1 Images of Childhood and their Influence on Research

Mary Kellett

Introduction

Was there ever a time when the concept of childhood did not exist? Is there an exclusive identity linked to the stage of childhood or is this merely subsumed within adult apprenticeship? Can children ever just 'be' or are they always in a state of 'becoming' an adult? These are some of the questions that have shaped people's images of childhood over time, constructed from a variety of conceptualisations and assumptions about what it is to be a child. This chapter explores the diversity of such perspectives within and across historical and disciplinary boundaries and examines how they have influenced approaches to research about childhood. There is a degree of over-simplification in separating out perspectives into opposing schools of thought. Contemporary notions favour a blended approach which fuses hitherto polarised views such as those held by biologists and sociologists (childhood as a biological phenomenon versus childhood as a social construct). Space in this chapter only permits an overview of these issues and interested readers can engage more fully with the individual topics via the cited references.

The chapter begins with a brief historical overview which sets the context and shows how different social and cultural understandings of childhood have influenced the growth of childhood research. A review of different disciplinary perspectives explores how these have further developed childhood research contours, and have in turn been shaped by diverse cultures, theories and politics. Finally, the chapter draws on critical issues in contemporary society such as human rights and children's participation as major drivers in present-day representations of childhood and concomitant approaches to research with children and young people.

Historical overview

This first section provides a brief overview of the evolution of conceptions of childhood, mainly in the UK context, showing the close relationship between images of childhood in research and wider society. Childhood research began as theory generation by philosophers and gradually took on more experimental and interventionist characteristics in keeping with changing constructions of childhood leading to the richly diverse and multi-faceted nature of contemporary approaches to research with children and young people.

The question of whether and when childhood was accepted as a separate entity was raised by the French historian Ariès who claimed that in the Middle Ages there was no understanding of the child as anything other than an 'adult in waiting' and no sense of a transitory period between infancy and adulthood (1962). Using images of children from historical paintings as the basis of his work he argued that once weaned, children were in effect treated as adults. There was much criticism of Ariès (see e.g. Evans 1997) for not appreciating that parents dressed their children in small versions of adult clothing for the grandeur of portraiture and that this would not have been how they were dressed in normal daily life. Ariès' work was further undermined by those who pointed to medical treaties on the subject of childhood diseases (Cunningham 1991) as evidence of an interest in the life stage of childhood. The division of childhood into sub-periods was also evident in literature (Shahar 1990). Ariès has been further criticised for an over-emphasis on middle- and upper-class children, taking no account of social class and gender in determining the nature of childhood. Nevertheless, Ariès' work did challenge the notion of childhood as universal for all societies in all times in history. He showed how conceptions of childhood change and are rooted in their own times and cultures and, to an extent, the role of research mirrors this work since it seeks to confirm or challenge assumptions and images that have been constructed in different social and historical periods.

Early conceptualisations of childhood are attributed to the seventeenth century (Hendrick 1997) when images of childhood came to be dominated by Puritan dogma. This was epitomised in the belief that children were innately evil, born with 'original sin' that must be purged from them. The Puritans maintained that children could only be 'enlightened' or 'improved' through education, strict discipline and control. Sayings such as 'spare the rod and spoil the child' and 'only fire can straighten crooked wood' originate from this time and aptly illustrate the harsh images that prevailed. Later in the seventeenth century Locke (1632–1704) challenged the idea that children were innately evil, or innately anything for that matter, arguing they were merely a product of their environment. He posited the image of children as a *tabula rasa*, 'a blank slate' capable of

being shaped by their environment and experiences. With the right environment and education this blank slate child could become a responsible adult, and developing logic and reasoning were seen as key elements of this process. While Locke recognised that children had specific needs of their own, the emphasis was still on the importance of 'becoming' rather than 'being' (Uprichard 2008).

By the eighteenth century secular discourse had, to a large extent, replaced religious dogma. Instead of 'evil', there was a dominant view of childhood as a time of innocence and of children as needing to be saved from corruption and moulded into responsible adults. At this time, children were perceived as being born pure and naturally good and any wrongdoing could be attributed to the corrupting influence of adult society. One of the principal proponents of this discourse was Rousseau. In his book, *Emile, or On Education* (1762) he expounded his theories on how he thought children should be educated. He argued that they needed a natural environment where they could develop at their own pace. Rousseau's construction of childhood fostered an idyllic image. Children were commonly portrayed in angelic garb surrounded by the beauties of Nature. Poets exalted their natural wisdom and spiritual vision. Becoming adult represented a process of steady decline from innocence to corruption.

