

Introduction

The Perspective and Interdisciplinarity of Children and Childhood Studies

The *SAGE Encyclopedia of Children and Childhood Studies* represents but one moment of instantiation of a field which has fought for its identity and legitimacy over the last four decades. It is a field that continues to burgeon with the establishment of numerous academic journals, university-level departments and degree programs, research centers, and scores of conferences, colloquia, and seminars of all description. Fueled in large part by the passage of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989, studies of children and childhood have gained significant footing in areas beyond psychology and education as the focus of research and inquiry turned to exploring the social, legal, cultural, and political lives and contexts of children existing in diverse circumstances. Historians, anthropologists, sociologists, and feminists proved central to the emergence of what came to be known as the “new studies of childhood” largely by challenging accepted conceptions of childhood as a linear sequence of developmental stages or of social growth, whereby children’s behavior progressively evolves from simplicity to complexity, from irrationality to rationality.

In place of this view, childhood studies enunciates a standpoint that takes children to be active subjects who engage in the creation and interpretation of their own lives in various ways; it encourages the understanding that childhood itself is something socially, historically, and situationally constituted, instead of primarily biologically given and universal. The *child*, so conceptualized, never stands still—culturally, ontologically, or politically—but is to be problematized and re-problematized with each new insight and each novel approach brought forth. More than anything else, childhood studies offers a lens—a way of knowing—rather

than factual knowledge alone, and it is this angle of vision that constitutes the particular, definitive contribution of this field-in-the-making. Such a stance toward one’s subject matter and field demands that scholars and practitioners, as well as agencies and governments, account for and consider the place of children in their schemes and practices and to account for them as necessary and constitutive, rather than contingent and epiphenomenal. In the process, those engaging in children and childhood studies continue to embark upon significant interventions in theory and method, which are made possible when children and childhood are positioned at the center of consideration.

Central to this posture toward children and childhood is a belief that knowledge cannot be contained within a disciplinary boundary. Engaging in childhood studies thereby necessarily entails the pursuit of interdisciplinary investigation and transdisciplinary thinking. Researchers and practitioners hail from many fields and apply their studies widely—for instance, from applied health professions to those concerned with social justice, from communications and media perspectives to literary theory and archaeology, from psychology to postcolonial studies. Many scholars and practitioners work at the intersection of law, politics, and advocacy in studies of transnational migration; others seek to comprehend and make visible the changing practices and understandings of children’s domestic labor, education, and caretaking. As well, the ways in which children are implicated in religious institutions and practices, alongside the ways they come to know and understand religious experience and concepts, presents yet another of dimension of the field represented in this encyclopedia.

To be sure, issues and identities regarding gender, ethnicity, race, social-economic class, geographies, sexualities, abilities/disabilities, among others, inform these studies in complicated and provocative ways. To that end, the reader will find robust clusters of entries which address, for instance, issues of gender, gender expression, transgender and queer childhoods as well as informative treatments related to children and adults with disabilities, the variety of digital media, the material cultures of childhood, and the multiply articulated aspects of children's rights.

Yet, as many have learned over these decades of field building, interdisciplinarity does not arrive ready-made as a simple admixture or cocktail of desirable views and concepts. Disparate concepts and positions from varied conceptual quarters do not often find easy fit with one another, even when many expend sincere effort to make a space that is inviting to a wide swath of perspectives and traditions. On top of it, institutional myopia, professional defensiveness, and a lingering, generalized sense that issues of children and childhood remain secondary to the important concerns of society—despite significant lip service and ideological bluster to the contrary—these, combined, make for significant headwinds against which to struggle.

The *SAGE Encyclopedia of Children and Childhood Studies* arose as an effort to provide a space for these many views, traditions, and perspectives to gather and be made available to a wide audience. The project embraces the differences in approaches and emphases represented in the many entries, refusing to avoid the difficulties and discomfort of multidisciplinary engagement. For the strength and lure of childhood studies resides in these struggles and will never be absent from them.

Using the Encyclopedia

Cognizant of the many strands and tensions of the field, we did not seek to enforce a particular ideological conception or insist upon a singular disciplinary vocabulary. Authors were invited to write from their own knowledge base so as to help continue to nourish a field and community of practice. The contributing authors worked hard to strike a balance between intellectual honesty, quality, and a readable text suitable for a reference work. We

hope the reader will be delighted by the depth and breadth of the kinds of materials that have been included and by the varied writing styles herein.

The *SAGE Encyclopedia of Children and Childhood Studies* is comprised of over 1 million words in approximately 600 entries, written by hundreds of contributors from several dozen countries. Given the nature of a reference work, there necessarily will be some redundancy between entries, but such a publication is not intended to be read fully from front to back. Understanding that interdisciplinarity does not reside in any one entry or in any one text, the idea is that the reader comes to the encyclopedia with nagging problems or driving questions which spur investigations into the various, interrelated, articles and topic areas. The interdiscipline, in this way, can be found in the dynamism of the relations between the entries and the problems and questions the authors pursue and the reader brings.

The interlocking Cross-References and the listing of Further Readings provided for each entry are intended to make each entry a steppingstone to other investigations. We sought to compose the entries with the idea that they could serve as perhaps a classroom reading on a subject—not as an end point but as a point of departure. To that end, the encyclopedia is accompanied by a Reader's Guide of themes to help chaperon users through various topics and issues:

- Age Identities/Age Positions
- Areas of Study/Fields of Interest
- Children's Rights
- Education
- Environments and Geographies
- Family and Childrearing
- Histories
- Institutions and Organizations
- Key Thinkers and Cultural Figures
- Measurements
- Media
- Medical Discourses and Practices
- Movements
- Objects and Material Culture
- Practices
- Religions
- Representations
- Research Methodologies
- Social Issues and Controversies
- Theories and Concepts

Conclusion

The work of scholarship can entail many efforts—reading, writing, teaching, disseminating. It also involves gathering and gleaning ideas, perspectives, and approaches into a large catchment in order to sort, arrange, and present to others. In many ways, the work of editing an encyclopedia is like that of gathering and gleaning. Care must be taken to collect the meticulously arranged thoughts and formulations of others which have unfolded over time and strive to re-present them in a somewhat new and simple form so that larger ideas and perspectives become accessible to many. One lesson to be taken away is that no matter how many words or how many entries one is given, “full” coverage is impossible because the phenomenon to be covered and addressed continues to expand and transform with every word written about it. My hope is that this project does not simply ossify into a momentary culmination of knowledge but will serve as a pivot point that inspires new angles of vision and ways of thinking.

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*Daniel Thomas Cook
Rutgers University–Camden, NJ, USA*