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The future at risk: Child labour

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The Future at Risk: Child Labour

Theme *Living with Justice and Compassion*
Writer *Bernadette L. Dean*

TOPICS

- ❖ The meaning of child labour
- ❖ Kinds of child labour
- ❖ Root causes of child labour
- ❖ Life of a child worker

Purposes/Objectives

- To know what is child labour.
- To know the kinds of labour children are engaged in
- To know first hand the problems and difficulties facing child labourers.
- To analyse the root causes of child labour.
- To recognize the right of all children to education.
- To practice some interviewing skills
- To appreciate the value of cooperation and work as a team
- To practice respect for others by listening to them
- To feel compassion for those less fortunate than themselves.
- To educate the public about the issue of child labour.
- To take a small action to reduce child labour.

Time Three sessions of 45 minutes per session

Level Senior Secondary

Preparation

Materials

- ❖ Newspaper or magazine cutouts of pictures of children at work stuck on cardboard with some guide questions for analysis (see activity sheet #1 for sample). Other pictures should show the different kinds of labour children are engaged in (refer to information sheet #2)
- ❖ Cardboard for the pictures
- ❖ Glue or tape to stick the pictures on the cardboard

Information Sheet

- ❖ Information Sheet #1: What is child labour?
- ❖ Information Sheet #2: Kinds of child labour
- ❖ Information Sheet #3a-3c: Causes of child labour

Activity Sheet

- ❖ Activity Sheet #1: Child at work?

Introduction

The introduction below may be used by teachers as background information for the lesson and as a general guide to the topics when discussing them with students. It may also be used by teachers as a lesson script. Some parts may be reproduced for students' information in the form of transparencies or information sheets. Teachers are encouraged to provide additional information that may be helpful in preparing students to participate better in the activities.

What is child labour

Children do a variety of work in widely divergent conditions. This work takes place along a continuum. At one end of the continuum, the work is beneficial, promoting or enhancing a child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development without interfering with schooling, recreation and rest. At the other end, it is very destructive or exploitative. There are vast areas of activity between these two poles, including work that need not impact negatively on the child's development.

At the most destructive end, no one would publicly argue that exploiting children as prostitutes is acceptable in any circumstances. The same can be said about 'bonded child labour', the term widely used for the virtual enslavement of children to repay debts incurred by their parents or grandparents. This also applies to industries notorious for the dire health and safety hazards they present.

But to treat all work by children as equally unacceptable is make it more difficult to end the abuses. This is why it is important to distinguish between beneficial and intolerable work and to recognize that much child labour falls between these two extremes.

A decade ago, UNICEF determined that child labour is exploitative if it involves:

- Full-time work at too early an age;
- Too many hours spent working;
- Work that exerts undue physical, social or psychological stress;
- Work and life on the streets in bad conditions;
- Inadequate pay;
- Too much responsibility;
- Work that hampers access to education;
- Work that undermines children's dignity and self esteem, such as slavery or bonded labour and sexual exploitation;
- Work that is detrimental to full social and psychological development.

The impact of work on a child's development is the key to determining when such work becomes a problem. Work that is harmless to adults can be extremely harmful to children.

Education is one of the keys that will unlock the prison cell of hazardous labour. Education helps a child develop cognitively, emotionally and socially, and it is an area often gravely jeopardized by child labour. Work can interfere with education in the following ways:

- It frequently absorbs so much time that school attendance is impossible;
- It often leaves children so exhausted that they lack the energy to attend school or cannot study effectively when in class;
- Some occupations, especially seasonal agricultural work, cause children to miss too many days of class even though they are enrolled in school;
- The social environment of work sometimes undermines the value children place on education, something to which street children are particularly vulnerable;
- Children mistreated in the workplace may be so traumatized that they cannot concentrate on school work or are rejected by teachers as disruptive.

The roots of child labour

Most children who work do not have the power of free choice. The vast majority are pushed into work that is often damaging to their development by three key factors:

- the exploitation of poverty;
- the absence of education; and
- the restrictions of tradition.

The exploitation of poverty

The most powerful force driving children into hazardous, debilitating labour is the exploitation of poverty. Where society is characterized by poverty and inequity, the incidence of child labour is likely to increase, as does the risk that it is exploitative.

