Maturity in ender's game: a state of mind, not a physical quality

When a person is referred to as ' mature', it does not necessarily mean that he/she must be an adult. In Ender's Game, by Orson Scott Card, maturity is a recurring theme. Yet, the main characters are mainly comprised of children. This brings forth the idea that age cannot be the deciding factor when judging one's maturity. The characteristics that typically make up maturity are only presumed to come with age. Shown throughout the novel Ender's Game, maturity is a state of mind developed by experience rather than a characteristic that only develops with age.

In Ender's Game, the main protagonist is a young boy named Andrew, or Ender, Wiggin. As the reader will find out right from the beginning, Ender is different from the other kids. However, there is one trait that he and his fellow students share: none of them are childish. " Ender's Game is one novel brave enough to really look at children without making them childish" (Kelly 112). The children in the novel do not act like typical children their ages. In fact, they are shown to be quite mature for their ages, especially Ender. Ender is constantly bullied by the other boys he goes to school with. But when the reader sees how he reacts to it, it is not in the way that one would expect from a child as young as him. " Ender's response to the other boys' bullying is more intelligent and calculating, as everything Ender does is, and Card uses it to show another aspect of childhood, the struggle between intellect and fear" (Kelly 113). Normally, a child may cry and run away, or act completely on impulse, but not Ender. He seems to know what he's doing. He is able to plan things out in his head efficiently. This assists in differentiating him from other kids, showing that he is smarter and thinks differently than them. This, of course, only makes him a target for more

bullying. " Yet he possesses a genius and mature assuredness that makes him a target for abuse by peergroup bullies and adults who are in control" (Kelly 112). When Ender is involved in these types of situations, it is his quick wit and " mature assuredness" that gets him out mostly unharmed. He reacts almost as if he already has experience in these situations because he is able to calculate the results of his possible actions. This starts to bring up an underlying tone of maturity. Ender's thought processes early on show that he is advanced and make him seem mature to the reader even though he is only a young child.

Although Ender seems to be the one character most obviously showing development of maturity, he is not the only one to act in this way. One of these characters who seems to already be grown up is Ender's brother, Peter. " Peter...seems patterned on evil geniuses...but never does he show a hint of a child's mental formation. He is fully grown from the start—an adult" (Kelly 114). As soon as the reader is introduced to Peter, it is evident that he is a very aggressive and violent character. While getting to know Peter as a character, the reader realizes that although Peter is technically a child, he shows no aspects of being childish. He also seems to have already developed his personality, which is not something that is common in a child. Peter's multiple cruel actions are not impulsive, either, like a troubled child's may be. For example, when Peter makes Ender play " buggers and astronauts" with him, he kneels on Ender's torso, making it hard for him to breath: "' I could kill you like this,' Peter whispered. ' Just press and press until you're dead. And I could say that I didn't know it would hurt you, that we were just playing, and they'd believe me, and everything would be fine.

And you'd be dead. Everything would be fine'" (Card 12). Everything he does is thought out and planned, and he is fully aware of what he is doing. He is often shown to be smarter than the average adult. Because Peter is represented in this way – an " evil genius" – it is like he never had to grow up; he is already an adult in every way except age. This demonstrates the idea that maturity does not rely solely on age for development. Another portrayal of this idea is the character Valentine, the sister of Peter and Ender. Valentine is like Peter in the way that she calculates things. When the two siblings decide to cooperate in order to communicate their ideas with the world over the internet, the only things holding them back are their legal ages. " The only thing separating Peter and Valentine from adulthood…is the fact that the world can see that they are children and therefore discriminates against them for it" (Kelly 114). Once they are able to get on the nets appearing as adults, they are able to speak without being disputed. The recurring question of what effect age truly has regarding maturity is once again raised in the novel. Although children may have the same ideas as adults, they are often not taken seriously simply because they are children. Even if their personalities have already been developed, the world still sees them as nothing other than children. The character Bean is another example of the common theme of already being grown up. " He was a soldier, and if anyone had asked him what he wanted to be when he grew up, he wouldn't have known what they meant" (Card 224). Bean, although technically a child, knows what he is in life: a soldier. This not something typical of a child, but rather something an adult might feel. This also hints at the repeated idea of not needing to grow up. Bean already knows who he is and does not need to grow up to figure it out. It is also possible that Bean feels grown up by this

time – maybe not physically, but mentally. And maturity is predominantly a mental quality, meaning that Bean is already mature because of his obvious lack of needing to grow up, similar to Peter and Valentine. Maturity is constantly being represented as something that is figurative rather than literal, because the most mature people in the book are the children.

