EXPLORING CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH

This exciting new book illustrates and analyses the complexities of children’s and young people’s everyday lived experiences throughout childhood. Taking an interdisciplinary approach, it provides theoretical frameworks and case studies to critically examine assumptions in the field and explore emerging perspectives. Considering different stages throughout childhood and youth, chapters cover key topics such as eating practices, gender, play, digital media and the environment.

Drawing upon insights from cultural studies, sociology, social anthropology, psychology, health and education, this book focuses on four key areas:

- Bodies and minds
- Space, place and belonging
- Inequalities and inclusion
- Childhood in the past, present and future

Essential reading for students on childhood and youth studies and education courses, Exploring Childhood and Youth is an important resource for practitioners working with children and young people, and for parents, communities and legislators who have influence over children’s and young people’s lives.

Victoria Cooper is Senior Lecturer in Childhood and Youth Studies at The Open University, UK and is former Co-Director of the Children’s Research Centre. She is particularly interested in issues of identity, research methods, and children and young people’s experiences living with a family health crisis.

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This book forms part of the module ‘Exploring childhood and youth’ (E232), an interdisciplinary module which develops theoretical knowledge about children and young people across the world. This is a key module in the Open University BA (Hons) in Childhood and Youth Studies qualification, a leading interdisciplinary programme, which offers a range of critical perspectives on children’s and young people’s lives in the twenty-first century. It is designed for anyone working with children and young people or with a general interest in the field.

Details of this and other Open University modules can be obtained from Student Recruitment, The Open University, PO Box 197, Milton Keynes MK7 6BJ, United Kingdom (tel. +44(0)3003035303; email general-enquiries@open.ac.uk). www.open.ac.uk.
CONTENTS

Editors’ acknowledgements ix
Notes on contributors x

Introduction 1
Victoria Cooper and Naomi Holford

1 Childhood identities and materiality 7
Victoria Cooper

2 Becoming a child 21
Heather Montgomery

3 Children and young people negotiating gender in context 35
Naomi Holford

4 Food, eating and identities 49
Mimi Tatlow-Golden

5 Everyday violence and everyday places 64
Jiniya Afroze

6 Getting ready for school: who’s playing? 78
Karen Douthwaite

7 Children and young people’s experiences of school: do we listen hard enough? 93
Lucinda Kerawalla

8 Poverty, place and learning 108
Gavin Williams

9 Inequalities in access to further and higher education 123
Fiona Reeve
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Normal ways for normal days: building our practice upon the exploration of people’s preferences</td>
<td>Jonathan Rix</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Children, young people and voluntourism</td>
<td>Heather Montgomery</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Eugenics and the lives of disabled children</td>
<td>Kieron Sheehy</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Psychiatrising children</td>
<td>Brenda A. LeFrançois</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Children in the digital world: privacy and autonomy in surveilled digital lives</td>
<td>Mimi Tatlow-Golden</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Changing environments</td>
<td>Peter Kraftl</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Index                                                                 222
Many colleagues within and beyond the Open University contributed to the production of this book. We are appreciative of all the authors for their contributions and for responding with patience to our editorial changes. We would also like to thank other colleagues at the Open University who contributed vital feedback and support: Sheila Curran as a member of the module team, and Kate Breeze, Sara Clayson, Jennifer Colloby and Stephen Harrison as critical readers. Gill Gowans was instrumental to this book’s production. We are indebted to Sarah Richards (University of Suffolk), our external assessor, for her insightful and constructive feedback on drafts throughout.

In particular, we would like to thank Sally Black, our curriculum manager, for invaluable support throughout, ensuring production ran smoothly.

We are also grateful to Annamarie Kino and Alex Butterworth at Routledge for all their work and support.

Victoria Cooper and Naomi Holford, July 2020
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In this book we explore the complex, multi-faceted, but often taken-for-granted lived experiences of children and young people. Childhood and youth studies is now a firmly established academic field, with university courses continuing to grow in popularity, and many publications bringing children’s and young people’s experiences to an adult audience. The idea that children’s and young people’s lives and perspectives should be taken seriously is now itself taken seriously.