A century later, this idealised, romantic construction of childhood had become solidly rooted amongst wealthy middle-class families who tended to advocate that childhood was something to be enjoyed and protected. It was a different situation for poorer, working-class families where children as young as 5 might be put to work. Harsh economic reality put paid to any notions of childhood innocence or the preservation of a special child identity. With industrialisation, women and children could now undertake work that had previously required the strength of an adult male (Humphries 2010). Indeed, some of the early spinning machines in cotton factories were designed to suit the smaller fingers – and cheaper wages – of children. In this social sphere children were an important economic commodity and the survival of many families depended on them. These conditions did not favour the spread of idealised images of childhood. 'Childhood', as we understand it in modern terms, was delayed for the poorer classes until social reforms in the late nineteenth century began to have a real impact on the lives of children. The 1842 Mines Act that banned the employment of those under 10 significantly reduced the number of young working children. The introduction of half-time working for school-age children in the 1844 Factory Act caused the number of working children to dwindle further and almost disappear when compulsory schooling became a reality in 1880, with the exception of some rural areas where schools were sparse and child labour an essential part of agricultural life.

Extensive social reform and subsequent child labour legislation brought significant changes in the construction of modern childhood. Children were no

longer so important in the workplace. Zelizer (1985) argued that childhood assumed an 'economically worthless' but 'emotionally priceless' image. She claimed that by the second half of the nineteenth century most urban middle classes had accepted this view of childhood, although poorer families continued to rely on whatever wages children could earn until legislation and compulsory schooling finally put an end to this. In some societies, this prompted a 'sacralisation' of childhood, for example some American reformers asserted that to profit from children's labour was a profanity (Heywood 2001). This led to a more sentimental attitude towards children being adopted.

The aftermath of World War 1 led to a re-appraisal of childhood and its importance. Children began to be seen as the 'future of the nation', as valuable commodities to be emotionally prized and preserved at all costs. They were viewed as having a singular identity with physical, mental and emotional needs. This era of preserving and protecting children brought about a major shift in the approach to research. Investigations centred on the areas of nutrition, health and preventative medicine such as childhood vaccinations, heralding a wave of 'applied research' where results were fed into practice to improve the health and welfare of children and enhance their mental prowess. Comparative studies of children's physical well-being and mortality rates exposed inequalities between different social classes, and this laid the seeds for emancipatory research approaches to develop.

The rise of the Welfare State brought with it an increasing political interference in child-rearing practices in Britain. Reformers tried to impose middle-class values on working-class families, eschewing many of their more flexible, traditional practices in favour of rigid rules such as advice on breast feeding on demand that took no account of mothers who needed to work. The numbers of Child Guidance Clinics grew rapidly and with it a new impetus for childhood research:

> The significance of the clinics was that they took 'nervous', 'maladjusted' and delinquent children and 'treated' them, producing as they did a new perspective on the nature of childhood. (Hendrick 1997: 53)

Schools became an important focal point for this research when control of most children's education passed into the hands of the government through the introduction of state-funded education. Local authorities now decided what was taught, how it was taught and for how long. This significant phase of research was heavily influenced by politics and fuelled by educational reformers. Compulsory schooling presented new opportunities for the study of childhood with ready-made, convenient samples of participants. Childhood research became more discipline-focused, and characterised by distinctive theories and practices. The first of these to emerge was developmental psychology. By 1923 the field of

child development had acquired its own research council, which launched the first issue of *Child Development Abstracts and Bibliography*. Ten years later the learned Society for Research in Child Development had been established. The influence of different disciplines on the growth of childhood research is discussed later in this chapter.

In Western society, the early twenty-first century brought new representations of childhood influenced by advertising and the media. Perspectives became preoccupied with images of the toxicity of youth and childhood in crisis. The 2006 campaign in the UK 'Hold on to Childhood', led by the *Daily Telegraph* newspaper, bemoaned the loss of public play space, the obsessive engagement with digital social media and rising consumer culture which were blurring the boundaries between childhood and adulthood. Kehily (2010) considers this to be a reflection of adult anxiety and insecurity in reaction to the increased risks and uncertainties of late modernity as perceived in cultural shifts, which have led to the reconstruction of conceptualisations of the family and child rearing, including, for example, the way young people are frequently being pilloried in the media. A study by a group of young researchers (Clarke et al. 2009) investigated how young people were portrayed in the popular national UK press. They found that the vast majority of media coverage of young people was negative and focused on minority groups. Most of the stories published were about crime, gangs, education or social inclusion. The imbalance in the amount of positive coverage resulted in misleading portraits of young people as knife-wielding rogues, defined by their choice of clothes, roaming around in gangs:

> Adults do not trust you if you wear fleeces with hoods on or 'hoodies' – they presume you are in with a knife carrying gang and are on drugs. (Focus group comment by young person). (Clarke et al. 2009: 18)

Greater politicisation accompanied these representations of childhood along with new ways of thinking about research, largely influenced by the advance of children's rights. This will be addressed specifically in the final section of this chapter. Before that, we consider the influence of different disciplines on the changing nature of childhood research.

