

Children's Work in Southern Africa ¹

MICHAEL F.C. BOURDILLON

Emeritus Professor, University of Zimbabwe, Zimbabwe

Department of Sociology

P.O.Box MP167, Mount Pleasant, Harare, Zimbabwe

mbourdillon@mango.zw

Abstract. This article questions the applicability of international standards on children's work to such situations as are found in South Africa. Differing contexts affect ideas of what is appropriate for children. Although South Africa has a developed economy and technology and aspires to full participation in the developed world, poverty remains a problem, as does quality and accessibility of schooling. These factors, together with different cultural views on children and growing up, affect experiences of childhood and of school, making them very different from the experiences of young people in the developed world. Although few children in South Africa are in regular paid employment, those undertaking part-time paid work often see this as a positive feature in their lives, while many find that unpaid work in the home can be a problem. Such children doing useful part-time paid work, as well as those doing excessive work in their homes, need protection and support, yet escape attention in international discourse on abolishing 'child labour.'

Keywords: childhood; education; child labour; domestic work

1. Introduction

Much discussion in this journal is about cultural influences on literature and language. In this article, I raise questions about how social and economic experiences influence values and the way people think about what is appropriate in childhood, and about the place of work in the lives of children. Standards that are assumed in much of Europe to be universal cannot easily be applied to the very different contexts of Africa, with their different experiences of childhood and of education. This creates a tension in South Africa, with its advanced economy

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