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Chapter 9

Working Children

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"YES to work- NO to exploitation! YES to dignified work- NO to undignified conditions! YES to work- NO to marginalisation! YES to work –NO to discrimination!" statement from the 5th meeting of Latin American working children (cited in Liebel, 2004, p. 21)

Introduction

In this chapter we discuss children's engagement in work and how normative understandings of childhood as a time for play, formal schooling and socialisation play out in debates about, and experiences of, child workers. Ideas about children's development, taken up in national and international policy frame debate about working children, distinguishing between work and school, with the view that work is very much at the limits, or margins, of normative childhood.

Debates about whether children should work, or not, draw upon particular ideas about childhood, as distinct from adulthood and as a period of vulnerability that requires adult protection, or at least supervision (see Crafter et al. 2009; Burman, 2008). From this perspective child workers are constructed as in need of protection. We discuss how children's

engagement in work is constructed, in particular the distinction made in much of the literature, and in policy and practice, between labour and work, childhood and adulthood, and between the global north and south. The chapter focuses on how dominant constructions of the developing child (drawn largely from the global north) make particular assumptions about the kind of work children should, if at all, be engaging in. The chapter also interrogates the assumption that 'work' is paid activity that takes place outside the home through a discussion of children who are young carers to family members. The symbolic, and actual, limits of childhood are played out in public debate and legislation internationally about the role of work, including care work, in children's lives.

Children and work

There has been a great deal of international research to identify the scale of the 'problem' of children working. International organisations such as the International Labor Organisation (ILO) through their International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) have used surveys from across the world to estimate the number of the world's children who work. ILO (2013a, viii) note that "There are some 264 million children ages 5 to 17 in economic activity in the world in 2012 (16.7 per cent). This is 42 million fewer than in 2008".

The ILO distinguishes 'economic activity' from child labour, which they define as illegal working practices as articulated through national legislation and ILO statutes. IPEC estimate 168 million children to be involved in child labour in 2012, about half of these in hazardous, or what they term 'worse form of child labour' (ILO, 2013b, viii). There are an estimated 300,000 'children associated with armed forces and groups' internationally (warchild.org, n.d.). The statistics provided in these reports are likely to underestimate the number of working children, as many children work illegally and are therefore very difficult to research (Dayiogiu, 2012; McKechnie et al, 1998). Dayioglu (2012) has argued that the

way in which questions are asked in surveys, such as the Child Labor Survey, determine the level of work captured across different countries. For example, rates of agricultural work are high in Africa but are lower in countries such as Moldova. Dayioglu suggests that this is because commercial agriculture is more widespread in Moldova and therefore family work on farms may not be recognised as children's work.

It is evident that particular kinds of work put children (and adults) at immediate risk of harm. Research by the International Labor Organization (2013b) reported that in a one year period 106.4 million children aged between 5 and 17 experience a work related injury and 15.1 million of these require subsequent medical attention. There are obvious health risks for children such as exposure to risks associated with prostitution e.g. HIV/AIDS (Forasteri 1997); or those who work in agricultural settings where there is risk of exposure to dangerous pesticides and heavy machinery (Forasteri 1997; McKechnie et al 1998). The ILO (2013b) report on the hazards of child labour focused on physical harm, but there are also psychosocial hazards to consider (Woodhead, 2004). The psychological effects of being trained to be a soldier (often by giving children drugs and forcing them to commit violent acts on their families and communities) have been documented (Human Rights Watch 2003 in Schmitz, Traver, Larson & Pieris 2004; United Nations, n.d).

It is evident in public discourse, including legislation, that children's engagement in work is accorded a special status. Where work is permissible for children (as set out in national and international legislation) it is usually seen as an activity that takes place outside the home for which the child worker gets paid and that does not interfere with the 'real' work of childhood- attending school and socialising with peers. The International Labor Organisation (ILO, 2011) stated that acceptable work for children, "includes activities such as helping their parents around the home, assisting in a family business or earning pocket money *outside school hours*" (cited in Wyness, 2015, p. 80, italics added).

