School-Work, Paid Work and the Changing Obligations of Childhood

Jens Qvortrup

Setting the stage

In a remarkable statement, the Fifth Family Report to the German Federal Government in 1995 says that "the costs of the educational system … are of the same immediate importance to society and economy as expenses to traffic infrastructure because of the superior consequences a qualified labour power potential has as an instrument for fundamental economic policy. Thus these expenses cannot primarily be regarded as an element in equalisation of family burdens" (Bundesministerium, 1995, p. 291, my translation).

The statement is remarkable because it is one of the rare cases - perhaps the only one - where it is openly admitted in an official political report that the costs of schooling is not an investment primarily to the advantage of children and their parents. Therefore, the report argues, they do not belong to those items on the budget, that are open for negotiations about redistribution between different groups in society. Instead they must be understood as a general expense in line with traffic, research, defence, public administration etc. which is regarded as beneficial for the common good and therefore to be shared by all taxpayers. The German report in other words argues that educational expenses do not have a status comparable with transferred resources, such as cash payments in terms of child support and tax reductions, or in kind support such as Kindergartens.

The reasons for this position are not only that education and schooling are assets which benefit everybody in society, but also that it has so far been overlooked that parents themselves, more or less directly, are massively contributing to the whole process of human capital formation. The monetary value of this contribution is estimated to DM 445.000 per child (Bundesministerium, 1995, p. 291-293). Also the distribution of expenses between parents and the public purse is calculated with the result that public funds are estimated to contribute merely 10 per cent. This tiny part is what the taxpayer as a whole adds economically to the upbringing of children, which means that parents have themselves to provide the remaining 90 per cent[1]; itself a considerable burden since (in 1996) only one household in four includes children under 18 years in Germany (Statistisches Bundesamt 1997, p. 65).

To the traditional option of 'family burden settlement', the Family Report in other words adds the idea of 'family achievement settlement' (see also Olk and Mierendorff, 1998a and 1998b) and thus also opens the discussion about contributions of the family to society with the purpose of bringing about a more just balance between families with and without children. This is a remarkable step. Yet, one thing is in my view missing in the Family Report: only parents are acknowledged as partners of public authorities as agents of human capital formation. Children are not mentioned in this capacity, which were perhaps also too much to be expected. This is however what I am going to examine in this chapter. *What I want to suggest is that there is an intricate relationship between children's activities, family economy and family size, and I think that children's activities play a crucial role in this equation*.

Most observers seem to agree that children in pre-modern society were useful and an asset to the family economy to such an extent that the Australian demographer Caldwell (1982) could conclude from numerous and extensive studies that there was a positive net wealth flow of resources from children to adults, and he saw this as conducive to a high level of fertility. Now the situation is completely reversed, he argues: it has now become an obvious economic disadvantage for families to have children, children are not in general seen as useful, and the fertility level is very low. I think Caldwell is right: this is how it appears and this is also how it works in practice. Parents do currently face a situation in which they have to incur losses in terms of money, time and career to raise children. The question, however, is this necessarily so? It is my argument that it merely appears to be so because we have failed to appreciate the part of the equation which deals with children's activities, i.e. to recognise the importance of children's school work as a major input into the modern social fabric. I am therefore going to argue that in principle nothing has changed in terms of intergenerational wealth flow.

Now as before there is a division of labour and obligations between generations implying that children are obliged to do *socially necessary work* and that the adult generation must provide for their elders (two elements previously identified as fertility motivations). If this intergenerational reciprocity were still taken seriously and, in particular, if children's school work was acknowledged as a part of those 'family achievements' to be compensated, it is not certain at all that the wealth flow would have been reversed. In Germany, Franz-Xaver Kaufmann, who is also one of the main authors of the Family Report, does not go so far as to include children's activities as an achievement which has an economic value, but he does suggest that children were forgotten in the modern version of the generational contract (see Kaufmann, 1996).

An acknowledgement of children's school work as a part of human capital formation, and thus as a factor to be taken seriously in discussions about transfers between social groups, might lead to a better economic position of families with children. Whether this would also lead to an increase in fertility and in the end make provisions for the elderly easier to manage in future remains to be seen.

This is the broader framework of this chapter, but one that has to be dealt with elsewhere. For the purpose of this chapter I am going to concentrate on children's school work and how it has been misapprehended.

Children are not 'trivialmachines'

The historical *faux pas* leading to this situation was that parents or children were not, in the transition to modernity, materially compensated for their loss when, as Kaufmann has indicated, the state expropriated children's labour force from their parents[2]. In Kaufmann's interpretation the problem was that parents incurred a loss, whereas he does not discuss the changed working modus of children, let alone if their usefulness in their new obligatory occupation as pupils.

Now, are children still useful to day? This is the question. Many contemporary researchers would answer yes by demonstrating children's extensive work for wages outside of school and home, perhaps even in the family doing chores (see Morrow, 1994; Morrow 1996). This is without doubt true, but *as I shall argue, this work is somehow residual and anachronistic*. The children's work which I will be focusing on is school work, because this is the part of children's work which is constituent to modern society.