Many of the core assumptions at the heart of childhood and youth studies retain the power to surprise and disturb, challenging ideas about childhood that are deeply embedded in the UK and the Global North more broadly. Teaching Open University students, who bring a wealth of experience and expertise from their own backgrounds, we find they are still intrigued and compelled to discover a subject that considers the world from a child’s and young person’s perspective. As such, this book is designed to introduce new audiences to key founding themes of childhood and youth studies: the idea that children and young people are active agents in shaping their own lives, that childhood is socially constructed, that children’s and young people’s perspectives are worthy of study in their own right (James and Prout, 1997), and that their rights are important and require respect. At the same time, we aim to reflect the broadening of contemporary childhood and youth studies, critically examining assumptions of the field and exploring emerging areas and perspectives. This book is designed primarily for a mid-level undergraduate audience with an interest in children and young people, including (but not limited to) those currently working in different areas of childhood and youth services or with a desire to do so in the future, as well as parents, grandparents and relatives. It has been designed to explore a range of themes pertinent to the lives of children and young people within a UK context, complemented by an analysis of international childhood experiences, covering the age range from early years to young adulthood (0–23 years).

One key aim in this volume is to foreground the everyday – those aspects of children’s and young people’s lives and contexts that might otherwise go unexamined, be overlooked or taken for granted – the material things, such as games, pictures and toys which furnish their lives, the food they routinely eat, digital media they engage with, how they play and their relationships with the environment – and how close inspection of these everyday experiences can provide rich insights into the interplay between adult power, children and young people’s rights and their own personal
agency. Of course, what is everyday to one child is not to another. The experience of institutionalisation as a psychiatric inpatient is everyday life to 15-year-old Andrew (Chapter 13), just as using his dad’s computer is to six-year-old Bernie (Chapter 1) and avoiding violence from her supervisor in a small hand embroidery workshop is to 12-year-old Rima (Chapter 5). In all these examples, everyday experiences are shaped by an array of social, cultural, political and economic factors around the individual child.

These intertwining influences mean that in order to understand any child or young person’s life we need to adopt an interdisciplinary approach. The authors come from a range of backgrounds in the social sciences, with some drawing upon the more familiar disciplines within childhood and youth studies, such as anthropology and sociology. Others draw upon newer disciplines, like ‘mad studies’ (a relatively new field of academic study focused on making overtly visible the violence experienced by people deemed mad). Many authors incorporate insights from children’s geographies, which has produced so much of the influential work in recent childhood and youth studies. In addition, several authors work with psychology. Childhood studies and psychology have not always sat comfortably together; indeed, early work in childhood studies (e.g. James et al. 1998) was often explicitly framed as a rejection of developmental psychology, and what was seen as its tendency to consider childhood as a series of universal stages, establishing norms of development from which deviation is considered a problem. While we share some of these critiques of certain forms of developmental psychology and continue to emphasise the importance of the cultural shaping of childhood, we also consider psychology as a wide and varied field and value its insights into childhood as well as its critiques from within (Montgomery and Tatlow-Golden, 2020). Through the chapters in this book there is also a focus on embodiment, recognising the importance of the body and biological factors in shaping (and being shaped by) childhood. Indeed, Peter Kraftl argues in our final chapter that childhood and youth studies may need to look further than the social sciences, with contemporary and future childhoods profoundly and inescapably affected by climate change.

As we adopt an interdisciplinary approach, bringing different disciplines together, so we aim to look at childhood through an intersectional lens, understanding how different aspects of children’s and young people’s identity come together – how they intersect – and what that means. Crucially, intersectionality (a term introduced by the black feminist Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989) emphasises inequalities between and among different groups; it is not interested just in describing differences but in examining relations of power between people. Discussing the impact of her theory over 20 years, Crenshaw described intersectionality as:

> a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects. It’s not simply that there’s a race problem here, a gender problem here, and a class or LBGTQ problem there. Many times that framework erases what happens to people who are subject to all of these things.

