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**Title:** Children as 'Being and Becomings': Children, Childhood and Temporality

**Abstract:**
Notions of 'being' and 'becoming' are intrinsic to childhood research. Whilst the 'being' child is seen as a social actor actively constructing 'childhood', the 'becoming' child is seen as an 'adult in the making', lacking competencies of the 'adult' that he or she will 'become'. However, I argue that both approaches are in themselves problematic. Instead, theorizing children as 'being *and* becomings' not only addresses the temporality of childhood that children themselves voice, but presents a conceptually realistic construction suitable to both childhood researchers and practitioners.

**Introduction**

Over the past three decades, there has been much discussion about the different constructions of children and childhood (James and others, 1998; Jenks, 1996; Mayall, 2002; Qvortrup, 1994). This paper taps into those debates by concerning itself specifically with notions of children and childhood 'being' and 'becoming' (e.g. James and others, 1998; Qvortrup, 1991). By explicitly addressing the temporality intrinsic to the notions of 'being' and 'becoming', I suggest that it is appropriate to consider these discourses *together*, and not necessarily as conflicting discourses but as ones that complement one another. Moreover, I argue that understanding the 'child' as both 'being and becoming' increases the agency that child has in the world.

Drawing on Prigogine's (1980) discussion of time as 'being and becoming', I suggest that viewed from this alternative angle, children and childhood are *always and necessarily* 'being and becoming'. Here, the manifestations of time - indeed the dynamics of time - in the physical and social world are themselves seen as 'being and becoming'. Progogine (1980) argues that these alternative concepts of time are not

necessarily at odds with one another but instead actually interact together and complement one another. Thus, whilst in children and childhood literature, there is an unresolved tension between 'being' and 'becoming', interestingly in complexity literature, time and change as 'being and becoming' are seen as necessary preconditions of all physical and social things. This paper, therefore, draws on this overlap as a way of resolving the implicit tension involved in conceptualising children as both 'being and becomings'.

It is important to state from the outset that I am not suggesting a return to the 'incompetent', 'incomplete' notion of the child. Rather, by injecting specific notions of time and temporality into the discussions about children and childhood 'being' and 'becoming', the paper seeks to instigate discussion about how researchers might address the antagonism between studying the 'being' child who – ideally – also ultimately 'becomes' adult. Thus, the paper begins by revisiting the debates about 'being' and 'becoming' respectively, and argues that whilst the extant conceptions of the 'becoming' child are problematic, from a *temporal* perspective, not to mention an ethical one, it is also problematic *not* to consider the 'being' child as someone who 'becomes' an 'adult'. As I then go on to suggest, this is particularly because of the inherent 'arrow of time' and temporality of 'being and becoming' in the world – a world that is also continually 'being and becoming'. Finally, I conclude that understanding children as 'being and becomings' has implications on the notion of children as active agents, and on childhood research more generally.

**The study**
To illustrate this argument, the paper draws in part on empirical material taken from an ESRC funded doctoral study on urban change in York (UK) and Dijon (France).[1] The study involved five methodological approaches to produce different representations of change and continuity in York and Dijon since the 1970s. One approach included using small group interviews with local school children. The children's views about the city

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[1] These two cities were selected in part because one was relatively easy to access (York) and the other (Dijon) was in many ways a suitable city to compare and contrast alongside the other given its socio-economic historical trajectory.

were interesting in themselves, but they were particularly helpful in relation to understanding the present and future trajectories of the cities. Moreover, during the course of the interviews, there was an interesting interaction between how the children spoke about *themselves in relation to the changing places* in which they lived, and it is this material that I bring forward here to discuss the notion of children as 'being and becomings.' In sum, 79 small group interviews were conducted with children aged four to twelve, i.e. over 300 children in total. In York, children from six schools were interviewed; in Dijon, children came from nine schools. In both places, the schools were selected across the cities. The author is bilingual in English and French, so interviews were conducted by her in both languages; all French quotes have been translated by the author. All respondents have been given pseudonyms to preserve their anonymity.

