

Introduction to socialisation

Recent research on childhood and children in the past

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This introduction to the complex and manifold study of childhood and children in the past is one of the first presentations dedicated to socialisation that combines both interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches to the field. On the theoretical and methodological level, the author reflects upon some general and particular aspects of this type of study, sums up the contributions to the volume and looks at significant tendencies and trends for future work in the recent research represented by established and up-coming scholars in the disciplines of anthropology, archaeology, classical studies and ethnohistory.

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Between worlds

“Quarter of the grade comes from the upbringing”. Icelandic proverb (cf. Lárusson 1959:545, my translation).

Socialisation is a research field in the sciences, arts and humanities dealing with essentially the whole process of learning throughout the course of human life. Many disciplines are engaged in advancing knowledge and understanding of the material and immaterial influence of socialisation on the actions of children and adults and on the interrelationships in the worlds between them. Associated with the study of childhood in the past, and the advancement of the field as an explicate area of research on the academic scene, the issue of socialisation is brought forward here to respond to and give a taste of the variation and richness of the field.

As a theme underlining a growing amount of recent literature on childhood and children in the past, such as anthropology (LeVine & New 2008, Lancy 2008, Montgomery 2009), archaeology (Sofaer Derevenski 2000, Baxter 2005, Wileman 2005, Dommasnes & Wrigglesworth 2008, Rogersdotter 2008), classical studies (Beaumont 2000, Rawson 2003, Neils & Oakley 2003, Cohen & Rutter 2007), history (Orme 2003, Stearns 2006) and history of religion (Bakke 2005),

the central part in the discourse on socialisation has been directed towards children as the active agents or the passive appendages to adults. Whether or not general theories of childhood and the socialisation of children exist in these disciplines, the field is at least lacking a thoroughly considered framework for interpretation (for an overview, cf. Crawford & Lewis 2008). The overall aim of this presentation is to introduce the contents of the volume and reflect on some theoretical and methodological aspects of childhood linked with the study of socialisation of children in the past. To sum up the general discussions of the essays in the volume, I will look at some general and particular tendencies and trends in the recent studies dedicated to this field of research.

Background to the volume

The Society for the Study of Childhood in the Past (SSCIP) held its second annual conference in Stavanger, Norway, on 28–30th September 2008. With “Childhood in the Past – Recent Research” as the overall theme, the SSCIP Committee aimed to focus in particular on aspects such as socialisation, learning and play. The choice of topic engendered anticipation as regards the reaction to the call for papers worldwide.

Would the responses fill a two-day programme, and especially what type of papers would emerge on the conference scene? Based on the twenty received and accepted papers, it was possible to organise the programme to follow the human life cycle in a life and death perspective (SSCIP 2008, Lillehammer 2008:24–25). The programme had seven sub-titles. (1) Socialisation, learning and play. (2) Growing up in the environment. (3) Becoming people. (4) The skilled kidnapper. (5) The religious child. (6) Bury the children. (7) Children past and present.

To explore the programmatic theme of socialisation, learning and play, thirteen of the conference speakers chose to publish essays here in the form of overviews or case studies. Others decided to publish their papers elsewhere, such as in the SSCIP journal *Childhood in the Past*. Highlighting some common aspects in the recent research approaches to socialisation shared among the contributors, the essays in this volume are organised with regard to the long and short dimensions of time and space by contrasting the past with the present. The volume is divided into four parts: (1) Introduction, (2) Childhood and agency, (3) Childhood and liminality, (4) Childhood and alterity. The authors, both well-established and upcoming scholars in the disciplines of anthropology, archaeology, classical studies and ethnohistory, are predominantly female, and with the exception of Australia and Argentina, they are also mainly from Europe.

An afterthought

The question of a theory of childhood was discussed and left open at the end of the Stavanger conference. In this context, to draw from the particular viewpoint of archaeology, the main approach to childhood in the past has been to seek the presence of children directly in the scientific record (Lillehammer 1989, Crawford 1991), and then to start searching for evidence of what is acknowledged to exist from the very beginning of human life (Chamberlain 1997, Sofaer Derevenski 1997, Scott 1999).