(Columbia Law School, 2017)
Childhood and youth studies has always been concerned with power and difference; perhaps most fundamentally with considering the power differentials and relationships between children and adults. Outlining the key founding concepts of childhood studies, Allison James and Alan Prout included the principle that childhood is not a ‘single and universal phenomenon’ (1997, p. 8), but is one aspect of social analysis that cannot be entirely separated from other categories like class, gender or ethnicity. Taking an intersectional approach to childhood and youth studies requires recognition and analysis of the complex inequalities that shape children’s lives. As Konstantoni and Emejulu (2017) argue, “‘being a child” and “having a childhood” mean different things to different children by virtue of their race, class, gender and geographical location’ (p. 17). As explored throughout this volume, geographical location or place influences children’s and young people’s experiences greatly. One key axis of power/difference is divisions between the Global North – high-income, Western countries like the USA, UK, Australia, New Zealand and Europe; and the Global South – low- or middle-income countries like many African countries. Although it is important to stress that there are vast differences within these regions as well (there is significant poverty and inequality in the Global North, and significant wealth in the Global South), the power relations between these regions generally favour the North at the expense of the South. Throughout this book, we aim to take seriously the broader factors that shape children’s and young people’s everyday lives and identities, and to focus on those who are marginalised. Nevertheless, we recognise that we, and the contributors to this volume, are primarily situated in the Global North, and that our interpretations are inevitably shaped and limited by this.

The year 2019 saw the thirtieth anniversary of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child – the human rights treaty ratified by all UN member states except the USA, which outlines the rights to which all children across the world are entitled. Children’s rights have become widely accepted and embedded in politics and society – at least in theory. Of course, for many children and young people throughout the world their rights are challenged on many levels. Poverty, disability, mental health issues, complex gender identities and violence can challenge everyday experiences and in this book we explore these themes in relation to children’s and young people’s learning and schooling, play, access to further and higher education and their sense of self. In situating children’s and young people’s everyday experiences at the heart of this book we recognise their fundamental right to share their views on matters which impact upon their lives. Furthermore, this recognises that although children’s and young people’s lived experiences are shaped to a greater or lesser extent by social and cultural forces such as policies, legal frameworks and political ideals – which are examined in this book – children and young people have agency and the capacity to steer and influence their own lives.

The authors in this volume are thus committed to children’s rights to provision, protection and participation, and to foregrounding children’s and young people’s voices. However, we also recognise the tensions and challenges of children’s rights. These arise both practically: for instance, how should rights be implemented, and what does it mean to champion children’s rights when so many children still lack those rights and there may be little practical recourse; and theoretically: how might rights be in tension?
For instance, might a child’s right to protection from harm come into conflict with their right to participation, to make a decision over their own medical care? Can we acknowledge children’s and young people’s rights to expression, information and participation in the digital sphere, while also upholding their right to protection from harm that may come their way online? At the same time, children’s rights may sit uneasily with the rights of adults; for instance, the particularly complex and controversial question of considering where the right to life begins, in the context of a pregnant person’s right to control their own body. Similarly, we recognise the limitations of listening to children: whose voices are speaking; whose voices are being heard; and what difference does that make? While throughout this volume we draw upon research carried out with children and young people, and some research that is led by children and young people, we have not included contributions from authors who are children or young people themselves; we must acknowledge that our childhood and youth studies is shaped by adults.

In compiling this volume authors were provided with a broad brief, and this is reflected in the distinct styles of writing and diverse voices presented here. In a number of chapters authors take a very distinct approach in an attempt to convey a particular argument or point of view. Some of these views may challenge your own thinking and experiences and you may disagree with some of the material presented – indeed, some authors within our collection might disagree with others on certain points. All of our authors draw upon contemporary and emerging research with children and young people to theorise lives and experiences, and questions may be raised that are not fully answered; the aim here is to encourage deep thinking, reflection and debate, inviting readers to critically analyse children and childhoods.

Despite the stylistic differences between chapters, this book has been organised around four core themes, namely to explore bodies and minds; places, spaces and belonging, issues around inequality, diversity and inclusion, and childhoods: past, present and future.