Nobody is likely to deny that children's school work is an activity in the abstract sense that it involves brain, muscles and use of time, but it is not customary to regard it as an activity which contributes to forming human capital, let alone to producing and hoarding wealth in society. At the same time nobody would dare to suggest that schooling - understood as the totality of educational activities taking place in schools - is without such a value. These activities are however exclusively credited to the teaching staff, whose task it is to transfer knowledge to children. In this sense children are logically reduced to a medium, into which knowledge is placed, and few thoughts are invested into how knowledge is produced and processed: how does one imagine it to be received, embodied, carried through the medium and made active without the help of the child's own capacities and competencies? However, it does not seem to make much sense to contemplate this

process without taking children's active involvement into account. As Niklas Luhmann (1991) has rightly pointed out, this medium - this 'trivialmachine', as he calls it - cannot exist in practice in terms of living organisms. To use a marxian phrase, children are in this imagery the objects of simple production, which is characterised - like a 'trivialmachine' - as vehicles for reproducing what was put into them and nothing more than that.

I doubt that anyone would subscribe to such an interpretation, so why I am describing it? It is because - despite its patent absurdity - children's school activities are nonetheless typically not recognised as useful in the sense that *just and equitable consequences are drawn from acknowledging it in terms of a relationship between obligation and reward*. I am doing it furthermore because revealing absurdities may force us to think deeper about ongoing processes. If the view of children as 'trivialmachines' - like a computer - is rejected, what then are children's role in the process? If in other words we recognise that children actually are doing something more than acting as receptacles, we will have to define what that is. If they are not merely a medium for simple production we must explore to which extent they are taking part in extended production. That is, production the result of which is more than was invested into it, a corollary of which seems to be that something must have happened on the part of children themselves. Perhaps even more interesting: if it is thus acknowledged that somehow extended production does take place, for instance in terms of a broad understanding of Corsaro's concept 'interpretive reproduction' (see Corsaro, 1997). I.e., if children are themselves adding to human capital formation in contributing to enhancing knowledge shouldn't we then be inclined to also include them into our systems of reward and distribution? By asking this question I am of course implying, as I did to begin with, that the whole issue is one which cannot be dealt with in a void, as merely an exercise in definition but one which is intricately related to issues of welfare as intergenerational distribution.

Children's system immanent activities

It is however important to understand the changing historical nature of children's work in terms of the meaning it assumes under various stages of economic development or modes of production. The renowned comparative sociologist Erwin Scheuch many years ago said, that "Similar indicators in different countries may be interpreted as functionally different, while different indicators may be interpreted as functionally equivalent (Scheuch, 1969, 173, my translation).

In the context of children's activities this means that one must be careful not to automatically interpret their work as being qualitatively of the same kind even if it appears to be so; in other words, it may very well happen that forms of children's work which look completely different may indeed be of the same kind in qualitative terms, and vice versa. To be more concrete, although many children until this very day are still working manually we have no guarantee that it has any correspondence with manual labour hundred or more years ago, other than the fact that in both cases children use their hands. Manual work has not by necessity equivalence of meaning or in Scheuch's words: functional equivalence.

In my view this is the mistake made by many researchers of child work or child labour; they appear to be saying - indeed often they launch the view *expressis verbis* - that there is a *historical continuity* in child work in the sense that children now are working manually as before. It cannot be denied that they actually do perform manual work now as before, and therefore in a sense they are right; it is also true as revealed by many researchers - sometimes to the surprise of media and politicians - that this type of child work still looms large in quantitative terms. Therefore, whatever one's assessment of children's manual work, the study of it is and remains important. Yet, I believe it deserves a more profound understanding, and in particular I find the continuity thesis questionable.

In the first place, although the quantity of it is large in terms of numbers of children involved, it is rather modest in terms of time invested into it compared with children's school work. Children's extra-familial manual wage work is concentrated to relatively few age groups, say 13 to 17, perhaps even from 10-11 years of age, while school work starts much earlier, from 5-7 and continues another 8-10 years depending on country[3]. The Danish historian Ning de Coninck-Smith suggests that, in terms of manual work, the current mean work hours *per week*, i.e. 4-6 hours, corresponds to the *daily* work hours in 1900 (de Coninck-Smith, 1997, p. 154). Thus it is an obvious point that the number of hours children work in school throughout their childhood adds up to dramatically much more than hours worked after school work. From a historical point of view I would suggest that a quantitative relationship between children's manual work and their school work has tentatively developed as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: The development of children's obligatory activities

