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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCING CHILDHOOD

Overview

This chapter starts by asking the questions:

- What is childhood?
- How do we know about childhood?

In answer to these questions, it presents a range of sources – physical, pictorial, numeric and written – that can tell us more about childhood, using classic examples to demonstrate how this has been achieved. Among others, it introduces the work of:

- Philippe Ariès
- Linda Pollock
- Neil Postman
- Barbara Hanawalt
- Harry Hendrick
- Sally Crawford
- William Corsaro.

It then discusses the changing paradigms affecting childhood.

For early years educators, childhood is a topic of central importance but for many of those who first explored the subject it was a means to another end – a way of furthering their knowledge of living things, of animal behaviour, of human cognition, and the adult psyche – in order to develop a better society.

The advantage of this heritage is the breadth of expert knowledge that contributes to the field and ensures that, whatever aspect we choose to explore, we have access to a range of credible theory and research. As a topic, childhood is truly interdisciplinary. As a subject, the child is central to our collective and continuing existence, so it is right that we should take his/her needs seriously and readily support the journey to adulthood. To what extent this is genetically pre-determined or socially constructed has long formed the central nature–nurture debate fundamental to the discipline, and views of childhood have varied considerably through time as circumstances and knowledge bases change. Yet children remain less visible and less powerful than the adult members of any community so it is appropriate here to start by examining how people can, and have, investigated the experiences of childhood.

What is childhood?

Richard Mills claims (2000: 8): ‘such is the nature of childhood that its study cannot be confined within one academic discipline’. As he rightly says, it comprises aspects of: ‘anthropology, art, computing, education, history, literature, medicine, philosophy, physiology, psychology, psychoanalysis, psychotherapy, sociology, statistics or theology’ (ibid: 8) and these are perspectives that are discussed within this book.

The concept of childhood passes unchallenged in everyday speech. Yet there are questions around its definition. Should this be in terms of status, power, age or physical maturity? Should it be defined independently, or in contrast to adulthood? Do we follow tradition and mark adulthood by rites of passage, or rely on legal acts, independent of individual achievement and capability? Morrow (2011), recognising this complexity, views childhood as both legal and relational, but also behavioural in the sense of acting ‘childishly’ and being ‘innocent’. Questions of definition raise parallel issues around boundaries. Can children really become adults overnight or should the change be gradual, acknowledging that children adopt adult abilities and behaviours progressively as they encounter different situations? What marks the ending of childhood? In Western society it is often bounded by the completion of compulsory schooling but in many parts of the world childhood ends with early marriage as this can bring forward the age of majority (Morrow, 2011).

Over time and place, notions of childhood vary considerably, making it, in the words of Wyness (2000) a ‘contested’ concept. Jenks (1982: 9) describes how, for centuries: ‘theorists have systematically endeavoured to constitute a view of the child that is compatible with their particular visions of social life’, and seeing childhood as a social practice, explains how in Western society at least, we endeavour to formalise children’s social position. Jenks believes that these formal structures then shape and delimit our views of the child.

The child status has its boundaries maintained through the crystallization of conventions into institutional forms like families, nurseries, clinics and schools, all agencies specifically designed to process the status as a uniform entity. (1982: 11)

This is a process that, I think, may be coincidental rather than intentional. Turmel (2008: 6) supports a more active construction. He sees childhood as a 'product of a complex movement of cooperation, conflict and resistance between a broad range of social actors, including children themselves' rather than an 'inevitable consequence' of public policies and expert guidance, a view that sees power as more loosely distributed.

How do we know about childhood?