For poor families, the small contribution of a child's income or help at home that allows the parents to work can make the difference between hunger and a bare sufficiency. A high proportion of child employees give their entire wages to their parents to maintain the economic level of the household. A review of nine Latin American countries has shown that without the income of working children aged 13-17, the incidence of poverty would rise by between 10 and 20 per cent.

If employers were not prepared to exploit children, especially poor children, there would be no child

labour. The parents of child labourers are often unemployed or underemployed, desperate for secure employment and income. Yet it is not they but their children who are offered the jobs. Why? Because children are easier to exploit. Many see the exploitation of children's work as a natural and necessary part of the existing social order. They believe that low-caste children should work rather than go to school.

Poverty is not an eternal truth. It is increased or reduced by political and economic policies and opportunities. For example, The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) imposes a package of policy prescriptions known as structural adjustment programmes on indebted nations, in return for loan guarantees. Firsthand experience in most countries shows that the real cost of adjustment is being paid by the poor and by their children.

A serious attack on poverty will reduce the number of children vulnerable to exploitation at work. Social safety nets are essential for the poor, as are access to credit and income-generating schemes, technology, education and basic health services. But many countries still spend scarce resources on military rather than social priorities. Budgets need to be reexamined and redirected in this light.

Tackling the exploitation itself does not have to wait until some future day. It can and must be abolished here and now.

The absence and lack of relevant education

The most important single step in ending child labour is education. Cuts in social spending have affected education. In all regions, spending per student for higher education fell during the 1980s, and in Africa and Latin America, spending per pupil also fell for primary education.

Education is clearly underfunded. But the school system as it stands in most developing countries also suffers from an often rigid and uninspiring approach, and a curriculum that is irrelevant to and remote from children's lives.

Overall, 30 per cent of children in developing countries who enroll in primary school do not complete it. The figure rises to 60 per cent in some countries. In Latin America, enrolment in school is comparatively high, yet only half those who enter school finish it, broadly the same proportion as in Africa with its much lower levels of enrolment. Even Brazil, one of the richest countries in Latin America, has a primary school completion rate of only 40 per cent.

Education has become part of the problem. It has to be reborn as part of the solution.

Restrictions of Tradition

here is a darker side to the expectations about children's work. The harder and more hazardous the jobs become, the more they are likely to be considered as work for the poor and disadvantaged, the lower classes and ethnic minorities. In India, for example, the view has been that some people are born to rule and to work with their minds while others, the vast majority, are born to work with their bodies. As a result many are not worried that many lower caste children fail to enroll in or drop out of school. And if those children end up doing hazardous labour, it is likely to be seen as their lot in life.

Understanding all the various cultural factors that lead children into work is essential. But respect for tradition is often given as a reason for not acting against intolerable forms of child labour. Children have an absolute, unnegotiable right to freedom from hazardous child labour – a right now established in international law and accepted by every country that has ratified the Convention on the Rights of the

Child. Respect for diverse cultures should not hinder us from using all the means at our disposal to make every society, every economy, every corporation, regard the exploitation of children as unthinkable.

The shapes of child labour

The many manifestations of child labour can be broken down into six main types, none of which are unique to any one region of the world. These are

1. domestic service,
2. forced and bonded labour,
3. commercial sexual exploitation,
4. industrial and plantation work,
5. street work,
6. work for the family and girls' work.

1. Domestic Service

Child domestic workers (work in other people's home) are the world's most forgotten children. That is why we will consider their plight first. Although domestic service need not be hazardous, most of the time it is just that. Children in domestic service may well be the most vulnerable and exploited children of all, as well as the most difficult to protect. They are often extremely poorly paid or not paid at all; their terms and conditions are very often entirely at the whim of the employers; they are deprived of schooling, play and social activity; and of emotional support from family and friends. They are vulnerable to physical and sexual abuse. What more miserable situation could there be for a child – sometimes as young as age five – than to experience such conditions among often hostile strangers?

Accurate information can be helpful and put to good use. In Kenya, for example, evidence of psychological and emotional damage has helped convince parents and society at large that the problem must be tackled. A different approach has been taken in Sri Lanka, where the government has targeted employers with large newspaper advertisements stressing that employing child domestics is illegal.

