

Children and Work Research Series – Session 6

Dr. Matías Cordero Arce

Title: Play and work, continuum or dichotomy? Playfulness and the possibilities of children's emancipation *in* and *through* work.

Abstract: A vast and consistent amount of research on children's work has enriched our knowledge of working children worldwide, especially organizations of working children in the majority world (NATs), that are collectively and intergenerationally struggling for their rights, with special emphasis on their right to a dignified work. The aim of this presentation is to pose the need to confront this alleged emancipatory struggle of children for their rights, with centuries-old critiques of work as bearer of alienation and exploitation, that is, as a hindrance to any significant conception of rights-as-freedom. In a time of emerging new forms of exploitation and precarity under neoliberal post-Fordism and in which feminist and Marxist critiques come together to talk of *antiwork* politics and *postwork* imaginaries, the claims of working children must necessarily engage with these critiques in order to consolidate their emancipatory potentialities. To move this dialogue forward I suggest that a fertile possibility might be to rely on what many scholars have described as a play-work continuum, referring to that playful coming and going from *otium* (play, leisure) to *negotium* (work, business), which has been identified as the normality in hunter-gatherer societies and most non-industrial societies, and which has also been identified in the lives of most working children throughout the world. Digging into this continuum is done being aware of the current co-optation of play and leisure by the "creative industries" and, in general, of their use as new forms of control in the workplace. But with this caveat in mind, this approach allows to acknowledge the possibility of a healthy porosity in the border between play and work, which, if struggled for, might help to carry on with Liebel's (2004) call to strive for the transformation of children's and adults' work into a meaning-generating free activity.

Bio: Matías Cordero Arce is an Independent Researcher and an Educator at a Young Offenders' Institution in the Basque Country. He holds a LLB (Catholic University of Chile) and an MA and PhD in Sociology of Law (University of the Basque Country) and has presented, lectured and published widely on issues related to children's rights. He currently lives in Vitoria-Gasteiz, Basque Country, with his wife Ainara, daughter Maialen, and son Xabier.