The way it is illustrated in Ender's Game, maturity is something that is forced upon the children if they have not yet developed it. One case of this is when the gifted children chosen for Battle School are introduced to the reader. " Children must also possess an ability to adapt quickly to new situations; empathy, or the ability to understand and care for others, is also a valuable character trait" (" Ender's Game" 107). If they have not yet started to display certain characteristics, they are essentially forced into quickly developing their personalities to fit the military system. This is basically forced maturity. An example of this is when the adults that run Battle School are talking about Ender, after he has arrived: "' His isolation can't be broken. He can never come to believe that anyone will come to help him out, ever'" (Card 38). In this quote, it can be seen that the adults already have a plan to develop Ender to their liking. The Battle School system is specifically meant to take advanced children and make it so that they develop themselves even faster for the benefit of society. " The military is purposefully structured to be unjust, breaking those who cannot rise above injustice fast enough" (Blackmore 115). Those who run the military know what they are doing, and use unfairness to their advantage. If only the ' strong' children who are able to develop quickly can move on, then the system is kept at its most efficient. Yet, being able to deal with injustice effectively is generally something adults

are faced with, and this time it relates to children. This shows that it is possible for children to be mature, because if it wasn't, then the entire foundation of Battle School would fail. One of the tools that the adults of Battle School use to mold the kids – especially Ender – to their liking is isolation. " Isolation makes dependence on others impossible; Ender is forced to fall back on and develop his own resources" (Blackmore 117). Since Battle School is up in space, the children are extremely far away from their families down on Earth. This forces them to rely on themselves for their own well-being. " Parental authority is replaced by dependence on the self" (Blackmore 117). These kids no longer have their parents to guide them and tell them what to do. The only orders they'll receive are those from their commanding officers. That is not something that children are used to; rather, it is something characteristic of adults. But in Battle School, that is what they come to expect and are forced to adapt to. So, in a way, it is like the children in Battle School are not really children. One of the characters who is a kid in Battle School, Dink, has been taking note of this fact during his time at the school. "'…I've got a pretty good idea what children are, and we aren't children. Children can lose sometimes and nobody cares. Children aren't in armies, they aren't commanders, they don't rule over forty other kids, it's more than anybody can take and not get crazy'" (Card 108). Dink acknowledges that the kids in Battle School aren't really children, because of the thing that they are made to do – not normal ' kid things'. When the children are put into severe situations more commonly associated with adults, it makes them seem less and less like actual children. This again illustrates the forced maturity brought onto the children when they are chosen for the school. The characteristics that make up what most people

think of as maturity are also able to be seen in the children in Battle School. "' That's right, we never cry…Nobody ever cries. We really are trying to be adults'" (Card 109). Dink says this to Ender when he sees that Ender was starting to tear up after something he said but told Dink he was fine. Not crying is typically a stereotype of adults. Yet, the children in Battle School learn not to cry because it shows weakness, and weakness is the core thing that the adults at Battle School want to beat out of the kids. The children who are ' weak' do not make it up to becoming commanders. Most clearly evident in Battle School, the adults are forcing the children to ' grow up', but since they cannot literally age quicker, they must mature, once again showing that it is a state of mind.

When maturity is described in Ender's Game, age is generally the last thing that comes to mind. Going back to the time when Peter is trying to convince Valentine to go on the internet with him to share their ideas with the world, they have the following dialogue exchange:

" Peter, you're twelve."

" Not on the nets I'm not. On the nets I can name myself anything I want, and so can you" (Card 129).

Peter is telling Valentine that he can create a fake representation of himself on the nets; he does not have to be 12-year-old Peter. This shows that Peter may literally be a child, but he is not in other aspects, such as his way of thinking. On the nets, people will believe he is an adult if he is listed as one because of the way he thinks and articulates his ideas. The contrasting viewpoints in the Ender's Game also help to show the overarching

similarities between the adults and the children. " Card forces the reader to move between two viewpoints: that of the suspicious, manipulated child and that of the paranoid, utilitarian machine worker" (Blackmore 116). There is a common understanding of the injustices at Battle School between the adults and most of the children. The " machine worker" refers to the adults of the military system, and a number of children know that they are being fooled by them. They are being tricked into believing that they are individuals at Battle School and they all have a chance at greatness. But there are a few of the kids who know that they are only being used collectively by the adults to attempt to save society. They know what the true intentions of the adults are. Dink is one of these kids. "' I can't believe you haven't seen through all this crap yet, Ender. But I guess you're young'" (Card 107). He says this to Ender after explaining that the corruption of the military system is what kept him from accepting promotions to become a commander. He doesn't want to be manipulated anymore by the teachers. Dink's reasoning for why Ender is still alright with the military system is that he is young. Being young usually means that one is naïve due to a lack of experience in the world. Dink realizes that because Ender is young, he is also naïve, and so he hasn't yet come to see all of the corruption that goes on at Battle School. At this moment, Dink is shown to have an obvious sense of maturity because of his ability to recognize corruption, which is typically something that adults would do. The children and the adults in Ender's Game are definitely not the same, but it is not their levels of maturity that separate them from one another.

