Studying childhood, children, and their rights: The challenge of interdisciplinarity

Zoe Moody
University of Geneva, Switzerland; Valais University of Teacher Education, Switzerland

Frédéric Darbellay
University of Geneva, Switzerland

Abstract
This article proposes an epistemological reflection on the multidisciplinary/interdisciplinary fields of Childhood and Children's Rights Studies. The theoretical backgrounds underlying the claims for interactions between disciplines in these specific fields are investigated, exploring their multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary nature(s). Between specificities, similarities, and complementarities, possibilities of dialogue and integration within and beyond the fields are explored, to identify the conditions for interdisciplinary work on the complex issues of childhood, children, and their rights.

Over the last few decades, scholars from various disciplinary backgrounds claim that their work on childhood, children, and their rights requires an approach combining different disciplines, theoretical frameworks, and methods. Emerging fields of studies—such as that of Childhood Studies (CS) or more recently Children's Rights Studies (CRS)—explicitly founded on multidisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary approaches legitimize and reinforce these claims. As significant benchmarks toward the institutionalization of fields of studies and the establishment of a body of knowledge more or less stabilized, handbooks as well as specific academic journals descriptions or editorials

Corresponding author:
Zoe Moody, Inter- and Transdisciplinarity Unit, The Center for Children's Rights Studies, University of Geneva, Valais Campus, PO Box 4176, 1950 Sion 4, Switzerland.
Email: zoe.moody@unige.ch

show to a certain extent how disciplinary perspectives interact and are integrated by scholars themselves within their research. For instance, *The Palgrave Handbook of Childhood Studies* (Qvortrup et al., 2009a), *The Routledge International Handbook of Children's Rights Studies* (Vandenhole et al., 2015), and various papers of the journals *Childhood* (Alanen, 2010, 2012; Hanson, 2014; Thorne, 2007) or *The International Journal of Children's Rights* (Freeman, 1998; Mayall, 2000; Reynaert et al., 2009) among others provide insights on how the multidisciplinary/interdisciplinary study of childhood, of children, and of their rights is organized and conducted.

However, beyond the apparently consensual discourse on the necessity of interdisciplinary work, the challenges scholars face to produce "genuine" interdisciplinary data can be noted (see Alanen, 2012; Bühler-Niederberger, 2010; Carnevale et al., 2015; Quennerstedt, 2013). Also, despite the general use of the notions of CS and CRS among specialists, it remains difficult to reach an overall and broadly shared definition of these fields. Discussions, contradictions, mutual inclusions, or exclusions and areas of obvious overlapping, whatever the quality of the definitions, are frequently observed. Are children's rights a mere component of childhood, which should be studied as such? On the contrary, is childhood understood as a social construct, one among many standpoints useful to apprehend the complex issue of children's rights but itself insufficient? How do these fields of studies define themselves separately and in relation to each other? How do they deal with the multidisciplinarity/interdisciplinarity they claim to build upon? Finally, how does this shared interdisciplinary focus impact exchanges and cross-fertilization between the fields and contribute to their respective theoretical development?

This article aims to contribute to the epistemological reflection conducted on the multidisciplinarity/interdisciplinary fields of CS and CRS; by focusing on the theoretical foundations of interdisciplinary work in the fields and suggesting ways of overcoming the challenges that lie at the intersection(s) between them. Considering the added value of epistemological bases to organize the study of complex issues, this article proposes a theoretical and qualitative comparative analysis of most representative seminal works (handbooks, aims and scopes of journals, and articles), which clearly state their intent to study and/or stabilize one or the two fields referred to and their mutual interactions. Although these issues are more broadly disseminated and discussed, this contribution is indented as an in-depth analysis, also partly answering the call for more critical approaches of CRS (see notably, Hanson and Nieuwenhuys, 2012; Reynaert et al., 2012, 2015).

Interdisciplinary objects of study

Childhood, children, and children's rights are commonly regarded as multidisciplinary/ interdisciplinary objects of study. Across disciplinary boarders or resolutely at their interface, researchers argue for instance that "[t]he living realities of children and young people cannot be compartmentalized to neatly fit academic disciplines and university structures," providing a comprehensive understanding of these issues thus "implies combining various disciplinary perspectives" (Reynaert et al., 2015: 8). Underpinning these claims lays the idea that childhood, children, and their rights are, as Alanen (2012) writes, "highly complex and multifaceted" research objects which require collaborations between scholars of different disciplinary backgrounds in order to overcome the limits of

their own disciplines and find "innovative solutions to the problems at hand" (p. 420). By so doing, scholars acknowledge the added value of fine combinations of disciplinary perspectives to build a holistic understanding of these research objects, overcoming sterile dichotomies, binaries, and dualisms as well as analytic reductions followed by simplistic additions of bits of knowledge (see Hanson and Nieuwenhuys, 2012; James and James, 2008; Prout, 2005).

