

Norbert Ross

Associate Professor of Anthropology at Vanderbilt University

Nashville, TN, US

Expert in child centered anthropology, including children and violence.

Biography

Norbert Ross is a cultural anthropologist whose work focuses on childhood. Past research focussed on issues related to culture and cognition and was supported by several multiyear NSF and NIH grants. Living 10 years in southern Mexico allowed Dr. Ross to conduct extensive research among Itzá Maya of the Petén, Guatemala as well as Lacandon Maya of southern Mexico, while focusing most of his time on exploring how Tzotzil Maya children of southern Mexico create their environment and their place within it. Based on a mixture of experimental research and ethnographic work, Dr. Ross shows how children reproduce and produce ontological changes that affect their being in the world both figuratively and literally speaking. His book manuscript "A World of Many: Ontology and Child Development among the Maya of Southern Mexico" is under review. The research for the book was supported by two multi year NSF grants. Dr. Ross's ongoing research, supported by the Fulbright commission and a multiyear NSF grant takes place in areas with high levels of (past and present) violence in El Salvador, exploring how children deal with acts of violence (including the related stories), how they cope with it and what potential long term effects and solutions might be. The research includes work with illegal squatters in an urban slum area outside San Salvador. While the focus is not only on gang violence, the research includes gang youth as participants. As an extension of the research, Dr. Ross started an NGO in El Salvador that to support children and their families in the research communities, combatting different forms of violence via a community center he built and runs with after school programs. As part of the research Dr. Ross uses an innovative theatre approach, blending aspects of popular theatre, improv theatre, playback theatre and drama therapy to explore new ways of combining research and support. For this work he received some additional funding allowing him to take a local theatre ensemble to refugee camps in Mexico, performing for and with refugees stranded at the US border. Overall, Dr. Ross' research agenda examines how children and youth understand, explore and create the worlds they inhabit. It pursues a spatially aware ethnographic approach, interested both in people's symbolic and material behaviors as well as the practices that emerge in times of sustained violence.

Areas of Expertise

Central America, Culture and Cognition, Children and Violence, Child Anthropology, Theatre and Social Science, Migration

Education

University of Freiburg

Ph.D. Anthropology

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