

Notification and Call for Papers

International workshop

Which discipline do children belong to? Crossroads in research on childhood

Organized by
Group “Sciences of childhood, sciences’ children”
<http://jediscenf2013.sciencesconf.org>

Venue and dates :
École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales,
Salle Lombard - 96, bd. Raspail
75006 Paris-France
23-24 May, 2013

This two-day workshop aims to engage contributors in a reflexive and critical debate concerning the constitution of children and childhood as a full-fledged topic within the domain of social sciences. We are especially interested in examining the historical processes through which children have been inscribed within specific disciplines. We also aim to question what appear to be new, non-or pluri-disciplinary approaches to research on childhood.

Although children and childhood have continuously played a role in social sciences, the extent and ways in which they have been considered vary significantly between disciplines. Psychologists, psychoanalysts and educational specialists were the first to engage with children. Still today, they exercise a significant influence on the way the topic is dealt with. In recent decades, an increasing number of disciplines, including anthropology, history, sociology and, more recently, political sciences and geography, have progressively come to claim the legitimacy of their specific approach to studying children.

On the one hand, these disciplines have fully demonstrated their ability to appropriate the subject of "childhood". On the other, the range of their approaches and theories, the way they problematize such an object, the diversity of their methods and results, call into question the unity, as well as the validity of such an object. One cannot help but wonder whether childhood is actually “good to think”. Are the children studied by developmental psychologists in labs under controlled conditions, the same as the children studied by anthropologists in their everyday settings? Are the approaches consisting in demonstrating that “children” and “childhood” are social constructs, proposed in various ways by anthropologists, sociologists and historians, commensurable with the equally vigorous movement advocating for the development of a research with children, where they are considered as legitimate interlocutors with equal rights?

Although no single approach can claim to render the full complexity of such a multifaceted

object, one can observe a general trend towards constructing childhood as a field of study of its own. This very process takes different forms. For instance, sub-disciplinary divisions specialized in children and/or childhood have emerged in anthropology, sociology and history. In other cases, social scientists work together creating a non-disciplinary field (for example “Childhood Studies”) or hybrid disciplines (such as intercultural psychology or cognitive anthropology). Other forms include the gathering of specialists from different backgrounds in workshops or the creation of thematic series.

The increasing trend towards an all-reaching, non-disciplinary or pluri-disciplinary framework goes far beyond the specific case of childhood.

The question arises as to what is at stake in this reshuffling of former academic organisations. What was the meaning behind former scientific divisions? Are the interests of researchers who gather around a topic, rather than within a discipline, the same? What is the significance of such organizations, from a scientific, institutional, ideological, or practical point of view, on the knowledge they produce?

In the case of children and childhood, at least in English-speaking countries, there is an obvious will to put forward the recognition and the defense of their rights as a specific group of people. In this regard, childhood studies are somewhat similar to disability-, queer-, gender-, feminist- and other subaltern studies. Nevertheless, a key difference lies in the fact that, in the case of children, it is a desire to give recognition, rather than a wish for recognition originating from the children themselves. Amongst the reasons for which this research topic plays a prominent part in what was formerly decided along disciplinary lines, one might see the growing importance of action research and the demand for practical results of enquiry.

Which disciplines do children belong to? How have children been dealt with by the disciplines which have taken interest in them? How have these disciplines themselves been transformed by the study of children and childhood? Why has this “object”, of late, seemed to call either for an interdisciplinary collaboration, or for a dissolution of disciplinary boundaries? In which way can the research process be affected by these redefinitions when they take place? In short, how do children circulate within, cross over and move away from such disciplinary lines?

In order to answer these questions, a critical, historiographical and epistemic reflection on the object “children/childhood” is necessary. Respondents are hence invited to produce contributions following these non-mutually excluding areas of investigation:

- Notwithstanding the specificities of national and historical contexts, **we assume that research on children borrows a lot, explicitly or not, from other « related » disciplines** (Anthropology, for example, has often drawn theoretical inspiration from both developmental psychology and psychoanalysis).

Contributors are thus invited to: critically re-evaluate their scientific production on children, with regards to their personal, social and academic background; rethink the modalities of their research object’s disciplinary inscription; and bring “forth” dialogues with, influences of, and the borrowings from other disciplines or approaches.

Researchers, who have experienced disciplinary “conversions”, and/or multidisciplinary formations, are also encouraged to explain in which ways their research approach on children and childhood has been affected (or enriched) by these trajectories.

- Research and teaching practices regarding children and childhood can involve **actual collaborations** between academics coming from different disciplinary contexts. Contributors who have taken part in such initiatives are invited to present them, focusing on both the obstacles and the advantages they may have encountered. In the end, how did their research benefit from these experiences, for example in terms of knowledge production or of constructive synergy?

- The **Institutional and disciplinary evolutions of research on childhood can also be questioned from a critical and historical point of view**. Here we are referring to the constitution of childhood as:

- a) a specific and legitimate domain of research within a discipline,
- b) an object of research in and for itself (and no longer an object of research within a discipline),
- c) an object with multiple dimensions (culture and cognition, for example), leading to disciplinary hybridizations.

What do these evolutions reveal? Which transformative impact do they have on the research object? How do they fit into the history of social and human sciences, as well as into the object “children/childhood” and its transformations? What led to these disciplinary/institutional mutations? Who are the actors of such processes? What are their agendas? Is an evaluation of their results possible?

Contributors (whether as witnesses, participants, or analysts) are invited to share their reflections on the processes above described, their success, setbacks and, more largely, the theoretical redefinitions and practical implications for research which underlie them.

We invite proposals from various scholarly disciplines (including anthropology, history, sociology, law, psychology, education, cognitive sciences, etc.), as well as representatives of organizations working specifically with issues surrounding youth and childhood.

Please submit 500 to 600 words abstracts in English or French for proposed papers **by 15th January 2013** on the website <http://jediscenf2013.sciencesconf.org>. Notification of acceptance of paper will be sent by the end of February. Feel free to contact the organization committee for any information at sciencenfance@gmail.com.

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