Moving beyond this alleged consensus and the common metaphor of studying these objects at the crossroads of disciplines—where no one ever actually meets or talks it is worth noting (except in the event of an accident)—these common understandings deserve to be examined in an epistemological perspective. Why and how can CS and CRS be considered as multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary fields of research? Which disciplines contribute to understand the fields' complexity and how do these disciplines interact? What is behind the "Studies" label, merely new disciplines built following a paradigmatic logic or conversely a subtle and novel organization of disciplines?

Interdisciplinarity and complexity

One of the core arguments behind the call for an interdisciplinary approach to study objects such as childhood, children, and their rights is their inherent complexity. As Klein (2004) shows, the link between interdisciplinarity and complexity appears to be "evident" although "[c]omplexity is no less plural than interdisciplinarity" (p. 2). Clarifying the theoretical relation between these ideas has powerful implications and can improve interdisciplinary work. Based on the scholarly work conducted on complexity (see Darbellay, 2005; Klein, 2001, 2004; Morin and Le Moigne, 1999), these objects of research reflect most of the relevant features of a complex system. First, they are composed of several variables, in constant interaction. Childhood, for instance, can be regarded as a natural condition, a social construction, and a structural space. It is the interplay of these various components—more or less identical or different depending on the viewpoint—that provides a complex understanding of childhood. Therefore, the links between these components, and this is the second feature of a complex system, are dynamic, recursive, and non-linear. To address the child as a social actor requires considering the complex nexus of structure and agency, researchers thus have to go back and forth from sociology to social anthropology combining questions and methods (see James, 2010; James and James, 2008; James and Prout, 1997). This dynamic movement is an emergent process that leads to a co-production nexus and allows the creation of new meaning for the findings, for example, "childhood is socially constructed and […] children are active social agents in the construction of their own childhoods" (James, 2010: 486).

Third point, a complex system is not reduced to its components, as the famous saying goes, "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts." The simplistic addition of our knowledge on the child's psychological development to that on the process of socialization cannot offer a comprehensive understanding of how the child experiences his or her actual life while progressively moving toward adulthood (Alanen, 2014; Ryan, 2011; Thorne, 2007). Moreover, a hologrammatic principle reinforces the object's complexity (Darbellay, 2005; Morin and Le Moigne, 1999). This principle highlights the fact that the part is not only in the whole, but also that the whole is in the part. As Nieuwenhuys

(2008) writes, "limiting our understanding of children's rights to legal codes, however widely endorsed, would severely limit, not increase, both children's entitlements and our understanding of children's subjectivity in the making of both culture and childhood" (p. 8). Structures configure Children's rights as a whole, as much as Children's rights are at play in structures. This leads us to the fourth distinctive trait: a complex system is an emerging one. It is a result of the interaction between its elements, throughout a co-constructive process. Unity and diversity can be though as complementary considered as the paradox of "unitas multiplex" (Morin and Piattelli-Palmarini, 1983: 194): thought as a whole, the system—childhood(s) or children's rights—is one and homogeneous and seen in terms of its constituents—structures, relationships, processes, norms, and so on—it is diverse and heterogeneous.

The last feature that emphasizes the complexity of childhood, children, and their rights as objects of study lays within the interdependence of the observing subject and observed object (Darbellay, 2005). As in many other cases in social sciences, research devices are not neutral for the observed object, which should *de facto* be called subject. When working with children, the challenge is all the greater given that "adults have power over children in all known societies" (Boyden and Ennew, 1997: 9). The tremendous production of literature on research about and with children over the past decade is a strong indicator of this interdependence (e.g. Alderson, 2001; Christensen and James, 2008; Lundy and McEvoy, 2011; Melton et al., 2014; Spyrou, 2011); just about as much as "a key feature of the growth of childhood studies" according to James and James (2008: 27).

Identifying the complexity of childhood, children, and children's rights underscores the need to combine various disciplinary perspectives to give full account of it and better reflect reality.[1] Also, it shows that these objects of study can be subjects in their own right in numerous disciplines. Most importantly, clarifying the theoretical assumptions underpinning the need for interdisciplinary work on behalf of complexity is a means to aim toward "more self-conscious focus on the process of integration" (Klein, 2001: 54), which is a key aspect of disciplinary combinations and a way to overcome solely multidisciplinary approaches.

Interdisciplinarity and studies

Anyone who seeks dialogue, interaction, or eventually to break down barriers between disciplines is confronted to the profusion of terms that revolve around the idea of interdisciplinarity. Pluridisciplinarity, multidisciplinarity, polydisciplinarity, crossdisciplinarity, interdisciplinarity, transdisciplinarity, postdisciplinarity, and so on, so many prefixes that reshape and transform the core concept of discipline. Without detailing definitions and currents of thought flowing from studies on interdisciplinarity as such, we will focus on three concepts that stand out in the literature: multidisciplinarity, interdisciplinarity, and transdisciplinarity (see Aboelela et al., 2007; Darbellay, 2015; Huutoniemi et al., 2010; Klein, 1990; Piaget, 1972). These concepts are structuring for the study of interconnections between disciplines for they show the progression between the different levels in complexity of disciplinary configurations. From *multi*disciplinarity to *inter*disciplinarity and then to *trans*disciplinarity, the semantic and epistemological dynamics are similar.

