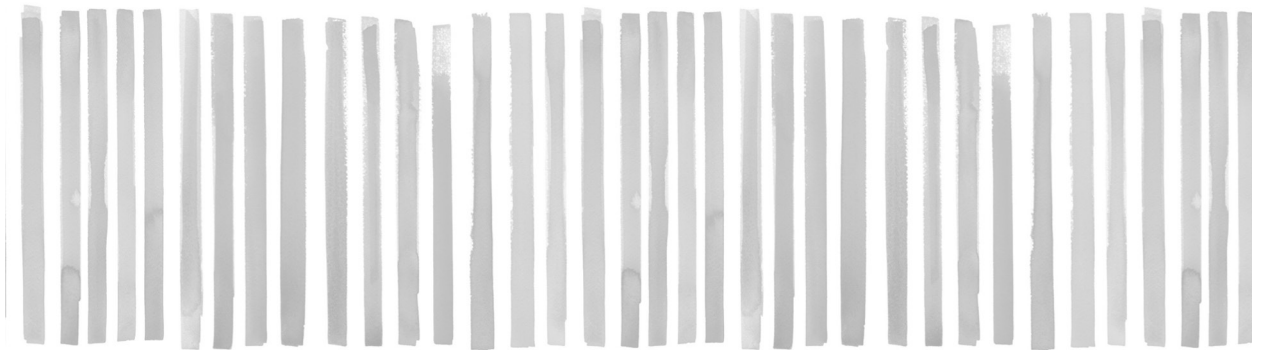


The SAGE Handbook of
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The Nature and Scope of Child Research: Learning about Children's Lives

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... We must first, all of us, demolish the borders which history has erected ... within our own nations – barriers of race and religion, social class and ignorance. Our answer is the world's hope; it is to rely on youth. The cruelties and the obstacles of this swiftly changing planet will not yield to obsolete dogmas and outworn slogans. It cannot be moved by those who cling to a present which is already dying, who prefer the illusion of security to the excitement and danger which comes with even the most peaceful progress. This world demands the qualities of youth: not a time of life but a state of mind, a temper of the will, a quality of imagination, a predominance of courage over timidity, of the appetite for adventure over the life of ease. ... It is a revolutionary world that we all live in; and thus, as I have said in Latin America and Asia and Europe and in my own country, the United States, it is the young people who must take the lead. Thus you and your young compatriots everywhere have had thrust upon you a greater burden of responsibility than any generation that has ever lived.

These words were uttered in Robert F. Kennedy's Day of Affirmation speech – probably his most famous – at the University of Cape Town on 6 June 1966.¹ Both the historical and rhetorical contexts for these remarks were stirring. Making many allusions to the similar challenges facing South Africa and the United States in the mid-1960s (and before and after), Kennedy called on young people to 'strip the last remnants of

that ancient, cruel belief' – 'the dark and poisoning superstition that [the] world is bounded by the nearest hill, [the] universe ends at river's shore', and that the commonality of humanity 'is enclosed in the tight circle of those who share [one's] town or [one's] views and the color of [one's] skin'.

In the most memorable passage of the speech, Kennedy urged his listeners not to be limited by their youthfulness. Reciting a lengthy list of notable young adults – some famous; some little-known – who, as individuals, had 'moved the world', Kennedy proclaimed, 'Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centres of energy and daring, those ripples build a current which can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance'.

We have quoted at some length from the Kennedy speech because it starkly presents a common image of the relation of age to political beliefs and actions. Kennedy linked innovation, energy, and 'adventure' to youthfulness, and he tied those attributes to the imagination and courage required to seek greater justice in communities, societies, and the world. In other words, Kennedy associated

conventionality – whether grounded in fear, tradition, tired ideas, or complacency – with middle and late adulthood. By contrast, he perceived young people to be drawn to moral principles – to *ideals* – necessary for progress toward ‘the enlargement of liberty for individual human beings’ – ‘the supreme goal and the abiding practice of any *western* society’ (emphasis added). Notwithstanding the allusion to Western society, Kennedy clearly believed the traits that he wished to foster to be ones universally associated with youth, ‘the only true international community’.

For almost everyone who lived through the past half-century, many images consistent with the concept of youth that Kennedy articulated are indelibly stored in memory. The protests by the ‘lost generation’ of young people in South Africa – those who were on the barricades (not in schools) while their older leaders were imprisoned (see Cowell, 1990; Hawthorne and MacLeod, 1991) – are but one example. Recall, for example:

- the university and high school students who engaged in sit-ins at racially segregated lunch counters in the American South;
- the students who were in the vanguard of virtually every overthrow of a Latin American dictatorship (see Thomas and Craig, 1973);
- the American university and high school students whose demonstrations, teach-ins, and door-to-door campaigning for anti-war candidates hastened the end of the Vietnam war;
- the French university and lycée students whose protests stimulated weeks of general strikes and permanently changed social norms;
- the Chinese university students who faced tanks and live ammunition in Tiananmen Square;
- the Palestinian boys who challenged Israeli rifles and tanks with stones from the streets of refugee camps during each intifada;
- the German young people who triumphantly disassembled the Berlin wall;
- the Czech university students who filled Wenceslas Square in Prague and peacefully brought down the Communist regime;
- the Iranian youth who risked their lives and liberty to protest apparently corrupt election returns and to bring the resulting government violence to the world’s attention;

- the Arab young people who used social media to launch mass demonstrations and to overthrow some long-ruling authoritarian governments.

The extraordinary historical significance of these events is undeniable. Any meaningful account of youth engagement in political life must take them into account. Moreover, the events noted have been so profound in their influence on the course of the second half of the twentieth century and the first decades of the twenty-first century that a reasonable hypothesis would be that achievement of a new political order (at least in the current ethos) is contingent in part on youth participation and maybe even youth leadership in such change.

At the same time, however, the examples suggest that the converse is also true. In other words, although substantial involvement by young people may be necessary for massive political change, such participation is not enough. As illustrated by the variable success of the activists in the Arab Spring in 2011, youthful fervour must be actualized through institutional sponsorship and commitment if it is to be successful (Schwartz, 2011).

BEYOND YOUTHFUL IDEALISM

Youth in political parties

Although the examples given so far are of instances in which youth participation appeared to stimulate democratic change, youth action need not push in such a positive direction. Just as Robert Kennedy presumed young people to be malleable (unfettered by tradition or a solidified ideology), totalitarian regimes have generally regarded childhood to be in the public sphere (Qvortrup, 2008), because it was the context for socialization into the prescribed social and political order. As Toots et al. (Chapter 4, this volume) discuss in more detail, a key element of state power in most such regimes has been the creation of powerful, nearly

universal political organizations for children and youth (such as the Hitler Youth, Young Pioneers, and Komsomol; see Wallace and Alt, 2001). Even young children were engaged in celebrations and demonstrations that were linked to parents' workplaces and related adult organizations (Qvortrup, 2008). Hence, youth movements served as forums from which to influence parents, not just children, adolescents, and young adults themselves.

Western political parties have also often established youth organizations to coalesce direct involvement (for example, 'working the polls') in partisan activities (for example, in the United States, Teen Dems, Teen Age Republicans, Young Democrats, and Young Republicans, in the latter two instances, with college branches). Unlike their counterparts in totalitarian regimes, the youth wings of Western political parties are more elitist than mass. They are self-selected, in the same sense that student governments, even if effectively powerless, generally attract and further socialize young people who are and will be active in various aspects of civic life and who already enjoy participation in the battles, drama, and pageantry of political life (Crystal and DeBell, 2002; Glanville, 1999; McFarland and Starmanns, 2009; Sigel and Hoskin, 1981; Youniss, 2011).

For example, the Labour Party camp that was the site of the dreadful terrorist shootings in Norway in 2011 had a tradition of being an entry point into the activities of the long-dominant political party in Norway. Historically, the deliberations of the youth conference had been open only to young people themselves, but most adult leaders of the Norwegian Labour Party had attended the camp when they were adolescents. The camp was thus a peer-governed training ground for politically active young people who already had established a political ideology and party identification and who were apt ultimately to become Labour Party leaders and perhaps office holders.

Except that participants' parents themselves are often politically active, youth branches of

Western political parties are generally semi-autonomous and youth-led, often with weak links to the adult parties with which they are affiliated. Accordingly, these activities are better conceived as democratic political socialization (in this instance, practice in grassroots political organizing) than as orchestrated elements of a state or party apparatus.

