a discussion of the incompletely theorised nature of international human rights law more generally, including the CRC, see Tobin 2013. For notable exceptions to the non-theorisation of ESR and ESR obligations under IHRL, see Shue 1996; Young 2008; Waldron 2014, and Warwick 2019 (forthcoming).

poor children with regard to rights enjoyment – has repeatedly emphasised the particular vulnerability to poverty and deprivation of some groups of children (Vandenhoele 2014; Nolan 2018).

Unsurprisingly given the central played by the CRC in CRS post 1989, a significant majority of child ESR research takes that instrument as its central framework. There is no doubt, however, that the relatively limited engagement of the Committee on the Rights of the Child with ESR under the CRC (Nolan 2013) until the early 2010s did not serve to encourage scholarly engagement with ESR under the CRC. Indeed, this lack of engagement seems at least partially to blame for the existence of child-specific ESR scholarship that relies heavily on the non-child-specific ESR framework of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights when considering the scope of ESR obligations in a child ESR context (see e.g., Apodaca 2010). Furthermore, while child rights are sometimes addressed by ESR scholars, this has generally been in a passing way, with very limited attention focused on the specific position of children as right-holders and no meaningful theorisation of *child* ESR.

While there was a very slow start in terms of scholarship in child ESR, there is no doubt that there has been a notable increase in such work, particularly since the entry of ESR into ‘the academic mainstream’ in the 2000s. Consistent with the ever-growing body of child rights-specific jurisprudence at the regional level – a key feature of which has been growing engagement with the CRC and child ESR – we are seeing a small but growing body of scholarship focused on ESR under specific regional systems (see, e.g., Sloth-Nielsen 2016; De Paz González 2018: 92-122; Nolan and Kilkelly 2016; Chirwa 2016; Durojaye 2012; Odongo 2012). There is also extensive academic work around children under domestic ESR frameworks (see, e.g., Veriavaa & Skelton 2019; O’Mahony 2006; Rebell 2019; O’Brien 2019; Etchichury 2018; Lopes et al 2017; Bestard 2012, Gray 2011),⁷ in the context of child law, constitutional law, health law, social security law, youth justice, and education law.

There remain, however, shortcomings in terms of child rights scholars’ treatment of child ESR due to relatively frequent misunderstanding of the obligations imposed by those rights. This is attributable at least in part to the relative complexity of ESR obligations as well as the relative neglect of such in human rights and child rights scholarship and course curricula. That said, there has been slow but definite progress in fleshing out those obligations (see, e.g., Nolan 2013 and 2018; Tobin 2019; Vandenhoele 2009). This has stimulated, fed into and complemented work on the part of the Committee on the Rights of the Child in the area (see, e.g., UN Committee on the Rights of the Child 2016). There are still gaps in ESR scholarship in terms of addressing the parameters of the CRC framework: for instance, the scope of extra-territorial obligations non-state actor obligations. (Notable exceptions on the former point include Vandenhoele 2009; Nyongesa Wabwile 2010, while Gerber et al 2013 have written on the latter one). That said, there is no reason to assume that these lacunae will not be addressed as child ESR scholarship evolves and its profile increases.

In terms of child rights research scholarship, there are some limited examples of employment of ESR as frameworks for child rights research methodology (e.g., Larkins 2013). In practice, however, much of this work does not employ an ESR framework as such, rather it entails a methodology premised on participation-related CRC obligations in ESR-related contexts such as education (e.g., Lundy 2007;

⁷ It should be noted that there is extensive child constitutional and legislative social rights jurisprudence from the Americas but, due to linguistic limitations on their part, the authors are not able to provide a full account of the Spanish and Portuguese academic literature pertaining to the relevant national frameworks and case-law.

Alasuutari 2014; Pettersson 2013) or health (e.g., Reading et al 2008), in some instances to the extent of excluding any reference to relevant ESR⁸.

