



Colloquium: Sedimenting Labour through Schooling: Colonial State and Working Children in Early Twentieth- Century India

Speaker:

Sarada Balagopalan, Associate Professor, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, New Delhi

Date / Time:

November 7, 2013 - 4:00pm - 5:30pm

Venue:

10th Floor, Pixel A, Azim Premji University

Abstract:

The contemporary deployment of formal schooling as the ‘natural’ antidote to ‘child labour’ evades the complex history of the relationship between the two. This historical terrain is marked by a vast unevenness of the modes in which an apparatus of formal schooling materialized in the lives of working children. The discursive and practical field of early twentieth-century schooling, wherein various pedagogic experiments with working children emerged, was situated on an imperial terrain where distinctions were already being shaped and justified through the colonial ‘civilizing mission’. The economic expediency that often underlined these ‘civilizational’ imperatives has been laid bare through archival research on how natives came to be produced as plantation, factory and other types of labour. But, the ways in which their children were reproduced as labour, using a parallel discourse on the kind of schooling ideally suited for working children and children of labouring populations, has been less researched. My paper will provide a glimpse into how the modern colonial apparatus of schooling in the early twentieth century was deployed to naturalize the learning of labour in the lives of working children as well as lower-caste and tribal children, categories that often overlapped in colonial India, just as they do now. In attempting this rather sizable discussion, the effort is not to provide a comprehensive nor definitive mapping of various sites, practices and effects. Instead, I try to make broad connections across sites and emergent practices to disclose the politics that underlay this early twentieth-century moment in which modern schooling was systematically deployed to ‘improve’ the lives of marginal children by ‘including’ them in school.

A Note on the Speaker:

Sarada Balagopalan’s research is on post-colonial childhoods. Trained in education and anthropology, her work foregrounds the tension between children’s work and schooling as a key

site where discourses of colonial modernity, the ‘developmental’ nation-state, late capitalism, and current transnational efforts around children’s rights get played out. Her related research on elementary education engages the contemporary policy regime in light of the experiences of first-generation school goers and their communities. Using the 2010 Right to Education Act as its point of departure, Balagopalan’s new research on schools in Delhi looks at ‘aspirations’ as a productive node to map emergent imaginations of childhoods within distinct caste/class communities, as well as in the legal and political spheres.

Balagopalan’s work has also involved efforts to translate her research interests into curricular and related interventions in elementary education. She served as Chief Adviser for the National Council for Educational Research and Training’s middle-school Social and Political Life textbooks (2005–08), and is one of the founding editors of Contemporary Education Dialogue, the bi-annual interdisciplinary journal on education in South Asia. She is on the editorial board of the journal *Childhood: A Journal of Global Child Research* and guest-edited a special issue of this journal in August 2011. She has been published in *Economic and Political Weekly*, *Feminist Theory*, *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth*, and *Contemporary Education Dialogue*. Her book on post-colonial childhoods is forthcoming in 2013.