The history of children is a relatively new field compared to the history of education, gaining its original impetus from the work of social historians and psychohistorians in the 1960s. When I first encountered the history of children in the early 1970s, it was a nascent field, full of promise, but undeveloped and scattered across a variety of disciplines and specialties. Today, more than thirty years later, the field has emerged as a robust, multidisciplinary enterprise with its own professional organization and a new scholarly journal. In 2001, after initial support from the Benton Foundation, a group of scholars established the Society for the History of Children and Youth. In 2007, the Society will hold its Fourth Biennial Conference in Sweden. In June 2007, the first issue of the new *Journal of the History of Children and Youth* is scheduled to appear.\(^1\)

(2005), the extensive collection of documents and essays, *Childhood in America* (2000) edited by Paula S. Fass and Mary Ann Mason, and *Small Worlds: Children & Adolescents in America, 1850–1950* (1992), a collection of original essays edited by Elliott West and Paula Petrik, represent important contributions to the field. All of these developments reflect the remarkable expansion in the scope and the striking improvement in the quality of the scholarship on the history of children and youth that has occurred in the last two decades. Indeed, an impressive number of recent scholars have been recognized for their work. There is little reason to doubt that this field will continue to develop and expand its influence.

In retrospect, I realize that I was drawn to the history of children in large measure because, as a young historian of education, I sensed that to study children, to really study children, was fundamental to understanding the human condition, and that to study children’s history was essential to understanding human history itself. To state the obvious, children are basic to human existence, and to experience childhood is the lot of every human being. Or as Mark Twain put it, “We haven’t all had the good fortune to be ladies, we haven’t all been generals, or poets, or statesmen, but when the toast works down to the babies, we all stand on common ground.”

Perhaps it is unnecessary to argue here that this “common ground”—the universal experience of childhood—has important implications for the history of education. Children are obviously central to the process of education, however defined. Perhaps more than most historians, we historians of education have appreciated the unique perspective that can be gained by the study of children, past and present. Perhaps—but there is ample evidence that even if we have generally given more attention to children than other historians, we have not fully utilized the considerable historical leverage that the study of children in the past offers to historians of education. Until recently, we have been so intensely occupied with the study of educational ideas and institutions, teachers and administrators, teaching methods and curricula, class and race, and gender and ethnicity that children did not usually come to center stage except to illustrate these important topics. James Axtell observed more than two decades ago that historians of education too often failed to capture “some sense of what the educational process was like at the level at which it actually occurred.” Axtell urged historians “to portray a waist-high view of education, one that enables us to see the