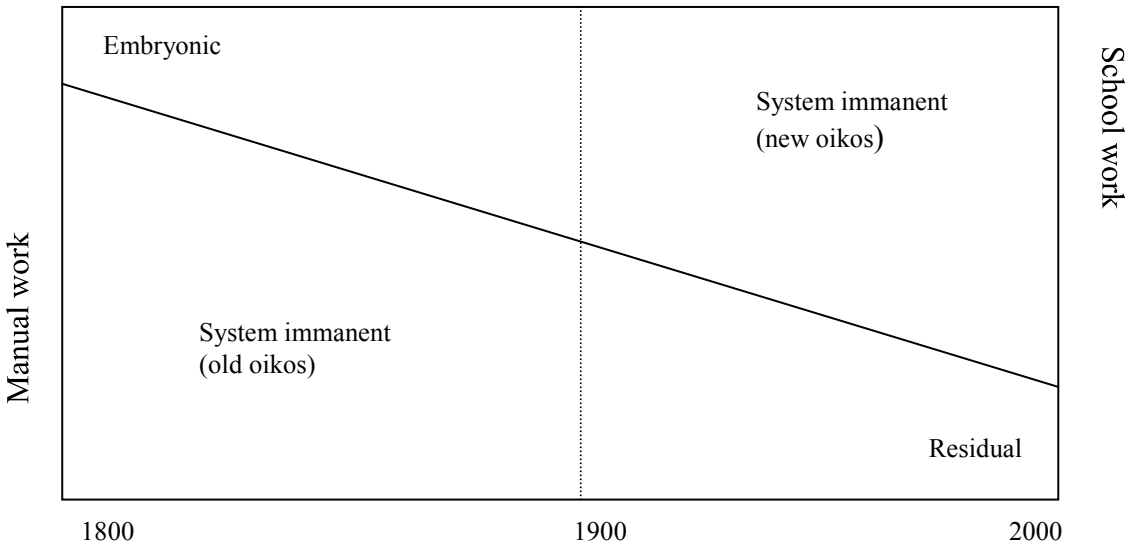

Figure 1 is meant to illustrate a secular trend in children's main activities over the past two centuries. It contends that manual child work as well as school work have both been represented throughout this period, and indeed for much longer. Two centuries ago, child manual labour was by far the most widespread, while school work represented only a small fraction. Today manual child work is still with us, but it has declined from being children's predominant form of activity to becoming a residual one, a remnant of times past to be replaced by school work as children's predominant activity.

Much more important however is it that also from a qualitative point of view it has lost terrain, although for other reasons. *What I am arguing is that we have to understand children's socially necessary and therefore in practice obligatory activities in relation to prevailing or dominant ways of production*[4]*, and by using the term obligatory activities I am abstracting from their particular forms.*

As it is well known, *economic development in general* has entailed a movement from manual activities to abstract or symbolic activities corresponding to a movement from producing use values to producing exchange values and from simple to extended production. Quite a number of trades and much workmanship, which were indispensable previously, have disappeared and it is presently almost impossible to find any occupation that can be carried out without knowledge of and competence in abstract symbols: letters, numbers, digits etc. While most people in general worked with their hands two centuries ago, it is a dwindling number who do so to day. And those who do

must have some knowledge of the symbolic instruments. It is the demands from this new economic way of production which have forced new forms of obligatory work upon both adults and children.

The correspondence between the prevailing economy and children's obligatory tasks has been demonstrated by Coleman (1993), who shows children's embeddedness in the process in terms of an almost *parallel development of men leaving agriculture and proportion of children, who do not attend schools*. These highly instructive time series cannot help but alert us to the nature of children's participation in economic development. They are a warning against theories which discursively leave children outside of this, since they are likely always to have been an integrated part. Indeed, integration into any economy has been the rationale behind all historical struggles over children's time. Children's obligatory tasks have and basically always had a correspondence to the prevailing forms of production: they have a *system immanent* nature. It is not by chance that the bulk of children's activities changed from one system immanent type to another one. Indeed it is also not by chance that children's school work eventually came to occupy more and more of their time as the *prevailing form of production demanded greater capacity for abstract reasoning and communication in symbolic terms*. The struggle over children's time for adults was a struggle to expropriate the value of their work with the purpose of obtaining control over their labour, something which no planning or governing body could afford to be indifferent to.

So far I have argued that children's school work has become dominant in quantitative terms and that this happened because the new economy could not survive and prosper with forms of children's activities which did not meet with its immanent requirements. The problem is, however, that the consequences of this qualitative change were not acknowledged. In particular it has been detrimental to families with children, both demographically and financially. I shall therefore deal more with this schism between the popular imagery, and what I see as children's real position.

Children's exclusion from the modern oikos?

My use of the term obligatory work must not be understood in a purely formal meaning. I am rather suggesting that children have always - disregarding any legal underpinning - been forced to take part in what was deemed necessary by any prevailing economy (or as I shall call it shortly: any *oikos*). *Therein lies the historical continuity of children's participation*. In hunting societies children hunt; in fishing societies they fish; in agricultural societies they undertake farm work; in embryonic industrial society they work in factories; and in developed industrial society *children do*

school work[5]*. What are superficially different tasks are similar in the sense that they are all system immanent because they pertain to prevailing ways of production, however different the forms of work and ways of production are.*

Until the arrival of modernity this is fairly easy to appreciate because *the oikos* was what it originally meant: a household or in the words of Eucken 'a simple centrally directed economy' (see Brunner, 1978, p. 86), in which production, consumption and planning were in the hands of the head of the household, but also a household in which each and everybody had a role - apart perhaps from the very young and the very old, *who nonetheless were legitimate claimants on all resources provided*. Only with modernity was this transparency lost, because the central and, in the end, controlling body of the production process changed from being the household to the state. The local or the extended *household* turned into the *family* and the societal household became the *oikos*.[6]

Interestingly enough, this was also the time when classical child labour ceased to be the predominant form of child work; when schools became massively accepted and attended, fertility rates started their almost incessant decline, the old aged were disconnected from the extended family and children from the *oikos*. There is really nothing new in this, all of it is basically reflected in a number of dichotomies, the most famous of which is Tönnies' Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft, which were both embodied in the *oikos* 'des ganzen Hauses', but now have been split up so as to leave 'Gesellschaft' to the firm and the state, while 'Gemeinschaft' belongs to the family. Brunner mentions interestingly that the concept of the family became common in Germany only in the 18th century (Brunner, 1978, p. 89), while according to Ariès the 'invention' of childhood occurs slightly earlier in France.

