

PART ONE

PERSPECTIVES ON CHILDHOOD

This first part of the book is concerned with perspectives on childhood and on how children grow up. If there is one message from all that has been written about childhood in the last 25 years, it is that childhood is not at all the same thing in different times and places. That childhood differs in important ways according to where in the world we are, what period of history we are in, or which social group we are considering, is not in dispute. What is sometimes disputed, however, is whether we can use the words 'childhood' and 'children' to apply to what we find in different times and places or among different social groups. Unsurprisingly, some authors prefer to speak of a multiplicity of 'childhoods' rather than a single 'childhood'.

It is now generally accepted that childhood is, in a significant sense, socially constructed – that is, it is something produced in social interaction and discourse rather than being a purely natural phenomenon. That is not to say that there is not a physical and biological base to some of the important characteristics that distinguish children from adults – but the form which these differences take is a social production. In no way is this more evident than in the enormous variation between the appearance of childhood in different times, places and social settings.

The following chapters approach the issue of differences in childhood from four different angles.

In Chapter 1, Bob Sanders focuses on the differences in childhood in different cultures, and explores the power issues that lead to the defining of childrearing patterns in some parts of the world as 'proper' while other parts of the world are seen as failing. The chapter introduces an issue which has long challenged anthropologists – finding the right balance between *ethnocentrism* and *cultural relativism*.

In Chapter 2, Roy Lowe turns his attention to the history of childhood and considers how the pioneering work of Ariès and others has redefined the way in which we understand childhood. Key themes in this chapter are the tension between views of children as innocent or corrupt, how far childhood is socially constructed or biologically given, and how far childhood in history differs in different places. Lowe looks in particular at the significance for childhood of key social changes that took place in Britain during the sixteenth century in domestic life and in education.

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In Chapter 3, Nigel Thomas reviews developments in the sociological study of childhood, and the potential of sociology for advancing our understanding in this area alongside other disciplines. He shows how theoretical models such as Corsaro's 'interpretive reproduction' help us to understand how children can be at the same time determined by their culture and society and active in making meanings and transformations. A strong message is that children do not simply exist in relation to the family or the school, but may have to be understood differently in different settings. This echoes the point made earlier that there is not one 'childhood' but a multiplicity of childhoods, and that children themselves help to define and make those childhoods what they are.

In Chapter 4, Helen Penn argues that while it is possible to identify some general features of early childhood, all of them are shaped and modified by cultural contexts to the extent that, rather than searching for what is shared, it may be more useful to understand what is particular: that is, local conceptions of childhood. Penn illustrates some of these particularities through a consideration of traditional African values and attitudes – in particular, the principle of ubuntu. Turning to the globalisation of early childhood, Penn notes the tension in the South (the majority world) between the need to provide early years education and care and the importing of inappropriate Euro-American models of good practice.

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CHILDHOOD IN DIFFERENT CULTURES

Bob Sanders

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Introduction

This chapter asks why it is important to understand how different the experience of being a child can be, depending upon where in the world a child is growing up. It begins by considering why we should study childhood in different cultures – not only because it helps us provide better care for children, but also because we need to understand the power issues that lead to the definition of childrearing patterns in some parts of the world as ‘proper’ whilst those in other parts are seen as failing to live up to Westernised notions of what all children should aspire to. The chapter discusses culture and introduces an issue which has long challenged anthropologists – finding the right balance between *ethnocentrism* and *cultural relativism*.

Why study the development of children in a cross-cultural context?

There are many reasons for studying the cross-cultural context of children's development. First, there are practical reasons. Trawick-Smith (1997) gives an illuminating example of a relatively experienced care provider who encounters difficulties in her new post in a large urban childcare centre, when trying to soothe a young child from a different cultural background. The usual things that she has tried in the past do not seem to work with this child. He asks the question: 'How is it that this lesson had escaped her until now?' (1997: 577). The answer he suggests is:

Children in her previous family childcare home were of very similar cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. They were primarily sons and daughters of white middle-class professionals. Their family lives were very much like her own. Her new child care setting includes children of many different cultural and social economic backgrounds. (Trawick-Smith, 1997: 577-8)

To operate effectively with young children, the worker needs not only to learn 'what works?', but 'what works for this particular child, from this particular socioeconomic and cultural background?'

