Introduction

Children appear to be predisposed to learn the skills of their elders, perhaps from a drive to become competent or from the need to be accepted or to fit in, or a combination of these. And elders, in turn, value children and expect them to strive to become useful—often at an early age. The earliest tasks are commonly referred to as chores. David Lancy’s *The Anthropology of Childhood: Cherubs, Chattel, Changelings* (Lancy 2015a, cited under Surveys and Anthologies), in surveying the relevant literature, advances the notion of a chore “curriculum.” The author notes that the tasks that children undertake are often graduated in difficulty and complexity. These built-in levels, or steps, create a kind of curriculum that children can progress through, matching their growing physical and cognitive competence to ever more demanding subtasks. The anthropological literature on children’s work is both extensive and elusive. That is because, with the exception of Spittler’s *Hirtenarbeit: Die Welt der Kamelhirten und Ziegenhirtinnen von Timia* (Spittler 1998, cited under Animal Husbandry), no single volume is devoted exclusively to the subject and relatively few articles or chapters with work as the sole focus. In contrast, every ethnography of childhood and the family, as well as studies of subsistence systems, devotes some attention to the contributions of children and their “education” to the survival skills inherent to the culture. The same cannot be said for published material on the history of childhood, which, as yet, pays little attention to work. A distinction must be made between the chores assigned to children in the household and village and “child labor.” See the *Oxford Bibliographies* article Child Labor for more information on that subject.
Surveys and Anthologies

Lancy 2015a is an overview of the anthropology of childhood and includes a chapter on the subject of work and apprenticeship. Lancy 2016a is an anthology of recent field studies of children learning to work. Lancy 2016b discusses the processes involved in children’s learning, including work skills. Lancy 2012 surveys children’s work as various “chores.” Liebel 2004 complements the work of Lancy by providing a sociological perspective—primarily on children working for wages rather than in the village. Zeller 1987 offers a brief survey of children’s work in thirteen societies. Spittler and Bourdillon 2012, an edited collection, highlights recent work on children and work in Africa. Lancy 2015b presents a theory that explains why children seem to be precocious in their learning of critical skills.


  This chapter provides a theory (the chore curriculum) that accounts for the processes—psychological, ontological, and cultural—underlying children’s acquisition of subsistence and craft skills.


  A comprehensive overview of childhood, from a cross-cultural perspective. It includes a review of children learning to work, contributing to the family workforce, and laboring for wages.


  This article advances the theory that children’s competencies in the world of work usually appear ahead of the period when they are required to apply them in earnest. But various triggers including family crises, intensive labor requirements in agriculture, and catastrophic events (plague) may call for children to “step up.”


  A collection of four papers including an overview of the field (Lancy), and ethnographies of children’s work from Mongolia (Michelet), Brazil (Medaets), and Papua New Guinea (Little and Lancy).

This article reviews relevant literature in anthropology to support a model of the cultural and psychological processes involved as children learn critical work skills, especially the use of tools.


  This work covers a wide reach but is much more focused on children as laborers than as helpers and workers at home. “Cross-cultural” in the title should be “international.” The author is a sociologist and adopts the theoretical and analytical stance characteristic of that discipline. Though he does cite some anthropological literature on children’s work, it is drawn almost exclusively from the limited corpus of work published in German.


  The first volume to collect studies of children’s work, primarily in Africa. The main theme of the book is that children’s work is also the pathway to knowledge and that work must be studied in cultural context. Exploitative forms of children’s labor are discussed, but they are not the primary focus.


  Cursory survey of children’s work in thirteen societies. Available online for purchase or by subscription.

### Parental Attitudes

Almost universally, adults expect children to assist in the household and domestic economy at the earliest possible age. In most cases, parental expectations and children’s aspirations coincide. Children attend to the tasks that need doing and practice to improve efficiency. In some cases, children are rewarded for accepting the responsibility of mastering routine chores; more frequently, they are chastised or punished for laxity. Parents also expect children to learn either on their own or with the help of older siblings. Harkness, et al. 2010 initiated the systematic study of parental views. Studies in Mexico, Mali, Sudan, Kenya, Uganda, Papua New Guinea, Oceania, and the Arctic (Sanchez 2007, Whittemore 1989, Weisner 1989, Evans-Pritchard 1956, Goldschmidt 1976, Barlow 2001, Howard 1970, Guemple 1979) provide a diverse sample of such theories in action. Zepeda and Kim 2006 provides one of the few studies of parental views in a developed country, specifically Wisconsin dairy families.


  In contrast to Goldschmidt 1976, the people of the Murik Lakes emphasize the use of rewards and praise to encourage children to be diligent. Two areas are singled out for
discussion: gathering freshwater clams and gardening. Available online for purchase or by subscription.


Evans-Pritchard’s classic ethnography pays a great deal of attention to childhood. The Nuer do not acknowledge a child until the child is at least six years old, because “when he tethers the cattle and herds the goats . . . when he cleans the byres and spreads the dung to dry and collects it and carries it to the fire,” that child is considered a person (p. 146).


In the context of a more general ethnography, the author examines family life. Mothers are concerned that their daughters “learn proper housekeeping so that their husbands will not beat them for neglecting their duties, and so it will not be said that they failed to learn proper behavior from their mother” (p. 259).


Inuit children learn their culture—subsistence skills, particularly—without instruction by an adult. There “is remarkably little meddling by older people in this learning process. Parents do not presume to teach their children what they can as easily learn on their own” (p. 50).


