2: Studying Childhood through an Interdisciplinary Framework

Learning Objectives

• Develop an interdisciplinary framework from which to examine a specific research question.
• Identify 3 major challenges facing children today.
• Explain the role of disciplines in ethical, practical, and political responses to children’s well-being.
• Describe how disciplines advocate for action for the benefit and well-being of children.

Terms to Consider

During your work this week, you will likely visit these concepts.

• **Children’s Places**: Spaces children choose to occupy and make use of in their everyday lives and the ways in which they understand their environment.
• **Disappearance or loss of childhood**: The idea that the differences between children and adults are becoming less pronounced and that this is creating problems for children.
• **Internet and Social Media**: Children’s engagement with electronic media of all kinds.
• **Sexualization**: The material cultural practices of treating young girls as if they were young women.
• **Spaces for Children**: Built environments that are suitable for use by children.

This week we will explore interdisciplinary frameworks used to examine your research questions for the group project. There are samples of past projects and poster available on Blackboard.

Your Poster Presentation Project will clearly describe how you used insights from different disciplines to more fully understand the issue.
What are some current topics that you could explore further as progress through the Childhood Studies Minor at Bridgewater State University? I included 4 possible areas to investigate and the list is endless as you will see in the resource I included.

### Children’s Places and Spaces

Since the 1970s, how children use environments and how physical environments influence child development have been important topics in environmental psychology and and behavior studies. This area of interdisciplinary studies brings together social scientists with urban planners and designers, architects, and landscape architects. Then cognitive psychologists became involved with the goal of understanding how to create environments that best support children. Holloway and Valentine 2000 were influenced by the sociology of childhood, which argues that childhood and children’s use of space are social constructions, and therefore it emphasizes changes in children’s place experience depending on social contexts. Dudek 2005 and Day and Midbjer 2007 illustrate efforts by architects to apply principles of child development to design. **How does the environment shape development?**

### Disappearance or loss of childhood

Are children different today than when you were growing up? Is childhood disappearing? Is the distinction between adulthood and childhood is narrowing? Over 20 years ago, in 1994, Neil Postman argued that childhood is ‘disappearing at a dazzling speed’. He supported his position with the trend towards giving children the same rights as adults, the growing similarity of adult and children’s clothing and even cases of children committing ‘adult crimes’ (murder, rape). He added that electronic media blur this separation and that children are now much more able to access the ‘adult world’. As a result, childhood as we know it is disappearing. I would add that children have more pressure for academic achievement and that helicopter parents add to their stress.

Not everyone agrees with Postman. Some people believe that childhood is just more complex, and that children are more protected with labor and welfare laws. **Do you think is childhood disappearing?**

The disciplines of English, Communications, Arts, History, and Psychology could be helpful in studying this area more thoroughly.

### Internet and Social Media

**Does using the Internet affect children’s development?** How often do children use the internet? Do children become socially isolated or connected when they use the Internet? Do they become depressed or elated? Does school performance suffer or improve?

There seems to be both positive and negative effects of electronic media usage on children. Some of the positive effects of social media usage are socializing and sharing common interests; a space where children and youth can be creative, interact, and learn (Chau, 2010); an alternative way to get students interested in learning with a new and previously unconventional medium (Rosen, 2011); and assisting with “homework and group projects” (Clark-Pearson, O’Keeffe, 2011). Social networking can help shy adolescents. (Rosen, 2011). Additionally, adolescents who use Facebook have
been shown to demonstrate more “virtual empathy” (Rosen, 2011).

Some of the negative effect, especially for adolescents, include a decrease in the level of contentment, an increase of getting into trouble or being depressed (Rideout, 2010; and teens who use Facebook tend to be more narcissistic, antisocial, and aggrrssive (Rosen, 2011).

Cyberbullying has also been the cause of many suicides in young people (Kowalski, 2009). Many young online users are lured by online sexual predators (Ybarra, 2007). Another problem is that many adolescents are unaware of the privacy policies on the social media websites they use (Cox, 2007).

Many children and youth are influenced by the powerful advertising they see on social media sites, and it strongly influences their buying habits. Studies have shown that adolescents and even college students who are on Facebook too much have lower grades (Rosen, 2011). So is social media usage good or bad? The disciplines of English, Communications, Arts, History, Criminal Justice, Sociology, Social Work, and Psychology could be helpful in studying this area more thoroughly.

**Sexualization**

A 2007 report from the American Psychological Association (APA) found evidence that the increase of sexualized images of girls and young women in advertising, merchandising, and media is harmful to girls’ self-image and healthy development.