These approaches are grounded into clearly identified disciplines, while at the same time nourished by their dynamic interactions and the dense network of relations which they form. It is in this dynamic that interdisciplinarity finds its particular significance. Between (*inter*-) the disciplines, such an approach outreaches their simple juxtaposition—as in the case of multidisciplinarity—and represents a stage in the progressive integration of disciplines, which is the purpose of a transdisciplinary perspective.[2] Disciplinary divisions are thereby in reciprocal interaction and reconfigured throughout the dialogue between scientific cultures and the resolution of societal problems, and in this case, the concrete problems related to childhood, children, and the exercise of their rights.

This integration process and overflow of disciplinary boundaries are typical of multidisciplinary fields of studies—such as CS and CRS—which cannot be reduced to a disciplinary and paradigmatic vision of knowledge production (Darbellay, 2014). Therefore, *Studies* have intricate relations with the still massively disciplinary organization of the academic world. In this context, are CS and CRS genuinely innovative and creative realms of knowledge on institutional, conceptual, theoretical, and methodological levels or are they compelled to eventually adopt a disciplinary operating mode to survive? On the one hand, these fields call for inter- or even transdisciplinary cognitive openness to address the complexity of the issues they cover, which cannot be studied from one single disciplinary standpoint. On the other hand, the need to suit institutional requirements and conditions of academic socialization (paradigmatic structuring, publishing, networking, course of study, and research funding) puts them in a paradoxical tension, typical of fields of studies that take up the challenge of interdisciplinarity. The diversity of *Studies* raises the more general question of the tension between their aim to emancipate or to escape too narrow disciplinary anchors and the disciplinarization trend they face while having to make it through the disciplinary organized academia. This paradox does not necessarily have to be seen as an obstacle, rather as a richness providing scholars with the opportunity to think about new ways of organizing and producing knowledge.

This dialectic between the need to build upon and borrow from the multiple disciplines convoked in CS and CRS and the requirement to reorganize them within and in between each of these fields, according to internal and reciprocal logics, is constitutive of their respective evolutions. Also, it emphasizes the challenges these fields of studies face beyond the difficult task of producing interdisciplinary work/knowledge. The positioning of CS and CRS with respect to one another and more broadly in academia is therefore highly instructive.

CS and CRS: From distinctiveness to integration

Beyond the similar challenges CS and CRS face—that are more or less the same as those faced by any other multidisciplinary field of studies—these fields have their own specificities, on epistemological, empirical, and institutional levels. They do not always build upon the same core disciplines; their publication strategies sometimes diverge and their social impact or aims also are different. However, there are some areas of overlapping, cross-fertilizing, and conscious dialogue. Convergence and mutual inclusion are a reality for scholars anchored in one field or another or who choose to travel from one to the other in a linear or in a dynamic perspective.

Identifying these modes of interaction is crucial to overcome the "intensive debate on how disciplines (should) relate to and interact with each other," as Reynaert et al. (2015: 11) describe it, as well as the difficulty to "define the borders between sciences allegedly more focused on the individual, like psychology, and for instance, sociology, anthropology, geography and law, which claim a much broader context as their remit" underlined by Qvortrup et al. (2009b: 3). It shows indeed that interdisciplinarity is plural and defines itself in relation to contexts, fields of studies, and disciplines: its nature will vary from one field, scholar, or research project to another in a dialogical and conversational perspective (Alanen, 2018; Darbellay, 2014).

Definitions of CS and CRS

Interestingly, definitions of CS and CRS proposed by scholars of the fields themselves are mutually inclusive. In their *Key Concepts in Childhood Studies*, James and James (2008) define the field of CS as "The interdisciplinary study of the early period of the human life-course that is legally recognized and socially (as well as, in part, scientifically) defined as childhood, as distinct from adulthood" (p. 25). Emerging from this short definition appears the idea of various disciplines contributing to the understanding of a commonly defined phenomenon in opposition to another (adulthood). The identification of the object of study of CS therefore requires a careful examination of what definitions of childhood are given in their core disciplines as well as in practices more generally; one of those being the legal definition of childhood. This inclusion of children's rights in the attempt of defining CS also appears in the introduction of *The Palgrave Handbook of Childhood Studies*, in which Qvortrup et al. argue that one of the features of CS is to study children's agency and voice. They (Qvortrup et al., 2009b) add,

> It is interesting that the UNCRC [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child] was formulated during the same period as the breakthrough in childhood studies, because this momentous document also granted children participatory potential and endowed them with participatory rights, even though they were restricted compared to those held by adults. (p. 5)

This historical convergence between the activities conducted in the field of CS and those carried out by the children's rights movement is regularly underlined, as in the introduction of *The Routledge International Handbook of Children's Rights Studies* (Reynaert et al., 2015; see also Alanen, 2010; Freeman, 1998, 2012). Although the historical developments of children's rights and CRS cannot be summed up to a movement implementing in practice and policy ideas developed on an academic level (see notably Dekker, 2009; Hofstetter, 2012; Moody, 2014, 2016), it does seem that the *new child image* or *new childhood paradigm*, as referred to in the literature, is a point of encounter between CS and CRS.

