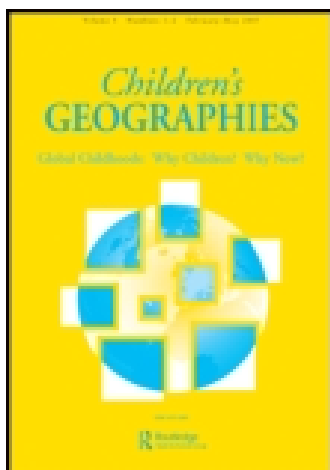


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## Children's Geographies

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### Changing children's geographies

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## CHILDREN'S GEOGRAPHIES ANNUAL LECTURE 2013

### Changing children's geographies

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This keynote explores the changing nature of children's geographies as an academic project. It proceeds in four parts. Part 1 considers the shift away from research on children's spatial cognition which envisaged the child in largely biological terms, and contemplates contemporary efforts to rework the nature/culture dualism. Part 2 traces the incorporation of new social studies of childhood into geography, emphasising the importance of children's voices, their positioning within axes of power, and the need for quantitative and qualitative methods. Part 3 explores how feminist research led to interest in parents, educators and other actors/institutions which shape, and are shaped by, children's lives. Part 4 ponders what children's geographies might add to, and learn from, broader interdisciplinary debates, and the benefits and pitfalls of research impact. The conclusion argues that a well-informed appreciation of sub-disciplinary history provides a strong vantage point from which to engage with new ways of thinking.

**Keywords:** children's geographies; new social studies of childhood; education; parenting; concerted cultivation; after-school activities

### 1. Introduction

The journal editors invited me to give this keynote both because I had written on the development of children's geographies and as I had undertaken empirical research in this field myself.<sup>1</sup> Their dual rationale informs my agenda in this paper. First, as this is the first Children's Geographies Keynote, I have chosen to explore the changing nature of children's geographies as an academic project, reflecting on the roots of this area of research and where we might take it in the future. My story will inevitably be a multi-stranded one because children's geographies as an intellectual field has not developed from a singular source, or in a linear fashion, but rather has involved multiple paths with some notable deviations (Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson 2011). Second, I have elected to say something about the changing geographies of children, youth and families as they are shaped, lived and experienced by grounding this discussion through reference to my recent empirical research on enrichment activities for children. My assessment of the field is thus personal – shaped by my own academic trajectory and interests – and placed – located in the worlds of those children, families and educators with whom I have worked. This positionality, as a long history of feminist debate tells us (Women and Geography Study Group 1997), matters and I allude to its implications and what we might learn from this through the course of this narrative.

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The paper is organised into four sections which reflect upon three of the different intellectual roots of children's geographies and our relations with wider academic debates. Section 2 considers early research on children's spatial cognition and mapping abilities, and explores ideas about the biological, social and psychic nature of childhood. In Section 3, the focus is on the rapid growth of social approaches to children's geographies which emphasise young people's voices as well as their positioning within axes of social difference. Section 4 contemplates the importance of longstanding feminist research which stimulated interest in parents, educators and other institutions which shape, and are shaped by, children's lives. Towards the end of this paper, Section 5 appraises the links between children's geographies, the wider discipline and interdisciplinary contexts. In each of these sections, my aim is to say something about the origins of this particular scholarly thread or trend, to explore how it has appeared (or not) in my own recent research and to examine issues for future thinking in geographies of children, youth and families. In conclusion, this paper emphasises the importance of understanding our own individual and collective histories and diversity in efforts to shape future intellectual agendas.

## 2. Erasing traditions; recurring themes

One of the sub-discipline's roots lies in research on children's spatial cognition and mapping abilities. This strand of research sits at the boundaries of children's geographies and developmental psychology, and was shaped by a core group of researchers who refined Piagetian models of children development to suggest that children as young as 3 in urban and rural environments in the Global North and South have some map-reading abilities (Blaut, McCleary, and Blaut 1970; Liben and Downs 1997; Blaut et al. 2003). The child in this particular mode of study is conceived of in largely biological terms (Prout 2005) and the research challenged scientific understandings of the limits to children's developmental potential by showing they are more competent at younger ages than was previously thought. It is noteworthy that this knowledge of children's biological potential was being garnered for social effect. Blaut et al. (2003), for example, argue that its implication is that education needs to be rethought as children's ability to understand visual representations means that they can enjoy a rich curriculum before they have well-developed literacy skills (see Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson 2011 for a more substantial review).