Researchers use a variety of sources to explore the concept of childhood and its practical manifestations as children. Sometimes there is choice of material – it depends on geographical and chronological contexts. In some disciplines, investigatory methods can use primary and secondary sources, and researchers consult documents, observe and talk to real children, but for those interested in earlier historical periods, the available resources can be minimal. Archaeologists, for example, often have to hypothesise from isolated physical artefacts. Their understandings are gleaned from examining multiple sources that, viewed collectively, enable broader interpretation. Early documentary evidence is scarce and carefully filed away, but with the advent of printing, the number of descriptive texts increased exponentially, making data available to a broader range of researchers, which in turn led to a greater proliferation of printed material. Visual images, statistical analyses, observational data and official documents provide additional secondary records of what it was or is to be a child, and these are often supported by artefacts that were designed and made to support children's mobility, their play and learning, and general well-being. However, many of these materials are hidden amidst general records and collections that focus on the adult population. Through the centuries, children, like women and the poor, were largely invisible. Even now, their problems are sometimes concealed within general household data that studies the family rather than the child.

Using pictorial records

Although his work has been highly criticised, Phillipe Ariès (1962) is generally credited with the origination of a modern interest in children and childhood. Ariès examined the nature of childhood in medieval times and considered how it differed from more modern interpretations, setting out

hypotheses that 'have become the benchmark for all subsequent students' (Cunningham, H., 2005: 5).

Ariès was a demographic historian who wanted to understand the modern phenomenon of family better. Recognising the connection between childhood and family, he set out to study childhood to find out more about families. In the introduction to his book, *Centuries of Childhood*, he clearly identifies his fundamental concern (that children were seen as miniature adults) and identifies his main source of data (the detailed study of historic works of art), examining children's clothing, demeanour and activities to see how this came to change.

In the tenth century, artists were unable to depict a child except as a man on a smaller scale. How did we come from that ignorance of childhood to the centring of the family around the child in the nineteenth century? (Ariès, 1962: 8)

Ariès also investigated extant written records, but like works of art, these too focused on the wealthier members of society. In part, his claim that 'the idea of childhood did not exist' (ibid: 125) is based on the prurience of the French court under Henri IV where adult courtiers revealed a casual attitude to children's sexuality. In making this claim, Ariès was careful not to deny that children were treated with affection, simply, that once they no longer needed the 'constant solicitude' of the mother, they belonged to adult society. He does, however, talk of 'the huge domain of unexpressed feelings' (ibid: 127) and might more accurately have referred to 'unrecorded' rather than unexpressed feelings. Ariès' discussion is intricately linked to his portrayal of schooling for he sees this as an expanding disciplinary space that extended the duration of childhood and divided society into those (mainly male and upper class) who attended school and those (girls and the lower classes) who did not, whether or not they entered the world of work. Making another strong claim, Ariès asserted that:

The whole complexion of life was changed by the differences in the educational treatment of the middle-class and the lower-class child.

(ibid: 223)

Strong claims often invite further investigation and, to quote Hugh Cunningham (2005: 27), 'Medievalists never seem to tire of proving Ariès to be wrong'. Shahar (1990: 3) has tried to establish that 'childhood was in fact perceived as a distinct stage in the life cycle, that there was a conception of childhood, and that educational theories and norms existed'. She challenges Ariès' hypothesis but does acknowledge that it was the 'historians who followed his lead' (ibid: 2) who claimed that 'parents made no effort

to keep their children alive and accepted their death with equanimity' (ibid). In Ariès' text, these ideas were only 'implicit'.

Using personal documents

Linda Pollock (1983) studied parent-child relations and presented significant evidence from primary sources, mainly autobiographies and diaries kept between 1500 and 1900, to refute the notion that medieval parents were emotionally distant from their offspring. Like Shahar, she is arguing against the 'sentiments' approach (Heywood, 2001: 6) of Ariès followers, Lloyd De Mause, Edward Shorter and Lawrence Stone, rather than Ariès himself. Translation of Ariès' French term 'sentiment' as 'idea' rather than 'feelings' stripped it of its original broader sense as an affective concept, leaving his views open to a degree of misinterpretation.