Another reason for studying children's development across cultures is to appreciate the value of, and the necessity for, diversity in adaptation to different environments. Darwinian principles apply not only to the physical adaptation of living organisms to their environment, but also to their social adaptation. Harkness and Super (1994) have suggested the concept of 'developmental niche', which is conceived in terms of three basic components: the physical and social settings of the child's everyday life, the culturally-regulated customs of childcare and childrearing; and the psychology of the caretakers. It is important to remember that childrearing patterns vary from culture to culture and represent an adaptation to different environments (physical and social). Given the dynamic nature of the adaptation, they may represent the optimal survival patterns within that particular environment. Child development is a continuing dynamic of an individual interacting with, and adapting to, his/her environment – an 'ecological' model of child development that has gained considerable attention in recent years (Barrett, 1998; Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

A third reason is to remind us that the process of attaching values to different cultural practices, whether in relation to childrearing or to other customs and practices, contains a *power* component. In this sense there is a postmodern construction of cultural differences. The 'discourse' within cross-cultural childrearing can be construed as a set of events and circumstances defined and evaluated by those with power, in relation to those without (or with less). Sanders (1999), for

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example, looks at child abuse in a cross-cultural context, and argues that it is essential to understand the power to define 'abuse'. There is a danger that Westernised concepts of child abuse are taken on board in other cultures and societies where there may be far more urgent threats to children's well-being and survival, certainly dangers that are at least as pressing as the risks posed by intra-familial abuse.

A fourth reason for studying culture in relation to children is to gain a new perspective on our own society. As Rogoff and Morelli put it:

An important function of cross-cultural research has been to allow investigators to look closely at the impact of their own belief systems . . . Working with people from a quite different background can make one aware of aspects of human activity that are not noticeable until they are missing or differently arranged. . . . (1993: 18).

It is helpful to understand just how different child upbringing can be, so that one's own cultural approach can be set in the context of a range of different approaches. It provides a 'You are here' marker in relation to a world map of diverse cultural childrearing.

Related to this is a fifth and final reason – the value of a 'decentring' exercise, so that one's own experience of being on the receiving end of childrearing does not become the yardstick against which other methods of childrearing are compared. There are other yardsticks for looking at differing childrearing approaches, which will be discussed below, but using one's own upbringing is a potential pitfall to be avoided. It should be remembered that differences are just that – differences. They should not be seen or interpreted as deficits.

This chapter does not describe the different patterns of childrearing throughout the world: there is simply not enough space. Instead, it considers some of the issues around looking at childrearing patterns across cultures. The chapter considers the issues of culture, ethnocentrism and cultural relativism, globalisation, and the development of international conventions to promote the welfare of children.

There is, however, a wealth of information available for students to consider in depth the experiences of growing up in particular societies and cultures. Not all of this is in the form of textual material, and students are also advised to look at the portrayals of children and childhood in film. Childhood has long been a favourite theme of film-makers, and they will often use children as the protagonist in films to highlight issues such as the impact of large-scale adversity (for example, war and political turbulence) on children, or use the 'uncontaminated' eyes of the child to present to the audience a particular view of society. Such films can be seen to contain profound themes in relation to the social construction of childhood, a theme of this book, but on a more immediate level, they contain depictions of everyday life involving children in other societies and cultures.

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Several highly worthwhile films include:

- *The Blue Kite* (China)
- *My Life as a Dog* (Sweden)
- *Kolya* (Czech Republic)
- *The Bicycle Thieves* (Italy)
- *The 400 Blows* (France)
- *The Boy Who Stopped Talking* (Netherlands and Kurdistan)
- *Ma Vie en Rose* (France)
- *The Spirit of the Beehive* (Spain)
- *Pather Pachali* (India)
- *Los Olvidados* (Mexico).

