

# The SAGE Encyclopedia of CHILDREN AND CHILDHOOD STUDIES

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schedules, courses, syllabi, and nearly everything is organized under the realm of *chronos*. We plan, aim, and organize our educational life according to a time that expects of everyone the same things in the same amount of time. Is there any space for childing in schools nowadays? It is interesting to go back to the Greek word from which school is derived. *Schole*, with the meaning of free time, is a space with a different time than social time. As Jan Masschelein and Maarten Simons have shown, in school, *schole* time has largely been lost. But in its origin, at least, time in school looks closer to *aion* than *chronos* to the extent that it is much more open to childing than today.

This issue is related to another difficult question: What is childhood? Our society also usually responds to this question chronologically: a stage of life, understood as a line of consecutive, successive, and irreversible chronological movements. If we were to respond to it *aionically* we should answer that childhood is a form, intense, of experiencing life. We think, under *chronos*, that childhood is the first part of our lives that we abandon when we grow up: every adult has been a child but needs not to be anymore a child in order to be able to become an adult. In this perspective childing is limited to a stage of life. But what if we considered life as an intensity, duration, deepness of experience? Could we exercise childhood and childing as adults? Could childing be a possibility of experience not only for children but also for adults? Could the creation of the conditions for the emergence of childing in schools be considered an educational aim?

This problem takes us to what the education of childhood is about and how we consider the meaning and sense of an educational practice. In the Western tradition, so-called, education has been dominantly understood as the formation of childhood. In effect, educational policies, discourse, and practices are established so as children could become the socially desired adults, citizens, members of the ideal society that educational institutions will help to achieve. In a sense, this understanding implies an oblivion of childhood and childing. This obliviousness probably explains why our schools are so chronological and the time of childing is concentrated and minimized during the breaks. But *schole* and *aion* inhabit every school at least virtually. And if we consider childing an unforgettable dimension of life then one of

the tasks of a teacher could be conceived as creating the conditions so that every child could experience childing in school, not only as a form of break but as a form of expressing another possibility of being in the world. Even more, every teacher could think of childing as a possibility not only for children but also for themselves to inhabit differently school. Maybe we are a little far from education as the formation of childhood and closer to a childhood of education. This happens because *aion* is also the time of thinking and writing. What is the time of teaching? What kind of times experiences can a teacher offer to herself and her students while teaching? In what way can teachers conceive themselves as childing beings? It is not bad to finish this exercise on childing with questions. Maybe this is all what childing it is about—namely, opening oneself to childhood, its time, its way of being in the world, or to childing itself.

Walter Omar Kohan

See also Children as Philosophers; Schooling; Time and Childhood; Time, Concept of, in Children

### Further Readings

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## CHILDISM

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*Childism* is sometimes defined as viewing the social from the perspective of childhood. This includes taking children's experiences and

perspectives seriously, but it also goes beyond. In this context, *viewing* implies conducting objective analyses of children's positions in society and in social theory with a view to carrying out theoretical reconstruction relating to criticism of, and claims about, social justice and recognition for children. While **childism** includes both a political and a scientific dimension that are interrelated but not identical. This entry offers a definition of **childism**, exploring its central claims and its limitations.

### **Childism Defined**

Politically, **childism** puts forward the radical notion that despite differences in age, body size, brain development, experience, and power, children and adults are inherently of equal worth, and children's perspectives and experiences should thus be considered on the same footing as those of adults. Thus, the political dimension of **childism** may also be defined in terms of advocacy for the recognition of children and their rights. However, the concept has also been used in the opposite sense, for instance in the work of the American psychotherapist, Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, to address discrimination against children, a position that is usually defined as *adultism*.

Full recognition of children's democratic rights involves a range of ethical and methodological challenges. John Wall has argued that the main aim is to ensure that children's experiences and interests make a difference to how power is exercised. Only then is democracy truly representative, seen from a childist perspective. One tool that could promote that agenda would be to give everybody, regardless of age, the right to a vote, as politicians are typically more attentive and loyal to the interest of citizens with *voting power*. Children's right to vote could take the form of the right to choose either to vote oneself or to let another person vote on one's behalf. Of course, a baby cannot make such a choice, but this could be solved by giving the baby's guardian (typical a parent) the right to vote on his/her behalf, albeit with the restriction that the moment the child wishes to vote or hand over his/her vote to another person, s/he has the right to do so. As Wall points out, this *solution* is not without risks and pitfalls; nevertheless, a reform of the democratic system

that is informed by **childism** and which also addresses the related methodological and ethical challenges and pitfalls would not only enhance children's democratic rights but would also ensure a more radical and inclusive democracy for others who, for one reason or another, are excluded from voting.