**The 'Being' and 'Becoming' Child – some emerging issues**

Briefly, the 'being' child is seen as a social actor in his or her own right, who is actively constructing their own 'childhood', and who has views and experiences about being a child; the 'becoming' child is seen as an 'adult in the making,' who is lacking universal skills and features of the 'adult' that they will become (Brannen and O'Brien, 1995; James and James, 2004; James and others, 1998; James and Prout, 1997a; Jenks, 1982; Jenks, 1996; Qvortrup, 1991; Qvortrup, 1994). Hence, perceiving the child as a human 'being' or human 'becoming' tends to involve conflicting approaches to what it means to be a child. In contrast, I argue that neither approach is in itself satisfactory, but that they can be used together in complementary ways.

There are two main issues with the construction of the 'becoming' child discourse. The first is that it is explicitly future orientated. This necessarily places the onus of importance on that which the child *will be* rather than that which the child *is*. The child is seen as 'a future adult' rather than a 'young human being' in his or her own right. This assumption is problematic because the temporal focus necessarily forces us to neglect or dismiss the present everyday realities of being a child. However, how we conceptualise something in the future may influence how we conceptualise it in the present. Furthermore, whilst our anticipation of the future may influence how we

conceptualise something in the present, our anticipations may be wrong (Davis, 1985). Therefore, to base our constructions of what a child *is,* primarily on what that child *will be,* is problematic, even if we accept that the future matters.

The second issue, by implication of the first, is that serious issues relating to 'competency' are raised, namely that children are incompetent and that adults are not. From a 'becoming' perspective, as Young (1990:41) writes, the child 'is seen as progressing from a state of vulnerability to sophistication, from an earlier lack of skills to a later possession of abilities.' This perspective not only implies that 'competency' is something that is acquired the closer one is to becoming 'adult', but also that competency is necessarily (and only) an adult characteristic, i.e. one that children *cannot* possess. This interpretation of 'competency' is not only troublesome to children, who seemingly cannot be competent at anything, but it is also troublesome to adults who are seemingly competent at everything!

Consequently, several authors (2001; Christensen and James, 2000; James and others, 1998; Lee, 2002) have challenged the notion of competency by emphasizing the social context in which a person is situated. From this perspective, both children *and* adults can be both competent and incompetent depending on what they are faced with. This is reflected in the ways that the children spoke about themselves in relation to others in the interviews. For example, Pierre (aged ten, living in Dijon), explains that he can do certain things that his mother cannot: 'I still need my parents but they also kind of need me too – I mean, my mum doesn't know anything about computers or DVDs, so I have to tell her everything!' Similarly, Helen (aged seven, living in York) points out that skills and abilities can be measured not only by comparing children with adults, but by comparing ourselves with our peers:

> 'just because I can't do everything that grown up's can, and even sometimes, I can't do things that my friends can do - like I can't do a headstand but Jane can - but this doesn't mean I can't do other things. I can! And sometimes I can do things that other people can't, like I can play the violin, but my brother is really good at maths.'

Pierre's and Helen's comment suggest that reflections on self-competency are derived from relational observations between themselves and others, where the 'other' can be both other adults and other children. Hence, whilst there are assumptions to do with '(in)competency' associated with the 'becoming' child, these assumptions do not necessarily hold true. Yet the construction of the 'becoming' child is thoroughly engrained in notions of children and childhood, and is very much at the core of the 'dominant framework' (James and Prout, 1997a) of childhood studies. Conversely, the 'emergent paradigm' for the sociology of childhood and its construction of the 'being' child (James and others, 1998; James and Prout, 1997a) stands in opposition to the 'becoming' child in almost every way. It involves a deliberate attempt to shift the pre-1970s focus on the 'becoming' child to consider children as social actors who do 'not have to be approached from an assumed shortfall of competence, reason or significance' (James and others, 1998: 207). This shift of emphasis is both correct and important, not least because it presents children as agents of their own social worlds. Nevertheless, I suggest that it too is remains unsatisfactory for two main reasons.

The first reason is most clearly by Strandell (2005: 2) who comments that '[b]y redefining the status of childhood from becoming to being, the theoretical understanding has been turned the other way round, resulting in a mirror picture of the developmental paradigm.' The fact that the construction of the 'being' child acts as a 'mirror picture' of the 'becoming' child actually reinforces and sustains the hierarchical adult/child dualism and, in turn, the importance and viability of the 'becoming' child perspective (see Derrida, 1973). Hence, the 'being' child is inextricably linked to the 'becoming' child; rather than subverting the 'becoming' child discourse, it maintains it, albeit implicitly.