It is noteworthy in that regard that the strategies of youth control adopted by fascist and Communist governments were never fully successful (Wallace and Alt, 2001). Despite the authorities' attempts to build and sustain monolithic youth movements, youth subcultures emerged in Nazi Germany and the countries in the Soviet sphere of influence. These informal youth groups did not form an 'opposition' in the ordinary sense. Searching, however, for personal freedom in societies that had little, they tried to differentiate themselves through emulation of Western musical and clothing styles. Official youth organizations tried to co-opt these subcultural expressions by broadening the entertainment available in the established groups.

Children in political life

As in most commentary on 'youth' in politics, so far there has been little discussion of children (distinguished from adolescents and young adults) in this chapter. To some extent, this omission reflects the realities of visible political engagement. University and, to a lesser degree, secondary students were at the centre of most of the examples of youth leadership in political change in the past half-century. At least in part, this centrality was the product of the independence that older youth have as a matter of fact and, at least in regard to those who have passed the age of majority (typically 18; see Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989, art. 1), as a matter of law.

The focus on adolescents and young adults is also based on the conventional wisdom,

crystallized by Erik Erikson (1950, 1968), that the germination of interest in politics occurs during those phases of the life cycle. Throughout the world, this assumption is at the foundation of the placement of formal civic education almost exclusively in secondary schools (see Torney-Purta, Schwille and Amadeo, 1999). Thus, for example, formal school-based political education in Europe occurs primarily in lower secondary education (the equivalent of middle school or junior high in the American system; Eurydice, 2005).

Like other competencies, interests, and values discussed in this volume, however, the assumption that elementary-school-aged children are apolitical ('innocent') is more the product of the social construction of childhood – perhaps coupled with a sense of guilt about the terrible conditions that some children face – than empirical reality. As Robert Coles persuasively demonstrated in his Pulitzer Prize-winning series on *Children in Crisis* (Coles, 1967, 1971a, 1971b, 1977a, 1977b) and his subsequent treatises on the moral (Coles, 1986a), spiritual (Coles, 1990), and political (Coles, 1986b) lives of children (including children in then-conflict-laden societies outside the United States, such as Northern Ireland), children are often profoundly affected by – and cognizant of – the socio-political realities that all too often are troubling or even traumatic.

In his book on *The Political Life of Children*, Coles observed the high frequency with which the word 'really' appears in the conversation of mental health professionals. He confessed that he had for many years failed to attend to children's comments about political matters because he had been trained to believe 'that everything I was hearing was "really" about the patient's *parents*, their beliefs' (1986b: 7). Applying his psychoanalytic education, Coles might have added that he regarded children's political statements as '*really* thinly veiled statements of transference of oedipal strivings onto the authoritative psychiatric interviewer' (Melton, 1987a: 362).

Coles' appreciation of the reality of children's stated concerns about political situations was most powerfully stimulated by Ruby Bridges, the 6-year-old African American child from New Orleans who in 1960 was the first to be integrated into a White elementary school in the American South (see <http://www.rubybridges.com/story.htm>). In *The Problem We All Live With* (the centrefold artwork for an issue of *Look* magazine in January 1964), Norman Rockwell famously captured Ruby's dignity on canvas. Accompanied by US marshals, she walked with head held high through a crowd of jeering adults into her classroom of one. (Parents of other children refused to allow them to be in the same classroom as Ruby, and the regular classroom teachers refused to teach her.) First told in a series of articles for the *Atlantic Monthly*, Ruby's story began Coles' series on *Children in Crisis*, which chronicled the situation for children in ethnic minorities, children of migrant workers and sharecroppers, children in impoverished families in Appalachia, and children in wealthy families, all in the United States.² Although Ruby did not fully comprehend the situation (for example, she likened the jeering and throwing of objects in her trek into school to the noise and disorder at Mardi Gras), she did understand that her going to the White school had resulted in trouble for her family (such as her father's losing his job). She also understood the hatred in the crowds that lined her way to school. She coped by praying for the people who yelled terrible things or who otherwise tried to frighten her by, for example, displaying a Black doll in a coffin.

Although Ruby Bridges' experience at age 6 was unique, her basic understanding of the situation was not. Even primary-grade children often comprehend the universality of the right to be treated humanely and with dignity. They also have an exquisite awareness of the allocation of authority – who is 'boss' – within the institutions of which children are a part and, in general, show deference to those authorities (Berti and Bombi, 1981;

Furth, 1980; Melton, 1980, 1983a; Melton and Limber, 1992). They also can recognize national political symbols (Dawson, Prewitt and Dawson, 1977). Indeed, by third or fourth grade, most children apply conventional moral judgements (for example, concerns about fairness and social order) to everyday questions pertaining to democratic norms (such as freedom of expression in the school newspaper; see Berti and Bombi, 1981; Furth, 1980; Melton, 1980, 1983a; Melton and Limber, 1992).

Perhaps even more to the point, political ideologies are largely inculcated by that age. Thus, for example, American children in the intermediate grades, regardless of ethnicity, region, or social class, virtually always define and justify children's rights in terms of classically liberal (libertarian) ideals of freedom of expression and autonomy in action. On the other hand, Norwegian children of the same age often offer definitions and justifications based on social and economic rights (such as entitlements to adequate nutrition, education, and health care). In short, although 9-year-olds in the two societies are usually unable to articulate a principled ideology, in fact they have already adopted the libertarian and social democratic values that are dominant in American and Norwegian political cultures, respectively (Melton and Limber, 1992).

Similarly, habits of political activism (such as wearing campaign buttons) are commonly established by early adolescence (Hess and Torney, 1967). So too are commitments to volunteer community service (see, for example, Hashima and Melton, 2008). In general, the period of greatest change in political interest, activity, and identification is middle childhood, not adolescence, even though civic instruction typically occurs in the latter developmental phase (Jennings and Niemi, 1974).

Nonetheless, Furth was correct when he concluded that 'the understanding of what a societal community is and how government functions is only rarely developed in children below age twelve' (1980: 47), *if* he was referring to an ability to articulate facts

and concepts about the political system. Of course, many adolescents and adults also lack sophistication in the mechanisms of political reform (see, for example, McClosky and Brill, 1983; Torney-Purta, Lehmann et al., 2001).

Furth's conclusion has implications for policy and practice to protect children from unwise or ill-informed decisions. For example, there is good reason to be especially careful when considering children's waiver of rights in delinquency proceedings. Such decisions are apt to be made on the bases of erroneous or incomplete beliefs amid the urging of parents, probation officers, and others who demand that juvenile respondents 'talk' (Grisso, 1981) – a problem compounded because young people are inexperienced in seeking and using the advice of lawyers and other professionals.

Nonetheless, it is clearly mistaken to conclude that elementary-school-aged children's limited ability to describe the fine points of the legislative process or to offer abstract reasons for their political attitudes and values implies that elementary-school civic education is a waste of time. To the contrary, insofar as the principal purpose of public education is to prepare children for full participation in community life, a much stronger argument can be made that a civic education curriculum is inadequate if it does not include major components in elementary schools.

More directly to the point of this book and, in particular, to the chapter by Anu Toots et al. (Chapter 4, this volume) on children as political actors, it is also clear that school-age children *are* participants in community life, even when their civic 'participation' is relegated to observation. The belief in elementary-school-age children's 'innocence' and their purported obliviousness to power and politics is a social construction – more like wishful thinking than social fact – designed to maintain consistency with traditional age-based authority relations in the family and, perhaps even more so, the society at large. (Seen from a modern perspective

[for example, Zelizer, 1994], the belief that children are outside the marketplace is even more incredible [cf. Brusdal and Frønes, Chapter 7, this volume.] Such reliance on myth historically has served to justify the creation of age-segregated institutional structures to ‘socialize’ children in groups that are on or outside the boundaries of the community (see, for example, Dahl, 1986; Levine and Levine, 1992; Melton, 1983a, 1987b; Platt, 1980).

Implications for research

There are two important corollaries for research. First, given its moral, social, and political significance, children’s participation in the various aspects of civil society should be an important domain of child research. In particular, much more attention should be given to the ways that elementary-school-age and even preschool children are or could be actors (not simply dependent subjects) in community life and to the meaning that such activities (or, conversely, instances of ‘protection’ from such involvement) have for children themselves.

Second, children’s absence (or seeming absence) from some contexts should not necessarily be regarded as indicative of their capacities. As post-Piagetian scholars have demonstrated, ‘incompetence’ is sometimes a methodological artefact. In other words, the capacity to undertake a task and, by extension, to reason about it may be masked if the means of measurement requires particular verbal skills or vocabulary. Even when such an artefact is not evident, ‘incompetence’ may reflect a lack of experience or a motivational lacuna that is a product of children’s ascribed roles.

