

Children's rights and child poverty: Reflections through the lens of representation

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Abstract

The focus on 'child poverty' in policy, practice and academia (in industrialised countries) has increased significantly in recent years. This is in large part due to the increasing number of children growing up in poverty. It is estimated that since the economic and financial crisis in 2008, the poverty rate in more than half of the OECD-countries increased, sometimes up to a doubling of children living in a situation of poverty. There is general consensus that poverty has a significant impact on the physical, psychological and social development of children. To tackle the problem of children growing up in a situation of poverty, different countries introduced particular anti-'child poverty' policies. These policies are framed from the perspective of children's rights. Child poverty in this line of thinking is considered as a violation of the rights of children as recognized in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and therefore a matter of social injustice. In this paper we discuss the issue of 'child poverty' in relation to children's rights, relying on the work of Nancy Fraser. Fraser developed an understanding of social justice as 'parity of participation' that consist of 3 domains: redistribution, recognition and representation. In this contribution, we explain that children in poverty are represented differently compared to their parents in poverty in claims for social justice. For children, demands for combatting child poverty appear within the 'institutionalized youth land'. This youth land or youth moratorium can be considered as a separate and exclusive domain for children with social provisions such as the school, youth work, youth care, etc. In this youth land, children are represented as the 'victim of poverty' and are thought of as the 'deserving poor'. Consequently, investing in child care and education for instance is widely regarded as the best way to combat child poverty. In contrast, parents are represented as the 'undeserving poor', responsible for their own poverty situation and the poverty situation of their children. Therefore, activating measures are set up to compel parents to take responsibility. The distinction between the way in which children and parents are represented needs to be understood from a particular interpretation of children's rights. Despite the fact that a child rights-based approach is set forward as an important frame of reference to combat child poverty, different interpretations can exist of such an approach, with different ideas on the representation of children and parents. Based on in-depth interviews with 30 families living in poverty, we argue that a segregated approach of the representation of children and parents in poverty can be considered as a problem of 'misrepresentation'. This injustice can have a negative impact on realising children's rights for children living in poverty. This is so because such an approach narrows the social problem of poverty down to an educational problem. Opposite to that is an approach of child poverty from a children's rights perspective that connects both representational claims of children with representational claims of parents and relates issues of representation with demands for redistribution and recognition.

Presenter - Bio

Didier Reynaert is lecturer Social Work and senior researcher at the EQUALITY//ResearchCollective of HOGENT University of Applied Sciences and Arts. His expertise lies in the field of social work theory, social justice, human rights and children's rights. Didier Reynaert is also guest lecturer Social Work Theory at the HAN University of Applied Sciences (the Netherlands) and guest lecturer Children's Rights at Odisee University of Applied Sciences. He is one of the co-founders and current member of the Board of the Children's Rights Knowledge Centre (KeKi) and member of the Advisory Committee of the Flemish Children's Rights Commissioner.