Influences of different disciplines

The perspectives of different disciplines have influenced the ways in which childhood research has evolved. Both the distinctive discipline characteristics and cross-fertilisation between disciplines have been important in shaping our approaches to research with children and young people. To date, influences

on childhood research have come from three main areas: developmental psychology, anthropology and sociology, ultimately fusing into a new discipline of Childhood Studies.

The influence of developmental psychology

Developmental psychology fostered images of the child as an incomplete, malleable organism developing differently in response to different stimuli. 'The child is portrayed, like the laboratory rat, as being at the mercy of external stimuli: passive and conforming' (James and Prout 1997: 13). The notion of 'childhood' tended to be viewed in terms of a preparation for adulthood but now it was 'theorised' within the discipline of developmental psychology and divided into age-graded developmental stages. Schools and nurseries provided ideal opportunities to observe large numbers of children of the same age at the same time and under 'controlled' conditions. This made it possible to analyse average ability and arrive at standardised definitions of what constituted 'normal'. One of the tools for establishing 'normal' was the intelligence test, and psychologists produced a range of different tests for measuring mental processes. This led to the 'labelling' of children and segregation according to their IQ. Whilst research of this nature added to the body of knowledge about cognitive development, it also produced some negative outcomes, particularly for those children who were assigned to institutions for the 'mentally defective' on the basis of their IQ scores. Moreover, it opened the door to abusive practices of eugenic social control and to the promotion of the image of the white child as superior, as in the notion promoted by Terman and others (Terman 1925; Richardson 2011). It should be noted that there was a more progressive side to the development of intelligence tests in that they enabled intelligent working-class children to be recognised and thus dispelled some of the assumptions that the lower classes lacked intelligence. A beneficial consequence of this was the generation of education scholarships.

The influence of Jean Piaget (1896–1980) has been pivotal within developmental psychology. His work outlined clearly defined stages of cognitive growth from the *sensory-motor* stage of infancy through *pre-conceptual*, *intuitive* and *concrete* stages to the *formal operations* of adolescence and adulthood. Movement from one stage to the next was argued to be dependent on the achievement of a specific 'schema' of physical and mental actions and a gradual process of 'de-centring' from the self and orientation to others' perspectives. Piaget maintained that all 'normally' developing children pass through these stages, not at the same rate but certainly in the same sequence. Critics of Piaget's work point to the hierarchical assumptions that are implied in the incremental and linear nature of his version of child development

(with infant sensory-motor intelligence at the lowest end and adult formal operative intelligence at the highest). Piaget was also critiqued for failing to take sufficient account of socio-cultural considerations, and the impact of the environment a child grew up in. Paradoxically, as interest in the phenomenon of childhood grew, research focused increasingly on cognitive development and the process of becoming adult.

An alternative perspective to Piaget's staged interpretation of development came from the Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1896–1934), who proposed a social constructivist model of child development, with an emphasis on the socially interactive nature of learning (Burman 1994; Woodhead 1999). Although he too was concerned with bringing about adult models of thought as exemplified in his 'zone of proximal development', which is the term he gave to the gap between what a child can achieve alone and what can be achieved with adult support. Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) developed this into a notion of 'scaffolding' children to function at a higher level through adult assistance. In essence, within a socially constructed world there are no constraints and childhood is not viewed in any precise, identifiable form. A child's cultural background – such as language, cultural heritage, social context – provides the cognitive development tools which adults help them to acquire (for a more detailed exposition of the social constructivist position see James et al., 1998).

The influence of anthropology

The origins of modern anthropology date from a period when interest focused on discovering, and in some cases conquering, unfamiliar corners of the globe, particularly in what were regarded as 'primitive' societies. Malinowski (1884–1942) is regarded as one of the most influential founders of the discipline and the first researcher to establish 'ethnographic research'. Chapter 7 includes a more detailed consideration of ethnographic and anthropological methods, but for the purposes of this overview it can be said that anthropology is a global discipline studying human behaviour, cultural and social organisation, which draws on a range of methods, particularly ethnographic approaches. Ethnography is a specific methodological approach to studying human behaviour, where the researchers immerse themselves as participants in people's daily lives in order to observe, record and gain insights into naturally occurring events over an extended period of time.