I am taking the liberty to avail myself here of the concept *oikos* as a supra-concept, one understood as any prevailing economic organisation. At any time *oikos* involves production, consumption, circulation and the division of labour; only their forms change[7]. The transition to the modern *oikos* represented an enormous centrifugal expansion resulting in many production units (firms) and even more units of consumption (families); in a proliferation of the division of labour, which could no longer be contained within the confines of the locality; in unprecedented levels of circulation of labour, goods, services, and wealth; and all of it held together by a planning body, the national state, which was also charged with collecting taxes and redistributing revenue. Even in a capitalist marked economy with private property rights, the state remains the controlling body through which labour force planning is done and the balance of the economy checked. The character of each

prevailing *oikos* cannot, however, be decided merely by law but depends as much on the strength of the relationship between the actors and agents at any given time.

Among the peculiarities of the modern *oikos* - or rather how it is depicted in academic and political discourses - is that children are disconnected from it. In fact, this was the gist of Ariès' message about the birth of *childhood*. Both in popular imagery and in terms of legitimate claims children are excluded from production and the division of labour; as consumers they have merely claims on their parents with whom they constitute a family but no *oikos*; and finally in terms of circulation they appear rather to be objects than subjects - objects in the sense of raw material or potential human capital to be formed as future labour power without acknowledgement of the contributions they make while children.

Does this imagery correspond to reality? By and large it does not, I believe. Only as far as consumption is concerned are children *in reality* outside the modern *oikos,* because they do not independently dispose of 'common equivalents' (money)[8]. This is the problem: and until children are rehabilitated as agents in the division of labour and childhood integrated as part of the modern *oikos*, we do not have much of an argument for granting them status as claimants of societal resources. For parents the problem is that they were left with the obligation to provide for children, while having lost any claims on them as producers as well as legitimate expectations on their progeny for provisions in their old age. This means that what was previously a motivation for childbearing vanished. Children's activities may have a positive impact on the family economy, but not to an extent that it even remotely balances the expenses parents have on children; and provision for the elderly has in terms of intergenerational reciprocities become alienated from (covenant) modalities of solidarity and obligations.[9]

"The thesis here maintained will be that the declining birth-rate has resulted from a ripening incongruity between our reproductive system (the family) and the rest of modern social organization, ... The incongruity has been frequently recognized, but there are two contrasting views as to its nature. First, the view of the cultural lag theorists, who maintain … that eventually it will adapt itself to the new situation. Second, my own view, that the kind of reproductive institution inherited from the past is fundamentally incompatible with present-day society and hence can never 'catch up'." (Davis, 1937, p. 290).

It seems to me that Kingsley Davis in the sixty years, which have passed since he wrote these passages, is correct in asserting that there has been *a ripening incongruity between our reproductive*

system (the family) and the rest of modern organisation. It is indeed a fact that this modern organisation does not assume responsibility for the family and its children. In a similar vein of thought Kaufmann has suggested that:

"The problem lies more in the … *structural disconnection of economy and family*: modern business is, unlike previous household economies, indifferent towards the problem if its labour force carries parental responsibility or not" (Kaufmann, 1996, p. 16-17; my translation and italics).

Now, between Davis' pessimistic, functional realism and Kaufmann's radical Christian morality, there may be another interpretation which allows children a position in the modern *oikos*. This interpretation does not contest Davis' and Kaufmann's observations, which empirically have much support; rather it is an interpretation which looks for the logic of children's participation within any *oikos* - or in Polanyi's words, in any 'substantive economy'.

In terms of *production*, children's obligatory tasks were in the traditional *oikos* or in pre-industrial economy decided by their parents - or rather by the *pater familias* - who in a local, subsistence economy purportively knew best how to make use of children's time and work; as responsible for the *oikos* he had to decide what children were obliged to do in terms of useful work. In exchange children had a claim on their part of the resources for consumption.

In principle the basic mechanisms for giving obligatory tasks to children have not changed, although the exchange of results have. The state has now taken over from the *pater familias* as the main agent for deciding where and how children must use their obligatory time; it does so because it has the responsibility for securing the long term functioning of the economy (*oikos*). Thus no country is without an educational system, although it varies how far the state decides to go in fulfilling this responsibility. The state is, as it were, conscripting its children to do obligatory work in accordance with the demands of the modern *oikos*; but in contrast to pre-industrial *oikos*, children have no legitimate claim on any revenue from the current decision making agent or employer - the state. They do get something, but not as deserving participants in the division of labour, but rather for reasons predicated on necessities of reproducing the labour force and preserving a socio-political balance. These are however tasks which are left to the parents, which means that children's material satisfaction is made contingent on their parents' position in the division of labour. State interventions do occur to varying degrees, but nowhere with reference to children's school work. On the contrary, educational investments are typically understood as a contribution to meeting

children's needs, to enhancing the general well-being of families with children and to augmenting human capital, a view which, as we saw, is partly challenged by the 5th Family Report.