2. Forced and bonded labour

Many of the forms of child labour practiced around the world are 'forced' in the sense that children are taught to accept the conditions of their lives and not to challenge them. But the situation of some children goes far beyond the acceptance of poor conditions. They find themselves in slavery. In south Asia, this has taken on a quasi-institutional form known as 'bonded' child labour. Under this system, children, often only eight or nine years old, are pledged by their parents to factory owners or their agents in exchange for small loans. Their lifelong service never succeeds in even reducing the debt.

In India and Pakistan bonded labour is widespread in agriculture, as well as in industries especially the carpet industry.

3. Commercial sexual exploitation

The hidden nature of the multibillion-dollar illegal industry in the commercial sexual exploitation of children makes it difficult to gather reliable data. But NGOs in the field estimate that each year at least 1 million girls worldwide are lured or forced into this form of hazardous labour. Boys are also often exploited.

When scandals about child prostitution in developing countries break in the international media, it is usually a story about the phenomenon called sex tourism in which holiday-makers from the rich world, mainly, though not exclusively, men, travel to locations such as Brazil, the Dominican Republic, Thailand and elsewhere in search of sex with children.

But we should not lose sight of the fact that many thousands of young girls in numerous countries serve the sexual appetites of local men from all social and economic backgrounds. And widespread child prostitution exists in industrialized countries as well. In the US alone, at least 100,000 children are believed to be involved.

4. Industrial and plantation work

All over the world, children work in hazardous conditions. The industries are manifold, from leather working in the Naples region of Italy to the pre-industrial brick-making of Colombia and Peru, which can involve children as young as eight.

Children are sometimes exploited in mining operations that would be considered too risky for adults in the industrialized world – for example, in the diamond and gold mines of Cote d’Ivoire and South Africa, and in Colombian coal mines. Typically, the children work with hardly any safety equipment and constantly breathe in coal dust.

The respiratory problems faced by child miners are also common in other industries. Many suffer from tuberculosis, bronchitis and asthma. Children working in earthenware and porcelain factories, for example, are often unprotected from the silica dust. In the lock industry, they inhale noxious fumes given off by dangerous chemicals. In the brassware industry, children work at high-temperature furnaces and inhale the dust produced in polishing.

The numbers of children exploited in the agricultural sector across the world may be just as great and the dangers associated with much of their work just as bad. In Brazil’s sugar plantations, for example, children cut cane with machetes, a task that puts them at risk of cutting off their hands. They make up a third of the workforce in some areas and are involved in over 40 per cent of the work-related accidents. Brazilian children are also exposed to snakebites and insect stings on tobacco plantations, and carry loads far beyond their capacities. In Colombia, young people who work on flower-export farms are exposed to pesticides banned in industrialized countries.

5. Street work

In contrast with child domestic workers, some children work in the most visible places possible – on the streets of developing world cities and towns. They are everywhere: hawking in markets and darting in and out of traffic jams, plying their trade at bus and train stations, in front of hotels and shopping malls.

Children who work on the streets often come from slums and squatter settlements, where poverty is common, where schools are overcrowded and poor, and where safe places to play simply do not exist. Their numbers have increased in places experiencing armed conflict.

On the streets, they shine shoes, wash and guard cars, carry luggage, hawk flowers and trinkets, collect recyclables and find a variety of other ways to make money. The amount they earn may be small but is sometimes more than they would receive from formal sector work. The large majority of these children return home each night. Some are able to combine some schooling with their street work, but nevertheless many are exploited and cheated by adults and peers and must spend many hours earning

their survival. Many suffer from malnutrition and from illnesses including tuberculosis.

For about 1 in 10, the street does become home. Inevitably these children become more prone to engage in marginal and illegal work, such as begging and petty thieving. Many are led into the dangerous world of crime engaging in pick pocketing, burglary, drug trafficking and prostitution. The lives of these children are marked by aggression and abuse, exposing them to extreme hazards.

6. Work for the family and girls work

Of all the work children do, the most common is agricultural or domestic work within their own families. Most families around the world expect their children to help in the household, whether preparing food, fetching water or groceries, herding animals, caring for younger siblings or working in the fields. This kind of work can be beneficial. Children learn from a reasonable level of participation in household chores, subsistence food-growing and income-generating activities. They also derive a sense of self-worth from their work within their families.

But it is by no means always beneficial. On the contrary, work for the family may demand too much of children, requiring them to labour long hours that keep them from school and take too great a toll on their developing bodies. Such work can prevent children from exercising their rights and developing to their full potential.