Harkness and Super initiated the study of parental ethnotheories and have, along with colleagues, made substantial contributions to the literature. The Kipsigis of western Kenya characterize an intelligent child (*ng’om*) as respectful, polite, and responsible; “a girl who is *ng’om* . . . sweeps the house because she knows it should be done. Then she washes dishes, looks for vegetables in the garden, and takes good care of the baby” (p. 67).


Commenting on the parent as teacher, the author asserts: “In contrast to American parents, who seem to feel that knowledge is something like medicine—it’s good for the
child and must be crammed down his throat even if he does not like it—Rotuman parents acted as if learning were inevitable because the child wants to learn” (p. 37).


Study among an Indian population in Mexico that closely parallels Harkness, et al. 2010. In the village, all children (from the age of three) contribute to the family through work: “Work is something that is shared, that unites people and is dignifying” (p. 91).


Weisner makes a widely applicable observation that, if children want someone older to pay attention and offer assistance, this is most likely to occur as they attempt to carry out a chore or assist in the fields (p. 176).


This is a very important study of infancy and early childhood that includes work as a matter of course: “As a young girl explains matter-of-factly, ‘you must (work) for your elders. They will bless you.’ Implicit in her statement is the acknowledgement of elders’ authority over her. . . . She, in turn, exercises such authority . . . over children younger than she” (pp. 173–174).


Parents expected children to assist with household and farm work from an early age and “jobs” were matched to the children’s age and skill set. They felt that work built character.

**Historical Perspectives**

The historical literature can be divided into two epochs: before c. 1950 (Shahar 1990, Mitterauer and Sieder 1984, Heywood 2001, Lassonde 2005) and after c. 1950 (Ochs and Izquierdo 2009, Klein and Goodwin 2013, Bowes and Goodnow 1996, Wihstutz 2007). In the earlier period, parental views closely paralleled the ethnotheories described in anthropology: children are
expected to help out by doing chores from an early age. More recently, we see a role reversal, in
which children are no longer expected to assist with household maintenance or the domestic
economy, and children’s chores are now undertaken by parents or hired help. The section
includes three works that demonstrate the persistence, in Europe, of children’s work in the
domestic economy, respectively from Poland (Brykczyński 2014), Russia (Golovnev 2004), and
Switzerland (Schmid 2011).

• Bowes, Jennifer M., and Jacqueline J. Goodnow. “Work for Home, School, or Labor
   Force: The Nature and Sources of Changes in Understanding.” Psychological Bulletin

   In the modern middle/upper class, children no longer work. When queried, children treat
   “the term work as having one meaning only: waged work outside the home. Work is
   something that one ‘goes to’ and that is done in exchange for money” (p. 302).


   Photo essay depicting children’s lives in a Polish farming community.

• Golovnev, Ivan, dir. Malenkaya Katerina. Documentary film. Ekaterinburg, Russia:

   Film records three years (ages 3–5) in the life of a girl growing up in a Siberian reindeer
   herding community. Conspicuously, from the onset of the film, Katerina is depicted as
   carrying out numerous chores. Translated as “Tiny Katerina.”

• Heywood, Colin. A History of Childhood: Children and Childhood in the West from

   “As late as the nineteenth century, the majority of children . . . were . . . to begin
   supporting themselves at an early . . . age[,] 7 was an informal turning point when
   children were generally expected to start helping . . . with the little tasks around the
   home, the farm or workshop” (p. 37).

• Klein, Wendy, and Marjorie H. Goodwin. “Chores.” In Fast-Forward Families: Home,
   Work and Relationships in Middle-Class America. Edited by Elinor Ochs, and Tamar

   The chapter reports on an in-depth ethnographic study of middle class families. The
   authors find that, in spite of much cajoling by parents, children strongly resist doing
   chores or even taking care of their own room.

• Lassonde, Stephen. Learning to Forget: Schooling and Family Life in New Haven’s
One study, among many, that documents the resistance to universal schooling, on the basis that children are lost to their parents as workers or wage earners.


One carries away the message that, among peasants, the parent–child relationship was analogous to employer–employee. Emotional ties were weak, and the child’s obligation to obey and assist the parent was stronger than the parent’s obligation to nurture and bring up the child (p. 100).


In dramatic contrast to the ethos of the village, this study describes chore assignments in middle-class American families. Here, parents struggle to get children to take responsibility for their own self-care, let alone care for the family and household. A common scenario shows the parent serving the child, valet-like or pleading with the child to cooperate in the completion of a chore. Available online for purchase or by subscription.


A film that deals with a remote Swiss farming community where children are fully involved in farm and house work.


Peasant children observe parents at work and help by running errands, tending animals, and harvesting food from a young age: “They acquired their various skills in the course of work beside adults and under their guidance” (p. 243).


Study of families in Germany. Middle-class German parents do not expect children to do household work, and the children do not volunteer. Contrast immigrant families: “With us Africans it is tradition that you help doing the shopping and the household chores. It means showing respect to your parents” (p. 82).