Consideration of how this tradition of research has informed my own recent empirical research on enrichment activities for children provides a useful route through which we can explore broader themes in the development of children's geographies. This project on enrichment activities, undertaken with my colleague Pimlott-Wilson from Loughborough University, used quantitative and qualitative methods to explore English children's, parents' and educators' views on organised forms of play which have an increasingly prominent role in some children's lives in the Global North, including activities such as musical instrument lessons, chess and drama clubs, Brownies and Cubs, community football and swimming lessons. So how did this particular thread of research on children's spatial cognition and ability to read and make maps contribute to our study of children's enrichment activities? Well, by and large, it did not. We have not looked at new forms of play and examined how their changing socio-spatial organisation impacts upon children's spatial cognition, their awareness of and abilities to mentally map their neighbourhoods, or indeed their competencies in navigating the cities, towns and villages where they live. In effect, we have not sought to directly measure the impact of this particular type of play on children's development, assessing either how it enhances or inhibits 'normal' development, or how processes such as these challenge existing understandings of developmental norms in childhood. Could these forms of play be open to such an analysis? Probably, and the results might well have been pertinent and insightful, but we did not examine this. So why not?

That is a question that can be answered at more than one level. The particular (inter)disciplinary culture in which I was educated and continue to work means this is not a tradition that I was ever taught, or that I have encountered with much regularity in an ever-growing literature. An honest answer would be that, with this background, it simply did not occur to me to pursue this type of approach. However, such a truth obscures the context of my decision-making. This matters as, bluntly, it would have occurred to me to consider these questions if they had been required by peer reviewers of my grant applications and publications, but the waning popularity of this tradition means that it was not expected of me, and indeed being labelled 'old hat' might have counted against me in the race for social science funding. It is in this way that the minor threads in the development of the sub-discipline can become erased from contemporary practice. The histories of geographies of children, youth and families are made up not just of winners, but also of losers, and this is one tradition that has lost out.

What is interesting to think through is why this particular mode of children's geographies has all but disappeared. It was cast as a straightforwardly biological approach to childhood at a time when social approaches which understood children as 'beings' rather than 'becomings' were coming to the fore in a range of disciplinary contexts (see Section 3). Although it is conceptually neat to argue that some approaches have focused on biology and others on society, this dualism between the natural and the social has always been somewhat more blurred than that. As Prout (2005, 53–54) notes, Piaget gives equal weight to biological and social environmental factors which are understood to interact – though Prout critiques the fact that biological and social factors are seen as separate and interacting, and thus additive of the two sides of the dualism rather than moving beyond it. Ryan (2012), in a wider context, goes further and argues that the apparently rival paradigms of developmental psychology and socialisation theory both engage with ideas about biology and society and thus envision childhood through a biosocial nexus. Thus, for him, the 'posited biosocial dualism is a discursive construct and not a historical artifact: the object of present concerns rather than a product of past realities' (Ryan 2012, 450).

Notwithstanding debate about the degree to which there has ever really been a clear divide between biological and social approaches to childhood, it is noteworthy that outside geography in the broader field of Childhood Studies, there have been calls for this 'continuing wall of silence' between developmental and social approaches to become further blurred (Thorne 2007, 150). However, recent attempts to include the biological and social approaches in studies of childhood have not simply done so through an engagement with developmental psychology. Prout (2005), for example, calls for the nature–culture dualism to be blurred by drawing on actor-network theory and complexity theory, while Ryan's (2012) approach is more informed by readings of Foucault and engagement with his notion of bio-power. Kraftl (2013) notes that few geographers have taken up Prout's challenge to shape a new wave of childhood studies which move beyond the nature–culture dualism, and seeks to forward this agenda himself by drawing inspiration from nonrepresentational theory to highlight the possibilities of 'more-than-social' children's emotional geographies (6). Kraftl is right in a sense that few other geographers have taken up Prout's explicit call to move beyond a nature–culture dualism. Nevertheless, other contemporary geographies also blur the boundaries between nature and culture, biological and social without reference to that particular debate, perhaps because many children's geographers rejected earlier invitations to structure our thinking through dualist modes of thought (Holloway and Valentine 2000a).

If we take work on the body for example, this engages both with the fleshy, material nature of our beings and the ways these are interpreted and shaped in our social worlds. B. Evans's (2010, 34) work on obesity policy is a case in point which explores the position of children's bodies within this particular form of pre-emptive biopolitics, highlighting the blurred distinctions between 'scientific truths' and 'affective facts' in the making of a future obesity crisis which

can be acted upon in the present. In a contrasting example, Holt (2013, 646) engages with non-representational theory and geographies of emotion and affect though a focus on infancy – which, she highlights, is a phase of biological, social and psychic growth – to both ‘contribute to endeavors to deconstruct the autonomous agent and replace it with an inherently relational, intersubjective or interdependent subject ... [and] enable insights into how agency emerges within these inter-subjective processes of subjection’. So neither of these authors engages directly with nature/culture in Prout’s terms, but both, as with Kraftl, are engaging in different ways with issues to do the coming together of the biological, social and indeed the psychic.