The chapters

The first four chapters draw upon contemporary research examining children’s and young people’s identities questioning when a child is recognised as a child, how they define their sense of self, how they are seen by others and how identities are connected to the everyday themes of food, materials and bodies. With a shared focus on identity, each chapter looks at different aspects of children’s and young people’s emerging sense of self. The opening chapter by Victoria Cooper looks at identity formation as a dynamic process in which children construct multiple identities throughout their lives and how material things, such as toys and pictures, provide a medium through which to understand how identities are shaped by intersecting social and cultural systems and how children shape their unique sense of self. But when does childhood begin? This is a challenging question central to Chapter 2. Here Heather Montgomery focuses on the infant body and looks at how different cultures understand the beginning of life. This chapter questions how children become socially recognised as human beings and how it is intertwined with their biological development before and after birth. While recognising
the multifaceted and complex nature of childhood identity, in Chapter 3 Naomi Holford concentrates on one aspect: gender. This chapter explores what we mean by gender, how young people experience and construct masculinities and femininities in physical and digital spaces, and how ideas about gender are changing in contemporary societies. The social construction of childhood identities is expanded in Chapter 4 where Mimi Tatlow-Golden considers food as one of the ways in which children, young people and families express their belonging to groups. It examines ways in which food in children’s and young people’s lives articulates identities relating to family, culture and class, moral and ethical views of the world, as well as generation and gender.

Children’s and young people’s experiences do not occur within a vacuum and are shaped in part as they move between different places and everyday spaces such as home, community, pre-school and school, and forge a sense of belonging. The next section of the book looks at the complex relationship between social structures, adult power and children’s and young people’s own personal agency and rights in these everyday spaces. In Chapter 5 Jiniya Afroze draws upon her own international research to consider how children and young people understand and negotiate the accepted and somewhat routine violence experienced in a Bangladesh camp, including violence shaped by gender and age. The intersection between children’s lived experiences, and broader social structures and policies, is a core theme of Chapter 6 which focuses on the early years and how children’s play and learning relationships are influenced by the places they are in as well as their ‘place’ in policy provision and thinking. Here Karen Douthwaite explores a range of historical, political and theoretical perspectives on the purpose of early years provisions and their relevance to young children’s play and learning relationships. Chapter 7 by Lucinda Kerawalla adopts a critical stance in considering children’s views and experiences of school in the UK – a space where children spend so much of their time. The chapter considers the value of listening to children’s and young people’s perspectives on their experiences of life in their classrooms but questions the extent to which their right to be heard and listened to is put into practice.

In the next section of the book the chapters examine issues around inequalities, inclusion and diversity. In Chapter 8 Gavin Williams considers the relationship between poverty, place and learning. Focusing on his own research in the south Wales valleys, he explores the importance of place and belonging and how it shapes children’s learning experiences in an underprivileged area, through a Bourdieusian lens. In Chapter 9, Fiona Reeve extends this use of Bourdieu, asking some important questions about inequalities and access to further and higher education in the UK and other Global North countries, such as why some young people transition seamlessly into higher education and others do not consider this as a possible future, and whether certain forms of education are more highly valued by society. In Chapter 10, Jonathan Rix considers inclusive professional practice from a broad perspective, looking at the tension between individual and collective solutions to supporting children and young people considered disabled, and asking how we can change the way we think about practices. Interactions between advantage and disadvantage are examined in Chapter 11 by Heather Montgomery, where she explores the growing trend in volunteer tourism among young Westerners – often on gap years – working as volunteers in orphanages.
Here she considers the intercultural contacts between young Westerners and children overseas and the impacts these contacts have on both groups of children and young people, raising important questions about power imbalances and the role of good intentions in improving vulnerable children’s welfare.