For some of these films the societal context is peripheral to the theme of the film, and we see an unselfconscious depiction of a child in a particular culture at a particular time as conveyed through the eyes of the director. In others – for example, *The Boy Who Stopped Talking*, *The Blue Kite*, *Kolya*, *Ma Vie en Rose*, *Pather Pachali*, *Los Olvidados* – the focus is on the interaction between a young child and some powerful influence of the society within which he or she is growing – for instance war, political ideology, sexist ideology, or third world poverty.

Culture, ethnocentrism and cultural relativism

So how are we to understand culture? At its most basic, culture can be understood as the ‘rules and tools’ of a society. White (1959: 3) defines culture as comprising ‘tools, implements, utensils, clothing, ornaments, customs, institutions, beliefs, rituals, games, works of art, language, etc.’ (cited in Kottak, 1994: 36).

Kottak (1994) describes aspects of culture which provide us with a clearer understanding. Culture is *learned* and relies on symbols to convey meaning. Culture is imposed upon nature (‘natural lakes don’t close at five, but cultural lakes do’). It is both general and specific: all people have culture, but individuals have different cultures. It is all-encompassing, in the sense that it includes everything that people do, not just the more ‘aesthetic’ activities. Culture is *shared*: it is learned through interaction with others in the society. Consider, for example, children who have not had that experience – so-called ‘feral’ children brought up by animals away from human society (Newton, 2002). Not only do they miss out on learning human language, and that part of thinking that is dependent upon language, but they have also not been *encultured*; they have not engaged in that process through which babies and young children acquire culture. Culture is *patterned* in the sense that aspects of it are linked, so that if one cultural institution changes, for example, employment practices, other connected institutions, such as domestic roles within families, may change as a result. Consider, for example, the way in which our conceptualisations of the needs of

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children changed before and after the Second World War, with women first contributing to the war effort (and children being provided with day care to enable this) and then being told that they were needed back in the home in the role of mothers and caretakers for their children, leaving the jobs for those returning from the war.

On other hand, although people may be clear about cultural requirements, people don't always follow rules, reflecting the tension between the individual and society identified by child development theorists and criminologists alike. We expend considerable effort in trying to understand why some individuals don't conform to what we expect, and it is arguable that we should spend as much time studying why people *do* conform. And, indeed, following the rules may require a great deal of sophistication, perhaps much more than we are sometimes aware of. Waksler (1994) reminds us that, for a kindergarten school child, knowing what the unwritten and implicit rules are (such as stopping dancing when the music stops) can be very difficult. As she notes:

Being a rule-abiding kindergartner is no mean accomplishment; it involves extensive, sophisticated knowledge and the grasp of a wide array of subtleties and nuances of words and action. (Waksler, 1994: 105)

Another aspect of culture described by Kottak (1994) is that it has universality, particularity, and generality at the same time. By *universality* is meant those cultural aspects that distinguish human beings from other species and which are present in all people. *Particularity* refers to the uniqueness of every culture: it is like no other. *Generality*, on the other hand, refers to aspects of culture that may link some cultures together into groupings, but not all. In relation to people, there is an expression: 'Every person is, at any one time, like all other people, like some other people and like no other people.' The same could be said to apply to cultures.

Cultures do not exist in a vacuum. They are in a social world within which there is increasing contact at all different levels (see discussion of globalisation below). The early anthropologists were aware of the dangers of imposing external cultural values on the societies they were studying. They began to articulate such notions in the concepts of ethnocentrism and cultural relativism, which may be seen as opposite ends of a continuum. These are difficult concepts to fully understand, and indeed because one (ethnocentrism) has tended to become value-laden as a 'bad thing', and the other (cultural relativism) as a 'good thing', it is sometimes difficult to appreciate that extremes of either can be unhelpful.

What is ethnocentrism?