To what extent can one argue that children are still a part of the *division of labour*? In addition to a number of new divisions of labour in the wake of the change of *oikos*, such as educational, occupational, geographical and gendered divisions, an overlooked form is one which has to do with flow and duration of production. I call it the *diachronic division of labour*. In previous ways of production the processes were contained within the locality and aimed at producing use values; the number of hands the resources went through was small, the time of production was rather short and *converged towards synchronicity*. Currently, the opposite is the case. One end-product has typically passed through many heads and hands, and the total production period from idea to goods or services is long. There is in other words a *growing diachronicity* in the production process. Therefore, exactly as children previously were a part of the synchronic division of labour, their school work is presently to be understood as a part of the diachronic division of labour. In the first place, it takes a long time to produce a labour force to become part of an adult labour market. It begins already in the school; next, children are not any goods to be processed: as human capital they actively take part in processing themselves, and it is hard to believe that a new labour force can be processed without the active involvement of children's own intelligence, capacity and competence. Children, thus, are active partners in the diachronic division of labour already as children, because without their activities in school no production can take place later on. It is in other words not only as adults that they become useful.

Thus, the peculiarity of children's school work is that on the one hand they are producing a labour force, which in itself as a product eventually enters supply-demand equations in the labour market. But on the other hand their school work is indispensably, albeit with a delay predicated on the diachronic nature of modern economy, a precondition for the production of other goods and services, and therefore far from useless.

Finally, in terms of *circulation*, children are now as before - and this is a corollary of my analysis - both producers and consumers of wealth flows. This is obvious not only in the short run in the market for products for children or the interchange with the state in producing human capital, but also in the long run as a conventional labour force and in making provisions available for older generations (although not for their own parents).

What I have been arguing is therefore that children during the transition from the old to the new *oikos* did not lose their usefulness, but that the new *oikos* took advantage of the historical transformations to reconsider and reformulate its obligations. The previous mechanism of reciprocity, according to which children had both obligations and claims on the prevailing *oikos* (parents, family, locality), was replaced by a new mechanism whereby children and their families were faced with a predicament in which children's new obligations came without reciprocal claims on the new *oikos*. The claims they had were now as before directed to their parents who in the meantime had lost their status as decisive agents of production and therefore could no longer count on children as partners, nor could they fully meet the needs of children without facing comparative disadvantages vis-à-vis both families without children and other age groups.

Nothing of this was a result of conscious planning nor a conspiracy towards families with children. In fact there were many other changes which made this step reasonable, perhaps even desirable seen from the point of view of children and parents. Even if it is now acknowledged that children did often play a useful role in material terms, it was for millions of children a major advantage spending their time in schools rather than in factories. The dedication of child savers (see Platt, 1977) to rescue children from child labour and from the streets, and the concomitant redefinition of the child through developmental psychology and progressive educationalists made the soil fertile for changing attitudes towards children as convincingly described by Zelizer (1985). Another part of this was an upgrading of the family implying an underscoring of parents' care and in principle exclusive responsibility, which included both existential, moral and economic responsibilities. In that there was nothing new, but it became more visible, not least in urban settings where the family as a 'haven in a heartless world' (Lasch, 1977) became the last resort for children as much as the locality based on mutuality had lost its material underpinnings. The precondition, as Brunner says, for the new meaning of the family in terms of a particular emotionality, is its disconnection from the totality of the old *oikos* and its emergence into the narrow urban small family (Brunner, 1978, p. 89).

To sum up, my arguments for seeing children's school work as part and parcel of our current *oikos* are the following: 1. children are no 'trivialmachines' and therefore some human capital formation must take place through their activity; 2. children are obliged to use an enormous amount of time; 3. their school work is system immanent; 4. their activities are an integrated part of modern society's diachronic division of labour; and 5. they are now as before an indispensable part of the overall circulation of goods, services and wealth flows.

One might argue against these points that they are speculative. It is certainly true to suggest that they need more elaboration. On the other hand, I would suggest that an argument that children's school work is not useful is no less speculative. I therefore challenge anyone to prove that school work is actually not useful. Where, in other words, is the burden of proof?

Consequences

This lack of recognition of children's school work poses a major problem for the family. Children are producing for and in the modern *oikos* but without a legitimate right to share the results. They have claims on parents, whose incomes must bear the strains of supporting children. Welfare states may socialise these costs, but as we saw above, in Germany only ten per cent of all resources via the public purse.

Thus throughout modernity parents have held the obligation to provide for their children, whose labour force was expropriated by the state. The benefits of children's school work were in the long run shared by everybody in society; particularly for business for whom an educated labour force is supplied more or less free of charge. On the other hand, of course, it has a value in itself for children to be supported in obtaining knowledge and the capacity to act as citizens and workers. On balance however, it is my thesis that children and their parents were the losers in this exchange; the calculation by the 5th Family Report is an indication of that.

Although many positive features can be mentioned about strengthening the family and the ideology around it, one appears to have forgotten what was really new; namely that the status of the family underwent a metamorphosis from being the core unit in the old *oikos* to its new place as the repository for rest and recuperation for individual members in the new *oikos*. While in the old *oikos* children were a part of the hierarchy - although certainly at the bottom of it - in the new *oikos* parents became small wheels in a new hierarchy, while children were completely disconnected from it.

The reason that this was tolerable was first of all that the new system permitted a dramatic increase in wealth and prosperity for everyone, including children. The price to be paid was - besides the misjudgement of children's school work - a dramatic reduction in the share of children in the population and an increased risk of their impoverishment (Preston, 1984; Ringen, 1997; Sgritta, 2000). It has however bearings for my thesis, which suggested a positive relationship between

recognition of children's main activities, per capita incomes in families without children as compared with families with children, and number of children born.

