

Chapter I

Children and childhoods

In this opening chapter we examine what is meant by child development, which leads us to look at how important both history and culture are to any understanding of child development. We will start by looking at childhood, as a concept, and examine its origins and the importance of thinking about childhood as a space or a phase separate from adulthood. As we do this we will also look at how concepts of ‘the child’ have developed and how they do not remain static over time or place. Closely allied with concepts of childhood per se are aspects of reality such as poverty and rights and we touch on these. We develop a workable image of the child of the twenty-first century and touch on the notion of ‘good parenting’.

Child development: which child? What development?

It is evening in the Zocalo in Oaxaca in Mexico. The street sellers and the shoe-shine boys and the mariachi are out in the streets. Three-year-old Cristina is there, too, as she is every day and every evening. Her mother has a stall that sells plastic inflatable toys and giant balloons, which billow above the stalls in the breeze. Cristina is cruising the streets, as she does every evening. All the stall-holders and the food sellers and the musicians know her: she is a member of the market community that inhabits the square. As she roams around munching on bits of food given to her, chatting to people, looking at the things on display she keeps her mother within view although she is perfectly safe. All the adults there treat her as though she were their child. This is her world. This is her childhood.

In Ho Chi Minh City, Hung is in the arrivals hall of the airport. He holds up a card on which his wares are displayed – books of postcards of Vietnamese scenes, bracelets made of strips of plastic, comic books. It is 2.30 in the afternoon and his school day has ended. He goes early in the morning and finishes in time to get in a whole afternoon’s selling – and, more importantly, speaking English – at the airport and in the streets. He is 7 years old and his English is fluid and fluent. He tells people he has learnt it from the tourists who arrive at and leave from the airport. He is known to the other sellers at the airport and to the taxi drivers and to the police who threaten to move him on, but his cheery smile seems to protect him from authority. He says he is saving up the money he earns (after he has given most of it to his mother) to buy a mobile phone. This is his world and his childhood.

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Jinjing is 4 years old and lives in a village in rural China. She goes to kindergarten everyday although this year on 9 April there were such severe traffic problems that she could not get to the kindergarten and was taken instead to the village teaching spot – an open-air space where teachers had gathered to teach the children. She is an only child and her father is a tool dresser and works in the streets. Her mother does whatever part-time work she can get and the family is poor. But they do enjoy going to the wet market and to cultural events in the nearest town. Jinjing has many friends at kindergarten and they often play together in the courtyards where their houses are set.

Lindelwa lives in KwaZulu Natal in South Africa. She is 5 years old. Her mother died of HIV/AIDs last year and she hasn't seen her father for many years. He works far away. Her older brother Vusi is sick and so is her uncle. Three people in the house next door have died of AIDS. Lindelwa lives with her grandmother and she goes to school whenever she can. It is a long walk to school but Lindelwa loves going to school and she wants to get an education so that when she grows up she can become a doctor and find a cure for the terrible illness that is devastating her community. Her grandmother thinks this is a wonderful plan and she has talked to the teachers at the school who say they will help Lindelwa in every way they can. Hers is a difficult childhood and a difficult life.

(Personal observation notes)

Four different children: four different childhoods. This can be multiplied and multiplied and one would still not have any real sense of just how individual and different childhoods are. This is a book about child development. You may question why another book about child development is needed. After all there are dozens around, from the famous classical texts of researchers and theorists from the developed world like Piaget and Vygotsky, to simpler primers written for a range of audiences. This book aims to explore some of the ideas of the recognised authors and to consider how they contribute to our knowledge of children today not only in the developed world but also more globally. This is a book that adopts a position which goes beyond the psychological and the individual and considers findings from other fields and domains that contribute to our understanding of how children in both the developed and the developing worlds grow and learn. A consideration of child development at the start of the twenty-first century cannot afford to ignore the realities of life for the majority of the world's children.

We start by considering what we mean by 'child development'. Superficially, child development can be described as a discipline that looks at how children develop from conception to the end of childhood. The definition of when childhood ends, however, is not as simple as it might appear. In the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, childhood is deemed to end at the age of 18 unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier. The discipline of child development aims to identify, describe and predict patterns in children's growth, which includes intellectual (or cognitive), linguistic, physical, social, behavioural and emotional development. Because all aspects of development are interrelated, child development is seen as being holistic.

Important themes emerge from this and embedded in these are a number of assumptions:

- 1 Since development is seen as holistic (where all aspects of development are conceived of as being interrelated) it is evident that *something that affects one aspect of development may affect others*. For example, children who fail to thrive physically are sometimes expected to fail in other areas. In some cases this is so, but the question to ask is whether this is a given.
- 2 Development is thought to be *continuous and cumulative* and the early years are almost always described as vital to later development. For example, children who have a difficult start in life are often expected to be less likely to succeed in life. Again, there is evidence to suggest that this is often the case, but as the next point illustrates it is not always so.
- 3 Development is sometimes considered to have a certain *plasticity* that allows for children to adapt and adjust to adverse events and circumstances. Evidence suggests that some children who have a difficult start in life overcome enormous difficulties, and conversely children who have a privileged start in life sometimes struggle to adapt to later hardships.