**Running Errands and Marketing**
Often the very first chore assigned to children is to send them on errands. Delivering messages and presents (and bringing back gossip!) segues easily into marketing. The “errand” curriculum incorporates many “grades,” from carrying messages (at age five) to fetching firewood and water to marketing produce, hard bargaining, and making change for customers (by age eleven). Boys, whose virtue is less vulnerable, may be preferred over girls for many errands and as market stall operators. The articles highlighted provide a representative sample of cases in which children’s errand running/marketing is described in detail. Locations cover Guatemala (Nerlove, et al. 1974), Liberia (Lancy 1996), Côte d’Ivoire (Gottlieb 2000), Kenya (Wenger 1989), Venezuela (Ruddle and Chesterfield 1977), Tanzania (Raum 1997), Ghana (Clark 1994), Nigeria (Schildkrout 2008), and Mexico (Paradise and Rogoff 2009).


Children are not always merely pawns of those older; they may themselves “initiate . . . errand-running relationships in order to establish relationships with neighbors, more distant kin, or influential adults such as schoolteachers that may prove beneficial” (p. 367).


The Beng make the point that it is best to establish the child’s subservient status early: “Remember that in our language, one word for ‘child’ really means ‘little slave.’ As soon as the little one can walk confidently, don’t hesitate to send your child on errands in your . . . neighborhood” (p. 87).


This chapter describes children’s work in a Kpelle village, with particular attention to errand running. Children are favored as mobile messengers and traders because adolescents or adults seen in close proximity to neighbors’ houses might be suspected of adultery, theft, or witchcraft.


A good example of the curricular nature of chores. Available online for purchase or by subscription.

Detailed description of a girl emulating her mother’s behavior and learning the skills needed to market produce. Available [online](#) for purchase or by subscription.


Parents can be quite strategic in sending children to deliver food and presents to potential caretakers: “Children . . . take . . . cooked food to their grandparents. . . . One sees little troops of children carrying pots and moving hither and thither throughout the country. They are taking supplies to their relatives” (p. 197). Originally published in 1940 (Oxford: Oxford University Press).


An illustrative case from South America: “Between eighteen and thirty months of age, depending on its physical ability, the child begins to act independently as a messenger. . . . Seven- or eight-year-olds fetch water in the morning, enough for the whole day. Each afternoon they must collect one day’s supply of firewood” (p. 31).


Because of restrictions on women appearing in public, children act as agents for their mothers in running errands and conducting marketing transactions.


An ethnographic study of children’s work, with an emphasis on the early years. Giriama mothers acknowledge that assigning chores, especially errands, conditions children to become good workers: “A mother who does not expect her children to help is remiss, even neglectful” (p. 93).

## Child Care

Anthropologists had consistently observed that much of the care of the very young is in the hands of somewhat older siblings, but Weisner and Gallimore 1977 brings this truth to a broader audience. “Sib-care” has become an important part of the anthropology of childhood. Representative descriptions of sib-care are provided from Sulawesi, Mexico, Kenya, Papua New Guinea, the Marquesas, Afghanistan, Central Africa, Madagascar, and Burkina Faso (Broch

In this excellent ethnography of childhood, Broch makes an observation that is frequently echoed in the literature: “Bonerate children have little need or desire to play with dolls or to play mother, father, and child because they are integrated into many daily household chores including looking after babies and toddlers” (p. 110).


Discusses the importance of sib-care in pastoralist society.


Among the Kipsigis of Kenya: “Child nurses are expected not only to carry the baby around, but also to play with it, sing lullabies to it, feed it porridge if the mother is unavailable, and help the baby in learning to talk and walk” (p. 227).


Sib-care in a forest-foraging society (p. 200).


The primary focus of the study is on sib-care and the role of the playgroup in the lives of young Marquesans. Because Marquesan playgroups range farther afield, unlike the Maya, the wishes and moods of young charges may be ignored.


Survey of children being cared for and learning from older siblings.

In this study of child care, the author notes the importance of sib-care by girls as training for motherhood (p. 111).


Reports on the role of children as caretakers of the very young. Translated as “Childhood, culture and moral emotions: About socialization of fear and rage in rural Madagascar.”


This is a very thorough study of childhood in the Eastern Highlands of New Guinea and one of the few detailed descriptions of sib-care (pp. 180, 187).


Landmark study highlighting the importance of sib-care. Available [online](#) for purchase or by subscription.

### Foraging

Foraging is a form of subsistence in which the community depends on wild resources, including trapped, fished, or hunted meat; edible and medicinal plants; and plant material, for shelter and clothing. In one of the earliest and most thorough studies of (Ju’Hoansi) foraging (hunting and gathering), the physical and intellectual challenges of successful foraging kept children at home in camp until they were into their teen years (Hames and Draper 2004). This first section focuses on children gathering plant material among the Hadza in Tanzania (Blurton-Jones, et al. 1997; Marlowe 2010; Crittenden and Zes 2015), several groups in Botswana (Bock 2002), the Maya in Belize (Zarger and Stepp 2004), Dominica (Quinlan, et al. 2016) the Mikes in Madagascar (Tucker and Young 2005), and the Bakkarwal of India (Rao 2006). Martinez-Rodriguez 2009 is representative of a number of recent studies that focus on children’s environmental knowledge, an obvious prerequisite to successful foraging.


In contrast to the Ju’Hoansi, Hadza children are able to acquire calories from gathering (baobab fruit) and hunting (small game) from as young as four.

Bock has done several quantitative studies to assess the productivity of children in differing subsistence systems.


Hadza children are excellent foragers and this paper details the social dynamics of foraging, particularly food sharing.


Surveys literature showing that, in some foraging societies, children contribute little to subsistence (pp. 325, 334). Available online for purchase or by subscription.


