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Studying childhood and children's rights: the challenge of inter- and transdisciplinarity

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Over the last few decades, scholars from various disciplinary backgrounds claim that their work on childhood and children's rights requires an approach combining different disciplines, theoretical frameworks and methods. Emerging fields of studies - such as that of Childhood Studies (CS) or more recently Children's Rights Studies (CRS) - explicitly founded on pluri-, inter- or transdisciplinary approaches legitimise and reinforce these claims. However, beyond the apparently consensual discourse on the necessity of interdisciplinary work, the challenges scholars face in order to produce "genuine" interdisciplinary data have to be noted. Also, in spite of the general use of the CS and CRS "labels" among specialists, it remains difficult to reach an overall and broadly shared definition of these fields. Discussions, contradictions, mutual inclusions or exclusions and areas of overlapping are frequently observed. Are children's rights a mere component of childhood, which should be studied as such? On the contrary, is childhood understood as a social construct, one among many valuable standpoints to apprehend the complex issue of children's rights, but insufficient in itself? How do these fields of study define themselves separately and in relation to each other, in a complementary way or in contrast? How do they deal with the interdisciplinarity they claim to build upon? In a spirit of positive provocation, do they exist on an institutional level and can they develop sustainably as relatively autonomous academic fields or are they only an amalgam of disciplinary perspectives? This presentation proposes an epistemological reflection on the pluri-, inter- and transdisciplinary fields of Childhood and Children's Rights studies. First, it aims to define the theoretical backgrounds underlying the claims for interactions between disciplines in these specific fields and by so doing to investigate their interdisciplinary nature (s). Secondly, working from the definitions of these fields and the modes of articulation of disciplines made possible, the similarities and complementarities will be underlined. Finally, in a forward-looking vision, we will sketch the potential development of those fields, within and beyond academy and through an interdisciplinary research community.