



Learning to be responsible: Young children transitions outside school

Patricia Ames^{*,1}

Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, Horacio Urteaga 694 Lima 11, Peru

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 10 May 2012
 Received in revised form 22 April 2013
 Accepted 24 April 2013
 Available online 21 May 2013

Keywords:

Childhood stages
 Family and community learning
 Indigenous children
 Transitions

ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on out of school learning during early childhood transitions through case studies of young children in two different rural communities in Peru. It shows that for young children, increasing participation in their social worlds is marked not only through specific rites, but also through a more subtle process that involves a progressive change in their roles and responsibilities within their households. This transition involves the learning of practical and social skills, develops a sense of identity, belonging and responsibility, and makes children feel valuable members of their families and communities. The process takes place at the same time as young children start formal schooling, but is often ignored by school itself. The paper contributes to current discussions on out-of-school learning and child work at specific life-course moments such as the transition to middle childhood, contributing empirical material as well in order to understand the transition itself.

© 2013 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Introduction

Over the last two decades, the increasing attention paid to the significance of early childhood transitions for the well-being and development of children has produced a wealth of studies on and theoretical approaches to the topic (Vogler et al., 2008). However, while most of this literature focuses mainly on minority world countries and educational transitions (Corsaro & Molinari, 2005; Dockett & Perry, 2005; Dunlop & Fabian, 2007; Woodhead & Moss, 2007), it rarely addresses other out of school transitions of young children in majority world countries. Nevertheless, the work of anthropologists has uncovered a diverse array of moments of change in children's lives, some of them identified as "rites of passage" (Van Gennepe, 1960), and others associated with learning processes outside formal education institutions (Rogoff, 1996).

This paper aims to contribute to current discussions on out-of-school learning, work and children competency within the context of early childhood transitions. It also provides empirical evidence on an under-researched topic: the transition from early to middle childhood.

The paper focuses on young rural children during their early years in a majority world country through longitudinal case studies. Five- and 6-year-old children from two different rural communities in Peru, as well as adults, participated in the research across two years. Participants belong to a Quechua indigenous community in the Andean highlands and to a coffee farming village in the tropical rainforest.

This paper originated from a wider study that included also urban children. The research uncovered the presence of a specific social transition in the life of rural children at the time they started school, which did not exist among urban children in the sample, and thus the focus is exclusively in rural children.

Researching children's transitions outside school is necessary in order to make visible the process of change young children go through, the learning they gain through this process and how their competence is developed. The paper aims to understand the

* Tel.: +51 13301034; fax: +51 13326173.

E-mail address: pames@iep.org.pe.

¹ Current address: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos & Pontificia Universidad Catolica del Peru.

significance of these processes for children, their families and their communities. Two key features are explored in this paper: a particular type of learning based in observation and participation; and the beginning of child work as part of household economy. Both features entailed values for parents and children beyond practical needs and related to the development of a sense of responsibility, identity and belonging, which are discussed in the final part. This introduction briefly presents theoretical and methodological issues. Afterwards, the results and discussion follow.

Theoretical framework

The conceptualisation used in the current study adopts a socio-cultural approach. This perspective stresses that the “changes of individuals are assumed to be inseparable from their involvements in socio-cultural activity” (Rogoff, 1996, p. 273). Transitions therefore are conceptualised as processes of change in the life of children where individual changes are studied not in isolation but as part of interpersonal and community processes.

In anthropology, transitions have often been studied within a framework of linear life stages or life cycle model. The life cycle model states that life stages are universal (all go through them), strictly ordered (in the same sequence for all) and coherent (changes are consistent across different domains of life) (Johnson-Hanks, 2002, p. 866). However, this model has been criticised as it oversimplifies life course and obscures social reality. Instead, several anthropologists advocated for a model of life trajectory as process in which stages are always in the making, recognising that life events vary greatly in timing, pacing, order and synchronization (Johnson-Hanks, 2002, p.867). This approach does not deny the existence of life transitions, but alerts the researcher to look at the processes that make possible such transitions instead of taking them as natural events: recognisable life stages are socio-cultural constructions rather than biological facts.

A socio-cultural approach to human development is compatible with such a shift, as it moves away to the study of the isolated individual, by studying individual change as it constitutes and is constituted by interpersonal and community process, recognising as well that multiple paths are possible and accepting the importance of social interaction to shape and acknowledge changes through the life course.

This approach also allows for the identification of transitions beyond those marked in ritualistic ways, such as the classic “rite of passage” as defined by Van Gennep (1960), which refers to a key ritual moment in the life of a person where an important and socially recognised change of status takes place. Although much anthropological attention has been devoted to rites of passage associated with puberty, much less has been paid to early and middle childhood, although transitions in these periods have been indeed documented (Lancy & Grove, 2011). If transitions are understood as processes of change in the life of children, either marked by rituals or not, it allows recognising more subtle processes as the ones described here. Considering transitions as longer processes rather than events that take place at one point in time also makes evident the usefulness of longitudinal research (Bell-Booth, Staton, & Thorpe, 2012).

From a socio-cultural approach it is also clear that even if transitions are mostly about change, they are also inextricably attached to learning processes. The concept of learning is therefore central to understanding the transitions observed. Within the socio-cultural approach, learning is understood as a socially situated practice, which involves progressive participation of the apprentice in the socio-cultural practices of a given community (Lave & Wegner, 1991; Rogoff, 1990). As the communities studied were rural, many of their socio-cultural practices included children's participation in agricultural and domestic work, and thus child work is strongly present in relation to learning practices. Literature on child work, which includes children's productive and domestic activities inside and outside their households and both paid and unpaid, points out its benefits and harms, which depend to a great extent not only on the type of activity but also on the context, relations and values that are embedded in children's activities (Bourdillon, 2006; Boyden, Ling, & Myers, 1998; Woodhead, 2004). This literature has contributed to understanding the data collected as child work also seems to be a defining feature of the transition to middle childhood. Middle childhood may be defined as a distinctive time in the life course, between early childhood and puberty. Lancy and Grove (2011), in a study based on an extensive review of ethnographic data, point to several characteristics of this phase, such as more visible participation of children in family and community endeavours through their assumption of more roles and tasks, the acknowledging of children's sense of responsibility linked with greater sensitivity to the expectations and needs of others, and increasing gender differentiation and segregation. Although the authors refer to specific stages, they do recognise the elasticity of both the beginning and the end of such phases and rather than looking at the individual in isolation, they show that the above-mentioned characteristics account for children in interaction with others and the changing roles and expectations that are part of such interaction, making this approach compatible with that of Rogoff (1996).

Research participants & questions

The case studies analysed in this paper are part of a larger study, *Young Lives*, a longitudinal study of childhood poverty. *Young Lives* periodically collects qualitative and quantitative data from two age cohorts: survey information from 3000 children that was collected in three rounds (2002, 2006 and 2009) and qualitative, in-depth case studies that were developed in two rounds (2007 and 2008) with 50 children randomly selected from four sites where children from the main sample lived. Further rounds of data collection are planned up to 2015.

This paper analyses primarily the qualitative data, focusing on the case studies from the two rural villages (N = 27). I focus mainly on the Younger Cohort children (born 2001–2002) — six boys and seven girls. In one village we work with all *Young Lives*

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/364410>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/364410>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)