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Citation

Tatlow-Golden, Mimi and Montgomery, Heather (2021). Childhood Studies and child psychology: Disciplines in dialogue? *Children & Society*, 35(1) pp. 3–17.

URL

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Childhood Studies and child psychology: Disciplines in dialogue?

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Abstract

Childhood Studies is a dynamic and still-growing subject, bringing a child-focused, rights-based and (usually) constructionist perspective to children's lives. Its early days were also marked by wariness of, even hostility to, developmental psychology. Yet it is increasingly recognised that some mainstream developmental psychology is opening itself to more contextualised understandings of children and childhoods, and that other psychologies offer further opportunities for dialogue between disciplines. We aim to explore these opportunities, to consider what (and whether) these fields of study can learn from one another and how this might enrich and further challenge research and practice.

KEYWORDS

child development, childhood, interdisciplinary, psychology

INTRODUCTION

In their seminal book, *Theorizing Childhood*, James, Jenks and Prout memorably argued that developmental psychology belonged in the 'dustbin of history' (1998, p. 9). Since then the idea that developmental psychology stands in implacable opposition to Childhood Studies has become something of an orthodoxy. In Childhood Studies, psychologists have variously been accused of: being obsessed with the 'normal' child and its universal, unchanging needs; being ethnocentric and taking little account of diverse childhoods while researching almost exclusively middle-class children in Western countries; using Western developmental patterns as the norm and downplaying the different capacities, competences, interests and developmental trajectories of poorer and less privileged children both in the

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West and in other parts of the world; promoting a deficit model of childhood which fails to understand the complexity of children's different competences or appreciate individual or cultural diversity; and finally believing themselves to be part of a neutral scientific endeavour, positioning themselves above politics and claiming to generate value-free 'objective' knowledge and evidence on which policy and practice are based.

Many of these criticisms can certainly still be applied to much of the mainstream developmental enterprise, yet as this paper and others in this Themed Section will go on to explore, they do not reflect significant strands of developmental and psychological thinking. Psychologists themselves have critiqued the validity of research in most branches of their field, including developmental psychology, that rely on WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich and Democratic) participants in their studies (Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010; Nielsen, Haun, Kärtner, & Legare, 2017). Increasingly, psychologists from Africa and Asia are questioning the use of the Western child as the developmental norm (see for instance the contributors to Serpell & Marfo, 2015). There is also a new interest amongst psychologists in exploring more sociologically infused constructions of children's rights and agency (Helwig & Turiel, 2017), albeit at a time when the centrality of children's agency within Childhood Studies is being questioned and challenged (Spyrou, Rosen, & Cook, 2018). At the same time, a strong strand in Childhood Studies has developed, represented by scholars such as Lee (2001), Prout (2005, 2019) and Wells (2018), which insists on the importance of the biological and psychological as well as the social. Prout (2019, p. 309) has argued passionately and persuasively for Childhood Studies to fulfil its potential as 'a field that can be multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary in a broad sense — that is spanning the natural sciences, the social sciences and the humanities.'

Nevertheless, the characterisation of developmental psychology in which Childhood Studies often engages omits to consider domains of child psychology where overlaps might be found. Even in mainstream developmental psychology journals, psychologists have long sought to make the case that understanding development requires looking beyond simplistic categories of cultures and take a processual view of the interdependence of culture and development. Theorists such as Urie Bronfenbrenner and Arnold Sameroff developed robust theories demonstrating the need to attend to the many contexts and complex trajectories of children's lives (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; see also Sameroff, 2010; Chen & Eisenberg, 2012). Since the 1970s, cultural developmental psychologists have argued that children navigate many pathways depending on their sociocultural worlds and so development must be understood as embedded in the cultural and social contexts of children's lives (e.g. Cole, 1996; Cole & Bruner, 1971; Goodnow, Miller & Kessel, 1995; Miller, Fung, Lin, Chen, & Boldt, 2012; Rogoff, 2003). Working in the West and elsewhere, cultural psychologists have sought to contextualise children's developmental trajectories in understudied groups such as young African-American children in the United States (Sperry & Sperry, 1996) and to develop nuanced, socioculturally situated understandings of concepts such as learning, intelligence, social competence or resilience (Burman, 2016; Miller et al., 2012; Miller & Sahni, 2016).