Although this work is quite broad, Marlowe’s particular interest is childhood and foraging skills. The Hadza are noteworthy, especially among foragers, for the early onset of self-provisioning through foraging (pp. 153–158).


*Tsimane* children are very active foragers, gathering various wild plants used for food, medicine, and cáñere, which is used to stuff mattresses. The study also contrasts male and female foraging activity.


Survey of children’s knowledge of the environment and skill in harvesting wild plants.


Discussion of children’s acquiring ethnobotanical knowledge (p. 58).


Authors compare children’s foraging success in the Kalahari and in southwestern Madagascar in showing the importance of the local ecology.


Reviews several studies demonstrating Mayan children’s “precocity” in learning salient aspects of ethnobotany. That is, without instruction or even much encouragement by adults, children, foraging in groups, effectively identify and gather a range of useful plants. Available online for purchase or by subscription.

Hunting

Hunting is perhaps the most challenging skill set for a child to acquire (MacDonald 2007). Detailed cases are provided here from Australia (Bird and Bird 2005), Paraguay (Hill and Hurtado 1996), Brazil (Peters 1998), Borneo (Puri 2005), Tanzania (Crittenden, et al. 2013), and North America (Goodwin 1942).


Young Martu hunters acquire much of their own food, particularly by capturing goanna lizards (pp. 135, 142).


A critical study of Hadza boys’ development as hunters as studied through observation and measurement of the food value of their “catch.”


Description of the stages in becoming a competent hunter (p. 475).

Children forage for edible fruits, larvae, and small animals from an early age, but usually within hearing of their mothers (p. 222). Boys play at hunting, but they will be well into their teens before they can reliably obtain game and into their twenties before reaching full competence (p. 223).


Quite comprehensive survey of the literature.


Learning to hunt in this tribe in the Amazon region (pp. 90–91).


Some discussion of how children learn to hunt (pp. 233–236, 280, 282).

**Maritime Foraging**

This area of the ethnographic record contains some of the most thorough studies of children’s skill acquisition, including studies from the Torres Straits (Bird and Bird 2000; Bird and Bird 2002a; Bird and Bird 2002b), Micronesia (Johannes 1991), Samoa (Odden and Rochat 2004), and Japan (Hill and Plath 1998).


Note that children don’t just enact slower, less competent replications of adult foraging, they exploit different food sources that adults ignore.


Study of children foraging on the reefs in the Torres Islands.


This article delineates with great precision the development of marine foraging skills among children on Mer Island. Children learn the reef ecology and how to take advantage
of it from a very young age and without any direct instruction. Six-year-olds are already quite proficient. Available online for purchase or by subscription.


Divers learn largely on their own; one mentions specifically being rebuffed as she attempted to attach herself to her mother as a novice. One can gather shellfish effectively after only a season or two; however, “[i]t takes at least a decade to absorb the full corpus of moneyed knowledge about the reef environment and its inhabitants” (p. 218).


The author describes in some detail the development of a fisher. Characteristically, boys are prevented from using costly tools (bone fishhooks, in this case) until they have reached a certain level of skill and maturity (pp. 88–89).


Study of observational learning on Samoa in three areas, including learning to fish (p. 45). The authors found that children learned fishing through observation and practice, with no evidence of teaching by an adult.

**Animal Husbandry**

Children are heavily involved in the care of livestock. Commonly, a child will be given a single, young animal as a kind of pet. Also, we see a graded curriculum, from a small, easily managed animal to a larger animal or flock. A representative sample of cases is provided from the Solomons, Papua New Guinea (Hogbin 1964, Whiting 1941), India (Dyson 2014), Tanzania (Raum 1997), Ghana (Fortes 1970), Niger (Spittler 1998), Malawi (Read 1960), and Sudan (Katz 2004).


This is an ethnography of childhood— with an emphasis on children’s chores—in a Himalayan agro-pastoralist community. Dyson’s analysis focuses on the relationship between work and gender construction.

- Fortes, Meyer. “Social and Psychological Aspects of Education in Taleland.” In From Child to Adult: Studies in the Anthropology of Education. Edited by John Middleton, 14–
Fortes was one of the first anthropologists to view children’s acquisition of adult skills and ideas as “education”: “Every small Talensi boy of six to seven years and upwards has a passionate desire to own a hen” (p. 20). Originally published in 1938.


  Deals with young boys given a pig to care for (p. 39).


  Boys, particularly, are able to combine their duties as shepherd with vigorous play with friends: “Saddiq and Mohamed let the animals graze, joining two friends who had met them along the way to play shedduck, a game in which players hop holding one leg behind them, madly attempting to knock down their opponents while remaining standing” (p. 6).


  A child-centered ethnography of the Ngoni, Bantu pastoralists. Ngoni boys work their way up from tending a goat to a calf to sheep to a cow to multiple cattle—all the while observing and discussing cattle with older brothers. The “cow curriculum” is quite extensive (p. 133).


  An extremely comprehensive study of children’s work. Among the Touareg, girls and boys are responsible for the care of goats, and boys will transition to the more demanding care of camels. The long process of becoming a camel caravaner is described in precise detail, revealing the multistep character of the learning process.

This is an early and extremely important ethnography of childhood. Boys are given a piglet to raise (p. 47).