Qvortrup et al. (2009b: 4–6) discern five characteristics of this new childhood paradigm, which could theoretically apply to both fields: (1) *The study of "normal" childhood*, in opposition to previous trends focusing mainly on children deviating from what was seen as desirable conditions or on children encountering problems; (2) *A critique of the conventional socialization perspective*, "to enhance the visibility of children here and

now, […] and to understand, […] children and their life worlds *in their own right*" (Qvortrup et al., 2009b: 5); (3) *Agency and voice for children*, CS scholars aim to look into the prejudices children face being "reduced to vulnerable people to be protected" and therefore never considered as "participants in the larger social fabric" (Qvortrup et al., 2009b: 5); (4) *Structural constraints on childhood*, taking into account parameters such as economics, technology, urbanization, and so on to study childhood and also to compare how various contexts impact childhood; and (5) *The use of ordinary social scientific methods to study children and childhood*, rejecting the idea that studying children necessarily requires specific methods, allowing to overcome their "[conceptual incarceration] in a microworld […] of particularism" (Qvortrup et al., 2009b: 6).

A priori, children's rights scholars do not disagree with these five points (e.g. Freeman, 1998, 2012; Mayall, 2000, 2015). It is however the way they conduct them that differs, challenging by so doing the paradigm, nourishing some CS internal critiques (see Prout, 2005, 2011; Tisdall and Punch, 2012) and encouraging researchers to reconsider some of its dimensions. One can identify three main axes where these differences are at play and where the two fields thus cross-fertilize. First, CRS are concerned by "normal" as well as vulnerable childhood and by how children's rights apply in various contexts. While CRS have very broadly benefited from the urge to overcome the sole focus on "at-risk" children, progressively including equal human rights in addition to special protection provisions in legal documents (Hanson, 2012; Moody, 2016), the rights perspective leads researchers to admit that "different and even competing childhood images can *coexist in one single person*" (Desmet et al., 2015: 414). In a feedback loop, CS can build upon this understanding to overcome some criticized dichotomies—such as childhood versus childhoods (James, 2010)—and more specifically find greater coherence between the first and fourth characteristics of this paradigm ("normal" childhood and the impact of context). Second, CRS do not rely as heavily on Sociology and are therefore less crossed by the need to position themselves against previous dominant modes. The critique perspective is in this case aimed more specifically at overcoming top-down approaches of human and children's rights (Hanson and Nieuwenhuys, 2012; Liebel, 2012; Pupavac, 2001; Reynaert et al., 2012). This focus invites CRS to examine the debate about the nature of children's rights and how rights are given meaning depending on the context and by children themselves, considering structural as well as natural and other constraints, which is a path that has been called-on and followed by various scholars working in the field of CS over the last decade. For instance, when studying the incoherence between international standards in respect to children's enrollment in armed conflicts and their own perspectives on the issue (e.g. Drumbl, 2012), it is scholars from CRS that contribute to problematize traditional socialization and developmental models. One can say that the problem-framing and -solving approach differ, while the findings are very similar. Finally, it can be added that CRS scholars claim and aim to build strong link with practices, relying quite intensively on participatory research methods:

> The knowledge that this academic field should produce can make a fundamental contribution to obtaining insights in children's rights-based practices and can give ground for further dialogue on these practices, with the aim to change these practices in the direction of a greater respect for the human dignity of children. (Reynaert et al., 2015: 11)

Interestingly, this impact-oriented ambition, while having to a certain extent weakened the field of CRS, by placing too much attention on implementation aspects (Hanson, 2014), could be one of the ways of overcoming James' (2010) concerns about proliferation of data versus producing research contributing to the theoretical development of the field of CS (see also, Spyrou, 2017).

In sum, the main assumptions underlying these fields are relatively close, although variation and specificities can be observed. These slightly different positions highlight variations of perspectives around the objects of research, the disciplines involved to study them, and the way they are articulated.

Core disciplines, research objects, and integration

Although there is unity in the diversity of CS and CRS, their epistemological pluralism induces a marked diversity in some respects. The disciplines involved and the variation in disciplinary configurations induce important differences in the construction of hypotheses, research objects, and in the choice of methods. In both fields, one can observe a couple of *core disciplines*—from which the field originates to a large extent or which are inevitable for the study of the topic—and various related or *connected disciplines*—which have engaged with the topic in a rather systematic manner.