In rural Africa and in South Asia, children begin helping with domestic chores well before school age. Girls must fetch the household's water and fuel wood. Children of both sexes help with farm work, looking after animals and performing all tasks to do with water, jobs often physically taxing in the extreme. They also work in the informal sector of the rural economy, including traditional crafts and small trades essential to village life, especially shopkeeping. Many of these girls and boys are denied their fundamental right to primary schooling.

Much of this work, particularly by girls within their homes, is invisible and the scale of child labour is difficult to measure. It is also excluded from child labour legislation, partly because of the difficulty of policing child labour within the family. Legislation must be made more inclusive, but this will not of itself protect these children. The difficulties of enforcement will remain. But at the very least it will spread the message that there are strict limits as to what can be expected of a child's labour in the home. It may also make affirmative action more possible, and open social discussions involving parents and community members on what is considered to be good for a child.

Lesson Proper

Teacher Preparation

Cut out several pictures of children at work and stick them on cardboard with guide questions for analysis (see Activity Sheet #1 as sample).

Activity 1: Picture analysis (Instructions for the teacher/facilitator)

1. Introduce the lesson by asking students if they have any direct experience or stories to tell

about child labour? There might be a few students who have interesting stories to tell. Use their stories to motivate the class to move on to the next activity.

2. Pass out the pictures of children at work stuck on cardboard with guide questions for analysis. If you were able to prepare only a few pictures, you might need to form groups to look at one picture.
3. Give time for students to study and interpret the pictures carefully.
4. Discuss their answers to the questions.

Observation Questions

- What are the children doing?
- What activities are they engaged in?
- Are they working alone or together?
- What kind of clothing are they wearing?
- What tools and materials are they working with?

Interpretation Questions

- How is what they doing different from what you do?
- What kind of labour are they involved in?
- What values underlie the activities?

4. As students respond, note down on the board their answers to the questions.
5. From the students answers, help them come up with a definition of child labour and identify different kinds of child labour.

Activity 2: Kinds of child labour (Instructions for the teacher/facilitator)

Homework for students

1. Give each student a copy of Information sheet #1 and #2 and ask them to read the text carefully.
2. After reading, they cut out from old newspapers or magazines, two pictures of children working, if available, in two different settings.
3. Ask the students to bring to class their copy of Information sheet #1 and #2 and their picture cutouts.

In-class activity

1. Divide students into groups of 3.
2. Ask the students to bring out their copy of Information Sheet #1 and #2 and their cutout pictures.
3. In each group, ask the students to take turns teaching each other what they learned from

the two information sheets. Let them also show each other the pictures they brought.

- Using information sheet #2 The kinds of child labour, let student number 1 teach and check for understanding, then number 2 and number 3 until the whole group knows all the material in the text. (Each student deals with two kinds of child labour). Remind them to listen to each other actively.

Activity 3: Inquiry (Instructions for the teacher/facilitator)

Preparation

- Tell students they are going to do an inquiry on the question: What are the causes of child labour?
- In preparation for the inquiry, have students state their hypothesis/educated guesses in answer to the question. Write their hypotheses on the board.
- Have them develop a few questions to ask of children who work. For example:

Questions

What work do you do?
Please describe the work you do?
Do you work alone or with other children?
What tools and materials do you work with?
For how many hours do you work each day?

Field work: Interview

- Ask each student to interview a working child or two, using the prepared interview guide. This may be a child working in their home, a street child, a child selling items in the bazaar, a child working in the fields, etc.
- It is essential to remind the students to be very sensitive and mindful in their approach so as not to make the child interviewee uncomfortable or feel exploited even more. You might need to spend some time practicing with the students how to ask permission for the interview, assure confidentiality, etc.
- After their interview, have students individually reflect and write in their journals the problems and difficulties facing children who work. How is their life different from the life of working children?

Activity 5: Sharing (Instructions for the teacher/facilitator)

- When the students return to class after their field work, have them sit in their original groups of 3 and share their findings from the interviews. Have them look critically at their findings to provide evidence and examples to support or disprove their earlier hypothesis.

2. Distribute Information Sheet #3a-3c: The root causes of child labour. Let students read and then add more ideas in support of their hypothesis. (Student 1 to read Information sheet #3a, student 2 read Information Sheet #3b, and student #3 read Information Sheet 3c.)
3. In each group, let students teach each other about what they have read in the information sheets.
4. Allow time for the groups to prepare a synthesis of the answers to their inquiry.

