

# Contemporary perspectives of learning and development essay

[Family](#), [Parents](#)



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## **Introduction**

The construct of the child can be defined as the way in which different cultures and societies view children at different points in time. Some people especially from the west view children as innocent and unable to take up any responsibilities. Furthermore, a difference arises from the historical perception of children in comparison modern day. The essay will therefore, address the understanding of children as influenced by societal cultures, beliefs, values, and time.

Today, many people regard childhood, as a stage that is very different from adulthood and this is especially the case in the US. In fact, the childhood construct makes a distinction of this stage from that of adulthood. Children are believed to be very innocent and more vulnerable to danger as compared to adults (Congress & Manny 90). As such, people have taken the initiative to protect children from the responsibilities and the problems associated with adulthood. Actually, the stage of childhood is not static but rather it is a cultural and social construct. After World War II, the society has strongly held the notion that children should dedicate their time towards their education thus they are not required to engage in adult responsibilities

(Leira & Chiara 68).

The effect of this societal belief of childhood construct in the 21st century is that children have become more carefree and spend most of their time playing and seeking for adventures (Davidman & Patricia 30). However, this was not the case during the 20th century especially in the 1900s. During this period, children were exposed to extremely long hours of work in conditions that were very harsh. Cases of child labor were prevalent at the time yet the society was not greatly alarmed because that was their construct of childhood. This is evident from the collection of photos that were used by the Library of Congress to give a clear picture showing the prevalence of child labor.

The above picture dating back to 1917 shows children age 10, 9 and even 8 working in a tobacco farm, in the interiors of Hawthorn Farm. Even worse is that these girls were making a mere 50 cents on a daily basis. This was socially and culturally accepted more than one hundred years ago (Corey 72). If the same was to happen in our contemporary society, it would result in the prosecution of parents and even the owners of the farms and factories where the children are working. In fact, policies have been established to protect children from child labor and to ensure that they get an education. Therefore, a violation of these laws amounts to serious punishment to individuals who break the law.

The above photo also gives evidence of child labor in 1909 with boys collecting garbage from the dumpsites in Boston. This shows the prevalence of child labor in the 20th century and it was normal for children to contribute towards the family's expenses, as this was the social construct. The second

evidence that portrays the difference in childhood can be seen in the context and culture of children from different cultures. According to James & Adrian (88) people from the Canadian arctic are of the view that children need to acquire understanding, reason, and thought as they grow up. Usually, young children lack these qualities and may thus cry frequently or even get angry. Therefore, parents from the Canadian arctic tend to treat their children with so much leniency and tolerance. It is only until when they grow older and have become thoughtful that parents can discipline them. Contrarily, the parents and even their older siblings often beat children who come from Tonga. This is because the childhood construct in Tonga's Pacific Island is that children are naughty, mischievous, and clumsy. Consequently, parents discipline their children by meting physical punishment, as they believe that in this way they will be able to achieve social competence. The impact of this societal construct in Tonga is that children have been able to develop a mindset of taking up responsibilities at an early age.

The culture practiced by the Fulani and the UK further gives evidence to the multicultural perspective in the childhood construct. In the UK, children are regarded as being dependent and incompetent (Lawrence 102). As such, it is an offence for a child is below fourteen years of age to look after another child. In contrast, children in Fulani, which is in West Africa, can and contribute towards the family's welfare in any small way. For example, as early as four years, girls were expected to look after their siblings, fetch firewood and water and when they get to the age of six, they can comfortably pound grain and assist their mothers to sell the same.

My personal construct of children is that they are dependents and

that they are not in a position to understand issues especially complex matters like the ones adults deal with. Even so, I believe that children are not completely helpless and besides societal construct that they do not have responsibilities, I am of the view that they can slowly learn things and hence take charge of small responsibilities. For instance, I believe that a four year old can do certain things for themselves like tying their shoelaces and brushing their shoes. This is especially important because, besides attending school, they will become responsible at a tender age.

This picture shows schoolchildren dancing in a Pacific Partnership event held in the year 2009 Faleloa Primary School in Tonga. This gives evidence to the childhood construct in the present times. Unlike in the past when children were expected to work, most children currently go to school and they enjoy their childhood because they are allowed to play (Hertz & Nancy 121).

## **Conclusion**

Childhood is a phenomenon that keeps on changing and different people treat and view children differently depending on the time, culture, values, and the beliefs they hold. Therefore, one should not interfere in the construct held by a particular group about children because the multicultural perspective held about children influences it. Moreover, the childhood construct promoted by a given culture and at a given time are likely to yield either positive or negative results even as the child grows up.

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