Advanced academic study programs and their contribution to awareness raising on children and their rights

The example of the M.A. Childhood Studies and Children’s Rights

Abstract: Advanced, specialised academic programs of study have been mushrooming over the past years. This is particularly so in the field of humanities and more specifically regarding the study of democracy, conflict management, human and children’s rights. Advancing from this fact, outcomes of such programs are mostly intangible and only few have been evaluated concerning their impact on participants and the contribution they can make towards an awareness amelioration of social circumstances in the field concerned (Hirseland et al., 2004).

In this chapter, I will discuss the M.A. Childhood Studies and Children’s Rights at the Freie Universität Berlin and University of Applied Sciences, Potsdam, Germany. I will do so respectively as one example of how scholars, researchers and well-studied practitioners can position themselves, engage in research and take action in view of the difficulties children face in today’s societies. Evaluative data collected during the rest decade of the program’s implementation (2007–2016) will be drawn upon. A brief overview will be given of the program’s content introducing the concept of ‘Children Out of Place’ (Conolly & Ennew, 1996; Invernizzi et al., 2017) as a theoretical basis for understanding marginalised children’s living circumstances. By listening to graduates voices and their estimation of the program’s impact on their professional and personal lives as well as their attitudes when interacting with members of society, in particular children, this article will argue towards the necessity of continuing and establishing more such specialised and advanced programs in children’s rights.

Keywords: advanced M.A. program, evaluation, children’s rights, childhood studies, children out of place

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Introduction

Is it possible to reach a conclusive answer to the question whether and how advanced academic study programs, such as the M.A. Childhood Studies and Children’s Rights (MACR) contribute to raising awareness of children’s rights; referring to migrant and refugee children and other children who are in some way ‘Children Out of Place”? Could potential contributions made by an academic program to the improvement of children’s lives and the lives of Children Out of Place in particular be defined and described or even measured? As in other trainings, workshops, modules and programs of study in areas such as democracy, human rights, tolerance, non-discrimination, anti-bias, children’s rights (understood as a special form of human rights), direct impact and outcomes can hardly be depicted due to the intangible and long-term results of the qualification. What can be done is to evaluate the impact the training has on its participants and their subsequent actions in which skills and tools as well as theories obtained during the qualification are contextually applied. One prevalent outcome of the qualification is a change in understanding what childhood is, the attitude towards children and approaches to research concerning children, and a shift from research on children and their need for protection to researching with children: I became much more aware of the concept of children as participants rather than just beings that we need to protect (answer of a MACR graduate to an online survey conducted in autumn 2014).

What effects this change of attitude and understanding has on society and how it impacts social living conditions and specifically children and their rights is difficult to assess (objectively) to say the least. Henceforth, the question may rather be asked: In what way does the program contribute to understanding and taking according action regarding how children in societies can be assisted in coping with difficulties and challenges.

1 In autumn 2014, I developed and conducted an online survey, which was sent to graduates of children’s rights study programs at several European Universities. Several of the few comments (about 40) on what the studies’ main impact has been is that a shift away from children’s rights as protection rights towards agency and participation rights has been evoked. The question answered here is: How has studying children’s rights impacted on you personally? Has your mind set changed, and if so, how would you describe this change?

When graduates and alumni of the MACR are asked what the main and dominant knowledge acquired through the program is, they often answer similarly. It seems graduates and alumni of this particular program feel that the notion of children’s rights as participatory rights has been conveyed to them through the MACR and has changed their view on children. Prior to the program, alumni viewed children merely as vulnerable, largely incompetent beings in need of protection, development and of acquiring (cognitive) knowledge and skills, or, said in other words, as nearly empty buckets which need to be filled with resources and capacities to make them true members of society. In contrast, upon completion of the program, the students’ understanding of children has been extended to give more weight to both the agency and subjective rights of children as beings in the present. ...it strengthened my respect for children as agents and their participation rights (MACR graduate, online survey 2014).
The M.A. Childhood Studies and Children’s Rights (MACR)

The M.A. Childhood Studies and Children’s Rights (MACR) is an advanced 1.5 year study program, with seven modules and a final Master’s Thesis. In this section, I will outline the individual modules, their content and the impact they have had on graduates.