Development, then, is a complex and dynamic construct and is sometimes described as though it exists outside of history and culture. The theme of this book is that development cannot be fully understood outside of a historical and a cultural context. Criticisms are often made of the books written about child development on the basis that they adopt an almost totally Western view of children and of their development. When one considers that there are significantly more children growing up in the developing world than there are in the developed world the primacy of the views of North American and European writers remains a concern.

The changing representations of children

The early Renaissance painter, Caravaggio, scoured the streets of Italian towns and cities, sketching the faces and postures of people he encountered. In his paintings – almost always of religious subjects and themes – the faces – smiling, weeping, anguished, joyous – of the people he had sketched appear as Salome or Jesus or Herod. Through the use of line and colour and light he was able to represent anger, disbelief, awe, horror, fear, love – every possible emotion. And the bodies of the people in his paintings are clearly human, capable of movement and repose. His skills were unequalled. And yet, when it came to drawing infants or babies – most often cherubs – this eye for detail and truth and reality seemed to desert him. The babies are unlike any babies you will see anywhere. They are – in proportion and expression – miniature adults. The question of why this is so is a fascinating one and it does not take much imagination to realise that this was not because he was unable to draw babies in proportion. Clearly, this most exceptional of painters could reproduce anything he had seen. It seems likely that the reproduction of babies in his work relates more clearly to the concepts he held of infants. Leonardo da Vinci's babies are chubby and rosy-cheeked and idealised in his paintings, but in his anatomical drawings they are accurate and exact. It seems that in these scientific drawings he drew what he saw whilst in some of the paintings his ideas about babies and small children overcame this. It is tempting to conclude that at that time and throughout much of Europe infants were seen as miniature versions of adults – as adults in waiting. And indeed an analysis of medieval European paintings does seem to suggest as much.

By contrast, during Victorian times the perceived and romanticised innocence of childhood was very evident in images of children. It is interesting to situate this view in the context of growing industrialisation and the development of new capitalist endeavours. Children were often depicted in pastel colours, prettified, with softened edges and these images were later transposed to be used in advertising. A famous example is of John Millais's painting of *Bubbles* (1886), which was later used to sell Pears' soap and is an image some of you may be familiar with.

What seems evident is that images of childhood have changed over time and do change with place. This means that the conceptions people have of childhood will relate to not only to childhood itself but also to attitudes to children, to their positions in the family and society, to how they learn and develop morally, intellectually and emotionally, and to what their rights are.

It was the work of the author Philippe Aries that first drew attention to how notions of children and childhood have changed over time. In his seminal work *Centuries of Childhood* (1962) he suggested that the concept of childhood was a new one that did not exist in medieval times. He studied medieval icons and used them to show how images of Jesus as an infant always showed him as a shrunken adult and linked that to the concept of the *homunculus* (little man). He went on to argue that, beyond infancy where the child was seen as totally dependent, there was no concept of a child per se, and consequently no real concept of childhood as a specific phase of life. He believed that the concept of childhood developed slowly in the upper classes in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and only appeared fully in society in the twentieth century. In his argument young people between the ages of 7 and 15 were regarded as adults: they were required to work as apprentices in the fields and later in the factories, and entered into what we might regard as adult life at very young ages. The great painters of the Renaissance did not paint realistic infants not because they lacked skill but because they perceived of babies as adults in waiting.

Aries went on to examine how the developing concept of the child and of childhood changed the position of young people in society. He argued that with the concept of childhood came a theory of the innocence of the child. Children were to be protected from the dreadful realities of life – from birth and death, sex and world events. Where children had once been merely apprentice adults, age itself was of no consequence, but with the development of childhood as a concept children were increasingly segregated by age. Along with the concept of the child and of childhood came thoughts about leisure and play and work and family roles.

For Aries the changes that came about between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries could be ascribed to three factors. First there was a change to what was happening within families as children became perceived of as more vulnerable and more valued and in need of protection. Second, at a later stage, children were seen as being in need of discipline and training. Third, with the development of schooling, children's ages were seen as significant and schools were seen as the institutions where children belonged. These changes gradually spread from the upper and middle classes until they affected all classes.

Aries's arguments have been challenged by various authors including Shulamith Shahar (1990) who, in her study of childhood in the Middle Ages, concluded that some thinkers did conceive of childhood as being made up of several separate stages. She criticised Aries for using very limited sources (things like the diaries and letters and pictures from primarily French aristocratic homes) in order to describe childhood per se. Her point

was that the majority of children were not written about and this is a theme of much of the work that followed.

Later historians, including Heywood (2001), have shown how modern concepts of childhood arose through the different discourses and practices relating to child labour, to criminality and to welfare. The development is sometimes summed up as the path from the child as miniature adult, to the child as sinner, to the child as property, to the child as school pupil.