In that regard, goals of child ‘protection’ and ‘participation’ may sometimes be in conflict. Adults’ assumption of responsibilities that may preclude children’s own actions is, of course, often morally demanded, even when children have the capacity for greater involvement in community life. Obviously,

children’s engagement in paid labour, for example, not only may place them at an unacceptable level of risk to their health and well-being, but it also often precludes their engagement in educational activities that are necessary for optimization of their short- and long-term quality of life. There are also instances in which children are obviously unable to perform (a conventional basketball court is not an asset for a 4-year-old!) and many others in which children’s survival and development are necessarily and appropriately in the hands of adults.

Nonetheless, as a general matter, the problem is not zero-sum (adults [usually parents] *or* children). There are two ethical concerns leading to such a conclusion:

First, ... the fact that the interests of multiple parties are almost always at stake in matters involving children must be taken into account. Such a principle ordinarily implies the need for structures to promote *shared* decision making. Second, taken together, the dual values of autonomy and beneficence imply that children should have opportunities for increasing independence in contexts in which risk is minimized. As a general matter, self-determination is less important than participation in decision making. Nothing is more fundamental to the experience of being taken seriously than simply having a say, being heard politely, and having one’s perspective considered – in effect, being part of a conversation about matters of personal significance. In the same vein, children’s interests are most likely to be promoted when they are given opportunities for *graduated* decision making – in effect, ‘learner’s permits’ that enable children to gradually assume independence so full autonomy is not exercised until there is some experience with the decision or task.

In short, the human-rights mandate to take children seriously as people usually should not be framed as deference to parents *or* children. Rather, careful efforts to promote the participation of children (as well as parents and other interested adults) – to help them feel they are heard – will usually bring parents *and* children together in shared decision making.

(Melton, 1999: 936 [citations omitted]).

Insights about the nature of children’s involvement in everyday life in community settings are at the base of the development of

childhood studies, including new directions for empirical child research. The remainder of this chapter provides an overview of such ideas and of their reflection in the contributions by the authors of the chapters in this book. Before addressing the childhood studies movement itself, however, it is useful to take a brief look at the somewhat earlier initial development of ecological psychology, which provided an intellectual foundation for the movement's challenges to traditional concepts and methods in developmental psychology.

THE ECOLOGY OF CHILDHOOD

... One can not go to the scientific literature of child behavior to find what the behavior of children looks like. One must go to the novelists, the diarists, the news reporters. This is true because most data of psychology [and other social sciences] have been assembled in terms of particular problems or theories and this almost always requires the fractionation of behavior to such a degree that its appearance is destroyed. The psychological landscape is strewn with the debris of these dismantling operations.

(Barker and Wright, 1955: 14)

Drawing on the theories of his mentor Kurt Lewin and working more than a half-century ago, Roger Barker and his colleagues at the University of Kansas sought to describe the lives of children in everyday settings. For a quarter-century, Barker and his co-workers copiously recorded observations of children in a multitude of *behaviour settings* (such as the Girl Scouts' cookie sale at the grocery store; the Saturday night social at the American Legion Hall) in 'Midwest', a pseudonym for Oskaloosa, a small town (in 1950, population 707, including 119 children younger than 12 years old) in northeastern Kansas, about 20 miles from the University of Kansas.

As illustrated by the opening quote, Barker believed that the then- (and now-) dominant methods in research on the behaviour of children stripped such activity of practical

meaning by isolating children from their ordinary milieu (the 'habitat'):

An essential feature of most methods of psychological diagnosis, testing, and measurement is the creation by the investigator of a special, standard psychological situation within which to observe behavior, thus destroying the natural habitat. Most tests, questionnaires, interviews, and experiments attempt to create for the subject a psychological situation designed for the special purposes of the investigator. To use these methods, except for very limited purposes, would be methodologically parallel to a plant ecologist's importing soil, broadcasting seeds, and coming back later to study the 'natural' vegetation. The task of an ecological field study is to determine the state of affairs that exists independently of the investigator's methods. The questions that exist in a subject's mind are as important as his answers to them. If the investigator asks the questions and poses the problems, he changes the subject's habitat and destroys the very thing he aims to study. Furthermore, free or nondirective interviews can cause profound changes in the subject's perception of himself and his world.

(Barker and Wright, 1955: 12–13)

Thus, in effect, Barker argued for – and undertook – a 'ground-up' science that relied heavily on direct observation of children in the settings of everyday life. This approach consumed most of Barker's adult life. Indeed, Barker and his wife and co-investigator Louise Barker were in many ways participant-observers. They not only worked in Oskaloosa; they also lived there.

Roger Barker's rationale for his approach was primarily scientific. As indicated in the quote opening this section, he believed (like his mentor Lewin) that behaviour was the product of the interaction between person and environment. Omitting or substantially altering either element for the purpose of research diminishes 'ecological validity' (correspondence to real-world phenomena) to an extent that the findings have little meaning. Consequentially, Barker believed, such research also has little usefulness in improving people's well-being.³

Barker and his colleagues did contribute important findings of lasting scientific significance. Commonly regarded as the

founder of environmental psychology and as a seminal contributor to theory in community psychology, Barker was sensitive to the 'demands' that both physical and social environments exert on human behaviour. (An example of an environmental demand on behaviour would be the design of roadways to minimize or eliminate the possibility that drivers would enter on the wrong side of the road. In the social domain, tasks might be established that, as a side effect, elicit positive interaction or, undesirably, result in pressure to engage in antisocial behaviour or in 'education' in such misbehaviour through modelling.)

In that vein, the Kansas group was particularly influential in its research showing that 'under-populated' (in the original terminology, 'undermanned') settings, such as small schools (Barker and Gump, 1964) and churches (Wicker, 1978) and, more generally, rural communities (see Melton, 1983b), demand frequent, diverse participation, with few people uninvolved, greater personal satisfaction, greater sense of competence, and little segregation by age, ethnicity, or wealth. Consider, for example, this description of the social structure of Midwest:

Midwest children had to tolerate a wide range of individual differences in the inhabitants of most of the behaviour settings they entered, and they had to develop skill in making diverse people fit into the same behavior patterns. The need for participants was so great in relation to the number of inhabitants that selection on the basis of sex, age, social group, intelligence, personality, political beliefs, or wealth was virtually impossible. This tendency was supported by a pervasive democratic ideology. The low degree of segregation meant, further, that most behavior settings had to accommodate a wide range of abilities, motives, and personalities within their standing patterns of behavior. This, in turn, required that children learn early to adjust to a wide range of individual differences. Such adjustment was accomplished partly by special rules and arrangements, but basically it required a great measure of self-control and tolerance.

The lack of segregation in Midwest behavior settings was a factor adding to the richness of life for Midwest children. Not only did they participate in many independent settings with different

standing patterns of behaviour but, within most of these settings, a wide range of Midwest citizens was present. The old and the young, the rich and the poor, the bright and the dull rubbed shoulders in most settings.

(Barker and Wright, 1955: 460)

By illustration, one of us (Melton) lived for a long time in Nebraska, one of the most rural states in the United States. In much of the state, not only are the centres of population merely hamlets, but the distances between settlements are great. In tiny school districts in Nebraska, it is common for schools to play eight-man (rather than conventional eleven-man) American football, so that there are enough players to fill all of the positions. Moreover, a boy is likely to play both offence and defence, he may play clarinet in the school band's half-time show, and he may sell advance tickets to the game to people in the community. In a very small community, it is difficult not to be engaged! (The one downside of such an ecology is that it is difficult or even impossible for an individual to specialize and therefore to achieve the highest level of accomplishment in a particular role or skill.)

Barker et al.'s conclusions about the behavioural effects of setting size arose, of course, from their method of simply counting activities (who did what and where they did it). This descriptive research is not only theoretically important. It also has important implications for public policy. Unfortunately, however, in planning school construction, for example, economies of scale and, to some extent, community pride (the false assumption that 'bigger is better') tend to triumph over the long-established fact that youth engagement is greater in small settings. In turn, youth engagement is known to be positively related to students' school attendance, overall achievement, and happiness and inversely related to such negative outcomes as the frequency of delinquent behaviour, dropping out, and depression (Committee on Increasing High School Students' Engagement and Motivation to Learn, 2004; Melton, 2005). Although such findings have not stemmed the growth of ever

larger consolidated schools, they have pushed toward innovations to make schools 'feel' smaller (such as 'schools within schools', so that large buildings and the school population itself are divided into largely discrete units).