First Semester

Module 1: Childhood Studies

Within this advanced study program on children’s rights and childhood studies in higher education, the struggles that children and young people face today are approached from various disciplines. The basis for discussion is lent in large parts from sociological perspectives and more concretely from the “New Sociology of Childhood” which is based on the assumption that childhood is a social construction that changes and has changed over time, and requires contextualization (see e.g. Hungerland, 2008; Gaitán 2009, Liebel, 2007, 2009 and other years). In their millennial work *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood*, 225

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James & Prout (1990, p. 7) argue: “The immaturity of children is a biological fact but the ways in which immaturity is understood is a fact of culture... childhood is both constructed and reconstructed both for and by children”. These thoughts as well as the understanding that children, already at a very young age, are an inherent part of society and accepted as such, which, in many societies outside of the Global North is factual living, just as much as children’s contribution to a functioning communal living, children’s agency is acknowledged, discussed and critically reflected in the MACR. The core belief is that children are social actors, equal members of society and not only their parents’ or guardians’ dependents. A child does not become (a member of society), he/she is a member already today. Children are often seen as being the future, which makes us blind to the fact that they are part of our societies in the present, during their childhood. Western, European normative assumptions of what a ‘proper’ childhood is, namely the phase in life in which children are still immature, unable to participate in society and in need of preparation for their future role as adults in society, is questioned. According to this understanding of childhood, it is a period in which persons are freed of responsibilities and in need of protection (Ariés, 1965; Hungerland, 2008). This approach to childhood still dominates discourses on childhood, which per se view childhood outside the North/West in the Global South as unfortunate, lacking, needy and, as James, Jenks & Prout argue “even outrageous, violat(ing) some universal, natural childhood” (James et al. 1998, p. 141; see also Burman, 1994). This categorisation bears problems, as the ‘developing’ world, the entirety of the Global South, cannot be generalised; Chile or Brazil are much different than Sudan or Myanmar - by arguing in simple North/West-South distinction, justice to these varying societies cannot be done. The discourse on whether there is one childhood (a proper one) or many (see Prout, 2005; Alderson, 2013), whether children who do not grow up having a proper or ‘real’ childhood are children without or ‘outside’ childhood,

2 Already in the early 20th Century, Janusz Korczak understood children as actors of today. ‘Children don’t become human beings, they already are’ (see Korczak, 1919/1920 in Eichsteller, 2009, p. 384).
There have been changes of terms due to political correctness and the premise of non-discrimination:

From ‘Third World’/‘Developing Countries’ to ‘Majority World’ (where the majority of the world population lives) and the ‘Global South’ (all the countries are in the South of the equator). This term is mostly used at the moment. All terms carry a message: the first implies superiority of the North/West, the second has the most neutral and factual connotation and the third can easily be equated only geographically which carries the message of a homogenous Southern half of the world.

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is discussed in the MACR to grasp diversity in contrast to claimed universal concepts. ....I really, really had to reflect on my own thinking about childhood and especially the idea of “Kinder ohne Kindheit” (children without childhood) which actually negates the other types of childhood that many children have around the world (Moritz, p. 72–75, Graduate of 2008, interviewed in early 2016, UK Citizen living in Germany, child rights ombudsman for a small NGO in Berlin and tutor in the MACR).

Module 2: Children’s Rights (as Participatory Agency Rights)

Accordingly, children’s rights in the MACR are understood as subjective rights children can claim for themselves rather than rights solely conveyed to them on their behalf by adults. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and its four guiding principles: children’s right to non-discrimination (Art. 2), the best interests of the child (Art. 3), the child’s right to life, survival and development (Art. 6) and respect for the child’s views (Art. 12–17) are the starting point to grasp the concept of children’s rights as part of international human rights laws and instruments. The CRC is neither the first nor the only international agreement on children’s rights. It is the outcome of a lengthy development process in which ideas and declared rights of children from former international declarations were taken up and further developed (see e.g. Cantwell, 1992; Holzscheiter, 2010, Liebel, 2007). The perspective of a child’s right to participation as a new angle shifted the approach from a mere protective and provisional view on children and their rights to include children’s participation.