British childhood over time: an illustration

We are talking about childhood as a social construct – which means that the ideas of what childhood is and what children are like are created by adults. It requires little extrapolation from this to see that the adults who construct images of childhood do so within a specific time and place, responding to the economic, political, religious, class and political influences and challenges in place. We will use evidence of how views of childhood and children changed over time within Britain over the past two centuries.

It was in the eighteenth century that a public debate began about children and about how they should be thought of, nurtured, disciplined and educated. There were two competing strands operating. At one extreme were the harsh views of John Wesley, the Methodist leader, who urged parents to break the will of the child so that it could be subject to the will of God and at the other extreme the views of Rousseau and his followers. In his famous and influential book *Emile* (1762), Rousseau wrote of the child as being imbued with goodness – the natural child. He urged teachers and parents to treat the child like a child – which was revolutionary in the sense that although the child was seen as being prepared for adulthood, childhood was given some status as a phase in its own right.

The notion of the natural child evolved into the notion of the romantic child as the Romantic poets Blake, Coleridge and Wordsworth began to explore the essence of the being, the development of self. Although there were variations in the details of how these poets conceived of this, essentially childhood was a state of innocence and a model of what would – inevitably – be lost during later life. The childhoods being reflected here bear little relation to the reality of life for the majority of children in Britain at the time, reflecting the extremely precious and sentimentalised childhoods of the rich. For the poor children harsher views grew up around the impact of industrialisation, the effect of the French Revolution and the growth of capitalism. The effect of this on the lives of children included a focus on original sin, and parents were urged to teach their children that they were evil. The *Evangelical Magazine* in 1799 referred to children as being ‘sinful polluted creatures’. The founder of the Sunday School movement, a woman called Hannah More, carried this even further, believing that children brought into the world a ‘corrupt nature and evil disposition’ (cited in Hendrick, 1997). Despite these negative views of children, More had an abiding belief in the importance of educating and rearing children.

As the eighteenth century drew to a close child labour predominated. But this began to change as factory children and chimney sweeps and apprentices in the cotton mills began to be seen as slaves being denied their childhood. It was now that a new construction of childhood began to be apparent and the use of children as free labourers died out. The concept of childhood as a specific time and phase characterised by a concern for the welfare and protection of children began to grow. Fears grew for the safety of children

in work, for their weakness as compared with adult workers. In an attempt to define what qualities children had, and the span of childhood, in 1883 a Royal Commission declared that childhood ended at age 13. Although all of this was concerned with the universality of childhood there were clear perceptions that the childhoods of the rich and the poor still varied widely and much attention was paid to the so-called 'delinquent' child. Out of this grew the great education reforms that resulted in compulsory schooling. By the mid nineteenth century the concerns were mainly on establishing norms and images and the role of the state in determining aspects of childhood was fixed.

And what of today's child? Trond Waage, special adviser to the UNICEF Research Centre, gave a talk in Glasgow in November 2005 where he stated his views about the image of the child in modern Western societies. He said that today's children are in conflict for many reasons. For one, they have been through a gender revolution that has meant that their schooling has given them the same opportunities as one another, regardless of gender. For a while they had the opportunity to pursue education without a concern about the cost to their parents. Today, in England at least, that has gone. They have a developed understanding of the global world due to the development of the internet, the mobile phone, social networking and more. So today's children cannot follow well-trodden paths but have to be in charge of their own futures more than children in the past. They live in an intensely consumerist world where even toys are invested with symbolic values – they become expressions of love or pride. Children are often made aware of their rights – sometimes their rights seem to dominate those of all others in their world. Many are concerned that today's children have no sense of the real lives and needs and concerns of others in their own community, let alone those further removed (Waage, 2005).

The portrayal of children

When we talk about 'representations' here we are thinking of representation in its cultural sense and about the socially available images and concepts through which children are thought about and portrayed by others. As we have seen, images of painting reveal quite clearly how the concept of childhood in the Western world has changed and developed. Higonnet (1998) describes how children in paintings have moved from those sentimentalised and romanticised representations of painters like Millais and Gainsborough. Higonnet believes that childhood is defined largely by what it is not: it is not adulthood. These are idealised images of children – children without class or gender or culture. You will still find images like these on calendars and birthday cards, on biscuit tins and on adverts that seek to represent children as part of happy families living uncomplicated lives of innocence. So childhood itself is portrayed as being 'not adulthood' – without difficulties or problems.

Towards the end of the twentieth century, however, these images themselves were being challenged for their perceived sexual preoccupation. Parents themselves became nervous of photographing or painting their own children naked. You may have read of a case in the United States where the director of an arts centre was charged with (and later released) promoting obscenity after staging a photographic exhibition by the controversial artist Robert Mapplethorpe.