Legislation in many countries includes a transitional stage of life where young people are permitted to work for a limited period of time per day. For example, UK legislation from the early twentieth century onwards has created a framework for seeing some work as acceptable for older children, with the view that children working a small number of hours, under adult supervision for 'pocket money' combined with full time education, was an acceptable practice (Crafter *et al.*, 2009; McKechnie & Hobbs, 2001). From this perspective, certain types of work may be considered to be appropriate activities if they are undertaken with adult supervision and seen to be enhancing, rather than interfering with, the child's education.

However, many activities are not covered by legislation and take place outside the boundaries of the definition of work as given by the ILO above. For example, in the UK babysitting is not part of employment legislation and so does not officially 'count' as children's work. The view that work takes place outside the home in return for money has been challenged by feminists who view work as a broader set of activities, which can include caring responsibilities and domestic work (Burman, 2008a; Punch & Sugden, 2013). Research that has documented the kinds of work children around the world participate in note that a considerable amount of children's work takes place within the home or family business. The most common form of work that children engage in is not in the 'commercial' or business sector, but in unpaid labour in the context of family or community life (Mizen & Ofosu-Kusi, 2012; Punch & Sugden, 2013).

A distinction is often made between children's engagement in 'work' and 'labour', in which child 'labour' is seen as harmful, or, at the very least, not in a child's best interests; whereas children's 'work' is perceived as benign or neutral (Weston, 2005). Wyness (2015) suggests that distinctive features of child labour are activities that involve children working as adults, i.e. the focus is on the present, rather than working as children where work

activities would have a future orientation, ie. there is an educational element and support for the child to engage in what are seen as 'age appropriate' activities.

A common assumption in the global north is that child labour is not part of our/their society. For example Liebel (2007, p. 5), writing from Germany argued that, "In our latitudes, the work of children is generally seen as a phenomenon from distant parts of the world or from our own distant past". However it is clear that children across the world are involved in hazardous work that equates with 'child labour'. It is also evident that the distinction between child work and child labour are not clear-cut and terms are often used interchangeably (Bourdillon, 2006) and politically (Liebel, 2007; Morrow, 2010). The notion that work for children in the global south is hazardous child labour whereas work for children in the global north is positive, safe forms of work is simplistic and inaccurate.

There are many reasons to account for children working. Some children have no choice about whether they work. Slavery and debt bondage/bonded labour (where a child's work is linked to an adult's work contract or the child is exchanged for money) is evident in many countries including the UK (Craig, et al, 2007). There is an international trade in trafficking of women and children for sex trade and domestic work (Forasteri, 1997, UNICEF, n.d.). Morrow (2010) and others have argued that the underlying causes of child labour are poverty, unbalanced economic growth and problems in the education system. Children are often key to the survival of the family in difficult circumstances. It is easy to make the assumption that the world's children work because of the economic conditions they live in. However, many commentators have argued that whilst the overriding reason for many children is economic, reasons are complex and it is not as simple as poor children *have* to work; "very little is known about the characteristics of working children or their motivations to enter work" (Mizen *et al.*, 1999, p. 429).

Globalisation and consumerism directed towards children has increasingly made children consumers, or want to be, of goods or particular lifestyles (Burman, 2016 and 2008 White, 1996). Consequently, children may enter the labour market with or without their parents' approval. However Burr (2006), and others, have argued against a perception of street children as abandoned by their families. For example, Invernizzi (2003) noted ways in which children were inducted into work by their parents. In the case of girls working in the Bangladesh export garment industry, work (starting around the age of 11 years) offered a secure and skilled job for the future. When legislation around child workers was tightened in Bangladesh many of the girls lost their jobs and none of those dismissed went back to school (see White, 1996). For some children their contributions to family income serve to protect them, and their families, from worse exploitation or neglect (Nieuwenhuys, 1994).

Understandings of work are influenced by the specific context of families including social class and geopolitical context as well as the gender of the child. There are gendered differences in the kinds of work many of the world's children perform. For example, Invernizzi (2003) noted that the work performed by the street children of Lima was different for boys and girls; boys moved away from mother's pitch earlier than girls. In a longitudinal study based in Kerala, India, Nieuwenhuys (1994) noted that it was common for sons to join fathers in long-established fishing businesses whereas girls most often remained in the home.

