

Jens Qvortrup, Marjatta Bardy,
Giovanni Sgritta, Helmut Wintersberger (Eds.)

Childhood Matters

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Childhood Matters provides the reader with unique material on the living conditions of children in industrial society, and it presents a number of new theories and interpretations regarding the characteristics of childhood in modern society: in relation to family, economy, politics, time and space, intergenerational relations and demographic developments.

The title *Childhood Matters* is pertinent in more than one sense. First of all, the book takes children seriously in their own right, in acknowledging their constructiveness as actors, not only for themselves and their own lives but also for society as a whole. Secondly, it challenges the idea of children whose target should be to become “integrated into society”. School, day care and other structures constitute children’s own life arenas, and it is forcefully argued that children’s time and children’s activities are their own, despite efforts by adult society to “colonize” them for its own purposes and interests.

Methodologically, it is reasoned that even if children are, in fact, dependent, it is both possible and necessary to analytically develop instruments to give children and childhood the conceptual autonomy of which, until now, they have been deprived in statistics and other social accountings.

Childhood Matters contains original contributions written by participants in what, so far, seems to be the largest international sociological study on childhood: the project *Childhood as a Social Phenomenon*, carried out between 1988 and 1993 under the auspices of the European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research in Vienna. Sixteen authors from twelve predominantly European countries have contributed to this book.

Childhood Matters signals a rapidly growing interest in the sociology of childhood. The book is not written as a traditional textbook for student courses, though it might be extremely useful and provocative in the hands of competent and open-minded teachers. The issues dealt with in the book will be of interest to students with some training, to scholars, but also to policy-makers, administrators, and the enlightened public.

Jens Qvortrup, University Centre of South Jutland, Esbjerg; *Marjatta Bardy*, National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health, Helsinki; *Giovanni B. Sgritta*, University of Rome; *Helmut Wintersberger*, European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research, Vienna.

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