Scholars from and out CS or the so-called "new social studies of childhood" generally recognize Sociology and Anthropology as the core disciplines of the field, grounding the study of childhood as a social construct and the relationship between structure and children's agency ("voices"; e.g. Alanen, 2010, 2011; Frønes, 1993; James and James, 2008; Mayall, 2000; Qvortrup, 2009). Many other disciplines are, however, considered as fundamental to understand childhood and the child as complex phenomena: History, Geography, Psychology, Social Policy, Law, Education, and Humanities among others. If Legal studies are of course central to the field of CRS, Psychology and Sociology are also considered as core disciplines, to scrutinize the meaning of children's rights on individual and social levels. Since children's rights cannot be reduced to rules, but are at play in processes, structures, and relations (Morrow and Pells, 2012; Reynaert et al., 2015), several other disciplines are convoked to broaden the understanding of children's rights practices, the concepts of children's rights, and children as bearers of human rights: these are notably Education, History, Anthropology, Social policy, Social work, Biology, and Medicine.

The description of these different disciplinary configurations in CS and CRS is neither exhaustive nor exclusive. It is not strictly accurate either depending on what national context and academic culture we focus on. Bühler-Niederberger (2010), for instance, shows that "although childhood sociology has always been internationally oriented, there is a variety of themes and approaches and different emphases placed on particular topics in the [ten] different countries" (p. 369; see also, Sirota, 2006). Variations also occur in a historical perspective, academics having tried to study the child as a whole before the emergence of these fields of studies—see, for instance, the progressive institutionalization of *Paedology* at the turn of the 20th century (Depaepe, 1997; Hofstetter, 2012)[3]—organizing hubs of knowledge in different manners. Moreover, CS and CRS have their own histories and evolve: the disciplines they convoke vary over time, which implies that their research objects and methods of investigation also change.

See, for instance, the illustrative example Alanen (2012) gives of the oblivion of developmental psychology "the oldest among 'childhood disciplines'" (p. 419) by the Editor in Chief of *Childhood* in the 1993 Journal's first issue. To emphasize the importance of considering childhood as a social construction (vs a natural and biological fact), CS scholars tended to exclude works providing from developmental psychologists, while founding the field. This situation has of course significantly evolved; psychology is now systematically referred to as a discipline connected to CS whether in scholarly work or in teaching programs (see Qvortrup, 2009; Thorne, 2007).[4] As regards CRS, scholars with a legal background also strongly oriented the way the field developed in a first place. Grounding their work on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and its application in various contexts, insights from connected disciplines were mainly ancillary. Children's rights were therefore considered by some as those enshrined by international law exclusively, which was strongly criticized for failing to study the social, cultural, political, and practical meaning of children's rights notably (Alanen, 2010; Quennerstedt, 2013; Quennerstedt and Quennerstedt, 2014; Reynaert et al., 2009). A so-called "critical turn" has recently been taken (see notably Hanson and Nieuwenhuys, 2012; Reynaert et al., 2012, 2015) leading scholars to set up goals in respect to the study of children's rights as part of a wide societal and complex context, but also regarding interdisciplinary work.

Between relative autonomy, reciprocal contacts, and openness to dialogue, this dynamic tension between CS and CRS is replayed within the main endogenous publishing channels for each field of study. This is the case, for example, with the two leading academic journals in the fields: *The International Journal of Children's Rights* (Brill) and *Childhood* (Sage).[5] On their respective websites, they describe their aims and scope: Their research objects are clearly identifiable, although an opening to the other field of study is systematically proposed or even expected. The *International Journal of Children's Rights* states that it aims to "contribute to a greater understanding of children's rights and *their impact on the concept and development of childhood*," underlining the unavoidable links between the study of children's rights and the childhood phenomenon and the need to convoke "the insights and methodologies of all relevant disciplines" in so doing[6]. Comparatively, *Childhood* announces that it "publishes theoretical and empirical articles, reviews and scholarly comments on children's social relations and culture, with an emphasis on their *rights* and generational position in society,"[7] highlighting the importance of understanding how their rights impact their status. The inclusion of the other field's research object is a shared strategic positioning; one of the Editor in Chief even writes "with some overlap of boards, the courses steered by the two [journals] have never threatened any collision" (Freeman, 2012: 29).

This prudent recognition of influenced areas and occasional overlapping is not strictly reproduced in each field's respective handbook. Handbooks are crucial in positioning a field or a domain by proposing systematic states of the art and extensive references (Vickery, 2000). It is thus worth noting that an inclusion strategy is in this case adopted: the Editors give a specific and defined place—in inverse symmetry—to the other field of studies. *The Palgrave Handbook of Childhood Studies* (2009) includes two chapters devoted to the rights of the child, as an object of study, and *The Routledge International Handbook of Children's Rights Studies* (2015), among the disciplinary perspectives convened, includes several chapters on the sociology of childhood or CS.