Yet it remains the case that neither Childhood Studies nor psychology has responded to intermittent calls to consider what each has to offer (Alanen, 2012; Thorne, 2007), and the 'wall of silence' that Barrie Thorne identified between the disciplines in 2007 largely remains. In this themed section, we aim to explore some of the ways the two fields can learn from each other and how this can be communicated to those outside the field, particularly to practitioners and policy-makers. There are three further papers in this section through which we intend to present dialogue and discussion and to suggest possibilities for future collaboration. The first two papers by Cordelia Sutton and Christine O'Farrelly draw on theories and methods from both Childhood Studies and psychology to demonstrate how their research has integrated these two areas. Cordelia Sutton's small-scale study of children's happiness integrates psychological theories of happiness with an emphasis on children's own understandings and

definitions while Christine O'Farrelly's also emphasises the need to listen to children themselves and calls for psychological, economic and psychiatric research, especially that with policy implications, to acknowledge that children are key stakeholders. Her work gives a good example of how this is possible and why it is desirable, yet where frictions may be found. Finally, the article by Norman Gabriel is rooted in the idea of relatedness, a key concept in both fields, and looks at how psychological and psychoanalytical concepts of relatedness can open up new ways of understanding children's worlds. All three papers show the possibility of useful synthesis and open the door to a more holistic study of childhoods that includes both disciplines, acknowledging childhood's 'hybrid character, part biological and part social' (Prout, 2011, p. 7).

Our interest in more dialogue between disciplines of childhoods arises in part from our teaching; in particular our work on two Open University degrees — a Masters in Childhood and Youth Studies and a first-year undergraduate module, *An Introduction to Childhood Studies and Child Psychology* both of which have embedded discussions of child psychology into more traditional Childhood Studies teaching. These have been an enormous, if unexpected, success and over 20,000 students have taken the undergraduate module since 2014. We find that students of psychology are engaged by the more sociological and rights-focused stance of Childhood Studies while Childhood Studies students want to learn more about methods and findings of psychology. Yet it is fair to say that the modules in their current forms are multidisciplinary, with the disciplines presented alongside one another rather than in interaction — as is indeed commonly the case for the disciplines within Childhood Studies as well (Punch, 2016). Yet as these subject areas are two of the most significant ways students understand and learn about childhood, we aim to find more constructive ways of linking the two subjects' common desire to understand children's internal and external worlds, whatever the ideologies and methods by which they are informed. This raises the challenge of exploring a meaningful, integrative interdisciplinarity in studies of childhoods, where disciplines are engaged in productive dialogue, unafraid to identify frictions yet to make common cause — exploring the possibilities of 'coalition across difference' as feminist scholar Gail Lewis has articulated it (2014). The benefits for students include the ability to manage complexity, to locate and interpret multiple sources of information and perspectives, to see patterns and connections, to hold the tension of conflicting perspectives and to achieve more holistic understandings (Lyall, Maher, Bandola, & Kettle, 2015).

THE RISE OF CHILDHOOD STUDIES

Childhood Studies is a firmly established but still dynamic and growing subject area which interrogates contemporary societal and global challenges concerning childhood. In 2000, at The Open University, there was one course in Childhood Studies, attracting around 600 students a year; now, there are over 20 courses attracting up to 10,000 students annually. In other universities too, there has been a rapid rise in the number and variety of degrees and other courses aiming to theorise childhood and understand children's experiences. Many, under a Childhood Studies heading, take a broadly sociological approach, emphasising childhood as a social construction, critically re-examining categories such as 'the child', 'childhood' or 'children' and asking questions about children's competencies, agency, voice and rights (see Mayall, 2013 for a discussion of the history of the sociology of childhood and the rise of Childhood Studies).

In Childhood Studies, the idea that everything is relative, that all 'facts' are social constructions and that childhood, like adulthood 'is always a matter of social definition rather than physical maturity' (La Fontaine, 1986, p. 19) quickly became a cornerstone of the discipline and then a 'theoretical orthodoxy' (Wyness, 2015) — even a cliché (Alanen, 2015). Yet new theorisations and questionings

have played an important role in maintaining the currency and relevance of Childhood Studies, acknowledging its dynamic and constantly critical nature of the subject area. This willingness to reflect, change and develop provides opportunities to learn from other fields, and this may extend to include some approaches to developmental psychology.

For example, doubts remained within Childhood Studies about the wholesale jettisoning of biological and developmental understandings of children and childhoods. Prout (2005) has long argued that social constructionists overstate their case, and that ignoring the biological features of human life and experience and differences between children and adults reinforces binaries such as the natural and the cultural, the biological and the social instead of reconciling them.

[h]owever illuminating it is to regard childhood as a social phenomenon, it is not and has never been purely social. In fact it is hard to envisage what a 'purely social' phenomenon would look like. Social relations are already heterogeneous, that is they are made up from a variety of material, discursive, cultural, natural, technological, human and non-human resources. Childhood, then, like all phenomena, is heterogeneous, complex and emergent, and, because this is so, its understanding requires a broad set of intellectual resources, an interdisciplinary approach and an open-minded process of enquiry.