Children, school and work

Definitions of 'appropriate' work for children, legislation and public discourse about child workers draw on a view of childhood as a time for education and schooling. School is a central aspect of normative childhood, a time to develop skills to prepare for, rather than necessarily engage in, work (Burman, 2016). From this perspective work is defined as part of the adult world and often in contrast to schooling and education. The

construction of childhood as a time for play, school and friends (Jans, 2004; Wyness, 2015) feeds into national and international legislation such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989). For example, article 28 of the UNCRC requires governments to "recognize the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity" and article 32 "children's work should not jeopardize any of their other rights, including the right to education, or the right to relaxation and play" (www.unicef.org). The expectation is that children have the right to go to school and that school will benefit the child in the long term (Woodhead, 1999). Play is seen to be an essential and universal aspect of childhood, and opportunities for education and play are often assumed to be lost when children work (Burman, 2016).

Seeing work and education as incompatible is, McKechnie and Hobbs (2001) argue, a "false dichotomy" (p 9). Indeed, these authors (and others) have argued that the cost of schooling is often part of the reason many child work. Furthermore, Lieten and White (2001, p. 6) suggest that the 'blind spot' for campaigners who want to abolish child labour is that they, "consistently ignore the fact that most of the world's working children attend school". The view that most working children attend school is supported by ILO surveys (Forasteri, 1997). The World Bank (no date, cited in Schmitz, Traver, Larson & Pieris, 2004) estimated that 50-70% of working children attend school, it is likely that this figure is now much higher. For example, Liebel (2004) noted that many of the working children he met in his research had created small syndicates, cooperatives or unions, for example, shoeshine children in Paraguay allocate work places in the morning or afternoon so their peers can attend school during the other half of the day, a strategy that also helps protect their sites of work. He noted that working children in the global South who "see in their work not merely a

burden or a necessity, but also a chance to learn things that school does not offer them"
(Liebel, 2004, p. 2).

For some children and their families education does not have the status of paid
labour/work (Jans, 2004), and many parents fail to see the value of education which takes
children away from actively contributing to family income (Punch & Sugden, 2013;
Schlemmer 2000). Many children live in families and communities where children work as
apprentices in a family business (Schmitz et al, 2004). In an international study that examined
children's perspectives on school and work in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, the Philippines and
Central America, it was found that 77% of the 300 working children studied felt that
combining work and school was best for them (Woodhead, 2001). Most did not see work and
school as alternatives in their present situation, and reported that they felt work was a
necessity whilst schooling was felt to be desirable.

In situations of chronic poverty such as those explored in the Young Lives project,
attendance at school was seen to compound family difficulties (Pells, 2012). In one example,
a 15 year old boy from rural Andhra Pradesh described the many life skills he learnt from
working with his father and his cousins listing masonry, ploughing, bulldozing, tractor
mending, building walls and plastering. School attendance was seen as the 'risky' option.
Morrow (2010, p437) observed that in the global north children's engagement in work has
shifted historically, "children are effectively no longer 'earners' but have become redefined
as 'learners'". However assuming that being a 'learner' only happens at school is not an
accurate reflection of how children (and adults) learn. Indeed it could be considered that all
children work (Schlemmer, 2000) because, although it is rarely viewed in this way,
attendance at school can be conceptualised as a form of work (Qvortrup, 2001; Close, 2009
cited in Morrow, 2010). Learning through working in families and local communities has

been neglected because of the construction of school as the dominating place where 'education' is performed (Morelli, Rogoff & Angelillo, 2003).

Children, care work and families

As discussed above, 'work' is still largely assumed to be activities that take place outside of the home and for which the worker is paid. However, care work is "a mostly hidden and unacknowledged part of national economies" (Robson, 2004, p. 229), often because it is unpaid, takes place in a domestic arena and viewed as 'women's work' (Burman, 2008; Punch & Sugden, 2013).