Barker's team also pioneered in the field of rehabilitation psychology (see, for example, Schoggen, 1978; Wright, 1983 [1960]). They examined the trajectory of changes in the frequency of various behaviours in diverse settings following an injury or illness and treatment. Such data not only provide a picture of the natural history of recovery, but they also suggest ways in which settings might be modified in order to enhance the fit between the individual and the setting.

As in the other contexts mentioned, behaviour ecology is not 'developmental' in the way that the term is ordinarily used. Barker and his colleagues understood that age-related changes in behaviour reflect not only maturational changes in the child but also changes in the nature of the settings in which children of different ages are likely to find themselves. Thus, for example, age might be a variable in behaviour mapping related to a particular disability, but age differences in the types of settings where children are found or the kinds of activities in which they participate would not necessarily mean that the disability is manifested differently among children of different ages or that rehabilitation was differentially effective by age. Changes in the child, whether by maturation or rehabilitation, must be understood as a product of interaction between the child and the setting (including the other people who are a part of a given setting).

That assumption builds the connection between the work of ecological psychologists and that of specialists in childhood studies, which did not develop systematically until about a generation later. In both instances, children's behaviour is understood to be a function of context.

Although Barker and his colleagues did not start from an ideology of childhood in the way that some contemporary scholars

in childhood studies do, Barker et al. made clear that they also valued children's experience for its own sake. They considered the meaning of children's experience in the here and now, not merely as practice for adulthood:

The children of Midwest occupied positions of power and prestige; they were not a luxury in the community; they performed essential functions. About one-quarter of all performances in Midwest were by children. Even infants penetrated a few settings to the performance level, and younger school children were joint leaders of some settings. The settings children entered to the performance zones were not primarily those which were created especially for children; in fact, more than half of them were 'adult' settings. The meaning of this for the children of Midwest was that their achievements were not relegated to unimportant settings; children had the opportunity to achieve power and status in behavior settings which were generally prestigious.

(Barker and Wright, 1955: 460)

Clearly, however, Barker and his colleagues' perspective was exceptional for the time and indeed for decades to come. We turn now to consideration of the processes by which such attention to children's actual and potential engagement in community life moved to a central point in child research.

HOW CHILDHOOD STUDIES CAME TO BE

Intellectual underpinnings

Child and family studies grew up to a large extent outside universities. Even theoretical scholarship on child development was largely a product of scholarly work undertaken outside academia. For example, Jean Piaget spent most of his career at the International Bureau of Education in Geneva, and much of his 'research' occurred in his own home as he observed the development of his own children. Sigmund Freud developed his theory of child development in his psychiatric office – and then in consultations with *adult* patients! Moreover, as psychoanalysis grew as a field

of scholarship and practice, such studies took place in free-standing psychoanalytic institutes.

Analogously, much of the early systematic research on child development took place in free-standing institutes, such as the Merrill-Palmer Institute in Michigan and the Fels Research Institute in Ohio. In the United States, family studies also grew initially outside the principal academic units of universities, as 'domestic science' was typically a feature of Cooperative Extension units in land-grant universities (public universities with an outreach mission and a corps of professional staff with a translational job description and usually without doctorates).

Gradually, however, such work became more 'scientific' and nested within departments of psychology (developmental psychology) and sociology (family sociology) within colleges of arts and sciences in universities. With the new emphasis on application of the scientific method, child and family studies, especially the 'best' such scholarship within programmes in developmental psychology, became heavily laboratory-focused and experimental. As a general rule, internal validity (reduction of sources of 'error') was valued more than external validity (generalizability to real-world settings).

As Adrian James and Alan Prout have pointed out, the developmental theories prominent in child psychology provided a framework of 'rationality', 'naturalness', and 'universality'. Children's behaviour was understood to be largely the product of a natural process, in which the nature of children's reasoning, moral judgements, social behaviour, motor behaviour, psychosexual concerns, and emotional expression all unfolded in predictable, forward-oriented maturational patterns. Such patterns were generally held to be consistent across cultures; in effect, biology was destiny.

Just as development was conceived ordinarily as unidirectional (moving forward through maturation), so too were developmental influences. Adults influenced ('socialized') children, as their capacities expanded.

By implication, therefore, children were 'shaped' by their genes, their level of maturation, and their environment. They were generally not perceived as *actors* in their environment, except perhaps in relation to siblings and peers.

However, dissatisfaction with that organizational and epistemological base began to appear in the 1970s and to be reflected in some new academic structures in the 1980s and (at an increased rate) the 1990s. In arguments consistent with constructivist perspectives (or 'critical studies') arising in multiple disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, historians (for example, Kett, 1977) began to conceive of both 'childhood' and 'adolescence' as 'inventions'. Apart from the epistemologies involved, such arguments were hard to ignore because empirical historical evidence, like cross-cultural research, suggested that the nature and pace of children's development were significantly influenced by their context. Similarly, the societal attributions about children were recognized as social phenomena that have meaning beyond children's objective levels of maturation. Consider, for example, historical and cultural differences in the way that children are depicted in paintings.

Critics like Barker and Bronfenbrenner regarded much of the work about children and families that had emerged in the academy as being intellectually sterile, divorced from the realities of everyday life and unresponsive to the needs of organizations, communities, and societies for expertise in dealing with the complex problems that many children and families face. Such critiques were by-products in part of more general trends toward 'relevance' in the academy, which in turn emanated from the protests of disadvantaged groups that they had been systematically ignored or denigrated in major institutions, including universities.

Developmental research itself began to suggest that biologically grounded 'stage' models, such as Jean Piaget's and those of his intellectual progeny (such as Lawrence Kohlberg), underestimated the importance

of both cultural factors and individual differences. Even more to the point here, Piagetians were said to overlook situational factors in children's behaviour that sometimes masked their actual capacities and their potential. (For a succinct review of these criticisms and the counter-arguments in regard to Piagetian theory, see Lourenço and Machado, 1996; see also Narvaez, 2005, on Kohlberg and his critics.)

Other child researchers argued that 'ecological' models are better tools than biological, cognitive-developmental, or social theories alone in understanding child development as a scientific matter and underlying the design of policies and professional practices. Their answer to most questions about the effects of a sometimes potent variable on a malleable outcome was, 'It depends'.

The creation of settings for child research

In order to facilitate holistic responses to the needs of policymakers, educators, clinicians, and others for assistance in serving children and families, many universities and governments again moved outside traditional psychology and sociology departments to form interdisciplinary centres and institutes intended both to generate and transfer knowledge about child ecology or childhood itself. The fact that they are special structures outside conventional university departments and schools (faculties) is an indicator of the fragility of such entities (Melton, 2013). They come and go, and they expand and shrink, with much greater dependence on external sponsors and often on a founder's vision than is typically true for other university units that are more conventionally organized and more predictably funded.

Today the global consortium Childwatch International (based at the University of Oslo) has more than 40 member centres and institutes (some of which are not university-affiliated), and the (American) University Child and Family Policy Consortium has

more than 30 member institutions. A look at those lists and the websites of some other child research centres of which the authors were aware showed that some of the largest and best established centres were established in the 1980s (for example, the Norwegian Centre for Child Research, based at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology in Trondheim, 1982; International Centre for Research and Policy on Childhood [CIESPI], Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro, 1984; Chapin Hall Center for Children, University of Chicago, 1985; Office of Child Development, University of Pittsburgh, 1986; Center on Children, Families, and the Law, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 1987), but that most were established in the mid-1990s or later. The only pre-1980 child research centre that we identified was the Children's Rights Centre (established in 1978) at Ghent University in Belgium), which has evolved into the national, multi-university Children's Rights Knowledge Centre (KeKi), founded in 2010.⁴

(This assessment overlooks the small group of much older, once free-standing institutions for child research. For example, the Merrill-Palmer Institute, now the Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute of Wayne State University in Detroit, was established in 1920. The Fels Research Institute for the Study of Human Development [since 1977, absorbed into the lifespan health research programme at the medical school at Wright State University in Dayton, OH], was founded in 1929. However, these institutes were and are conceived as programmes for research on *child development*, not *childhood studies*.)

