

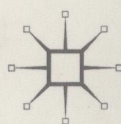


STUDIES IN
CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH



Participation, Citizenship and Trust in Children's Lives

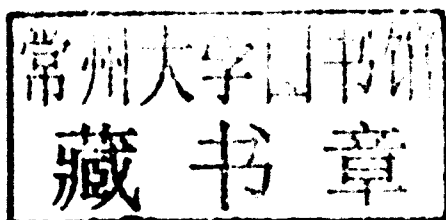
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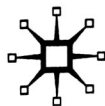
Participation, Citizenship and Trust in Children's Lives

Edited by

Hanne Warming
Roskilde University, Denmark



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Introduction

Hanne Warming

This book is a pioneering work addressing trust dynamics in children's lives from the perspective of the new sociological studies of childhood. It aims to enhance our understanding of children's wellbeing, citizenship and participation, and offers new theoretical angles which we hope will inform future research into these pressing issues.

Over 30 years ago, Niklas Luhmann pointed out the lack of studies about trust in the sociological literature (Luhmann, 1979). Today, this no longer holds true. Quite the contrary, trust is nowadays widely recognised as highly pertinent to social life and individual agency in highly complex societies. Trust as a central concept is today deployed in theoretical and empirical analyses in various fields, as evident from literature reviews of trust studies carried out by Misztal (1996), Blomqvist (1997) and Grosse (2009). These reviews identify no less than 15 overarching fields of trust research covering a myriad of subcategories and subthemes (Christensen, forthcoming). Although the large number of overarching fields recorded is partly attributable to the different categorisation strategies used (e.g. according to scientific discipline or the relationship of trust to other concepts), it is striking that in this literature trust only appears once in connection with childhood and children, namely in Grosse's review (Grosse, 2009). Here, childhood is linked to one of the five categories of scientific discipline that she lists under trust research, namely psychology. The other disciplines listed are sociology, political science, economy, philosophy, theology and the sociology of religion (Grosse, 2009; Christensen, forthcoming). It seems that childhood has been largely overseen in trust research in most disciplines, even sociology, with the single exception of psychology. And even here, childhood tends to be approached from a traditional developmental psychological perspective which regards children as objects and 'becomings' rather than as active agents and 'beings'. None

of these studies draw on insights from the new social studies of childhood, nor do they contribute significantly to this paradigm.

In 2010, Michael Christensen conducted a review on trust in childhood research as part of a Danish research project on trust in social work with children at risk (see www.tillid.ruc.dk). The review is based on 1.258 articles from peer reviewed childhood research journals, which include the words 'trust', 'mistrust' or 'distrust' in their title, abstract or keywords. This review reveals an interesting paradox: although trust is considered very important in these articles, it is vaguely defined and often not explicitly conceptualised. Only very few articles pay attention to the diversity of meanings of trust, or discuss how trust differs from related concepts such as confidence, faith and trustworthiness. These articles include Tranter and Skrbis (2009), Raamat et al. (2008), Salmi et al. (2007), Paton (2007) and Harlow and Shardlow (2006) (Christensen, forthcoming). Finally, the book *Violations of Trust: How Social and Welfare Institutions Fail Children and Young People* (Bessant et al., 2005) deserves mention as a more extensive piece of work; however, it refers solely to the Australian context and focuses on the dynamics of trust violation at the expense of the dynamics of trust building.

In sum, trust and mistrust typically figure in sociological research on childhood as significant, but under-theorised and very seldom systematically explored factors which shape children's participation, citizenship and wellbeing. There is a dearth of in-depth sociological studies on the dynamics of trust building and violation which take into account the interplay of micro, meso and macro dynamics. This book is intended as a first step towards filling these gaps. We hope that it will be a source of inspiration for further research and publication within this important field.

Trust, participation and citizenship in complex globalised societies

In sociological literature on life conditions in globalised societies characterised by increasing risk, complexity and unpredictability, trust is regarded not only as an essential human need, but as crucial to individuals' agency and their ability to cooperate with others (Luhmann, 2005). Following this line of thought, the concept of trust can help us to understand the challenges to, and opportunities for, individual and collective agency, and thus also for children's and young people's participation and citizenship in globalised societies. Not surprisingly, therefore, researchers from many different disciplines have shown increasing

interest in the role played by trust in social cohesion, social capital and citizenship (e.g. Warren, 1999; Uslaner, 1999 and Misztal, 2001), deliberative democracy (see Harré, 1999 and Inglehart, 1999), and responsibility in social work (see Howe, 1998; Smith, 2001 and Ruch, 2005). Giddens (1990, 1991), for his part, analyses how the disembedding processes of modernity change and challenge trust. Likewise, in their research on social work, Parton (1998), Smith (2001) and Ruch (2005) point out that processes of bureaucratisation, contractualisation and standardisation undermine trust, making it a 'scarce resource' (Smith, 2001: 289).