**Agricultural Work**

Agriculture provides a wide variety of niches that can be exploited by children; hence, they can make a contribution from an early age, even if it is just picking up fruits that older, more experienced pickers have dropped. It is also true that most skills required are rudimentary and that productivity will improve reliably as the child matures physically. This section offers a sample of ethnographic descriptions of children engaged in agricultural work in Papua New Guinea (Lancy 1983, Sorenson 1976, Hogbin 1970, Whiting 1941, Fajans 1997), the Solomons (Watson-Gegeo and Gegeo 2001), and Mali (Polak 2003).


  The Baining discourage play and, instead, direct children’s attention to gardening (p. 92).


  The Wogeo are more proactive, assigning a garden plot to a three-year-old. Even though the child is still too young to be responsible, he or she is to learn a sense of ownership and responsibility for food production (pp. 139–140). Originally published in 1938.


  Like Fortes (see Fortes 1970, cited under *Animal Husbandry*), Lancy treats children’s acquisition of adult skills in the village as analogous to education. In this multisite comparative study, he demonstrates the enormous cross-cultural variability in the complexity and length of this “indigenous education.” The contrast between swidden horticultural societies in the Highlands and coastal maritime forager/traders is particularly dramatic (pp. 121–122).


  The author describes Bamana children aged three, five, and eleven and their work in the bean fields. This very detailed ethnography illustrates the curricular, or developmental, character of children’s work. We see how the nature of the task varies with the age and
competence level of the child and how slightly older children serve as role models and
guides for their younger siblings (pp. 129–132).

- Sorenson, E. Richard. The Edge of the Forest: Land, Childhood, and Change in a New
  “Girls were not instructed in the art of gardening. Rather, while they were young, they
  began to play about the garden, often modeling their activities on those of their older
  associates. Eventually, this initially nonproductive (and, often, even destructive) activity
  began more and more to resemble the productive activity that sustained gardening as the
  basis of the Fore way of life” (p. 200).

- Watson-Gegeo, Karen Ann, and David Welchman Gegeo. “‘That’s What Children Do’:
  Perspectives on Work and Play in Kwara’ae.” Paper presented at the 27th Annual
  High population density has strained carrying capacity, so children are expected to “pay
  back” the resources they consume starting at three. A lengthy catalogue of child-
  appropriate chores is cross-referenced to the typical age of the child worker. An eleven-
  year-old girl is expected to be fully capable of managing both household and gardens.

- Whiting, John W. M. Becoming a Kwoma: Teaching and Learning in a New Guinea
  The Kwoma also set aside space for the child’s garden (p. 46).

**Economic Value**

Several careful quantitative studies have demonstrated that, by their mid-teens, children in
agricultural societies actually “pay back” the resources their parents have invested in their care
(Nag, et al. 1978; Cain 1977; Reynolds 1991; Kramer 2002; Kramer 2005; Stieglitz, et al. 2013). These studies also explore the trade-offs between putting a child in school versus having them work in the garden (Skoufias 1994).

- Cain, Meade T. “The Economic Activities of Children in a Village in Bangladesh.”
  In this study from rural Bangladesh, the break-even point is twelve, and, by fifteen,
  children have produced more than they consumed in their first twelve years. Available
  online for purchase or by subscription.

- Kramer, Karen L. “Variation in Juvenile Dependence: Helping Behavior among Maya
In a Mayan farming community, children begin working in agriculture at an early age at tasks requiring minimal preparation, and by fifteen (girls) or seventeen (boys), their contribution exceeds their cost (p. 312). Available online for purchase or by subscription.


Kramer and colleagues compare the Maya to South American forest foragers. Mayan children achieve net production about five years earlier, suggesting that foraging skills take longer to acquire (p. 135).


Discusses the returns provided from investments in children. Quantitative data taken from studies in Nepal and Java. Available online for purchase or by subscription.


Comprehensive study including both quantitative analysis and ethnographic insights on children’s work among the Tonga in the Zambezi River valley. Children’s work consisted of child care and farming, primarily. The author also notes a wide disparity in leisure time by gender-favoring males.


This study, like others in this section, measures trade-offs in the allocation of chores versus schooling. Girls are more likely to be working; boys are more likely to be in school. Families with greater resources are more likely to send boys and girls to school. Girls’ work is primarily domestic; boys work is agricultural. Available online for purchase or by subscription.


This systematic field study measures the distribution of labor among children as a function of age, gender, season, and so on.

**Historical Perspectives**
Looking at the past, we see parallels between the historical and ethnographic records. Life for rural children throughout history has been entirely comparable to the village children studied by anthropologists. Occasionally, circumstances occur that alter the pattern, at least for a time. In the aftermath of warfare (and during the contemporary AIDS epidemic in Africa [Robson, et al. 2006]), the absence of adults drives up children’s participation in subsistence. In the settlement of the western United States, children “ramped up” their contribution to the domestic economy in response to the heightened labor demands of the frontier (West 1992). Mayall and Morrow 2011 shows how, during war time, childhood is curtailed as children replace parents and adolescent siblings who have been “called up.”


In Britain there was the “cogs” scheme (that is, children were encouraged to regard themselves as cogs in the war-work machine). Hundreds of thousands of children joined “cogs corps.”


Treats children as caretakers and substitutes for those sickened or killed by HIV/AIDS.


In the settlement of the western United States, children fulfilled many functions that, in the early 21st century, we would consider adult work: “Children, in fact, generally labored at a wider variety of tasks than either mothers or fathers. They were in that sense the most accomplished and versatile workers of the farming frontier” (p. 30).