Discussion

Ask each group to present their answers to the inquiry they conducted. Facilitate the discussion to draw out from students some information they have learned and feelings they have experienced. You can use similar questions they used in the interview:

- What activities were the children engaged in?
- What tools and materials were they working with?
- How is what they were doing different from what you do?
- Based on the kinds of child labour you have studied, what kind of labour were the children involved in?
- What values underlie the activities?
- What did you feel when you were interviewing the children?

Synthesis

Use the synthesis period to enhance the students understanding of the complex issues of child labour. After going through the activities, students should be able to come up with enlightened answers to the following questions:

- What is child labour?
- What kinds of labour children are engaged in?
- What do you know first hand about the problems and difficulties facing child laborers?
- What are the root causes of child labour?

Commitment to Action

Encourage the students to take little steps to help raise public awareness about the conditions of working children. Still with their own groups have them prepare an action plan stating who will do what, by when, and how. Each group or several groups combined could take responsibility for seeing the actions through. Some possible actions could be:

- Write an article for the children's section of a newspaper.
- Organize a mela/bake sale to collect money to educate children.
- Encourage the school to start a community service program to educate the adults and the children in the community.
- Advocate for the school to allocate at least 5 free places each year for children whose parents do not have the financial resources to pay for their schooling.

Information Sheet #1

What is child labour?

A decade ago, UNICEF determined that child labour is exploitative if it involves:

Full-time work at too early an age

- Too many hours spent working
- Work that exerts undue physical, social or psychological stress
- Work and life on the streets in bad conditions;
- Inadequate pay
- Too much responsibility
- Work that hampers access to education
- Work that undermines children's dignity and self esteem, such as slavery or bonded labour and sexual exploitation
- Work that is detrimental to full social and psychological development

Information Sheet #2

The Kinds of Child Labour

The many manifestations of child labour can be broken down into six main types, none of which are unique to any one region of the world. These are

1. domestic service,
2. forced and bonded labour,
3. commercial sexual exploitation,
4. industrial and plantation work,
5. street work,
6. work for the family and girls' work.

1. Domestic Service

Child domestic workers (work in other people's home) are the world's most forgotten children. Children in domestic service may well be the most vulnerable and exploited children of all, as well as the most difficult to protect. They are often extremely poorly paid or not paid at all; their terms and conditions are very often entirely at the whim of the employers; they are deprived of schooling, play and social activity; and of emotional support from family and friends. They are vulnerable to physical and sexual abuse. What more miserable situation could there be for a child – sometimes as young as age five – than to experience such conditions among often hostile strangers?

2. Forced and bonded labour

Many of the forms of child labour practiced around the world are 'forced' in the sense that children are taught to accept the conditions of their lives and not to challenge them. But the situation of some children goes far beyond the acceptance of poor conditions. They find themselves in slavery. In South Asia, this has taken on a quasi institutional form known as 'bonded' child labour. Under this system, children, often only eight or nine years old, are pledged by their parents to factory owners or their agents in exchange for small loans. Their lifelong service never succeeds in even reducing the debt. In India and Pakistan bonded labour is widespread in agriculture, as well as in industries especially the carpet industry.

3. Commercial sexual exploitation

There is a multibillion-dollar illegal industry in the commercial sexual exploitation of children. NGOs in the field estimate that each year at least 1 million girls worldwide are lured or forced into this form of hazardous labour. Boys are also often exploited. When scandals about child prostitution in developing countries break in the international media, it is usually a story about the phenomenon called sex tourism in which holiday-makers from the rich world, mainly, though not exclusively, men, travel elsewhere in search of sex with children. But we should not lose sight of

the fact that many thousands of young girls in numerous countries serve the sexual appetites of local men from all social and economic backgrounds. And widespread child prostitution exists in industrialized countries as well. In the US alone, at least 100,000 children are believed to be involved.

4. Industrial and plantation work

All over the world, children work in hazardous conditions. The industries are manifold, from leather working in the Naples region of Italy to the pre-industrial brick-making of Colombia and Peru, which can involve children as young as eight. Children are sometimes exploited in mining operations that would be considered too risky for adults in the industrialized world – for example, in the diamond and gold mines of Cote d'Ivoire and South Africa, and in Colombian coal mines. Typically, the children work with hardly any safety equipment and constantly breathe in coal dust. The numbers of children exploited in the agricultural sector across the world may be just as great – and the dangers associated with much of their work just as bad.