The growth of centres and institutes was roughly parallel with – or perhaps slightly preceded by – the development of national and international structures for facilitation of scholarship in child studies. In addition to the consortia mentioned earlier, scientific societies and academic journals have been important catalysts for growth of the field. For example, the American Sociological

Association established a Section on Children and Youth in 1992, the European Sociological Association began annual conference programmes on sociology of childhood in 1999 (Research Network 4), and the International Sociological Association created a Research Committee on Sociology of Childhood (RC 53) in 1998. Through the initiative of the Norwegian Centre for Child Research, the journal *Childhood* began publication in 1993, and the *International Journal of Children's Rights* (a spin-off from an international study group convened by the Israeli chapter of Defence for Children International) also published its first issue in 1993.

A loose network of scholars interested in child indicators began meeting in the mid-1990s. That group evolved into the International Society for Child Indicators, which began holding biennial international conferences in 2007 and which initiated the journal *Child Indicators Research* in 2008.

Publication of major treatises in the field followed the initial development of centres and associations supportive of such scholarship. As the list of key texts in Table 1.1

illustrates, scholarship framed in relation to childhood studies became prominent in the early 2000s. The topical development is a still later phenomenon, so that it is only recently that a handbook with the scope of the current volume became possible.

With the development of a full-fledged field of study, graduate programmes specialized at least in part in childhood studies have begun to emerge since 2000, predominantly in Europe but also in Oceania, Latin America, and North America (see, for example, the programmes listed at www.icyrnet.net/index.php?page=links). The degree programmes are predominantly at master's level, as illustrated by the European Network of Masters in Children's Rights, founded in 2009, and a parallel Latin American Network that was initiated by Save the Children Sweden (Rädda Barnen). However, there are a few doctoral programmes in childhood studies, such as those at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (founded in 2006) and Rutgers University-Camden (founded in 2007). Some other interdisciplinary doctoral programmes have a substantial focus

Table 1.1 Some leading monographs and textbooks on child research

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- Ben-Arieh, Asher and Frønes, Ivar (eds.) (2009) *Indicators of Children's Well-Being: Theory and Practice in a Multi-Cultural Perspective*. New York: Springer-Verlag.
- Ben-Arieh, Asher, Kaufman, Natalie Hevener, Andrews, Arlene B., Goerge, Robert M., Lee, Bong Joo and Aber, Lawrence J. (2001) *Measuring and Monitoring Children's Well-Being*. Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer Academic.
- Corsaro, William A. (2005) *The Sociology of Childhood*. 2nd edn. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press. (1st edn, 1997).
- James, Allison and James, Adrian L. (2004) *Constructing Childhood: Theory, Policy and Social Practice*. Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan.
- James, Allison and James, Adrian L. (eds.) (2008a) *European Childhoods: Cultures, Politics and Childhoods in Europe*. Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan.
- James, Allison and James, Adrian L. (2008b) *Key Concepts in Childhood Studies*. London: Sage.
- James, Allison, Jenks, Chris and Prout, Alan (1998) *Theorizing Childhood*. Cambridge, England: Polity Press.
- Kjørholt, Anne Trine (2004) 'Childhood as a social and symbolic space: Discourses on children as social participants in society'. PhD dissertation, Norwegian University of Science and Technology.
- Lancy, David F. (2008) *The Anthropology of Childhood: Cherubs, Chattel, Changelings*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Prout, Alan (2004) *The Future of Childhood*. London: Routledge Falmer.
- Pufall, Peter B. and Unsworth, Richard P. (eds.) (2004) *Rethinking Childhood*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Qvortrup, Jens, Corsaro, William A., and Honig, Michael-Sebastian (eds.) (2009) *The Palgrave Handbook of Childhood Studies*. Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan.
-

on childhood studies (for example, Clemson University's PhD programme in International Family and Community Studies, founded in 2006 and now delivered in both South Carolina and Albania).

The chicken or the egg?

As the discussion thus far shows, the field of childhood studies is young, but it has evolved both organizationally and substantively in logical ways. It is interesting to consider, however, whether the field of childhood studies is stimulating or merely responding to change in the status and well-being of children. Of course, the likelihood is that the process is bidirectional. New ideas generated in the academy gradually make their way into popular consciousness, and scholarly discourse changes in response to popular concerns.

However, in this instance, it is likely that the stronger influences have been from forces outside academia. For example, the upsurge during the 1990s in scholarship on childhood and particularly on children's rights was undoubtedly stimulated in part by the enactment of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) by the UN General Assembly in 1989 and the nearly unanimous ratification by the global community soon thereafter. The CRC's enactment was enabled in turn by the end of the Cold War and the advances of other disadvantaged groups. Taken together, those developments universalized demands for democracy and challenged the belief that *any* class of people – even the smallest and most vulnerable – could be justifiably denied full recognition as persons entitled to human rights. The implementation of the CRC itself had considerable direct effects on childhood studies by creating a need for monitoring national fulfilment of children's rights and indirect effects by giving new legitimacy to the recognition of children's status as 'persons' in political, legal, and moral life.

However, the enactment of the CRC was not the whole story. For example, it is unlikely that the proliferation of scores of

university-based American centres on child and family issues was heavily influenced by the adoption of the CRC, which the United States still has not ratified and which has been given little attention in the American media.⁵ Rather, at least in the American case and probably to a substantial degree in other countries, the push for development of centres on children's issues came from foundations, policymakers, and child-serving agencies that demanded – and often indicated a willingness to pay for – expertise and new policy- and practice-specific knowledge that they often could not find in conventional academic departments.

Such demands were grounded in the mismatch between guild- or discipline-based work (in both universities and human services) and the realities of child and family life near the turn of the millennium. As a result, child professionals had been slow to develop and widely apply new modes of family support and human service delivery in response to the sea changes that had occurred since the 1960s in family structure, family attitudes, family law, economic stratification, workplace demands, gender roles, ethnic groups' status, residential mobility, relationship networks, informal support, human-service regulation, and communities' trust of both governmental and voluntary institutions (Melton, 1994, 2010a, 2010b; Melton and Wilcox, 1989). Although the growth of the intellectual framework for childhood studies was a predictable evolution of ideas, the motivation for such change could be found in practical realities.

PREMISES OF CHILDHOOD STUDIES⁶

Descriptive assumptions

So what then are the key ideas that typify the childhood studies movement and correspondingly underlie the new child research? Some core ideas are descriptive tenets about the nature of childhood.

First, *'childhood' is a social phenomenon*. Although membership in the class who are called 'children' is defined in part by biological and cognitive maturation, it is by no means the only criterion or even a limiting criterion. Consider, for example, the CRC's definition of 'children' as inclusive of 17-year-olds. That definition leads to the legal fiction of describing – and treating – many teenagers as 'children', when that descriptor would never be used in ordinary conversation.

On the other hand, as the average age for achievement of economic independence continues to increase, the initial assumption of historic 'adult' roles becomes more remote for each cohort of young people. Accordingly, the social status of teenagers and 20-somethings is increasingly ambiguous, as reflected in some scholars' use of a new label ('emerging adults') for many people who would have unequivocally been considered 'young adults' even in the recent past.

Second, *children are actors, not merely subjects*. The range of options for children may be limited by objective gaps in skills and knowledge (caused sometimes by inexperience or lack of environmental accommodations more than true incapacity) and, perhaps even more so, in ascribed roles. Almost from the beginning, however, children are active participants in constructing their environment. (See Kampmann, Chapter 8, this volume, for discussion of children's engagement in early childhood programmes.) There is now a consensus that Piaget and other early theorists in child development grossly underestimated young children's abilities and indeed the sophistication of their typical behaviour:

We now know that infants and young children have a stunning array of biopsychosocial competencies. Even young infants have rudimentary intentions and organized and motivating emotions and are able to react to the meanings of others' intentions and emotions. With these biopsychosocial competencies, infants make meaning about their relation to the world of people and things and about themselves. Of course, their meaning-making

is nonsymbolic and radically different from the representational meaning made by older children and adults, but it is meaning nonetheless.

(Tronick and Beeghly, 2011: 107; citations omitted)

Third, *it is meaningful to conceive of 'children' (or 'adolescents' or 'young children' or 'young people') as a class*. The concept of 'childhood' itself and the descriptions of particular 'childhoods' (circumstances of childhood) often slough over individual and group differences in both the objective reality and the subjective experience of childhood. (In that regard, the title provided for the Convention on the Rights of *the* Child is unfortunate.) However, it is possible for an individual to step from childhood (or adolescence) to adulthood, as provided in law by the age of majority and as may occur in the attributions that both adults and children make about that person, regardless of age or psychological maturity. Therefore, although 'development' is a continuous function, the question of whether an individual is properly classified as a 'child' may have a binary (nominal or ordinal) answer, as illustrated most obviously by rites of passage.