The positioning of each field in respect to one another varies: From exclusion to fusion, going through intermediary stages of recognition of overlapping and mutual or reciprocal inclusion, scholars adopt different strategies according to their scientific, publication, and institutional aims. CS and CRS remain distinct while creating bridges between their aims and scope (e.g. *new paradigm of childhood*), objects of study (childhood(s), children, and their rights), multidisciplinary configurations (core and connected disciplines), and publications channels. Since these fields have permeable boundaries, interdisciplinarity is also at stake in between them in what one could call *inter*-field interdisciplinarity. This macro form of interdisciplinarity avoids radical understandings of the relations between the two fields of studies. Indeed, by recognizing the internal and legitimate diversity of each field, this scientific dialogue maintains their relative autonomy, allowing to overcome basic strategies of inclusion of one field in the other or to tackle the issues raised by the sterile opposition between fields, disciplinary ways of thinking, or institutional structures (Darbellay, 2012). It is not a matter of merging or removing boundaries between these fields of studies, but rather identifying them at the outset, as well as the openings that exist or can be created and finally confronting different points of view by crossing theories, concepts, and methods. This confrontation, in a positive, respectful, and tolerant spirit, leads to an integration between disciplinary skills to deal with the complex analysis of childhood, children, and their rights, going beyond a mere juxtaposition of disciplinary contributions to explore possible hinge points, based on a win–win model.

Finally, if dialogue between disciplines is a necessary condition for interdisciplinary work, it is insufficient insofar as this type of work requires the decompartmentalization between disciplines and the articulation/integration of their contributions into a global and systemic understanding. By identifying on what points CS and CRS diverge and converge, we broaden the areas where fruitful dialogue is or can be established. Interdisciplinary work does in this case not depend only on collaborative dynamics between various specialists. Theoretical framework articulation, around shared definitions (e.g. agency) or federating concepts (e.g. wellbeing), methods transformation, complex models of understanding building and stakeholders involvement are as many ways of wandering along the interdisciplinary gradient from a gentle form of multidisciplinarity toward interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity. The degrees of interaction and integration between disciplines within and beyond each field of studies remind us that there is no interdisciplinarity as such but rather various forms of interdisciplinarity that take on their full significance in specific contexts, in particular fields and topics, and according to the configurations of the necessary disciplinary skills and actors–researchers involved.

Conclusion

Aiming to explore interdisciplinarity at play within and between two neighboring fields—CS and CRS—we have shown the various levels where it takes place and forms it can take. While outlining the claims for interactions between disciplines in these specific fields, we have investigated the theoretical backgrounds underlying these claims as well as their interdisciplinary nature(s). The various definitions of these fields available

in seminal texts provide us with a broader understanding of the objects of study, privileged methods, and possible modes of articulation of disciplines. This analysis has allowed us to underline the similarities and complementarities between the fields. Finally, we evoked potential exchanges between these fields, overcoming a dialogical vision or re-disciplinarizing perspectives, in order to conceive interdisciplinarity as a means of integration between various and complementary disciplinary points of view.

In order to conclude, we may add that this dialogue is not simply a matter of simple addition/accumulation of theories, concepts, or methods. On the contrary, it is the starting point for integration between the various disciplines concerned. If interdisciplinarity is a wish it must not only capitalize and build upon disciplinary skills but also give free rein to the interdisciplinary know-how that has proved its worth. It is a way of guaranteeing vertical disciplinary deepening while opening to a more horizontal interdisciplinary questioning between the disciplines. Breadth and depth could therefore be considered as complementary by CS and CRS researchers. Such an approach affects the choices of research methods, which are of course linked to the disciplines at stake but also impacted by those providing from other backgrounds. Relevant and contextualized mobilization of disciplinary knowledge, mixing of methods, reasoned borrowing and transfer of theories and concepts between disciplines, participatory openness in the research process, not only within academia but also with the stakeholders of the fields, are all means to achieve the interdisciplinary work intended but also carried out by CS and CRS researchers.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

Funding

Notes

1. Reality should be understood as a "nexus of interrelated phenomena that are not reducible to a single dimension" (Klein, 2001: 48).
2. Due allowance being made for the various definitions applied to the latter.
3. *Paedology*—from the Greek *pais, paidos* the child and *logos* science—was founded as a scientific field of investigation in the late 1800s. Considered as a scientific form of "child study," in opposition to previous less systematic and sophisticated forms of philosophical explorations of childhood (Hofstetter, 2012), it aimed to investigate children's development (mind and body) as well as the ordinary or normal child (versus the deviant). The ultimate goal was to "integrate into one science all the data on the child that had been gathered in various disciplines; biology, physiology, psychology, pedagogy, sociology, criminology, anthropology, history, and so on" (Depaepe, 1997: 688).
4. The dichotomy between the nature/biological and social/cultural aspects of childhood is still, however, being scrutinized (see Ryan, 2011).
5. Our focus on these journals is mainly oriented by the fact that both fields of studies and their main object of study are mentioned in the aims and scope.