5. Street work

In contrast with child domestic workers, some children work in the most visible places possible – on the streets of developing world cities and towns. They are everywhere: hawking in markets and darting in and out of traffic jams, plying their trade at bus and train stations, in front of hotels and shopping malls. On the streets, they shine shoes, wash and guard cars, carry luggage, hawk flowers and trinkets, collect recyclables and find a variety of other ways to make money. The amount they earn may be small but is sometimes more than they would receive from formal-sector work. The large majority of these children return home each night. Some are able to combine some schooling with their street work, but nevertheless many are exploited and cheated by adults and peers and must spend many hours earning their survival. Many suffer from malnutrition and from illnesses including tuberculosis.

6. Work for the family and girls work

Of all the work children do, the most common is agricultural or domestic work within their own families. Most families around the world expect their children to help in the household, whether preparing food, fetching water or groceries, herding animals, caring for younger siblings or working in the fields. This kind of work can be beneficial. Children learn from a reasonable level of participation in household chores, subsistence food-growing and income-generating activities. They also derive a sense of self-worth from their work within their families. But it is by no means always beneficial. On the contrary, work for the family may demand too much of children, requiring them to labour long hours that keep them from school and take too great a toll on their developing bodies. Such work can prevent children from exercising their rights and developing to their full potential. Much of this work, particularly by girls within their homes, is invisible and the scale of child labour is difficult to measure. It is also excluded from child labour legislation, partly because of the difficulty of policing child labour within the family.

Information Sheet #3a

Causes of child labour: The exploitation of poverty

The most powerful force driving children into hazardous, debilitating labour is the exploitation of poverty. Where society is characterized by poverty and inequity, the incidence of child labour is likely to increase, as does the risk that it is exploitative.

For poor families, the small contribution of a child's income or help at home that allows the parents to work can make the difference between hunger and a bare sufficiency. A high proportion of child employees give their entire wages to their parents to maintain the economic level of the household. A review of nine Latin American countries has shown that without the income of working children aged 13-17, the incidence of poverty would rise by between 10 and 20 per cent.

If employers were not prepared to exploit children, especially poor children, there would be no child labour. The parents of child labourers are often unemployed or underemployed, desperate for secure employment and income. Yet it is not they but their children who are offered the jobs. Why? Because children are easier to exploit. Many see the exploitation of children's work as a natural and necessary part of the existing social order. They believe that low-caste children should work rather than go to school.

Poverty is not an eternal truth. It is increased or reduced by political and economic policies and opportunities. For example, The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) imposes a package of policy prescriptions known as structural adjustment programmes on indebted nations, in return for loan guarantees. Firsthand experience in most countries shows that the real cost of adjustment is being paid by the poor and by their children.

A serious attack on poverty will reduce the number of children vulnerable to exploitation at work. Social safety nets are essential for the poor, as are access to credit and income-generating schemes, technology, education and basic health services. But many countries still spend scarce resources on military rather than social priorities. Budgets need to be reexamined and redirected in this light.

Tackling the exploitation itself does not have to wait until some future day. It can and must be abolished here and now.

Information Sheet #3b

Causes of child labour: The absence and lack of relevant education

The most important single step in ending child labour is education. Cuts in social spending have affected education. In all regions, spending per student for higher education fell during the 1980s, and in Africa and Latin America, spending per pupil also fell for primary education.

Education is clearly underfunded. But the school system as it stands in most developing countries also suffers from an often rigid and uninspiring approach, and a curriculum that is irrelevant to and remote from children's lives.

Overall, 30 per cent of children in developing countries who enroll in primary school do not complete it. The figure rises to 60 per cent in some countries. In Latin America, enrolment in school is comparatively high, yet only half those who enter school finish it, broadly the same proportion as in Africa with its much lower levels of enrolment. Even Brazil, one of the richest countries in Latin America, has a primary school completion rate of only 40 per cent.

Education has become part of the problem. It has to be reborn as part of the solution.