Fourth, as discussed by Toots et al. (Chapter 4, this volume), *childhood may be conceived as a culture in itself with its own institutions, norms, mores, dialect, and styles*. Moreover, it may transcend boundaries both vertically and horizontally. Thus, for example, one may conceive of an American youth subculture, but one may also talk meaningfully about a youth culture that in at least some respects (including music, fashion, games, particular political concerns) may cross national boundaries.

Normative perspective

Giving children a voice

Childhood studies also incorporates a *normative* perspective – values and norms about how children *should* be treated. Perhaps the most basic assumption in that regard has already been noted; namely, children are *people* whose

perspective is valuable and sometimes distinctive. In particular, they should have a voice (even if their opinions are not necessarily dispositive) in describing the settings of which they are a part and the effects on their lives of various policies and programmes.

Moreover, effects on children as children, not only as future adults, should be considerations in decision making. Thus, for example, the public good might be advanced by improving children's current quality of life (for example, enhancing recreational opportunities) even if such action cannot be demonstrated to improve children's productivity or happiness as adults.

The emphasis on learning about children's own viewpoint is based on three reasons. First, as already indicated, there is a *moral* dimension. Such research provides a means for children to have a say when their personhood may be in question. Second, there is a *pragmatic* concern. Information about children's own views may better guide the design of policies, practices, and even the physical environment in order to match (in ecological terms, 'fit') children's expectations, so that services are more acceptable and probably more effective. Third, as illustrated by Barker's work, knowledge about children's daily lives and their experiences of the settings in which they are a part is apt to be *scientifically* valuable, so that knowledge better reflects the realities of childhood.

Scholars on childhood typically believe that efforts to obtain more direct information about children's experiences and their behaviour in everyday settings is especially important because of gaps and misconceptions that have long pervaded both popular and professional beliefs about children. In particular, children's capacities as citizens have often been underestimated. To the extent that children's level of performance has been accurately observed, their apparent abilities have often been constrained by their status and the corollary range of their experiences.

In the same vein, children's experience in everyday settings has been given insufficient attention. Partly as a result, topics

on which there is basic research suggesting strategies for intervention (for example, educational approaches to improve understanding and exercise of rights; neighbourhood approaches to enhancement of children's safety and well-being) have often not been followed by translations of such knowledge into programmatic trials until decades later, if at all.

Building ethically and empirically sound public policy

In general, public policies affecting children should recognize and accommodate (a) children's capacities, (b) the 'real' developmental differences that shape their experience and their possibilities, and (c) the constraints placed on their performance by their social and legal status (see Melton, 1999, for explication of these points in practical terms). In the first instance, policies and programmes should offer opportunities for children to enhance and apply their skills in relation to matters of concern to them. In the second, efforts should be made to ensure that caring adults are available for consultation and that risks attached to improvident decisions are minimized. In the third, policymakers should recognize the unfairness of holding young people fully responsible for bad behaviour when they have had little opportunity to practise the independent exercise of good judgement. Provision of adequate knowledge for application of these principles will often require innovations in methodology (see the chapters in Part III of this volume, especially Craig, Chapter 25 and Rasmussen, Chapter 24) to enable valid observation of children's everyday behaviour and optimal communication between researchers and child participants at all phases of the process, including diffusion of results (Dahl, Chapter 30; Hayne and Tustin, Chapter 29; Saywitz and Camparo, Chapter 21; Soffer and Ben-Arieh, Chapter 28).

In turn, these new approaches raise complex problems of research ethics. Behavioural research is rarely of direct benefit to the participants, child participants are often

unaccustomed to exercise of autonomy, and in many instances they are in populations that are of uncertain competence, low freedom, and high vulnerability (see the examples in Part II of this volume; see also Melton and Stanley, 1996). Moreover, research on children's everyday lives almost inevitably intersects with the complicated legal and social relationships that permeate the settings of which children are a part (see the examples in Part I of this volume, especially Levesque, this volume; see also those chapters that focus on third-party informants (for example, Bornstein, Chapter 26; Goerge and Bong-Lee, Chapter 23)). Given the evolution of children's status, the opportunities for undue intrusions on children's – and third parties' – privacy are rampant (see Melton, 1991), no matter whether the unobtrusive measures are direct observations (as in Barker and colleagues' work), alternative media (such as Rasmussen, Chapter 24, this volume), or analyses of administrative data (including Goerge and Lee, Chapter 23, this volume). Interviews and questionnaires about sensitive matters (including one's associations and use of time), even when intended to be 'innocuous', can be especially intrusive (see Melton, 1991), no matter whether the informants are children themselves (see this in volume, Craig, Chapter 25; Hayne and Tustin, Chapter 29; Saywitz and Camparo, Chapter 21; Soffer and Ben-Arieh, Chapter 28), children as adults (Pillemer and Dickson, Chapter 27), or adults important in the children's lives (Bornstein, Chapter 26, this volume). Increased respect for children with corresponding desire to learn about their experiences ironically raises the risk of violations of their privacy.

THE CONTENTS OF THIS BOOK

The contributors to this volume reflect the topical, disciplinary, and geographic diversity of the field. The following abstracts are intended to guide readers in both selecting

chapters of particular interest and identifying themes that develop across chapters. (Abstracts are not included for the introductions to the major sections of the book.)

The book's first topical chapters address childhood in the context of major normative systems: law, politics, and theology. In his discussion of childhood as a legal status, **Roger Levesque** (Chapter 3) revisits some of the controversies surrounding children's rights in law and practice. The on-going debates about the proper allocation of roles, rights, and responsibilities among child, family, and state give shape to the legal status of children and ultimately affect the experiences of childhood, parenthood, and family life. Levesque stresses the significance of the concept of 'evolving capacities' in defining the bounds of children's rights. Unless governments recognize children's capacities in fact, their capacities in law may be empty promises.

In Chapter 4, **Anu Toots, Natalie Worley, and Anna Skosireva** revisit some of the issues raised in the current (introductory) chapter. In particular, they address ways in which young people have been both engaged in and affected by major political changes, and they consider the meaningfulness of 'youth culture' amid such transformations. Toots et al. discuss developmental changes in children's understanding of political life, social factors mediating those changes, and the nature and effectiveness of mechanisms for civic education and political socialization. They also note the growing availability of youth parliaments and other structures for consideration of children's interests in particular settings, especially schools, and sometimes the body politic as a whole. Such structures commonly remain impotent in policymaking, but they nonetheless sometimes facilitate children's political engagement and leadership development.

Eugene Roehlkepartain (Chapter 5) reviews the state of the art in the study of children's religious and spiritual development. Until recently, religion and spirituality in childhood were hardly addressed in scientific

literature. In part as a result, however, of the broader concern with childhood, research is growing in regard to children's religious and spiritual beliefs, experiences, and commitments. Although noting methodological challenges, the authors underscore the importance of recognizing that spiritual development, like other aspects of personal development, is a product of interaction between children and systems of influence. Sources of influence in that regard include not only micro-level settings, such as the family, the school, and the religious institution itself, but also the norms and myths in local, ethnic, and societal cultures.

The next three chapters examine children's roles as consumers of, respectively, health care, material goods, and education. The role of health care consumer ('patient') is fraught with vulnerability for both children and adults, at least in the societies that **Priscilla Alderson** (Chapter 6) describes as 'the minority richer world'. Although adults wish to spare children the stress and responsibility of the decision-making process when it comes to treatment choices, children often demonstrate remarkable capacity to weather and navigate through such challenges. Through her discussion of children's experiences in the 'patient' and 'non-patient' zones, Alderson issues an indictment against commercially driven research and service delivery that neglect health needs of children in 'the majority poorer world.' By juxtaposing examples of over-pathologizing generally healthy children and underserving very sick children, Alderson expands the discussion of childhood illness to include consideration of business agendas and other economic influences.

In Chapter 7, **Ragnhild Brusdal and Ivar Frønes** discuss the influences of consumerism as both culture and activity on socialization of children. No longer merely the beneficiaries of their parents' choices in the marketplace, children have become powerful purchasers of goods, services, and experiences, whether directly or through influences on parents and grandparents. For

product developers and marketers, children and parents present particularly sought-after consumer groups: children, because their physical size and scope of activities grow rapidly, and their preferences change as they mature and as peer-culture dictates; parents, because they regard purchases for their children as high-priority investments that enable greater choices for their children in the future. Consumption claims greater portions of children's and parents' time, and family schedules involve more paid-for activities with more paid-for things. Childhood itself has become commercialized, with market definitions of what a boy or girl of a particular age and status must have and do.