Schultz and Lavenda (1990: 32) offer the view that ethnocentrism is 'the opinion that one's own way of life is natural or correct, indeed the only true way of being fully

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human'. Seymour-Smith (1986: 97) offers as a definition 'the habit or tendency to judge or interpret other cultures according to the criteria of one's own culture', and considers it to be a universal tendency. Applebaum (1996) considers that one of the greatest achievements of multiculturalism has been a better understanding of the 'indignity' of ethnocentrism, arguing that appreciating diversity and finding value in other cultures does not imply belittling one's own culture. Kottak (1994: 48) describes it as 'the tendency to view one's own culture as best and to judge the behaviour and beliefs of culturally different people by one's own standards.' In connection specifically with childrearing practices, Barnes (1995: 102) refers to the 'ethnocentric fallacy', which holds that 'what any one culture considers to be optimal childrearing practices (for example, firm control with clearly explained reasons embedded in a climate of warmth: the authoritarian style...) will also be optimal for every other culture.' In the same vein Sprott observes, 'Polarized ideas about parental control dominate the Anglo Dominant Culture's value orientations, reflected in both popular and scientific literature. Parental permissiveness is cast into an opposing category of "noncontrol", imbuing it with negativism' (1994: 1111). Prejudice against 'Eskimo' childrearing as being over-indulgent is examined in that context and a method is offered to 'loosen' the grip of Anglo beliefs about parenting.

However, it is not as simple as it might seem to avoid some degree of ethnocentrism. It can be tantamount to trying to achieve a completely value-free perspective, or a viewpoint that is not based on the history of one's own experiences. A particular dilemma posed by Seymour-Smith (1986) is how anthropologist should deal with ethnocentrism encountered in the populations they study. He asks:

... should 'native ethnocentrism' be respected as part of the indigenous world view, or should the anthropologist combat prejudice and misinterpretation in the community by providing more information about the values and customs of other people? (1986: 97)

What is cultural relativism?

If ethnocentrism is an evil to be avoided, what then is cultural relativism? It is understanding another culture well enough and sympathetically enough so that the culture is comprehensible as a plan for how to live. Kottak (1994: 48) defines it as, 'the position that the values and standards of cultures differ and deserve respect. Extreme relativism argues that cultures should be judged solely by their own standards.' Seymour-Smith (1986: 63) defines it as 'An approach or theory in anthropology [in which] each culture or each society possessed its own rationality and coherence in terms of which its customs and beliefs were interpreted.' In all three of these definitions we see a pattern of internal consistency emerging as a defining characteristic. If then indeed, a culture were to be understood in its own terms, and not according the standards and dictates of other cultures, 'what business did

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members of one culture have telling those of another what to do?' (Gardner and Lewis, 1996: 28).

But as with ethnocentrism, there are dilemmas. Seymour-Smith (1986: 64) notes, 'One of the major problems in the concept of cultural relativism when held dogmatically is that it leaves the anthropologist without a theoretical basis for comparative generalizations regarding human societies or cultures.' Korbin (1981), in her anthropological examination of child abuse, notes that 'a stance of extreme cultural relativism, in which all judgments of humane treatment of children are suspended in the name of cultural rights, may be used to justify a lesser standard of care for some children'. Barrett also addresses the issue of abusive cultural practices:

The time-honoured way in which anthropologists have attempted to avoid ethnocentrism is relativism. It has generally been assumed that there are no good or bad cultures or cultural practices. This approach carries with it the danger of slipping into the more radical position of amoral relativism, in which there are no standards whatever. In other words, under the guise of culture, anything goes, because moral judgment is ruled out. This seems to be one of those problems incapable of rational solution. If we criticize someone else's cultural practice, such as clitoridectomy (female circumcision), we would seem to be guilty of ethnocentrism; but if we fail to do so, where do we draw the line? The obvious way around this dilemma is to articulate a set of universal values, but that is easier said than done. (1996: 21)

How then is one to approach the issue of cultural practices, particularly as they apply to children, which might be acceptable within the context of one culture, but unacceptable when judged by another? At a time when there was much less contact between different cultures, when that contact was limited to anthropologists from Westernised developed nations visiting so-called 'primitive' societies, the issue might have been less significant than it perhaps is today when most nations now have majority and minority ethnic groups, and many countries have a significant number of different cultural groups establishing communities within national borders. These globalising trends place different cultures in contact with each other much more than previously, and this trend is likely to continue. As I have noted elsewhere:

