

Children Young People and Families

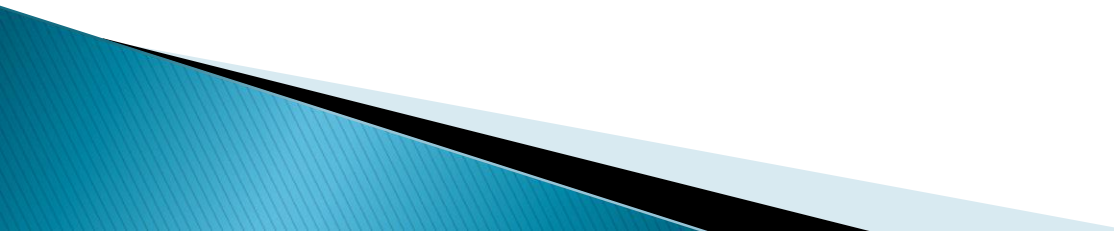
What is Childhood?

What is a child?

- ▶ Every adult was once a child – common factor– regardless of range of the differences that make us unique individuals.
- ▶ So what is childhood?



Class Activity

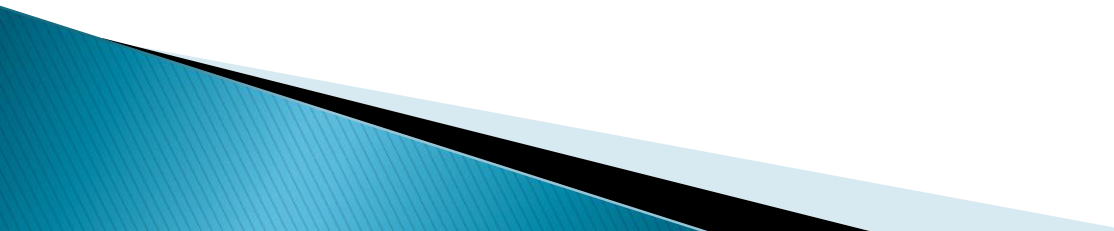
- ▶ Complete the following sentences–
 - ▶ A child is.....
 - ▶ Childhood is.....
 - ▶ Write down your definitions on a piece of paper.
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Feedback

- ▶ What are your definitions of a child?



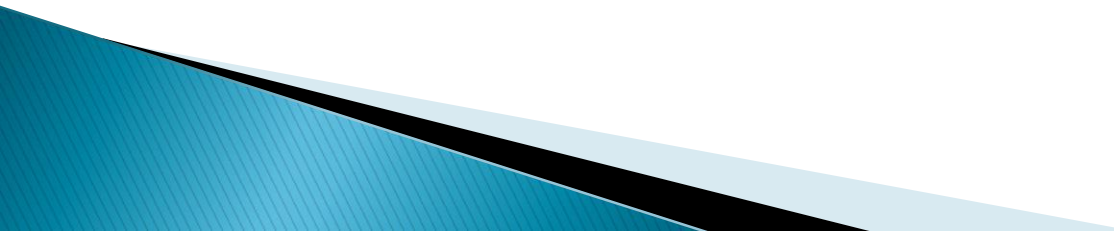
Common Responses

- ▶ *A child is a small being who is not yet fully grown.*
 - ▶ *A child is someone who is still learning.*
 - ▶ *A child is a young person who is developing socially, emotionally, physically and cognitively.*
 - ▶ *A child is someone in the vulnerable stage of life when they are still developing*
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Legal Definition

- ▶ The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child defines a child as everyone under 18 unless, "under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier" (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1989). The UK has ratified this convention (NSPCC 2015).

Dictionary Definitions

- ▶ An infant, baby
 - ▶ A boy or girl (or young human) in the period before puberty
 - ▶ A son or daughter of any age
 - ▶ An immature person
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Differing Perceptions

- ▶ Child grows – regarded as adult not a child.
 - ▶ When are they grown?
 - ▶ Are there discrepancies?
 - ▶ When are they able to look after themselves?

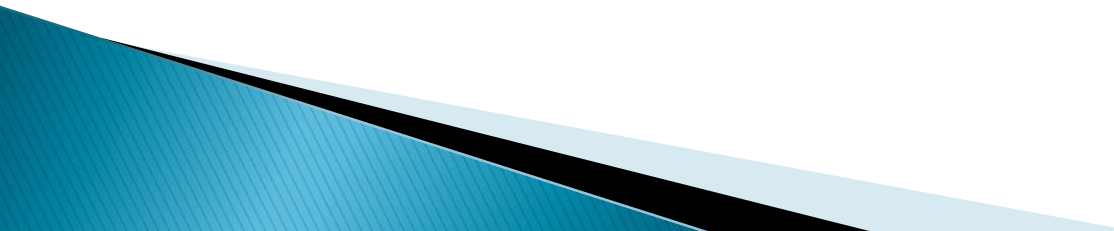
 - ▶ Most of these definitions are based on concepts of growth and development – implying a being who is still incomplete and unfinished.
 - ▶ Another idea is of vulnerability and the need for care and nurturing.