(Prout, 2005, p. 2)

After all, childhood (however, it is defined) is a distinct stage in the human lifecycle and almost all children do undergo recognisable patterns of physical and psychological development and growth. Indeed, anthropologists have found no cultures which do not distinguish between children and adults and, on a 'common sense' level, people can usually recognise a child even if they cannot analyse or articulate what the category childhood means.

Other orthodoxies, once central to the identity of Childhood Studies, have also been challenged and rethought in the new millennium. The idea that children are social actors in the here and now, who needed to be theorised as people in their own right — human 'beings' rather than the human 'becomings' of developmental psychology or the subjects of socialisation — has ultimately proved to be yet another limiting binary as it reinforces the notion that adulthood is a complete, stable and independent end point, which is not subject to change over time (Lee, 2001; Uprichard, 2008; Wells, 2018). Lee (2001, p. 103) argues that in a post-modern world, both children *and* adults experience lives that are changeable and unstable, 'fundamentally dependent and incomplete', and that differentiating between being and becoming, whether psychological or sociological, makes little sense. Indeed, this is a point of agreement with developmental psychology itself, which has long taken a lifespan approach and understands that not just children but also adults experience ongoing change over time. There has also long been recognition in developmental science that change throughout childhood is not simple, linear and incremental. Instead, it is more accurate to describe a process of both gains and losses, as increased capacity in some respects brings challenges and risk in others (Miller & Goodnow, 1995). For example, psychologist Susan Harter's work on self-concept development (2012) notes that young children, from about 5 years, gain the cognitive capacity to view their abilities realistically and to compare them to those of others; this cognitive gain can bring losses in its wake, as they also lose a former boundless sense of their own capacity and become susceptible to negative feelings about themselves.

Children's agency too has come under interrogation by those in Childhood Studies who fear its centrality has proved limiting, circular and self-perpetuating — everything children do must be agentic because they are, by definition, agents. Or as Spyrou et al. (2018, p. 1) more elegantly put it: 'the constructed, agentic, knowing child — regularly enfolds back on itself, often reappearing as the solution to the problem it poses.' The solution, Spyrou and his colleagues argue, is not to focus even

more directly on the child but instead to decentre the child and move beyond a fixation with children's voices, agencies and perspectives and explore children's everyday experiences in relation to other human and non-human entities across diverse socio-spatial and political contexts (see also Kraftl, 2020). This requires embedding studies of childhood more explicitly within the political, cultural and philosophical realms (Spyrou, 2019; Spyrou et al., 2018). Although the decentring of the child as subject may at first glance appear challenging to psychology, which typically takes the lens of the individual, this more explicit commitment to contexts and interdisciplinarity presents opportunities for exploring dialogue with other disciplines of childhoods that are potentially congruent.

PSYCHOLOGY AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR INTEGRATION AND SYNTHESIS

As psychology claims to bring identifiable and measurable benefits to children based on evidence-informed knowledge, one practical (even utilitarian) reason for Childhood Studies to collaborate with psychology is that its work has an influence and appeal far beyond academia and is seen as bringing tangible benefits to children's lives, in a way Childhood Studies, as yet, does not. Since the early 20th century, developmental psychology has dominated the study of children, focusing on establishing norms for their physical, mental, emotional and behavioural changes and Woodhead argues that 'the power of psychologists, has been in offering an authoritative account of what it means to be a child and what is appropriate in terms of quality child care and education' (1999, p. 5). Twenty years later, this power remains in place: psychology continues to supply key evidence for policy development. Furthermore, psychological constructs such as peer pressure, attachment or self-esteem are commonplace in everyday speech. Critiques of these concepts and others have been enormously influential in the field of Childhood Studies and are often cited as the reasons why it has not, does not need to and indeed *cannot*, engage with developmental psychology. However, it is our contention that such unease and even antagonism towards psychology rests on a failure to consider those developmental psychologies that can engage in fruitful dialogue with Childhood Studies.

