

Message from the Guest Editors

Since the beginning of Modernity, childhood has been a central topic in the discourses on society and humanities. The way in which children have been addressed, regulated, segregated and, eventually, protected has shown great variations according to age, context, gender and ethnicity. But also, historically there have been - at least - two childhoods; one with a guarantee of inclusion in socialization mechanisms and an excluded childhood in which children do not have access to their rights. This differential recognition based on the socioeconomic background is not always acknowledged by the human rights and children rights narratives.

The question that summons us is how can the discourses on childhood help place the effects of inequality on the most vulnerable sectors of the population onto the political and social agenda and translate into actions and programs that work in favour of childhood welfare? The challenges, at these turbulent times, come from various, equally complex, fronts.

One of them is the Coronavirus pandemic. Even though it has lost much of the centrality it had in the past two years, according to the World Health Organization, as for April 2022, there have been more than 510 million confirmed cases of COVID-19, including 6.22 million deaths which have already left many children without one or both parents or other caregivers. And orphaned children are particularly vulnerable to diverse forms of exploitation, including trafficking, sexual exploitation and forced labour. But even without facing such extreme situations, school closures due to COVID-19 have brought significant disruptions to education resulting in severe learning losses and increases in inequality. UNESCO estimates that about 24 million students, from pre-primary to university level, are at risk of not returning to school following the education disruption due to COVID-19.

Another front comprises long-lasting armed conflicts, without an ending in sight, like those in Syria, Yemen, Afghanistan, Libya, South Sudan, amongst many others. These are specially damaging for children, since they dramatically disrupt the possibility to access the most basic rights, including the right to life. The most recent conflict, the invasion of Ukraine by Russian forces on February 24th, has already caused one of the fastest large-scale displacements of children since World War II, with - according to the UN- more than 4.3 million children forced to flee their country or region. But besides displacement, the war has devastating consequences for children wherever they are such.

Finally, climate change is also taking its toll on children. In Africa (especially in Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia) at least 10 million children face severe drought conditions that can lead to hunger, malnutrition and thirst. Even though this regions are the most dramatically affected, according to UNICEF almost every child on earth is exposed to at least one climate and environmental hazards, amongst them severe drought and flooding, air pollution and water scarcity.

This is only a partial and arbitrary list of some of the problems that we -the adults of this world- managed to create, and all of them represent a tragic reversal of the progress of children rights which impact is already visible, but its lasting consequences are yet to be seen. In this Special Issue of *Language, Discourse and Society* the reader will find different approaches to a variety of topics related to childhood; all of them framed in a discursive

perspective. They re-present multiple struggles; for a voice, for an identity, for belonging, for decent life of children from various backgrounds and cultures.

In *The rise of the discourse on children's right of self-determination. The case study of Early Childhood Education and its construction of children as agents in education*, Federico Farini and Angela Scollan offer a systematic review of literature around the theme of children's right of self-determination and discuss the positioning of children as agents who can make choices and construct valid knowledge, within the foundation of the discourses on children's right of self-determination based on a critical examination of the CRC. The discussion, concentrated on Early Childhood Education in the Freire's description of critical pedagogy, (re)constructions a view on education.

In *The Dynamics of Language Attitudes of Young Parents towards the Preservation of the Mother Tongue*, Yunisrina Qismullah Yusuf, Zulfadli A. Aziz, Menalisa and Teuku Zulfikar present a study on the attitude towards Acehnese, a local language of Indonesia, and how families and communities struggle to preserve and pass on this language, along with all its cultural and symbolic values, to their children. Nevertheless, language maintenance in the family it's a part of cultural transmission, required for individual identity and social integration.

In *Changes in language about IDD, mental illness, disability in different countries in different languages*, Anna Perkowska-Klejman, Magda Lejzerowicz, Julien-Ferencz Kiss, Florica Ortan, Rolf Magnus Grung, Dag Dæhlen, Lynne Marsh and Sam Abdulla analyse how the understanding and definition of disability has evolved during the 20th and into the 21st century in different countries of Europe, showing how the narrative shift reflects increasingly inclusive practices and the recognition of a human rights based approach towards people with IDD.

In *Media usage, media violence and the Nigerian Child*, Blessing Adjeketa addresses the impact of violence in the media in the behaviour of children, analysing what kind of violence originated in the media is replicated by children, and how electronic media constitute an intrinsic part of children's lives with all its implications. The studies not only pay attention to the huge problem, but mostly may lead to different actions affected the reduction of violence among children.

In *"We owe this noble duty to our children": A corpus-assisted critical discourse analysis of Ghanaian parliamentary discourses around children*, Kwabena Sarfo Sarfo-Kantankah and Ebenezer Agbaglo offer a critical analysis on childhood discourses of inclusion, participation and identity, and show how some of the most urgent problems faced by children, such as child labour, exploitation, child marriage, are conceptualized by law-makers and presented in the Ghanaian parliamentary discourses. Ghanaian parliamentarians dispute international description of children rights, recognizing they should be analyse within cultural-specific contexts.

Finally, in *Creativity and Authenticity in an Emerging Naija's Youth Hip Hop Culture*, Idom T. Inyabri, Eyo O. Mensah and Kaka Ochagu analyse the creative use of verbal and non-verbal codes by the youth of Nigeria and how they redefined the hip hop landscape through the development of new and rich cultural expressions. The youth has made Nigerian Hip Hop a part of the transnational, multi-vocal Global Hip Hop Nation.

All of these articles share an understanding on the fundamental importance of language, not only in the interpretation but in the construction of reality. Language changes don't ensure the reduction or disposal of social problems. The paramount importance of the Convention on the Rights of the Child is also highlighted through these contributions, together with creative readings and interpretations that make it clear that thirty three years after the ratification of the CRC, it remains a fundamental milestone in the battle for the rights of the child and their protection.

Because - and let's make no mistake here - it is a struggle one that challenges us as social scientists, pedagogists, educators, to mobilize our energy and resources to contribute to the recognition and respect of these narratives.

In times of proliferation of conflicts, what is at stake is the very notion of human rights, of children rights, of groups (ethnic, national etc.) rights. In this sense, (re)thinking childhood and children rights is a symbolic operation with decisive practical consequences. There is no possible neutrality here; the way we perceive and interpret reality shapes the way we act in the world. We believe the works in this selection will inspire further research but also numerous action in the fields of rights.

Only through a practice guided by critical reflection we will ensure that humanity and solidarity prevail, together with the understanding that besides our differences we are all part of this world. A world that, as the proverb says, "we do not inherit from our ancestors; we borrow it from our children".

Let's ensure we make every effort so that all children can share this (their) world in peace and dialogue.

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