4 This and the following quotes are taken from structured interviews with graduates and alumni that have been conducted over the past eight years. All names have been anonymised. A full analysis of the interviews and other evaluative data on the M.A. Childhood Studies and Children’s Rights is being done in the frame of my PhD. For full interview transcripts, please contact rbudde@fu-berlin.de or budde@fh-potsdam.de


6 The rights enshrined in the CRC are often referred to as the three P’s. Protection, Provision and Participation, of which participation rights are the ‘newest’
The right to participation is emphasised and lived in the MACR – in order to grasp the meaning of true participation, of natural participation that is effort-less and normal, it is important that students experience and reflect their own participation in the MACR, by engaging in discussions and learning from each other rather than getting input mainly from the teacher. During and upon completion of the program, some students criticise this as unprofessional or not scientifically worthy of M.A. level studies as they may be based on reflections yet perhaps not researched opinions of other students. This concept is new for some students who come from other disciplines, such as law or economics, from other countries and cultures, where university education often emphasises listening to knowledgeable professors’ input without much space for students’ participation. In retrospect, students value the exposure to other opinions and perspectives and disciplinary backgrounds as one of the greatest assets of the MACR. (...) ...there wasn’t only one way but you could tackle children’s rights from different perspectives (Lulu, p. 204–205, Graduate of 2014, Macedonian Roma, works as a children’s rights school mediator) Lulu is referring to the significance of various opinions and perspectives to take interdisciplinary and truly holistic approaches to children’s rights in all working stages. [...] The major players, in the CRC’s implementation e.g. NGOs, public institutions, governments, politicians and individuals are also a focus of discussion in Module 2.7

Module 3: Techniques and Research Methods

The methods of research on childhood and children’s rights, the third of the core modules in the first semester, are mostly based in social qualitative research approaches. This is based on the belief that there is no all-inclusive recipe for a social group as diverse as children which, as often practiced in quantitative approaches, cannot be depicted in numbers and statistics only. Social research, especially qualitative methods, can, when taught in theory, be overwhelming for students who do not yet have experience in this field. As the MACR student groups are very heterogeneous, with students from up to fifteen different countries per group and just as many disciplinary backgrounds, not many have been exposed to qualitative research methods before: ....methods and techniques, ummm, well

7 Due to limitations I cannot go deeper into this complex topic.
pro- cess of observing and learning; analysing and drawing of conclusions to use for better understanding of phenomena of concern to children and subsequent action to meet the identified needs. Art. 12 (and following Articles 13–17) of the CRC gives the legal foundation for children’s participation, stating that:

**States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child (CRC, Art. 12 (1)).**

Although Art. 12 mainly aims at including children in judicial proceedings, it can and must be applied to all matters affecting them (principle “best interests of the child”, CRC, Art. 3), including research on them, towards a focus on researching with them. As Mason & Hood (2010) argue, if the increasingly acknowledged children’s agency is taken seriously, the power dynamics in child-adult relations must be re-negotiated so as not to continue researching children according to ideas, patterns and assumed children’s needs defined and categorised by adults. Still today, most research concerning children is designed by adults. And yet, often the criteria are not even defined by adults who are in the children’s surrounding, or who at least are grown-ups from communities sharing similar values as the children concerned, nor by involving people in direct contact with the children (parents, teachers, coaches, doctors etc.) in the process. On the contrary, studies conducted by researchers from the North/West in the Global South rarely take into account, let alone are based on the issues children themselves experience as challenging. Moving away from such an adult-centered paternalistic approach to research opens the eyes for participative research methods in which children are creators of their own living space. Involving them in research can empower children to co-design the research frame and research questions to best approach the most pressing themes they are dealing with (Ennew et al., 2009; Percy-Smith & Thomas, 2010; Tisdall et al., 2006). What makes participation meaningful to children? Finding an answer to this question in cooperation with children is one step towards ensuring real participation. One alumna from Germany, Lisa, debated whether to start her PhD research after having graduated from the MACR. She had the idea of engaging in empirical research and having children conduct the research themselves. She had in mind to have children truly and meaningfully participate, not only by consulting with children on the research topic and questions or involving them by asking predefined questions, letting them draw or participate in their own focus group discussions. Rather, Lisa wanted to encourage children to conduct interviews themselves or animate children to collect own data, which she may have analysed cooperatively with them. *well, like I like actually wanted and still want to [...] work with children and elaborate with children and conduct interviews with children and in fact not only with children as interview partners but children interviewing children [...] ehm, and I am still passionate about this idea – and she (the professor) said, that is nonsense, if you’d like to work with children, then organise and hold nice workshops but this isn’t worthy for science [...] she of course didn’t articulate herself exactly like this – but that was then a bit...* (Lisa, pp. 222–228, Graduate of 2012, own translation). So the professor she wanted to work with argued that this would not be scientific. This demonstrates that even those scholars, researchers and professors who are active in the field of childhood and children’s rights (the
professor had been the spokeswoman of the National Coalition for the Implementation of the CRC in Germany before) do not, in reality, trust children to have the competence to do research (under the guidance of adults) which is scientifically valid - the image and understanding about children not yet being in a position to do so prevails. More children’s rights study programs can contribute to further thinking. ....with children instead of about them (Ruth, Graduate of 2013, studied pediatrics, is a neonatologist, and did bedside teaching for a long time, German) in participative research to produce more adequate, grass-roots data and understanding of how children can live and enjoy their rights and live them.