The application of terminology and considering what is the main issue for a social study, childhood, children, or both as the interplay between two perspectives on social relations and cultures (Christensen & Prout 2005:50), have been important in this process. From a constructionist perspective, children are regarded as social agents and socialisation as an interactive, social process where children act on the environment while also being shaped by it (Freeman & Mathison 2009:6).

Recently, the phenomenological approach has been proposed as a means of studying children and childhood in the past (Lillehammer, in press). The main principle in the study of socialisation of children is the approach. The main question is whether the knowledge and understanding of parents and carers – the world of adults – should form the background for the study of socialisation of children. Or should we look for the adult world through the world of children. The past is made up of the history of adults who once were themselves children. Based on memory and experience of their own childhood, they set rules and restrictions for the life and outcome of new offspring in society. Considering the social relationship between child and adult to be contradictive, among their peers, the children are the creators and innovators of their own world. We may therefore regard children as mediators between different worlds. In investigating the material and immaterial evidence of children, the approaches to socialisation are directed towards general and specific levels of analyses and focused upon four areas of research: (1) children's bodies or their remains, (2) child constructions of their world, (3) the relationships between the worlds of children and adults, and (4) adult constructions of the world of children.

A main concern in the study of socialisation of childhood is the interrelationships between the cognitive, physical and social developments of children. Regrettably, archaeology seems divided between social archaeology and bio/palaeo/osteoaerchaeology on the sex, gender, age and identity themes. Disciplinary contrasts exist between thinking of children as bodies, either as biological functions or as non-biological social constructions (Sofaer 2006). Motivation for examining the social dimensions identified in material culture, and not only of bodies and of objects, also exists for the study of the interrelationships between them. Though conceptually and disciplinarily problematic in the research procedure, to develop an understanding of the socialisation of children and explain the impact upon conditions in childhood, we have to include the study of bodies from early stages in the human life course and their relationships with the environment, and to extend the search for the surrounding worlds and the areas between them.

The contributions to this volume place little focus on bodies or skeletal remains of children, however much we wanted this type of research to form part of the content. Relevant approaches to the effects of socialisation on their bodies, such as stress marks on bones, are left out of the discourse. Based on the information

about childhood and children extracted from textual and material sources of scientific evidence, their bodies are represented directly in references to mummies and indirectly in analyses of teeth marks impressed on lumps of resin and examination of clothing and sculptured, photographic, painted or drawn depictions of children.

Socialisation: theory and method

On the elementary levels of knowledge and understanding, such as in the disciplines of archaeology and cultural literacy, sports science and medicine revealed in the Oxford Dictionary and Encyclopædia Britannica, the keywords describe socialisation as the complex learning processes and patterns in the development and understanding of the world. They point to culture, and to the skills, customs, attitudes, values, beliefs, knowledge and modes of behaviour enforced, approved and pertained by society in order to carry and pass on cultural features to new generations through acculturation. This is seen in the modification of the culture of a group or individual as a result of contact with a different culture, or in the process by which the culture of a particular society is instilled in a human from infancy onward. Hence, children get along with and behave similarly to other people in the group such as parents and peers largely through imitation as well as group pressure.

On the particular levels of scientific research, the study of the socialisation of children concerns theories and methods to examine various aspects and interrelationships between material and immaterial worlds, such as (1) individual, group, home, family, school, society, (2) behaviour, function, adjustment, participation, interaction, agency, culture, and (3) child-rearing. From the perspective of child development, this involves considering a range of genetic, cognitive, physical, nutritional, educational, familial, cultural and environmental factors, such as physical specifications and stages of motor, and cognitive, psychological, linguistic, social and emotional development. However, the study of the socialisation of children in the past exceeds these research aspirations, aiming not only to understand and explain biological, social, economic and cultural constructions and representations of childhood.