Traditional anthropology has been criticised for rarely examining children in their own right. In the 1920s, Mead was among the first anthropologists to complete work on children. Her ethnographic studies titled *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928) and *Growing up in New Guinea* (1930) gave insights into the lifestyles of Samoan and New Guinean children and young people. She had an abiding

interest in the extent to which nature or nurture determined human behaviour and set out to discover whether biology or socialisation shaped adolescent behaviour. She has since been criticised for using Western developmental principles as her theoretical base. For example, although the pioneering nature of her work is still esteemed, Freeman (1983) challenged the accuracy of her fieldwork claiming she had been gullible in her use of the accounts provided by her informants.

Later anthropologists shifted away from using Western theoretical constructs about childhood as a starting point for interpreting the lives of children in other societies. In the 1950s, Briggs engaged in ethnographic research with the Inuit people of Qipsia. She found that children behaved and were treated differently because of environmental factors. For example, she describes a 3-year-old girl sobbing and being left without comfort once her younger sibling was born. In the Inuit people, the cultural practice was for older siblings to defer to the needs of the baby. As a result the young girl learnt not to cry, but to withdraw into herself silently when she became upset: in this way silence rather than crying was an indication of distress among children just out of infanthood (Briggs, 1970).

The work of anthropologists raised questions about the tendency to assume that Western patterns are universal, and in some respects it poses a challenge for universalist discourses, such as those focusing on children's rights.

The influence of sociology

The perceived inadequacy of universal models was a major influence in the rise of sociological thinking. Sociology has developed through a wide range of theoretical approaches from those that consider the economic and social structure of whole societies, to approaches which study the minutiae of day-to-day interactions between people (Giddens 1995). Sociologists question assumptions about how roles and relationships in society are understood, particularly regarding power relations, and this raises many ethical and political issues and affects the way we think about research. Frones et al. (1990) warned against viewing childhood as a homogenous entity, stressing the importance of accommodating diversities such as race, gender, class, disability and religion. However, despite a substantial focus on the 'family', and a foregrounding of feminist work on the roles of women, children in their own right remained largely invisible in the sociological discipline until the later decades of the twentieth century. The biggest influence on contemporary research understandings of childhood has emerged in the wake of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) in what has come to be known as the 'new sociology of childhood'. James and Prout (1990, 1997) reconstructed childhood as a concept where children and young people have agency in

their own lives and are accepted as valued members of society in their own right. This became firmly established in James et al's seminal theorisation of childhood (1998) which documented the changing perceptions of children's status in society, through four models of childhood representations: *developing child, tribal child, adult child* and *social child*. The first model, *developing child*, has already been described in the section about developmental psychology. The *tribal child* assumes children are socially competent and autonomous within their own cultural worlds, an assertion of the integrity of the child perspective:

> Children were no longer simply to be judged as non-adult by reference to idealized standards of adult rationality. They were not to be labeled as '*pre*-operational' or '*pre*-moral' or *pre*-anything else. Children were just different … what children meant was what they said … nor was it a problem that these meanings might not be congruent with those of the adult world. (James 1999: 239)

James et al's focus on children in the here and now has been superseded, to an extent, by Uprichard's (2008) construct of children as both beings *and* becomings. The third model '*adult child*' represents the child as a competent participant in a shared adult–child world. Here, although the emphasis is still on the adult, children and young people's perspectives are acknowledged and valued. James et al's fourth model, the *social child* signifies children as agents in their own lives, as what the authors refer to as 'social actors'. While accepting that children ultimately become adults, the new sociology of childhood emphasises the separate and unique identity of childhood in the here and now.

From this sociological perspective, childhood is viewed as a dynamic and transient life stage where children are social actors in ever-changing social and cultural contexts. Whilst not all theoreticians acknowledge these particular models of childhood, the widening of the scope of childhood to a societal level along with the shift towards human rights most closely characterise contemporary images of the status of children and young people.

So far we have considered how images of childhood in research have changed over time, how they have been shaped by the different theoretical approaches adopted by researchers working in the disciplines of psychology, anthropology and sociology, and how ideas about childhood have spread across these disciplines, particularly in the field of Childhood Studies. There are other factors that affect how approaches to childhood research have evolved. These are the critical issues that bubble up at certain times creating waves that impact on the global community more universally. In the contemporary era, one of the biggest waves was created by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (commonly referred to as the CRC, 1989) and its impact on the status of the child.

23

The influence of human rights

Power

The CRC is frequently referred to in terms of the three Ps – provision, protection and participation. John (2003) asserts we should include a fourth 'P' – power. Giddens' (1995: 54) rendition of power is:

> … the ability of individuals or groups to make their own concerns count, even when others resist. Power sometimes involves the direct use of force, but is almost always accompanied by the development of ideas (ideologies) which justify the actions of the powerful.

