Bimodal Mission Advancement in Ministry with Street-living and Working Children

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Abstract
In a multi-disciplinary approach, contemporary childhood perspectives in sociology, urban studies, international development and theology are looked to for insight in understanding the street-children phenomenon within Latin America (macro perspective) and Cochabamba, Bolivia (micro perspective). The study includes findings resulting from case-study research of the Early Encounter Project in Cochabamba. The research looks to what has come to be known as the emergent paradigm for a new sociology of childhood and missiological foundations in developing a convergence theory that contributes to a theoretical construct for engaging with street children.¹

Keywords
Bolivia, child agency, child protagonism, child protection, field research, street children

Introduction
The street-children phenomenon in Latin America today is frequently portrayed as if it were something found only in contemporary society. Children living and working on the street is not a recent development.* Street children have been present since at least the seventeenth century. Early accounts tell of children and youth wandering about the cities of colonial Latin America, begging, stealing, and loitering.²

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In contemporary society, children found roaming the city streets are perceived as something other than ordinary. Evidence suggests that the term “street children,” and its equivalent in Spanish, was coined in order to define children who do not fit into what is perceived as a normal category. In other words, those found playing in the street, park, or garden do not receive special terms because they are within the realm of perceived normality, yet those who sleep and spend long hours in the street are abnormal and must be assigned a particular category to describe their uncommon lifestyle (Glauser, 1997: 151–52). This lends to the belief that children on the street do not fit into a typical “childhood” regardless of the context or conditions in which they live.

Children who live or work on the street are typically portrayed as victims and passive recipients of adult care. As children they are figured to be incapable of making decisions that bring hopeful responses to constraining situations. Mission action has historically responded to children from an ideology that evokes thoughts of helplessness and victimization. Recent shifts in childhood interpretation point toward the notion that children are social actors, capable of both action and contribution. This moves mission theory away from traditional paternalism that recognizes children as only passive recipients. Mission theory and action are beginning to point toward new concepts that incorporate the idea that children are not just objects of mission, but rather social agents capable of far more than they have traditionally been granted by regulatory and protection policies. This idea is precisely what the findings of this research (see below) acknowledge.

Theoretical underpinnings for new understandings of childhood today look to Philippe Ariès and his groundbreaking book on childhood. In 1962, with the release of Ariès’s book *Centuries of Childhood*, came an insight that shook the academic world and affected future studies of anthropologists, sociologists, and historians alike. Ariès chose to write primarily about Western concepts of childhood and the “history of the idea of family,” including the essential perception of childhood (1962: 10). Of special recognition in the writing of Ariès is the concept of change within childhood. Ariès was one of the first to argue that the very notion of childhood is constructed and changes within different periods of time.

New notions of childhood have arisen out of Ariès’s original contribution. One particular social theory of childhood helps to develop a theoretical framework for what emerges out of the field research conducted for this study. The emergent paradigm for a new sociology of childhood promotes the following central ideas: (1) childhood is understood as a social construction, not a universal concept; (2) childhood is understood as distinct from biological maturity; (3) childhood must never be disjointed from other social variables like, class, ethnicity, or gender; (4) the relationships of children and their specific cultures deserve to be studied independently of how adults think about childhood (this means that children must not be viewed as socially inactive objects, as is frequently found in structural determinism); (5) there must be room for constructing and reconstructing childhood in society and children must be perceived as the primary actors in this role; (6) ethnography is the best method due to the place children are given in communicating their own thoughts and
opinions; and (7) the double hermeneutic in the social sciences must be kept in mind when seeking to understand the local childhood phenomenon (James and Prout, 1997: 3–8).

As a theoretical framework for the research itself, the emergent theory points to new notions of childhood within street-living and working children in Latin America. In particular the issue of children as social actors in society vis-à-vis their need to be protected is analyzed through a case study in Cochabamba, Bolivia. The methodology focuses the study toward understanding missional engagement with this population of young people. The research contributes to new approaches of caring for those most marginalized in their communities.