Apart from a few exceptions, and conditioned by limitations of the scientific evidence and source material, these are striving for interdisciplinary approaches. Studies of childhood and children have gained a

more significant space of their own and reached the stage where they examine material and/or immaterial culture beyond the level of a restricted discipline. The contributions tend to be less interdisciplinary and instead reflect multidisciplinary approaches in theory and method. In one of the first efforts, Joanna Sofaer Derevenski (2000) invited scholars from the disciplines of palaeontology, psychology, social anthropology, biological anthropology and prehistoric, classical and medieval archaeology to explore the material culture of children. A conference on “Child Anthropology – *Kind und Kindheit als biologisches und soziales Konstrukt*” (Children and childhood as biological and social constructs) (Alt & Kemkes-Grottenthaler 2002), represented the disciplines of anthropology, archaeology, ethnology, history, medicine, pedagogy and psychology. From the experience of the working relationship between ethno-psychology, osteoarchaeology and archaeology, this initiative resulted in a discussion of the idealistic interdisciplinary working model of research approach (Hug 2008, Röder 2008, Figs. 2a–d). Hug viewed the interdisciplinary work as demonstrating difficulties in defining childhood and children, but enhancing an understanding of the cultural relatedness in thinking about children (Hug 2008:93).

In this volume, the collaboration between osteoarchaeology, archaeology and ethnohistory by Anna Kjellström, Bengt Nordquest, Annika Snäll and Stig Welinder represents an interdisciplinary experiment of contrasting the socialisation of children to explode biological and cultural boundaries of childhood in time, space and structure. For students and researchers who consider the question of socialisation in the past, it is important to note the tensions between disciplines on the biological versus the cultural lines of science and humanism, i.e. the question of biological or cultural determinism in the study of childhood and children. This is seen in the methodological divide between approaches for studying “children” (biological) or “childhood” (socialisation). The application of biological and cultural approaches to historical perspectives on childhood and children in the past is complicated.

The science of biological or human anthropology looks at the ageing of the physical body (biological age, chronological age) and the growth, health and stress conditions of the skeleton (Katzenberger & Shelley 2008). In this way, we may study development as the history of behaviour and the learnt body as a social process from an early age (Sofaer 2006:134–138). As a social, chronological, cognitive, emotional and

biological/sexual model on maturation and decline of human ageing (Jamieson 2002), it has been suggested that gerontological understanding should be applied in the study of life course. However, due to individual maturation and problems in recognising ageing in extant physical remains, except for the very young and very old, identifying and studying intermediate stages in the cultural record is difficult (Lewis-Simpson 2008a:2–4).

According to social theory, childhood is a social construction on agency that puts constraints on what children do (James *et al.* 1998, James & James 2004). Childhood has been defined as a social phenomenon (Jenks 1996:3), but which historiography is developed from a western point of view (Cunningham 2005). In the study of childhood, there are gaps in knowledge and not one theory. From the position of the social sciences, Ivar Frønes (1994:146–148) pointed out that childhood is defined as the period in life during which a human being is regarded as a child, and the cultural, social and economic characteristics of that period. Opposed to the idea of children representing the biological and social categories of an early stage in human life, the perspective of socialisation, which emphasises the process of growing up and their future status as adults, is often implicit in discussions of childhood. The definition of childhood needs to be based on a series of perspectives representing different ways of interpreting the phenomenon. Childhood can be analysed from a number of perspectives each leading to different interpretations, sometimes also to different conclusions.

The fluid and contextual embodied state of *being* a child or an adult (Toren 1993) makes distinctions between biological and social categories and roles challenging to approach. Childhood relates passively to the state of being a child, which makes it difficult to regard children as representatives of change (Lillehammer 2000:20). In critical terms, discussing the study of experiences during childhood (Freeman & Mathison 2009:8–12), such as in the model on the four conceptions of children (James *et al.* 1998:4), the social constructed child, the tribal child, the social structural child and the minority group child, may lead to new questions and change the perception of childhood and how children appear in social life:

- Children are biologically immature, but culturally meaningful
- Children are people in their own rights, but their childhood is shared socially with adults

- Childhood is a universal phenomenon, but diversely constructed
- Children are an inferior, oppressed minority, but with individual views and experiences

As pointed out by Crawford & Lewis (2008:6–8), conceptual confusions exist in the discourses about childhood and children. Inquiries (Lillehammer, in press) into the “theory of childhood” and the terms “child” and “childhood” reveal an epistemological gap of logical shortcoming in the socio-cultural relationship between subjective experiences of children’s own culture and objective constructions of childhood by adults, and this is based on differences in ontological status between children and adults (Wartofsky 1981). It concerns the question of who is the actor and who is the constructor in the available world between them (Qvortrup 1994:4). The term “childhood” represents by definition an analytic category of ontological and epistemological divide between children and adult. Rather than being a single or universal phenomenon (James & Prout 1990), comparative and cross-cultural analysis also reveals a variety of childhood and the concept of childhood to have great cultural variability. Applications of ethnographic evidence show the problems in defining the term of childhood; partly because the nature of childhood is diverse, elastic and heterogeneous due to gender, age, birth order and ethnicity, partly because childhood has been overlooked as a research object (Montgomery 2009:3, 8). In the next section, we will consider a case of conceptual confusion about the childhood concept that is significant for the study of the socialisation of children in the past.

