Reflections on negotiated and constrained interdependencies within and across generations
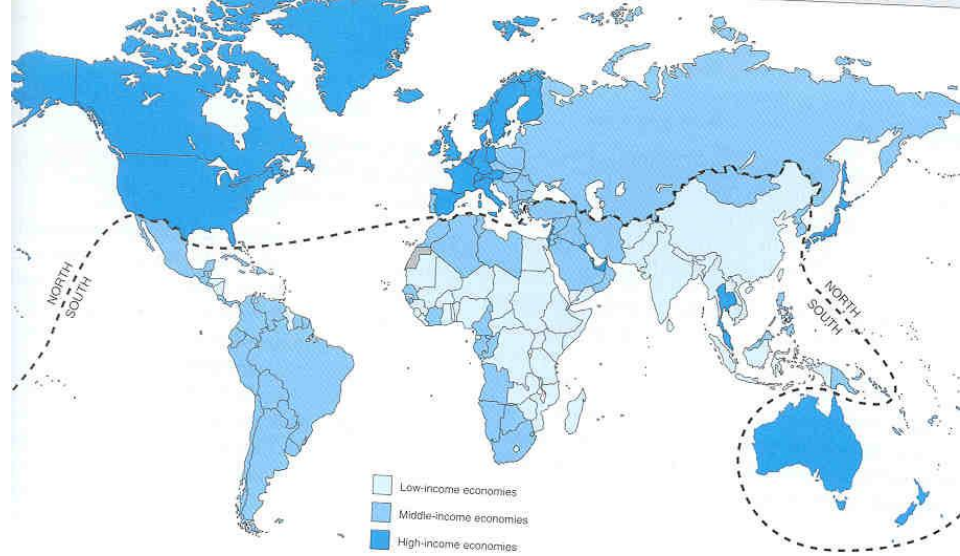
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Majority World:

– Asia, Africa and Latin America

Minority World:

– UK, Europe, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, US, Canada

Learning Across Majority & Minority Worlds

- Drawing on literature from both contexts

    - *Children and Young People's Relationships* (Punch & Tisdall 2013)

    - *Global Perspectives on Rural Childhood & Youth (*Panelli et al.2007)

- Katz's work in the US and Sudan

    - revealing the "unexpected connections among disparate places" (2004, p. xiv)

    - rare comparison of changing childhoods

- Cross-learning opportunities still relatively rare

    - Jeffrey and Dyson (2008): *Telling Young Lives*

    - Chawla (2002) *Growing Up in an Urbanising World*

    More inter-disciplinary, cross-world dialogue bridging the divide between academia and practice (Punch 2016)

'New' sociology of childhood (Prout and James, 1990)	Consolidated in academic discourse, policy and practice in the UK by 2012?
Childhood as a social construction	Fully embraced within academic discourse but not always in policy
Childhood - variable of social analysis	**Widely accepted within childhood studies but remains on the margins of mainstream disciplines (Sociology/Geography/Development)**
Children's social relationships and cultures are worthy of study in their own right	Yes - wealth of empirical studies and conferences; specialist journals; degrees programmes
Children as social actors	Academically this is fully recognised but do we need a **clearer definition and theorisation** of the concept of children's agency? Why is there still a **gap between theory & policy/practice?**
Ethnography - a particularly useful methodology	Just one of many approaches: innovative and traditional methods, participatory approaches
A new paradigm of childhood is also part of reconstructing childhood in society	Many developments in policy and practice but complexities in relation to operationalising children's rights and recognising children as active agents

Tisdall, K. and Punch, S. (2012) 'Not so 'new'? Looking Critically at Childhood Studies', *Children's Geographies,* 10(3): 249-264.