 - ▶ Do these views justify the regulation and control of children? (Mc Dowall–Clark 2013).
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Key Personal Milestones

- ▶ Think about when:
 - 1) You were given permission to walk to school independently
 - 2) You were allowed to stay home or had the 'key to the door'
 - 3) You learned to drive, left school, left home
 - 4) You began to socialise more with friends outside the family

(Oliver and Pitt 2011)



Feedback

- ▶ What are your definitions of childhood?



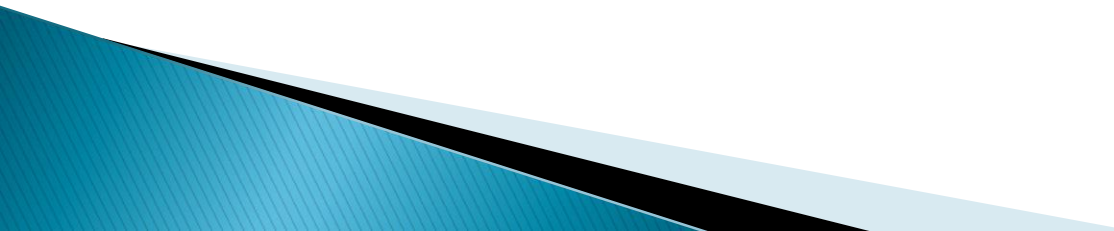
Childhood as a Social Construction

- ▶ Hard to determine what we mean when we use the word 'child', even more difficulty occurs with an attempt to define 'childhood'.
- ▶ Look in a dictionary – find something along the lines of– *childhood: the time or state of being a child (Chambers Dictionary, Collins Dictionary).*

Definition of Childhood

- ▶ Wagg (1992:10) cited in McDowall–Clark (2013) explains
 - ▶ *‘Childhood like so many other vitally important aspects of social life–gender, health, youth and so on [is] socially constructed. It [is] in other words, what members of particular societies, at particular times on particular places, say it is’.*
 - ▶ Is there a meaningful definition which is true for all societies and cultures?
 - ▶ Does childhood vary depending on cultural norms and expectations?
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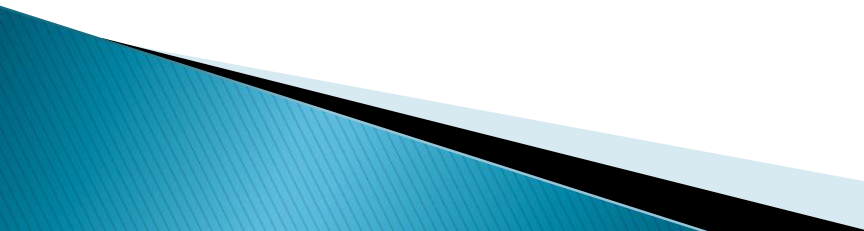
Definition of Childhood

- ▶ Phillipe Ariès (1962) closely associated with defining children and childhood.
 - ▶ Until mid 18th Century concept of childhood did not exist (cited in Pound 2014: 144).
 - ▶ Ariès (1962) cited in Oliver and Pitt (2011) investigated the construct of childhood and argues that babies and infants were cared for in terms of their biological needs, but once they were able to look after themselves they were quickly treated as adults.
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Definitions of Childhood

- ▶ Achard (1993:20 Cited in Pound 2014:144) rejects Ariès view that earlier societies lacked a concept of childhood and states that “at most it shows that they lacked our concept”.
 - ▶ This suggests that the concept of childhood has changed throughout history to our present concept of childhood.
 - ▶ A number of factors have influenced these changing concepts of childhood.
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Definitions of Childhood

- ▶ Ariès argued that words such as ‘child ‘ would be used for any age and that the term adolescent did not exist in pre modern times.
 - ▶ De Mause (1974) cited in Oliver and Pitt (2011) would agree with this arguing that levels of childcare can be seen as progressively worse the further back you look in history. He discussed periods such as infanticide followed by abandonment and ambivalence toward children.
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Definitions of Childhood

- ▶ Due to high mortality rates parents did not risk the emotional damage that occurs as a result of infants and babies dying so were emotionally neutral.