Pollock uses personal documents to build her argument: adults and children's diaries and autobiographies, occasionally letters and wills if they were included within the other sources. She located 144 American and 236 British diaries, 36 autobiographies, and 17 unpublished British manuscripts. So this was an extensive study, enabling her to judge whether her findings were representative, if people censor their own diary entries, and overall, whether such records have importance beyond their individual contexts. After analysis, she concluded that, despite a slant towards the middle classes: 'the majority of diarists were not exceptional, but ordinary people living out their lives in anonymity' (1983: 87). The virtue of these accounts is their intimacy and detail, the way they reveal the actuality of childhood rather than popular attitudes towards it, and the way that children are seen as members of families rather than in isolation.

Both Ariès and Pollock relied on representations of childhood, Ariès favouring pictorial records, Pollock using written accounts to view the lives of children through the memories of their parents. Both approaches used a limited number of individualised sources to make more general points. In Ariès case, the pictures were intended for public viewing, at least within the home, whereas Pollock's sources were written for private purposes. Whether this makes them more or less accurate can be argued indefinitely.

Using contextual knowledge

In a study carried out in 1982, Neil Postman (1994) examined the influence of popular culture on childhood, specifically the effects of new media. Firstly, he argued that the advent of the printed word promoted childhood because it created adults as a literate elite, as the sharing of new ideas became dependent upon the ability to read. The rise of cheaper printed material made information both more and less accessible: 'print closed off

the world of everyday affairs with which the young had been so familiar in the Middle Ages' (ibid: 49). Dissemination passed from the oral to the written tradition, supporting higher levels of control at both points of delivery and reception, and enabling a new stability of content. This excluded children (and workers unable to read), supporting Ariès' argument that education marked the path to maturity. As Postman also claims 'childhood became defined by school attendance' (ibid: 41) and a 'level of symbolic achievement' (ibid: 42).

Secondly, Postman explored the role of television and other visual media in eroding those barriers, as they again made material equally accessible to children and adults. He describes television as a 'total disclosure medium' (ibid: Chapter 6) for it 'makes public what has previously been private' (ibid: 83). Unlike the printed book, it is an 'open-admission technology to which there are no physical, economic, cognitive or imaginative restraints' (ibid: 84). Information is even more accessible to children than it was when it was shared orally, for as Postman claims, television 'eliminates' one of the principal differences between children and adults (ibid: 84) and displaces elders as a primary source of knowledge (ibid: 89).

Overall, Postman argued that accessibility to knowledge plays a key role in determining whether and when childhood is bounded. Supported by Tuchman (1978), he claimed that medieval childhoods ended at seven, as at this age the child achieved functional language skills. In a society where information was shared orally, the skills of talking, listening, understanding and remembering were key to full participation within the community. Postman cites historian J.H. Plumb's claim that in earlier times children and adults occupied the same 'world', sharing the same games, toys and stories (Plumb, 1971: 7, in Postman, 1994: 15-16).

Postman argues that the growing sophistication of medieval and later society extended the range of childhood. Children needed to be educated, initially to become literate but also to acquire the practical skills, the mathematical and scientific knowledge and the social awareness necessary for engagement with an increasingly complex world. Postman feared that television was undermining the status of childhood. He decried the way that 'children had virtually disappeared from the media, especially from television' in the 70s and 80s, as they were everywhere 'depicted as miniature adults in the manner of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century paintings' (1994: 122). Postman's views were voiced before the internet and other new technologies (addressed in Chapter 9) further, and more radically, altered children's access to media and communications. Perhaps we should be mindful of his arguments later, when we consider the artificial creation of ranges of children's goods, the television programmes, books and clothes that at least make some attempt to differentiate between adult and children's markets. Does their proliferation purely reflect the commercial imperative for new markets or are

parent's supporting this consumerism in a desire to keep their children apart from the adult mainstream?

Postman's views date from 1982 but his arguments can be carried forward into new contexts, as they are not tied to original sources in the way that Ariès' and Pollock's were. Postman was using ideas and concepts to create a view of childhood but not drawing heavily on original research documentation, either written or pictorial.