The dangers of an ethnocentric perspective are relatively clear. It is a manifestation of the exercise of power imbalances between different cultures and societies. With ethnocentrism one has cultural hegemony; however, with cultural relativism one lacks a foundation from which to censure female circumcision, the internment of Jewish children (and adults) in concentration camps, the historical practice of foot-binding in China, and ultimately, the practice of child sacrifice as practised in some societies in former times. At its most extreme, cultural relativism would imply the acceptance of such practices. (Sanders, 1999: 27-8)

Are there universal standards which one can apply? One may perhaps consider the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as such a set of universal standards. However, as noted by Hodgkin (1994), implementation of the Convention can produce difficulties when violations of the rights of children are justified on the basis of cultural practice.

Globalisation

Globalisation is 'the rapidly developing and ever-densening network of interconnections and inter-dependencies that characterize modern social life' (Tomlinson, 1999: 2). McGrew (in Hall 1994: 229) describes it as 'those processes, operating on a global scale, which cut across national boundaries, integrating and connecting communities and organisations in new space-time combinations, making the world in reality and in experience more interconnected'. In both of these cases, it could be argued that the writers, by emphasising the intercommunication aspect, are describing the causes of globalisation rather than the consequences, and as such only focusing on a part of the definition. Pugh (1997) describes it as a 'process in a world in which time and space have become compressed because of the operation of modern transport, communications and the increasing internationalisation of economic activity. Thus, actions in one part of the globe have consequences elsewhere' (Pugh 1997: 101, cited in Pugh and Gould 2000).

Among these other usages, the concept reflects the increasing trend of cross-influence between different cultures on a world level. It also reflects power differentials within that process of reciprocal influence, which mean that the traffic is predominantly one-way. Despite the proliferation of exotic restaurants within Western societies (very frequently beginning with previously colonised nations – for example British-Indian, French-Vietnamese, Dutch-Indonesian), there is arguably more influence of Westernised, developed and industrialised countries on non-Westernised, non-developed and non-industrialised countries than the other way round. In large part this is because of the desire for overseas markets on the part of multinational companies. Hirst and Thompson (1996: 1) observe:

It is widely asserted that we live in an era in which the greater part of social life is determined by global processes, in which national cultures, national economies and national borders are dissolving.

With others being more influenced by us and *vice versa*, one aspect of concern about globalisation is the trend from a planet of diverse societies and cultures towards a planetary cultural homogeneity. It is possible, however, to overstate this. For example, Hall provides a number of reasons why the concept of cultural homogeneity is 'too simplistic, exaggerated and one-sided' (1992: 304). Reasons include the continuing fascination with difference, and the fact that this kind of globalisation is 'unevenly distributed around the world', affecting more so countries in the Western world.

A perhaps more powerful argument against the ultimate threat of cultural homogeneity emerges when we consider the reasons why we have different cultures. From a Darwinian perspective, it could be argued that one reason human societies differ from each other in the first place is because the world consists of tropical rain forests, vast plains, mountainous areas, deserts, areas of permafrost, and so forth. Culture is

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perhaps largely a reflection that human species have been compelled to adapt to different environments, thereby reflecting a diversity at least as wide-ranging as the ecological niches within which people are born, grow, live and die. The argument against the threat of eventual cultural homogeneity therefore would be that as long as the world has a variety of different environments within which people can and do survive, and as long as people continue to derive an advantage from living in social groupings rather than in isolation, there will continue to be a wide range of variations in cultures. However, whilst this may reassure us about the threat of the eventual demise of all cultures but one, it does not necessarily reassure us about variations in the levels of cultural diversity around the world.

