

About This Issue

Childhood Studies: A Field Ready to Harvest

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The academic field of Childhood Studies is beginning to boom. As a student at Rutgers Camden in New Jersey (first for my MA in English and now at Rutgers Law School), I have been fortunate to meet and speak with a number of people involved in the development of an Interdisciplinary PhD program in Children and Childhood Studies as well as in the Center for Children and Childhood Studies, a thriving and octopus-armed center with its tentacles reaching into many fields to create a rich academic and practical environment for the study of children and how to meet their needs. Housed in Camden, New Jersey, a city featured recently on 20/20 for being one of the poorest, most violent and, as the program discussed, one of the worst places to grow up in the nation, the Center struggles to meet the giant needs of its immediate community while also promoting academic standards of study that benefit all children.

Historically, childhood as an idea is a fairly new development. Early American agrarianism and 19th Century industrial reality did not leave much space for the concept, let alone the reality of the child, particularly in the lower classes where children had to keep an adult's work schedule for family survival. Indeed, prior to the 17th century, historian Phillippe Aries argues that the concept of the child did not exist at all. But now, in the 21st century, the child is here and the world is taking note. Advertisers study how to market to them, educators study how to teach them, social scientists and psychiatrists study how to serve their unique needs, lawyers study how to represent, protect and support them, academics study how the literature of our culture reflects and tries to change them, and so on.

In this issue of MP Journal, we have sought to produce just a small template of some of the exciting work being done in Childhood Studies. Our guest editor, Vibiana Bowman, is a librarian at Rutgers University and will be among the first class of students in the new PhD program for Children and Childhood Studies. Her work with the Center for Children and Childhood Studies and as the Childhood Studies chair of the Mid-Atlantic Popular Culture Association gives her unique perspectives on this burgeoning field.

About Children and Childhood Studies

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Children and Childhood Studies (CCS) is relatively new interdisciplinary field. While scholars have used the terms *child studies* and *childhood studies* (in fields such as education, psychology, medicine, and anthropology) for decades, CCS as a *discipline* began in the United Kingdom in the mid-1980s. In the United States there are dozens of programs with children/childhood "modules," minors, or concentrations, however, the first program in North America to award degrees (BA through PhD) specifically in CCS will begin at Rutgers University, Camden New Jersey in the academic year 2007-2008.

While CCS scholars utilize all areas of study, as a field it chiefly draws upon scholarship in the social sciences, humanities, and behavioral sciences. The unique perspective that CCS brings to the academic community is an underlying advocacy of children and the issues affecting their lives and well-being. The

mission of CCS as a field of scholarship is to utilize all areas of contemporary study to ask the questions, understand the problems, and find the solutions toward improving the quality of childhood experienced by the world's community of children (Bowman and Spencer, 2007).

The evolution of CCS as an academic discipline has much in common with the development of other types of interdisciplinary scholarship such as African-American Studies and Women's Studies. It is with Women's Studies that CCS intersects most closely for many reasons but particularly because scholarship have common themes (e.g. issues relating to family and gender), and because each was initiated for the purpose of bringing to the academy points of view that had been underrepresented, if not repressed.

This special issue of MP, "Feminist Voices in Children and Childhood Studies: Critical Readings of Popular Culture" showcases new scholarship that demonstrates the intersection of these two interdisciplinary fields. The goal of the editorial board in selecting these papers was to highlight the politics, power, and voice that are imperatives for feminist and child-centric scholars.

Works Cited

Bowman, Vibiana and Laura Spencer, "Toward a Definition of Children and Childhood Studies" in Scholarly Resources for Children and Childhood Studies: A Research Guide and Annotated Bibliography. Vibiana Bowman, editor. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2007: 3 -16.