

# CHILDREN'S PERSPECTIVES ON THE WORLD OF WORK

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## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In research about work and career development adolescence and adulthood are in the centre of attention. The importance of childhood is rarely discussed (Porfeli & Lee 2012; Palladino Schultheiss 2008). At first this neglect seems reasonable. Nowadays childhood is mainly understood as a special protection and education period. Generally work, not only in its exploitative formations, is mostly regarded as a threat to children's wellbeing. Nevertheless a few career theories consider the early years of life. Donald Super divided career development in different stages. During the so-called growth phase children until the age of 14 develop initial ideas about their future occupation (Brown 2002, 5). Linda Gottfredson showed in her circumscription and compromise theory that the vocational wishes of boys and girls are more influenced by gender roles and social background than their actual capabilities from an early age on (Gottfredson 2002). Even if children do not participate actively in employment their daily lives are still shaped by it. This includes the use of time and space in their families as well as social resources and risks (Kirchhöfer, 2012, 35). Ellen Galinsky, who conducted a study with 1.023 children from the third till the twelfth grade in the United States, pointed out that children know more about parental work than adults would expect: „(...)We may not talk *with* our children about what we do and the way we feel about our work, but we definitely talk about it *around* them. And - particularly if something is troubling us - the children are listening " (Galinsky, 1999, 228, emphasis in original). These results fit with the new childhood research where girls and boys are regarded as important subjects with specific knowledge, skills and abilities in the present and not only as adults in the future (Andresen & Hurrelmann 2010; Groundwater-Smith/Dockett/Bottrell 2015; Harcourt/Einarsdottier 2012, Heinzl 2012).

What vocational wish do you think I am?

You can write down suggestions below.



## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Which understandings of work do children develop, from the age of four till ten?
- Which learning processes take place?
- What connections do children in this age range see between education and work?



## METHODS & DATA

- Grounded theory approach
- Participatory-oriented research design
- 15 semi-structured interviews and drawings

*I see work as [mmmh] work , work , work , so practically go to work, work there something, program computers, sewing and so on. And then walk back from work to home or ride a bike [engine noise] or by car [engine noise] or when working in another country by airplane [engine noise]. And then I go in a certain house , a hall or simply do it at home. It can be at home if you, for example, have to write a message with the computer or something. Sometimes I have to travel to countries and this is not at my cost , but at the cost of the company . And then I get money for the trip and then [...] I get the normal salary and then I go back home. And then I understand that work usually takes quite long.*  
(Ben, 7 years old, translated from German to English)



## FINDINGS

Children develop understandings, vocational aspirations and value judgements of work and career paths from kindergarden age on. Both gender and social orders play hereby an important role, especial social background influences children's vocational aspirations much earlier than Linda Gottfredson assumed in her theory. Children also change their vocational aspirations over time and can explain the reasons behind. However they have only a few ideas how to actually get to a vocation. Furthermore they also spend time at workplaces, usually of their parents or in educational institutions. They also learn about social relationships within company structures. Children point out worries that their families cannot live a good life without enough paid work. They also regard some of their own activities as work, especially learning for school and house work.



## LITERATURE

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- (further literature online—see QR code)

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