Currently, the area of child ESR is dominated by lawyers or those with a legal background – something that would seem to reflect the ‘legal’ focus of child rights as manifested in the CRC. Positively from the perspective of the development of an inter and/or multi-disciplinary body of research on child ESR, there is some evidence of scholarship ‘beyond the law’ in this area, with increasing references to child ESR standards and obligations being made by those working in areas such as public health (e.g., Garde et al 2017; Sanghera et al 2015; O’Hare et al 2018; Handsley & Reeve 2018); education (e.g., Christie 2010; McGrath 2018), child protection and social work (e.g., Berthold & Libal 2016; Dickinson 2018); development economics (Reed et al 2013); geography (e.g., Matthews and Limb 1999), urban planning (e.g., Riggio 2002) and philosophy (Bruno & Schweiger, 2019). This suggests a growing and increasingly multidisciplinary engagement with ESR. Overall, however, the ESR of children undoubtedly remains a neglected area of child rights at the international, regional and domestic levels compared to topics such as juvenile justice, violence against children or child participation rights.

Bridging Child Poverty and Children’s Rights

Child poverty is certainly not solely an ESR issue⁹ but it has a particularly strong relationship with ESR. It is thus perhaps to be expected that the lack of scholarly focus on ESR has translated to some degree into child poverty receiving less attention from child rights scholars – particularly lawyers. Indeed, the authors would argue that the disconnect between child poverty and child rights is attributable to disciplinary disconnects and the dominance of child poverty scholarship (particularly with regard to child poverty definition and measurement) by non-law disciplines such as development economists, and social policy. These disciplines bring huge conceptual and methodological strengths to bear in child poverty work but they do not necessarily (or even frequently) share the same aims, terminology, theoretical or methodological approaches as child rights academics; indeed, even those fields within children’s rights studies have their own specificities, on epistemological, empirical, and institutional levels (Moody & Darbelly 2019: 12).

It is an oft-repeated truth that the CRC does not contain a specific right to freedom from poverty. In recent years, however, the Committee on the Rights of the Child has focused extensively on poverty, using the right to an adequate standard of living under Article 27 as a particular focus for its work in this area (Nolan 2018). However, as Vandenhoele (2014: 612) notes that “the relationship between human rights of children and poverty is conceptually vague and in need of further clarification”. Child poverty can be approached as both a cause or consequence of ESR violations and there is no equivalent to the OHCHR’s (2004, 2006) conceptual framework on human rights and poverty reduction for child poverty and rights. That said, there are also growing efforts to conceptualise child poverty itself from an ESR perspective (e.g., Pemberton et al 2007), including by lawyers (see, e.g., Nolan 2011 and 2019 (forthcoming); Vandenhoele 2014), together with some recognition by non-legal child poverty scholars (and practitioners) that child poverty is a ‘child rights’ issue (White et al. 2002; Gordon et al. 2003; Redmond 2008). Unfortunately, there remains an ongoing failure really to come to terms with complexities of child rights in terms of requirements of standards of employment of

⁸ See, e.g., the non-reference to Article 31 CRC in the context of a piece on child rights and play in Yates & Oates 2019

⁹ See note 1 supra.

those standards in both defining child poverty (though this is improving) and methodologies for measuring child poverty.

Contested concepts, definitions and measures

In the wider, non-legal academic and policy literature on poverty (whether child or adult), debates on concepts/definitions and measurement are inextricably linked (Roelen et al. 2009). Within economics and to some extent social policy, data-driven approaches are typically employed, which means that the availability of data (either what data exist or choices over what it is deemed possible, desirable or appropriate to collect) drives the measure and thus the ways in which poverty is conceptualised and defined - although this approach is not without critique (see, e.g., Flaherty et al. 2004). Hence in the discussion that follows we explore both debates on concepts/definitions and measures of child poverty, considering the reasons for the lack of engagement of scholars from the child poverty field with children's ESR, as well as the strengths and challenges brought by engagement with other disciplines.