Justifications for adults maintaining power over children are readily found in paternalistic and maternalistic assertions of acting in children's best interests, of protecting children from harm and in adults' claim to superior knowledge and better judgement. While most people, including many children, agree that some adult power is necessary and legitimate, there are others who question the degree of this. For example, Mayall (2000: 120) asserts that generational ordering is key to adult–child power dynamics: 'Adults have divided up the social order into two major groups – adults and children with specific conditions surrounding the lives of each group: provision, constraints and requirements, laws, rights, responsibilities and privileges'.

One of the ways that power is manifested is in how the term 'knowledge' is employed and, until recent times, knowledge-making was considered to be the domain of adults. However, with new considerations of human rights and recognition of children's agency, the prospect of children sharing power as co-creators of knowledge becomes more real. This is evident in knowledge that is generated through consultations with children and through the findings of their own research (Kellett 2011). Interested readers can learn more about concepts of power within sociological thinking in the *Sage Handbook of Sociology* (Calhoun et al. 2005), or for a more in-depth discussion see Foucault (1980) or Hoyle (2000).

Children's rights

As indicated in the introduction, it is overly simplistic to separate out perspectives on childhood into opposing schools of thought. A unifying theme of contemporary thinking in much research on children's lives is the importance of children's rights, which signals that a clear, discursive space has been delineated for children and young people. Within the field of Childhood Studies, for example, children are now considered as having an autonomy that exists outside family, school and institutions, and a voice conditioned

neither by competence nor chronological age. Freeman's (2009) distinction between the politics *for* children and politics *with* children is relevant here. In the former, children's rights are subsumed within a concept of childhood as being an integral part of family and therefore of children as the possessions of parents. Hence many rights, such as choice of schooling, are vested in the parents not the child. In the latter, children's rights are positioned both within and beyond the family, with children's status recognised in society and their consequent access to the civil and human rights encompassed by modern welfare states.

Historically, children have been denied decision-making rights that affect their lives, such as decisions about the use of corporal punishment, on the basis of moral and cognitive incompetence, as epitomised in the paternalist stance of so-called 'child savers' (Archard 2004) who are primarily concerned with protecting children from a stance of adults' superior knowledge about children's best interests. This standpoint has been challenged by liberationists who argue that even young children can make rational decisions (Hyder, 2002; Lansdown, 2005). The concept of children and young people's rights is bound up in central principles of entitlement to be consulted, to be heard and to participate meaningfully in matters affecting their lives as constituted in the CRC, as articulated in articles 12 and 13:

Article 12
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 affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

Article 13
The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice. (UNCRC 1989)

Even within the Convention itself, there is room to open up or close down children's entitlements depending on the interpretation of the term 'is capable of' (see Article 12 above) and its mediation through the adult lens. In the aftermath of CRC, rights-based conceptualisations of childhood began to be embodied in contemporary participation and voice agendas in all societal arenas of childhood, but increasingly in political agendas. This was because the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child regularly reviewed signatory countries' progress against implementing the CRC articles and this catalysed political activity around consultation and participation with children.

Participation

The participation agenda evolved in three phases: listening, consulting and involving children in decision-making processes. Hart's (1992) 'Ladder of children's participation' was the first sustained attempt to theorise participation. Using the metaphor of a ladder, he classifies the first three rungs as non-participation (*manipulation*, *decoration* and *tokenism*). The next four rungs become increasingly empowering: *assigned but informed*, *consulted and informed*, *adult-initiated shared decisions with children* and *child initiated and directed*, while the highest rung is reserved for *child-initiated shared decisions with adults*. While some have found this to be a powerful evaluation tool, others (e.g. Reddy and Ratna 2002) criticise its hierarchical structure. John (1996) decries the implied power dynamic of the bestowing of participation rights on the powerless by the powerful adult, and Treseder (1997) critiques the failure to acknowledge cultural contexts, because children can participate to different degrees depending on the societal context.

By contrast, Shier's model (2001) of participation focuses more on the adult roles than the status of children within projects. From the lowest level ('children are listened to') to the highest ('children share power and responsibility for decision making'), Shier frames questions for adults to consider when planning or evaluating participatory projects around 'openings', 'opportunities' and 'obligations'. He places a lot of emphasis on the collaborative activity of adults and children to bring about the most effective participation.