Locally Constructed Childhoods

Given the new directions in understanding childhood, this research recognizes the need for developing a context-specific understanding of childhood experiences that will inform missional practice. This understanding is needed given the amount of missional engagement with children that is currently being promoted in Christian circles today. In particular, a theoretical construct is needed in order to develop a framework in which research can seek to understand the local experiences of children that are living and working on the street. In response to this research, local outreach and care can be developed in a way that is consistent with life experiences and not based upon assumption.

As a result of the emergent paradigm for a new sociology of childhood, children are understood as social agents in the construction of society and not mere victims or passive beings. This in itself is a new development that potentially helps children recognize their God-given abilities and place in the kingdom of God. Children are not just identified as compliant individuals under the sway of social structures, but rather as individuals who are constantly bringing about change to society.

Responding to the Emergent Paradigm

There are two positions that are juxtaposed in current missiological reflection and children care theory today. One position is that which recognizes children as agents, and the other is that of protectionism. One of the primary theoretical gaps involves the idea that children are social actors (with emphasis on human agency), yet also need protection (emphasizing constraining structures in society). These two notions appear in both secular and missional engagement in Latin America and are primarily portrayed as either/or experiences.

Little missiological theory looks to a reconciliation between the two concepts in caring for children at risk. As churches, development agencies, and other faith-based organizations (FBOs) seek to care for at-risk children, a missiological construct leading to the development of practical models is required. This missiological theory begins to take shape in the following pages.

In light of the theoretical gap that appears in the emergent paradigm, other related issues have also come to the surface. Several noted weaknesses of the paradigm are analyzed. One issue is the inference that children are independent individuals. It is
important that we realize that children are dependent on adults. Young children are significantly dependent on adults and according to biblical tradition they should be guided by them.\(^6\) Another concern is focused on the idea that the emergent paradigm and other social-construction theories are hard pressed to produce ideas that prevent practices that, while culturally acceptable, lead to harmful results. If we follow the line of thought that childhood is completely relative to local constructions, child rights and other protective measures are rootless. Biblical notions of justice and dignity become a counterbalance to what could be construed in malignant ways.

**Theological Contributions**

While the emergent paradigm is helpful, it falls short of a comprehensive theory for mission given the lack of theological substance necessary for missiological theory-building. Theologizing within the field of childhood studies could potentially take this study in several new directions, yet in keeping the research focus in mind, it is most appropriate to build this section around language of the *imago Dei*.\(^7\) It is to this theological reflection that missiological groundwork for Christian care of street-living and working children is developed.

Among other things, the study of God’s image in humankind includes new insights into human agency and dignity. Because of this, the *imago Dei* is a key theme for theologizing in childhood. As Colin Gunton reminds us, “We cannot articulate a doctrine of the human creature without putting this concept somewhere near the centre” (1998: 195). Given this chief place of the *imago Dei* in theological anthropology, it is crucial that any study on children include this foundational concept.

What this section hopes to add to the conversation is a theological discussion that will open the door to understanding the place of children as social actors with agency in missional engagement. Additionally, the *imago Dei* concept leads to valuable insights on human dignity that seek to counterbalance some of the tendencies within the emergent paradigm that could lead to morally relative treatment of children and young people in society.

Genesis 1:26 is the base text for understanding the *imago Dei* in the Old Testament: “Then God said, ‘Let us make human beings in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.’”\(^8\) This passage is most referenced in speaking to issues of the *imago Dei* and is the primary text for understanding this important issue in this study.

The historical context must first be acknowledged. Jürgen Moltmann (1993) is helpful in developing an understanding of the *imago Dei* especially in light of its connection to ancient Near Eastern conditions. In focusing on the first chapter of Genesis, Moltmann develops a comparison with Egyptian theology in identifying the Pharaoh as a type of direct image-bearing manifestation of God. In royal theology, the Pharaoh was the primary representative of God on earth. And “according to the ‘representation’ thinking of the ancient east, the Pharaoh was actually present in the statues which he had set up in all the provinces of his empire” (1993: 219).
The notion that the Pharaoh was the exact replica of God on earth was an acceptable idea to those within that historical context. Of note is the idea that the Pharaoh’s imagery as God could be manifested in statues. The story of creation was identifiable for the wandering people of God; for it was well known that there were those who identified themselves with the deity on earth. Scripture takes the phrase, “Then God said, ‘Let us make human beings in our image, in our likeness,’” and radically changes the notion that the people of God were so used to hearing and seeing. Instead of focusing the image of deity upon the one individual, God clarifies that in creation, his image was laid upon all of humanity. The implications are helpful in understanding the place of dignity and human agency in child and adult alike.