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Second Semester

Module 4: Children’s Work and Education

The second semester in the MACR is dedicated to four major themes of which three, seminar 2 in module 4 on working children’s rights and both seminars in module 5, refer directly to the concept ‘Children Out of Place’, which I will highlight here. Before introducing the concept, for reasons of completeness, I will depict the content of the first seminar of module 4: children’s right to education. This seminar has a focus on reform pedagogical approaches, global and informal learning as well as inclusive education. As most people agree, education (and learning) is key for succeeding and progressing in one’s life. The right to education is written and manifested in the CRC, Art. 28 (1) articulating the general right to education, and the quality and aims of education are discussed in General Comment No.1 on ‘The Aims of Education’. They are introduced and critically discussed in the seminar by looking at different case studies. The heterogeneous approaches to education and what complimentary or additional forms of education and learning concepts are needed are presented and challenged in a number of ways. Namely by weighing the pros and cons of specific educational settings, raising questions such as to what end children shall be educated and what type (and quality) of school, educational system or institution should be accessible for them in which world region or social strata. Challenging questions in the module are whether children ought to be educated with the objective of their becoming a part of the functioning, skilled and able workforce, i.e. for “useful (tangible) things in life”. Alternatively, should they be educated to become socially responsible members of society or to become supporters of specialised knowledge and progression? (Ross, Dooly & Hartsmar, 2012, p. 1). Issues discussed in the MACR are the different connotations of education and learning, learning understood as a lifelong, informal process, that occurs in any life situation compared to education which is mainly attributed to formal education in institutions pertinent to the Western schooling system (Singh, 2004, p. 93). As a result of the high numbers of refugee children, MACR students are introduced to the (difficulties faced in the) recently established so-called “Willkommensklassen” that aim at introducing children to the German school system and teaching them the German language and by this bringing them “Into Place”.

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The second seminar in module 4: ‘Children’s work in an international and intercultural comparison’ introduces and invites students to re-think the familiar and widely agreed understanding of child labour and shed light on child workers’ heterogeneous living circumstances. The topic of children’s economic contributions to family or community income and the rights of working children is one of the most controversial subjects dealt with in the MACR. The common, generalised and frequently misjudged view of working children is one of child labourers in less developed countries who are exploited and have to be freed from their plight of being ‘Out of Place’. A differentiation of meanings of children’s work for the children (and their families) and its impact on their lives is rarely stressed outside academia, where a wealth of critically researched and reflected publications on street and working children can be found (see e.g. Liebel (various years) Bourdillon, 2012, 2017; Saadi, 2012; Reddy, 2017; Invernizzi et al., 2017). Not all working children are exploited and ‘Out of Place’; many work as street sellers of homemade food or as shoe cleaners, to earn some money for schooling or to contribute to their families’ income in order to have a stronger basis for survival, i.e. children’s work does not necessarily take place in mines, sweatshops or similar exploitative economic areas as is often demonstrated in both the media and fundraising campaigns of international child help organisations. Exploitative child labour is mostly found in family circumstances in which parents and other family members are also working under such conditions, i.e. the exploitation does not only concern children but persons of all ages and requires measures for effective counteraction. ILO Convention 182 on the prohibition of the worst forms of child labour has tried to set a frame to abolish child labour, unfortunately it has overshot the objective, by turning all working children into criminals pushing them ‘Out of Place’, as child labour has become illegal. Movements of working children, in particular in Central and South America (NATS- Niños y Adolescentes Trabajadores), but also in Africa and India are introduced in the seminar and their activities discussed, analysed and evaluated considering children’s testimonies and case studies of working children (Abebe & Bessel, 2011; Bourdillon et al., 2010; Ennew, Myers & Plato, 2005; Liebel, 2013).