Conceptual confusions and structural differences

The results of two recent studies of child burials reveal interestingly age-related patterns between Late Viking Age Sweden (Mejsholm 2008) and Anglo-Saxon England (Lee 2008). However, the studies are based on strikingly opposite views on childhood. Mejsholm’s study (*ibid.*) refers the concept of childhood to a social construction defined by and therefore also reflecting contemporary society. Examining a syncretic cemetery dated to the period of religious transition from pre-Christian to Christian faith, it uses burial ritual and ritualistic evidence to compare social representations of infants and older children with disabled or dysfunctional adults. Based on the material evidence, it suggests that dysfunctional adults belong to a social sphere closely related to children under the age of three, and represent the social groups of unproductive

dependants in the household. Lee's study (*ibid.*) postulates that childhood and disability represent modern concepts. In a thoroughly conducted analysis of Anglo-Saxon cemeteries, Lee found that children and adults with impairments shared the same places in death. They may have been regarded as belonging to the same group of people and represented similar categories. She suggested that it was feasible that impairment was more readily accepted in the past than today.

The difference in the positions between the studies of Mejsholm and Lee may reflect the contrasting historical perspectives on childhood between Ariés (1962) and deMause (1974); i.e. a modern invention or an historical stage of evolutionary development (Crawford & Lewis 2008:8). To think the past or the present comparatively is a matter for considering how modern concepts in the present add or lend weight to arguments that lead to conclusions about social perceptions and attitudes of the past. Structural differences appear in the argumentation when facts about children and impairments of the past are linked with terms of childhood and disability in the present. Looking at the concepts of childhood and children from the perspectives of life cycle ideology, the problem of confusing modern concepts with the establishment of historical facts is made clearer. The stages of life are known from classical and Christian writings (Burrow 1986:55–94) and are differently defined from northern attitudes towards the life cycle (Lewis-Simpson 2008a:3). Particularly relevant in this instance is that "childhood" exists as a word (*barndómr*) in Old Norse (Fritzner 1973:115), and in Old English as a word (*cildhād*) for "an age of man" distinguished in the Anglo-Saxon cycle of life (Shánchez-Martí 2008:206–207).

Ancient life cycle ideology is based on experience and common sense and embedded in natural attitudes towards the development of the human mind and body. The identity, role and potential of an individual are defined on the basis of sentiments and functions surrounding the ageing process. Being similar or contradictory to accepted norms of ageing, the attitudes towards biological, social and cultural characteristics of the body and mind are conditioned by the ability of physical and mental investments and the function of vulnerable groups such as children. In the life cycles of the medieval north (Lewis-Simpson 2008b), investments of love and care contrast with the harsh, brutal and competitive conditions in which statuses between young and old are negotiated and transformed. Social values and attitudes towards the human being are closely related to functional qualities that classify the

individual as strong or weak, rich or poor, free or dependant in society. Potential, ability and faculty at different life stages between infancy and adolescence are compared to functionality of the body and mind in old age. When researching the socialisation of children in the past, it is paramount to understand the realities behind life cycle ideologies and the attitudes towards natural growth as relational to functionality: children are perceived and valued from an adult point of view.

To reach above the debates on perspectives of childhood versus children, or historical evolution versus modern invention, the concept of childhood is deeply interwoven with thinking quantitatively (biologically) and qualitatively (socially) about children. Depending on the levels and areas of research, childhood is regarded as a cultural construction of social diversity to be studied on universal and particular levels of society, but it is also shown to be disturbing and difficult to process. For the researcher, it is necessary to consider theory and method and how to work with them in the research procedure. In this volume, to focus on specific aspects that are relevant for studying the socialisation of children, the debates are set aside in some essays while others stress that childhood is a stage of life which is acknowledged in the contemporary society (Mygland) and not a modern invention (Bobou).