As different scholars as Ariès (1962), Caldwell (1982) and Kaufmann (1996) seem to agree that scholarisation was the event which dramatically changed childhood, and at least the latter two appear to be saying that it had a major influence on the economic situation of families with children - Caldwell is thinking mostly in terms of intergenerational relationships, Kaufmann is analytically dealing more with differences between families with and without children. None of them are however granting children status as contributors.

As the 5th Family Report proposed, it is high time now to acknowledge the achievements of parents to human capital formation. If this achievement is converted into monetary terms, it might potentially create more equitable relationships between families with and without children and thus in the end bring children back into the intergenerational contract - but now at the level of the new *oikos*. In my view it makes sense also to consider children as major contributors and my proposal is thus a supplementary one to that of the Family Report. An argument for acknowledging children's school work as useful both here and now and for the future, and beneficial for the common good, is in the same vein providing an argument for equalising resources in intergenerational terms.

Whether this transfer of resources[10] actually will result in an increase of the birth rate in the long run remains to be seen. It seems in my view beyond doubt that the fertility rate is a sensitive indicator of people's experience of security. If however the fertility level increases as a result of an equalisation of resources, there are other benefits to be achieved; first of all in the long run in terms of improved chances for rescuing future pensions.

In this sense the circle is closed. What in the old *oikos* was a well understood contract between three generations, because the middle generation provided for both the younger and older ones, will have a chance to become re-established on conditions of the new *oikos*. It will again become a three generation contract, because all adults will experience wealth flowing upwards, and not merely those without children. It is of crucial importance for the functioning of the three generation contract that this is felt also by parents and potential parents.

Caldwell was right in suggesting that the wealth flow made a downwards turn at the time when children were placed in schools. There is however no reason why the tide of this flow cannot turn once again. The potential consequences of this are in my view positive: an improved family

economy, a slight increase in fertility rates, and a much better basis for provision and care for the elderly.

Children's manual wage work versus their school work

I have used most of my chapter to deal with the nature and meanings of children's system immanent work, that is manual labour in the old and school work in the new *oikos*. Since it is a widespread idea that currently children's wage work after school hours is of pre-eminent importance, I find it worthwhile to conclude with some reflections comparing the two forms more directly; the much more so since I have argued that their contemporary wage work is residual and anachronistic.

Most importantly, it must be stressed once again that this charge does not mean that I see wage work as invaluable or useless, nor worthy of further research. Indeed, I see no reasons for contesting the main results of research on this issue, for instance that it has a worth for the family economy and provides children with work experiences and the capacity to handle money. Furthermore, given that children's wage work is a reality it also means addressing issues of their rights at work. Both rights to be protected against unhealthy and exploitative conditions and rights to negotiate wages and employment contracts.

Having said this, I also believe that we have to acknowledge the ambiguity with which children's wage work is met vis-à-vis their school work. Children's paid work appears to some extent to be wanted by children, encouraged by a considerable number of firms and at least tolerated by many parents, whereas it is normatively in a twilight, combatted by the trade unions and legally opposed by the state.

Thus, despite the fact that it is being opposed and partly declared unlawful, it is nevertheless the kind of work and perhaps the only kind of work for which children get some normative recognition, at least among children and some parents. It is definitely the only one which gives them in exchange money as 'a common equivalent', access to the consumer market and some freedom vis-à-vis parents and status among peers. The promises given by adults that for school work they will eventually receive their well deserved exchange, but they have to wait until they are adults, are logically not well-understood and well-received promises for children who otherwise are told that they must eventually grow up as autonomous persons.

On the other hand the recognition of children as manual workers in the midst of *a society marked by abstract and symbolic work* may at the same time be the last confirmation children as immature, as much as manual forms of productions as well as manual work are now-a-days emblematic for left-behind and primitive stages which suit the imagery of children in terms of developmental stages' postulates about incompetence and incapacity; at the same time, denying children the right to dispose of money may likewise be interpreted as a lack of trust in them, while adults fear that they are not sufficiently competent and responsible in using money.

If ambiguity reigns as far as children's wage work is concerned, their school work is simply not recognised as useful. It is typically seen as a part of children's socialisation rather than as a productive activity. And in contrast to children's wage work there is no way that it is related in a positive way to family consumption. It therefore appears that although everyone demands that children invest time and energy in schools, these activities are largely less prestigious than wage work after school hours. It is however not by chance that schooling is no longer a contested terrain. The struggle for children's time and activities is currently profoundly different from what it was one or two hundred years ago. Despite the fact that children may be normatively and pecuniary better rewarded for engaging in gainful work after school hours, it can hardly be denied that comparatively speaking, it is now children's manual work which is in the defensive position. Children's school work is no longer the privilege of an elite minority but a universal claim, while it is the agents of manual child work who are fighting their battles on the fringe of the dominant economy.

In figure 2, I am summing up the contexts and characteristics of children's obligatory work, that have been discussed in this chapter. By and large, I am suggesting that children's wage work in modern society belongs to the 'old *oikos*'. Since it is in many respects similar to unskilled manual adult labour, it may be argued that it to the same extent is part of the 'new *oikos*', i.e. the contexts in terms of production, division of labour, form of labour, circulation, and perhaps locus of activity. However, children's wage work is in modern society not an obligatory task, it is optional, even if it may be demanded by parents and felt as a necessity by children; there is furthermore no relationship between children's obligatory work - their school work - and their claims on or rights to sharing societal resources. The economic responsibilities for children are no longer connected with the beneficiaries of their work - the state or society as a whole - but now as before with parents who no longer specifically enjoy the fruits of their own children's work. Whichever argument in favour of children's wage work, it is bound to be residual, because children's school work will not go away.