...The age of children who work in street situations and how this creates conceptualisations of other descriptions with repression as their starting point (Pedro, p. 75–77 – graduate of 2015, studied law before, from Paraguay- own

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...Pedro is referring to the criminalisation of these working children and their stigmatisation through generalisation, categorisation; legal directives and their implementation by which they become ‘Children Out of Place’.

Module 5: ‘Children Out of Place’

The fifth module is specifically dedicated to the concept of ‘Children Out of Place’ that has already been mentioned several times in this article. The term ‘Children Out of Place’ is lent from an editorial of Judith Ennew and Marc Connolly to Childhood (Ennew & Conolly, 1996). In speaking about ‘Children out Of Place’, the authors referred mainly to street children, however the term has been taken further to include children who are not in the place they supposedly should be; not only measured by the dominant, normative, Northern understanding of children and their childhood but also by the local community in which they
grow up; i.e. the term is also used to refer to children’s groups such as internally displaced, refugee and migrant children (see e.g. Penn, 2005), working children, (as mentioned above) children affected by HIV/AIDS, child orphans (Bourdillon, 2017), children heading households, child domestic workers, children in forced marriage as well as sexually exploited and sex selling children (Invernizzi, 2017). In addition, the term does not only refer to groups of children but also to research on children and how it is done – in order to grasp the circumstances disadvantaged children face, more disaggregated data is needed (Liebel & Budde, 2017) and the children who are out(side) of place may have to ‘move to the centre’, they must be given a space to participate and their life experiences require contextualisation (Kjørholt, 2017, pp. 157–170). ‘Children Out of Place’ can be described as the most vulnerable, excluded and marginalised group of children. By having studied the MACR it is possible to find new concepts to deal with the difficulties of these marginalised children.

Asked about the knowledge and most important skills gained during the MACR and whether they live up to what was expected before studying, how they can be applied in professional, practical work and which ones are the most beneficial, Pedro from Paraguay says: ehm, yes, generally speaking, yes. I really believe that in the MACR, various tools were presented and that they have

*The module was originally called “Disadvantaged and Marginalised Children and Their Rights”.

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helped me – in particular all classes on ‘Children Out of Place’ that helped me – the dynamics [...] of how to work in, with such a vulnerable population, so yes, it gave me very important tools and skills, the importance also of this multidisciplinary approach – working with certain tools with people from other disciplines, e.g. doctors (Pedro, p. 133–139 – own translation). He works as a national consultant for juvenile justice and delinquent youth and coordinates centres for child convicts, conceptualising them in a child rights oriented way. Marginalised children are his major concern, the approach taken in the master’s program has been an eye opener to him. The ideology and the understanding of ‘helping’ the poorest people in the world, the most marginalised children, of which street children are a prominent example (Ennew, 2002, p. 399; Williams, 2007), is a one dimensional, arrogant perspective, of pretentious knowledge. This ideology is constrained by its focus on what, according to its prescriptions, these children are in need of and how they can overcome their problems to become children ‘with a childhood’, ‘children in place’ according to our Northern concept which has been engrained in us over hundreds of years (for a post-colonial viewpoint, see e.g. Nieuwenhuys, 2008; Liebel, 2017).