Historical Context

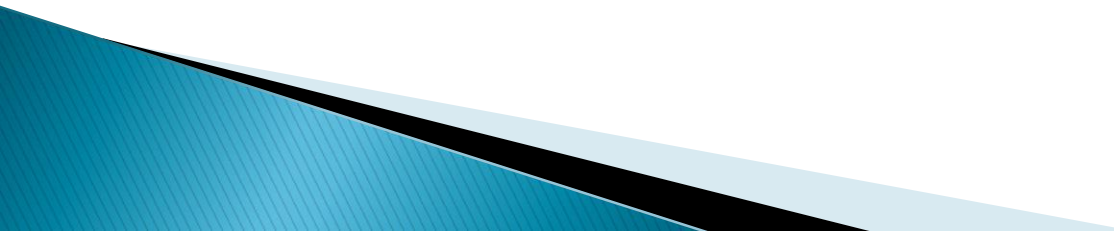
- ▶ *Ancient Greek and Roman Times*
 - ▶ Infant mortality rate high – infants not named immediately.
 - ▶ Physical perfection important – unwanted babies (often female) left exposed to die.
 - ▶ Wealthy employed wet nurses.
 - ▶ Children under 7 years stayed at home with mothers, play encouraged.
 - ▶ Contributed to household tasks and caring for younger siblings (mostly girls).
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Historical Context



- ▶ Gender differences
- ▶ Girls stayed at home with mothers until 15 years old then married.
- ▶ Boys socialised with men, encouraged to learn a trade e.g. Builders, coppersmiths, land work. Rarely married before 30 years.
- ▶ Wealthier boys from the age of 7 years educated – encouraged to play music, to draw, become athletes (Wright 2015: 35–36).

Historical Context

- ▶ Aries and Postman cited in McDowall–Clark (2013) argue that in the past the young were not understood as children in the way we now understand them.
 - ▶ In Medieval society the idea of childhood did not exist – children lived and worked alongside adults, wearing the same clothes and undertaking the same activities.
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Historical Context

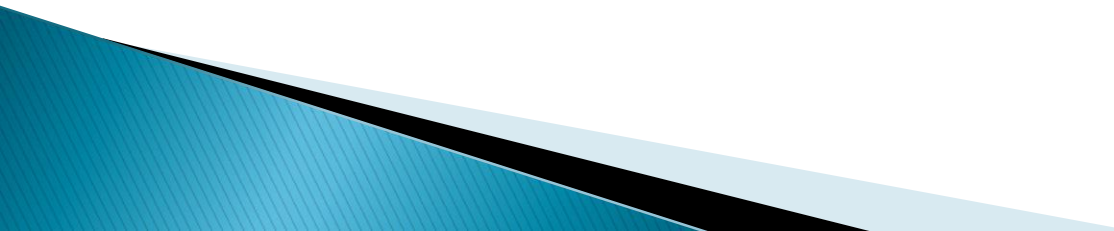
- ▶ *Middle Ages*
- ▶ Children were nurtured – rights protected by legislation.
- ▶ Children were swaddled and breastfed.
- ▶ Prevalent view of children as evil – led to practice of coddling to constrain babies’ “supposed propensity to wilfulness” (James et al 1998:12, Cited in Pound 2014:144).
- ▶ Rise in mortality rate aged 3–4 years caused by dysentery or malnutrition due to poor weaning.
- ▶ 8 year old – children sent to other households to learn a skill.
- ▶ Girls – weaving/domestic; boys riding/handling weapons, some to monasteries for basic education.
- ▶ Life expectancy was 30 years (Wright 2015:37)



Historical Context

- ▶ Throughout the seventeenth century childhood began to be recognised with special clothing, books and playthings produced for children.
- ▶ Common theme that children were innately bad and needed careful correction.

(McDowall–Clark 2013)



Historical Context

- ▶ *Industrial Revolution (1760 – 1830)*
- ▶ Factories and mills needed workers – employed children.
- ▶ Children were small and nimble – could pass easily under and between machinery for cleaning, repairing and tidying up of waste.
- ▶ Child labour was cheap and small hands and nimble fingers enabled them to undertake tasks of tying in threads easily.
- ▶ Children dominated by adults and often harshly disciplined and punished. Forced to work long hours for little pay.