Let us now consider some further aspects of this concept. It would not be possible to have such a worldwide trade in culture without the incredibly rapid technological advances of the 20th century. Transportation and communication developments in particular have effectively made a reality of the phrase 'It's a small world' – and becoming smaller all the time. Whereas at the end of the nineteenth century it would have taken a month to cross the Atlantic, now one can do it in a matter of hours. Communications technology over the last two centuries has gone from telegraph systems (1837) to transatlantic cables (1858) to the invention (1876) and subsequent development of the telephone, the development of wireless radio (1895), and the subsequent development of public broadcast radio, the development and marketing (1936–1938) of televisions, the large-scale distribution of personal computers and the development of the Internet during the 1990s. During the same time cars have revolutionised the ability of people to move around within and between countries, and air travel, once the prerogative of the affluent elite, has developed into a widespread necessity of life, enabling people to live and work further and further afield from the place where they may have originated.

These technological advances have also contributed to another facet of globalisation, which has been highlighted through 'McDonaldization' and 'Coca Cola-ization' metaphors: 'Wherever you go in the world you will find a McDonalds.' Apart from wonder at the successful marketing of a product that is less than forty-years-old, and aside from the astounding economic success of the product, there are other cultural implications. Firstly, it is not only bringing an American product, but an American ideology (entrepreneurial enterprise) to many other countries. As noted by Fukuyama 1991, cited in Pugh and Gould (2000: 124), 'For some writers, globalisation marks the triumphal spread of the capitalist free market influence over the world's economic and political systems.' Nothing exports capitalism nearly as effectively as the fast-food delivery of a Big Mac. The product is both standardised and adapted to the local customs. The success of McDonalds draws on the love-hate relationship with the USA throughout the world. Whilst people may have deplored the engineered involvement of the USA in numerous overseas conflicts, protested outside American embassies over a range of political activities, etc., there has ever been a deep fascination with American cultural symbols, and companies in the USA have

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been quick to exploit these. Levi and Wrangler Jeans, Hollywood icons such as James Dean, Marilyn Monroe, Humphrey Bogart, entertainers such as Elvis Presley, Chuck Berry, Buddy Holly – all are ‘products’ that have been deliberately marketed overseas and have been voraciously devoured by consumers of various nationalities, eager to import American culture, if not American imperialism, into their part of the world.

Let us now briefly consider the role of language in globalisation. The Biblical story of the Tower of Babel tells of the origin of different languages. It was God’s punishment for the arrogance of mankind, that they should contemplate building a Tower that would reach to heaven. To punish them he made them all speak in different tongues, and with that, the ability, and necessity, to collaborate in the building of the Tower was lost and the Tower was abandoned. The tale highlights the necessity to be able to communicate, and the ability to sell products and services overseas has historically required the ability to communicate in local languages. However, English had become the ‘lingua franca’ of the world by the end of the twentieth century. Europe provides a very interesting illustration of the ethnocentric orientation of the English language. In virtually every Western European country except the UK, children are taught a second and sometimes a third language at an age when they are most receptive – in primary school, usually starting around age seven. By the time that European children are eight or nine, they are generally extremely proficient in English. In the UK, other European languages are not taught until children enter secondary school (although in Wales children learn Welsh in primary school). In effect, children of other countries are expected to learn English, but English-speaking countries make little effort to teach their children European languages. However, this is likely to change. It was announced by the Education Secretary, Alan Johnson in March 2007 that by the year 2010, children aged 7–14 in England will be required to take a modern foreign language as part of the National Curriculum.

To further highlight the significance of language, Sanders (1999) demonstrates how child protection can be influenced across national boundaries, in ways that reflect linguistic similarities (USA and UK; Belgium, Netherlands and France). If the models adopted to address social problems are indeed, as suggested, derived predominantly from interactions with countries speaking the same language, and if English appears to be headed towards being the Esperanto dream of a language spoken around the world, regardless of what other language is spoken, then it would seem to follow that there is a likelihood, and a danger, that the future holds the prospect of more and more solutions to social problems being derived from the English-speaking nations.