The remaining four chapters are grouped around the core theme of childhoods: past, present and future, and look at how ideas, attitudes, policies and practices about childhood have shifted and sometimes changed in a range of areas, including mental health, disability, the environment and digital media. Indirectly or directly, the authors are all concerned with how different ideas and understandings affect the lives and experiences of children and young people. In Chapter 12 Kieron Sheehy addresses the highly sensitive topic – the history of disability and particularly the way of thinking known as eugenics, which made judgements about the worth of disabled children and how they should be treated. These decisions included the enforced segregation and long-term incarceration of children, involuntary sterilisation of young people, the withholding of life-saving care from infants and even, in some countries, a targeted extermination of disabled children. In Chapter 13 Brenda LeFrançois examines another sensitive and challenging topic of childhood mental health and particularly the dominance of medical models in diagnosis and treatment, which she presents as forms of oppression and marginalisation. In Chapter 14 Mimi Tatlow-Golden looks at how children’s and young people’s lives changed dramatically in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century with the expansion in digital media; she explores the nature and extent of technological surveillance, and how privacy works for children and young people in online spaces. Finally, in Chapter 15 Peter Kraftl discusses childhood and youth studies in the context of changing environmental conditions, considering ways in which childhood and nature are entwined, and exploring children’s agency in climate protests. He argues that the complex and interconnected nature of today’s challenges requires complex, interdisciplinary approaches for understanding childhood and children’s lives; a call that reflects our intention and focus across the book as a whole.

References


weekend – mealtimes, family practices of what children do, when and how – these all provide childhood with structure and meaning and make useful connections to childhood identities. As Law (1994, 143) argues, ‘modes of ordering’ are impossible to step out of. They provide cultural pathways (Plowman and Stevenson, 2012) through which children construct and reconstruct ‘maps’ which can provide meaning and, as Iovina and Opperman (2014, p. 3076) suggest, ‘the amalgamation of self and materials is the source of life’s narrative’.

Concluding thoughts

Developments within social science have taught us a great deal in terms of recognising the complexity of children’s identity as embodied, affective, socially and culturally constructed (Cooper, 2014). Identity is not a thing but a dynamic process in which children negotiate, construct and reconstruct multiple identities throughout their lives (Durand, 2010; Cooper and Collins, 2008; Cooper, 2014, 2017). Thus while the notion of childhood identity sits alongside well-established and adult constructed ideas of stages and categories, other ways of looking can also provide a different lens through which to appreciate childhood identity as nonlinear and fluid. Identity is continually constructed through everyday practices and connections between people, places and things (Butler, 2003, p. 129). Horton and Kraftl (2006, p. 71) argue that meaning is often lost or hidden in the taken-for-granted ways of understanding the world, and urge researchers to consider some of the hidden and seemingly mundane aspects of childhood which contribute to a child’s constantly evolving identity. As Grube (2017) suggests, material things not only ‘juxtapose the past with the present’ but can be a ‘bridge, a common stomping ground’ (p. 3075) that connects to childhood. So, if researchers are to examine how children give meaning to themselves it is important to locate and examine the complex meanings into which the individual is born and raised.

Note

1 Multi-modal research methods typically incorporate both language-based and nonverbal communication to explore key areas.

References

Childhood identities and materiality


and neonatal children are both socially constructed and biologically embodied beings and provide an excellent example of the relational nature of children’s lives and the way bodies cannot be separated from the objects, spaces, people and other bodies with which they interact.

References


each other in exploring different gender and sexual identities, while another boy was bullied for liking ‘girl’ things, but also for being in foster care; another example of the need to consider gender in a wider, intersectional context. Generally, young people felt that their generation was more accepting of gender diversity and equality, and they expressed support for the idea of gender fluidity, rejecting a rigid gender binary. However, despite these attitudes, they also talked of enduring everyday gendered norms, including harassment and violence as discussed earlier. They described the role of consumer culture in creating gendered categories and emphasised the role of school as reinforcing the gender binary, particularly school uniforms, but also sports and facilities. Research with teachers also suggests a tendency towards anxiety and discomfort around trans students (Payne and Smith, 2014); US teachers tended to focus on the logistics of fitting trans students into existing binary structures rather than questioning those structures. However, encountering gender-diverse, especially non-binary, children can also lead to reflection and change in teachers’ practice (Neary, 2018).

Concluding thoughts

This chapter has explored children’s and young people’s negotiations of gender in different contexts across the UK and internationally. It has emphasised the importance of intersectionality – seeing gender as one of a range of different aspects of identity. Children’s and young people’s experience of gender is one of both continuity and change. Gendered inequalities continue to endure, even as they are played out through new technologies; but at the same time, young people are challenging gendered conventions. Some children and young people can embody successful masculinities or femininities in the gender they were born into; for others it is more of a struggle, whether they are trans or not. Expanding visibility of gender diversity has allowed many children and young people to express a more comfortable identity, but at the same time trans and gender-diverse children and young people still experience harassment and face difficulty navigating gendered structures. Although many experiences of gender are positive and pleasurable, rigid gender binaries and boundaries can cause distress and discomfort, closing down opportunities and options.