If you take the time to examine current images of children you will see a different view of childhood. Children from different cultures and classes, ethnic groups and genders

are presented. Sometimes these children are shown as victims but this is certainly not always so. What some theorists believe is happening here is that a new image of childhood is being promoted. Christensen (1999) believes that this new image of childhood is one in which aspects of power relationships between adults and children are played with and where children are often portrayed as the strong, the able, the competent as compared to the weak, embarrassing adults. This is depicted in some of the jokey cartoons or in recent films showing 'adult' babies and infantile adults. This fictional reversal of rules and of roles is almost always temporary, with power eventually restored to its 'proper' place – i.e. with the adults.

In China at the time of Confucius there was no such thing as a children's playground. Children from wealthy families were looked after by wet-nurses and taught by private tutors. They were constrained by the regulations and formalities of high society at the time. In paintings of children from the Song court we see these well-bred children having time for entertaining themselves. By contrast (and as in many societies) the children of the peasants grew up in the fields and did not go to school. They spent their time alongside their parents and their areas of play were the places of work for their parents. Illustrations from traditional agricultural manuals show children playing alongside their working parents. An example cited by Bai (2005) shows women working in a room where silkworms are breeding while two little children play with silkworms in a basket.

Moving away from popular images, the images of children in paintings also reflect a changed view of childhood. Paula Rego, born in Portugal, and still painting, includes in her work disturbing images of children and of women. The images are drawn on her own experiences, often of poverty and cruelty, and imbued with her strong political sensitivities. In 1992 she was invited by the Folio Society to produce a new illustrated version of J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan*. The pictures reveal images of Peter and Wendy in a relationship imbued with sexuality. The young people are neither innocent nor depraved. They are adolescents in the grip of development. The images are disturbing perhaps because they show aspects of the lives of children that many painters have been reluctant to depict. But the realities of the lives of children often include things that are deeply disturbing.

The ways in which children are portrayed in literature and on film give further illustration of the prevailing philosophies of children and childhood. We are all familiar with how children – particularly poor boys – are portrayed in the Victorian novels of Charles Dickens. One such boy, Oliver Twist, is to be both admired and feared: a poor boy subject to tremendous trials but overcoming adversity through his own 'pluckiness'. In France, Gavroche in Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*, is represented in a similar way. In North America Mark Twain gave us a picture of a street child, Huckleberry Finn – a free spirit representing, according to Twain, all that should be avoided for mothers and all that should be aimed at for boys.

Moving into the early twentieth century, representations of the lives of children change. In literature, in art and later in film and cartoon we find representations of children who did not fit into the conventional mode of Western childhoods – e.g. not only those who were poor heroes but also those living on the streets, being without a family, involved in adult work. Jorge Amado's heroic street child in Brazil was Pedro Bala in his book *Capitães de Areia*. This was paralleled in some of the films that were produced particularly in Europe after 1945. In Hollywood the depictions of children in film remained largely sentimentalised and offered a somewhat saccharine version of childhood: by dramatic contrast films produced in post-war Italy moved to revealing the brutal realities of the

lives of children. Basil Davidson, writing in the *New Statesman* in 1951, drew attention to how determined Italian film makers were to depict the reality of life for many in Italian cities and in the countryside. A milestone in cinema depictions of children was *Bicycle Thieves*, which showed the impact on one child of massive unemployment, and the effects of deep poverty and utter despair. From India, too, came films about childhood showing the effects of poverty and deprivation – like Satyajit Ray's *Apu Trilogy*, made up of *Pather Panchali* (Song of the Little Road), *Aparajito* (The Unvanquished) and *Apur Sansar* (The World of Apu).

Along with changing representations of childhood came changes to the language used to discuss children and childhoods and a developing understanding of children's interests and preoccupations. Bai (2005) tells us that in classical China there were no words to describe children's playthings. It was only when Froebel's ideas about play in education were introduced into China at the beginning of the twentieth century that the Chinese invented a word to describe the 'gifts' given to the children of the affluent to play with. In the fields, however, children picked up the things around them and used them to their own purposes. These were their playthings or toys. At the same time some adults were designing things for children to play with and as in Western society today these were often miniatures of things in the adult world. Toy lanterns are a case in point. So children's games developed, often reflecting popular customs and rites.

In the famous nursery schools of Reggio Emilia the ways in which language is used reveal their very particular view of children and of childhood. The word for 'play' ('giocare' in Italian) is used but less frequently than words like culture and competent and challenging and critical. All children are seen as competent children, all set in the context of their culture, all raising and answering questions. So learning includes being able to make and challenge meaning, to construct metaphors and explore paradoxes, to develop and use individual symbols and codes in the process of learning to decode the established symbols and codes of their culture and society. The educators in Reggio Emilia are clear that childhood itself is a value-laden construct and Rinaldi explains how political the concept is as she tells us that 'childhood does not exist, we create it as a society, as a public subject. It is a social, political and historic construction' (Rinaldi, 2006: 13). This relates closely to the work of Foucault, who looked at how knowledge and power are intertwined in the dominant discourses. The dominant discourse about childhood in the Western world relates to our notions of child development, the importance of play and stages of development. These very concepts then contribute to how we think about the child – the whole thing being cyclical. Knowledge and power legitimise one another.