Using public records

In contrast, Barbara Hanawalt (1993) used archival material already in the public domain. Official documents form a useful historical record but rarely focus uniquely on children or childhood. Hanawalt examined court records in detail to build up a picture of children's lives in medieval London, and used literary sources and advice books to supplement her narratives. She found that the English legal system clearly recognised children as minors and carefully protected the rights of those orphaned at an early age. She also found that court cases often reported background personal information whether the subject was a child or adult. Hanawalt consulted a range of reports, including land registration, common pleas and coroners' rolls, which described incidences of child death (and frequently documented how the children were housed and cared for, and the grief expressed by bereaved parents). She also studied wills and last testaments, which brought together information from all classes of person.

Eminent British social historian, Harry Hendrick, was also interested in the fate of children and wrote an account of child welfare in England (Hendrick, 1994), which was updated in 2011 and is still widely acclaimed. He compiled a survey of sources on childhood that arranges material in 'age-related' chapters, which summarise salient points (Hendrick, 1997).

Combining archaeological evidence with anthropological insight

If we want to study childhood in earlier periods of history, the material becomes scarcer. For ancient civilisations, historians have some recourse to written records, and art in the form of carvings, mosaics and depictions on pottery. Such sources exist for the civilisations of Mesopotamia (Sumer and Akkadia), Egypt and the Indus valley, which were developing between 3000 to 2000 years BCE; and for the important civilisations arising between 2000 to 1000 BCE in China (Shang), South America (Olmec and Chavin) and ancient Greece (Minoan and, later, Mycenae). These civilisations were richly endowed compared to the rural Bronze Age settlements in Western Europe in the period

2000 to 600 BCE. From 1000 BCE empires flourished in Rome (Etruscan) and South America (the Mayan, and later the Aztec and Incan empires), but the majority of Europeans still lived in rural Iron Age settlements.

However, to understand really early cultures – the people of the Stone Age – we rely on limited archaeological evidence, using extrapolation from known events within anthropology to suggest credible interpretations. This period includes the first humans of the Palaeolithic (2.5 million to 20,000 years ago), the hunter-gatherers of the Mesolithic (20,000 to 12,000 years ago) and the early farmers of the Neolithic (12,000 to 5,000 years ago).

Kathryn Kamp (2001: 2) argues that archaeologists tend to neglect childhood, perhaps because it is 'too intangible'. Baxter (2005: 1) supports this view, explaining that even when they are included, children tend to be cast in 'peripheral roles'. Traditionally, children were seen to be unimportant in terms of their contribution to society, their lives unknowable as they left 'few material traces, with the exception of child burials' (ibid: 2). Artefacts are typically classified 'according to the (implicit adult) function for which it is presumed they were made' (Crawford, 2009: 59). However, the rise of feminist approaches in anthropology and sociology in the 1970s triggered a desire to restore the woman and child to the archaeological record, a move captured in Greta Lillehammer's (1989) seminal paper, *A Child is Born: The Child's World in an Archaeological Perspective*.

Views on how to establish children's presence in prehistory were, and are, greatly contested. Initially the focus was on identification of artefacts specifically for children but to decide whether miniature items were toys, tools, learning materials or votive offerings was difficult, reliant on evidence from contemporary cultures or historic ones for which there is a written record. Within bioarchaeology, there were also significant debates around definitions of childhood, as this could be described in terms of biological age (by dating skeletal development), chronological age (by establishing time since birth) or social age (based on socially constructed norms of behaviour and status). Archaeologists tended to establish site-specific categories, making it difficult to compare data from different 'finds' to enable comparison or generalisation. Yet, when bioarchaeology adopts a child-centred focus, stable isotope analysis can provide information about breastfeeding and weaning practices, and diet, while skeletal examination can ascertain patterns of physical activity, pubertal development and general levels of health (Halcrow and Tayles, 2008).