Theory versus practice

Similarly, contradictive theories and methods have evolved in the study of socialisation with regard to the cognitive and physiological development of children. Among these are Piaget's sensorimotoric stages of development at different life stages (Piaget in Gruber & Vonéches 1995:456–463), and how children from an early age actively construct knowledge through hands-on experience of their bodies and the environment (Piaget & Inhelder 1969), or Vygotsky's focus on the fundamental role of culture in determining development as a process (Vygotsky in Wertsch 1985). Based on Piaget's model, Sigrid Samset Mygland's essay classifies types and distributions of shoes in order to locate children in the environment. In retrospect, she says:

"The shoe shop owners and shoemakers I was in contact with were, not surprisingly, reluctant to put definite limits as regards children's feet and shoe sizes. However, I found a book that dealt with all kinds of average features in relation to the sizes of children of different ages, including foot length. The different lengths were then converted into shoe sizes. It put far too much emphasis on certain percentages in terms of length to make allowances for changes in average

length between medieval times and the present day” (Mygland, personal communication, my translation).

Commenting on the essay, in examining the images of children and how children were depicted according to age, Olympia Bobou recollects how she chose criteria after consulting the internet <http://www.keep-kidshealthy.com/welcome/conditions/developmentaldelays.html>, and the general literature on infancy (Bremmer 1999), development of children (Cole & Cole 2001) and understanding children (Smith *et al.* 1998). She says:

“I noticed what was emphasized in sculpture (after looking at the statues for so long) and then checked some online sources and books to see what changes there were in children’s physiology according to age” (Bobou, pers. comm.).

Considerations of theory and method on how to search for and analyse the scientific evidence show that theory and practice may not always be the same thing. The theoretical models are based on the observations of modern children, and the search methods differ in the options that appear. In reflecting on the procedures, researchers consent to the use of experience (their own and others) and to improvisation in order to refine their methods. The bodies of children are observed objectively from an outside position in the present day; from the perspective of adult constructions of the world of children. This position allows us to discuss similarity and difference in the cognitive, physical and social development of modern and ancient children. It is often the standpoint where we start from scratch deductively or inductively in our research. We may ask questions and select appropriate theories and methods to answer them, and then we proceed by describing, analysing, synthesising and explaining the evidence. Or we may choose the other way and work “bottom up”, moving from specific observations to broader generalisations and theories, but sometimes this may also lead us astray.

Mediators between worlds

At this point in the discourse, it seems necessary to reconsider Margaret Mead’s discussion on the development of interlocking sets of conceptual frames for the study of human universals, such as childhood and children. According to Mead (1963:187), it is important to reaffirm the difference between the study of enculturation and the study of socialisation: on the one hand the process of learning a culture in all its uniqueness and particularity, and on the other the set

of species-wide requirements and exactions made on human beings by human societies.

In her book on the culture of infancy in West Africa, Alma Gottlieb (2004:217–218, 299–303) writes about hungry babies, poverty and foster children among the Beng, and how children are sent to live with others. Kinship arrangements provide a variety of options for orphaned children, and some are more congenial, nutritious and safe than others. Young children are often sent to live with others, usually relatives, in a town or city. This is sometimes meant to benefit the child, sometimes the relatives. The system has certain similarities with Western systems of foster care, but there are critical differences. Generally in the West, the child is orphaned or the victim of extreme abuse and neglect due to a specific crisis in the family. Among the Beng, parents decide to send their child away to be raised by a relative or a friend for the sake of convenience, training, or improvement in their life situation.

Despite differences in the social systems between the African Beng and Western societies, the care of children is conditioned by crisis or convenience. Children are objectified to accommodate adults. It seems relevant to ask in particular about the arrangements of fostering, and in general whether children are mediators between worlds or not. In common terms, mediation is a practice under which, in a conflict, *the services of a third party* are utilised to reduce the differences or to seek a solution” (NEB 1973–1974:745, the italics are mine). Mediation is a field related to agency where machinery and machinations are associated with procedures for solving crises and conflicts in various areas and on different levels of society. It is an endeavour carried out by adults and consequently a product of the adult world. To think constructively about children of the past as mediators – individuals of their own intensions and inflections – we are less inclined to perceive them as the opposite; the victimised objects of crises, conflicts and convenience. The conditions of foster children represent alternatives to historical or cross-cultural narrations of the socialisation of children. On the general level, to point at variations and flexibility in the social position and affiliation of children, and in particular to children as the third party of referees giving services to someone or somebody, or going between worlds.