(Wright 2015:42)

Child Labour



Historical Context



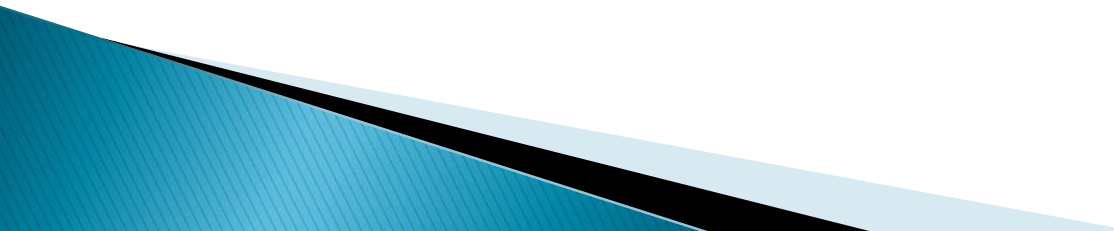
- ▶ *Victorian Society (1837 – 1901)*
- ▶ Populations in Britain grew.
- ▶ Big differences between rich and poor.
- ▶ Society became more conscious of children and their needs and contributions.
- ▶ Class systems developed.
- ▶ Upper and middle classes – children led protected lives cared for by nannies/governesses.
- ▶ Lower classes – children heavily exploited – involved in factory work or chimney sweeps, some became pickpockets/scavengers.
- ▶ As cities grew living conditions deteriorated.
- ▶ Health policy and legislation introduced to relieve poverty and to set limits on age and hours for work and education.
- ▶ Compulsory education by the end of the Victorian era.

(Wright 2015: 43–44)

Historical Context

- ▶ Mid 18th Century
- ▶ Jean Jacques Rousseau's (1712 –1778) view of children contrasted with earlier views – that a child was innocent. Rousseau said children had a “natural goodness and clarity of vision”

(James et al 1998:12, Cited in Pound 2014:144).



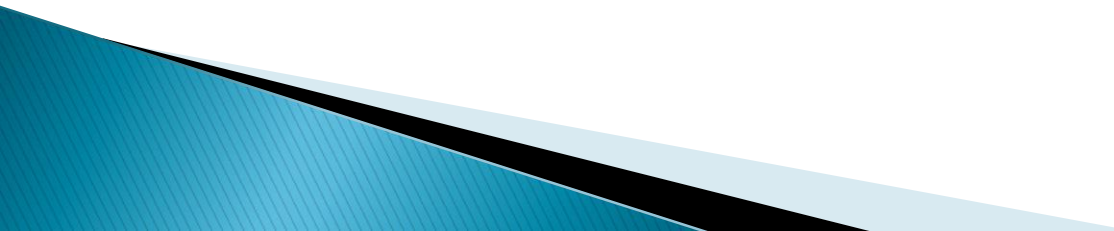
Historical context

- ▶ Ariès (1986) and Neil Postman (1994) cited in McDowall–Clark (2013) both suggest that childhood is a modern phenomenon that has only come into being in recent times.
 - ▶ Is this nonsense? Always reproduced and given birth otherwise human race would have died out.
 - ▶ Reproduction not the same as a social category of ‘childhood’.
 - ▶ In the past children were not treated differently nor considered in need of concern due to their young age (McDowall–Clark, 2013)
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Classifying the social category of childhood

- ▶ No universal agreed definition of childhood.
- ▶ Who is regarded as a child depends upon social, cultural and economic factors.

Further Reading

- ▶ ***Chapter 8 pages 144 to 160***
 - ▶ Pound, L. (2014) The Historical Background of Early Childhood Care and Education: Influencing Factors. In Mukherji, P. and Dryden, L. (Eds) *Foundations of Early Childhood: Principles and Practice*. London: Sage
 - ▶ ***Chapter 3 Historical Perspectives pages 34 to 51***
 - ▶ Wright, H. R. (2015) *The Child in Society*. London: Sage
 - ▶ ***Chapter 2 Pages 17 to 30***
 - ▶ Mc Dowall-Clark, R (2013) *Children in Society for the Early Years*. 2nd Edition. London:Sage
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References

- ▶ Britt, R. (2009) *Is Modern Society Ruining Childhood?* [online] available at: <http://www.livescience.com/7713-modern-society-ruining-childhood-html>
 - ▶ Cunningham, H. (2006) *The Invention of Childhood*, London: BBC Books
 - ▶ McDowall-Clark, R. (2013) *Childhood in Society for Early Childhood Studies*, 2nd Edition. London: Sage
 - ▶ Oliver, B. and Pitt, B. (2010) *Working with Children, Young People and Families*, Exeter; Learning Matters
 - ▶ Pound, L. (2014) The Historical Background of Early Childhood Care and Education: Influencing Factors. In Mukherji, P. and Dryden, L. (Eds) *Foundations of Early Childhood: Principles and Practice*. London: Sage
 - ▶ Wright, H. R. (2015) *The Child in Society*. London: Sage
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