References

Negotiating gender in context


Concluding thoughts: food as an expression of intersecting identities

This account of many food-related identities experienced and expressed by children and young people is by no means exhaustive. Yet already it can be seen that a food identity is complex and multifaceted – all food identities are intersectional. Food is a symbolic representation of identity that may be influenced by ethnicity, gender, class, age and political-moral positioning, and individuals are likely to have discontinuous, divided, possibly conflicting food identities. Food both creates and expresses these multiple identities. Food identities and practices are often absorbed from the family, social, cultural and commercial norms practised in the social surround, and generally this is not a conscious process. At the same time, children and young people engage actively, as social, economic and moral agents, with aspects of their food practices. Studies of families’, children’s and young people’s food practices show that food creates and transmits norms, values, morals, relationships, emotions, status, belonging and more, and that food and diet – although viewed as ordinary, daily necessities – are crucial to signalling children’s and young people’s identity and belonging.

References


also shed light on the symbolic power of social relations and social spaces, while reflecting on the ways that influence children’s experiences of violence in everyday lives. The findings also bring out how, within the complex historical, political and structural milieu of the camp, while many children conform to the way of the world, others also find ways to express themselves by negotiating and contesting their agency within the constraints.

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and young people, although research suggests that children’s and young people’s involvement is often limited to their opinions on issues surrounding participation in school rather than issues about teaching and the curriculum (Hulme et al., 2011). On some occasions the presence of children and young people can be tokenistic, which can result in pupils becoming disillusioned and disengaged (ibid.).

More recently, The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) has developed a ‘rights respecting schools’ award which encourages schools to engage with the children’s rights of the UNCRC (UNICEF). Schools are encouraged to make children’s rights central to the school’s ethos, their approaches to teaching, and the attitudes and behaviours of staff and pupils. Where schools adopt a children’s rights approach, teachers and pupils are more likely to view their relationships as collaborative and supportive, and pupils are more likely to believe that the staff have a genuine concern for their well-being (Sebba and Robinson, 2010; UNICEF). Pupils also report that they feel more valued and listened to; in some schools they work with teachers on devising lesson plans and interviewing job applicants for teaching posts (Sebba and Robinson, 2010; UNICEF). To date, thousands of schools across the UK are working towards, or have achieved, a ‘rights respecting schools’ award from UNICEF.

Concluding thoughts

This chapter has discussed children’s and young people’s perspectives on their experiences of life in the classroom from a children’s rights perspective. It is apparent that attempts have been made, over the past 20 years or so, to give children and young people opportunities to voice their perspectives and to be taken seriously. However, this can be difficult to achieve on the ground where adult voices can compete with those of children and young people. Latterly, initiatives such as school councils and rights respecting schools have gone some way to address this imbalance, although much remains to be done.

References


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UNICEF Rights Respecting Schools Award [Online]. Available at www.unicef.org.uk/rights-respecting-schools/.


There’s also the history in terms of coal production and the impact that had around the world. So it’s children being proud of living and coming from the upper Rhondda. It’s not about getting the children out of the valley, it’s about the children being proud of coming from the Rhondda Valley.

This notion of ‘getting out ‘to ‘get on’ – the idea that in order to succeed, children must leave their places of origin for more affluent towns or cities – is a common feature of research with people from working-class backgrounds living in deprived areas (e.g. Redmond, 2009). However, Mrs Rowlands’ account presents a different narrative. She suggests that it is important to ensure people are proud of where they come from rather than them thinking they have to move out to get on. This was also demonstrated in the children’s accounts. While they all had high aspirations (14 of the 19 aimed to go to university) and recognised the need to move beyond the confines of the valley to achieve their aspirations, it created a dilemma for them; they wanted to be able to continue to live in the area. This emphasises the importance of belonging and place in shaping not only their experiences but also aspirations for the future.