The Generational Order

- Alanen and Mayall (2001)
  - 'generationing' as a structural feature of child-adult interactions
  - 'childing' and 'adulting' practices

- Less developed theoretically than the gender order?
  - Gender mainstreamed into development but age is still marginalised
  - Multi-disciplinarity of childhood studies (Alanen 2012)

Pervasiveness of children's agency

- To counteract past models of child development and socialization

- To emphasise that not passive/victims, eg:
  - child soldiers (Rosen 2007)
  - child prostitutes (Montgomery 2009)
  - street children (Hecht 1998)

- "*A much used but largely unexamined concept*" (Mizen and Ofusu-Kusi 2013: 363)

Defining children's agency

- Vague and lack of clarity:
  - "*ability to act creatively and to make things happen*" (James 2009: 42)

  - "*ability 'to choose to do things'*"

    (Mizen and Ofusu-Kusi 2013: 363)

  - '*children's capacity to do*' (Oswell 2013: 3)

  - exercising agency or power?

"*capacities, competencies and activities through which they navigate the contexts and positions of their lifeworlds*" (Robson et al. 2007: 135)

- Cf. power, participation, autonomy, independence, interdependence?

Questioning agency

What is less clear is the degree of agency, the impact of that agency, let alone the nature of that agency (Bluebond-Langner & Korbin 2007: 242)

Children and young people's agency should certainly be a contested and scrutinised concept rather than one which is taken-for-granted, unproblematised or assumed inherently to be positive and desired by all children and young people. (Tisdall & Punch 2012: 256)

Cf. Adult imposed structure: not always negative (Benwell 2013)

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What happens to vulnerability?

(Bluebond-Langner and Korbin 2007)

- Polarised: adults only see vulnerability (Payne 2012; Pells 2012) or inappropriate agency?

- Vulnerability as driving agency rather than as denying children's capacity to act (Mizen and Ofusu-Kusi 2013)

- Ambiguous agency?
  - Appropriate, moral, responsible (Bordonaro and Payne 2012)

  Do we overlook those who do not have the capacity to act? (Holt 2011)

Problematising Agency

- Not polarised as active or passive

  – "*a simple binary, having or not having agency, capacity and power*" (Oswell 2013: 269)

- Continuum of agency (Robson et al. 2007)

  – varies depending on opportunistic and constrained contexts, created and expected identities, positions of power/lessness, lifecourse stage, and state of emotions and wellbeing

Majority World contexts

- Thicker / thinner (Klocker 2007: 85)

  – "'*thin' agency refers to decisions and everyday actions that are carried out within highly restrictive contexts, characterized by few viable alternatives. 'Thick' agency is having the latitude to act within a broad range of options*."

- Tactical agency (Honwana 2005:49)

  – "*… cope with the concrete and immediate conditions of their lives … Their actions, however, come from a position of weakness.*"

Relationality

- More relational

  - White and Choudhury (2010): children's agency not autonomous, supported by adults

  - Collective agency rather than individualised

- Focus on relationships
(Hopkins and Pain 2007; Ribbens McCarthy et al. 2013; Jamieson and Milne 2012)

- Negotiated interdependencies
(Punch 2001a, 2015b)

Gap between academic discourse and policy/practice

- Discourses of vulnerability & victimhood vs agency & participation
  - Eg. Pells (2012) children in Rwanda

- Adults imposing moral judgements
  - Payne (2012) child-headed households in Zambia: who is at risk and from whose point of view?
    - Agency treated tokenistically in practice

Explaining the Gap

- Children's agency needs to be understood from adults' and children's perspectives

- Language of academic discourse of childhood studies is not accessible enough?

- Or not appropriate/relevant to apply to everyday practice? ('impact')

- Indicates problem of over-emphasising agency and not locating it within the generational order

Way forward?

[Not] … "*to see children's agency everywhere or to see it as a universal, unitary phenomon. It is the task of a sociology of children to document that capacity when observed, but also to recognise incapacity, abuse, power relationality, torture and exploitation. But the task also relies on a recognition of children's dependency*."

