



CHC EPISODE 2: TEACHING CHILDHOOD AS DISCOURSE FOR PROFESSIONALS

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Interview with Jonas Qvarsebo and Johan Dahlbeck available [online](#)

CHILDHOOD: History and Critique (CHC) is a series of interviews, commentary, and happenings in historical studies of childhood presented by Dr. Patrick J. Ryan, Kings University College at Western University, Canada.

Since 2011, each May sixteen students from [Kings University College – Canada](#) and [Malmö University – Sweden](#) have joined an international exchange seminar in the study of childhood. Students travel to each other's countries attend lectures on the history of social institutions and critical thought; we discuss a common set of readings.



Students and Faculty of the Kings-Malmö International Comparative Seminar in Childhood Study. May, 2013 – London, Ontario.

Admission to the program is competitive and drawn from the undergraduate programs in [Childhood and Social Institutions](#) at Kings, and within the [Faculty of Education and Society](#) at Malmö. The students' professional paths lean toward the field of education – complimented by their interests in social work, law, and health care. The course provides an avenue for those headed into the helping professions to read and think about childhood more critically. For many of them, it provides their first opportunity to travel across the Atlantic. Much of the learning happens through the relationships between students. A number have made second-trips to Canada or Sweden building upon the friendships initiated by the seminar.

The seminar's comparative readings, discussions, and lectures prompt students to reconsider their categories. Typically, English Canadians are at pains to distinguish themselves from Americans, but maintaining this winkle of identity in a situation where the Scandinavian-North American comparison is paramount becomes precarious to say the least. Even a brief introduction into Swedish social policy or educational practices makes the comparative weakness of social democracy in Canada obvious.

Pulling students more deeply into cultural comparison, Professor Lars Trägårdh's presents to them the idea that a more individualistic sense of familial, sexual, and community relations – a ["Swedish theory of love,"](#) – helps explain the divergent trajectories of North American and Swedish childhood policy since WWII.^[1] Trägårdh's analysis requires that the nation-state stand as a unity of discourse. In my own [lectures](#), I offer students a less state-centered, but equally structural, history of childhood and disciplinary institutions in the English-speaking world.^[2] In contrast to these presentations, Professors Qvarsebo and Dahlbeck trouble structural thinking by introducing the possibility that ideas and practices of childhood have been more dispersed, protean, discontinuous. Rather than coherent power-knowledge structures, discourse might be examined as genealogy – a family tree with diffuse sources that do not necessarily follow national, state (or other recognized) historical boundaries.^[3]

Above – find a conversation among three of the four instructors of the exchange seminar: [Jonas Qvarsebo](#), [Johan Dahlbeck](#), and myself. We discuss our collaborative relationships, the practical details of the seminar, and the challenges of attempting to introduce historical critical research into undergraduate childhood studies curriculum.



Notes

[1] Henrik Berggren and Lars Trägårdh, "Pippi Longstocking: The autonomous child and the moral logic of the Swedish welfare State," in *Swedish Modernism: Architecture, Consumption, and the Welfare State* edited by Helena Mattsson and Sven-Olov Wallenstein (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2010): 10-22.

[2] The lectures elaborate on the argument presented in Patrick J. Ryan, "Discursive Tensions on the Landscape of Modern Childhood," *Educare Ventenskapliga Skrifter* (2011: 2): 11-37.

[3] Johan Dahlbeck, "Hope and Fear in Education for Sustainable Development," *Critical Studies in Education* v. 55, issue 2 (2014): 154-169; Jonas Qvarsebo and Thom Axelsson, "Lutherans, Value People or US Citizens: The Ever Present Dream of the Good Citizen," in Fejes, Andreas, Nicoll, Kathy (ed.) *Confession, Education and Lifelong Learning*, London (Routledge, 2014).



Patrick J. Ryan is Associate Professor at Kings University College at Western University - Canada with appointments in the Childhood and Social Institutions Program and the Department of History. He is a co-founder of H-Childhood (est. 1998) and author of *Master-Servant Childhood: a history of the idea of childhood in Medieval English Culture* (Palgrave, 2013).



Johan Dahlbeck is senior lecturer in Child and Youth Studies at Malmö University. He is interested in the writings of Benedict Spinoza, and has used a genealogical approach toward the philosophy of education. His work has appeared in the *Journal of Philosophy of Education, Educational Philosophy and Theory, Studies in Philosophy and Education, and Critical Studies in Education*.



Jonas Qvarsebo is senior lecturer in Child and Youth Studies at Malmö University. He is interested in history of childhood and youth, power and discourse. His work has appeared in *Paedagogica Historica*, and in many Swedish scholarly publications such as *Perspektiv på skola och barndom, Från storslagna visioner till professionell bedömning: Inledning, and Bedömning av barn i förtärad kommunikation*.