The development of the notion that the image of the deity does not just rest upon a single individual is important in distinguishing that the *imago* is a universal trait that is passed on to all who are made by the Creator, including babies and children. Now those most powerful in society are understood to be on the same human level as that of the homeless child. Christ radically notches up the discussion of human dignity in children by placing them in a preferential position of care. This occurs as Jesus discusses cultural mores and speaks of greatness in terms of caring for children (Mark 9:33–37; Matt 18:1–2, 4–5; Luke 9:46–48).

The teaching of Christ on this subject is rather “ironic, for children occupied the lowest rung on the social ladder, and caring for children was a low-status activity. But according to the principal of the eschatological reversal—‘whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all’—the humblest service characterizes the greatest” (Gundry-Volf, 2001: 43). Gunton remarks, “The teaching … is that some likeness or similarity to God characterizes the being of the whole human race” and is not just limited to those in power (1998: 197). Not only are the powerful able to create history and bring change to society, but now those who traditionally were insignificant are understood to have that inherent ability as well.

**Case-study Experience**

In part, the emergent paradigm for a new sociology of childhood is affirmed at certain levels through a case study of the Early Encounter Project in Cochabamba, Bolivia. Case-study methodology is a helpful way to understand research issues found within a specific organization or movement. Specifically, the methods of data collection included in the research are: informal and formal (focused) interviews, observations, focus groups, and collected documentation from the Early Encounter office and affiliated FBOs. Children that were researched were between the ages of seven and eighteen and were those primarily connected to the Early Encounter Project.

The Early Encounter Project is formed through a city-wide alliance and is supported by 11 local churches and 17 FBOs. All are evangelical in nature. In addition to the churches and FBOs, an interdisciplinary ministry team (facilitating body) provides assistance to the alliance in the implementation of the project. Two other organizations provide strategic support: Viva—Together with Children and Toybox.
The Early Encounter methodology is based upon the idea that children must be prevented from developing a street lifestyle and be encouraged to leave the street at an early stage in the development process. This strategy focuses especially on those children who are gaining interest in a street lifestyle or are heading in that direction. The issue of encountering street and working children at an early stage of their street-lifestyle development is a key intervention identified by researchers and practitioners alike (see Hecht, 1998; Lusk, 1989; Mickelson, 2000; Kilbourn and Sexton, 2006).

Early Encounter methodology not only recognizes that children need early intervention, but understands children themselves as highly involved in bringing about change to other needy children and society at large. The research points to significant action and transformation in society by children who have come out of at-risk situations. Children within this context are noted as social actors (often referred to as protagonists in Bolivia and other parts of Latin America) who bring about change to society and Christian projects.

Fieldwork, Data Collections, and Analysis

Prior to leaving for Bolivia, theoretical propositions were developed from the theoretical framework (the emergent paradigm for a new sociology of childhood) and other complementary theories. This methodology is consistent with case-study research. Based on the propositions, the data was organized around six units of analysis focused on (1) empowerment, (2) dialogical relationships, (3) child protection, (4) child participation, (5) asistencialismo (tendency to over-help and maintain children in the street), and (6) paternalism. Of particular interest for this study is unit number three. The theoretical proposition states that child protection, when applied with a proper understanding of child protagonism, results in a beneficial relationship between the Christian project and child. This is the central guiding proposition that acknowledges the main theoretical gap found in precedent research and identified in the emergent paradigm. In part, the research sought to acknowledge the theoretical gap while developing alternative approaches that would emphasize theoretical developments based on missiological concepts.

A key variable in this study is a concept referred to as child protagonism. Child protagonism is a term that is used in much of Latin America and at its core points the way forward in acknowledging new perceptions of childhood, which include the notion that children are to be respected as social agents who construct their own lives and bring change to society (Liebel, Overwien, and Recknagel, 2001: 380).