The second problem is that the 'being' child neglects the *future* experiences of becoming adult. But some children are aware that although they are growing up and changing, something about themselves remains the same. This is reflected in a statement that Joseph (aged six, living in Dijon) made: 'I'm me now and later I'll still be me. I'll also be me when I'm old but just older, like I'll just be an older me.' The 'being' child

discourse only goes half way to addressing the underlying issue of temporality precisely because it does not account for any future constructions of the child. In the process of focusing on the 'being' child, the temporality of the 'becoming' child has, for the most part, been lost. As Qvortrup notes:

> many adherents of the social studies of childhood overlooked that growing up as an individual was inherently and indispensably a part of childhood as a social phenomenon: in fact, it was not merely psychologists and parents who were looking forward to adulthood on behalf of 'the child'; also children were anticipating adulthood in ways that contributed to forming their childhood in the here and now.
>
> (Qvortrup, 2004: 269)

'Looking forward' to what a child 'becomes' is arguably, then, an important part of 'being' a child. By turning a blind eye to the future life of the child, researchers and practitioners are prevented from exploring the ways in which this may itself shape experiences of being children.

It is worth noting that some authors do explicitly consider acknowledge the biological aspects to 'growing up'. James and her colleagues, for example, who are perhaps the most explicit in doing so, frequently acknowledge the biological base of childhood (see, for example, James, 1998: 62-65; James and others, 1998: 59). In one their original theorizations of the 'being' child, they state that this perspective of the child is *not* atemporal. They write: 'The 'being' child is not … static, for it too is in time. Thus *there is no necessity to abandon ideas of past and future just because we have shifted from a conceptual framework that is predicated on becoming'* (James and others, 1998: 207, emphasis added). In other words, according to James and others (1998), the 'being' child *does* have a past, a present *and* a future. Furthermore, the 'being child' is seen as an actor in his or her own right, who is situated in the past, present and future. Similarly, James and James (2004: 18) have argued that because the 'materiality of the biological base of childhood is a cultural universal … we do have to acknowledge their shared experience, as children, of processes of maturation.'

Likewise, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child asserts that 'every child has the inherent right to life' and that 'States Parties shall ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child.' One of the consequences of children having their rights fulfilled, therefore, is that they live and experience their childhood in such a way that they *can,* and *do,* become adults. Children have the right to become adults and experience their childhood *as children who will be future adults*. Thus, within work that is frequently cited as that which supports the 'being' child perspective, we already find peppered throughout it, implicit and explicit references to the 'becoming' child. In other words, the two constructs of the child are already being used together. This paper simply argues that they are done so more often and more explicitly.

**The 'Being and Becoming' Child**

Effectively, the 'being and becoming' approach to children and childhood readily acknowledges that certain characteristics (e.g. dependency, competency, etc.) have so far been strongly associated with *either* children *or* adults. However, it is precisely these dualistic constructions that are carefully examined, questioned and ultimately deconstructed. Explicitly combining both 'being' and 'becoming' in this way is not an entirely new argument. Lee's (2002) work, for example, is unique for doing precisely this; other authors argue something similar (for example, Brembeck and others, 2004; James and others, 1998). In sum, Lee suggests, we are all - children and adults - inter-dependent beings who are also always in the process of 'being' and 'becoming' with one another, who are more or less competent at doing certain things throughout our lives. This 'being and becoming' approach is much more useful than either the 'being' discourse or the 'becoming' discourse taken alone, both to children and childhood researchers and practitioners, and importantly to children themselves, not just because it is based on a conceptually more realistic representation of both children and adults, but also because it bridges the gap that makes children 'different' to adults (see Strandell, 2005).