**Concluding thoughts**

As this chapter has discussed, it is undeniable that poverty influences lived experiences, attainment and future life chances. However, the findings from my study reveal the limitations in using poverty as a sole explanatory factor of children’s educational and learning experiences and perceived future life chances. They signify the importance of place as a lens to focus on lived experiences, including the role of heritage, geographical landscape, local opportunities and familial support in fostering a sense of belonging.

Furthermore, the findings offer an alternative narrative to that of the typical policy discourse of a ‘culture of poverty’ (Ivinson et al., 2018). As Ivinson et al. (2018, p. 141) identify, the key challenge for researchers is to help policy-makers understand lived experiences so it can ‘get us out of the narrow deficit discourses that blame families and teachers for low educational achievement’. This focus on the lived experience of children and young people is paramount, as it can help policy-makers understand the importance of place in shaping experiences which in turn can aid the development of localised targeted approaches to tackle the specific issues caused by poverty and disadvantage.

**References**


ethnically diverse and contains fewer students with disabilities (OfS, 2019). Arguably, apprenticeships at the higher levels are in danger of becoming another vehicle for middle-class students, and at this early point they are not yet making a significant contribution to addressing inequality. The problem with this is not only that the new system is failing to achieve one of its policy goals, but that focusing on apprenticeships leaves the remaining vocational options within further education underfunded.

Concluding thoughts: Where does this leave young people?

Young people are increasingly encouraged to make the most of their talents. Yet, as we have seen, the ‘playing field’ is far from level. When most young people leave school, they now transition not to work but to more education or training, all with the expectation of a better job. The incentive for staying on is increasing as job requirements rise. In the UK, the post-school options available to young people have become both more extensive with the shift to mass higher education, and more differentiated with universities of different status and offering different types of programmes. In addition, new vocational options are being developed, and attempts to simplify the vocational system have not yet succeeded. It is in navigating this differentiated system that disadvantaged students face problems not encountered by their more advantaged peers. Their families and schools may have limited experience of the university system, and it is suggested that they may lack the forms of ‘capital’ that can ease the process of applying. They have to exercise agency, substantial effort and considerable independence in making their application. In contrast, middle-class young people can often call upon knowledge built up within family or social networks, and this is reinforced by the resources of the schools they attend. These students absorb how to ‘play the game’ to maximise their chances of a place at a high-status university. These processes go some way towards explaining the current inequalities in access to universities and the slow pace of change. Arguably, recent efforts to increase the numbers of talented individuals making it through these barriers divert attention away from wider problems, towards tinkering at the edges of the admissions processes at elite universities. A more wide-ranging approach would involve a greater investment in further education, the commitment of employers to look beyond a limited range of high-status universities in their recruitment, and more effective advice and guidance across all schools. It would also involve valuing and supporting the different routes young people take after school, where value is not only seen in economic terms but in the contribution to society and personal understanding that participation in education and training can bring.

References


Inequalities and access to education


child or some children but that we have a collective duty to support all our learning. We can seek and take advantage of multi-modal opportunities. We can record, plan and encourage social interactions, seeing the child or young person within context. We can focus upon the things people need to feel supported, upon their communication and access preferences. We can voice them. And we can consider how these small changes make us view ourselves and our relationships with others.

The voice-recognition user is sat down now, looking out of the window. It is a very beautiful sunset this evening.

He wonders what tomorrow will bring ...

Acknowledgement

This work was performed within the framework of the H2020 project ARCHES (www.arches-project.eu), which has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No. 693229.

Notes

1 Most secondary schools in England are currently academies – schools which are funded by the state but independent of local authority control. Many are part of partnerships, forming ‘academy chains’ of several schools with shared strategies.

2 Multi-modal approaches use a wide variety of modes for exploring learning opportunities – these may be textual, aural, linguistic, spatial, digital and visual resources. They often also encourage a creative element.
References


ignores the role of history, politics and power imbalances and may reinforce ideas of the non-Western child as passive, helpless and in need of rescue.