(Oswell 2013: 280)

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Needs qualifying in relation to the Generational Order:

Children's agency can be understood in relation to negotiated and constrained interdependencies within and across generations (Punch 2015a)

Emerging conceptual framework

- Children's agency in relation to work

  - Constraints in rural Bolivia:
    - poverty, subsistence economy, cultural views of child-adult relations and discipline

  - Strategies: coping, avoiding, negotiating
    - combining work, school and play (Punch 2001a)
    - child-adult and child-child relations

  - **Household interdependencies**:
    - enhanced bargaining power despite structural constraints
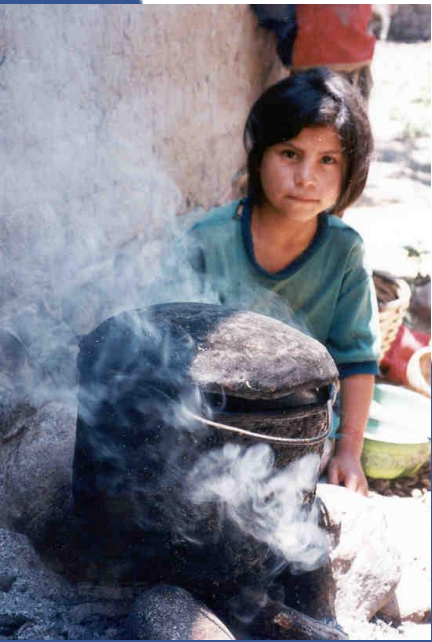
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Children's work, education & migration

- Opportunities may depend on birth order

- Majority World: relations of interdependence
  (Buhler-Niederberger and Schwittek 2013; Evans 2014)

  – strong sense of family responsibilities
    (Mills and Blossfeld 2005)

  – negotiated in practice

  - **Negotiated interdependencies** (Punch 2001a)

Negotiated and **constrained** interdependencies

"*a term which reflects how young people in the majority world are constrained by various structures and cultural expectations of family responsibilities, yet also assert their agency within such limitations as they balance both household and individual needs*" (Punch 2014: 35)

- Situated within structural context

- Penny Vera-Sanso: risk of overemphasising agency vs. limitations

Marianela

Negotiated and constrained interdependencies exist both **within and across the generations**

- Explicitly bringing in the generational order
  - Part of the structural context (Punch 2015a)

- Intergenerationality
  - Patterns of intergenerational change (Vanderbeck 2007)

- Intragenerationality
  - Roles of siblings and birth order (Evans 2014)
  - Peers, friends, partners (Punch 2015b)

Cross-cultural learning: applicability to Minority World?

- Generational Order: includes intra-generational relations - neglected? (Evans 2014)

- Age, birth order & sibling composition: intra-generational factors shaping the generational order
  - household divisions of labour (Punch 2001b)
  - the generationing of power: eg. parental vs sibling power (Punch 2005)

- Birth order still over-looked as a social variable (cf. gender, class, ethnicity)

Sibship and birth order

- Sociology of sibship under-developed (Edwards et al. 2006; Edwards & Weller 2014)

- Recognised hierarchy but negotiated and dynamic in practice (McIntosh & Punch 2009; Punch 2008)

- Twinship and interdependencies (Bacon 2012)

Youth transitions in the Minority World

- Failure of increasing levels of education to secure well paid jobs

- Shifting, dynamic nature of young people's trajectories: managing multiple and fragmented transitions (Punch 2015c)

- Importance of intergenerational and intragenerational interdependencies (eg. Plows 2012)

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Negotiated and constrained interdependencies within and across generations

- Indicates the dynamic and contingent nature of children's agency
  - situated in a social and cultural context

- Enabling and constraining processes
  - positive and negative aspects of agency and interdependencies from generational perspectives

- Within the generational order
  - focus on relational processes
  - intergenerational and intragenerational relations
    - Illustrates potential for dialogue across Majority & Minority Worlds (Punch & Tisdall 2012)

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