*Sexualization* was defined as when a person’s value comes only from their sexual appeal, to the exclusion of other characteristics, and when a person is sexually objectified, such as when they are made into a *thing* for another’s sexual use.

The report includes examples of the sexualization of girls in all forms of media including visual media and other forms of media such as music lyrics abound. The influence and attitudes of parents, siblings, and friends can also add to the pressures of sexualization.

Research showed that the sexualization of girls negatively affects girls and young women across a variety of health domains:

**Cognitive and Emotional Consequences:** Sexualization and objectification undermine a person’s confidence in and comfort with her own body, leading to emotional and self-image problems, such as shame and anxiety.

**Mental and Physical Health:** Research links sexualization with three of the most common mental health problems diagnosed in girls and women—eating disorders, low self-esteem, and depression or depressed mood.

**Sexual Development:** Research suggests that the sexualization of girls has negative consequences on girls’ ability to develop a healthy sexual self-image.

According to the task force report, parents can play a major role in contributing to the sexualization of their daughters or can play a protective and educative role. The disciplines of Psychology, Sociology, Health, Medicine, and Biology could be helpful in studying this area more thoroughly.
Current Topics Researched in Childhood Studies

Did you know that Childhood Studies is one of the most active fields in academia today? In the past, children might have been seen as passive, dependent or incomplete, they are now seen by researchers as equal participants in society, differently competent to adults, but of interest for what they are now, not only what they will become. Children's rights, and the changing relationship between families and children, are central to the field. Oxford Bibliographies in Childhood Studies is a helpful place to discover more about current research in Childhood Studies.

Careers and Childhood Studies

A wide range of career options are open to students who complete the Childhood Studies degree program. Sample career paths might be:

- Law as a child advocate
- Children's publishing (print & web)
- Social work
- School or community counseling
- Children's museums
- Children’s theater
- Early Education and Care
- Recreation
- Advocacy and public service
- Health and wellness

Additional career options are outlined in the attached document available at:


To prepare for the wide variety of possible career options, we encourage Childhood Studies students to pursue majors and minors related to their career goals. This is a list of minors available at Bridgewater State:

- Accounting and Finance Minor
- African American Studies Minor
- African Studies Minor
- American Studies Minor
- Anthropology Minor
- Art History Minor
- Asian Studies Minor
- Canadian Studies Minor
- Civic Education and Community Leadership Minor
• Classical Studies Minor
• Coaching Minor
• Communication Disorders Minor
• Communication Studies Minor
• Computer Science Minor
• Criminal Justice Minor
• Dance Minor
• Economics Minor
• English Literature and Literary Studies Minor
• Exercise Physiology Minor
• Film Studies Minor
• GLBT Studies Minor
• Global Religious Studies Minor
• Graphic Design Minor
• Health Promotion Minor
• Health Resources Management Minor
• History Minor
• Irish Studies Minor
• Latin American and Caribbean Studies Minor
• Management Minor
• Middle East Studies Minor
• Music Minor
• Musical Theatre Performance Minor
• Nutrition Minor
• Philosophy Minor
• Philosophy, Politics and Economics Minor
• Political Science Minor
• Portuguese Minor
• Psychology Minor
• Public Relations Minor
• Reading Minor
• Recreation Minor
• Social Studies Minor
• Social Welfare Minor
• Sociology Minor
• Spanish Minor
• Special Education, Inclusive Practices in Special Education Minor
• Statistics Minor
Think about how you see yourself working with children and families.

After participating in discussion you should be able to:

• Develop an interdisciplinary framework from which to examine a specific research question.
• Identify 3 major challenges facing children today
• Explain the role of disciplines in ethical, practical, and political responses to children’s well-being.
• Describe how disciplines advocate for action for the benefit and well-being of children.

Exercise \cite{2}:

Creating an electronic portfolio

To document your learning in the minor, which includes this course, you can begin to create an electronic portfolio. The portfolio will be used for those of you in the Childhood Studies minor during the Capstone course: CHST 400. All students benefit from creating an electronic portfolio according to the Association of American Colleges & Universities.

Your reflection on work submitted in e-portfolios can:

• Build your personal and academic identity as you reflect on your capabilities and progress
• Facilitate the integration of learning as you connect learning across courses and time
• Develop self-assessment abilities by judging the quality of the work you produce
• Assist with planning your academic path as you come to understand what you know and can do as well as goals for future learning.
• Be helpful when applying to graduate school or applying for job opportunities

References