Although mainstream developmental studies as currently practiced are indeed still often myopic to meaningful understandings of context, and focused on large-scale studies seeking to identify generalisable universals, it remains the case that psychologies of children and their development are not *necessarily* so. Not only have anthropologists interested in childhood, especially those from the US, drawn on or critically engaged with psychology to inform their understandings of children's lives in cultural contexts (Lancy, 2014; LeVine, 2017; LeVine & LeVine, 2016) but also the work of cultural developmental psychologists shows that children's development not only can, but indeed *must*, be understood in its sociocultural contexts (Miller & Sahni, 2016). Developmental theory has, since at least the 1970s, moved from simplistic linear models of childhood growth and change to consider interactive, transactional and multilevel dynamic systems approaches (Sameroff, 2010). Such perspectives provide clear avenues for integration with perspectives from Childhood Studies.

Increasing visibility is being accorded to developmental psychologists who take sociological, ethnographic or child-centred approaches to studying children and childhoods. Social psychologists such as Burman (1996, 2017), for example, have long contended that developmental psychology is guilty of overemphasising the individual, autonomous person (itself a socially constructed notion) or at best the mother/child dyad, and therefore conflating and confusing the interpersonal with the social. Burman argues that it is impossible to understand childhood as a universal lifecycle phase of growth and development without also analysing the cultural, social, economic and political context in which it occurs. In doing this, she challenged the idea that 'social constructionism' and 'psychology' are

mutually exclusive terms. Indeed, development has, even within mainstream developmental psychology, become increasingly recognised as a process, an interaction between specific cultural settings and each child. The case is made in mainstream developmental journals that childhood should be studied not only as a transactional process, a complex system requiring complex, multilevel methods and analyses, but also as culturally and environmentally situated (Chen & Eisenberg, 2012).

Several ecological systems and interactionist theories have been devised to address the multiple contexts in which children develop and experience their lives (Urban, Osgood, & Mabry, 2011). Arnold Sameroff proposed an early transactional theory of child development in 1975, later making the case that to answer the ‘primary question... [of] how we can improve the fate of individuals growing up in our society’, nonlinear models of development are required, that recognise that individuals and contexts are not divisible but are mutually constitutive (2010, p. 7). Dialectical models of development address both context and the individual, considering not just child, parent or both, but also biological, cultural, social, environmental and political factors — incorporating the influence of ‘neurons and neighborhoods, synapses and schools, proteins and peers, and genes and governments’ (2010, p. 7). Sameroff concludes that, to understand human change over time, at least four models require integration. These are *personal* changes in competencies over time; *context*, delineating social settings and institutions that facilitate and constrain change; *regulation*, to account for the dynamic systems interactions between person and context, and *representation*, to consider interpretations of experience that the self engages in. Sameroff notes that although regulation in psychology is almost invariably studied as a property of the person, in fact it is the case that ‘self-regulation mainly occurs in a social surround that is actively engaged in “other”-regulation’ (2010, p. 14), and understanding this requires transactional models that examine the multiple actors engaged in children’s experiences and development. Similarly, representations, or internally encoded experience, are elaborations of external worlds, and development is also influenced by representations of others such as parents, as well as ‘meaningful cultural engagement with desirable everyday routines that have a script, goals, and values’ (Sameroff, 2010, p. 16). Taken together, these four factors create a unified theory of development, a biopsychosocial ecological system that includes parents, family, school, peers, community and geopolitical features (Sameroff, 2010, p. 18).

Another ecological theory was devised by one of the most widely cited developmental theorists, Urie Bronfenbrenner. Bronfenbrenner’s work was prompted by his concern at the widespread lack of community supports for parents in the United States. His ideas had significant impacts upon childcare, education and social work practices across Europe and North America, for example, underpinning the Surestart/Headstart initiatives in children’s early years’ education in England and the USA. Over several decades, Bronfenbrenner devised a rich bio-ecological systems model of human development. The model employed four layers — *Person-Process-Context-Time* — to describe synergistic relationships between individuals and contexts: complex ‘reciprocal interaction between an active, evolving, biopsychological human organism and the persons, objects and symbols’ in their environment (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, p. 996).

Bronfenbrenner’s model is generally presented as a set of nested circles radiating out from the child representing the contextual systems in its environment, *micro*, *meso*, *macro* and *exo* systems that are experience-near such as family or school, and potentially more distant, such as media, policy and culture. In his final version, he placed as much emphasis on the active person interacting with people and symbols in the environment, and stressed the relevance of time (individual, contextual and historical) in development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998).