6. See the Brill website: http://www.brill.com/international-journal-childrens-rights (italic is ours)
7. See the Sage website: https://uk.sagepub.com/en-gb/eur/journal/childhood#aims-and-scope (italic is ours)

References

Aboelela SW, Larson E, Bakken S, et al. (2007) Defining interdisciplinary research: Conclusions from a critical review of the literature. *Health Services Research* 42(1): 329–346.

Alanen L (2010) Taking children's rights seriously. *Childhood* 17: 5–8.

Alanen L (2011) Critical childhood studies. *Childhood* 18(2): 147–150.

Alanen L (2012) Disciplinarity, interdisciplinarity and childhood studies. *Childhood* 19(4): 419–422.

Alanen L (2014) Theorizing childhood. *Childhood* 21(1): 3–6.

Alanen L (2018) Childhood studies: Conversation(s) in a conversational community. *Childhood* 25(2): 125–126.

Alderson P (2001) Research by children. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 4(2): 139–153.

Boyden J and Ennew J (1997) *Children in Focus: A Manual for Participatory Research with Children*. Stockholm: Save the Children Sweden.

Bühler-Niederberger D (2010) Childhood sociology in ten countries: Current outcomes and future directions. *Current Sociology* 58: 369–384.

Carnevale FA, Campbell A, Collin-Vezina D, et al. (2015) Interdisciplinary studies of childhood ethics: Developing a new field of inquiry. *Children & Society* 29: 511–523.

Christensen PM and James A (2008) *Research with Children: Perspectives and Practices*, 2nd edn. London: Routledge.

Darbellay F (2005) *Interdisciplinarité et transdisciplinarité en analyse des discours complexité des textes, intertextualité et Transtextualité*. Genève: Slatkine.

Darbellay F (2012) The circulation of knowledge as an interdisciplinary process: Travelling concepts, analogies and metaphors. *Issues in Integrative Studies* 30: 1–18.

Darbellay F (2014) Où vont les studies ? Interdisciplinarité, transformation disciplinaire et pensée dialogique. *Questions de Communication* 25: 173–186.

Darbellay F (2015) Rethinking inter- and transdisciplinarity: Undisciplined knowledge and the emergence of a new thought style. *Futures* 65: 163–174.

Dekker JJH (2009) Children at risk in history: A story of expansion. *Paedagogica Historica: International Journal of the History of Education* 45(1): 17–36.

Depaepe M (1997) The heyday of paedology in Belgium (1899–1914): A positivistic dream that did not materialize. *International Journal of Educational Research* 27(8): 687–698.

Desmet E, Lembrechts S, Reynaert D, et al. (2015) Conclusions towards a field of critical children's rights studies. In: Vandenhole W, Desmet E and Reynaert D (eds) *Routledge International Handbook of Children's Rights Studies*. London: Routledge, pp. 412–429.

Drumbl MA (2012) *Reimagining Child Soldiers in International Law and Policy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Frønes I (1993) Changing childhood. *Childhood* 1(1): 1–2.

Freeman M (1998) The sociology of childhood and children's rights. *International Journal of Children's Rights* 6(4): 433–444.

Freeman M (2012) Towards a sociology of children's rights. In: Freeman M (ed.) *Law and Childhood Studies: Current Legal Issues*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 29–38.

Hanson K (2012) Schools of thought in chidren's rights. In: Liebel M (ed.) *Children's Rights from Below: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 63–79.

Hanson K (2014) 'Killed by charity'—Towards interdisciplinary children's rights studies. *Childhood* 21(4): 441–446.

Hanson K and Nieuwenhuys O (2012) Living rights, social justice, translations. In: Hanson K and Nieuwenhuys O (eds) *Reconceptualizing Children's Rights in International Development: Living Rights, Social Justice, Translations*. Cambridge: University Press, pp. 3–13.

Hofstetter R (2012) La transformation de l'enfant en écolier (du 19e au milieu du 20e siècle): les "eurêkas" des sciences de l'homme naissantes, entre scientisme et romantisme: un "naturalisme" de l'enfance. *Paedagogica Historica* 48(1): 31–50.

Huutoniemi K, Klein JT, Bruun H, et al. (2010) Analyzing interdisciplinarity: Typology and indicators. *Research Policy* 39(1): 79–88.

James A and James A (2008) *Key Concepts in Childhood Studies*. London: SAGE.

James A and Prout A (1997) *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood*. London: Routledge.

James AL (2010) Competition or integration? The next step in childhood studies. *Childhood* 17(4): 485–499.

Klein JT (1990) *Interdisciplinarity: History, Theory and Practice*. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press.

Klein JT (2001) Interdisciplinarity and the prospect of complexity: The tests of theory. *Issues in Integrative Studies* 19: 43–57.

Klein JT (2004) Interdisciplinarity and complexity: An evolving relationship. *Emergence: Complexity and Organization* 6(1–2): 2–10.