**Gender**

This is one of the most thoroughly studied aspects of children’s work. Several generalizations can be made: that children’s work, like that of adults, is “gendered,” that girls transition from play to work earlier than boys, and that, whereas girls typically work in the shadow of their mothers, boys’ work takes them away from the household, keeping in the company of peers. In this section, three broad surveys are listed (Edwards 2005, Ember 1973, Blair 1992) as well as detailed case studies from Kenya (Wenger 1989), India (Nieuwenhuys 1994), Borneo (Nicolaisen 1988), North America (Schlegel 1973), and Mexico (Lipsett-Rivera 2002) and of Latin migrants to the United States (Orellana 2001).

Modern evidence of sex typing in chore assignments. Available online for purchase or by subscription.


  From a field survey of twelve societies: “Boys spend relatively more of their time playing. These sex differences are seen from age three onwards” (p. 87).


  “Sib-care” is preferentially carried out by sisters; boys contribute in the absence of a suitable female sibling.


  “Midwives greeted a baby boy with war cries, separated him immediately from his mother to indicate his future as a warrior, and gave his umbilical cord to an experienced soldier for burial far from home. In the first weeks of the boy’s life, priests pierced his lower lip to prepare him for the warrior’s lip plug. . . . Gifts presented to newborns at their naming ceremony had symbolic importance: for girls, a broom and a spindle, for boys, weapons” (pp. 55–56).


  “Children feel ashamed to engage in work of the other sex, and are often most particular about gender behaviors. My findings indicate that boys demonstrate this more passionately than girls” (p. 216).


  “Female tasks such as cooking and washing children’s clothes cannot be performed by a male without incurring the risk of ridicule. . . . Male tasks such as receiving guests and visitors, asking for loans and searching for wage work outside the immediate vicinity of the home, conversely, cannot be performed by females without the entire family losing face” (p. 69).

As in the village, girls are useful to their families at an earlier age than boys.


A discussion of work assignments and gender. Available online for purchase or by subscription.


A discussion of boy’s aversion to feminine chores (p. 100).

**Crafts and Apprenticeship**

Unlike subsistence skills, the acquisition of craft skills, such as pottery and weaving, is not always universal. Not every child or even the majority are expected to learn a craft. Crafts are not viewed as strictly utilitarian. A certain power or aura is associated with mastery, and often there is a significant body of “lore” or magic attached to the craft. In many cases, the aspirant craftsperson must pay for the privilege of working in the shadow of an expert. Some crafts are perceived as relatively easy to master, whereas others require a lengthy apprenticeship. The novice must perform menial work for an extended period. Formal education in craftsmanship may lead to rigid replication of customary patterns, whereas more informal transmission may promote experimentation and innovation by the novice. However, learning crafts shares many attributes of the chore curriculum. Learners are expected to rely mostly on the observation and replication of skills rather than instruction. Punishment for “laziness” or incompetence is also more likely than praise. This section will examine children’s work in the context of informal learning and should be read in conjunction with the article *Education*.

**Surveys and Anthologies**

The first comprehensive survey of apprenticeship in the ethnographic record has been recently published (Lancy 2012). Earlier attempts to review the literature on crafts and apprenticeship and to draw out generalizations have been made (Lancy 1996, DeCoker 1998). Four anthologies exist, three dealing with anthropology (Coy 1989; Stark, et al. 2008; Singleton 1998) and one with history (De Munck, et al. 2007).

A wide-ranging set of papers, particularly strong in ethnographic descriptions of West African crafts.


At least five of the seven characteristics would be true of most apprenticeship models.


A range of cases from Europe, including silk weaving and purse making in 19th-century Vienna and cabinetmaking in 16th-century London.


This chapter synthesizes much of the ethnographic literature available at the time.


The review and analysis suggest that the pedagogy of the apprenticeship matches the informal pattern found in craft learning generally. What distinguishes the apprenticeship is the need to deal with sociological issues of social rank and wealth. The review includes a lengthy reference list. Available online for purchase or by subscription.


This volume follows from an international conference Singleton organized at the University of Pittsburgh in 1993. Although originally focused on apprenticeship, the scope expanded to include other settings and situations in which cultural patterns interacted with human learning.

A fine collection of reports on the transmission of skills, particularly handicrafts. The primary method employed by the authors is ethnoarchaeology.

**Pottery**

The literature on children learning pottery making is extremely diverse, ranging from archaeology (Crown 2002) to ethnoarchaeology (Bowser and Patton 2008) and to case studies in contemporary societies, including Japan (Singleton 1989), Niger (Gosselain 2008), Cameroon (Wallaert-Pêtre 2001, Wallaert 2008), Brazil (Silva 2008), Ethiopia (Kaneko 2014), Côte d’Ivoire (Köhler 2012), and Ecuador (Bowser and Patton 2008).

- Bowser, Brenda J., and John Q. Patton. “Learning and Transmission of Pottery Style: Women’s Life Histories and Communities of Practice in the Ecuadorian Amazon.” In Cultural Transmission and Material Culture: Breaking Down Boundaries. Edited by Miriam T. Stark, Brenda J. Bowser, and Lee Horne, 105–129. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2008. A particularly dynamic study in that the authors trace the pathway of knowledge transmission—mothers are the primary models but not the only ones—as well as the stages and outcomes; that is, they provide a great deal of insight into the process whereby young potters adopt novel styles.


This is a very thorough study of Ari girls’ acquisition of the craft of pottery. Significantly, the author notes: “The Aari language has no word that corresponds to the English ‘teach’” (p. 73).