Although Bronfenbrenner is cited tens of thousands of times in the developmental literature, the rich complexity of his ecological model is in fact rarely translated into practice in research (Tudge et al., 2016). Tudge and colleagues observe that Bronfenbrenner himself noted that interdependent

multiple processes required analysis as a system, although he did not provide a primer for how to do so. At the very least, a study faithful to the bioecological systems perspective must assess the quality of the proximal process under investigation (e.g. child–peer interactions); include relevant person characteristics (e.g. personality or self-concept); explore two or more social groups (e.g. social class) and be longitudinal in design, to account for time. It should also consider socio-historical time. Furthermore, Tudge and colleagues note that a mechanistic interpretation of development — assuming the person is divisible from their contexts — cannot be reconciled with Bronfenbrenner's ecological model, which assumes not only that development is embedded in context and culture, but also that ‘competent development will vary in part according to situation- or culture-specific pressures’ (2016, p. 430). Therefore, development is the product of proximal processes within the synergistic relation of individual and context.

Despite the challenge of designing and carrying out studies that can represent these multiple and complex features, there are some well-realised examples of how Bronfenbrenner's *Person-Process-Context-Time* model facilitates crossing disciplinary boundaries in a genuinely integrative manner. Siraj and Mayo (2014) studied 50 children in the UK from disadvantaged backgrounds who succeeded academically ‘against the odds’, and flowed between sociology, psychology and education in the process. Through detailed interviews with students, parents and teachers, they examined children's personal characteristics, family and classroom microsystems, and whether interactions between home and school, and children's engagement with broader community activities, contributed to academic achievement. They emphasised the importance of acknowledging and supporting children's individual agency while also stressing the need for ‘effective support from significant others in schools, classrooms and the wider community in the form of cultural, social and emotional capital’ (2014, p. 11). Importantly, they further argue (2014, p. 41) for a cross-disciplinary scientific realist stance that allows for the recognition that ‘knowledge can be both partial, fallible and approximate, yet still remain “objective”’.

The role of culture as central to developmental science was reiterated by Chen and Eisenberg (2012) in a special issue of the journal *Child Development Perspectives*. Reminding psychologists that studies have identified differences by culture and setting (e.g. urban/rural) in children's facial expressions of positive emotion, socio-dramatic or expressive activities in play and pro-social co-operative and aggressive behaviours, Chen and Eisenberg point to developmental theories that incorporate contexts such as the socioecological (e.g. Bronfenbrenner) and sociocultural (e.g. Rogoff, 2003), but argue that these bodies of work tend to focus on vertical socialisation from adults to children. Chen (2012) in contrast takes a contextual-developmental perspective that views children as active participants in the modulation of cultures and norms within which they evaluate each other and reinforce accepted behaviours.

Beyond Bronfenbrenner, work from cultural/developmental psychologies provides a long-standing example of the potential for integration and interdisciplinarity. Since the 1970s, indeed long before the rise of Childhood Studies, cultural psychologists rejected the idea that children's development could be viewed as a universal, unidirectional process of maturation that could be identified with experimental studies in a single cultural setting. As cultural psychologist Cole (1996, p. 1) put it, it is essential for psychologists to ‘keep culture in mind’, yet this is rarely done:

On the one hand, it is generally agreed that the need and ability to live in the human medium of culture is one of the central characteristics of human beings. On the other hand, it is difficult for many academic psychologists to assign culture more than a secondary, often superficial role in the constitution of our mental life.

Cultural psychologist Miller notes (2005, p. 34) that cross-cultural studies are now part of the mainstream developmental toolkit, yet these typically confirm the ‘presumed universality’ of existing theories and account for variations in development. Instead, developmental researchers need to recognise that culture, like biology, is ‘a fundamental constitutive source of patterning of human development’ (2005, p. 38). The crucial importance of recognising this fact not only in theory and empirical research but also in policy is well illustrated in a critical review by Sperry, Miller and Sperry (2020) of the recent pre-occupation in the United States with the ‘word gap’, the presumed difference of 30 million words heard by age 4 years between children of diverse socioeconomic circumstances, that delegitimises the linguistic competence of lower income children when they arrive in school. Sperry and colleagues note that despite concern about the educational implications of the ‘word gap’, in fact children attain linguistic competence at comparable rates in communities within and beyond the United States where children are exposed to talk around them, rather than extensive dyadic exchanges. Yet proponents of the word gap, which valorises Euro-American middle-class approaches to child-rearing incorporating much dyadic talk, fail to draw on ethnographic, historical, linguistic and contextual factors that demonstrate this (see e.g. Ochs & Schieffelin, 2017). The theoretical consequences are a failure to create understandings of development that acknowledge ‘culturally specific instantiations of universally emerging principles’ (Super, 2005, p. 23). The policy and political consequences are a delegitimation of many communities’ approaches to raising children (Sperry et al., 2020).