The dominant construction of childhood, drawing on a view of childhood from the global north, is that children should be cared for, rather than having responsibility for caring for others. Caring as a form of work is not seen to be part of a normative childhood. Debates about young carers in the UK (where we live and research) and in other parts of the world often centre around the assumption that young carers have lost out on their childhood through being a carer (O'Dell et al., 2010; Robson, 2004,).

Children are an active part of the care relations within families in many countries (Robson, 2004; Skovdal 2010). In many parts of the world, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, the HIV/AIDS epidemic has led to what has been termed as a 'lost generation' of parents leaving behind children to bring up their younger siblings. In many instances children care for dying parents or other family members. Robson (2004, p. 233) argued that young carers in these situations are "invisible in the geographical imaginations of global northerners because they do not correspond to the stereotype of "exploited Third World child worker" labouring in a factory producing export commodities such as sports footwear"

In Kenya the traditional view is that children are an important resource for families. Skovdal (2010) researched in the Bondo district of Kenya, a district that has high levels of poverty, an HIV rate of 13% (twice the national average) and where one in nine children have

lost both of their parents (Nyambedha et al., 2003, in Skovdal 2010). Skovdal (2010) noted in their research that orphaned children are often taken in by 'guardians' who are usually a family member and are often ill themselves. Many of the children interviewed as part of the research talked about needing to work in order to feed themselves and their family, many have full responsibility for their guardians and for younger children. All of the children performed the daily household chores and many nursed their guardian.

During Skovdal's (2010) research, children were given cameras to take pictures of their lives and to write an explanation of the pictures. Many of the children discussed negative feelings in relation to being a carer, for example Paddy, a fifteen year old boy caring for his mother:

> "I took this picture to show how I have been helping my mother since she has an unpredictable disease. It may come anytime and at these times I do not go to school. When she gets sick, I am forced to leave school to help her out. I clean the house, cook for her, feed her, wash her feet and look after the animals. It affects my education and makes me suffer." (Skovdal, 2010, p. 99)

Other research that has taken place in sub Saharan Africa also documents the role of young carers and the impact it has on their lives, for example:

> "During the last months of his mother's life Rindai (15 years) cared for her. His only sibling- an older brother- was away studying and could only come back home in the last two weeks before their mother's death. His father had died two years previously of HIV/AIDS. Each day Rindai carried his mother outside to sit in the sun, took her to the toilet, and brought her food and drink. His mother withdrew him from school and Rindai couldn't even go out to the shops and *do normal 15-year-old things*. [...] The experience made a big impression on him. He matured overnight. (Interview with UNICEF worker)" Robson (2004, p. 227, italics added.

Young carers in the UK have received much policy and practice scrutiny over the past fifteen years. In our research with young carers it was evident that being a young carer was seen to be outside of the expected activities for children. For example, Louise, who was 18 at the time we met her, had cared for her disabled mother from the age of 11 years old. As part

of the research we asked her what she thought about what fictitious character, Mary, who was

caring for her dad:

> "That's the same as me, that's the same as I did in high school, it's the same thing, you know, you take, if you have a disabled parent it's kind of like you're split ok, you have the side that just wants to be you. You want to be able to go out, have a kick about, you wanna be able to go to the shops and buy Nike, all the retails stuff. You wanna be able to just go over to your friends and watch movies and go 'ha, ha, ha'. But then on the other side you've got your obligations to your family because no matter how much you may want to be a normal person you also, if you tried being a normal person you'd feel guilty."