In summary, what I am suggesting is that this strand of research on children’s developmental pathways which was important in the beginning of children’s geographies has not endured. A balanced reading suggests that such research was never purely biological and it is probably ripe for some form of revaluation, but it is currently a loser in the stories of our history. What is interesting though is that the tensions which led to its gradual disappearance, that is tensions about the biological and social nature of childhood, are one again on the agenda, albeit in very different ways. New forms of engagement with the biological, with bodies and things, and with development of self, are emerging that are neither linear developments of, nor a direct replacement for, this, but which offer interesting and different opportunities for future research in geographies of children, youth and families. In effect one thread is disappearing from contemporary practice in the sub-discipline,<sup>2</sup> but very different ways of engaging with questions about the biological, social and physic are emerging which have the potential to inform fruitful future debate in geographies of children, youth and families.

### 3. Children’s voices and the issue of agency

The social approach to childhood, though having earlier antecedents (Hart 1978; Matthews 2003), flourished from the 1990s onwards in geographies of children, youth and families. Some researchers such as Matthews came to this from a history in children’s environmental cognition, but this shift in sub-disciplinary approach was also in large measure shaped by the advent of interest from new researchers with backgrounds in feminist, Marxist and post-structural approaches (Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson 2011). This in part explains the lack of a hard-fought intellectual struggle over a ‘paradigm shift’: this new wave of researchers often took their inspiration from elsewhere (seeing spatial cognition as largely irrelevant to their concerns). This social approach to children’s geographies – which concentrated on understanding children’s experiences as subjects in the world, rather than their abilities to perceive space – was further fuelled by the changing global landscapes which have elevated children’s position on the political agenda (Horton, Kraftl, and Tucker 2008).

Geographers’ approach in this respect was shaped through engagement with the new social studies of childhood (James, Jenks, and Prout 1998). This emerged from sociology and anthropology, as well as a wider interdisciplinary engagement (Prout 2005), as a reaction against both biological models of child development in psychology, and children’s absent presence in sociology, where children were viewed as ‘adults in the making rather than children in the state of being’ (Brannen and O’Brien 1995, 730) with the forces of socialisation (e.g. the family or the school) receiving attention with little direct consideration being given to children themselves (Jenks 2004). As James (2010, 216) argues:

... the door for interdisciplinary collaboration was opened through a common intellectual agenda, fuelled by shared assumptions about the ontological status of both children and childhood. That is to say, there was agreement, first, that children could – and should – be regarded as social actors, second, that childhood, as a biological moment in the life course, should nonetheless be understood

as a social construction; and finally, there was methodological agreement about the need to access children's views first hand.

This interdisciplinary engagement fed into geographers' desire to examine the lived experience of diverse children, often through ethnographic or participatory methods. This tradition of work has been open to the critique that it produced an overwhelming emphasis on different children's micro-geographies at the expense of a macro analysis (Ansell 2009). However, it is crucial to note that geographers' engagement with ideas about spatiality, and our strong heritage of feminist thinking, helped us to avoid the worst of the dualist split between either global (social structural/minority group) or local (socially constructed/tribal child) modes of thinking; a split which, like the nature/culture divide, did indeed hamper the new paradigm in other disciplinary contexts (James, Jenks, and Prout 1998; Holloway and Valentine 2000a).

This social approach to the geographies of children, youth and families is clearly evident in my current research on enrichment activities. Children's geographers have traced young people's growing exclusion from public space in the Global North: younger children, in particular, are seen to be in need of protection from stranger danger and traffic accidents, whilst older children are more often conceived of as a risk to the tranquillity and control of public space (Valentine 1996; Mattsson 2002; Karsten 2005). My research, with Pimlott-Wilson, sought to explore what is replacing independent outdoor play through a focus on clubs and activities for primary school-aged children. Our study demonstrated that 88% of children in an English region are involved each week in these organised forms of play which take place both on school premises (e.g. after school) and in other public spaces (e.g. community halls, leisure centres, theatres, etc.). Some school-based clubs are run free-of-charge by teachers, but many activities are run on a not-for-profit basis by volunteers, and there is a fast-developing industry of commercially provided enrichment opportunities which operate on and off school sites. Crucially, our statistical data show that these new play opportunities are not equally open to all. Middle-class children have higher participation rates: 98% participate in at least 1 activity per week, with 79% taking part in 3 or more and 42% in 5 or more per week. Working-class children have lower participation rates: 74% are involved in 2 or fewer activities per week, with 22% participating in none at all (Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson 2014a).

Children articulated both the practical nature of the way these activities fitted into their lives, and what these activities meant to them. A future paper will explore these issues in further detail, but here I want to highlight two themes which illustrate the importance of these activities to children. First, children argued that these activities kept them happily occupied: they were used to attending, enjoyed doing the activities with their friends, and thought they would be bored without them (the proviso being that the club/s in question suited the individual child). Second, children took pride in their achievements in these settings, achievements – whether it is a win for their sports team, a play performed or a badge acquired in Brownies or Cubs – which made them feel successful. From children's perspective, the growth of enrichment activities was not interpreted as a threat to their independent free play. For many working-class children, the occasional activities they attended provided a welcome change from playing out – they were envisaged as something fun, stimulating and different. Middle-class children's time was more thoroughly shaped by participation in enrichment activities, but they too valued them alongside free play and family life which also formed part of their everyday experience.