References


There seems to be a good case for using this technology ‘to rid families of monstrous genetic diseases’ (Miller, 2015), and many painful life-threatening and limiting diseases might hopefully be addressed. However, there is a risk that such technologies will go beyond a therapeutic intervention and be used for enhancement (Peters, 2019), to deliver new definitions of who is healthy and who is ‘unfit’.

Concluding thoughts

Over a century ago the eugenics movement defined and categorised what was healthy and normal, and consequently which children were deemed ‘defective’ (Sheehy, 2010). This way of thinking was used to remove disabled children from society (Wilson and Pierre, 2016). Currently we live in a world where the lives of disabled children remain widely at risk through violence and mercy killing (UNICEF, 2019), and where many parents choose that potential disabled children are not born. The creation of a new technology is welcomed, as it holds the promise of ‘fixing’ faulty genes and addressing life-threatening diseases and conditions (Pollack, 2015). However, ‘the new genetics will enable adults to control children’s identities in previously unimaginable ways’ (Alderson, 2002, p. 1). Indeed, the moral and technical questions about how we treat disabled children, and improve the health of children in the population, may become ‘a consumer question of who can afford it’ (Kevles, 2016, p. 49). It seems likely that we will become able to improve babies, perhaps in relation to their athletic or even intellectual abilities. In this ‘free market eugenics’ it seems probable that the wealthy will be the first customers and that the technology’s use will move away from merely addressing purported and genuine biological issues and towards delivering advantages for consumers (Kevles, 2016). The lower socioeconomic classes will become the ‘genpoor class’ (Gouw (2018, p. 503) cited in Peters, 2019) and, as in history, the victims of eugenics will reflect the social hierarchies and prejudices of the time. This is why the ability to modify a children’s genes, ‘designed to order’, has been seen as ‘the opening of a return to the agenda of eugenics’ (Pollack, 2015).

References


References


Concluding thoughts: surveillance, privacy and autonomy

Questions of adult surveillance and control of young people go to the heart of the question of what childhood and youth are and should be.... Children and young people need their own spaces, physically, imaginatively and emotionally, which are free from adult power and adult surveillance.

(Steeves and Jones, 2010, p. 188)

Although children and young people have always been the objects of adult surveillance, the present generation are watched over as never before. Details of their lives are published by their parents, a wide range of seen and unseen audiences have access to their social media posting, and commercial actors extract all this information to construct profiles, predict and manipulate behaviour.

Adult surveillance of children, whether in the home, at school or in the digital world, is sometimes essential, and is often well-intentioned with the goal of providing safety, care and education. Yet as Steeves and Jones indicate, children also need spaces in which they are not subject to adult surveillance. Gillian Thomas and Gina Hocking (2003) identified adult ‘colonisation’ of childhoods through control and surveillance and commercialisation as key trends affecting twenty-first-century childhoods. These wider forces affect ‘the child’s opportunities to control his or her own relationship with time and space’ (p. 23).

Privacy entails having autonomy over our personal information, and choosing what others see of us. Privacy frees us from the scrutiny of others, supporting the ‘development and exercise of autonomy and freedom in thought and action’ (Nissenbaum, 2010, p. 83). Without privacy in the digital world, children and young people can be seen and known by others, including many who are unknown. Furthermore, they are manipulated in their preferences and choices by those who extract their data in digital technologies and hence curtail their autonomy. This raises profound questions about how surveillance affects children’s and young people’s lives and identities in the twenty-first century.

References


elsewhere in this chapter – just like the problem of plastics – require perhaps radically interdisciplinary forms of scholarship and practice that foreground interconnections between children and more-than-human objects and processes. When combined with – rather than seen as a move away from – more traditional approaches to children’s voice, agency or mobility, these three sets of resources could offer the springboard for powerful future interventions into children’s manifold relationships with changing environments.

Notes

1 Murilo was a participant in my (Re)Connect the Nexus research project, which explored young Brazilians’ experiences of, and learning about, the food–water–energy nexus (see Kraftl et al., 2019; www.foodwaterenergynexus.com/). Murilo is a pseudonym.

2 Minority Global North and Majority Global South are alternative terms for Global North and Global South, which aim to emphasise the fact that the majority of the world’s population lives in the less affluent countries of the Global South.

References