Whilst Lee presents an alternative discourse to children and childhood, what is not adequately addressed in his work is the temporality of 'being' and 'becoming.' Indeed, at the beginning of conclusion of the book, Lee acknowledges this omission and, justifies it, correctly I think, as follows:

> .... we seem to have said very little about growing up. There are some very good reasons for avoiding this topic entirely. *It is still hard to think of children changing over time without accepting the terms of the dominant framework. This is because it seems hard to chart and to describe change unless one has a fixed finishing point,* such as journey's end or standard, complete adulthood, to refer to.
>
> (Lee, 2002: 137; emphasis added)

Lee's final chapter is poignantly subtitled 'growing up and slowing down', signalling his effort to address the temporality of growing up. In his words, he attempts to tackle the 'difference between the dominant framework and the sociology of childhood in terms of their approaches to 'time'' (Lee 2002: 137). However, Lee only directly addresses the issue of time in this chapter in less than a page. The rest of the chapter reviews the book and refers very briefly to the notion of growing up as a movement through different social orders. Some key questions relating to temporality therefore remain: How can we understand childhood in relation to bodily changes as we all journey – always necessarily – through the arrow of time of our life course? Moreover, how can we consider the *temporality* of the 'being' child alongside that of the 'becoming' child without falling into the trap of the dominant framework? It is here that Prigogine's ideas about the ontological nature of time and change as 'being and becoming' can help us to go some way in answering these questions.

### *Time and Temporality as 'Being and Becoming'*

Essentially, Prigogine's (1996) work takes us beyond the Newtonian conception of time as reversible and to the notion of 'time as an arrow' in thermodynamics as both 'being and becoming'. Reversible time is time understood within reversible processes, such as

the motion of a frictionless pendulum. Such systems do not have any privileged direction of time; the pendulum can be set to run in the 'opposite' direction and yet it can still be understood using Newtonian laws. 'Time' in these processes simply 'labels' the direction of the trajectory. In contrast, irreversible time is understood to be an internal parameter within the thing itself. Viewed from this alternative perspective, time is not simply understood as an external independent feature, but as something that acts within and upon the system being described, i.e. time is an ontological dimension of that system. For example, from an epistemological perspective, we can describe a tree at two different time points, i.e. time is reversible and external to the tree; it simply acts as a 'marker' of time. However, from an ontological perspective, the temporality of the tree needs to be taken into account in order to know about the tree. In other words, the age of the tree will impact on the way that tree actually is, and becomes, during and between those two time points. Here, the ontological description of the tree has changed partly because of the effects of time on the tree itself, i.e. time is irreversible and internal to the dynamics and change of the tree. Therefore, to describe how a thing changes over time, we need to understand time in two kinds of ways: as a 'marker' of time (the epistemology of change) and as an intrinsic internal feature of the thing itself (the ontology of change). In other words, for all things in the social and physical world, time is reversible and irreversible, external and internal to the thing itself, and always and necessarily 'being and becoming'.

Stated briefly, Prigogine's discussion of physical systems 'being and becoming' refers to time and change in dynamic systems. Prigogine argues that a prerequisite to understanding dynamic systems is to merge our different ideas of time together. He contends that because irreversible processes are real, play a constructive role in the physical world, and are deeply rooted in dynamics, our knowledge about how these different notions of time interact is key to tackling the problem of understanding the world. Prigogine's work is important to childhood researchers and practitioners because it provides a conceptualisation of time and temporality that is also ontologically congruent with the current discourses on children and childhood. On the one hand, the 'being' child discourse considers the 'time of childhood' and children experiencing and living their childhood time. Time in this discourse can be thought of as 'external' to the

child inasmuch 'childhood' itself is understood as 'marker' of time throughout the life course. On the other hand, the 'becoming' child discourse considers the *ageing* child. Time in the 'becoming' discourse is, therefore, seen as an intrinsic internal feature of that person.

In addition, Prigogine's notion of time as 'being and becoming' also sits comfortably with the dynamics of the ageing process in general. As Hockey and James (2003: 214) argue, the ageing process exists as a triangular relationship between the body, the self, and society such whereby ageing takes play at the site of body; this embodiment, in turn, necessarily brings with it the social experience of ageing; and ageing necessarily means that individuals move, inexorably, from birth to death across the life course. The temporality of the ageing process that Hockey and James describe, I suggest, is precisely that which Prigogine's work exposes: it provides a language with which to describe the way that we are all always ageing, from birth to death, and that the biological aspect to ageing is taking place throughout the life course, and the ageing process is always situated and experienced socially.