Reflection on this particular study of children in the Global North can provide some insights into issues which have, and continue to be, of importance to geographies of children, youth and families. First, it reiterates the point that early children's geographers' conviction that we ought to listen to children's voices remains true today, even as we have growing recognition that what they have to say may not accord with normative understandings of childhood (or moral social ideals)

(Bordonaro and Payne 2012). In the context of children's play, we can see that early geographical debates have been crucial in highlighting children's marginalisation in public space and this remains a valid concern in the present. However, if we listen to children we are also forced to engage with the notion that they value other forms of play too, and these enrichment activities are more open to some children than others. Listening to their voices thus shifts our agenda markedly – we still need to challenge children's spatial marginalisation, but access to other organised forms of play also matters to them and so this too needs to be on our agenda. Children's voices have something valuable to add to debates about their lives and we need to continue to insist on the importance of listening to them, even (perhaps especially) where their views challenge conventional academic and activist wisdom.

This insistence that we listen to children does not always sit easily with relational understandings of the subject. It requires us, if only strategically, to reify children as independent knowing subjects whose voices add something important to debate. However, this does not mean we need to cast them as all-knowing. They are not the only ones capable of producing accounts of their lives, and we must also continue to listen to others (parents, educators, policy-makers, business, etc.) who have the power to shape, or are shaped by, children's lives. Moreover, in listening to children's voices, it is politically important to articulate the differences between them. Efforts to develop nonrepresentational approaches in children's geographies have been critiqued for their general inattention to enduring axes of social difference and their inability to explain the persistent nature of these power differentials (Mitchell and Elwood 2012; see also Cresswell 2012). The point of importance here is that not all subjects in the making have equal power to act in events which reproduce them as relational beings. It is therefore imperative to study children both as knowing beings whose life worlds are of interest, at the same time as we treat them on occasions as a structural category in order to show which adults and which children win (and which lose) from the current organisation of society. This can be seen in my own research where I have explored both children's experiences of enrichment activities, and how their use in England is shaped by processes of class differentiation. This commitment to seeing children as social actors, and to exploring their positioning within wider sets of social relations, has fed my longer term desire to link micro and macro thinking in social studies of childhood, and informs my current interest in but also desire for more than nonrepresentational geographies of children, youth and families.

The notion that we should engage with children both as social actors and as a social category has interesting methodological implications. Gallacher and Gallagher (2008) produced a fascinating critique of the enthusiasm in children's geographies for participatory methods, arguing that they are neither better nor worse than any other research method, but that '[t]hey are not objectively "right": an epistemological and ethical panacea' (513). Participatory research methods clearly do offer much of value as well as presenting challenging issues (Jupp Kina 2012); however, my current research on children's enrichment activities also shows the value of diverse methods. The brief overview above used statistical data to illustrate contemporary patterns of play and differences between children, while individual and paired interviews with children produced an insight into their worlds. My argument here is not new, numerous geographers have illustrated the benefits a quantitative and mixed method approach might bring to children's geographies (Graham et al. 2012; McKendrick 2014), but it is still salient. Different methods allow us distinct insights into the lives of children, youth and families; they are also differentially received and a mixture can allow us to get our message across to varied audiences. However, unremarkable (unfashionable even) it might seem, I therefore want to argue that having diverse methodological skills within the sub-discipline, and indeed within us as individual researchers, is a valuable asset.

#### 4. Beyond the all-knowing child

A third thread in the development of children's geographies emerged from the feminisation of the workforce in the Global North and the importance of feminism in geography. Feminist geographers, from the 1970s onwards, began to explore geographies of mothering. One strand of this research explored the ways women, and now often parents, reconcile childrearing with paid employment (England 1996; Kusakabe and Pearson 2013), in the process considering both the geographies of childcare (Gregson and Lowe 1995; Boyer, Reimer, and Irvin 2013) and increasingly the ethic of care itself (McDowell 2004; Schwiter 2013). Another strand explores how mothering, and to a lesser extent parenting, cultures are reproduced within particular sites, neighbourhoods and online spaces (Aitken 2009; Foy-Phillips and Lloyd-Evans 2011). Recently, the politicisation of parenting (Faircloth, Hoffman, and Layne 2013) has produced a new wave of interest in the impact of growing policy intervention in family life (Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson 2013, 2014b; Jupp and Gallagher 2013a; Wainwright and Marandet 2013).