Poverty is typically conceptualised in either monetary or multidimensional terms (Roelen 2010). Definitions of monetary poverty relate to income or expenditure in relation to absolute or relative standards. Absolute or extreme poverty is usually defined and measured as households living below a poverty line, such as the World Bank's threshold of living on less than \$1.90 dollars a day which has been applied in low- and middle-income countries (World Bank 2018) and included as an official indicator in the Sustainable Development Goals. Children living in such households are defined as living in absolute or extreme poverty (World Bank & UNICEF 2016). In contrast, definitions of relative poverty acknowledge that living costs differ by context and that the circumstances of the individual must be judged in relation to others within the same society (see, e.g. Bradshaw et al 2012). Again, relative poverty is typically measured in monetary terms, as it is argued income largely determines the extent to which an individual can participate in, or is excluded from, society. However, reliance on income-based definitions and measures of poverty is problematic from a children's rights perspective. First, children are often invisible when poverty is defined and measured in monetary terms, obscured by a focus on the family or household (as White et al. (2002: 383) note: "income-poverty data refer to the number of children living in poor households, rather than the number of children living in poverty"). Second, household-based income poverty measures assume an equal sharing of resources within the household, yet these may be allocated differently, between adults and children, between males and females and so on (White et al. 2002; Hulme & McKay 2008; Rodriguez Takeuchi 2015). Third, while there have been attempts to disaggregate poverty data by age, these are only relatively recent and at first were not always consistent with the CRC in terms of that instrument's definition of a child (Olinto et al. 2013). Finally, while income is undoubtedly crucial, it may not be the key factor determining poverty in all societies (Penn 2005); there are other material deprivations that might affect children more directly than monetary poverty, such as access to water, health services, schools and transport (Feeney and Boyden 2004).

An alternative approach to conceptualisation and measurement, is to approach poverty as multidimensional, as advanced by the pivotal work of sociologist Peter Townsend (2009). He linked multiple deprivations (e.g. nutrition, food, education, health) with the human rights framework so as to include within the definition of poverty aspects such as exclusion from participation in everyday life

and activities normal for the surrounding society (for instance, holding or attending ceremonies for rites of passage or attending activity clubs). Here, poverty is conceptualised as a denial of choices and opportunities due to a lack of resources that leads to social exclusion.¹⁰ For instance, the view of poverty as multidimensional is reflected in Sustainable Development Goal 1 with its reference to ‘poverty in all its forms’¹¹. It has been argued that a multidimensional approach aligns more closely with both a child-focused and a more holistic, rights-based approach by recognising the multiple and interconnected domains of people’s lives that are affected by poverty (see, e.g., Pemberton et al. 2012). However, this is still dependent on how material deprivation is defined and the main multidimensional indices – such as the UN Human Development Index (HDI) which ranks countries on ‘progress’ in the dimensions of health (e.g. life expectancy), education (e.g. expected years of schooling for children) and material living standards (e.g. gross national income per capita), and the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) (which uses the same three dimensions, but with a broader range of indicators) – have limited direct measures that capture *child*-specific data (White et al. 2002).

Specific child-level multidimensional poverty indices have been created that attempt to address some of the shortcomings identified above. Two out of the three most common approaches to measuring child multidimensional poverty use the UNCRC as a foundation. The ‘Bristol Approach’ created for UNICEF’s (2007) Global Study on Child Poverty has seven dimensions, which the creators argue map onto Articles of the UNCRC (see Gordon and Nandy 2012a; Pemberton et al. 2012: 33) and categorises a child as poor if they are deprived in two or more dimensions (which have moderate and severe thresholds). The MODA approach (Multiple Overlapping Deprivations Analysis MODA) also developed by UNICEF 2012 (De Neubourg et al. 2012) uses the same dimensions as the Bristol Approach plus protection from violence and focuses on how the different dimensions overlap for children. Both approaches can therefore be used to measure the ‘depth’ of poverty. A third approach is the child-specific version of the MPI developed by OPHI and while informed by the capabilities approach and has three dimensions: education, health and living standards (Alkire et al. 2017). However, critics have questioned the choice of indicators (Gordon and Nandy 2012b) and difficulties in interpreting findings (Roelen 2017). Lastly, the SDGs stipulate that data, including poverty figures, should be disaggregated by age and gender, which has resulted in the fostering of more global child poverty measurement (see Chzhen, Gordon and Handa, 2018).