A wonderful study of informal acquisition of pottery making. Stresses the importance of the child’s motivation and persistence.


Good explication of the “miniature” stage in craft acquisition, a common practice in which children are encouraged to assay miniature versions of the adult product (p. 235).


An in-depth ethnographic study of traditional craft pottery apprenticeship in Japan: “One Japanese term for apprenticeship is minari, literally one who learns by observation” (p. 14). Further: “When an apprentice presumes to ask the master a question, he will be asked why he has not been watching the potter at work, or the answer would be obvious” (p. 26).


A very complete breakdown of the developmental process, with age/task complexity levels carefully delineated (pp. 188–192).


A very rare case in which daughters undergo a formal apprenticeship with their mothers. Characteristically the mother as “master” treats her novice daughter quite harshly. Available online for purchase or by subscription.
Blacksmithing

The blacksmith studies (Coy 1989, McNaughton 1988, Lancy 1980, Morice 1982, Obidi 1995) are all from Africa, largely because of the importance of the blacksmith as both craftsperson and ritual specialist.


  Coy describes the blacksmith apprenticeship in the village of Kuikui, in the Kerio Valley of Kenya. It is normal to pay for the privilege, and one does not apprentice to one’s father. Direct instruction was rare, such as the smith’s occasionally calling attention to something the apprentice was doing (“now this is the difficult part”) or angrily berating him when he did something wrong (p. 120).


  Study of children incorporating their observations of the village blacksmith’s compounds and forge into their make-believe play. Discussion of the blacksmith apprenticeship. Available online for purchase or by subscription.


  In West Africa the blacksmith is often also a shaman, so there is a division between the transparent metalworking skills of the smith and the opaque political, religious, and medical knowledge. The apprentice spends years doing uncomfortable menial work, such as operating the bellows. The master lets the novice learn by trial and error, rarely corrects, and almost never actively instructs.


  In metalworking trades, apprentices are largely self-taught. “The apprentice constantly has to take all kinds of initiative and to . . . be . . . his own boss: if a tool is missing he makes it; if a piece of metal is necessary he looks for it; if a particular skill is lacking he . . . substitutes an alternative technique (p. 519).”


  Description of the process of becoming a blacksmith among the Yoruba. Available online for purchase or by subscription.
Weaving is a rich source of material for comparative purposes because there is literature from a broad cross section of societies, such as the Hausa (Deafenbaugh 1989), Tukolor (Dilley 1989), Navajo (Richard 1997), Berber (Naji 2012), Penan (Puri 2013), Gonja (Goody 2006), and Telefol (MacKenzie 1991), and includes both male and female apprenticeship (Aronson 1989, Greenfield 2004) and learning arrangements ranging from formal (Tanon 1994) to informal.


Weaving is women’s work, and if men attempt to learn to weave, they’ll be cursed with “impotency or death” (p. 151). Because all women are expected to learn to weave, “by age three, girls are seen playing at weaving on upturned stools in a way that indicates they have mastered the basic gestures” (p. 151).


This ethnography is particularly thorough in showing how the craft is broken down into components and the way in which the apprentice is restrained or encouraged to essay a new skill: “The structure of an apprenticeship is very rigid and conservative. The apprentice is not expected to innovate, alter, change, or improve on anything. He is to copy the master’s techniques . . . exactly” (p. 173).


Boys initially play at weaving or play with lengths of cloth and then gradually begin helping with easy tasks, like bobbin winding. Fathers may “prefer that another weaver should train their sons after they have acquired some basic skills during childhood, since they feel that they will not exert enough discipline in training” (p. 188).

Gonja (Ghana) weavers do not learn from their fathers because sons are too familiar with their fathers to show sufficient respect and fathers are too attached to exert adequate discipline (p. 254).


  Comprehensive, fully illustrated account of a long-term study of skill acquisition in the village. A rare case in which the skill acquisition process is studied.


  Extended coverage of the process whereby a girl learns to create the ubiquitous *bilum*, or net bag (pp. 100–106). All girls are expected to learn to make the simpler kinds of bags through observing their mothers.


  Author details the impact of schooling on Berber girls becoming weavers.


  This work thoroughly describes the process whereby individuals learn basket-making, some of whom will become quite expert. There is a clear emphasis on the initiative and social learning capacity of the aspirant basket-maker rather than the tutelage of an expert.


  Discussion of aspirant novice weaver repulsed by her mother, yet persisting and becoming a competent weaver nonetheless (pp. 38–41). Originally published in 1934 (New York: Macmillan).


  An extremely thorough ethnography of males learning to weave.
Woodworking

There are, unfortunately, only a few cases of youth learning woodworking from Venezuela (Wilbert 1976), Polynesia (Borofsky 1987), Micronesia (Gladwin 1970), and Amazonia (Chernela 2008).


  Author makes the point that overt teaching by an expert implies an unwelcome status differential, so experts and learners must be discreet. Case discussed is canoe making and repair (pp. 74–75).


  All males are expected to learn to make grater boards from their fathers, in part because of the object’s great symbolic and exchange value.


  The inhabitants of this remote atoll rely on large, oceanic outrigger vessels to travel great distances to other islands. Chapter 3 describes these canoes and the apprenticeship process that transmits knowledge of their construction to the next generation.


