

Doris Bühler-Niederberger- University of Wuppertal

The power of innocence

Social politics for children between separation and participation

Doris Bühler-Niederberger- University of Wuppertal
The power of innocence – I – The separative view



„On ne connaît point l'enfance ...“
Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1961[1762]), *Émile ou De l'éducation*. Paris : Garnier, p.6



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The power of innocence – I The separative view

“We know nothing of childhood, and with our mistaken notions the further we advance the further we go astray. The wisest writers devote themselves to what a man ought to know without asking what a child is capable of learning. They are always looking for the man in the child without considering what he is before he becomes a man.”



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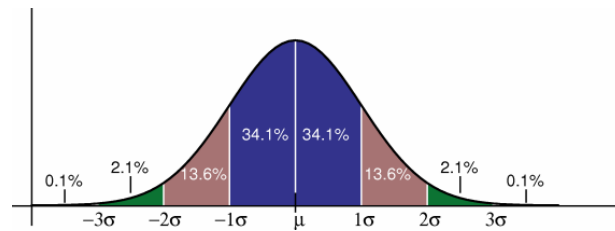
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**“Je ne vois point comme les autres hommes ...”
(I do not see things like other men ...“)**

(Rousseau op. cit. p.6)

The *separative view* puts children's strangeness into scientific language and in this course

- the notion of otherness increases
- becomes incontestable
- has to be „treated“



Separative view and childhood today - four steps of separation

- show the fundamental difference between adults and children
- real exclusion from what becomes an adult world
- measuring and gaining norms
- pathologization of the group



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The power of innocence – II – Children as objects of concern

Systematization of interest in children

- investment in children as human capital
- disciplining of children to guarantee future social order

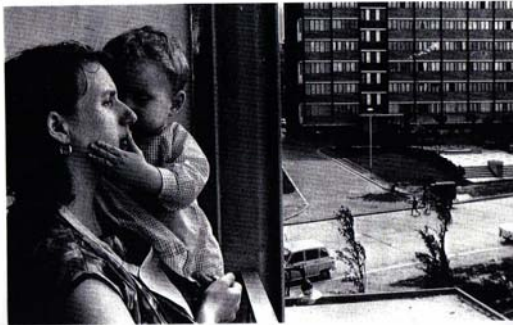
"...historically social policy has not thought of children as persons with a voice. Rather they have been seen as objects of concern. Contemporary societies are perhaps more ambiguous on this point, with different visions on childhood coming into play, sometimes overlapping and sometimes conflicting with each other."

(A. Prout, C. Hallett 2003, Hearing the voices of children)

Some characteristics of organized interest in children:

- theory of faultless childhoods
- explicit or implicit theory of criminal career
- poor children as main target group of interventions
- useful individuals are taken to be the royal road to social order

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Power of innocence – II – Children as objects of concern



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The power of innocence – III – Glorification and innocence



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The power of innocence – III – Glorification and innocence

1. The concept of the "needy child" is the most promising to gain public attention and be successful.
2. It is used on both sides of the argument: to accuse a political opponent and to establish a moral victory for one's own position.
3. It results in a naturalization of politics. This means that decisions and institutions are legitimated as naturally right because – and only because – they are adapted to the needs of children. These needs are received as an expression of "the child's nature" and therefore as universal and unchanging.
4. Decisions made on this basis are no longer open to discussion and negotiation, even if they are evidently connected with political tactics and vested interests. In this way the "naturalization of politics" involves a depoliticizing of what is political.

“As far as policies relating to children are concerned, actually I don't know anyone who has an ambivalent attitude toward this topic. The topic appeals to people, and in this respect I can only advise anyone entertaining the idea of going into politics and wondering what topic to choose ..., 'Start with this one!’”

“Many opportunities to make one's name and to present oneself arise from the level of public interest in topics relating to children”; he added that he didn't believe his commitment to the commission would damage his career and concluded the interview: “Well, now you have had a really honest reply.”

Another member of Children's Commission stated that people's willingness to become active in the Commission was due to motives that were “[...] certainly on the one hand sincere though ... one cannot fail to recognize – though this is something I only found out later – that it has a great effect on public relations and every member of parliament is keen on that [...]”

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"Children, like Marx's peasants, could not represent themselves and had to be represented, and their well-being was shamelessly linked to efforts to increase the population, stabilize the labor force, restore paternal authority, or emancipate wives."

(S. Pedersen, 1993, *Family, dependence, and the origins of the welfare state*, pp.425-426)

Bill: When they came here the first time, [and] should talk to me and they said that it was me, that I should feel safe and that it should all be about me (pause) and not about him (pause) and then they came several times and said, but he [has] said that he wants to see you and he has the right to see you because he is your daddy, he is your biological daddy, but then I told them that you said that it was I who should feel safe and I do not feel safe because I do not want to see him at home. Okay. But you can try a little. Then I said No. Then they said okay, we will come another time. [They] came another time, said he wants to see you and he has the right to see you. Then they started [...] they came so many times, so I said that okay, I can see him but I do not want to.

(M. Eriksson, E. Näsmann, 2006, Participation in family law proceeding for children whose father is violent to their mother. Paper presented to 16th World Congress of Sociology, 23.-29.7.2006 Durban)

Bill: ... the first time after I had met him I started to feel sick, started to have stomach ache [...], I vomited, but they came again because they did not care about how I felt [*No*] No, if I felt good, if I felt sick, I should go there anyway. Even if I felt sick I should go there anyway. I could have stomach ache, I could feel sick, I could [...] it could be anything, but they said you should go there anyway.

(M. Eriksson, E. Näsman, 2006, Participation in family law proceeding for children whose father is violent to their mother. Paper presented to 16th World Congress of Sociology, 23.-29.7.2006 Durban)

„I used to not know what to say. I used to think I was saying the wrong thing.“

(A. Mullender et. al. 2003, „Could have helped but they didn't“ – the formal and informal support systems experienced by children living with domestic violence, pp. 150)

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 The power of innocence – IV – Absence of concrete children

Kontaktperson	Item	kein Kontakt				sehr häufiger Kontakt	n=	Mittelwert
Betroffenes Kind (bis 14 Jahre)	4.1	1 (0,78%)	8 (6,20%)	42 (32,56%)	60 (46,51%)	18 (13,95%)	129	2,67
Betroffener Jugendlicher (ab 14 Jahre)	4.2	1 (0,77%)	1 (0,77%)	16 (12,31%)	58 (44,62%)	54 (41,54%)	130	3,25
Mutter	4.3	0 (0,00%)	3 (2,31%)	14 (10,77%)	59 (45,38%)	54 (41,54%)	130	4,26
Vater	4.4	0 (0,00%)	13 (10,00%)	40 (30,77%)	55 (42,31%)	22 (16,92%)	130	2,66
Eltern gemeinsam	4.5	2 (1,54%)	9 (6,92%)	54 (41,54%)	42 (32,31%)	23 (17,69%)	130	3,58
Andere Erwachsene (Helfer)	4.6	0 (0,00%)	4 (3,10%)	38 (29,46%)	70 (54,26%)	17 (13,18%)	129	2,78

(J. Kotthaus, 2006: Kindeswohl und Kindeswille in der Jugendhilfe. Zur Beteiligung von Kindern an Entscheidungen in den erz. Hilfen, p.168)