Western concepts of childhood

The way in which childhood is perceived in the developed world today is as a very distinct and separate phase of development from adulthood. The very discipline of child development as a separate subject illustrates this. Those theorists whose work we will examine later in this book, particularly those who see childhood as being a linear process of moving from dependence to independence, from immature thought to rational thought, encourage the growth of this concept of childhood. In much of the developed world childhood itself is now separated out into different phases – early childhood, childhood and adolescence, for example. For each phase there are ideas about what children should and shouldn't be doing, how they should and should not behave and what their

world should be like. Childhood is perceived of as a time of exploration of the world, moving towards adulthood, protected by the family and the state and free from the pressures of economic demands and work. Remember, however, that we are talking about a minority rather than the majority of children.

Did you know that in the developing world in 2012 one in six children (an equal number of boys and girls) between the ages of 5 and 14 are involved in work? (<http://www.childinfo.org/labour.html>)

Powerful in the development of childhood as a unique phase are the advertisers, the manufacturers and the producers of things designed and made specifically for children. Cross (2004), in his analysis of the underpinning philosophy for the development of children as consumers, describes it as 'wondrous innocence'. He argues that the roots of this lie in the romantic view of childhood expressed in the nineteenth century and in the changing views of the middle classes in the USA and also in Europe. This view of childhood does not mesh well with views of educators or psychologists: nonetheless the influence of it is pervasive and powerful.

Cross (2004) analyses the development as having started in the first three decades of the twentieth century with the growth of magazines for middle-class women. These magazines reached millions of readers and promoted the notion of the child as central to the life and happiness of the adults. The image of the child they promoted was that of the individual, sheltered and scientifically raised child. Adverts consequently promised children (and their parents) brighter, happier, more fulfilled futures if they bought the product. So buying the correct soap could protect the child from illness; ensuring the child had access to a particular toy would promise future opportunities. Buying an insurance policy would guarantee against future hardship and so on. So the child emerged as an independent being with needs different from those of the parents.

As advertising took hold and a market of specialised goods flourished, so adverts appeared encouraging children to 'teach' their parents. Towards the middle of the century adverts often featured father-son bonding as a theme for buying. Fathers, like their sons, would enjoy electric train sets, for example. Girls were often featured as prospective users of beauty products and shown with their mothers in female-bonding around their appearances. Over the twentieth century Western childhoods came to be treated as imitations of adulthood with children being overwhelmed by miniature versions of 'real life'. No longer was it enough for children to play with sticks and lengths of fabric and empty boxes and sand and water: children were offered miniature ironing boards, guns, tables and chairs, washing machines. Children's clothes increasingly began to resemble the clothes being worn by their parents and children's fashion became an enormous growth industry. Younger and younger children were encouraged to dress glamorously or casually but in the fashion of the day: to acquire jewellery and use facial products; to consider their nails and have more than one pair of shoes; to explore fantasy worlds through electronic toys.

In schools and other settings for young children it was thought that the wider the range of bought equipment, the better the education children would receive. That was the implied message and often this was linked to the messages being drawn through the media about what current research into brain activity indicated. Children need to be stimulated and the more varied the stimuli the better the learning. This is something that we challenge throughout this book.

You will recall that we looked briefly at the image of childhood held by educators in Reggio Emilia. For them, the image of a child is, above all, a cultural – and hence a social and political – construct that allows those who hold that image to recognise or ignore some qualities and potentials in children and from that to develop expectations and contexts that will develop the potentials or negate them. Rinaldi says, ‘What we believe about children thus becomes a determining factor in defining their social and ethical identity, their rights and the educational contexts offered them’ (Rinaldi, 2006: 83). This is something to be considered when reading what follows.

Representations of global childhoods

Many in the developing world find the images of childhood in that world deeply offensive. You will be used to images of children as victims – of war, of ethnic cleansing, of poverty, of disease, of natural disasters, of work and of cruelty. The intention behind these images is ostensibly to make an emotional appeal to the rich. In 2005 there was what was described as a celebration of Africa in the media. Images of the poor and deprived dominated and Africa was portrayed as a single entity with all of its people as suffering and stereotyped. Africa is, as you must know, a vast continent made up of many nations, cultures, languages, beliefs, values, levels of wealth and poverty and with a complex and rich (if not always enriching) history. It is important to remember, however, that using such images merely reinforce the centuries-old creation of the superiority of the developed over the developing world.

In many developed countries, including the UK and the USA, there are rich as well as poor children. In these countries the gap between rich and poor is vast and it could be argued that the concept of childhood in these and other countries is a privilege of the rich and practically non-existent for the poor. This was the finding of Goldstein (1998), who explained that rich children in Brazil share many of the experiences of children in the developed world. They go to school, although for those involved in paid labour this is to a limited extent. Poor children in Brazil, however, are required to contribute to the economy of the family and cannot go to school – except for some who may attend sporadically and infrequently. Some are cut loose from their families and have to live on the streets. Remember that this was in 1998.