This interest geographers have shown in the ways states are seeking to shape parenting, and the ways parenting cultures emerge in particular contexts, is in evidence in my current research on enrichment activities. The research was undertaken in an environment where state policies promoted the provision of enrichment activities through schools, and the dissemination of information about commercial and voluntary provision beyond the school gate (Department for Education and Skills 2007). It revealed overwhelming support from parents for these activities which were seen to be fun for children, to provide them with a safe place to play and, for clubs which involved physical activity, to promote child health through regular exercise (Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson 2014a). The clubs thus help parents manage the 'risks' of contemporary childhood – whether that be stranger danger or obesity – whilst also aiding their effort to fulfil that other imperative of modern parenting, ensuring children to have a happy, stimulating and enjoyable childhood (Furedi 2008). Moreover, the clubs were also seen to have longer term benefits for children's social and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986), as they extended children's social networks beyond their primary schools, at the same time as they developed their social skills (e.g. coping without parents, mixing harmoniously, teamwork, being a good winner and loser) (Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson 2014a). This enthusiasm for enrichment activities was tempered by appreciation of another core feature of contemporary parenting discourses, that parents should be responsive to the needs of their child (Furedi 2008; Hays 1996), and our interviews with parents and children highlighted the importance of children's views in decisions about which and how many clubs they attended.

As I emphasised in the previous section, our empirical work encompassed both middle- and working-class families. In the US context, Lareau (2002, 748) has argued that middle-class parents engage in 'concerted cultivation', for example fostering their talents through participation in enrichment activities, whereas working-class parents emphasise 'the accomplishment of natural growth', ensuring children are safe, fed and loved so they grow up and thrive in adulthood. Our research in Britain reveals a subtly different picture in which all parents value these activities, but where low-income working-class families are financially excluded from all but the free or very cheap, and local, opportunities, resulting in the lower participation rates in enrichment activities discussed above (see Section 3). Middle-class parents by contrast, whilst still having to balance their budgets, were much better able to afford children's activities. Financial costs were not the only ones involved, however, as children's participation involved a considerable amount of work for parents, in particular mothers, including sourcing and booking activities, preparing children and kit for attendance, chauffeuring them to activities and sometimes watching them participate in, and helping to organise, their enrichment activity (Mattsson 2002; Lareau and Weininger 2008). The implication was that children's activities shaped many middle-class

families' use of time-space, producing busy social lives for the children, and often frenetic (though sometimes sociable) caring work for the parents (Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson 2014a).

This very particular study of enrichment activities in the Global North can provide us with some broader insights into the place of parents and children in children's geographies. On the one hand, it illustrates that whilst children's geographers have envisioned children as competent social actors whose world views should be heard, we have not simply focused on children's worlds in isolation (cf. Ansell 2009), but have also engaged with significant others in children's lives, including in this particular project parents (and, as we will see in the next section, educators). In this sense, whilst for sociologists resisting the focus on the 'forces of socialisation' mattered to new social studies of childhood (Jenks 2004; Prout 2005), geographers, who were not weighed down with the same disciplinary baggage and whose early work was strongly shaped by feminist perspectives, have been much more happy to study children in the context of institutions such as families and schools. Geographical research of this ilk has the potential to explore the influences on young people's lives alongside analysis of children and youths' own experiences and world views. In the familial context, for example, concurrent research with parents and children has been used to explore a diversity of issues in the Global North ranging from access to public space, to family drinking cultures, to welfare reform and working parenthood (Valentine, Jayne, and Gould 2012; Carver et al. 2013; Harden et al. 2013; F. Smith 2013). In the Global South, this emphasis on public space is also seen, but more attention has also been paid to the ways young people whose parents have either passed away, are ill or not immediately available are linked into wider family and institutional networks and systems (R. Evans 2010; van Blerk 2012; Benwell 2013; Riley 2013).

On the other hand, the focus on parents in my current empirical research demonstrates how children's geographies extend not only beyond micro-analyses of children's everyday lives, but also beyond analyses of how other institutions or agents shape young people's lives, to explore the ways adults' lives are shaped by the presence (or absence) of children. Geographies of parenting do not simply matter as they shape outcomes for children, they also matter to parents, and this is perhaps increasingly true as we witness a shift towards discourses of intensive mothering (Hays 1996) and the contemporary politicisation of parenting (Faircloth, Hoffman, and Layne 2013) in the Global North. In a context where the presumed duties and daily practices of parents are changing, we need to continue to build on earlier feminist traditions and explore the consequences of these developments for adults as well as their offspring. Moreover, Vanderbeck's (2007) point that this focus on intrafamilial intergenerational relations should be matched by one on extrafamilial intergenerational relations is well made. The title of our journal *Children's Geographies* is, in this respect, somewhat problematic (as is Holloway and Valentine 2000b) as it does not encapsulate in two words the diversity of work we undertake. The Royal Geographical Society Research Group on *Geographies of Children, Youth and Families* is somewhat more rounded (as is Holt 2011), but it too contains its exclusions with the privileging of intrafamilial over extrafamilial relationships. There is no perfect label for our research as sub-disciplinary definitions inevitably place imperfect boundaries on the flow of intellectual ideas and indeed people. Nevertheless, the question of how we relate of other parts of the discipline and interdisciplinary contexts continue to matter, and is the subject of the next section.

