New Project Launched

Children’s Rights and Perceptions of Justice

Rights and Equality: the Challenge of Children’s Representation: A New Project Funded by the British Academy

2019 will mark 30 years since the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly. The adoption of this treaty signified a culmination of over 100 years of discourse on international children’s rights which had predominately been led by Western European and North American governments, charitable organisations and middle-class philanthropists seeking to improve the conditions and welfare of children, initially in their own contexts and later, further afield. As a new treaty of the United Nations, the Convention was perceived as representing a key achievement in the history of the organisation and marked a turning point in how children were addressed by elevating children from ‘objects of adult charity’ to independent rights holders. The Convention achieved this by not only including protection and provision rights within its contents, but also ensuring that the participation rights of children were provided for. This is significant because hitherto, international children’s rights discourses and programmes were characterised by the silencing of children’s voices, even in their efforts to ensure the welfare and wellbeing of this group. Hence, with the recognition of the right to participation, a whole new domain emerged in the field of childhood practice, policy and scholarship which, in turn, addressed novel concerns such as children’s agency, the age at which children are seen as being able to effectively participate, the intersections between race, class and gender in children's experiences of participatory rights, children's responsibility and practices of children’s active involvement in decision-making processes. The persistence of these debates in academic, professional and policy sectors today highlights the extent to which children's representation is critical to a fuller understanding of not only children’s rights, but also of inequality as well as the delivery of social justice for this group.

In particular there is a need to explore the politics of children’s representation by trying to understand the interplay between the claims of different actors in the area of representation of children and their rights, including children themselves, and the basis upon which these claims are made. To this end, then, a new international network has been established comprising of scholars who:

- are based in 6 different countries;
- all focus on children’s rights in either the global North or the global South;
- and work in a range of disciplines related to the Humanities and Social Sciences including history, political science, anthropology, sociology, social work and law.

Together, as a group, members of the network will review and analyse primary and secondary data relating to projects that were based on qualitative and quantitative research methods. Specifically, the data analysed will be based on countries in which team members have conducted multiple research studies over the years: Ghana, India, the UK, Belgium and Sweden. Additionally, given the critical role that international agencies have played in the
area of children’s rights and in particular, in discourses around the representation of children, our analysis will include data collected through research with transnational organisations such as the UN and the ILO.

The project is led by Dr. Afua Twum-Danso Imoh who is based at the University of Sheffield (UK). The co-investigators of the project are as follows: Professor Yaw Ofosu-Kusi, University of Energy and Natural Resources, Sunyani (Ghana); Professor Bengt Sandin, Linkoping University (Sweden); Dr. Jonathan Josefsson, Linkoping University (Sweden); Dr. Sarada Balagopalan, Rutgers University (USA); Professor Karl Hanson, University of Geneva (Switzerland); and Dr. Didier Reynaert, University College Ghent (Belgium).

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