When we recognise that children's relationships with the world are 'fundamentally different from those of adults' (Baxter, 2005: 4) it becomes possible to identify 'patterning' in the distribution of children's artefacts and thereby make visible their presence. As Sally Crawford (2009: 64) explains, children were given and appropriated a range of household items, discarded or borrowed, to embellish their play so a juvenile presence may be apparent in the location of items and 'their unnatural proximity to other objects'. Children play a role in collecting and depositing material, so the co-presence of broken or

multiple fragments of bone, bead or pottery may indicate that the items were used for play purposes. Similarly, the discovery of imperfectly crafted items, like pots, identifies the presence of novice potters who could be children, but also the elderly and infirm. However, archaeologists are able to distinguish between the old and young through scientific studies of fingerprint patterns (Kamp et al., 1999). As an example, this process has shown that it was children who made the animal figurines found among utility ware in Northern Arizona's early Sinaguan culture (Kamp, 2001), demonstrating that they were allowed to play with clay while their parents made the pots necessary for domestic survival.

Using interactive methods

A traditional ethnography involves living within a culture to examine the minutiae of people's customs and beliefs. This is a long-term project requiring researchers to become accepted by communities so that their presence does not disrupt normal practices and has tended to focus on complete cultures rather than children in isolation. It involves observing people, talking to them and joining in their activities to gain a sense of their lives. However, Hammerley and Atkinson (1995 [1983]): 1), long-time advocates, state that the term can be interpreted in a 'liberal way, not worrying much about what does and does not count as examples of it'. In contemporary research terms, studies of lesser duration that involve observing or talking to children, possibly examining their pictures and writing too, are said to use ethnographic techniques. William Corsaro (2006: 53) describes his 'prolonged fieldwork' to study peer culture in pre-school settings in the United States and in Italy as ethnographic, referring to the intensity of his involvement and his need to establish a 'reactive method of field entry' (ibid: 54) by simply sitting down in free play areas and waiting for children to approach him. Jane Payler (2007: 240) also refers to her comparative study of four-year-olds in an English school and playgroup setting as ethnographic.

Other researchers use a range of child-friendly strategies to take a participatory stance. Tim Waller (2007) encouraged children to tour their outdoor area, take photographs and make maps and books to create personalised 'learning stories' (Carr, 2001). This was a multi-strand research methodology, one that Clark and Moss (2001) term the 'mosaic approach'.

Observations can be carried out without interrupting the child's normal activity so are a particularly useful way to capture children's natural actions. Talk, or more formally, interview, enables the researcher to check his/her understanding of observed activities or discuss different subjects entirely. It is arguable whether this is a more or a less accurate process for so much depends on contexts and relationships. Participatory methods empower the children to carry out their own research but still require an adult analysis to develop a fuller interpretation. Whichever approach is chosen, studies of

contemporary children, apart from one's own family, require researchers to seek ethical approval to ensure that children are not 'hurt' or disadvantaged by taking part in a study that may be of no direct benefit to them. This, a 'relatively new' requirement (Gray, 2012: 65), awarded if the researcher develops a well-designed and presented proposal that details the aims of the research and its potential value for society.

Using statistical data

It is possible to build a picture of distant or contemporary childhoods using statistical data too, even when this was initially collected for a different purpose. Because survey material is usually extensive in coverage, it permits the researchers to make supported claims. It can sometimes be used alongside ethnographic material to enable a degree of generalisation beyond a small-scale study.

Monica Magadi (2010) used data from the 2004–5 *Family Resources Survey* (DWP, 2005) to examine the extent of severe child poverty in the UK. Her study employed regression techniques to establish the risk factors associated with child poverty. This means that possible factors were analysed together to see if they trended in parallel or in opposition and this particular study found the risk of poverty to be positively associated with a number of factors: parental unemployment, poorly educated parents, large family size, minority ethnicity, and disabled adults. Contrary to expectation, the regression found that lone parents often fared better than dual-parent families in similar circumstances and that non-receipt of benefits disproportionately increased the likelihood of child poverty. Thus, the statistical analysis tells us a considerable amount about the economic well-being of children in the UK, creating a predictive capacity to inform new policy initiatives.