Think, too, of the millions of children in sub-Saharan Africa who, as a result of the AIDS pandemic, are themselves heads of families. But can we say that for these children childhood does not exist? Clearly there are aspects of their lives that are terrible and urgently need to be improved, but if we deny them the existence of a childhood we characterise childhood as the domain of the rich. I am persuaded by the arguments of Prout (2005) who suggests that we need to broaden our concept of childhood to include the childhoods of the poor as well as those of the rich. In other words, childhood itself cannot be seen as a single simple concept but one that has to take on the diversity of the reality of childhoods across the world. This is an important theme of this book.

Rosemberg (2005) added another dimension to the argument. In her study of childhood and inequality in Brazil she pointed to the dominance of presenting what is problematic – being poor, being black, being indigenous, being ‘the other’ – and asks why there is no focus on what it means to be white, to be of European origin, to speak the dominant language. Very rarely do we question how the dominant status of one group is maintained over generations. That would require us to examine what it is we have to do to maintain our position vis-à-vis the rest of the world. Rosemberg noted

that many recent developments (increased urbanisation, access to television, drop in infant mortality and fertility rates, for example) contribute to the concept of childhood in Brazil. Parents are now reconsidering their patterns of child-rearing. They now see young children as intelligent and the role of the father is being reconceptualised.

In 2009 Marco Kisil analysed how provision for young children in Brazil is being changed through government plans to develop programmes of early childhood development. Poverty still exists, of course, and progress is slow, but there are some interesting and important initiatives that lend hope for the future. For example, in 2003 in one of the southern states a programme was launched aimed at enabling family members to learn to pay more attention to what their young children are doing and saying. Today there are 222 local authorities taking part in another project, which was inspired by the Cuban programme called *Educa a tu Hijo*. This involves staff members visiting families at home to help them understand about child development and how to meet the developmental needs of their children. In addition, there is a programme in the north-east of Brazil that looks at rural children in poor areas (Health Exchange News, 2009).

Gupta (2005) examined concepts of childhood in mountain villages in the Himalayas. She found that the mountain communities were, on the whole, functioning well and that the impact of modernity on them was not helping them move forward, as anticipated, but rather making these traditional societies more fractured. The result is that the communities are losing confidence in their own abilities, their own styles of child-rearing, their own value systems. Gupta's view is that the space of traditional societies must be restored so that their confidence is regained and they can take their own initiatives.

Penn (2005) spent some time in Kazakhstan and highlighted the advantages to children of living in the old Soviet system. Children had freedom and mobility, showed respect for their elders, were part of extended families where child-rearing was shared. Children were thought of as valuable to society – principles upheld both by Soviet society and Central Asian nomadic culture. With the breakdown of the Soviet Union the kindergartens for children, the health services, the water and sanitation facilities broke down. Alongside this has come the impoverishment of women and children – not only in Kazakhstan but also in many of the countries that were part of the Soviet Union. In the first five years after transition the amount of gross domestic product spent on social security has decreased by about 90 per cent, and education and health spending by more than 50 per cent. Families are unable to protect children from the negative outcomes associated with this, despite the traditional pride families take in children.

Did you know that inequality in terms of income distribution in 2012 was greatest (meaning the gap between rich and poor was extremely wide) in five African countries and lowest in Denmark, Japan and Sweden? This is according to the Gini Index, which measures equality (where an index value of 0 represents absolute equality). No country attains or even nearly reaches this target. Income inequality, worldwide, is still with us.

Images of childhood and poverty

One of the most significant and neglected factors in discussions of child development is that of poverty. The United Nations Children's Fund report, published by UNICEF in 2005, stated that 90 per cent of the world's wealth was owned by only 10 per cent of the world's population. It appears that the poor of the world are getting poorer and many

believe that this is caused by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank imposing a free-market economy on the economies of Africa, Asia and South America. What this means is a cut in state expenditure on vital issues like health, welfare and education, reversing state ownerships of various things and removing or lowering barriers to free trade. For some countries these measures have been effective, but for many they have resulted in debt and retrenchment. Prout (2005) tells us that:

Between 1998 and 1993 the real income of the world's poorest five per cent actually fell by over a quarter (UNICEF, 1996). In 1990 the annual income per person in high-income countries was 56 times greater than in low-income countries: by 1999 it was 63 times greater (UNICEF, 2001). The number of people struggling to survive on less than \$1 per day (the international measure of absolute poverty) rose by ten million for every year of the 1990s.

(Prout, 2005: 18)

The ways in which poverty itself are depicted and the effect that poverty has on the lives of children and families is something deserving attention. For the millions of children across the developing world, living without clean water, sanitation, health care or enough food, life is difficult. Parents often struggle to know how to deal with the problems they face. Often these parents are characterised as inadequate or uncaring when in reality they are merely overwhelmed by what life has dealt them. Descriptions of the lives of such families abound: Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1993) writes of the neglect and resulting high infant mortality rate in the *favelas* of Northeast Brazil and Phillipe Bourgois (1998) of similar issues in the *barrios* of New York where he worked with Puerto Rican families.