> O'Dell, et al, 2010, p 651

The developmental assumptions, that young carers should be able to '*do normal 15-year-old things*' (Robson, 2004, p. 227) transcend the geopolitical location of the child caring

for an adult family member. Young carers across the world experience lack of visibility and

value of their care work (Becker, 2007; Robson, 2004). In the example of Louise, above, she

also articulates a sense of normative expectations against which she is aware that she is

different. Louise compares her life (and that of the character, Mary, who is a young carer in

the vignette she was discussing) with a 'normal' childhood and articulates how she feels torn

between being a 'normal' teenager and being a carer:

> "Teachers sympathise, they do sympathise and they do try it. When it comes down to disabled parents, one thing that I found like at this college, teachers do sympathise because teachers do understand that when it comes to your family if you've got a disabled parent it is very hard on you because you have to be there for the parent but also have to get your grades. So you have the stress of school but you also have the stress of family and everything else and so teachers do understand but at the same time they don't"
> O'Dell et al. 2012, p. 710

In our research, and in others, it is clear that young carers have complex feelings

about caring for an adult family member. Intervention in both the UK and sub Saharan

Africa, focuses on the (assumed) loss of childhood when children care for adult family

members. It is evident that children who are given no choice but to be a carer, who perform

intimate and personal care, or administer complex health treatments, find the activity

challenging and stressful. However, researchers such as Skovdal (2010) and Robson (2004) challenge the view of young carers as passive 'victims' of their circumstances. Robson (2004, p. 239) argued that caring ensures a family stays together and can be viewed as a "creative and active choice". Skovdal (2010) noted that the view of child orphans as a burden and as tragic is a partial explanation of the lives of young carers. For example Samuel aged 13 has cared for his sick father and now cares for a disabled friend and his sick mother:

> "All that I have done makes me happy. This is because I don't do bad things in the community, and the villagers love me seriously for that and the fact that I like helping sick people"
> Skovdal, 2010, p. 99

Many of the young carers in our research talked about a sense of pride that they can help their family and talk about wanting to help rather than feeling forced into it. Louise exhibits agency (although not perhaps in ways that adults, particularly her teachers, may condone):

> Like, for me, I used my, I hate to say it but I did use my mum as an excuse to get out of school because I was not having a good time and everyone thought I was dumb. But in Mary's situation she may, she may love school, she may be doing fantastic, or she may be like me and hate school and use it as an excuse. But at the same time she's still, she's still being, in a way, robbed of high school.
> O'Dell et al, 2012 p. 711

The lifestyles and activities of young carers in very different contexts challenge ideas about normative childhood. Paradoxically they may miss out on the formal and informal developmental opportunities that their communities offer them at school and elsewhere, but are engaged in highly skilled and emotionally challenging work as a carer. It is perhaps their agency in this role, such as avoiding welfare 'assistance', that might threaten the integrity of the family, that most strongly challenges a simplistic linear view of child development.

Conclusion: Working children and the limits of childhood

In this chapter we have argued that children's engagement in work is an activity that takes place in particular cultural and spatial locations and is given meaning within them. We have touched upon some of the structural and contextual conditions that frame children's lives and those of their families. The constructions of child workers discussed in this chapter are closely linked to the historical development of education systems in different parts of the world. Systems where a prolonged childhood in formal education, with a view to future economic reward, sit at odds with learning through work where economic gains are more immediate, and often necessary. As discussed in the Young Lives project, school might be seen as the risky option by young people when paid or unpaid work with the family provide vital skills for dealing with chronic or cumulative poverty.

Parents, teachers and friends as well as the culture in which they live have an impact on children's work, and it is not possible to account for children's experiences without understanding how work as an activity is mediated through these structures (Rogoff, 2003; Woodhead, 2004). Work, for many children is part of family life (when broadly defined) and is part of everyday activity. It is evident that looking at work purely as an economic activity misses out many forms of work and many aspects of children's experiences of work (Invernizzi 2003). Aspirations for a better life and education feature alongside a need to remove themselves from physical violence, poverty, poor future prospects or arbitrary punishment (Mizen & Ofosu-Kusi, 2012). Invernizzi uses a definition by Bolle de Ball (1987) in which work is conceptualised as a series of social links between an individual and meanings given to their working activities:

- Socio-economic (material benefits)

- Sociocultural (relationships with other workers and social belonging)

- Sociopsychological (social identity and social activity)

Similarly, Woodhead (2004, pp. 333-334) argued that *"recognising that cultural beliefs and expectations surrounding the value of children's work, goals for their development and indicators of well-being will strongly mediate children's perspectives on and experiences of work, and in turn its positive or negative impact on their lives"*.