One example of this arrogance of the Global North, is the Millennium/Sustainable Development Goal (MDG/SDG) to increase children’s enrolment in ‘proper’ schools, as their right to be educated is enshrined in the CRC which has been signed and ratified in nearly all UN member states. Education sells well, people agree that an education helps escaping (from misery), but for many children there is simply no access to ‘proper’ schools. Williams’ (2007) suggestion to make education more accessible to all children, in particular to ‘Children Out of Place’ and re-thinking what education shall entail could be met e.g. by offering outdoor school classes at a specific time at a specific spot for street children (or other children who are
interested). In this way, they would be able to drop by without the con nes of school expenses which they often cannot afford.

*In 2015, as the 195th and 196th states, South Sudan and Somalia ratified the CRC leaving only the USA as non-signatory state, despite the USA’s active role in drafting the Convention (see e.g. Holzscheiter, 2010).

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Although child and youth migrants in multicultural societies face problems and these are increasingly researched especially today with the high numbers of refugees coming into multicultural societies and societies that are in the process of transforming to be multicultural, the difficulties these children face may be judged differently than realities of marginalised and excluded children in some less developed and poorer regions, states and communities. The situation of refugee children has been a most prevalent topic as the massive movement of people we are experiencing today will not end in the next weeks, months or possibly years. Although borders have been closed and ways of entering the EU have become scarce, many refugees continue to take the risk of reaching the EU by crossing the Mediterranean Sea. In view of the contemporary global political situation, it is of utmost importance to look at issues that have arisen due to high numbers of foreigners coming into (West) European countries and to take all possible measures for their integration and inclusion in society so as not to see them remain and be condemned to remain ‘Out of Place’ as one of the most vulnerable social groups. Several graduates of the MACR are working in child rights, child help and child protection organisations and institutions, all of which have dedicated project and program work to migrant and refugee children and their situation in Germany. One graduate for example is working at a large NGO in Germany coordinating a project for refugee children: ‘Zukunft von Ankunft an’, in which several refugee housing facilities are visited to collect information on the situation of children and develop a quality framework for standards in the facilities while strengthening networks of help organisations.

She describes the approach taken within this project and difficulties encountered: ... not like: We will now tell you what you need- you need accommodation etc. rather we want to look at the situation together and see what realistic standards can be, I mean what can we do. For this we aim at implementing a children’s rights situation analysis, together with a research partner [...]"

10 In 2014, 218,000 refugees entered the European Union from the Mediterranean Sea; according to UNO 3,500 died on the way. In 2015, 35,000 refugees came to the EU from North Africa, about 1600 drowned, almost every 50th refugee. In this one year, the possibility of drowning is 30 times higher than in 2014 (The number of refugees dying on the way to Europe on foot crossing the Sahara is estimated to be even higher than the number of people who drown in the Mediterranean).

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and they will go through issues with the children using participative methods: where are the places you like being and where not – interviews with interpreter with parents, social workers, directors of the facilities are part of the project as well - a needs analysis shall be the result and from this another smaller project shall be developed for and with the children, such as, e.g. the design and equipment of the play area [...]. in all this, it is important that it is done from inside the housing facility, i.e. with the refugees themselves. [...] [A major difficulty encountered in implementing this ambitious project is that] ...it’s very difficult in the present situation with rising refugee numbers12, to find housing facilities that are actually open to participate in the project as they first off need resources due to a lack of capacity- often when I called they said: ‘yes, nice idea, but at the moment we don’t have time for such a thing’ (Miriam, Graduate of 2015, German, studied Islamic Studies before, pp. 115–119, 122–130 and 138–142).

The statements of graduates show that the knowledge and attitude gained during the MACR play a significant role in their work. The example of Miriam and her project shows that the clear positioning of an analysis as described here cannot be done without including those who are affected in a sensitive way.

Module 6: Children and Media and Module 7: Internship, Practical Project or Research Proposal and MA thesis

Before engaging in an internship or developing a (hypothetic) research proposal and writing the final master’s thesis, module 6: Children and Media, discusses advantages and potentials as well as risks and dangers of new media and representation of children in the media including children’s potential participation in the form this takes place. Questions of ethics in media about, for and with children form a basis for getting an insight into media production about, for and with children by having an introduction and first step workshop to acquire some practical skills. These skills are tested by students in a media production; e.g. short videos with children, on children’s rights; pocket exhibitions made with children, apps for children and young people, photo galleries and more.