Similarly, children (and adults) are always 'being and becoming' in Prigogine's use of those terms. The process of 'being' a child and 'becoming' an adult is irreversible, and it plays a constructive role in the physical and social world, and it is deeply rooted in the dynamics and experiences of being and becoming in the world. So far, the notion of the child being in the world has been separated from that of the child becoming in the world to such an extent that each has generated its own childhood discourse. However, as Prigogine suggests in relation to time in dynamic systems, it is the *interplay* between the different notions of time within each discourse that is key to understanding the notion of the 'child'. Hence, whilst the discourse of the 'being' child accentuates the present whilst that of the 'becoming' child stresses the future, both the present and the future interact together in the course of everyday life.

To be clear, I am not denying that social constructions may determine the cut off-points between what constitutes a 'child' and an 'adult', where 'childhood' ends and 'adulthood' begins, or how 'childhood' and 'adulthood' construct one another, etc. The

idea of a 'threshold' between a 'child' and an 'adult' has been challenged by many authors (see, for example, Alanen and Mayall, 2001; Solberg, 1996) who emphasise the social construction of age, time and temporality of childhood itself, and their arguments remain valid and important here also. Individual or group experiences of what it means to be a child (or an adult) are similarly influenced by social constructions that are time and space specific (Alanen, 2001; Alanen and Mayall, 2001; Mayall, 2002). As Pilcher (1995) sums up, age is a social category (among many others, e.g. class, ethnicity, gender, etc.) through which people define themselves individually and collectively. These arguments are entirely compatible with the 'being and becoming' perspective. That said, however we construct children and childhood, 'children' become 'adults' (assuming they do not die before this). 'Adults' were once 'children'. 'Childhood' is a stage of the human life-course that chronologically precedes 'adulthood'. Whilst social constructions of a 'child' or an 'adult' may be subject to historical change, and the social constructions of time and temporality within the life course are as well (Abbott, 2001; Hillman and others, 1990), to the extent that we are *necessarily* bound by of the 'arrow of time' (Coveney and Highfield, 1990) and the real mechanisms of the biological ageing process, our social constructions of the process of 'children being children, who also become adults, who were children but are now adults' can only help us to understand the ontological process of 'being and becoming' in the world.

To reduce the epistemological constructions of child or childhood to the irreducible and necessary category of being would be committing, what Bhaskar (1975) calls, the 'epistemic fallacy'. In other words, how we construct the notion of 'child' is not to be confused with being a child; knowledge about childhood cannot be reduced to what childhood actually is. Paradoxically, however, as Quine (1998) reminds us, the only way we *can* involve ourselves in ontological commitments is to use epistemic descriptions. The 'being and becoming' construction of the child explicitly and deliberately taps into the temporal ontology of 'being and becoming' in the world. After all, as a number of authors have suggested (Boyden and Ennew, 1997; Christensen and others, 2001; Medrich, 1992), childhood itself is a temporal event. The key is to achieve a working balance between the temporal constructs of 'being' and 'becoming' without diminishing the humanity or the personhood of every human being, child or adult.

**Illustrating the Case of the 'Being and Becoming' Child**

On the basis that there is at least a place for the notion of the 'being and becoming' child within the many constructions of children and childhood, by drawing on the study briefly outlined above, I now further illustrate the ways in which children spoke about themselves 'being and becoming' in a world that is also 'being and becoming'. As the children were discussing each place, or more accurately, as the children were discussing themselves in relation to each place, the theme of 'being and becoming' emerged more explicitly. That is, the children voiced an awareness of time and change inasmuch as they showed an awareness of themselves as young people situated in time and place. They recounted stories that their parents and grandparents had told them about 'the good olden days', as Sam (aged eleven, living in York) put it, described a time and a place that were different from the present city. In turn, the children took it for granted that they would change alongside the changing place. This is described by François (aged ten, living in Dijon) in the following statement: 'when we're old, it'll [Dijon] have changed and we might not like it but it might be because it's changed but it might also be because we're just old,' to which George (aged eight, living in Dijon) responded, 'it'll be because of both.' Thus, the children articulated what they thought the changes around them would be, and they also spoke about how they thought that they themselves may or may not change. Importantly, however, they also showed a great reflexive awareness about the ways in which changing perceptions of the changing environment may affect their perceptions of themselves. Hence, the temporality of 'being and becoming' was evident in the children's discussions.