Despite the evident challenges, a strand of studies in different Chinese cultural settings and over time, carried out by cultural and contextual-developmental psychologists and exploring children’s emotional and moral learning within families and amongst peers, point to the potential of interdisciplinary studies to understand children’s experiences. Heidi Fung, Peggy Miller and colleagues’ research in Taiwan and the United States explored socialisation practices and the role of shame by analysing family storytelling practices in early childhood (see Miller et al., 2012). They found that Taiwanese parents were much more likely to use shame as a means of communicating preferred forms of behaviour, using phrases such as ‘You made your mother lose face’ or the explicit threat of withdrawal of love ‘The louder you cry, the less I’m going to love you’. Such practices designed to teach children about appropriate behaviour (Fung & Chen, 2008) and in time children learn to accept and share the goals behind these parental socialisation practices.

However, when Helwig, To, Wang, Liu, and Yang (2014) explored children and young people’s views of these socialisation practices in Canada and China, they found nuanced interpretations. The children were asked to consider parental reactions, such as shaming, threats to withdraw love or reasoning, when dealing with children’s moral transgressions such as snatching a toy from another child or pushing them over in the playground. Children were asked to evaluate each form of socialisation practice as good or bad, to assess how common it was in their own community and context, to think about why parents (particularly mothers) would deploy such practices. They were then asked to judge how successful this practice would be in internalising morality.

It might be expected that the different communities would show very different moral beliefs about these different socialisation practices, with the Chinese children recognising and supporting shaming as a culturally congruent practice that supported children to learn behaviours that facilitate social cohesion. The data, however, revealed much greater complexities with Chinese children recognising that shaming was a cultural norm and understanding why it was used to ensure compliance, but nevertheless evaluating it as psychologically harmful and damaging to their self-esteem. They became increasingly aware of this as they got older. Children in all three settings preferred reasoning to shaming or the withdrawal of love, especially as they got older, and saw reasoning as much more effective as helping them to understand why something was wrong and to internalise the morality. Helwig and Turiel conclude:

Children in different cultures endorse forms of discipline that are based on reasoning and respect children as rational agents who play an active role in their moral socialization... As the research on psychological well-being shows, when children's basic needs for autonomy, justice, and security are not sufficiently met, children's psychological health suffers, even in traditional cultural contexts that have not historically emphasized children's rights.

(2017, p. 145–146)

Studies such as these present opportunities for meaningful interdisciplinary dialogue that accepts frictions and does not foreclose on difference or seeking seamless integration. Using children's own voices and understandings to explore moral development might sound like the perfect synthesis of Childhood Studies and developmental psychology. Yet it might also be characterised as an example of psychology's tendency towards universalism, with researchers using empirical data to seek to identify universal pathways to psychological 'health' which apply to all children and which underlie universal rights. At the same time, even cultural psychology, with its emphasis on the socially and culturally situated and contingent nature of development, does not eschew universals (Miller et al., 2012) — and it is worth considering the notion that relativism may have its limits.

Interestingly, socio-culturally and historically informed developmental research suggests a possible alternative explanation for Helwig and his colleagues' findings. Applying Bronfenbrenner's premise that the social and historical context affects how individuals develop socio-emotionally and cognitively, Xinyin Chen and his colleagues examined how cultural values affected and changed Chinese children's peer evaluations between 1990 and 2002, a period when China was undergoing rapid economic and political change towards a market economy, and cultural change towards greater valuing of independence, endorsed particularly by younger generations (Chen, 2012; Chen, Cen, Li, & He, 2005). This period also saw changes in education practice, favouring behaviours not earlier encouraged such as children's expression of personal opinions and self-confidence. Chen found that children's shy and wary behaviours, valued earlier in Chinese culture as indicating well-behaved, understanding, competent children, were preferred by peers in 1990, but were rejected by 2002, when peers favoured more assertive, individual-oriented behaviours. Chen's work demonstrates that quantitative methods grounded in developmental psychology can yield meaningful findings about social constructions of behaviour. It also suggests that Helwig and colleagues' research on morality may have coincided with a cultural-historical shift in children's social-emotional expectations in China. Yet Helwig and colleagues did find that older children expressed a greater preference for reasoning-based parenting rather than shame-based practices, so a developmental facet needs to be considered. Such explorations underscore the importance of interdisciplinary studies of behaviour that are developmentally, socially, culturally and historically situated.