Another study, Bayliss and Sly's (2009) report on child well-being in the UK, took a very different approach in its use of statistical data. These researchers were interested in non-aggregated data and examined a broader range of statistical sources to consider factors independently. They were interested in the geographical incidence of well-being so data was plotted onto national and local maps to reveal which areas were problematic. In their conclusion, the authors were able to identify the distribution of specific problems but still able to demonstrate that overall there is a strong north–south divide. Such conclusions would be difficult to substantiate without resorting to large-scale statistical analysis.

Using adult recollection

Biographical research prompts people to remember past events so can investigate childhood through adult memory. Done well this enables the

creation of in-depth but idiosyncratic accounts that can be useful in explaining people's current situations and in recording detail that may not be available in published historical accounts. My own work on women studying childcare (Wright, 2011) used psychosocial interview techniques to encourage ex-students to recall their educational experiences to build up a picture of the role of education in their lives.

In New Zealand, Sonja Rosewarne and colleagues (2010) employed collective biographical memory work (CBMW) to jointly explore the concept of transition to inform ways of dealing with children's transitions in early childhood settings. Rather than viewing transition as a rite of passage, this method enabled practitioners to capture the child's perspective, which foregrounded uncertainty, loss, powerlessness and shifting identity. By recalling the emotions associated with transition, the early years educators became aware of the stress that children experience and of the need to 'see' the inadequacy of generic treatment. The researchers found that transitional experiences are cumulatively stressful: this is important as even very young children may have a broad range of prior stressors. Thus, biographical recall can make staff more sensitive to the challenges children face.

Dorothy Moss (2011) used oral history to present a tapestry of childhood memories. She collected together adult accounts that gave a children's perspective on growing up in difficult conditions, during times of warfare, civil unrest and other hardships. Thus she captured the non-ideal childhoods experienced by disadvantaged children from whom we hear very little.

Using literature

Childhood as a concept operates at a level higher than individual childhoods. For this reason Jean and Richard Mills (2000) suggest that its 'timeless essence' can be conveyed through works of literature like the classic fictions of J.M. Barrie (*Peter Pan*), Lewis Carroll (*Alice in Wonderland*), Kenneth Grahame (*Wind in the Willows*), Charles Kingsley (*The Water Babies*), C.S. Lewis (*The Chronicles of Narnia*), A.A. Milne (*Winnie the Pooh*) and J.R.R. Tolkien (*The Hobbit*). Mills and Mills suggest that such stories, unbounded by the confines of reality, offer an archetypal sense of childhood, its 'illusory and elusive nature' (Mills and Mills, 2000: 9), which overrides the differences that individual children experience in their real lives.

This is an interesting argument. Such fiction can transform the prosaic rituals of daily existence, transporting children into imaginary and magical worlds. Successful authors are skilled in narration and description, and able to create exotic worlds that change less than the one in which we live, which are accessible to children through the generations.

Changing views of childhood

These are some of the different ways by which childhood can be made visible. In later chapters we will see how childhood is theorised within specific academic disciplines and how children themselves experience it differently in real world contexts. First, however, it is useful to consider how commonly held views (or paradigms) of childhood develop and to reflect on the power of overarching paradigms.