Card has a discreet way of separating his child characters from his adult characters and making his child characters actually believable as children.

Fear is often used in the novel to show the difference between the children and the grown-ups. It is a lot easier for fear to take over the minds of children. " Fear pushing intellect into the back seat is a reasonable characterization of childhood" (Kelly 114). Fear can be very powerful in people, most notably in children. This fact is used to portray many of the children's emotions in Ender's Game, as subtle as it may be. Feelings of fear and anxiety can cause rational thinking to be side-stepped, making reasonable thoughts hard to come by and resulting in impulsive actions, especially in fast-paced situations. " Insecurity is unavoidable in new situations, and in childhood everything is a new situation—maturity is just a matter of recognizing repeating patterns, and without comforting recognition, all these kids have to protect themselves with is violence" (Kelly 112-113). Most prevalent in Battle School, the children are shown to be insecure with their surroundings. This is one of the most contributing factors in differentiating between the kids and the adults. The adults who run the military system are obviously very familiar with what they are doing. The children, however, have no experience in this whatsoever. They are away from their homes and families, and being put in situations with other kids, such as simulated battles, that they have never been in before. So, in order to establish some sense of control, they tend to resort to violence. This ' control' would, of course, only be over other students at Battle School. The adults are the ones with the ultimate power and control in the military system. "…reviewers especially applauded Card's compelling portrayal of Ender as an innocent child being manipulated by controlling adults" (" Ender's Game 111). Throughout most of the novel, Ender is known as the child who is younger and smaller than everyone else. Even when he has

become the top commander in school, he is still the " little boy" out of all of his fellow commanders. " They couldn't beat him in the battle room, and they knew it—so instead they would attack him where it was safe, where he was not a giant but just a little boy" (Card 187). This portrayal causes the reader to feel sympathy for him, something that is not felt when the reader is introduced to the adults of the book. This also separates the adults and the children in the reader's mind. However, even though there are these small differences between the two groups, there are much more noticeable similarities. "…no distinction is made between a child's insatiable ego and the evil genius's power-hunger" (Kelly 114). Adult characteristics, such as " power-hunger", are combined with things that represent children, like naivety, almost making it seem like there is no difference between the two. This implies that is quite possible for children to be mature, even though it is not traditional. There is a fine line separating the children from the adults in Ender's Game, which again suggests that it is completely plausible that children can be mature, just as adults are.

The mature way in children are characterized in Ender's Game is fitting for the story, and, in a way, justifies how similar they can be to adults. If the kids in the novel had been like stereotypical young children, the plot would fail and nothing would make sense. Card feels this way about his portrayal of his child characters: "…considering it an innovation, as if the only alternative would be having the cadets in the Battle School play marbles and talk baby talk" (Kelly 112). He considers it a positive addition to the story. Card's opinion is again evidenced in the novel, when Colonel Graff and Major

Anderson are having a conversation about the way the children in Battle School act:

" Does it ever seem to you that these boys aren't children? I look at what they do, the way they talk, and they don't seem like little kids."

" They're the most brilliant children in the world, each in his own way."

" But shouldn't they still act like children? They aren't normal. They act like-history. Napoleon and Wellington. Caesar and Brutus" (Card 66-67).

It would seem rather foolish if the children in the book acted how people may expect them to as typical children considering the extreme circumstances they are involved in. Having the children show adult characteristics is a large part of the story and helps it to progress. Not only does this characterization of children work very well with the story, but it also provides the reader with an honest perspective of children. "...they are not any more vicious than kids are in real life, or could be" (Kelly 112). The kids in Ender's Game are made more relatable to the reader because Card is truly being honest about them. "...they praise Card for his unflinching honesty about the cunning and cruelty, the wisdom and humanity, of children" (Kelly 112). He is providing a correct interpretation of who children really are and how they behave in reality, rather than using the stereotypical child archetype. Most of the children in Ender's Game are gifted children. They are more advanced, so of course they are going to seem more mature. The level of maturity demonstrated by children in the novel only makes their characters more fitting for the story and believable to readers because it shows that children can indeed be mature, just like how they may act in real life.

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