

Book review

School journey as a third place

By Zoe Moody, Ayuko Berchtold-Sedooka, Sara Camponovo, Philip D. Jaffé and Frédéric Darbellay (Eds.), London: Anthem Press. 2023. pp. 263. £80. ISBN 9781839986314

This beautifully crafted book begins with the editors, who are all from the Centre for Children's Rights Studies, University of Geneva, providing a sound justification for listening to the still often-overlooked voices, views and experiences of children on and about their school journeys. By taking what is essentially an everyday but in no way mundane activity as a subject of study in its own right, this fascinating and timely book reinforces the need to recognise, understand and respect children's voices, their independence and right to interact with the environment as they travel to and from school.

Harnessing the key unifying concepts of 'transitional space' or 'third space' (Oldenburg, 1999) to study the journey to and from school, this collective book encompassing 11 chapters is split into two sections. The first part explores the different theoretical frameworks developed around the school journey, and how they can be used to inform research methods for data collection and analysis. This section also skilfully showcases the innovative and creative approaches used by various researchers. The second part adds an interesting international element and perspective on empirical studies of children's experiences to and from school in different countries, and is a real strength of the book. While this international perspective demonstrates the similarities of the school journey for children from different parts of the world (common features include the coding of the school journey as a rite of passage, and the omnipresence of moderate parental fear), it also highlights the diversity at play. It demonstrates that while the school journey as a 'third space' can provide children with opportunities for freedom, independence, creative play and socialisation, it is not without its hidden dangers and perceived risks, as demonstrated in the third chapter which looks at the experiences of young girls in Cape Town and Abuja.

I began reading this book at the start of a new school year and naturally it made me reminisce about my school journey, particularly as a teenager, where I would travel by tube to and from secondary school. I can vividly recall the irate tube driver one summer afternoon shouting down the intercom that he would 'throw the lot of us off' if we 'didn't stop misbehaving'. It is with even greater poignancy that I now look at the school journey through the lens of a mother—my son, in his second year of secondary school, forsaking the bus to avoid 'grumpy bus drivers' for the freedom and excitement of the bike to get him to and from school; and my daughter, coming to the last years of her primary education, negotiating a half way drop off and pick up point between home and school. I wish I had read this book before I started the school run all those years ago, as it has encouraged me to rethink, reimagine and appreciate the joy, excitement and importance of children's autonomous mobility as they navigate and explore the school journey as a transitional or third space.

Overall, this is an excellent book which provides an interesting and invaluable insight into the everyday lives and geographies of children as they journey to and from school. By elevating children's voices, and providing them with a space to share views and experiences about their school journeys, this book reinforces the need to recognise, understand and promote children's rights to interact and form relationships with their environment, and the different spaces and places they encounter on a daily basis. After all, it is these mundane activities and everyday encounters which all come together to shape children's identities and understanding of the world. In the context of increasing threats to outdoor leisure time and decreasing access to urban environments, this thought-provoking book shows how research can help support the creation of child-friendly and inclusive school journeys, and for both parents/carers and children alike, this can only be a welcome development. This book, given its theoretical and multidisciplinary approach, will be of interest to a range of readers including researchers, practitioners and policy-makers.

Biography

Ellen McHugh is a Senior Lecturer in Education.

Reference

Oldenburg, R. (1999). *The great good place: Cafés, coffee shops, community Centres, beauty parlors, general stores, bars, hangouts, and how they get you through the day* (2nd ed.). Paragon House.