In the social and academic spheres, paradigms dominant at a particular time or place and time shape the way that people think about childhood as a concept, and how these views are applied to policy and practice, so future chapters will add detail to the brief overview given here. For almost 100 years from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries, a developmental paradigm arising within psychology was uncontested (Turmel, 2008). In this period, the modernist discourse of progress formed a theoretical framework for more specialist perspectives. This anticipated a stepped linear pathway from the primitive to the advanced and described child development as a series of defined physical stages towards the goal of maturity. In a similar vein it was assumed that traditional societies would pass through stages of industrialisation and urbanisation to achieve higher levels (Western standards) of development. In contrast to psychology, sociologists took an ahistorical perspective. They also focused on families rather than children (Elias, 1987; in Turmel, 2008). In Chapter 6 we will see how a structuralist view (that everyone in society has a particular role to play) was undermined by the more radical propositions of Marxist, feminist, and postcolonial thinkers. In parallel, the social history tradition gave way to more critical perspectives that challenged the invisibility of the poor, the racially oppressed, the woman, and later the child, in the historical account. In turn, post-structural and postmodern thinking, further questioning the validity of universal dominant discourses, led to a greater awareness of the variety of childhood experiences, encouraging researchers to consider more fully the contexts and conditions in which real childhoods are lived.

From the 1970s onwards, postmodern perspectives undermined belief in a universal childhood. The 1990s saw the emergence of a growing interest in children and a 'new' sociology of childhood that recognised the diversity of childhood experiences (James and Prout, 1997). Growing media coverage informed the public of the differing ways that people live around the world and the disparity in the ways that children are treated in different societies. Yet global organisations sought to promote the commonalities of childhood, aiming to establish international policies that protect children everywhere. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1989) is a powerful 'instrument' with 'institutional power' which uses international law to frame 'global childhood ideals' (Boyden, in James and Prout, 1997: 216).

Thus, childhood is dominated by two opposing discourses – one of diversity and one of commonality – that are difficult to resolve. It is readily apparent that universalist approaches underplay significant differences between childhoods but, conversely, relativist perspectives risk undermining efforts to empower children through a collective voice.

Contemporary interest, fuelled by an increasingly globalised society and the connectivity forged by the world wide web, is focused on children's rights. In the global north (the developed societies of America and Eurasia, plus Australia) the concern is to give children more control over their own lives, taking the discourse to one of independence and autonomy within safeguarded home and school environments. In the global south (the less developed nations in continental Africa and large parts of Asia) the aim is to provide essentials like clean water and sanitation, shelter, health care and education (SOWC, 2012). Both sets of aims can be subsumed within a more general plea for well-being that is increasingly used at national and international levels to maintain a shared focus on improving children's lives.

Summary

This chapter has explored the ways we view childhood and the ways we can examine childhoods other than our own. It has discussed well-known studies of children past and present and other work that broadens our range of knowledge, using these examples to begin to answer the questions posed at the start of the chapter: What is childhood? How do we know about childhood? It provides material that suggests how the concept can be further investigated and understood. In so doing it has set the scene for the varying treatments that follow in later chapters, each of which focuses around one or more academic fields.

Points for reflection

-  Consider the range of sources outlined in Chapter 1. Which do you think have the most potential to build up a realistic picture of childhood in a bygone age? Why?
-  Do the commonalities between children override the differences? Which characteristics are essential to differentiate between a child and an adult?
-  How would you design an original study of childhood? How and where could you access physical evidence and documentary sources?

Further reading



Kehily, M.J. (2009) *An Introduction to Childhood Studies*, 2nd edn. Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill.

Qvortrup, J., Corsaro, W.A. and Honig, M-S. (2009) *The Palgrave Handbook of Childhood Studies*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

General texts with chapters on most issues central to childhood. Dip into these to understand the contexts.

Websites



www.20thcenturylondon.org.uk/children
London Museums Hub with historical overviews of children's lives and possessions.

www.unicef.org
Major international site offering overviews, data and resources.

<http://developingchild.harvard.edu>
Downloadable research studies on child development.

Documentary

Baxter, S. (2011) *Too Much, Too Young: Children of the Middle Ages*. First shown on BBC Four on 24 August.
This BBC documentary examines some of the sources that historians use and offers a visual and aural introduction to the study of childhood.

To gain free access to selected SAGE journal articles related to key topics in this chapter, visit: www.sagepub.co.uk/hazelwright.