

BOOK REVIEWS

Anthropological Perspectives on Children as Helpers, Workers, Artisans, and Laborers by David F. Lancy

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David Lancy's new book is an expansive survey and analysis of ethnographic scholarship on children's work in communities around the world. By situating his inquiry within anthropological theory and research, Lancy demonstrates that children's participation in subsistence activities constitutes a key socialization process that shapes their developmental trajectories. Each chapter provides a compendium of studies that illustrates the different tasks children are assigned as they age and the impact of the organization of household economies on children's lives.

In his introductory overview, Lancy briefly revisits his two contrasting models of society: (1) the child-centered "neontocracy," in which children are placed at the top of the family hierarchy and are not expected to contribute to the household economy; and (2) the gerontocracy, in which elders are ranked highest and children are expected to be subservient. Throughout the book, Lancy suggests that in the latter model, children's early autonomy renders them competent to take on responsibilities and help others, while children raised in neontocracies are ill-prepared for adulthood. By focusing primarily on ethnographic accounts of non-WEIRD (Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic) societies, Lancy sheds light on different cultural models of childhood and development. The chapters primarily examine child rearing and children's responsibilities across foraging, herding, farming, and crafts-oriented societies.

In chapter 2, "Playing to Working," Lancy emphasizes that "play" in village life largely involves tool use and the emulation of adult work activities; playing constitutes a distinct developmental stage in children's skill acquisition and preparation for future work. Chapter 3 ("Helpers") discusses children's transition from play to taking on supporting roles in work endeavors. Lancy cites a vast number of studies that describe children closely observing their elders and practicing tasks on their own, and he highlights the marked lack of explicit teaching and instruction by adults in these settings. Lancy notes that "indigenous pedagogy based on 'learning through doing' is probably a cultural universal" (p. 72).

"Becoming Workers" (chapter 4) describes the stage in which children begin to be held accountable for completing tasks in a satisfactory manner. Children's involvement is taken more seriously, and the quality of their work is typically subject to strict scrutiny by peers and elders, which generally results in children's increased determination to excel in order to boost their social status. The age at which this transition occurs varies widely across societies and tends to depend on the difficulty of the specific tasks and local ideologies of competence. In most communities, work is clearly gendered, and Lancy concludes that "girls work harder sooner across societies" (p. 93). Lancy explains that this situation is due in part to expectations that girls remain close to their mothers

as they work, whereas boys are permitted far greater freedom, yet the reasons behind gendered configurations of labor are not explored.

The apprenticeship model of socialization is introduced in chapter 5 ("Young Artisans"). The "craft curriculum" of apprenticeship is depicted as much more highly structured than the "chore curriculum" (the "helper to worker" model previously described). Lancy draws from his own research among the Kpelle to illuminate the politics of apprenticeship and the hierarchical and contractual aspects of this relationship. The master's transmission of skills and knowledge obligates the apprentice, typically an adolescent, to pay close attention to each stage of craftsmanship and display reverence for the practitioner, the complexity of the work, and the tools employed.

Chapter 6 ("Children as a Reserve Labor Source") considers times of crisis that thrust children into an "accelerated" childhood and require them to transition into taking on adult workloads or responsibilities earlier than expected. These cases reveal a utilitarian view of children that emphasizes their resilience when facing adversity; however, Lancy also refers to children who decide to leave their families to live and labor independently in urban areas. Lancy elaborates on the distinction he makes between "work" and "labor" in chapter 7 ("Children as Laborers"); while "work" involves children's active engagement and learning in family or village life, "labor" refers to children living apart from their families and under the supervision of institutional or commercial enterprises. In these situations, studies show that children are vulnerable to exploitation and harm, even in societies with child labor laws. The final chapter, "The Effects of Culture Change on Children's Work," explores the challenges that the introduction of the Western model of schooling presents to the cultural and economic well-being of families and communities. In many societies, requiring children to attend school results in cultural alienation and the loss of and respect for Indigenous knowledge.

Lancy's comprehensive overview highlights the importance of anthropological research for understanding cultural variation in children's socialization and work activities. One minor criticism of the book concerns the sparsity of the index, which does not contain any names of groups or geographical locations, making it difficult to locate pertinent information across chapters. Overall, however, this volume is a welcome and invaluable contribution to anthropological scholarship on childhood.