On the contrary, it is likely to become even more demanding of children's time and effort. It therefore unequivocally remains children's 'overtime' work, as already Kanitz (1970) observed.

Figure 2. Children's obligatory activities: contexts and characteristic differences & similarities between old and new oikos

	OIKOS	
	OLD	**NEW**
Production	Simple/use value	Extended/exchange value
Division of labour	Synchronic	Diachronic
Form of labour	Manual	Symbolic
Circulation	Local	Societal/global
Locus of activity	Locality	'Society'
Claims/rights to resources	Yes	No
Obligations to work	Yes	Yes
Economic responsibility for children	Parents/locality	Parents
Beneficiaries of child obligatory work	Locality/family	'Society'

Irrespective of the reasons children may give themselves for working for wages, among them that it is their objection to schooling as boring and inappropriately keeping them outside modern society's rewarding system, ideally - from a children's point of view as well as theoretically more satisfying and consistently system immanent - I would suggest two small changes in figure 2 under the new *oikos*: namely that 'no' is made into a 'yes' under 'claims/rights', and that 'parents' are changed into 'society' under 'economic responsibility'. These two small alterations would however mean a fundamental change, if not a revolution. They would admit that children's school work is socially necessary work and a contribution to human capital accumulation. This admittance would logically provide children and their advocates with a licence to negotiate with the state or other public authorities over their legitimate share of social production as a reward for their input in the social fabric. It would be an acknowledgement of their useful work in line with that of their parents, as suggested by the 5th Family Report.

Notes

References

Ariès, Philippe (1962) *Centuries of Childhood. A Social History of Family Life*. Vintage: New York.

Brunner, Otto (1978) "Vom 'ganzen Haus' zur 'Familie' im 17. Jahrhundert". In: Heidi Rosenbaum (Hrsg.): *Seminar: Familie und Gesellschaftsstruktur*. Suhrkamp: Franfurt am Main, pp. 83-92.

Bundesministerium für Familie und Senioren (1994) *Familie und Familienpolitik im geeinten Deutschland - Zukunft des Humanvermögens. Fünfter Familienbericht*. Bonn.

Caldwell, John C. (1982) *Theory of Fertility Decline*. Academic Press: London.

Coleman, James S. (1993) "The Rational Reconstruction of Society". In: *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 58, No. 1, pp. 1-15.

Coninck-Smith, Ning (1997) "The struggle for the child's time - at all times. School and children's work in town and country in Denmark from 1900 to the 1960s". In: Ning de Coninck-Smith, Bengt Sandin and Ellem Schrumpf (eds.): *Industrious Children. Work and Childhood in the Nordic Countries 1850-1990*. Odense University Press: Odense, pp. 129-159

Corsaro, William A. (1997) *The Sociology of Childhood*. Pine Forge Press: Thousands Oaks, California.

Dalton, George (1971) Introduction to Goerge Dalton (ed.) *Primitive, archaic, and modern economies: Essays by Karl Polanyi*. Beacon Press: Boston, Mass.

Davis, Kingsley (1937) "Reproductive Institutions and the Pressure for Population". In: *The Sociological Review*", Vol. 29, No. 3, 1937, pp. 289-306.

Kanitz, Otto Felix (1970) *Das proletarische Kind in der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*. März Verlag: Frankfurt a.M.

Kaufmann, Franz-Xaver (1996) *Modernisierungsschübe, Familie und Sozialstaat*. R. Oldenbourg Verlag: München.

Lasch, Christopher (1977) *Haven in a Heartless World: The Family Besieged*. Basic Books: New York.

Luhman, Niklas (1991) "Das Kind als Medium der Erziehung". In: *Zeitschrift für Pädagogik*, Vol. 37, pp. 19-40.

Morrow, Virginia (1994) "Responsible Children? Aspects of Children's Work and Employment Outside School in Contemporary UK". In: Berry Mayall (ed.): *Children's Childhoods: Observed and Experienced*. The Falmer Press: London, pp. 128-143.

Morrow, Virginia (1996) "Rethinking childhood dependency: children's contributions to the domestic economy". In: *The Sociological Review*, Vol. 44, No. 1, pp. 58-76.

Olk, Thomas und Johanna Mierendorff (1998a) "Existenzsicherung für Kinder - Zur sozialpolitischen Regulierung von Kindheit im bundesdeutschen Sozialstaat". In: *Zeitschrift für Soziologie der Erziehung und Sozialisation*, 18. Jahrgang, Heft 1, pp. 38-52.

Olk, Thomas und Johanna Mierendorff (1998b) "Kinderarmut und Sozialpolitik. Zur sozialpolitischen Regulierung von Kindheit im modernen Wohlfahrtsstaat". In: Jürgen Mansel und Georg Neubauer (Hrsg.): *Armut und Soziale Ungleichtheit bei Kindern*. Leske+Budrich: Opladen, pp. 230-257.

Platt, Anthony (1977) *The Child Savers. The Invention of Delinquency*. 2nd enlarged edition. The University of Chicago Press: Chicago.

Polanyi, Karl (1971) *Primitive, archaic, and modern economies: essays by Karl Polanyi*, edited by George Dalton. Beacon Press: Boston, Mass.