Kirby and Gibbs (2006) criticise all of these models on the basis that an individual initiative or task cannot be assigned a single level of participation because levels of decision-making power constantly shift within projects and within tasks. There is a gap between the rhetoric and reality of meaningful participation that I would argue is best understood through young people's own lived experiences. One group for whom the gap resonates is children who are in the care of the state, sometimes referred to as 'Looked-After' children. Research has found that many of these children resent the statutory medical and 'adultist' reviews (Sayer 2008) that frequently dominate their service provision and deny them any choice regarding their placement. A group of looked-after young people (Bradwell et al. 2011) in North Tyneside carried out their own research about the care review system. They designed and distributed a questionnaire to all children and young people in care in North Tyneside and then collected evidence from focus groups with 36 children and young people about their review meetings. They found that while they were generally listened to in the actual review meeting, young people had no input into the timing, venue, membership or agenda of the reviews. Some young people reported resentment that adults talked about them amongst themselves, as if the young person was not there:

'I didn't want myself to be there to be honest. I don't like going to them but I can't not go to them because otherwise you don't get told what is happening'.

'I don't like going to meetings and sitting in front of loads of people'.

'The social worker just decides'.

(Quotes from young people in Bradwell et al. 2011: 227)

Others wanted professionals with specific roles – such as teachers – to be present only for the education elements and felt embarrassed when more personal issues were discussed in front of their teacher, yet their requests that the teacher withdraw were not respected. While decision making for children in care is a complex process determined by multi-agency review, this piecemeal implementation of how much voice and participation children can exercise within that review process is indicative of earlier discussion points about adults holding the central ground of 'what is in the child's best interest' (Archard 1962) and choosing the degree to which participation is facilitated according to context (Treseder 1997).

Voice

Participation is the act of doing and being involved, voice is the right to free expression of views that may, or may not emanate from participation and relates to Article 13 of CRC. Lundy (2007: 933) maintains that voice is only one component of children's right for their views to be given a valued platform, recognition and impact. She conceptualises voice in four parts:

Space: Children must be given the opportunity to express a view
Voice: Children must be facilitated to express their views
Audience: The view must be listened to
Influence: The view must be acted upon as appropriate.

This is a helpful orientation and highlights the inefficacy of voice operating in a vacuum. There have to be the right conditions in place before children can exercise voice and mechanisms to carry that voice to an audience in a way that can bring influence to bear at a local or societal level. As Lundy states, creating space for children to exercise voice is an essential part of this process. So, researchers, educationists and policymakers need to be proactive rather than passive in providing for, and encouraging, children to express their views in safe spaces without fear of reprisal.

From within the education domain, the rise of pupil voice typifies many of the contradictions and tensions of this concept. UK legislation requires that schools consult with their pupils and that inspectors report on how a school seeks and acts on the views of its pupils. However, there is an implicit contract

pupils must enter into requiring them to 'speak responsibly, intelligently and usefully' (Bragg 2001: 73). Moreover, they are being invited to participate within a context where their attendance is compulsory rather than under their own control. Indeed, voice initiatives in schools can sometimes reinforce existing divisive practices rather than question them (Rudduck and Flutter 2004). This situation worsens if participating children are viewed as privileged, with a very real danger of creating or reinforcing hierarchical power structures within the pupil body.

In relation to pupil voice, Fielding (2001) observed that teaching and learning were largely forbidden areas of enquiry (Lodge 2005) and that softer topics such as school uniform or toilets were more commonly explored. However, the growth of school councils is beginning to change some of these perceptions and render more agency to pupil voice. In some schools students now sit on governing bodies and have a limited role in staff appointment processes. Other schools are empowering pupils as researchers to investigate issues that concern them, including pedagogy, leadership and management (e.g. see Priyasha 2010; Nijjar 2012). Moving through the second decade of the twenty-first century, an abiding, if at times aspirational, image of childhood is of the growing child and youth voice beginning to pervade policy and practice.

Agency

Children's agency is the fulfilment of participation and voice through actions that change or influence aspects of their lives. Children and young people as agents of change and knowledge-bearing experts are comparatively recent childhood images that have only recently begun to impact on childhood research. This can be traced back to the influence of theories such as Foucault's conceptualisations of power (1980). These have been explored through the lens of participation (Hart, 1992; Treseder 1997) before Lundy's (2007) visualisation of voice led to the recognition that agency had to follow to ensure participation and voice were not operating in a vacuum. Space is limited so we will explore the notion of children's agency through an illustration of young people with chronic health conditions.

The Getting Sorted project designs, delivers and evaluates self-care workshops to empower children and young people with type 1 diabetes (Webster 2007) and asthma (Webster and Newell 2008) to manage their own conditions and attain more life independence. Young people are involved in all aspects of the project as advisers, co-researchers and evaluators. Findings emerging from the project suggest that many of the children and young people involved have negative experiences of paediatric clinics such as those that children attend as

part of their diabetic care plans. They feel disempowered by consultants who either do not listen to them or give them no opportunity to express a view. Critically, they feel that professionals do not understand what it is like trying to be a typical teenager and engage in typical teenage activities while trying to manage their conditions. They report that medical staff only appear to be interested in the clinical management of blood sugar levels and are oblivious to the emotional impacts of their condition. Children speak of feeling nagged, judged and criticised to a point where their self-esteem gets crushed. Many also feel suffocated by parental restrictions on their activities. 'It depends on my blood sugar levels whether I am allowed to go out or not' (young person quote from Webster 2007: 26).

