



Reflections on Social Awareness, Wellbeing and Structural Vulnerability among Children and Youth in Times of Covid-19

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Outline

- Anthropological perspective on Childhood
- Fear, vulnerability and trans-generational memory
- Identity and Wellbeing
- The co-construction of knowledge
- Contrast between two crisis
- Questions for reflection

No ruler in his right mind has denied that without a full-blooded social mobilisation, there will be no survival this time. Whether this proves to be true or not, only time will tell, but we will look back on this time as one in which the arrogance of the nation-state has been dealt a massive blow by the rediscovery of the social resources that managing this crisis requires.

Arjun Appadurai, *The Covid Exception* (2020)



Anthropological perspective on childhood

- Co-existence of Agency and Vulnerability
- Children as meaning-makers
- Children can inform on social issues that especially concern them
- The category of “childhood” varies among cultures, it is context-specific
- The subjective experience of children always inform social structural patterns that affect them in their daily life.



Fear, vulnerability and transgenerational memory

- Generational theory (Mannheim): specific events that mark a period alter the worldview of individuals belonging to the same generation
- A traumatic year for many children and adolescents
- What knowledge will be shared in few years? How the current generation of school children will represent this year? Which values will have changed?
- Will the fear of infection will engender new forms of stigmatisation? Shall we worry about the growing trend of populist biopower?



Structural disparities and hierarchical identities

Deep cleavages among populations and among communities have been brought to light: no one can ignore that the strict measures we have to follow aim in great part at protecting the most vulnerable individuals of our societies, which include the victims of structural violence whose immune systems were already compromised due to poor living conditions.

- belonging as social determinant of wellbeing
- Identity construction is tied to space
- The school is where children and adolescents learn to negotiate their (multiple) identities and to construct new ones.
- Social media as sites of identity production *
- Searches for new communities of belonging through the cyber space have dramatically increased from the beginning of the pandemic

*Habit & Ward 2019

Wellbeing and feeling of belonging under Covid-19



The relevance of culture

- *Culture allows a codification of the totality of experiences lived by an individual, to make sense of what is happening, to anticipate the essence of what may happen, provide tools to harness the inherent violence of sudden life changes. It provides a reading grid of the world. This coding represents a complex process.*

Moro 2010,p.15, (my own translation)



Making sense of the pandemic and cultural representations

- It could be problematic for children to make sense of the pandemic and the dangers it represents, especially that local challenges are usually extremely complex.
- The heavily politicization of the crisis may lead to the use of "hidden transcripts"
* in daily life
- There is a large variety of cultural representations of health and illness and as many ways of addressing them : everyday life knowledge construction
- Knowledge co-construction participates in developing a sense of belonging which in turn may have a positive impact on wellbeing
- * Concept developed by James C. Scott

Contrast between two crisis: The Climate Change and the Pandemic

- Public recognition of agency of children and adolescents
- The meaning making of the crisis
- The perceived transgenerational implications
- The appropriation of the crisis by the youth
- The legitimacy to address the structures directly
- The transformative effect
- reappropriation of the ecoliteracy-youth agency message by the edumarket

Different types of literacy: Ecoliteracy and Health Literacy

Why our generations are not blamed for the lack of proper medical care infrastructures or general lack of preparedness? For neglecting health programs targeting Communicable Diseases?

Environmental education : Focus on the Collective, draws partly from critical pedagogy – generate strong identities, sense of belonging to a movement

Health education : Focus on the Individual, the responsibility is not perceived as generational, does not trigger any sense of belonging. Why?



Questions for reflexion

- Is it possible to support children becoming aware of the structural determinants of health and to learn to engage with them meaningfully?
- The socio-ecological model is the dominant framework in HPS. To which extent children and adolescents have the opportunity to develop their own comprehension of their ecosystem?
- Can the school act as a generator, not only of new knowledge, but of new modes of addressing matters pertaining to health inequities?
- Will new global identities emerge from this crisis?
- How can we increase research focusing on consequential participation of students? (a question already raised by Venka Simovska)



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Thank you!

