

## Intervention Comparative Childhoods December 3, 2012

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To begin with I would like to thank David for inviting me to make this intervention at this session, hopefully the first in a long row of forthcoming sessions within the framework of Comparative Childhoods. I am particularly honoured that *my* view is valued as this session aims at mapping the field and re-orienting the positions of Child- and Youth Studies.

### Part One

As speakers we were given thorough guidelines, or rather, should I say food for thought, to inspire our contributions? Like the obviously well-trained scholar that he is, David poses more questions than answers in his three page directives. As I read these, however, much of his cautious and eloquent wording could be summed up and put more bluntly in the one question: what is Child and Youth Studies... anyway?

This is a highly relevant question.

In 2007, when Peg Lindstrand, Ingrid Olsson and I from Stockholm Institute of Education, supported by Gunilla Preisler from Stockholm University, formed a working group to elaborate on the foundations of this department, this question was fundamental. Consequently, we raised a number of other questions. What did we want? What competences did we have? In what ways could we contribute to 1) the scientific field, 2) to Stockholm University, 3) to society and, 4) to a better life for children and young people? Although none of us had teacher training, Stockholm Institute of Education provided social and cultural bedding for posing these encompassing questions and, not least for taking the answers seriously.

At the time, the department of Child and Youth Studies merely consisted of about twenty people. Although many have now left for other positions or retired from working life, some of these people are still highly esteemed colleagues today.

The twenty or so people were just as engaged in this visionary work as the little four-people-working-group was. Indeed, there was an outspoken demand for cooperation which I believe in turn spurred an ambiance of expectation despite the forthcoming loss of stability forced upon us as employees as we entered the new administrative structure of Stockholm University.

Emerging from Stockholm Institute of Education, the people who originally formed the department drew from democratic ideas which permeated the university college, such as egalitarian values and self-governing. Every body's voice was equally important. Our imperative was that all children and

young people had a right to be listened to. And what we taught in class-rooms was also largely practiced in staff meetings. This, however, did not mean that we strove for consensus and homogeneity. Rather, our differences came across as the virtual strength of the small group of people. We were few, but *together* we knew a lot. And we actually believed that we could contribute to 1) the scientific field, 2) to Stockholm University, 3) to society and, 4) to a better life for children and young people.

Since then, the department of Child and Youth Studies has undergone many changes. A significant change is that the department has grown substantially. We are now five or six times as many as we once were. Another change is that the relevant question of what Child and Youth Studies *is* (which is so important related to the formation of identity) seemingly has slipped into oblivion, or at least out of the explicit agenda... until today. Personally, I warmly welcome this re-appearance which allows for discussions of inclusion and exclusion of themes, subjects, objects, approaches, ideas, perspectives, fields and more.

## Part two

I will now move on to more content related issues and again, five years later focus on the *visions* of Child and Youth Studies as a scientific field, from my point of view. In doing so, I will particularly address epistemological questions, which subsequently should impact methodological adoptions and theoretical choices.

As many of you know, my research interest in recent years has orbited knowing and learning in and through bodies that are contextualised in time and place. To explore this I have looked at women skateboarders' performances in a number of ways and in a number of settings. Among other things I have come to the conclusion that knowing is formed along paths of movement and rhythm, and that kinaesthesia, defined by (Potter, 2008, p. 449) as "a dynamic sense of constantly shifting one's body in space and time in order to achieve a desired end", could be identified as a multisensory experience. I have also discussed why it is a good idea to render the body both knowing and not knowing at the same time, by terming it un/known like O'Neill (2009) does.

My cross-disciplinary research both supports and draws from the later turns in social sciences. Because of the focus on the body, my research may by some be viewed as a contribution to the so-called corporeal turn pursued by a number of sociologically informed scholars (for instance Featherstone et al., 1991; Shilling, 1993; Crossley, 1995, 1997). However, I claim to have an interest beyond embodiment. Within anthropology, experiences produced by the sensing body have received an increasing amount of attention (Ingold, 2000; Geurts, 2002; Howes, 2003). This attention, which has even been named not a turn but 'a sensual revolution' (Howes, 2005, p. 1), has inspired intra-disciplinary writers as well as more cross-disciplinary scholars like myself. As a consequence of foregrounding the senses, Pink (2011) suggests a shift from embodiment to emplacement. She argues

that this theoretical advancement, which recognises not only the interrelatedness of mind and body but also the interrelatedness of mind, body and place, has broad implications. This conceptualisation of a moving body in a moving world might allow for re-thinking regarding how a body in context knows, teaches and, possibly, learns.

My approach has similarities to development in educational studies among small children where the spatial turn, the material turn and the affective turn has swirled the theoretical breeding ground. These later turns in social sciences poses epistemological critique to previous turns in social sciences and raise questions on how we know what we know beyond that which is structured by language. Subsequently they challenge us to develop new routes to explore these questions and new line of thinking.

### **Part three**

Summing up, Child and Youth Studies to me, is a cross-disciplinary field with its greatest strength in bridging other fields. This bridging demand highly qualified thinkers as well as open-minded and daring scholars.

As a former co-founder of the department, I believe in plurality, heterogeneity and in the importance of C as in childhood (but also as in seeing and acknowledging each other's competencies). In other words, I also believe in the importance of you, as in the recognition of the people who form the department and the field (but also as in U, the letter which represents ungdom/youth, in particular youth as value (Blatterer 2011), not a life phase or a stage in life).