The socialisation of children

To focus on the appearances of children in the world in general as concrete and actual entities (Sokolowsky

2000:44), in the following sections I will examine these essays to clarify questions and emphasise points of inference about the socialisation of children. A review of the essays reveals that they deal mainly with biological, social, religious and cultural aspects of childhood, and draw connections between these and research approaches commonly associated with children such as agency, liminality and alterity (Rapport & Overing 2000:29–32). A reconsideration of the term “child” (Lillehammer, in press) indicates that it exceeds biological and social categories; as agency connected with nature and culture, as liminal between nature and culture, and as alterity with nature. When the body of a child is referred not to chronological age, but to ontogeny and the origin and development of an individual organism from embryo to adult, its existence may indicate something between a human or animal placed somewhere in the environment.

Childhood and agency – learning and play of children

Agency is a term closely related to power, as seen in the relationship between individuals and social structure (Rapport & Overing 2000:1). It refers to acts done intentionally, as planning agency can be used to produce different outcomes (Bandura 2001:6); i.e. the capacity of an agent – an individual – to act independently in a world and to make free choices and decisions, and to engage with the social structure which seems to limit or influence the opportunities individuals have in society (Bandura 2001). However, does direct reinforcement cover all types of learning? Children can learn new information and behaviour by watching, being instructed by or modelling others. However, children are not merely great pretenders. Adding the social element of play, they are also great modifiers. Children transform sticks into houses, mud into food, and themselves into mothers and fathers (Schwartzman 1978:1). Therefore, we may perceive children as being independent and not always acting restrictedly; the subordinated being dependent on subculture, ethnicity, religion, social class, gender, etc.

In examining agency in relation to learning and play of children from the social structure and individual level in society, the essays analyse how external environmental reinforcement and mental states influence learning, and whether learning may lead to a change of social behaviour or not. An important question on the general level of inquiry is the material surroundings, and granted they have access to places and activities, their influence on the gendering of children

and youths. Annika Backe-Dahmen’s essay works on the hypothesis that a high degree of socialisation in Ancient Greece enhanced the prestige of a child and had ramifications for the reputations of parents and family. Olympia Bobou’s essay draws on the depictions of children in Ancient Greece represented at public locations and visited by children to investigate age and gender behaviour and norms of conduct in society. Else Johansen Kleppe’s essay argues that gender gains substance in practice through materiality. A gender perspective contributes to insight into the spatial use of landscape and the Sámi dealing with material cultural objects in the upbringing of children.

To explain and postulate the process of learning by doing to be something healthy and pleasurable, how far can we possibly reach the mental states of children by examining material culture, objects or individuals through the senses of their bodies? The essay of Anna Kjellström, Bengt Nordquest, Annika Snäll and Stig Welinder represents a new sub-discipline: *the archaeology of senses*. Contrasting the imprints on chewing gum made by modern children with those on resin lumps made by ancient children in the Stone Age, different reasons for chewing – labour and/or pleasure – appear to embody their skills and tasks. What triggers initiatives to learn and play, and what activities reward feelings of pleasure, pride, satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment or the opposite, of frustration, dissatisfaction and despair? The essays of Sigrid Alræk Dugstad and Lotte Eigeland consider the essential biological and social phenomena of cultural transmission and change in society, and of identifying the presence of children from the evidence of “otherness” in the material evidence. Eigeland’s essay seeks to modify old ideas about children as contributors to technological change. Dugstad’s essay argues for the presence of children as producers of technological traditions partaking in the life at settlements in the Stone Age. Social access to different worlds in the presence (or absence) of children in a medieval town is examined in Sigrid Samset Mygland’s essay. Whether children entered the town as servants or as part of the general workforce participating in adult work, it argues for child’s play to be related to role-playing and to reflect subversive feelings experienced from the social context and historical circumstance of war and conflicts. Povilas Blaževičius’ essay looks at the material culture of games and play as a tool of cognition and recreation, pleasure and amusement in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern periods. It offers a classification system to identify, classify and compare types of child’s toys

manufactured locally and suggests that some objects are based on imported models.