Curiously, however, this important research on trust has not yet really filtered into the field of children's participation and citizenship. Figuratively speaking, the two research fields seem to have inhabited parallel universes. One explanation for this may be that despite the growing number of publications in the field of children's citizenship and participation, the subject is still quite under-theorised, as pointed out by Moosa-Mitha (2005), Tisdall and Liebel (2008) and Thomas and Percy-Smith (2010). Although this is changing – Moosa-Mitha's article, the first part of the collected book *Children and Citizenship* (Williams & Invernizzi, 2007) and the third part of *A Handbook of Children and Young People's Participation* (Percy-Smith & Thomas, 2010) are important examples of that – on the whole this emergent theorising still overlooks the significance of trust for participation and citizenship.

This book arose from my realisation that the trust concept held great potential for research into children's participation and citizenship in particular, and for their wellbeing and agency in general. I hope that the book will go some way towards remedying the absence of a theoretically-based understanding of trust in the new social studies of childhood. The book is based on work carried out within the framework of an international research network on 'Trust dynamics in the governance of children and youth' (TRUDY),¹ which I initiated in 2010.

Content of the book

The book explores trust dynamics in the governance of children and youth as contextualised in specific social arenas (institutions, the local, the national and the global), in time (the global age) and as constructed over time. Thus, in line with Halldén (2005) and Uprichard (2008), we approach childhood from a combined 'becoming' and 'being' perspective. Becoming and being are two intertwined dimensions of childhood, which are both located within what Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1994) has termed the ecological system. The ecological system, that provides the

context for children's lives and development, consists of five different types of subsystem: *microsystems*, which are the face-to-face settings in which children participate, for example school, daycare institutions, peer groups and the family; *mesosystems*, which are the linkages and processes between two or more microsystems; *exosystems*, which are the 'linkages and processes between two or more settings, at least one of which does not contain the child but in which events occur that indirectly influence' (Bronfenbrenner, 1994: 39–40) the child's microsystems; *macrosystems*, which are the overarching cultural patterns of discourses and practices; and *chronosystems*, which encompass 'changes and consistency over time' which may affect both the child and the environment in which s/he lives (Ibid.).

Using the concept of *trust dynamics*, we address the causes and consequences of trust building and trust violation processes, which are explored through the combination of theoretical depth and direct application to analyses in different institutional and cultural contexts. The theoretical and empirical exploration of trust dynamics range from a subjective level, to interactions and institutional dynamics, to research examining the discursive and social structural level, and not least linkages between the different levels, covering the entire ecological system (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

Chapter 1, by Warming, revisits the issues raised in this introduction regarding how to theorise the relationship between trust and children's participation and citizenship. The chapter shows how Luhmann's concept of trust can be developed by reinterpreting it in the light of a difference-centred approach to children's citizenship, and combining it with Delanty's distinction between disciplinary and inclusive citizenship learning processes (identity) and Bourdieu's power sensitive theory of practice for the purpose of a critical rather than functional approach. These theoretical points are illustrated using a case borrowed from a Danish child-led research project on trust in social work. Chapter 2, by Moran-Ellis and Sünker, develops the issue of a critical power sensitive approach. Based on the observation that adult support of children's participation is in practice still a contested space, the authors argue that this is related to adults trust and mistrust in children, which is again related to generational power structures. The argument unfolds through analysis of three cases of children as collective agents. The chapter enhances an understanding of trust-power dynamics, and how they shape the social spaces of children as collective agents.

The next two chapters offer empirical analyses of trust dynamics on a subjective level. Chapter 3, by Grosse and Warming, examines the

impact of childhood trust experiences for children's wellbeing and trust dispositions throughout the life course. The chapter moves beyond an individual psychological understanding of trust by examining the impact of critical incidents within the framework of institutions such as the family, schools or social work settings, and those of a more interpersonal nature such as relationships with parents and peers, as well as more latent perceptions of early life. The analysis, which is based on qualitative interviews with young and middle aged Swedes and Danish children, shows how institutional practices and logics, the personality of significant others and dominant discourses all shape experiences of confidence and trust, and influence the development of subjective trust attitudes and behaviour dispositions. In Chapter 4, Turton takes an in-depth look at the identity and agency consequences of trust violation by a 'significant other'. Her contribution enhances our knowledge about the micro dynamics of the relationship between trust and children's participation and wellbeing. Her analysis moves beyond an individual psychological understanding, demonstrating how these micro dynamics are shaped by the discursive context. Her empirical focus is the difficulties that victims of maternal incest have in disclosing their abuse, and the dilemmas these children face when considering who to trust. The analysis is based on interviews with adult survivors of female perpetrators.