In addition to child protagonism, the place of protecting children is a key theme in the Early Encounter methodology and a prominent concern among the FBOs and the facilitating body. Child-protection policies are compulsory among affiliated FBOs. This manifests itself in the production of a manual within each associate project that is focused on protecting children from internal and external abuse, negligence, and/or manipulation.

Child protection is regularly raised as a concern by those who are advocates of child protagonism in the region. Some believe that protection policies are a façade for paternalism. One example of such a mentality is presented by child advocate Alejandro...
Cussiánovich: “The idea that children are to first be protected has long been a western culture paradigm for how to understand children.” The author claims that protection is often a “euphemism for authoritarian repression and control” (2001: 159).

The analyzed research data highlights the role protection plays in understanding child protagonism as a way of discovering new portrayals of childhood. In perhaps the most surprising results of the study, the case directs our attention to a new way of understanding child protection in light of the notion that children are protagonists in society and in the work of the FBOs associated with the Early Encounter alliance.

Protecting children is noted as an important development by both children and adults alike. In keeping with the research design, results come from documentation collections, observations, individual interviews, and focus groups. One example of such results is in regard to child abuse. Abuse (in all of its forms) was identified as an issue that must be addressed by the FBOs and local churches involved in the Early Encounter project. The former director of the alliance and now acting Andean region director for VIVA and the Early Encounter responded by noting that “when a child is at risk of becoming a victim of any type of abuse, be it physical, emotional or psychological we must seek to protect them.” This understanding found resonance with other responses by both children and adults. The Early Encounter methodology focuses heavily on prevention, believing the streets can be dangerous and not fit for especially young children. Protective measures are inserted into street ministry as well as in other modes of outreach, including education and residential and drop-in centers. Early Encounter’s street educator highlighted the need to protect children from not only the dangers associated with the street, but from the public as well. This sometimes leads to organizations heading up public campaigns aimed at changing our perceptions of street children.

In addition to protecting children, field observations note that providing for the spiritual, physical, and psychological needs of children is also important. Providing for children in the form of biblical instruction, housing, and nutrition is a key way to engage with such young people. This in particular was noted through observations in all the projects visited. Lunch meals and other basic needs are met through the participating FBOs. But, as noted by the Early Encounter leaders, provisions should not be carried out in a way that creates dependency. Where appropriate, children should be encouraged to take responsibility for their circumstances.

Focus groups and interviews point toward the notion that child protection should be a priority yet should not take place over the child as protagonist and hinder their participation as social actors. According to the Early Encounter facilitating body, children have a fundamental right to construct their own lives, and that includes how they are protected. In addition children and young people in such conditions are to be respected as to their human rights and dignity as people created in the image of God. As social actors, children are to be included, in most cases, in decisions that affect their welfare. Results highlight that in rare cases children should be forcefully removed from the street or other dangerous environments.

In conclusion, children are noted by both the Early Encounter staff and the children themselves as the primary constructors of their own existence. In the words of
15-year-old child leader, “children have the right to participate and should be active in defending the participation of other children as well.”

As a result of the analyzed findings, it must be acknowledged that while certain contributing factors in society have led to the street-children phenomenon in Bolivia, children are actively taking part in the construction of their lives, and in most cases continue to do so while involved in Early Encounter projects.

Children living and working on the streets of Cochabamba are visible in re-presenting a childhood that is distinct from other childhoods in the region. While the observed experiences and other data resulting from interviews and focus groups rightly acknowledge the constraining and contributing factors for this expression of childhood, nonetheless the children and young people featured are active in social development and are acknowledged as social actors within their context. Given the results that highlight the theoretical proposition mentioned in this section, what is needed for a missiological approach for understanding locally constructed childhoods while maintaining protective policies? How might this inform missional practice? It is to this issue that the study now turns.

**Missiological Convergence**

The development of the emergent paradigm as a theoretical framework and the field research of the Early Encounter Project result in a missiological convergence theory for street-children engagement. This theory integrates two primary means of ministry outreach noted in the fieldwork (child protection and child agency). These perspectives are described here as *mission from within* and *mission from without*. This convergence theory is coined *street-children bimodal mission advancement* and focuses on a convergence of the two modes that incorporate street-children engagement into mission theory.