Liebel M (ed.) (2012) *Children's Rights from below: Cross-cultural Perspectives*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Lundy L and McEvoy L (2011) Children's rights and research processes: Assisting children to (in)formed views. *Childhood* 19(1): 129–144.

Mayall B (2000) The sociology of childhood in relation to children's rights. *The International Journal of Children's Rights* 8(3): 243–259.

Mayall B (2015) The sociology of childhood and children's rights. In: Vandenhole W, Desmet E and Reynaert D (eds) *Routledge International Handbook of Children's Rights Studies*. London: Routledge, pp. 77–93.

Melton GB, Ben-Arieh A, Cashmore J, et al. (eds) (2014) *The SAGE Handbook of Child Research*, 1st edn. London: SAGE.

Moody Z (2014) Transnational treaties on children's rights: Norm building and circulation in the 20th century. *Paedagogica Historica: International Journal of the History of Education* 50(1): 151–164.

Moody Z (2016) *Les droits de l'enfant: genèse, institutionnalisation et diffusion (1924-1989)*. Neuchâtel: Éditions Alphil.

Morin E and Le Moigne J-P (1999) *L'intelligence de la complexité*. Paris: L'Harmattan.

Morin E and Piattelli-Palmarini M (1983) L'unité de l'homme comme fondement et approche interdisciplinaire. In: Apostel L, Benoist J-M, Bottomore TB, et al. (eds) *Interdisciplinarité et sciences humaines*, vol. 1. Paris: UNESCO, pp. 191–215.

Morrow V and Pells K (2012) Integrating children's human rights and child poverty debates: examples from young lives in Ethiopia and India. *Sociology* 46(5): 906–920.

Nieuwenhuys O (2008) The ethics of children's rights. *Childhood* 15: 4–11.

Piaget J (1972) Épistémologie des relations interdisciplinaires. In: Apostel L, Berger G, Briggs A, et al. (eds) *L'interdisciplinarité: Problèmes d'enseignement et de recherche dans les universités*. Paris: OCDE, pp. 131–144.

Prout A (2005) *The Future of Childhood: Toward an Interdisciplinary Study of Childhood*. London: RoutledgeFalmer.

Prout A (2011) Taking a step away from modernity: Reconsidering the new sociology of child-hood. *Global Studies of Childhood* 1(1): 4–14.

Pupavac V (2001) Misanthropy without borders: The international children's rights regime. *Disasters* 25(2): 95–112.

Quennerstedt A (2013) Children's rights research moving into the future, challenges on the way forward. *International Journal of Children's Rights* 21: 233–247.

Quennerstedt A and Quennerstedt M (2014) Researching children's rights in education: sociol-ogy of childhood encountering educational theory. *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 35(1): 115–132.

Qvortrup J (2009) Childhood as a structural form. In: Qvortrup J, Corsaro WA and Honing M-S (eds) *The Palgrave Handbook of Childhood Studies*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 21–33.

Qvortrup J, Corsaro WA and Honing M-S (eds) (2009a) *The Palgrave Handbook of Childhood Studies*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 1–18.

Qvortrup J, Corsaro WA and Honig M-S (2009b) Why social studies of childhood? An intro-duction to the handbook. In: Qvortrup J, Corsaro WA and Honing M-S (eds) *The Palgrave Handbook of Childhood Studies*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 1–18.

Reynaert D, Bouverne-De Bie M and Vandevelde S (2009) A review of children's rights literature since the adoption of the United Nations convention on the rights of the child. *Childhood* 16: 518–534.

Reynaert D, Bouverne-De Bie M and Vandevelde S (2012) Between "believers" and "opponents": Critical discussions on children's rights. *The International Journal of Children's Rights* 20(1): 1–15.

Reynaert D, Desmet E, Lembrechts S, et al. (2015) Introduction: A critical approach to children's rights. In: Vandenhole W, Desmet E and Reynaert D (eds) *Routledge International Handbook of Children's Rights Studies*. London: Routledge, pp. 1–23.

Ryan KW (2011) The new wave of childhood studies: Breaking the grip of bio-social dualism? *Childhood* 19(4): 439–452.

Sirota R (2006) Petit objet insolite ou champ constitué, la sociologie de l'enfance est-elle encore dans les choux ? In: Sirota R (ed.) *Éléments pour une sociologie de l'enfance*. Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, pp. 13–35.

Spyrou S (2011) The limits of children's voices: From authenticity to critical, reflexive representa-tion. *Childhood* 18(2): 151–165.

Spyrou S (2017) Time to decenter childhood. *Childhood* 24(4): 433–437.

Thorne B (2007) Crafting the interdisciplinary field of childhood studies. *Childhood* 14(2): 147–152.

Tisdall EKM and Punch S (2012) Not so "new"? Looking critically at childhood studies. *Children's Geographies* 10: 249–264.

Vandenhole W, Desmet E and Reynaert D (eds) (2015) *Routledge International Handbook of Children's Rights Studies*. London: Routledge.

Vickery BC (2000) *Scientific Communication in History*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press.