The theories of Pierre Bourdieu suggest particularly rich avenues of interdisciplinary exploration. Although Bourdieu's work did not deal directly with children or childhood, it has become an important strand of theorisation within Childhood Studies (Alanen, Brooker, & Mayall, 2015; Knight, 2017; Lareau, 2002, 2011; for an educational studies perspective see also Reay, 1995, 2001), particularly his identification of different forms of capital, and his concepts of habitus and field. These concepts have been taken up enthusiastically within Childhood Studies — most notably in Alanen et al. (2015). Habitus is also now often invoked in psychological research, though often in a rather superficial way (Wagner & McLaughlin, 2015). Bourdieu is known as an anthropologist and sociologist, yet his notion of habitus in particular is profoundly psychosocial, as it is based on the belief that predispositions and values are internalised and incorporated from an early age. Recently, psychologists have pointed to the habitus as a key point of overlap between the social and the psychological as it attempts to account for

the internalisation of social structures — although without particular reference to childhood (Wagner & McLaughlin, 2015). Reay (1995, p. 354) succinctly summarises it thus:

I envisage habitus as a deep, interior, epicentre containing many matrices. These matrices demarcate the extent of choices available to any one individual. Choices are bounded by the framework of opportunities and constraints the person finds herself in, her external circumstances. However, within Bourdieu's theoretical framework she is also circumscribed by an internalised framework which makes some possibilities inconceivable, others improbable and a limited range acceptable.

(emphasis added)

Yet the question of *how* people internalise these ideas has mostly been taken for granted within Childhood Studies. Bourdieu himself articulated the need to integrate sociological and psychological understandings of social relations and development. He argued that despite the disciplines' suspicions of one another, such an integration would be required to understand how the concept of 'investment' was internalised individually. He drew on classically Freudian, psychodynamic language to describe this process and exhorted the disciplines to work together:

Sociology and psychology should combine their efforts (but this would require them to overcome their mutual suspicion) to analyse the genesis of investment in a field of social relations, thus constituted as an object of investment and preoccupation, in which the child is increasingly implicated and which constitutes the paradigm and also the principle of investment in the social game. How does the transition, described by Freud, occur, leading from a narcissistic organization of the libido, in which the child takes himself (or his own body) as an object of desire, to another state in which he orients himself towards another person, thus entering the world of 'object relations', in the form of the original social microcosm and the protagonists of the drama that is played out there?

(Bourdieu, 2000, p. 166)

Bourdieu's work owes a great deal to psychological and psychoanalytical concepts and he did appear to recognise that 'psychological and psychoanalytic processes, as much as social and economic ones, constitute the habitus' (Reay, 2015, p. 12). Yet he did not carry out such integration himself, and indeed the challenge of examining how children experience and internalise dispositions, and thus, a habitus that defines their taste and preferences has been poorly met to date. There remain multiple avenues of connection and exploration. For example, mainstream psychologies (particularly in English-speaking traditions) are not very open to psychodynamic interpretations of children's internal and social development, but this need not necessarily be a barrier, as they do accept that the unconscious has a strong role to play in many domains of human behaviour such as cognition, motivation and attitudes, and that many human activities are dominated by unconscious processing triggered by stimuli in the environment and mediated by motivational structures (Kihlstrom, 1987, 2019). Bourdieusian analyses of how internalised frameworks form during childhoods and how these then play out through unconscious processing could be envisaged.

Furthermore, Omar Lizardo provides another cross-over between Bourdieu and psychology in making the case that Bourdieu's concept of the habitus may owe less to psychodynamic origins than to Piaget's 'unique blend' of structuralism and developmental cognitive psychology (2004, p. 377). Perhaps ironically, given the hostility to Piaget as expressed in some foundational Childhood Studies texts (e.g. James et al., 1998), Lizardo argues that Bourdieu's 'entire notion of class-based taste as producing differentially valued bodily and mental capacities to consume certain objects' relied on a

Piagetian model of ‘the external environment as being encoded in bodily practices’ (2004, p. 384). Piaget’s flexible structuralism described cognitive schemas that are not static symbolic representations but rather are translated into actions that generate feedback, leading to further development of symbolic cognitive structures, a ‘dialectic’, Lizardo concludes, ‘of active operation and cognitive representation’ (2004, p. 384).

Therefore, although Bourdieu himself neither theorised how his constructs develop during childhood nor rose to his own challenge to integrate his constructs across disciplines, the widespread application of his work in Childhood Studies and its alignment with psychodynamic and psychological constructs and psychological research indicate potential for exploring points of connection between the disciplines and the implications for children and childhoods.

