

## **CHILDREN’S RIGHTS AND CHILDHOOD STUDIES AS A CHALLENGE AND A DRIVER OF SOCIAL CHANGE**

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper contains an introduction to a selection of papers across social sciences and humanities, based on empirical explorations and theoretical conceptualizations. Authors highlight the issues of parental roles, parental styles, child and family positioning in the family and society. The lens of children’s rights and participatory approaches is also discussed. Authors focus on diverse practices in parenting, different approaches to children’s agency and freedom of choice, family as a negotiated space mediated by culture, children’s position in family and society, life chances and wellbeing, critical approaches to children’s rights perspectives, early intervention, socio-political context, finally Freire’s and Korczak’s pedagogies.

**KEYWORDS:** social pedagogy, education, socialization, participatory research, childhood

**T**his collection of papers dedicated to children’s rights, childhood studies and the use of children’s rights pedagogical lenses, creates a special space to explore both nature and culture, and their interplay with the ideals of childcare, children’s wellbeing and children’s upbringing. At the same time, it draws attention to new topics and approaches to research in contemporary interdisciplinary social studies, in which a key

role is played by childhood and children's rights together with early childhood studies. We started working on the collection of papers prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and whilst the situation remains serious in many parts of the world, the contributors and reviewers have made tremendous efforts to prepare the issue in good time. We are very grateful to them and inspired by their commitment to the cause.

Early childhood is of paramount importance for a child's development and later success in life, yet parents often do not have the knowledge and support to be the best parents for their children at this critical stage. Tired, exhausted and confused, anxious about their changing roles and changing obligations, parents may miss out on the positive aspects of parenthood and at the same time unknowingly affect their children in a negative way. Every developmental stage brings new challenges and questions for parents that often remain unanswered or inadequately addressed by pseudo-experts and heresy. This is an area for social pedagogues, social workers, psychologists, medical professionals and social politicians to explore and clarify. The effects of natural and cultural pressures give us an interesting opportunity to reflect on the roots of traditions and praxis of childcare, and parental practices observed in different cultures in different parts of the world and in different epochs (c.f. Bernheim 1989). There are so many areas that researchers can explore, starting with Korczak's innocent novel *Bobo* from 1914 (Odrowaz-Coates & Vucic 2019), followed by Buber's (1984) concepts of dialogical thinking, Freeman's (1992) ideological underpinning of child socialization, Gest et al. (1999) and on early intervention and the changing patterns of fatherhood worldwide (Hofner et al. 2011). These issues pertain to formal and informal socialization and also to educational systems. Baranowski (2020) brings attention to changes in education post the neoliberal turn through the introduction of the 'worthless education' idea to highlight the consequences of the ongoing educational transformations that underpin all levels of societies and have an impact on children's upbringing.

In a world built on distinctions: us and the other, a child and an adult, rights and duties, this volume is also a path to togetherness and overcoming the discourses of 'othering' (Odrowaz-Coates 2015, 2018) and an opportunity to look at written and unwritten children's rights (Markowska-Manista 2017). We oppose the practices of coercion in children's upbringing and advocate for participatory models of working and being with children and young people (Percy-Smith & Thomas 2009). The papers explore not only the issues highlighted above, but also the research praxis in the field of childhood studies. Markowska-Manista (2018) asks: "whose participation?" when considering participatory research with children and youths. This approach seems particularly necessary today, in fact it is indispensable in researching children and matters that concern them, as well as their activism (Torres-Harding et al. 2018; Budde, Markowska-Manista 2020) and was postulated by Judith Ennew in her research and activities with children. As Ennew stressed, children, like adults, have the right to be properly researched (Ennew, Plateau 2005). Participatory research and praxis enable a broader insight into children's situations and their activism, while impelling us to reflect on changes in approaches to research conducted with children, on childhood and children's rights (Markowska-Manista 2020: 9). Much has changed in the recent

decade, both in theory and practice of children's and youth's participation, both in a local and global dimension. Today, 'adultist' or 'tokenist' approaches to research and praxis concerning children, the largest minority of the world, seem misplaced. The world in an era of pandemic, forces us to look at children's right to participation (Collins et al. 2021). It obligates us to consider participation within important transformative praxis, praxis that decolonises stereotypical approaches and opens adults' eyes to new challenges.

In this collection of papers, the authors explore a range of topics. The paper by Dr Offiong and Uduigwomen, dedicated to socio-cultural values in Calabar, contains analysis of the history and value system that was associated with child upbringing in Nigeria. Communalism, as the authors demonstrate, ensured child socialization from birth, and was considered a common practise in the African context until European colonialization and the eventual introduction of capitalism, which, in the authors' view, contributed to the negative impact on overall children's rights in Nigeria. Magdalena Roszak writes about the phenomenon of parental alienation based on the netnographic study of parental conflict, whilst Megan MacCormac and Katherine MacCormac explore the issues of language policy for children with a migrant background in Canada. The MacCormac article is based on an in-depth empirical study and is embedded in a children's rights perspective. The contribution of the Sudanese researcher, Dr Nagmeldin Kraramalla-Gaiballa focuses on solutions to violence against children in the context of FGM, underage marriage, trafficking and laws that violate the dignity of Sudanese children, allowing for punishments such as flogging, imprisonment and death. Dr Turczyk writes about the child's right to a family and the participatory character of human development using an overview of local and international policy documents. A contributor from Turkey, Dr Seran Demiral, focusses on children's rights to protection, provision and participation. The author introduces a fourth area to add to the discussion, the area of children's power and merges it in Korczak's children's journal context. Furthermore, the empirical study of narratives from sex workers follows. Their experiences are linked to the socialization processes in childhood. Dr Gardian-Małkowska reveals issues of male prostitution and the motivation of clients, viewed through the sex workers' eyes. Moreover, the issue contains two contributions from early-stage researchers. In the first one, Sandra Kwaśniewska-Paszta focuses on evoking empathy in children from an early age. This is followed by Joanna Pawłowska, who writes about gender stereotypes in popular fairy tales. The issue closes with the book review by Professor Mark Bernheim. The reviewed book is dedicated to the unknown history of Jewish-Finnish paradoxes of identity conflict and survival during the World War II and was recently translated into English and published in the US.

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