12 The interview was conducted in early 2016, when the EU borders were still open.

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Some thoughts on the terminology of ‘problem’ and ‘multicultural’

The theme of the 10th UNESCO summer school: “The contemporary problems of children in multicultural societies” of which this volume is one outcome is phrased very broadly and cannot be taken up and discussed from all the perspectives it may concern: Firstly, normative legal frameworks should play a role- children and their rights as stated in international human rights law and the CRC; secondly, specific aspects of children ‘Out of Place’ are confronted with that require attention such as issues of unaccompanied minors, family reunification, criminalisation of young people, access and inclusion in school, school performance, access to labour market, personal relationships with host country members and other migrant or refugee children, often dire situation at refugee camps, language barriers, discrimination by
the majority population, outright racist behaviour and processes of ghettoization can and should be considered.

The definition of ‘problems’, which per se carries a negative connotation can pose difficulties due to a lack of criteria and variables ascribed to the term, perhaps using a more constructive solution oriented term such as ‘challenges’, may better reflect the efforts and resilience children “Out of Place” also have.\textsuperscript{13}

The definition of a ‘multicultural society’ is also not clear, i.e. by what criteria is a society defined as multicultural? In 2015, 17,1 million foreigners lived in Germany, this makes up 21\%, one fifth, of the total population. On average, the population with a migrant background is significantly younger than the bio-Germans\textsuperscript{14}. Every third person under the age of 18 has a migrant background; the highest percentage (36\%) is found in young children under the age of five. Only 10\% of people over 65 living in Germany\textsuperscript{15} have a migrant background\textsuperscript{16}. I will presume this to be enough cultural mix to back the claim that Germany is a multicultural society.

What about children without migrant backgrounds in multicultural societies? Do they have problems? It is implied that we are talking about migrant children, however the title suggests that we could also be talking about the native population. As far as I know there are only very few studies if any at all on the effect or impact the changing structure of population has on them. They are the group who have the most contact points with children from other backgrounds first, because a significant part of the migrant population is under the age of 18 and second, because due to the school obligation in Germany, young people are ‘con ned’ to a mutual space. The indefinite terminology places obstacles on one hand, as it can be arbitrarily interpreted. However, it can also be seen as an asset in that a large variety of approaches are presented, according to the involved researchers’ interests and beliefs.

\textbf{Conclusion}

\textit{This master has given me much vigour, courage and knowledge to work for children’s rights on different levels} (e-mail from Claudia, Graduate of 2011, previously studied pedagogy, German. At age 26, she is the youngest director of a private high school which takes a clear child rights approach to education and learning to turn children’s rights into living rights for the children).
M.A. programs in children’s rights are ‘en vogue’ across Europe- many of the new academic programs are offered at member universities of the European Network of Masters in Children’ Rights (ENMCR). It seems there is

15 All data retrieved from D Statis, Statistisches Bundesamt: https://www.destatis.de/DE/ZahlenFakten/GesellschaftStaat/Bevoelkerung/MigrationIntegration/MigrationIntegration.html;jsessionid=1D162FC8AF1FF546BF983B0791745508.cae4 (accessed on 11.11.2016).

16 A person has a migrant background, when she herself or at least on parent has been born with a non-German citizenship. This definition applies to immigrated and not immigrated foreigners (non-German Nationals), immigrated and non-immigrated naturalized citizens, (late) emigrants as well as their descendants who were born as Germans.

17 The ENMCR is a network of universities offering children’s rights studies. The MACR is a member of the network. www.enmcr.net.

a rise in acceptance and support at universities that the rights of children are ‘worthy’ of being part of higher education. At the same time, some members of the ENMCR are also encountering serious difficulties. There is a prevailing notion of social qualitative research lacking scientific validity due to the supposedly liberal interpretation of data, as I have discussed above in methods and techniques of childhood and children’s rights research and the qualitative, participative approach taken by the M.A. Childhood Studies and Children’s Rights. The lack of support stems partly from the general idea of research having direct tangible outcomes e.g. in pedagogy this would refer to cognitive, subject related knowledge which can be queried. In such a broad, disciplinary and global field as human rights and democracy education, direct or tangible outcomes may not be detected easily. However, in evaluating the program using qualitative research (in this case here by semi-structured interviews with graduates and alumni, an online survey and evaluation of classes and a final evaluation at the end of the course) the impact of the master on the participants as members of a transforming society can be uncovered. This is evidence enough to claim that cross-referencing practical with scientific knowledge to develop better theoretical foundations for children’s rights is one of the great assets of a master’s in children’s rights.18