Children and young people are also becoming more agentic in the area of mental health. For example, Young Minds VIK (Very Important Kids) is a group of children and young people aged between 5 and 25 in England who offer support to peers experiencing mental health problems. Their virtual panel Healthy Heads, which was set up in 2007, enables children and young people with various experiences of mental health services to feed into national agendas and policy formation regarding service provision.

Concluding thoughts

Tracing images of childhood over time, across disciplines and in the field of human rights has revealed a kaleidoscope of shifting concepts and theories that have shaped our understanding of this life stage. Different discourses arising from diverse theoretical disciplines along with constructs from different social and cultural value systems all contribute to the mix that informs our present-day images of childhood. There is no characteristic single image that we can latch on to. Children are at one and the same time portrayed as victims, consumers, social actors, innocents and criminals. They are perceived as threats to established order just as readily as keys to the future. So what might the next decades hold? Will the increasing focus on children as social actors foster more research by children themselves? Where is the next twisting contour of the saga heading? To unchartered waters in the guise of greater power-sharing with adults and partners in policy making? Or possibly a return to a more paternalistic and repressive era should a backlash against children's rights take hold and give way to collective panic? If 'childhood is the life-space which our culture limits it to be' (Qvortrup 1994: 3), then hopefully future images of childhood will continue to challenge the extent of those limits.

Bibliography

Archard (1962) *Children: Rights and Childhood*. London and New York: Routledge.

Archard, D. (2004) *Children: Rights and Childhood*. London: Routledge.

Ariès, P. (1962) *Centuries of Childhood*. London: Cape.

Bradwell, J., Crawford, D., Crawford, J., Dent, L., Finlinson, K., Gibson, R., Porter, E. and Kellett, M. (2011) 'How looked-after children are involved in their care review process', *Child Indicators Research,* 4(2): 221–9.

Bragg, S. (2001) 'Taking a joke: learning from the voices we don't want to hear', *Forum*, 43(2): 70–73.

Briggs, J.L. (1970) *Never in Anger: Portrait of an Eskimo Family.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Burman, E. (1994) *Deconstructing Developmental Psychology*. London: Routledge.

Calhoun, C., Rojek, C. and Turner, B.S. (2005) *The Sage Handbook of Sociology.* London: Sage.

Clarke, C., Ghosh, A., Green, E. and Shauriff, N. (2009) 'Media portrayal of young people: impact and influences', available at: www.open.ac.uk/researchprojects/ childrens-research-centre/files/crc-pr/file/ecms/web-content/clarke.pdf (accessed 17 October 2013).

Cunningham, H. (1991) *The Children of the Poor.* Oxford: Blackwell.

Evans, R.J. (1997) *In Defence of History*. London: Granta Books.

Fielding, M. (2001) 'Students as radical agents of change', *Journal of Educational Change*, 2(2): 123–41.

Foucault, M. (1980) 'Two Lectures', in C. Gordon (ed.), *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Freeman, D. (1983) *Margaret Mead and Samoa*. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press.

Freeman, M. (2009) 'Children's rights as human rights: Reading the UNCRC', in J. Qvortrup, W. Corsaro and M.S. Honig (eds), *The Palgrave Handbook of Childhood Studies.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Frones, I., Jensen, A. and Solberg, A. (1990) *Childhood as a Social Phenomenon: Implications for Future Social Policy*. Vienna, Eurosocial Report no 36/1.

Giddens, A. (1995) *Sociology*. Oxford: Polity Press. Hall, P. (2001) 'The Evolution of Economic Policy' in H. Machin (ed.), *Developments in French Politics Vol II.* London: Palgrave.

Hart, R. (1992) *Children's Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship*. Florence: UNICEF.

Hendrick, H. (1997) 'Constructions and reconstructions of British childhood: An interpretive survey, 1800 to present', in A. James and A. Prout (eds), *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood*, 2nd edition. Basingstoke: Falmer Press.

Heywood, C. (2001) *A History of Childhood*. Oxford: Blackwell

Hoyle, E. (2000) 'Micropolitics of educational organisations', in A. Westoby (ed.), *Culture and Power in Educational Organisations*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

Humphries, J. (2010) *Childhood and Child Labour in the British Industrial Revolution*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hyder, T. (2002) 'Making it happen: Young children's rights in action', in B. Franklin (ed.), *The New Handbook of Children's Rights: Comparative Policy and Practice*. London and New York: Routledge.