## 5. Thinking beyond the sub-discipline

In the twenty-first century, it has become increasingly easy to address an audience of others interested in children's geographies as dedicated conferences and conference sessions have emerged, alongside the re/emergence of journals such as *Children's Geographies* and *Children, Youth and Environments*, and growing interest in the field by publishing houses. This initially raised

concerns that the 'block politics' which are required to establish a field might eventually produce a 'gated community' (Aitken 2004, 172–175). This has not happened. In terms of geography as a discipline, children's geographers have not confined their publishing efforts to narrowly sub-disciplinary journals, but have been very active in writing in the high-impact discipline-wide geography journals. Indeed, I am sure many of us who write in the field do not actually define ourselves as children's geographers, or at least not solely as children's geographers, as our interests encompass but also extend beyond this field of research.<sup>3</sup> Research in *Children's Geographies* has also remained interdisciplinary in its outlook. Robson, Horton, and Kraftl (2013) have shown that the people publishing in the journal are interdisciplinary in nature, both in the sense that the majority of first authors are from outside geography, but also in that disciplinary diversity is common in jointly written papers. Moreover, there are numerous examples of where geographers publish in other disciplinary contexts (Mills 2011; Robson et al. 2013).

This culture of engagement beyond children's geographies is also evident in my empirical work with Pimlott-Wilson, and I want to take a brief detour into the details of our argument in order to later illustrate a broader point. Neoliberalism has been a defining drama of the twenty-first century geography, and we used the focus on educational reform in our study as a natural bridge to the broader literature on the localised production of neoliberal policy. The educational reforms which interested us were shaped by New Labour who understood education as a crucial economic and social policy (Reay 2008). Their policies placed greater emphasis on schools' role in child enrichment, empowering headteachers to target the needs of their school community in order to educate flexible citizen-workers, and ensure current and future social inclusion. Our interviews reveal that these state actors have very different interpretations of their client groups: headteachers' representations of parents in higher income schools coincide with normative models of parenting found in Government policy (Lister 2006; Reay 2008); by contrast, in low-income schools, the image of an ideal parent only emerges in headteachers' accounts in opposition to their construction of the parents of children attending their school. Although child enrichment activities were valued by headteachers in all socio-economic areas, these differential understandings of their client base influence the implementation of policy. Headteachers in low-income schools adopt a future-orientated perspective on childhood seen in wider Government policy (Lister 2006; Mayall 2006) and seek to enhance children's future social mobility by ensuring their access to activities which develop social and cultural capital. Headteachers in higher income areas draw on alternative narratives about childhood as a time for freedom and family life to question the very busy schedule of some children (Katz 2008), suggesting that this time might be better spent with parents who are envisioned as highly competent. Notwithstanding the provision of extra clubs in economically disadvantaged areas that New Labour's policy stimulated, some activities remain more widely available in higher income schools where parents have greater ability to pay for them (Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson 2012).

This analysis of headteachers' approach to neoliberal educational reform in the context of child enrichment activities allows us to make three broader contributions to debates about the localisation of neoliberal policy. First, our study emphasises the importance of the peopling of that state (Peck 2004) not simply in terms of the policy-making or technocratic elite (Bailey and Maresh 2009; Larner and Laurie 2010), but also of the everyday public sector workers who, as agents of the state, shape policy as it emerges in practice. Second, we contribute to the emerging geographical literature examining which types of subject positions are normalised in neoliberal policy, and which are seen as in need of intervention (MacLeavy 2007; Elizabeth and Larner 2009; Raco 2009). Specifically, we demonstrate that local state actors can both reproduce national policy discourses about ideal parenting and childhood, and in other instances rework them as headteachers draw on alternative models of parenting and/or childhood in

localisation of ‘national’ policy. Third, we show how the localised production of one contingent form of neoliberalism shapes geographically and socially uneven public service provision, including that designed for children, youth and families (Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson 2012).