In both York and Dijon, the children spoke about 'being' young in the world in the present with tastes and perceptions shaped by that present world. Yet they also spoke about 'becoming' older with tastes and perceptions shaped by that future world. Indeed, all children across the ages in both cities voiced that perceptions and attitudes to change are relative to the tastes of the individual, where in the life course that individual was, as well as the general cultural fashion of that time. Likewise, although they anticipated

some change in the future, they were sometimes reluctant to specify whether that change was for the better or for the worse. This was primarily because they recognised that what was considered as positive change by one group of people might also be considered as negative change by another group of people. For example, when asked whether York was different or the same when their grandparents were little, Julie (aged eight, living in York) responded with the following:

> 'Well, it depends how old your grandparents are really but, but if it, if they were quite old, like a hundred and three or something, then it would be... because the shops the people dressed differently like in quite fancy clothes like we would maybe use for shows at the theatre and there's like hmm... and the fashion is quite weird – we would think so but then if they were around here they would think we were really weird so it's not really... I mean maybe when all the modern stuff comes in, the new generation will like it because they've been brought up with everything like it, all the modern stuff, but I don't think the older generations, like maybe we will be, like when we're sixty, everything will have changed, I don't think we'll appreciate it as much as much as we appreciate York *now.'*

When asked the equivalent question in Dijon, Guillaume (aged seven, living in Dijon) explained, 'well, I'll be different when I'm older, well sort of, but things will be different anyway, and so will my friends, and you [pointing to researcher].' In other words, the children showed an explicit awareness of the changing world around them and that they too were changing and would continue to change in their own lifetimes. Hence, conceptualising children as 'being and becomings' is not only constructive in terms of explicitly addressing the ageing process within childhood itself, it also reflects the ways that children themselves see themselves and their changing world within which they are necessarily situated.

Moreover, the children interviewed recognised that whilst they might consider something favourably today as children, they might not consider it the same way when they are old people precisely because you see things differently when you are older;

vice versa, if an old person was young today, they might see things differently also. This can be seen the following interaction between Sally (aged ten), Luke (aged eleven), Emily (aged seven), who were all living in York:

> Sally: It's becoz older people, it's coz – no offense to them – but they're not up to date sort of thing coz when you're young, like yo-yos were the greatest craze in the world but then-
> Luke: But at our age, *we're* like *them* and *they* want what *we* want.
> Sally: And they think 'oh *Game boy*, *Play Station*, what a load of rubbish! But would they say that if they were our age now?
> Luke: they wouldn't want their yo-yos now.
> Emily: It's just how you would look at it if you were a child's point of view, so you can't, can't say, you can't, if he's 50, he can't say well things are rubbish becoz if he was our age he'd say they were good.

These children and others interviewed expected that by the time they were 'old', they too were likely to look back with nostalgia on the past because when you grow up, as Alice (aged eleven, living in York) said, 'you'll just remember things when you were little.' For Alice, thinking back to the 'good olden days' was an intrinsic part to being older:

> 'When you're old, you would remember everything when you were a kid... Like you would remember everything when you were a kid … Like you would like everything like it was and if it changed a bit different, you wish it was like when you were kids.'

The other children in the group agreed with Alice in her description. Moreover, it was suggested by Sophie (aged four, living in York) that being older actually means *not* wanting change:

> 'When you're a grown up, you like remember things like before and stuff, but when, like, like it makes you boring because you don't like it when it

changes, but I don't keep remembering things, like my mum's always saying 'Don't you remember that?' but that's why I like it when things are like different.'