Preston, Samuel H. (1984) "Children and the Elderly: Divergent Paths for America's Dependents". I: *Demography*, Vol. 21, No. 4, pp. 435-457.

Qvortrup, Jens (1995) "From Useful to Useful: The Historical Continuity of Children's Constructive Participation". I: Anne-Marie Ambert (ed.) *Sociological Studies of Children*, Vol. 7, pp. 49-76.

Rainwater, Lee and Timothy M. Smeeding (1995) *Doing Poorly: The Real Income of American Children in a Comparative Perspective*. Luxembourg Income Study, Working Paper No. 127.

Ringen, Stein (1997) *Citizens, Families, and Reform*. Clarendon Press: Oxford.

Scheuch, Erwin (1969) "Methodische Probleme gesamtgesellschaftlicher Analysen". In: Theodor W. Adorno (Hrsg.): *Spätkapitalismus oder Industriegesellschaft?* Ferd. Enke: Stuttgart.

Schildkrout, Enid (1980) "Children's work reconsidered". In: *International Science Journal*, Vol. XXXII, No. 3, pp. 479-489.

Sgritta, Giovanni B. (2000) "Inconsistencies: Childhood on the Economic and Political Agenda". I: *Childhood and Children's Culture*, ed. by Flemming Mouritsen and Jens Qvortrup. Odense University Press: Odense (forthcoming).

Statistisches Bundesamt (1997) *Statistisches Jahrbuch*.

Zelizer, Viviana A. (1985) *Pricing the Priceless Child. The Changing Social Value of Children*. Princeton University Press: Princeton, New Jersey.

[1] The value of parents' taxes is included in the 90 per cent; thus the mentioned 10 per cent is the contribution of all taxpayers barring parents.

[2] "With the introduction of the general school obligation, child labour eventually disappeared without an awareness of the consequences for families. In reality it was to do with a state legislated expropriation of parents as far as the labour force of their children was concerned" (Kaufmann, 1996, p. 15).

[3] I am here not dealing with ecole maternelles, let alone Kindergarten.

[4] I am using the phrase ways of production rather than modes of production to avoid confusing it with a strict marxian understanding of the latter.

[5] This description is admittedly shorthand; there are many other children's activities which are cultural in nature but nonetheless indispensable. Thus, Schildkrout describes the situation in the muslim city of Kano, Nigeria, where women through the socalled *purdah* are secluded, and "Children are the links between the secluded women and the outside world … they can act as intermediaries between the male and the female domains … perform errands, carry information, buy and sell food, including the ingredients for daily cooking, and help women in their incomeproducing activities … Although purdah makes women more dependent on children than they would otherwise be, such uses of child labour are not restricted to Muslim societies in West Africa. It is simply that in these societies the use of children in this way, which occurs elsewhere, is what enables the seclusion of women to persist and to be valued as a sign of high status of men" (Schildkrout, 1980, p. 486; see also Caldwell, 1982, for similar examples).

[6] Please note the comparative perspective even at this level: households understood as oikos *continue* to exhibit similarities in terms of the meaning of its tasks, while at the same time the *discontinuity* is apparent as far as the concrete operations are concerned.

[7] One could probably have chosen instead to use Polanyi's framework 'economy as an instituted process', which underlines the continuity in the various forms of economy (Polanyi, 1957). He here distinguishes between 'substantive economy' and 'formal economy'; the latter relates to the special case of economy (e.g. a market economy), while the former - as explained by Dalton in his Introduction to the book - means "every society studied by anthropologists, historians, and economists has an economy of some sort because personal and community life require the structured provision of material goods and services. This is the minimal definition of economy which calls attention to similarities among economies otherwise as different as those of the Trobriand Islands, an Israeli *kibbutz*, a twelfth-century feudal manor, nineteenth-century Britain, and the present-day economy of the Soviet Union. *These very different economies have in common that they make use of natural resources, technology, division of labor and, frequently, practices such as external trade with foreigners, the use of markets, and some form of money. But the specific institutionalization of these features may vary radically among economies*" (Dalton, 1957, p. xxxiii; my italics). The term oikos is easier to handle than 'substantive economy'; see also ibid. p. 16, where Polanyi himself refers to the Greek *oeconomia* - the etymon of 'economy' - as the principle of *householding*.
A similar distinction is made by Coleman, who talks about a change from a *primordial* structure to a *purposive* structure, "the world of corporate actors". See Coleman, 1990, chapter 22.

[8] The irony is of course that the only way in which they get some independent access to the modern consumer world is by availing themselves of activities that are not system immanent, namely manual work for wages!

[9] A conflict of interest has arisen between "*The interest of parents or potential parents in spending their resources on themselves versus the interest of the broader social order in spending their resources on the next generation*. This conflict of interest arises only when the intergenerational family is no longer the basic building block of the society, and persons in one generation are not dependent - financially or psychologically - on the success or failure of their own progeny, but on the overall success or failure of the generation that succeeds them in the society as a whole. This conflict of interest exists principally in the most advanced societies in Europe and America" (Coleman, 1990, p. 604, italics by Coleman).

[10] I do not deal with the practical political question of to whom the transfers are to be addressed: parents and/or children, or the age at which children can be entrusted as receivers. My main message is that the family is granted a larger share, although I admit that for children it is of importance also to obtain capacity as consumers.