  The canoe is essential to the Warao way of life, and every male is expected to become a canoe maker. Fathers pay attention to their sons’ ripening skill but do not actively instruct, except at critical barriers in the learning process: “There is not much verbal instruction between father and son, but the father . . . does teach him how to overcome the pain in his wrist from working with the adze” (p. 323).

Priest or Shaman

There is considerable variability in this category, ranging from traditional apprenticeship (Bledsoe and Robey 1986, Reichel-Dolmatoff 1976) to ordeals or other tests that reveal one’s potential as a medium (Reynolds 1996, Katz 1981) to an almost “academic” curriculum (Bascom 1991).
A diviner must memorize enormous quantities of oral text. Hence, the apprenticeship more closely resembles formal schooling. Originally published in 1969.

Although the rewards of becoming literate in Arabic and an expert in the Qur’an and associated esoteric knowledge can be great, the majority of “students,” or apprentices, never realize those benefits. The apprenticeship is freely described as “slavery” in which knowledge is valued only if acquired through much suffering. Available online for purchase or by subscription.

Comparative study, but common to both cultures is the ability of the child to enter a trance or altered state of consciousness. Also notes that “long before people try seriously to become healers, they play at !kia-healing” (p. 62).

Kogi children are examined at birth for signs of their potential to become priests. The future priest receives a special education from birth and indeed is transferred to the home of the máma, who will become his mentor. The apprenticeship is long and grueling.

Becoming a healer is a long, gradual, and quite informal process. Children with some evident “gift” are attached to an older healer—often a grandparent—to shadow them as they collect and use medicinal plants.

This last category includes some interesting apprenticeships that do not fit neatly elsewhere. These include learning to become a tailor (Lave 1990), minaret builder (Marchand 2001), book illustrator and scroll painter (Jordan 1998), long-distance navigator (Gladwin 1970), and traveling minstrel (Tang 2006).

The primary topic of this ethnography is the nature of long-distance navigation as a body of knowledge and skills and the process of becoming a navigator.


  The process is quite similar to other apprenticeships, with the addition of a “copybook”: “When a student had practiced a model many times, he would make a clean copy and take it to the master for his evaluation. After receiving the teacher’s permission, the student was then allowed to proceed to the next item. . . . In this way, the mohon (copybook) made up of teacher-approved copies was created” (p. 46).


  An unusual contemporary case of a large-scale urban tailoring shop where novices become expert at the intricate tailoring and decoration inherent in West African clothing. The author contrasts the structure and atmosphere of the apprenticeship with that of the public school.


  In this very thorough ethnography, the author identifies various trajectories among the apprentices. Many progress to a certain level but go no further. A very few continue to become master minaret builders (p. 120).


  The griot is a traveling minstrel—storyteller and musician. An aspiring griot must show great initiative and talent; for example, “Sabar drumming is never taught through formal lessons or apprenticeship, but rather is learned by observation and early exposure” (p. 108).

**Historical Perspectives on Apprenticeship and Craft Learning**
Apprenticeship and craft learning have not attracted as much attention among historians as among anthropologists, but broad consistency is found across the ethnographic and historical records. In examining the historical record, we see that the apprenticeship involved considerable investment of resources by the apprentice and his or her family (Gies and Gies 1987), both in initial fees and in a long period of what was, in effect, indentured servitude. Contrary to contemporary use of the term (Gruber and Mandl 2001) in discussions of children’s education, apprentices did menial work (De Munck and Soly 2007, Crowston 2007) and lived under penurious conditions. These conditions were so bad (Golden 2003, Steidl 2007) that legislation was repeatedly introduced to curb the worst excesses (Rawson 2003, Barron 2007, Mitterauer and Sieder 1988).

  Treats conditions of apprenticeship (pp. 49–51).

  Authorities interceded to change aspects of the apprenticeship. A few years of formal education were added to provide a moral and academic foundation. This process expanded to three steps when a period of manual work was added at the beginning because “children must be taught to work by age seven or eight, if they were to be preserved from a life of debauchery” (p. 55).

  Evidence from western Europe from the 16th to the 19th centuries shows that typical apprenticeship, for girls as well as boys, was quite grim. Children were worked hard, learned little, and rarely became masters at the craft.

  The authors draw many parallels between apprenticeship and schooling in the Middle Ages. Both involved separation from home and family (guilds forbade apprenticing to one’s parent); years of mind-numbing, repetitive activity; both involved corporal punishment for any lapse in diligence. In addition, both master and teacher were accorded enormous respect and deference (pp. 210–217).

Golden notes evidence of the abuse of apprentices (p. 14).


Academics (mis)label the relationship between the patient and loving teaching employed by parents of the intelligentsia with their children an “apprenticeship.” This perspective is well represented in this article, which describes the teacher/master “as a coach providing scaffolding” (p. 602), while the novice is invited to participate jointly in craft (lesson) construction (p. 603). However, this is not at all the scenario described by the majority of those who have researched the apprenticeship.


Discussion of the role of guilds in regulating the apprenticeship (pp. 103–105). A transition occurred over time as the apprenticeship evolved into a sweatshop (p. 107).


Examples are offered of early legal statues governing the treatment of apprentices by masters (p. 194).


“The most important reason for complaints was physical punishment. However, public authorities admonished the guilds not to maltreat their subordinates. In 1775 the mayor and other council of Vienna sent a letter to all crafts and trades’ organizations in which they complained about the ill-treatment of apprentices by their masters. Another public admonition in 1845 argued again against masters who maltreated their subordinates” (p. 148).