Why is understanding these concepts so important in relation to children and childhood? The answer is that there is a danger, in the context of unbridled ethnocentrism and an increasingly globalised world culture, that certain ideologies about children and childhood (derived predominantly from Western, affluent countries) will come to dominate the discourse about childhood and displace the vital diversity of experience of being a child that there is at present. Colton et al. (2001) for example note the limited range of countries (USA and Europe) from which are derived

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contemporary notions of child development, that is, how children do and should develop, and which are accepted as universal.

International conventions

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by all countries in the world except Somalia and the USA, sets minimum standards against which the treatment of children in different countries can be judged. Provisions such as the right to life, to a name and a nationality, the prevention of kidnapping and abduction, the right to free primary education, the prohibition of torture, cruelty, capital punishment, or life imprisonment of children, and protection from the effects of war, appear to relate to issues that are not of pressing concern within the UK. However, it would be a mistake to be complacent or regard the Convention simply as a tool to promote minimum standards in non-Western countries. The UK is a long way from adequately addressing children's right to express views on matters concerning them. There are concerns about protection for asylum seeking children – the UK was singled out in a European report as providing poor services in this respect (The *Guardian*, 3 April 2001). Kohli (2007) attributes this to an 'ambivalence' of policy at national level about such children which reflects at local level.

Even the Articles requiring countries to provide support to both parents to bring up a child, and to promote a child's right to an adequate standard of living, could be said to have been dramatically undermined between 1979 and 1997 in the UK, as increasing numbers of British children found themselves growing up in impoverished households. Government targets to reduce child poverty by 25% by 2004, by 50% by 2010 and to eliminate it by 2020 remain elusive, and despite some 700,000 children being lifted out of poverty, the government failed to reach the first target (Harker, 2006).

Likewise, if we look at the European Convention of Human Rights, we see that there are significant differences within Europe in the extent to which children are treated as citizens in their own right (for instance, by countries banning corporal punishment), or the extent to which the state is seen as having a role in the care of children (for instance, by countries providing pre-school programmes for young children). In these ways the interpretation of international standards is coloured by each country's own cultural values.

The final point to be mindful of when looking at provision across countries is whether rich and powerful countries are using their power and economic influence to coerce others to adopt their standards. In other words, the process of implementing international Conventions also brings us back to the tension we identified earlier, between ethnocentrism, cultural relativism and globalisation.

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on themes arising from a better understanding of children's development when located in a cross-cultural context. The focus has been to provide the student with a rationale for studying childrearing in different cultures, an examination of issues of power in defining 'normality' in child development (with particular references to discourses concerning ethnocentrism and cultural relativism), a discussion of globalisation, and a brief reference to international conventions affecting the welfare of children.

Questions and exercises

- 1 What are the most important reasons for studying the cross-cultural context of children's development?
- 2 How can we find out about cultural differences in childrearing?
- 3 What do we mean when we talk about 'culture'?
- 4 What is 'ethnocentrism' and what is wrong with it?
- 5 What is 'cultural relativism' and what are the problems with it?
- 6 What is 'globalisation' and what are its implications for childrearing and child development?
- 7 What is the impact of international conventions on the upbringing of children? Can such conventions help us to overcome the problems we have identified with 'ethnocentrism' and 'cultural relativism'?

Further reading

Bronfenbrenner (1979) is indispensable as an introduction to thinking about global differences in children's upbringing. Trawick-Smith (1997) is a useful starting point for understanding what sort of differences there are, and provides a particularly good critique of traditional child development theories, when examined from a multicultural perspective. Konner (1991) is an excellent source (with a range of interesting illustrations), highlighting cross-cultural variations in specific aspects of childrearing. Likewise, Keats (1997) focuses on specific aspects of different societies. Tomlinson (1999) is helpful on the issue of globalisation and its implications for culture. Harwood et al. (1995) and Kaçitçibasi (1996) both reflect powerfully on precisely what difference culture makes in the way children develop and finally, Valsiner (2000) describes the relatively new field of cultural developmental psychology and provides interesting cultural contexts of various aspects of children's lives and development.