Picking up key themes from the two previous chapters, the next two chapters examine trust dynamics in social work. In Chapter 5, by Pinkney, the analysis is based on qualitative interviews with British welfare professionals and consultations held by children's rights organisations with groups of children and young people. The focus is on work with children and young people who are either already in residential or foster care, or who have been deemed to be at risk of significant harm. The analysis assesses the personal and institutional constraints experienced during the trust development process. It further provides examples of good practice in which such constraints are overcome. It is argued that a key task both for individual professionals and child welfare institutions is to recognise the significance of the trust development process, and of trust relations, within the often fraught and contested arena of social work with children and youth. Along similar lines, Christensen's chapter (Chapter 6) on 'Trust, Social Work and Care Ethics' in a Danish context uses a Luhmannian perspective on trust to explore the situated position of social workers employed within a municipality structure. Taking its point of departure in critiques of the current dominant institutional focus on procedure, cost reduction, cost effectiveness and documentation, the chapter argues that the latter constitute significant constraints in trust building

processes between social workers and children at risk. Drawing upon empirical material from an ongoing research project, Christensen shows how, seen from a Luhmannian perspective on trust, social workers may be regarded as situated between the role of a system representative with specific trust signifiers, and that of an individual with personal trust attributes. He explains how social workers struggle to manage these different roles, but that these struggles – if carried out successfully – have the potential to create spaces in which positive, trustful relations between social workers and children at risk can be forged.

Chapter 7, by Baraldi and Farini, explores the dynamics of trust, especially trust building, on an interactional and institutional level. Based on different theoretical conceptualisations of trust (Luhmann, Giddens, Rogers and Kelman) and the possibilities they offer for trust building, combined with empirical analysis of interactions between students and educators, the chapter examines the theoretical consistency and empirical verifiability of presuppositions about trust building. The empirical analysis is based on videotaped interactions recorded during two international peace building summer camps for adolescents held in Italy, that is, videotaped activities of peace education among non-scholastic intercultural cross-national groups, and mediation activities in intercultural classrooms. These cases are strategically chosen for the purpose of examining, identifying and highlighting the types of educational actions that hold potential for trust promotion. The chapter thus offers theoretical development as well as examples of good trust building practice in educational systems.

Exploring the intersection between different discursive constructions of 'wellbeing', 'children's best interest' and 'proper parenting', Chapter 8, by Pantea, studies trust dynamics at the structural discursive level. The chapter situates children whose parents work abroad as under-recognised participants in the globalisation process. It contributes to our understanding of trust dynamics in the governance of children, and to knowledge about how children's participation and citizenship are shaped, by analysing how 'children's best interest' is symbolically negotiated among different actors (children, parents, caretakers, teachers, social workers) and the state of Romania. The empirical basis for the analysis is a literature review, document analysis and qualitative interviews with children and social workers. By exploring the intersection between different meanings of 'wellbeing', the chapter advances our understanding of the dynamics of power, control and trust as they relate to children as a social group, and of how these connect to the national context, in this case a former totalitarian society. The latter point is followed up in Chapter 9, in which

Ule explores trust dynamics in the governance of youth at the structural level in Slovenia, by analysing changes in the relationship between youth and society during the past two decades. This period was characterised by the transition from socialism to neoliberalism, which has accentuated social differences such as class, gender and ethnicity. The analysis, which is based on comparisons of data from youth studies carried out during this period, shows how this transition has transformed the position of young people from being a privileged group to being the 'weakest link'. This is because they are increasingly subject to pressures from social institutions such as the labour market, educational system, social care and protection, social security and health, over which they have very little or no influence. Increasingly, young people in Slovenia perceive the social world as unclear and unpredictable. They display low levels of trust in political institutions and subjects, and show a distinct tendency to turn towards privacy and private life. Thus, this chapter offers important insights into the – in this case negative – dynamic relationship between the general social structure and young people's trust in the society in which they live.

The concluding chapter reflects on the lessons learned across the chapters, arguing that the trust approach poses great potentials for a dynamic understanding of the shaping of children's participation, citizenship and life quality, including of the role of the welfare professionals. However, also limitations and a need for further theoretical development is revealed, which then together with the proven potentials form the basis for pointing out directions for future research.

Note

- 1 See www.ruc.dk/institutter/isg/forskningen/centre-netvaerk-samarbejder/trudy.

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