### **Childism's Central Claims**

Scientifically, childism's central claim is that to understand childhood properly is to understand society differently, and therefore that insights gleaned from childhood research not only generate knowledge about children's lives and perspectives but can potentially also shed light on human life, society and social changes more broadly, thereby also helping to revise existing theories and ensure more accurate analyses of *the social*, including social change. **Childism** challenges fundamental epistemological and ontological assumptions in the humanities and social sciences, creating a basis for rethinking social theories and gaining new or deeper insights into decisive issues in contemporary society, including identifying and opposing child-discriminatory mechanisms in relation to democracy.

From a social science perspective, a major goal of **childism** is to acknowledge childhood as a social phenomenon and to integrate critiques, generated by the new social studies of childhood (also known as the *second wave* of childhood studies), that target existing research and policies. These critiques regard the children–adults distinction as a false and dualistic construction; they also interrogate the practice of adultism, that is, the habit of taking the adult as the norm in all situations, and as a result, addressing children as the *other*, taking their position in the social order as natural and legitimating discrimination.

**Childism** may, thus, be regarded as analogous to feminism, which has challenged the dualistic construction of women and men, thereby generating insights into discriminatory mechanisms and contributing to theoretical reconstruction and development. Thus, **childism** makes a common case with feminism, as well as anti-ethnocentrism, anti-sexism, and the like, in its critique that mainstream research and policy are based on White, heterosexual, adult middle-class male norms. It

follows from this that calls for inclusion, social justice, and recognition must reject mainstream approaches and any notion of *equality* based on these norms, and instead embrace a difference-centered approach that seeks to restructure basic social norms as well as ontological and epistemological assumptions in everyday institutions, politics, and research. Following this line of thinking, childhood researchers have de- and reconstructed traditional models of citizenship with a view to designing more inclusive and difference-centered models.

### Childism's Background and Limitations

**Childism** is inspired by, and owes a considerable debt to, feminist and anti-racist approaches; however, **childism** also adds to and reformulates these approaches as—just like mainstream approaches—they often naturalize the othering of children, for instance, in the case of the social construction of children as care receivers and adults as caregivers. Thus, the feminist ethic of care has been reconstructed from a childist perspective that deconstructs the dualistic construction of caregivers and care receivers and replaces the related dependence-independence dualism with the notion of *interdependency*. Likewise, other theories including Axel Honneth's theory of recognition, Niklas Luhmann's concept of trust, and child development models in psychology, have been reconstructed based on insights from **childism**.

Although **childism** has deconstructed dualistic models of children, the approach nonetheless conceptualizes children as simultaneously "the same but different" compared to adults. This idea acknowledges children's difference, compared to adults, in terms of body size, brain development (including the absence, in healthy children, of brain degeneration), years of life experience, position in the social order, and generationally-based experiences and competencies; while simultaneously recognizing that differences *between* children—due to contextual differences, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, class, age, and so on may be equally—or even more—significant. Nevertheless, children's differences compared to adults pose (and expose) certain methodological and ethical as well as theoretical and societal issues, suggesting that research from a childist perspective can

offer unique insights. One example is that researching power relations (e.g., in participatory research practices or in society) from a childist perspective exposes the matter of age, enabling new theoretical concepts to flourish, such as the generational order, generational ordering, and *generagency*. Another example is that childhood exposes new dynamics and inequality fault lines, as well as hopes and fears related to social changes triggered by the global economy, environment, and new technologies. Thanks to its focus on children's experiences and agency, **childism** offers us a kind of *sociological microscope* through which to scrutinize such changes.

Hanne Warming

See also Adultism; Child-Centered/Child-Led Research; Childhood Studies; Children's Rights; Citizenship; Generationing

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## CHILDREN AND ART

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The arts are an essential tool for helping us understand the human experience. The arts, especially storytelling and play, are universal tools for children's meaning making. The arts enable children to understand different perspectives and experiences, generating empathy and solidarity. Anna Stetsenko argued that creativity is an *integral*