Poverty is also an issue in the developed world and current economic policies are ensuring that the divides between the rich and poor in the USA, Japan and Europe are still increasing. This was recently and poignantly illustrated by the impact of the earthquake and subsequent tsunami that devastated much of the rural and coastal regions of highly developed Japan. Many of those worst affected were the poorest and weakest people – the elderly, the ill and children. The state did intervene but was hampered in its success by the terrible nuclear accident that followed. In Japan as in some other developed countries the existence of a form of welfare state provides some protection from the more heinous effects of poverty. Nonetheless the differences between the most affluent and the poorest continue to grow and there has been a particular impact on children. In the OECD study carried out by Oxley *et al.* in 2001, of 17 developed countries, 12 showed a growing inequality between the children of the rich and the poor. A more recent OECD report (2011) presents some more optimistic findings, such as that growth in the developed world has outpaced that in advanced economies for more than ten years; China, which once accounted for over one-third of global poverty, now accounts for less than one-sixth. It became the leading trade partner of Brazil, South Africa and India and was set to surpass Germany as the world's largest trading nation in 2010.

Today poverty is becoming more and not less of an issue. I wrote the previous sentence in 2005 and it is sad that this is even more true now, in 2013. Tony Blair, Labour prime minister at the time, had promised to end child poverty by 2020. He did not succeed but the Labour government did manage to give nearly a million children a more secure childhood and a better future. But in 2012 the Centre for Social Justice published a paper called *Rethinking Child Poverty* that totally misrepresented what had been achieved by

the Labour government and reframed poverty as being an issue about morality and behaviour, citing things like poor parenting, adult addiction, worklessness and family breakdown as the causes. So lack of money is seen as a symptom rather than as a cause of poverty. In England, as in much of the developed world in 2012, poverty not only remains an issue but is perceived as being nothing requiring the help of the state (*Observer*, 2012).

Penn (2005) argues that even within the poorest groups there are some positive aspects associated with poverty. She points to the findings of Rahnema and Bawtree (1997), who found that within poor communities life was not meaningless, but grounded in a valuable non-consumerist way of living. There may be some truth in this, although critics find it a somewhat romanticised view of poverty. We must not abandon the battle against child poverty.

Representations of children: children as players

We have seen how childhood has been an intensively regulated phase of life with decisions about the lives of children made almost entirely by adults. It was only towards the end of the last century that the view of children as social beings – as players in their own life stories – began to be accepted as a principle. This was evidenced by the rights of children being encoded in Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which states:

States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters that affect the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.

Mayall *et al.* (1996) have looked at children's views on health and worked with them in schools, treating them as social actors. Children are a minority group in the sense that they lack power to influence their own lives. They may well have views and even be able to articulate these and be heard. But the decisions to be made remain remote from them. There are a range of constraints that stop them from being full participants. What Mayall *et al.* do is to link the sociological study of children in schools to a political agenda that goes beyond the notion of rights.

Some slow progress is being made in the area of children as actors, as people begin to reflect on how the previously dualistic versions of childhood (for example, as a time of innocence vs. as a time of evil) made it difficult for children to be perceived of as anything other than dependent. However, now, in countries throughout the world children are becoming social actors for justice. Some of the examples of this come from South Asia where 45 per cent of the population lives below the income required to meet minimum daily needs and where the disparities between rich and poor are becoming some of the widest in the world (Mahbub ul Haq, 1999). Children are beginning to ask out loud questions about fairness and justice. How fair and just a society is, is determined

by who has the power and how it is used. Social justice implies justice for the poor, the marginalised, the exploited, the oppressed and the denied. Redistribution of wealth goes some way towards addressing these inequalities, but the notion of rights is important too. Children are emerging from their invisibility as both active citizens and social actors.

Raman (2000) points out that understanding the concept of childhood cannot be separated from understanding the wider context.

The very definition of the selfhood, subject hood and personhood is deeply scripted by the larger context. The impact of macro-structures and processes operating at a wider societal level affect groups differentially determining the life-choices of groups and individuals.

(Raman, 2000: 12)

O'Kane (2002) uses this to analyse how concepts of childhood have changed in South Asia. Culturally children in South Asia were not encouraged to express their views or to take part in decision making processes at any level. Children, she says, were seen as the property of their parents. Through the development of some children's collective organisations like the Bal Mazdoor Union (a union of child workers in Delhi) and Bhima Sangha (a union of working children in South India), both of which have been in existence for more than a decade, children have found a voice to express concerns about grave events. A case in point was the killing of 15-year-old worker Zaffar Imam by his employer in 1994, the deaths of three street children at the Government Observation Home at Delhi Gate, also in 1994, and the brutal killings of Gond tribal women and children in Nagpur. All of these cases were discussed by the children and this has been documented (Reddy, 2000 and White, 2001). The impact of this on the views of parents and the community are worth considering. How will views of childhood change over the coming decades? Theis (2001) suggests that there is an ongoing paradigm shift in relation to children and to childhoods. Changes at many levels will result from this – changes to theory and practice, attitudes and language, laws and rights.