James. A. (1999) 'Researching children's social competence: Methods and models', in M. Woodhead, D. Faulkner and K. Littleton (eds), *Making Sense of Social Development*. London: Routledge, in association with The Open University.

James, A. and Prout, A. (1990) (eds) *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood*. London: Routledge.

James, A. and Prout, A. (1997) (eds) *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood*, 2nd edition. Basingstoke: Falmer Press.

James, A., Jenks, C. and Prout, A. (1998) *Theorizing Childhood*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

John, M. (1996) *Children in Charge: The Child's Right to Resources*. London: Jessica Kingsley.

John, M. (2003) *Children's Rights and Power: Charging Up for a New Century*. London: Jessica Kingsley.

Kehily, M.J. (2010) 'Childhood in crisis? Tracing the contours of crisis and its impact upon contemporary parenting practices', *Media Culture and Society*, 32(2): 171–85.

Kellett, M. (2011) 'Empowering children and young people as researchers: Overcoming barriers and building capacity', *Child Indicators Research*, 4(2): 205–19.

Kirby, P. and Gibbs, S. (2006) 'Facilitating participation: Adults' caring support roles within child-to-child projects in schools and after-school settings', *Children & Society*, 20(3): 209–22.

Lansdown, G. (2005) *The Evolving Capacities of the Child.* Florence: Innocenti Research Centre.

Lodge, C. (2005) 'From hearing voices to engaging in dialogue: Problematising student participation in school improvement', *Journal of Educational Change*, 6: 125–46.

Lundy, L. (2007) '"Voice" is not enough: Conceptualising Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child', *British Educational Research Journal*, 33(6): 927–42.

Mayall, B. (2000) 'Conversations with children: Working with generational issues', in P. Christensen and A. James (eds), *Research with Children: Perspectives and Practices.* London: Routledge Falmer. pp. 120–35.

Mead, M. (1928) *Coming of Age in Samoa: A Psychological Study of Primitive Youth for Western Civilisation.* New York: Dell.

Mead, M. (1930) *Growing up in New Guinea.* New York: Morrow Quill Paperbacks.

Nijjar, R. (2012) 'Investigating 11–12 year olds views about their learning environments in an English middle school', available at: http://childrens-research-centre.open.ac.uk (accessed 4 January 2013).

Priyasha (2010) 'Is homework affecting extra-curricular activities?', available at: http://childrens-research-centre.open.ac.uk (accessed 4 January 2013).

Qvortrup, J., Bardy, M., Sgritta, G. and Wintersberger, H. (eds) (1994) *Childhood* Matters: Social Theory, Practice and Politics. Aldershot: Avebury.

Reddy, N. and Ratna, R. (2002) *A Journey in Children's Participation*. Bangalore: The Concerned for Working Children.

Richardson, John T.E. (2011) *Howard Andrew Knox: Pioneer of Psychological Testing at Ellis Island.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Rousseau, J. (1762) *Emile, or On Education*, transl. Allan Bloom. Harmondsworth: Penguin (1991).

Rudduck, J. and Flutter, J. (2004) *How to Improve your School: Giving Pupils a Voice*. London and New York: Continuum.

Sayer, T. (2008) *Critical Practice in Working with Children*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Shahar, S. (1990) *Childhood in the Middle Ages*. London: Routledge.

Shier, H. (2001) 'Pathways to participation: Openings, opportunities and obligations', *Children & Society*, 15(2): 107–17.

Terman, L.M. (1925) *Genetic Studies of Genius*. Stanford University, USA.

Treseder, P. (1997) *Empowering Children and Young People*. London: Save the Children.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1989) Geneva: United Nations.

Uprichard, E. (2008) 'Children as being and becomings: Children, childhood and temporality', *Children and Society*, 22(4): 303–13.

Webster, L. (2007) *Development and Evaluation of the 'Getting Sorted' Workshops for Young People with Diabetes.* Faculty of Health, Leeds Metropolitan University.

Webster, L. and Newell, C. (2008) *Development and Evaluation of the 'Getting Sorted' Workshops for Young People with Asthma.* Faculty of Health, Leeds Metropolitan University.

Wood, D.J., Bruner, J.S. and Ross, G. (1976) 'The role of tutoring in problem solving', *Journal of Child Psychiatry and Psychology*, 17(2): 89–100.

Woodhead, M. (1999) 'Reconstructing developmental psychology – some first steps', *Children and Society*, 13(1): 3–19.

Zelizer, V. (1985) *Pricing the Priceless Child*. Princeton: Yale University Press.