Jan Kampmann (Chapter 8) offers a social commentary on children's activities as learners. Emphasizing the politics of early childhood education and care, Kampmann talks about the increasing bureaucratization of children's learning, as reflected in standardization of goals, methods, and quality assurance. The author criticizes the turn toward 'test culture', which attributes value to competencies that can be planned, controlled, and uniformly measured and which may allocate rewards on the bases of test-score differences that have little practical or scientific meaning. The standards-driven learning environment that functions according to codes and norms places additional requirements on children to de-code the institutional codes and to act appropriately, or 'normally'. International funders may apply these expectations globally, so that schooling becomes defined in practice as 'normal children's normal learning'. In such a context, children's individual experiences, diverse cultural backgrounds, varied systems of belief, and unique social circumstances receive less and less respect.

The buffer against children's domination by professionalized, bureaucratized institutions may be their relationships with family and friends. Increasingly, such relationships are regarded as zones of privacy. In global terms, this shift is in part the result of the welcome downfall of totalitarian regimes,

which typically treated child care as an appropriate (and effective) means of socializing children to conform to the norms favoured by the state (Qvortrup, 2008). It also reflects changes in economic organization as technical and structural changes permit or even demand flexibility of places and times for work and, therefore, of communities of residence. The 'retreat' becomes more valuable, and fences are erected both literally and figuratively. This strong trend, which has been in evidence for at least two generations in the West and which shows no signs of abating, has had a substantial cost in social capital, particularly in the number and intensity of sources of social support available to children and their parents (Putnam, 2000), with corollary negative effects on the well-being of children and families (Melton, 2010b, and Melton, in press, and citations therein).

In Chapter 9, **Jennifer Mason and Becky Tipper** engage in a methodological discussion about research on children's experiences of family life. Until recently, few studies directly addressed this topic. Children were implicitly regarded as subjects of parents' influence, and the marital (or cohabitant or non-cohabitant) relationship between parents was treated as a discrete phenomenon. Reciprocity in parent-child (never 'child-parent') relationships and the interaction, identity, and experiences of the family as a whole (including siblings and extended-family or clan members), both among themselves and with unrelated parties, were phenomena largely outside researchers' self-defined field of vision.

The newer research focusing exclusively on children's own perspectives provided insights about family dynamics through children's eyes, but it also presented numerous methodological and ethical problems. A particular challenge lies in uncovering and capturing what Mason and Tipper call 'relationality', so that the various family members' perspectives on their collective interaction, identity, and experience may be captured and interwoven. The socio-cultural

constructions of childhood and family are complex interactive processes that involve 'being, becoming, and developing', and none of these processes can be fully understood in isolation.

Similar considerations apply to friendship networks. Friendship may protect children from bullying, social anxiety, and depression. They offer possibilities for fun, fulfilment, and cooperative learning and service. At the same time, friendship can introduce children to potential losses, group misbehaviour, and victimization by peers. Appreciating these complexities, **Steven Asher, Whitney Brechwald Guerry, and Kristina McDonald** (Chapter 10) describe the nature of children's friendships and their effects on children's socio-emotional and academic adjustment. Although considerable differences in children's friendships can be found within and across cultures, much is universal.

Asher et al. note a large body of research on positive and protective effects of friendship, but they lament that this literature offers little guidance to professionals hoping to help children with friendship problems. The social tasks perspective may provide a useful basis for education of children about specific friendship-related skills, such as helping a friend, resolving conflicts of interest, and coping with a friend's dishonesty or betrayal.

Although the new child research has focused in large part on children in particular settings (especially those settings that are set aside for children), child researchers have also been cognizant of the reality that children's particular situations and expectations affect their adaptation even in those settings. It is noteworthy in that regard that Barker and Wright's (1955) early studies examined the particular activities and experiences of children with disabilities and of African American children in the settings of 'Midwest'. Part II of this book addresses the experiences common in children in particular populations.

In Chapter 12, **Oscar Barbarin, Emma Sterrett, and Dari Jigjidsuren** discuss the

well-being of ethnic-minority children in relation to the broader societies of which they are a part. They concentrate their discussion on stress, coping, and resilience among African American children. However, they also address the situation for Kazakh children in Mongolia and ethnic-Russian children in Estonia, and they note the diversity of situations for ethnic minorities in widely diverse societies.

Charlotte Patterson (Chapter 13) discusses a topic of growing interest to researchers and the general public: the intersection of the private matter of sexual orientation and the public domains of legal and policy issues, permitted and accepted institutional practices, and formal and informal systems of support and service provision. She examines these issues from the perspectives of two groups that are in different situations but that have similar interests: youth who are themselves in sexual minorities and children whose parents are in sexual minorities. Family support turns out to be a major factor in the adjustment of young people in both groups. Like Alderson in her discussion of children as patients, Patterson notes children's resilience in hostile situations, such as the social exclusion and public ridicule that youth in sexual minorities and children of parents in sexual minorities often experience.

Patricia Sloper and Bryony Beresford (Chapter 14) consider the situation for children with disabilities, another disparate population that historically has been subjected to stigma. Similar to older research on family life that rarely included children's perspective, studies of the experiences of children with disabilities has relied mostly on data obtained from adults and not from the children themselves. However, recent methodological innovations have enabled researchers to hear directly from children with autistic spectrum disorders, cognitive and perceptual disabilities, and physical, sensory, and communication impairments.

Sloper and Beresford share their experiences in conducting research with children with disabilities. They explore methodological-

challenges that such research presents, including researchers' own prejudices about disability, their need in some instances to rely on non-verbal communication, and their openness to use of non-traditional research tools. For example, Sloper and Beresford describe studies using visual methods with children who do not use speech to communicate, observing or joining in an activity with children with cognitive impairments, and collaborating with researchers who are deaf when conducting research with children who are deaf.

Experienced in research on treatment of juvenile delinquents with serious offence histories, **Michael McCart, Terje Ogdén, and Scott Henggeler** (Chapter 15) discuss illegal behaviour among juveniles and the systems of response to such misconduct, with a focus on economically advanced countries of northern Europe and North America – systems that are grounded in diverse assumptions about the nature of childhood and adolescence. McCart et al. review the extensive body of research (including cross-cultural studies) showing multiple determinants of delinquency and indicating the relative effectiveness of complex intervention approaches that integrate responses to the known causes and correlates of delinquency.

In Chapter 16, **Kelly McWilliams and her colleagues** at the University of California, Davis, examine the experiences of children who serve as witnesses in legal proceedings. Child witnesses' involvement varies both within and across countries and may include, for example, participating in multiple forensic interviews, testifying in open court, providing testimony by closed circuit television, or confiding in an assigned professional who will represent a child's voice in court. Although any legal involvement may be stressful, children report greater satisfaction with the legal process when they are treated with respect and allowed to form positive relationships with legal staff.

In Chapter 17, **Kelly McWilliams, Gail Goodman, Juliana Raskauskas, and Ingrid Cordon** discuss contemporary research about child victims of mistreatment, including

abuse and neglect by adults and bullying by peers. Taking a comparative approach, McWilliams et al. describe findings from diverse societies, including Egypt, Romania, China, Kenya, Canada, Ireland, South Africa, Philippines, and the United States. Echoing a theme throughout the book, McWilliams et al. stress the importance of hearing children's own voices when studying child victimization, but they caution that children themselves may not realize the seriousness or the wrongfulness of the acts they have experienced. The authors conclude that in order to inform policy and practice adequately, research on child victimization must include the perspectives of both child victims and sympathetic adults.

For a range of reasons (including threats to their safety), many children in both industrialized and developing countries find themselves living away from their families. After being voluntarily placed in alternative care settings by their parents, involuntarily removed because of treatment needs, abuse, or neglect, or separated from their families because of armed conflict or natural disasters, children may spend anywhere from a few weeks to their entire childhoods living somewhere other than their parents' home. In Chapter 18, **Judith Cashmore** discusses the various arrangements for children's out-of-home care, including kinship care, foster care, institutional care, adoption, and independent living, sometimes including homelessness. She gives primary attention to formal foster care settings in industrialized countries (the focus of much of the existing research), but she emphasizes the need for researchers to reach children in informal settings, including those who are homeless.