Poverty measures, whether monetary or multidimensional, have value in making the scale of the problem visible, working out who is most affected (although this will of course differ depending on the measure used (see Main and Bradshaw 2014; Roelen 2015). They also enable the measurement of change over time (making clear, for instance, whether the numbers of children living in poverty are increasing or decreasing in light of social or policy change). Such measures thus have the potential to make important contributions to the work of children’s rights scholars and advocates. For instance, such indices can contribute to ESR monitoring through generating data that serves as a basis for advocates to question national policy priorities, such as why countries with similar GDP per capita have different child development outcomes (see for instance, Bradshaw et al 2012). Conversely, data-driven measurement approaches pose significant challenges, both conceptually and methodologically

¹⁰ For an interesting example of an exploration of the relationship between child rights poverty and social exclusion as separate concepts in the context of an argument that the adoption of particular constructions of children’s rights in policy and practice that might result in social exclusions, see Reynaert and Roose 2016.

¹¹ While the definition of poverty therefore goes beyond income alone, the underlying target references national definitions of poverty, which could still be income related.

from a rights perspective. Methodologically, critics contend that such indices do not capture inequality within countries, so progress is achieved by capturing 'low hanging fruit' rather than reaching the most marginalised social groups (Ansell 2017). Conceptually, within economics and in some parts of the international development field, children are viewed as human capital in which it is essential to 'invest' to develop knowledge, skills and personal characteristics, which can be harnessed for future economic productivity and so contribute to poverty reduction via national economic growth (Cunha & Heckman 2010). The formation of human capital is central to neoliberal economics and circulates through international development discourses deployed by organizations such as the World Bank (Penn 2002) and has also been used by the likes of UNICEF (2012). While there may be strategic advantages of employing such discourses, as Mestrum (2015: 366) questions: "one should wonder what happens if the 'return on investment' is to happen or is not the desired one". Children are constructed as objects of development, as adults in the making, valued for future economic contributions, rather than considerations of children's rights and social justice (Morrow & Pells 2012). This view also constructs children as passive, rather than examining the ways in which children negotiate and contest processes of impoverishment in their daily lives (Unterhalter et al. 2012). Such approaches have roots in colonial projects of civilising and educating the colonized, and so children (and thereby the nation) are constructed as deficit or stigmatised as 'other' with formal schooling presented as the panacea for a whole range of problems, including poverty (Hopkins & Sriprakash 2015).

But while it is easy to criticise child poverty scholarship for its failure to engage with child rights, the child rights framework is far from ideal from the perspective of dealing with some of the complexities that arise in relation to children's lived experience of poverty, particularly relative poverty. A consistent finding of child poverty-related research is the stigma experienced by children living in poverty (Ridge 2004; Sumner 2010; Walker 2014). However, while the CRC deals well with stigma that amounts to discrimination in terms of Article 2 CRC it does less well with treatment that falls short of this legal standard. While there are certainly values and principles of child rights that can be used to counter notions of stigma – for instance, respect for human rights dignity and autonomy (see in the context of human rights and poverty more broadly, Sépulveda 2014) – there has not yet been extensive child rights-specific work focused on this issue.

A further complex area is the relationship between child and adult poverty. A children's rights approach has been critiqued for a focus on the individual child detached from the familial relations and circumstances in which they are living (see, e.g., Vandenhole 2014; Mestrum 2015; Brando & Schweiger, 2019). This is not to say that there should not be a focus on children, for reasons discussed above, but rather this has the potential to separate out children and adults, which can then be misappropriated in the services of either neoliberal agendas that sees poverty as an individual failing or greater surveillance of poorer families (see, e.g., Mestrum 2015; Rosen 2018).