Thus, whilst childhood researchers may prefer to see children as beings in the present, children are themselves aware not only that older people were once younger, or that they themselves will change as they become older, but also that they have conflicting views and experiences about what it may mean for them to become older in a changing world. Mona, a five year old living in York exclaimed, 'I can't wait 'til I'm seven because then I can go to the shops by myself!', suggesting that becoming (a little) older is anticipated with excitement. In contrast, Sophie, the four year old child quoted above, was not so excited about becoming older because she assumed that being adult may also involve being 'boring'. The children in these interviews were actively negotiating and imagining their future lives as well as the future of the world around them. They were actively constructing themselves as 'being and becomings' in a world that was also simultaneously 'being and becoming' as well.

This raises the need to account for a notion of agency throughout the life-course and the ways in which people's tastes and preferences vary also over time, and in turn the feed-forward and feedback implications these differences make on the structuring structures around them (Bourdieu, 1984; Bourdieu, 1990). The children's accounts are important because how we navigate through life is partly affected by our interpretations of the past, present and future (Brannen and Nilsen, 2002). Therefore, exploring the ways that children see themselves in the future (as adults) might help us to learn about how issues of empowerment and agency vary throughout the life course. Moreover, the notion of children as *knowledgeable* agents 'being and becoming' active agents in the world is especially important in terms of how we construct children as participatory agents more generally.

**Conclusion**

One of the key constructive outcomes that came out of the new social studies of childhood is that children are active social agents who participate in the knowledge construction and daily experience of childhood (James and others, 1998; James and Prout, 1997a; Mayall, 2002). From the 'being and becoming' perspective, this still holds; children are still seen as active agents, but, importantly, they are also seen as future agents. Thus, perceiving children as 'being and becoming' does not *de*crease children's agency, but instead *in*creases their agency in the world since it places the onus of their agency not only in the present but in the future also. This is especially the case because agency, as Emirbayer and Mische (1998: 963) have argued, is 'an embedded process of social engagement, informed by the past (in its habitual aspect), but also oriented toward the future (as a capacity to imagine alternative possibilities) and toward the present (as a capacity to contextualize past habits and future projects within the contingencies of the moment).'

If children are perceived as active agents 'beings and becoming', then we might also say that they too are in social processes of engagement that are based on past, present and future 'timescapes' (Hillman and others, 1990). In so doing, the 'being and becoming' discourse extends the notion of agency offered by the 'being' discourse to consider the child as a social actor constructing his or her everyday life *and* the world around them, both in the present and the future. Thus, the 'being and becoming' perspective of the child invites researchers and practitioners to consider what children say specifically in relation to being present and becoming future agents in the social world.

Considering the present and future of children negotiating their everyday lives as 'being and becomings' is already a part children and childhood research and practice. For instance, the notion that children are agents of their transition to adulthood has been explicitly discussed by Brannen and Nilsen (2002) and James and Prout (1997b). Child care practitioners - by virtue of their role in decision making processes to do with, for example, health, education, social care, intervention, and/or prevention - are concerned with improving young people's present and future lives. Similarly, policy makers are also necessarily involved in planning for the future (McCall, 2000; Pielke, 2004). There is a need, therefore, for a multi-disciplinary construction of the 'child', which also fits

with children's own constructions of their experiences of childhood. The 'being and becoming' perspective offers such a construction.

Given that the social is a process undergoing constant transformation (Freire, 1970:56), then learning about the ways in which agents consider themselves changing and growing up in that constantly changing world might also enable use to better understand how we might produce desired change and continuity in the future. In turn, we might also reconsider the sort of research that children might be involved in. After all, as Harden and others (2000: 1.1) point out, '[t]he way in which researchers conceive childhood will shape the research in which they engage.' Re-presenting children as 'being and becomings' places the construction(s) of children and childhood (back) on the agenda for all those involved in children and childhood research and/or practice, and it also raises questions relating to how we incorporate the 'arrow of time' into these constructions, which we must. It is worth repeating that reinstating the future alongside the present of the child is not to say that the biological base of childhood is a forceful determinant. Rather, it is acknowledging that children do become adults and the kinds of adults they are likely to become are shaped by the kinds of childhoods they are experiencing today. Sometimes, it will be more appropriate to be more present orientated than future orientated, and vice-versa; sometimes it will be important to consider both timescapes together. The 'being and becoming' construction of the child correctly acknowledges this. Furthermore, it conceptually places children in the real situation of being present and future agents of their present and future lives, and ultimately of the social world around them.

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