The *mission from within* (Figure 1) mode creates opportunities for new options in ministry and places its emphasis on human agency, especially as recognized in the *imago Dei*. Human agency helps us to recognize the role of children in constructing society as actors. No longer are children viewed as passive and constrained by social structures, but rather as young people who are involved in the development and planning of Christian projects. This model is understood as a bottom-up approach where children are highly involved in the process.

This approach consists of what has been coined a *dual-instructive relationship* (in borrowing from Paulo Freire’s dialogical relationship), biblical notions of child participation, child rights recognition, and transformative action in the life of the child, family and community. All of these components are essential in the mission-from-within mode of ministry.

*Mission from without* (Figure 2) represents a conventional model to working with street-living and working children and is primarily adult-centered action focused on caring for children. This study recognizes the place of protecting and providing for children. This is primarily understood as a top-down approach. While it tends to be paternalistic to some degree, children are protected from dangerous environments and
their basic needs are met. The mode also includes some traditional adult-to-child teaching relationships, Bible study, and rehabilitation for children involved in drug use. All of these methods are primarily needed to care for the child in street-like conditions.

As a result of these modes, the research now recognizes the need for a convergence that moves the theoretical construct away from polarized opposites (viewed as a divergence) and now finds common ground as the two modes converge into a single bimodal convergence model. This new convergence of modes also responds to the problematic areas of paternalism and dependency. The union of these modes helps bring into perspective a process that moves away from a handout mentality where an adult views him or herself as the child-saver and incorporates a balanced understanding resting

Figure 1. Mission from within mode.

Figure 2. Mission from without mode.
upon human agency, protection, and providing for basic needs. As is seen in Figure 3, the two modes come together to create a convergence that incorporates significant components coming out of mission to street children today. This convergence of approaches results in multi-faceted programs that are sensitive to local constructions of childhood as recognized in the emergent paradigm.

**Conclusion**

Christian ministry to street-living and working children in Latin America is representative in diverse ways. Contemporary modes of ministry are explored in light of the theoretical framework known as an emergent paradigm of childhood and the findings from the Early Encounter case. Several dominant themes of this theory help to expand the conceptual boundaries of ministry to street children today. We now understand that we must take into account that children are not just victims with outstretched hands.

**Figure 3.** Bimodal convergence model.
They are the protagonists of their lives and highly involved in constructing local understandings of childhood.

Ultimately, the bimodal street-children convergence theory seeks to restore human relationships and relationships between children and their Creator. Children who were once living in crises due to human failure are regaining biblical interdependence and a proper image of themselves as children who have been created in God’s similitude. As protagonists, they are endogenously empowered to help those of us in Christian ministry reconfigure how mission engagement is carried out among this group.

The idea that children are social actors, capable of action and contribution, is understood as part of the missiological foundations and described as a mission-from-within response. If those involved only view the child as a passive recipient and victim, the process falls under paternalism. If adults fail to recognize children with agency, little trust will be established between adult and child. In essence there will be no locally constructed relationship between worker and child to speak of, but rather a relationship built on only a top-down approach.

In taking this discussion forward, it is suggested that children are not just objects of the mission of God, but rather transformative actors. This is precisely what has come out of the findings and is now submitted to missiological theory-building as a new way forward in developing missional care for children at risk. Children, who in many cases have aligned their faith with Christ, have chosen to act and participate in extending the kingdom of God. As missional entities care for children who are victims, they are now in a position to understand that they are also participants in creating new ways forward in protecting other children.

As noted above, missional responses frequently recognize social controls and the dangerous environments in which children live. This elicits approaches that emphasize methods that seek to protect, provide for, and train children. These are best represented by the mission from without mode. The position that represents agency, dual-instructive relationships, human rights and child participation is best represented by the mission from within mode. Both of these modes are now understood, as presented within the convergence theory, as elements that tie together bimodal mission to street children.

The positions are no longer presented as polar opposites within the street-children bimodal convergence theory. This new bimodal approach creates an understanding of mission to street children today, where children are understood to be both child agents and in need of protection and nurture. In recognizing mission-from-within and mission-from-without as legitimate modes of ministry we acknowledge the place of bimodal mission engagement with street children that leads to multi-faceted outcomes for missional outreach.