Life course transitions to adulthood and the world of work can only be viewed within prevailing 'macrosocial' conditions (economic systems, government policy, rural/industrial/mixed trade) and 'microsystems' (changing relationships with family) (Kloep & Hendry, 2011). These same authors discuss the additional complexities of existing in, what they describe as, 'postmodern societies' whereby global relationships across societies, and the introduction of technologies, means changing situations for women and children in the labour force. Woodhead (2004) suggests children's work should be viewed through a set of guiding principles addressing 'development', 'context' and 'mediation'. A focus on 'development' looks at the long-term perspective of children's involvement in work through various transitions or phases. 'Context' emphasises the importance of the circumstances in which the work is taking place and 'mediation' recognises that there are varying cultural beliefs and expectations surrounding work and that this will mediate the children's own perspectives of the working lives.

The view that children who work are passive victims in poor economic circumstances (Liebel, 2004) or of inescapable family difficulties (O'Dell et al, 2010) is an inadequate view of children's activities. Liebel (2004) argued that children wish to work but under their own will and under safe and reasonable conditions. Liebel provides examples of working children's movements of Latin America and Africa, which are organisations usually run by working children aged 12-16 who work in the 'informal' work sector in cities. The organisations have typically been set up as a result of initiatives by adult humanitarian organisations but are run and administered by children themselves. Working children's

organisations wish to be recognised and participate in their culture as workers; children see their organisations as the best way to protect working children (Liebel, 2004). The organisations are usually framed within a rights discourse, for example: the right to vocational training in order to learn a trade; the right to carry out activities safely; the right to access to justice; the right to express ourselves and organize ourselves (Cited in Liebel, 2004, p. 21).

It is accepted by many commentators that rather than attempt to stop children working there is a need to recognise ways in which children work within communities and to, where necessary, change the ways in which children (and adults) work where the activities are hazardous and unsafe. For example, Leonard (2004) cited the case of the Bangladesh garment industry boycott on child labour in 1993, where a follow up by UNICEF found children were vulnerable and in exploitative occupations because of the ban on factory work. Hence moves to prohibit children working may lead to more precarious and hazardous activities. It is evident that children often work in situations where they have lower levels of status and power. The dominant construction of childhood as a time of dependency and innocence frames the kinds of work that children can engage in and how working children are viewed:

"work is all right so long as it is unpaid; children may also work for pay when they do not need to (for 'pocket money'), but not when they need to; children may help their parents' income-earning efforts (and gain pride and satisfaction from it) only if their parents own a family enterprise, but not if they are property less wage-workers" (White, 1994, p. 873)

Wyness (2015, p. 80), reflecting on the ILO definition of work as activities that take place outside of school hours argued that "In short, these kinds of activities are not perceived to threaten childhood". Similarly, Mizen et al (1999) characterised children's work as mainly low paid, unskilled and therefore argued that it is "firmly rooted in the material conditions of

childhood" (p. 424). Debates about child work, particularly when it is framed as labour in the global south, construct child workers as a "globally deviant category of childhood" (Wyness, 2015, p. 61) and hence engagement in work is seen to be at the limits of what is acceptable for children. It can be argued that legislation to prohibit, or restrict children's engagement in work operates to distinguish children's activities from adults' (Leonard, 2004; Wyness, 2015) and further distinguish between the worlds of children and adults.

In this chapter we have specifically discussed work within the home and the role of young carers. The assumption that parents care for children, and that children's role in families is as recipients of care, position young carers as transgressing assumptions about normative childhood. Young carers around the world are assumed to have lost out on childhood, not just in terms of lost opportunities to socialise with friends, but a symbolic loss of childhood. This, we have argued, is a simplified and problematic view of families, particularly of disabled parents who provide effective parenting to their children but are positioned as passive recipients of care (O'Dell et al, 2010; Prilleltensky, 2004). Developmental theorising needs to take account of diverse family structures in which the roles of adults and children are multiple and reciprocal.

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