In summary, in light of the extent of child poverty globally, the over-representation of children among those living in poverty, the lasting impact of poverty on children's lives, and the fact that those working in the fields of child poverty and children's rights have common concerns with regard to improving children's lives, it might seem surprising that there has been such limited engagement between children's rights and child poverty scholarship. At a superficial level, this can perhaps be attributed to the limited consideration of children within debates on human rights, poverty and inequality (Dean 2007; Balakrishnan and Elson 2008; Lister 2004; Townsend 2009). On a deeper level, however, while rights are sometimes mentioned as a moral rationale for a specific focus on child poverty (White et al.

2002) the conceptual linkages between child poverty and child ESR remain underdeveloped and there are some key theoretical and methodological tensions between the fields of children's rights and some approaches to child poverty.

Conclusion

The current state of CRS on children's ESR and child poverty is very much a 'work in progress'. There are, however, a number of current areas that the authors view as potential avenues for the extension and refination of such work.

The first of these is the increasing work around the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which has opened the door for ever-greater interaction between those working in development and ESR-focused child rights scholars (see, e.g., Fenton-Glynn 2019; Arts 2018; Nolan 2019 (forthcoming)). It remains to be seen, however, whether this work will adequately interrogate the theoretical and methodological differences between child rights and development approaches – in both policy and academic contexts. Nor is it clear whether child poverty scholarship will choose to embrace the SDGs to the neglect of child rights as an analytical and prescriptive framework.

Another area where provides scope for a child ESR focus is research centred on the rights impacts and implications of the environment and climate change (see, e.g., Kaime 2018; Makuch et al 2019). This is a development to be welcomed given the frequent co-imbrication of child rights and environmental rights, as well as growing understandings of the complex relationship between climate change, child rights and poverty. The recent financial and economic crises served as an important incentive for increased scholarly attention on ESR and poverty; it is only reasonable to expect that the pending environmental crisis will play a similarly catalytic role.

The authors do however have concerns that some of the issues that are currently evident in child ESR scholarship – including frequent fuzziness and misunderstanding about the nature and extent of child ESR – being perpetuated in certain areas of scholarship. Well-being is one such area, where children's rights and well-being are either used interchangeably or "casually paired together" despite their different conceptual, methodological and political foundations (Tisdall 2015: 807). While the aspirational and expansive conceptual framing of well-being may seem attractive given the oft-cited limitations of rights as being minimum standards (see, e.g., Lundy, 2013; Tisdall 2015). However, the lack of accountability mechanisms associated with the concept of well-being, the absence of a notion of inherent obligation, and well-being's emphasis on outcomes rather than process, raise concerns about the potential dilution of legal commitments to advancing children's interests and status in society.

Finally, further work is needed to assess how a child ESR approach can be used to address the root causes or structures that create, or fail to reduce, poverty. Such work is ever more timely and necessary given the current global political and economic context. As Townsend (2009: 155) noted, the power of rights is in the shifting of the "focus of debate from the personal failures of the 'poor' to the failures to resolve poverty of macro-economic structures and policies of nation states and international bodies". A useful example of the shortcomings of CRS from this perspective is the fact that CRS as it stands has only dipped its toe into the pool of economic policy (see, e.g, Stalford 2019; Reed et al 2013; Nolan 2013). This is despite the growing inter-disciplinary conversation about that topic in human rights scholarship more broadly (see, e.g., De Schutter 2019; Balakrishnan et al 2016;

Nolan et al 2013) Thus, the challenge for CRS moving forward is how to engage with an ever growing, interdisciplinary field on child poverty so as to work towards addressing the underlying causes and phenomena that exacerbate poverty – a task that will require learning from other disciplines, yet without losing its core ‘rights’ focus and commitment.

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