In other instances, children are in unstable situations because of population-wide problems, not just the difficulties experienced by their families. With or without their families, children who are refugees, asylum seekers, or displaced persons come to the safer parts of the world in search of protection from the dangers of their homeland, including armed

conflict, political and religious persecutions, and abhorrent practices, such as bodily mutilations. **Jacqueline Goodnow** (Chapter 19) discusses the challenges of research involving this population of children. Data collection may be particularly difficult, because refugee and displaced children and asylum seekers may avoid interviewers altogether or they may be very cautious in their responses, because they fear being denied their request for protection in the receiving country and then deported. As with other vulnerable groups, researchers need to be open and resourceful, to ensure that participation translates into a positive experience for the children, and to be clear about the intended beneficiaries of the information being generated.

Part III examines the usefulness of various methods for child research. Interviewing is a widely used method in social science research and a standard practice in a variety of applied settings, including health, mental health, and forensic settings. It is the most obvious means of learning about children's expectations and experiences, at least for school-age children and often for preschoolers. **Karen Saywitz and Lorinda Camparo** (Chapter 21) offer practical recommendations for both laboratory and field settings. The science of child interviewing has come a long way since 25 years ago, and today's interviews are informed by considerations of interview structure, rapport development, question composition, interviewer behaviour, cultural factors, language limitations, physical setting, traumatic context, and developmental differences in children. At the centre of a successful interview is respect for the child being interviewed and genuine interest in the child's point of view.

Much of what is known about children's development is the result of longitudinal studies that have relied on reports by family members, independent observers, and, in recent times, children themselves. **Amy Dworsky** (Chapter 22) provides a comprehensive review of national and international longitudinal studies that have involved children

as informants. The majority of the studies that followed children from an early age initially relied on parents' and caregivers' reports. Children's own reports were sought when they reached an age (usually 10) when they were perceived to be able to respond to surveys reliably. Dworsky considers the use of developmentally appropriate measures, a particular challenge in longitudinal research because of changes in children's competencies and interests as they mature. She stresses the importance of cross-cultural longitudinal studies that would advance the state of knowledge on universality and specificity of factors that affect children's development.

Rather than gathering new data, investigators of children- and childhood-related phenomena sometimes rely on existing administrative data, collected by various agencies and organizations in public and private sectors. In their review, **Robert Goerge and Bong Joo Lee** (Chapter 23) discuss drawbacks (such as lack of richness) and benefits (including widespread availability; reliability; accuracy; cost efficiency) of administrative data. Research has relied on administrative data about vital statistics (such as births and deaths), education (including test scores; disciplinary actions), health (for example, hospital visits and immunizations), unlawful behaviour (such as arrests and rehabilitation data), economic well-being (including family income and participation in anti-poverty programmes), and child maltreatment (most notably, recorded incidents of child abuse and neglect).

In Chapter 24, **Kim Rasmussen** describes use of children's photography as a relatively unobtrusive, engaging way of tapping children's knowledge and experience and doing so in a way that does not rely heavily on verbal skills. Cameras can be used, for example, on neighbourhood walks to identify the people and places most important to children. Photography is one example of the use of children's artistic expressions as data, whether through archives or work actually produced for research (for example, books analysing and presenting children's letters

to Eleanor Roosevelt (an archive; Cohen, 2002) and posthumously to Martin Luther King (a research effort; Colbert and Harms, 1998)).

Lyn Craig (Chapter 25) discusses time-use studies, which allow scholars of children and childhood a greater understanding of how childhoods are actually lived. (Note that this approach, although in contemporary research no longer relying solely on direct observation, is the one adopted by Barker and his colleagues.) What happens in the minutes, hours, and days of childhood? Although we know about the range of behaviours in which children engage (such as going to school; watching television; doing homework; playing; performing chores), knowledge of the content, sequencing, duration, and intricacies of children's activities is much more limited. Few time-use studies to date have specifically included questions about children's use of time, and fewer still relied on children as primary informants on their use of time. Although these studies present numerous methodological challenges, including recall bias and developmentally appropriate research tasks, such as completing a time diary, studies of children's time use yield invaluable findings relevant to children's health and well-being (for example, an association between children's time use and depression). In general, time-use studies offer an important window on childhood.

Several authors in this volume refer to the newer research that focuses on children's own perspectives and experiences as an element of progress in acquisition of child-related knowledge, most of which has been historically derived from adults' reports. In Chapter 26, **Marc Bornstein** takes a close look at parents' reports as a source of information about children's lives. He discusses strengths and weaknesses of the method that remains widely used in studies of childhood and child development, including studies of very young children, assessments of developmental histories, and studies of aggressive and other behaviours with low base rates.

Bornstein considers questions of parents' knowledge about their children, objectivity in reporting, expectations regarding children, and cultural preferences. Although well suited to answer certain research questions, a parent's report, like any other single source of information, is not sufficient to provide a complete picture of the child's life. A more coherent and valid picture of children's lives emerges when there is an integration of researchers' observations, the child's own accounts, and reports from various others who vary in their relationship to the child, the settings in which they interact with the child, and the values and perspectives that they use for evaluation of the child's behaviour.

Another interesting perspective on childhood is that offered by adults who reminisce about their own early years. Research in this domain has focused in large part on the accessibility and accuracy of early memories, questions that have been of interest because of their potential relevance in some forensic cases and their theoretical significance in regard to the bounds and processes of long-term memory. Starting from this point, **David Pillemer and Ryan Dickson** (Chapter 27) suggest that when adults remember certain childhood experiences, they may reassess the value of those experiences to fit their understanding of the personal significance that the events ultimately had – a perspective children themselves obviously lack. Pillemer and Dickson argue that finding a place in children- and childhood-related research for adults' recollections of childhood next to children's own accounts and direct observations of children would make an important contribution to understanding of 'the true fabric of childhood experience'.

Contemporary researchers who pursue children- and childhood-related inquiries largely agree that studies that involve children as direct sources of information about their own lives and experiences make a valuable contribution to adults' understanding of childhood. In Chapter 28, **Michal Soffer and Asher Ben-Arieh** discuss ways of obtaining reliable

information from school-aged children about their own lives. Soffer and Ben-Arieh urge adoption of inclusive and participatory child-centred methodologies. In particular, they suggest use of child-friendly data collection techniques, such as drawing, storytelling, and games.

Continuing the discussion about childhood memories, **Harlene Hayne and Karen Tustin** (Chapter 29) focus on young children's ability to provide information about their lives. Readers will recall that in the chapter on adults' memories of themselves as children (Chapter 27), Pillemer and Dickson review research on earliest memories, commonly dating back to the time when the now-adult child was 3 or 4 years old. Addressing this question, Hayne and Tustin reference a number of studies that reveal that very young children remember experiences before they can talk about them and they can maintain non-verbal representations of experiences for a long time. Inquiries into the workings of memory of very young children produced fascinating discoveries, including one that 2- to 4-year-old children may not apply their emerging vocabulary to descriptions of events that occurred in the past (at six or twelve months earlier). Instead, they use only words that were part of their vocabulary at the time of the event. Another finding that carries significant implications for research on children's own perspectives is that their ability to talk about their past is affected by their parents' practices of narration.

In the concluding chapter (Chapter 30), **Tove Dahl** provides advice about children in research not only as study participants, but also as collaborators with adult researchers at all stages of the research process. Building on developments in participatory action research, Dahl argues that by involving children in research as scientists, both the academic community and the children benefit. Academicians acquire a better understanding of children's subjective experiences of the world, and children are empowered through participation. The benefits spill over to the

world at large. The knowledge produced with the help of children as researchers contributes to improvement of the welfare of youth and ultimately the welfare of all.

NOTES

1 The Day of Affirmation speech is available in both written transcript and audio recording at <http://www.jfklibrary.org/Research/Ready-Reference/RFK-Speeches/Day-of-Affirmation-Address-news-release-text-version.aspx>

2 Coles (1995) also wrote a children's book about Ruby's story.

3 Important similar critiques were made later by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1981, 2004) and his most famous student, James Garbarino (2009). However, Bronfenbrenner and Garbarino placed greater emphasis on addressing problems of policy and practice. Hence, they did not begin with purely unobtrusive naturalistic observations in the way that Barker and his colleagues did.

4 The Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute in Jerusalem began in 1974, but its child research centre emerged later.

5 Most relevant American professional organizations have indicated that they favour ratification of the CRC. Although discussion of the treaty rarely occurs in the popular media, it may be the case that many professionals in the field have at least passing knowledge of the CRC. Except, however, for specialists in international children's issues, we doubt that many American scholars' work has been materially influenced by the CRC.

6 This section of the introductory chapter does not include references in the ordinary manner, because the ideas herein are found throughout the seminal treatises of child research. Among them are the books cited in Table 1.1.

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