Whether situated in the sociological or the psychological, the continued absence of children and their views in studies of children and childhoods remains notable, a central issue to the distinctive offer of Childhood Studies. Developmental psychologies, and sometimes also in cultural psychologies, still often fail to seek out children and young people’s perspectives and priorities — Chen, Helwig and colleagues belong to a relatively small cluster of researchers who investigate children, development and cultural processes through the lens of children’s perspectives rather than adult-led socialisation. A further example can be seen in mainstream developmental self-concept research including its cross-cultural variants. Self-concept (self-esteem) is one of the most frequently measured constructs in developmental psychology, employed in tens of thousands of studies of children’s learning, well-being and more. It is considered to be widely validated in many cultures, yet not only does it use measures with a Western, individualistic focus, these measures are almost exclusively devised by adult researchers. Adult-devised psychological self-concept scales assess young people’s views of themselves in a limited set of domains: academic and sporting ability relative to others, popularity with peers and other factors such as their behaviour. In a study in Ireland exploring young people’s views of the activities and relationships they valued most, Tatlow-Golden and Guerin (2017) found many differences compared with psychologists’ self-concept measures. They explored young people’s perspectives through conversation, drawings, ‘Identity Pies’ and other graphical means. When young people talked, drew and wrote about what was important to them, and why, they foregrounded many relationships beyond peer popularity (friendship, and relationships with parents, siblings, extended family and even pets) and activities beyond sports and school (very many creative and active pastimes). They also highlighted meanings of these salient relationships and activities that are rarely captured in the scales or not at all, such as personal incremental achievement in activities, or having fun. Young people almost never mentioned school or curricular learning — unless it was to discuss relationships or activities in the school context, or the obligation to ‘get an education’. As a consequence, it is likely that mainstream self-concept research fails to identify many factors and meanings that contribute to young people’s self-concept.

Tatlow-Golden and colleagues’ work (O’Farrelly, Booth, Tatlow-Golden, & Barker, 2020; Tatlow-Golden & Guerin, 2010, 2017) draws on children and young people’s perspectives to interrogate the validity of scales that are very widely used in psychological and educational research, including young children’s views of the construct of school readiness. Informed by child rights principles of listening to children, understanding their lived experience and employing multiple methods to encourage communication, these studies raise substantive questions about the content of widely used psychological measures, their underlying assumptions and the reification of the constructs that results from their use. They also offer opportunities to build better insights into what children and young people experience as meaningful. It is impossible to imagine how psychological measures that do not incorporate children’s perspectives can yield accurate, meaningful psychological findings about young people’s selves. Without such insights, psychologists are unlikely to achieve their ultimate goal

of supporting children and young people to develop and fulfil their potential, and so this is another area in which Childhood Studies perspectives and methods have the potential to enrich psychological research.

CONCLUSION

There are undoubtedly still tensions between some forms of developmental psychology and Childhood Studies, based on historical differences, divergent paradigms and wider debates about the role and function of the social sciences. Yet as examples in this article have shown, when one step away from more epistemologically simplistic versions of mainstream developmental psychology to consider children and their development as they are explored by cultural, social, contextual-developmental and critical psychologists, there are also large areas of overlap and, we believe, the potential for fruitful interdisciplinary engagement. Indeed, it could be argued that Childhood Studies and non-mainstream psychologies of childhood have a great deal in common, in that they each remain largely ignored by their dominant disciplines of sociology and mainstream developmental psychology respectively. There may be opportunities to gain visibility and impact by building common cause. There is certainly, we argue, potential to research and teach in richer and more challenging ways by taking deeper, interdisciplinary approaches to studies of children and childhoods.

Where psychologists incorporate genuinely ecological, contextual and cultural approaches in their models of childhood, important new insights can add to understanding of children and young people's experiences and responses to them. These can be further expanded where psychologists talk and listen to children and young people, understanding them not only as developing beings but also as people in the present, seeking to identify their meanings and interpretations of their worlds and using these to inform research. Yet while there is an effort by some psychologists to embrace aspects of Childhood Studies, this has rarely been reciprocated. Childhood Studies, on the whole, remains wary of psychology and there is still a reluctance to draw on psychology for answers and alternative ways of thinking. Being open to explore the work of psychologists, even while continuing to discuss paradigmatic differences, would change Childhood Studies from a multidisciplinary to a more interdisciplinary project, unafraid to dialogue with difference. This dialogue would be characterised by ways of looking at and understanding children which, albeit situated in (often) differing epistemological and (sometimes) varying methodological stances, would have the potential to identify ways to carry out complex integrations and mixed methods studies that could contribute to richer, more holistic studies of childhoods.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors are grateful to Karen Littleton and Martin Robb for their comments on previous versions of this work.

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How to cite this article: Tatlow-Golden M, Montgomery H. Childhood Studies and child psychology: Disciplines in dialogue? *Child Soc.* 2021;35:3–17. <https://doi.org/10.1111/chso.12384>