This recent research is but one example of the ways geographers have used research in children’s geographies to speak to broader debates in the discipline. The benefit of such an approach is not simply to demonstrate to other geographers that children, youth and families matter, and that study of them can enhance understanding of the ‘big’ questions in the discipline such as neoliberalism, though this is useful. More than this, it also situates the experiences of children, youth and families in this broader context, thus allowing a more fulsome understanding of the changing nature of their lives. I argued in the previous section that children’s geographies need to explore both wider influences on children and the impact children have on others’ lives. This analysis of the importance of the state embodied in the actions of headteachers demonstrates the benefits of linking these different types of research together in one project. In this example, it allows us to examine what different children think about enrichment; how their parents’ value and resource it; and how it is shaped by state attempts to create a flexible and educated population in which social cohesion is advanced. It is this type of multi-layered analysis – built on a willingness to engage with children as both agents and a socio-structural category, and diverse institutions such as the family and the state – which helps us bridge the local/global, micro/macro approaches in children’s geographies (Holloway and Valentine 2000a). The primary difficulty in this respect is cost because, as the acknowledgements to this paper make clear, such studies are not cheap to undertake.

However, whilst I want to champion the efforts children’s geographers have made to learn from and contribute to wider bodies of knowledge, this should not be read as cause for complacency. There are examples across our field of interest where more needs to be done but here, for sake of space, I will make the point with just two examples. Possibly, the most commonly heard concern is that there is too little research on children outside of a narrowly defined Global North (Dyson 2008; Skelton 2012) and – whilst research agendas in the Global South are not solely framed in relation to development – concern has also been expressed that there are insufficiently critical links between children’s and development geography (Tisdall and Punch 2012). Thus, despite a steady stream of research from diverse nations across (parts) of the Global South, Majority World children remain under-represented in children’s geographies, much as research on the Global South is under-represented in human geography as a whole. Moreover, intellectually, there is more that children’s geographers could learn from development geography, and vice versa, in a productive engagement which T.A. Smith (2013) argues would cause both to rethink some of their fundamental assumptions. Less regular concern is expressed about children’s geographies position in newly emerging fields of study. My own experience in geographies of education is that, as new fields of research develop in size, we need to be alert to and challenge the ways their formation can exclude both existing research by children’s geographers, and children, youth and families as the objects of study (Holloway et al. 2010).

However, the world beyond children’s geographies is not simply an academic one, and we also need to consider the policy implications of our work. The policy relevance of my recent empirical research is clear cut, as it traced both how headteachers sought to shape provision and what parents and children thought about enrichment activities. Indeed, we did work hard to maximise its benefit, for example co-producing guides to best practices with outreach practitioners, co-organising local authority training and planning days, writing policy reports for third sector organisations, as well as feeding back to our participants. This endeavour is not without its pitfalls. Some of these reflect the practicalities of politics. Our research and policy work spanned the last years of the Labour Government and their replacement post May 2010

with a Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition. Initial policy continuity meant few problems, but as the local government cuts introduced by the right-wing coalition began to bite, many of the people we had trained lost their jobs and services disappeared. Other pitfalls centre on political and academic strategy. Most notably, there is a complex politics at play when examining the localisation of neoliberal policy over whether to seek minor improvements in policy implementation, or engage in more thorough critique of the project of neoliberalism (Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson 2012). In this instance, for example, whether to engage with providers to make services more accessible to 'hard-to-reach families', or whether to engage in a critique that explores how contemporary neoliberal policy individualises responsibility for structural problems (here by promoting participation in enrichment activities as a route to self-improvement and social mobility without challenging the capitalist system which creates, and indeed relies upon, inequality). In practice, this need not be an either/or decision but the balance between the strategies is a difficult one to negotiate.

## **6. Conclusion: diverse pasts, presents and futures**

This keynote lecture is entitled 'Changing Children's Geographies' and my overarching aim has been to explore this body of work as an intellectual endeavour whilst using my own empirical work to illustrate the different routes taken and the paths sometimes avoided on this intellectual journey. What my four-fold reflection on different threads in our sub-discipline demonstrates is that the histories of geographies of children, youth and families are neither singular nor linear in their development. The influence of diverse intellectual traditions is evident in this history which features both winners and losers, real and apparent breaks with the past, as well as moments when old tensions re-emerge, sometimes in very different guises.

The first point I want to make by way of conclusion is that these histories of continuity and change in our thinking matter and that, even as we see ourselves individually as more than simply children's geographers, it is worth paying attention to constructions of sub-disciplinary history. In one respect, the realisation that knowledge has not always been this way is empowering. What is fascinating about academia is the ways ideas develop, break and change over time, and if we want to take new leaps forward in understanding, recognising how far we have come, and how previous academics have changed ways of thinking, is inspiring in itself. In another respect, a healthy appreciation of diverse sub-disciplinary trends provides a strong vantage point from which to engage with new ways of thinking. I was interested in Prout's (2005) assessment that in naming a new paradigm for the new social studies of childhood, he (and others) had, in some senses, overegged the case to make a point:

In order to establish their distinct contribution, novel intellectual initiatives, such as the new social studies of childhood, frequently overstate their case, overplaying their differences from earlier formulations. (2)