Information Sheet #3c

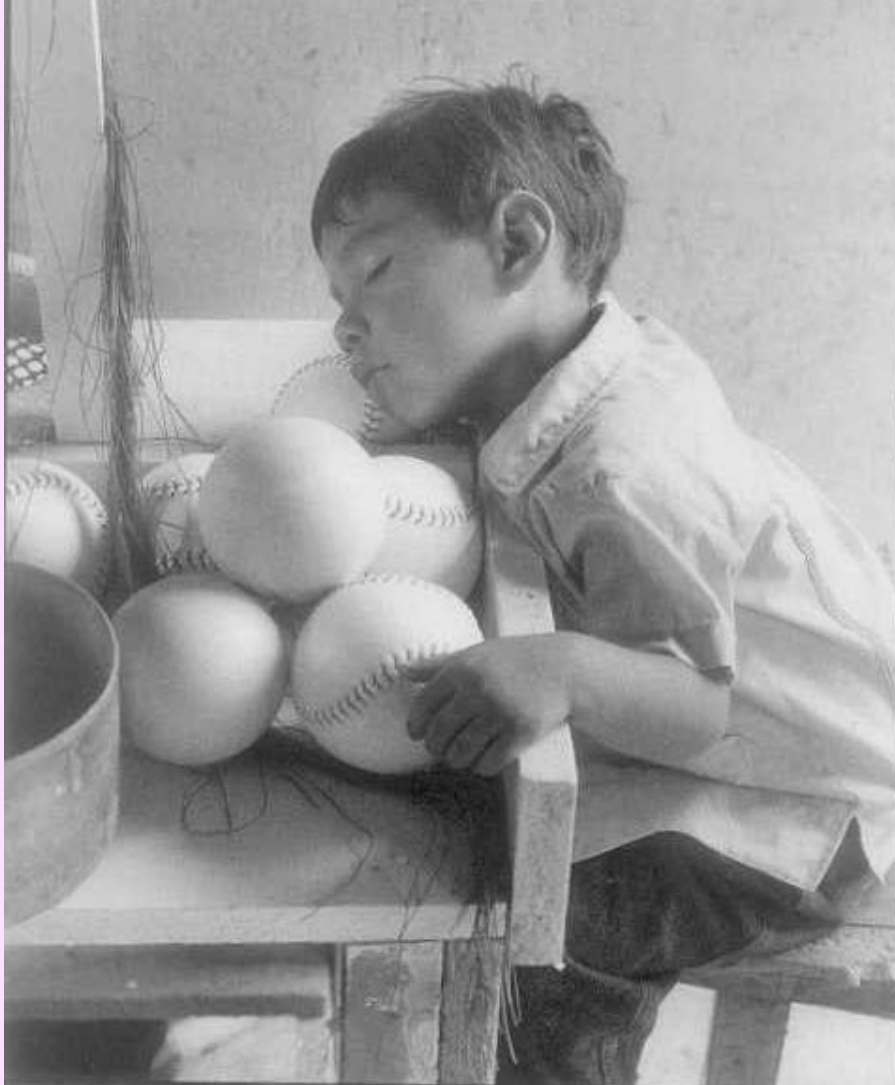
Causes of child labour: Restrictions of Tradition

There is a darker side to the expectations about children's work. The harder and more hazardous the jobs become, the more they are likely to be considered as work for the poor and disadvantaged, the lower classes and ethnic minorities. In India, for example, the view has been that some people are born to rule and to work with their minds while other, the vast majority, are born to work with their bodies. As a result many are not worried that many lower-caste children fail to enroll in or drop out of school. And if those children end up doing hazardous labour, it is likely to be seen as their lot in life.

Understanding all the various cultural factors that lead children into work is essential. But respect for tradition is often given as a reason for not acting against intolerable forms of child labour. Children have an absolute, unnegotiable right to freedom from hazardous child labour – a right now established in international law and accepted by every country that has ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Respect for diverse cultures should not hinder us from using all the means at our disposal to make every society, every economy, every corporation, regard the exploitation of children as unthinkable.

Activity Sheet #1

A child at work?



Observation Questions:

1. What is the child(ren) doing?
2. What activities are they engaged in?
3. Are they working alone or together?
4. What kind of clothing are they wearing?
5. What tools and materials are they working with?

Interpretation Questions:

- How is what they doing different from what you do?
- What kind of labour are they involved in?
- What values underlie the activities?