Craig (2003) offers us some interesting case studies of projects aimed at involving children and young people working on sensitive issues including racism. One of these relates to work being done in Germany with Turkish mothers and children, and McIvor (1995) has reported on a project where disabled children in Morocco are challenging their dependent status and critically examining how they are both portrayed and viewed by others. People involved in immigration work in the UK are beginning to be aware of the silence of those children and young adults living in situations of great uncertainty and this is surely a field worth researching.

Becoming a good parent

Much has been said and written about the importance of parents in considerations of how children learn and develop. We do not have space here to explore patterns of child-rearing and parenting across time and cultures, but we do have time to consider how images of 'parenting' affect how we conceive of children and their development. We have seen how dominant Western views of child development have been and discussed how much of the work has been done with white middle-class children and their families. Underpinning much of the work has been the assumption that 'everybody' lives in a

home with two parents – a mother and a father. We know that this idealised family is reality for the minority of the world's children and have seen how poverty and disease impact on family structures.

Along with this has been the widely held view that the role of parents – particularly of mothers – is crucial in deciding the success of children. Intervention programmes, developed in response to the idea that poor children need the rich to intervene to provide more stimulation for the children (not to address poverty and inequality *per se*) offer advice to parents such as 'Speak to your children; read to them; use English with them; play games with them'. Lamb (1999) suggests that what is conveyed through the psychological literature about parenting includes the following:

- Children need to have two parents – one of each gender.
- Parents should divide up family responsibilities between them with the mothers being home makers, care-takers and child-rearers (because they are better suited to these roles) and the father earning the living.
- Young children should be cared for primarily within the family and by family members.
- White middle-class parents have superior parenting skills and thus have children who are more likely to excel.

You will know that even within the developed North this model of the idealised family is uncommon. Hochschild (2001) wrote about the care chain in America where middle-class American mothers employed women immigrants from the South to care for their children while the children of these migrant workers were left behind. We find this pattern here in the UK today, when many Eastern European women have come here to work in order to earn more money to support the children they have left behind. This pattern of well-to-do people depending on the poor to care for children at the expense of their own children is documented across time and place.

Currently in the UK there are many projects designed to 'teach' parents how to 'parent'. This is clearly based on some image of 'the good parent' and this, by definition, is a monocultural, over-simplified and Western model.

An image for the twenty-first century?

We have looked, briefly, at how the concepts of childhood and children change over time, place and circumstance. We have seen that how children are represented sometimes gives an indication of how they are perceived within a culture or group, remembering always that often only certain children are represented in literature or art or film. We have considered the pervasiveness of Western ideas in many discussions about children and their development and seen how vital aspects like poverty are ignored or discussed in pejorative ways, suggesting that simple solutions can solve the immense problems created.

We need an image of the child to work with for the purposes of this book. The image suggested by Loris Malaguzzi, founding father of the Reggio Emilia preschools, offers a meaning making child, situated in a culture, coming from a rich history and being enabled to make meaning, represent feelings and ideas and challenge existing structures. The image we hold of the child, is, as we have said, one of the factors that will determine how we

conceive of development. Here is our twenty-first century child, drawn on the model suggested by Rinaldi (2006).

From birth she is engaged in building a relationship with the world and intent on experiencing it so that she develops a complex system of abilities, strategies for learning and ways of organising relationship. So she is able to make her own personal maps for her own development and orientation – social, cognitive, emotional and symbolic. She is making meaning from events from very early on and she will share her meanings through representations and language. She will make and take and share meanings through stories. She is a competent and active and critical child – thus one who might be described by the word challenging. Challenging is often used as a negative term but we use it to suggest that the child is challenging because she can produce change and movement in the various systems with which she is involved. These include the family, the setting, the school, the society. She is a player in her society. The child makes culture, values and rights and is competent in learning and in living. This child can explore a range of realities, can construct metaphors, seeing what is like what and why that matters. She can make and explore paradoxes, seeing what is different and why that matters. She can invent symbols and codes and use these to help her learn to decode the conventional means of symbolisation prevalent in her culture and community. Living within a community, she will learn from all those around her through interaction, watching, listening, being an apprentice and being a teacher.

Things to think about

- How do history and culture affect your understanding of child development?
- In what ways do poverty and rights affect the ways in which you think about how children develop and learn?
- How do you feel about seeing childhood as a separate and distinct phase? Does it allow you to take a broader view of development that encompasses the experience of all?
- Do you think that the dominance of privileged groups continues over generations? What do you see as the effects of this? Do you see this dominance as having an effect on how people in the developing world perceive their own customs, values, traditions and cultures?
- Should we, in the developed world, change, and if so how?