While the research was conducted in Cochabamba, Bolivia, the notion that children are active participants in society while also in need of protection is a missional response that can prove beneficial in other contexts. It is my hope that as mission engagement among this population moves forward this model will be tested in new contexts. This inevitably signifies more research resulting in contextually appropriate models for street-children engagement.
Notes

* In referring to children throughout this work it should be acknowledged that I am utilizing the United Nations definition and include anyone under the age of eighteen. Having said that, we must certainly recognize the developmental differences between those children in early childhood stages, middle ages and those of adolescence.

1. Research data and findings are re-presented from original fieldwork conducted for my doctoral dissertation. For more on this see Burch, 2010.

2. See Arrom, 2000; Blum, 1998; Hecht, 2002; Premo, 2005; and Rizzini, 2002 for more information on the early presence of street-living and working children.

3. The double hermeneutic here, incites us to go beyond the engagement process of the new paradigm and to respond to the process of reconstructing childhood in society (James and Prout, 1997: 8). The double hermeneutic in the social sciences is derived by Giddens as an interaction between theoretical positions (as a single hermeneutic) in which he considers lay actors’ engagement with reality (the other single hermeneutic). See Giddens (1976, 1984) for more on this issue. James and Prout identify the double hermeneutic as pronounced by Giddens as an essential understanding of the new paradigm given the reflexive components found in everyday social practices. So there is a theorizing engagement within the paradigm that is essentially for the scientific community and there is a process that has been adopted by the larger society and engages with the reconstruction of childhood in different contexts. The way this is understood is that there is both a need to develop theoretical frameworks for understanding childhood and a practical element which does the constructing within society. Children are part of this process as policy discussions now include the very subjects that are being discussed (James and Prout, 1997: xv).

4. One noted exception to this is the work of Glenn Miles. Miles suggests that protection and child participation should be understood as mutual approaches that lead to children being highly involved in the protection process (Miles, 2007: 162).

5. This is also promoted with the idea of protagonismo infantil as presented by Liebel, Cussiánovich and others (see Cussiánovich, 2001; Cussiánovich and María Márquez, 2002; Liebel, Overwien, and Recknagel, 2001).

6. While the primary focus here is not necessarily on developing a biblical argument for how Christians are to understand and raise children, that has been done in other places (see Barna, 2003; Bunge, Fretheim, and Gaventa, 2008; Gundry-Volf, 2001; McKenna, 1994; Stonehouse, 1998; Zuck, 1997), but rather on identifying the gaps in a social science theory and elaborating on those. Having said that, there are a number of biblical passages that help to identify and guide adults in their roles as parents, guardians, mentors, and leaders (see Ps 68:5; Prov 22:6; Isa 58:10; Eph 6:4; 1 Tim 3:4–5, 12; Jas 1:27).

7. The key verses for this study found in the Old Testament are Gen 1:26 and 9:6. The primary passage in the New Testament is Jas 3:9. Other significant passages in the New Testament, identifying the image of God within a christological context, are John 1:1–5; 2 Cor 4:4–6; and Col 1:15–23. The implications of this christological understanding of the image is that “Christ is the image of God in the ultimate sense … and is the divine image in that he is the one who reveals to us the glory of God” (Grenz, 1994: 176).

8. All biblical passages are taken from Today’s New International Version (TNIV) unless otherwise noted.

9. Data collection was conducted in Cochabamba from August 27 to September 21, 2008 with additional historical data verification in Quito, Ecuador (National Archive), September 24–26, 2008.
Observation periods led to conversations with directors, leaders, volunteers, and children. There were 67 short informal interviews and conversations lasting between 10 and 30 minutes that occurred during the observation stage. The data from these informal interviews was collected via handwritten field notes which were later transferred to a digital document upon leaving the facility or research location. In addition to informal interviews, there were 14 focused interviews conducted, lasting between one and two hours with an additional four interviews in which I participated. Five focus groups with a total of four adults and twenty children provided extra data for the verification of results. All interviews and focus groups were digitally recorded and transcribed. Data was later categorized, combed, and analyzed based upon theoretical propositions. Focused interviews were chosen given the limited time for data collection. This method, while still allowing for open-ended questioning, provided a necessary time restriction. The interview questions were first designed during the case-study protocol elaborated prior to leaving for Cochabamba.