Childhood and liminality – becoming people in the environment

According to van Gennep (1960[1909]), Turner (1967), Leach (1976) and others, liminality is defined as a period of transition in time, space and structure between two states with reference to people, places and things. The liminal state is an ambiguous, open, unstable and indeterminate situation in being transitory or on the “threshold” between two different stages. Normal limits to thought, self-understanding and behaviour are relaxed or ignored, and may lead to transformation or to some change of perspective. People, places or things may not achieve complete transition, or the transition between two states may not be fully possible, and those remaining in the liminal state may become permanently liminal. In formalised, institutional ritual, especially *rites de passage*, the transition involves some change to the participants, such as in their social status. The liminal place or thing is marginal, sacred, alluring and dangerous. To people, a social structure of community spirit and a feeling of social equality, solidarity and togetherness is formed, as seen during religious events such as carnivals, festivals, pilgrimages and processions (cf. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liminality>).

Beryl Rawson’s essay draws on the transition between childhood and adulthood, in particular to argue that it operates differently in large, urbanised societies than in societies organised in smaller groups of tightly knit rural communities. Parallel to Backe-Dahmen’s and Bobou’s essays on agency in Ancient Greece, its focus is on Ancient Rome and children and their association with public life and welfare as participants in, or observers of celebrations, rituals and entertainment. In examining northern rural Iron Age communities, Niall John Oma Armstrong’s essay offers an alternative interpretation and gender perspective to the centralised lay-out of courtyard sites as segregated arenas for transformational rituals from childhood and manhood, and to youth and age-set institutions as the producers of monumental material culture. The centralised, rural Inca state forms the background for Constanza Ceruti’s essay on the religious role of children. They were sacrificed to mark a ruler’s passing into the afterlife, and later worshipped at traditional festivals and pilgrimages. The essay investigates various aspects of the perceptions of liminal children in the alteration of perspective on a long-dimensional timescale.

Childhood and alterity – caring for children

The post-modern critique of “isms” of modernity has accentuated a general acceptance of the notion of “otherness” as a perspective in which to question authority and objectivity of scientific discourse and the concept and treatment of the alien objectified other. In all systems of alterity there is an interplay of the principles of inclusivity and exclusion which provide the rules and norms for interaction playing on the boundaries designated to create otherness (Rapport & Overing 2000:9, 12).

In 1921–22, the Norwegian explorer, scientist and diplomat, Fridtjof Nansen, as the League of Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, attempted to tackle the huge famine in the Soviet Union. Against the background of fundraising in England at the initiative of the Save the Children Fund (SCF), the forerunner of UNICEF, Heather Montgomery’s essay draws attention to victimised children in need, and why, after the First World War, the SCF was a groundbreaker for the protection of children, and why re-socialisation of British adults became an important issue of modernity. As a result of the Second World War and afterwards, and with regard to the protection of the world’s children, the keynote speaker at the Stavanger conference, Karin Holmgrunn Sham Poo, sheds light on the background and development of UNICEF’s history. We are asked to participate on a journey of historic contradictions and change of perspective on a global scale, from looking after the conditions of children in modernised societies in developed countries to becoming a vehicle in the modernising processes of traditional societies in developing countries of the world.

Final remarks for future research

As researchers, we may acknowledge the perspectives of childhood and children as representing complicated approaches to the past. It has been recognised as being problematic to reach the experiences of children in the present as well (Freeman & Mathison 2009). Structural similarity and difference exist in the character of socialisation between the experiences of children as “human beings” (Qvortrup 1994:4) and the adult perceptions of children as “human becomings” (Qvortrup 1994:4). On the general level of understanding and explanation of socialisation at this stage of research, the nearest we can reach is to consider and reconsider the theoretical and methodological frameworks that influence the study of formative relationships between

worlds – between the worlds of children and adults. In recognising the presence of children in the scientific evidence of textual and material sources to represent conditions, contexts and circumstances of childhood, many new doors open for future research on socialisation.