Likewise, Cresswell (2012) has argued that recent developments in nonrepresentational theory have been based on only a partial understanding of past traditions, an incomplete picture against which the newness of nonrepresentational theory can be asserted. This overegging does not mean these new ways of thinking have nothing to offer, they do. But a well-informed view of the histories of children's geographies can be a valuable tool in helping us negotiate some of the extremes of academic debate, enabling us, to continue the culinary analogy, to produce a pudding with an appropriate balance of ingredients. So, for example, I would argue that an appreciation of feminist geographers' work on parenting has been important in saving geographies of children, youth and families from an overly narrow focus on children's micro-worlds

that the new social studies of childhood might otherwise have stimulated (Holloway and Valentine 2000a), and recent Special Issues in this journal on Parenting (Jupp and Gallagher 2013b) and Education (Holloway, Brown, and Pimlott-Wilson 2011) continue to show the strength of our research beyond the all-knowing child. Similarly, Mitchell and Ellwood (2012) have highlighted the dangers of nonrepresentational approaches which jettison an appreciation of power relations seen in socio-structural approaches to childhood, but maintaining an awareness of these enduring axes of difference in reworking children's geographers engagement with nonrepresentational theory is producing valuable results (Holt 2013; Kraftl 2013). An understanding of our history does not tie us to the past, but it can contribute to less excessive geographies which are open to new ideas, and which contextualise their potential benefits with a fulsome awareness of what we might want to jettison from our existing modes of analysis, but also what we might want to keep, combine or use to refine these novel ways of thinking.

My second point of conclusion centres on the fact that the diversity in our past is matched by an ever expanding variety in the present. It is a sign of the sub-disciplines growing vitality (Tisdall and Punch 2012) that I have not been able to encapsulate the whole of sub-disciplinary thinking within one lecture, when in co-authoring the introduction to *Children's Geographies* (Holloway and Valentine 2000b) this did seem like a more reasonable goal. In conceptual terms, while I have discussed links with developmental psychology, the new social studies of childhood and feminist thinking, there is much more I could have said about affect, bodies, childhood work and caring, emotions, life transitions, mobility and so on and so forth. In empirical terms, my discussion has been grounded through reference to my contemporary research in the Global North, but there is more that could be written about children in the Global South and in historical contexts. The partialities of my account in part reflect the difficulties of containing an exploding field within the confines of one paper, but in broader intellectual terms they are to some extent inevitable, shaped (though not straightforwardly determined) by my positionality. Knowledge is not and cannot be neutral, and accounts of histories are always shaped by the intellectual heritage, social position and intellectual intent of their author (Women and Geography Study Group 1997). Put simply, I do not and cannot speak for the whole of children's geographies; having a series of keynotes is therefore crucial as it will allow a diversity of authors to provide equally partial and situated – but hopefully substantially different – insights into nature of children's geographies.

Finally, I want to argue that diversity is strength as we engage with the theme of this conference, new geographical frontiers. The issues facing children, youth and families are varied both within nations and across the globe, and will change as we go forward. Brief reflection on the content of my lecture will make plain some of my own world view. I have set out a picture of children's geographies which foregrounds children's own lifeworlds, places these in the context of wider social differences and examines the importance of parents, other actors and institutions in shaping, and being shaped by, children's lives. In so doing, I have paid attention to the importance of ideas about childhood, and appropriate adult-child relations, which emerge in, shape, and are reshaped through different socio-spatial contexts. However, even as I offer my own world view for show I appreciate that this is not the only agenda for children's geographies, and that others will point to different routes forward. My point here is not a relativist one; I have already made clear that I think it is important to evaluate different modes of thinking both in their own terms and from the vantage point of other intellectual traditions. It is this climate of rigorous intellectual debate between academics who are open to, but constrictively critical of, others' views that will genuinely strengthen a field of research which I find fascinating. Thus, the agendas for children's geographies should, in my view, be shaped both by a well-developed appreciation of our diverse intellectual histories and a positive openness to our own, and indeed others, differences.

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## Notes

1. This paper was first presented as the inaugural Children's Geographies Keynote Lecture at the Royal Geographical Society/Institute of British Geographers Conference in 2013.
2. It is noteworthy, however, that a focus on development does remain strong in some other disciplines (Jenks 2004).
3. It is interesting to reflect on who makes up, and who affiliates themselves with, a sub-discipline. I refer during this paper to 'we' or 'our' but in reality a shifting mix of people contribute to children's geographies. In the question and answer session after this lecture was presented, I referred to one of my colleagues as a children's geographer, a label she rejected seeing herself as a development geographer (who has undoubtedly enlightened our understanding of young people's lives in the Global South). I consulted my own curriculum vitae and noted that I had listed myself as a social geographer, with one of my more specific interests being in geographies of children, youth and families. Thus while I am happy on occasions to be labelled as a children's geographer, this is clearly not my only disciplinary identity. This shifting mix of associations is, I would argue, a strength which networks geographies of children, youth and families with other parts of the discipline (and beyond).

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