In the case of children, confidentiality was verified through a human research ethics committee at Fuller Theological Seminary and appropriate guardianship consent and ethical guidelines were ensured by the author at all points in the research process. Research with children presents important considerations. For more on this see Burch, 2010.

This was true as of September, 2008.

Located in the UK, “Toybox is a Christian charity committed to helping street living and street working children and those at risk of becoming so, principally in Latin America” (Toybox, 2009). Toybox is a funding and associate partner with the Early Encounter Project. In addition, the organization is currently developing other Early Encounter projects, in partnership with Viva of Latin America, in a number of other locations such as Lima, Peru, and Guatemala City, Guatemala. Viva—Together with Children (formerly Viva Network) is an organization that is dedicated to equipping, mobilizing, and networking Christian ministries and churches the world over. Viva has become a worldwide movement, working with 25,000 workers and 8000 projects established in 48 countries. In addition to the international office in Oxford, England, the movement has regional offices in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and North America. The regional office in Latin America is located in San José and currently employs 13 full-time workers who help to oversee national and local networks throughout Latin America and the Caribbean (Viva—Together with Children, 2009).

A street-lifestyle development highlights the notion that children who are considered street children develop a lifestyle of either working or living on the street (or both). By including the term development, it is suggested that children progress in a street-like culture and lifestyle. This is contrasted with the idea that a child becomes a street child instantaneously upon first exposure.

Similar lines of thought are presented by Corsaro, 2005; James, Jenks, and Prout, 1998; and Jenks, 1982, 1996.

In case-study research, the researcher is encouraged to develop theoretical propositions prior to the fieldwork. These propositions are based upon the precedent literature and an appropriate theoretical framework (which in this case involved the emergent paradigm for a new sociology of childhood). Robert Yin remarks, “Each proposition directs attention to something that should be examined within the scope of study” (2003: 22). Ultimately, these propositions are then used to develop the analysis strategy and to help shape the data collection, interpretation, and theory development (2003: 111–12).

This Spanish term, protagonismo infantil, is difficult to translate into the English language, but when it is, it is frequently translated as child protagonism. Given the relative obscurity of the concept, child protagonism as a Latin American concept is not touched upon
often within Western thinking. This is rather recognized by Latin America researchers and expanded upon in work by Castillo (2004) and Unda (2004). See Liebel, Overwien, and Recknagel, 2001, for further information on the term and its use in the English language.

18. For more on protagonismo infantil, see Cussiánovich, 2001; and Liebel, 2007.

19. On this particular issue and others that relate, five focus groups were conducted with children and some adults while 16 focused interviews were carried out with adults affiliated with the Early Encounter alliance. Primary results underscore significant interest and insight in upholding the theoretical proposition. Other theoretical propositions in the study were not upheld. One example of discordance with a theoretical proposition is found with number one: empowerment is a means to creating protagonismo infantil. Results varied and actually led to a new understanding that child protagonism should be understood as a meta-category which results in the empowerment of children and not vice versa. It was intriguing to note little use of the term empowerment by those interviewed. The term was also absent in the collected documentation by both FBO personnel and the facilitating team. Upon asking about the idea there were mixed responses. This is not to say that the idea was missing in its entirety. For more on this, see Burch, 2010.

20. Interviews, focus groups, and observations provide for a triangulation of research data. Documentation was also collected for corroboration purposes.

21. One such public campaign observed was the NNATS march. In addition to pushing for an acceptance of the new Bolivian constitution, children declared, via banners and placards, their right to work and to do so in a protective and just environment. As a researcher I participated with the children in a three-mile march, followed up by a festival. Other such campaigns aimed at protecting street-living children and other children at risk is represented by the Buen Trato (good treatment) Campaign in which nearly 1200 young people participated over a 30-day period.

22. This is regularly referred to as asistencialismo, which highlights the way some FBOs and secular projects help to maintain children in at-risk conditions in creating dependency. More research is needed in this area.

23. It should be noted that all Early Encounter leaders agreed that children in life-threatening situations should be rescued, and if need be rescued by force to protect them from bodily harm.


References


**Author biography**