A recurring theme in almost every evaluation session at the end of the program, and in the interviews, is the change in attitude which the students undergo during the 1.5 years of the master’s. Many also say that they used to have a feeling of injustice when they are confronted with others and their own behaviour towards children when interacting with them. However, they did not have the courage to voice this gut feeling as they did not have a theoretical understanding of what was happening. Now they can speak up more easily and argue much more profoundly than before. This, in my eyes, is reason enough to engage in more research in children’s rights and how they can be channelled to become the most useful tool for positive change. Miriam and Tobias are good examples to shed light on the effect the master has had on their work and attitude. Both are graduates of 2015 and now work at a large children’s NGO that has national and international programmes. Tobias emphasises that
A very real and practical issue limiting the offer of specialised advanced master’s programs are the necessary tuition fees, which due to economic constraints make it difficult for potential students to pay and by this ensure the continuance of such programs.

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a real asset of the MACR is that he looks at everything very critically and does not take anything for granted any longer (see Tobias, graduate of 2015, German, studied pedagogy before, 401).

At times it is difficult to apply this critical view in such organisational structures where many blind spots in need of visualisation are not of interest due to time constraints or donors’ expectations, with whom the delivery of certain scheduled outcomes have been agreed. This becomes especially clear, when working in a large children’s help organisation, where tactics for marketing its humanitarian nature often rely on pitiful media images of ‘Children Out of Place’ whom only we, from the ‘knowing’ and ‘advanced’ North can help, or who pay high salaries for workers who go to regions where children are suffering and need protection with a plan designed in the safeness of Germany or Europe mirroring nearly nothing of the local lived reality. Both Miriam and Tobias feel proud that they can take a critical children’s rights approach in their work which is based on researched scientific knowledge.

I would like to conclude with a, to me, very moving quote from one graduate, which shows what meaning the program (can) have on the participants and successively on their doings:

This is a master that I can recommend without any reservation and with all my heart. The child and her needs and interests are in focus (not her future use for society). The master is visionary in many respects and has been formed by people who very passionately, ideologically dedicated and above all inspiring stand for the interests of the child (Own translation) (e-mail by Daniela a graduate of 2014, studied economics before and is now working at “Teach First”)

The quote reflects what impression graduates have of the program, and what impact it has on their future activities, the impact they can have on their surroundings. The e-mail went out to colleagues of Teach First, an educational organisation which takes a child-centred approach to school classrooms and kindergartens as promotion for the MACR. Notwithstanding that some graduates also had different and more mixed feelings about the master. In some groups e.g. the dynamics were not as harmonious as in others, general feedback is positive and contents as well as results of discussions within the MACR are personally enduring and applied in work settings. It is likely that the children’s rights agenda will lead to an improvement of children’s situations, not only in

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‘multicultural societies’ but everywhere although admittedly more rapidly in some world regions than in others. Compared to 2005–2007, when the MACR started at Freie Universität Berlin and stakeholders, politicians, researchers and practitioners did not think in terms of children’s rights or have the idea to apply a child rights approach in their activities, today, ten years later, the children’s rights community has grown and with it the visualisation of children’s rights in society. To ensure that children’s best interests (Art. 3, CRC) are at the heart of any child related action, many more motivated and reflected passionate personalities have to be qualified who take on critical responsibility and ‘think children’s rights’ and who raise awareness of children’s rights by their learned and lived human rights attitude.

**Primary Material:**

The United Nations Convention On the Rights of the Child

Extracts of answers to online survey with European child rights alumni

Extracts of interviews and e-mail exchange with graduates and alumni:


**REFERENCES**


For full interview transcripts and complete survey questions and analysis please contact Rebecca Budde: budde@fh-potsdam.de or r.budde@fu-berlin.de.
Springer, Switzerland.


Dordrecht: Nijhoff.


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