



## **Colloquium: Naughty Children Make Sense: An Ethnographic Account of Children, Misbehavior and Control in Preschool**

Speaker:  
Sally Galman

Date / Time:  
February 13, 2014 - 4:00pm - 5:30pm

Venue:  
10th Floor, Pixel A, Azim Premji University

### Abstract:

While many contemporary popular cultural discourses in the US and other Western locations recognize and commodify children as distinct persons engaging in the middle class project of expressive individuation, much public and early educational policy has simultaneously intensified the control and regulation of children, children's culture and children's bodies and emotions in early education settings. Prout (2000) suggests that late modern schooling might be characterized by "practices directed at greater surveillance, control and regulation of children" (p. 304). This ethnographic study of a group of children in a rural New England community preschool setting explores rural children's lived experiences negotiating such control and contradiction. At its core, this paper is a story about naughtiness and the potential for mischief-making on the parts of children, teachers and a rural community. As schools themselves undergo radical centralization and teachers experience workplace intensification and other effects of the commodification of early childhood "readiness", children are conceptualized as containers for future economic productivity, and utilitarian, rather than expressive, individuation. Meanwhile, the competing and contradictory discourses of the child as a nostalgic or expressive project also do little to realize children's actual participation in social life or full personhood. This study suggests that rural schooling settings in the US, where technological and spatial realities both "shrink space" (Corbett, 2009, p. 2) and enlarge it as "phantasmagoric" (Giddens, 1990, p. 19), may muffle some aspects of these contradictions, and with them the Tayloristic conditions of late modern schooling. The New Elizabethtown Preschool children and community created liminal spaces where both political and individual practices that are "leaky and viscous" (Griffiths, 2006, p. 398) disrupted regimes of control and individuation. These created opportunities for destructive as well as generative, resistant "unruliness" (Khanna, 2012) for children and adults alike. While it is important for rural

ethnographers to resist the lure of facile romanticization of rural schooling and rural spaces, the generative possibilities afforded in this particular study context were largely borne out by findings.

A Note on the Speaker:

Sally Galman is Associate Professor in the Department of Teacher Education & Curriculum Studies, University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Her research interests are: 1) the anthropology of childhood and childhood studies, 2) gender studies, including but not limited to critical explorations of girl culture, carework and motherhood, and 3) the working lives of female primary school teachers, their nascent feminized and/or feminist practices in the classroom and the way they make sense of doing carework. Her interest in the lives of care-workers, mothers and the youngest children stems from her belief in their vulnerabilities in the contemporary policy environment, but also in their abilities to be "unruly" agents of resistance and change (Khanna, 2012). Along with colleague Laura Valdiviezo, she is the Editor-in-Chief of Anthropology and Education Quarterly. Dr. Galman grew up in northern Japan and attended Punahou School in Honolulu, Hawaii.