- Approaches to childhood and agency: aspects of learning and play intertwine in the social arenas between children and adults

When studying the diffused and hybridised areas between children and adults, it is a challenge to keep the one from the other, and sometimes, also, to identify into which adult processes and spaces children were allowed access, or seen from the opposite perspective, which spaces of otherness in the geographies of children in and apart from adults can be fully recognised. For the sake of learning, children engender and develop skills *at the hands* of the adults who linger in the background. It appears to be important to question the social interplay between children and adults: how tensions between biological and social potentials and limitations influence the faculty and function of children, and their ability to perform and have access to (or be absent from) spaces and places in the environment.

On the one hand, there are the structures of learning and play between children, genders and generations, and the various perceptions and attitudes in the social construction of childhood, and children to follow suit with adults. What institutionally formalised constructions in the worlds of adults lead to the treatment of children as a decor and/or a labour force for their parents and carers at various stages of childhood? On the other hand, there is the individual learning and playing; the amused child, the dutiful child, the religious child, the war-stricken child, the mischievous child, or the revolutionary child. Despite the illusive nature of toys (Rogersdotter 2008), and the toys made by children themselves to reflect their own views and interest (Wileman 2005), to explore the transformative qualities of child's play is indeed a matter of facing up to the challenges. On the structural and individual levels of agency, and observed from the contradictory perspective of normality or otherness of children as active agents, approaches to social constructions of the worlds of children in modelling or breaking the boundaries of adult expectations of the behavioural norms and values of childhood are shown to be constructive in the study of socialisation.

- Approaches to childhood and liminality: access to arenas of liminality give entry to esoteric knowledge and understanding of both sides

Children are participants of liminal processes or experience transitions themselves or observe events at public places. Their social identity is shown to be actively or passively constructed in common or separate places in the environment. Sacred or marginal, alluring or dangerous to children in particular, the arenas are not the separated places of children's geographies represented in their constructions of their own worlds. In a life and death perspective, children are *in the hands* of adults and are the objects of adult expectation and public concern. In the engendering processes of socialisation, they become urban citizens or warriors in life, or messengers or intercessors in death, and accommodate the social, economic, religious and political circumstances and needs in society. Recognising and examining the various arenas of liminality assigned to children at various stages during their early life may greatly enhance our understanding and explanation of their biological, social and cultural identity and roles in past societies.

- Approaches to childhood and alterity: attitudes of otherness towards children in the recent past lent perspectives to the treatment of children in the ancient past

Concerning the recognition and consideration of the "otherness" of childhood (Firestone 1970) and of the new in terms of birth and behaviour, and achievement in society (Lillehammer 2000:19), close relationships exist between acceptance and rejection, support and ignorance of children from the states of embryo, newborn, infant, juvenile and adolescent in the past as well as in the present (Mejsholm 2009). Rather than being treated as an enemy of expulsion and death, the impact of war and conflict help to influence adult views on children and childhood. In the life world of children in need of organisation and support for survival, the recent history of childhood conveys knowledge and understanding of the dynamic interplay between normality and otherness in the traditional or innovative ways of perceiving and dealing with children on the structural and individual levels of socialisation, but conditioned by what practices? On both levels of inquiry and areas in between, it seems important to respond to this central question.

Conclusion

Inquiring into socialisation appears to be rewarding for future research on childhood and children in the past. Children as mediators between worlds highlight them actively as imitators, moderators and modulators in the world. To extend this research, it has to approach the socialisation of children among their own peers. An essential question from the perspective of social interplay is to discuss the hybrid space between children and adults, and whether or not the frame “children” and “adult” relationship imposes bi-polar, hierarchical and developmental models which reproduce and enforce hegemony of adult-centred discourse within the production of knowledge of the children’s perspectives in the past. By making universal references without the use of appropriate theoretical and methodological frameworks, generalisations may lead to misleading conclusions about the social processes of childhood and the contribution of children to biological, social and cultural continuity and change.

However much the past is made up of special cases and these have to be reflected in the theories and methods of disciplinary variations, the self-evident prospect for future research is to proceed by inquiring into these relationships. Annika Backe Dahmen suggests that the literary sources should be tested against the archaeological evidence, which, in a working relationship, is itself an invitation to carry out new interdisciplinary projects. To continue the good work of exploring both multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary potentialities, we need to extend the knowledge and understanding of socialisation gained from systematically studying childhood and children in the past.

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