

Ntsako



wholeness and joy in childhood

WHAT IS A CHILD?

APRIL 2025

ISSUE I



Ntsakoblog is a monthly blog and newsletter designed to educate community members, caregivers and anyone interested in children on the basics of child development.

PART 1: WHAT IS A CHILD?

Encouraging us to think about how we think about children.

PART 2: HOW THE CONCEPT OF THE CHILD HAS EVOLVED

A dive into the complex history of childhood and the child and how they've changed, better understanding the social elements involved

PART 3: THE CHILD'S RIGHTS

A look into the current state of children's rights, why they exist, and how they are practically addressed

PART 4: A PERSON IN CONTEXT

A look into a theory/model that shows us just how important the environment around the child is for their development, and how everything we have discussed comes together. Helps us to better understand development and intervention efforts.



April 2025, Issue 1, Part 1

WHAT IS A CHILD?



WHAT IS A CHILD?

by VJ Tlakula

What a question. The answer may seem obvious and pointless. But besides being anyone below age 18, everyone has their own idea of children and their purpose.

To me, a child is a complex individual with their own personality, temperament, and way of thinking about, and experiencing, the world. They're constantly learning, exploring, and making their mark on the world. We can learn so much from them. Their life starts long before they're born. They are precious and unique and easily influenced. They are extremely vulnerable in many ways so they need to be protected and guided now and in future. They have intrinsic value and a purpose and are worth protecting.

I want us to think critically about where our ideas about children come from. What do you think about children? What feelings/emotions are triggered in you when someone begins to talk about children? Where do you think these thoughts come from and how might they affect how you treat them. I start off this series by giving you, the reader, a question: What is a child to you, and why?

RELEVANCE

This series is designed to educate about children and their development. It aims to help us all see and appreciate them in a new way. But first we need to address how we currently think about children and where those ideas come from, culturally, socially, and individually.

MAIN IDEAS

- 🧩 We all think about children and their actions differently.
- 🧩 How we think about children matters because it will always influence how we understand, treat, and speak to them.

CONCLUSION

This Issue discusses social and ideological ideas of and attitudes towards children. Once we understand what a child is, we can address how they should really be treated. The child and their childhood are an illustration of the joy and beauty of life, and they need to be valued and protected.

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ntsakoblog.com

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HOW THE CONCEPT OF THE CHILD HAS EVOLVED

by VJ Tlakula

Although children of the past were loved by their families, they were usually treated like adults. Historically, people's main focus was not much more than survival. How children were raised and trained centred largely around their contribution to the family. Many worked exploitative adult jobs.

In 1600s Europe, social opinion on childhood began to change. Adults saw them as individuals having different needs, innocent, vulnerable and needing protection. Childhood needed to be enjoyed. However, people noticed the growing difference between what children 'were' and how they were living and sought to fix that. This introduced child rights and changed how children were socialised. Children went from being for the family to the family being for children.

With the influence of colonisation and increased modern globalisation, much of the world and their ideas around children has become similar. Society is structured a certain way and depending on their role in that society, children are conceptualised a certain way. This together with the demands of the society, determines how they are socialised and mature.

RELEVANCE

We need to notice what affects how children are perceived, because this influences how they are raised. We need to understand where we've come from to understand where we are going. Because how children are raised changes the future of society.

MAIN IDEAS

- 🧩 The idea of childhood has changed over the years and most of the world carries a western view of childhood
- 🧩 The main elements which affect the evolution of childhood are conceptualisation, socialisation, maturation, modernisation, acculturation, globalisation

CONCLUSION

The concept of childhood has never been fixed and has changed based on major events and changing expectations of society. This has changed the perceived "goal" of childhood, what parts of development are prioritised, the role of the family, and the transmission of social values and morals.

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THE CHILD'S RIGHTS

by VJ Tlakula

Children's Rights are meant to support development, not control people. They have been set in place to ensure that that desired outcome becomes a reality. Children are not an object, or someone's property, and should not be subject to other people's wills without considering how they're affected.

Children's rights emerged during a time where how people were thinking about them was not lining up with the reality of what they were experiencing. They were being 'robbed' of the childhoods they were supposed to experience. The main aims of early child rights were around preventing abuse, tackling child labour, and getting children into schools. Modern children's rights emphasise things like specific forms of protection, identity, home, nutritional development, psychological wellbeing, education, family, community, play, and shielding from traumatic events.

In 1989, the UN, recognising the vulnerability of children, launched the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). It is a standardised document which influences nearly all policies and laws concerning children globally. It covers the entire life of every individual below 18.

RELEVANCE

Children's rights and the importance placed on protecting and enforcing them are often shaped by what we know about children's developmental needs. It is important to know, teach, and think critically about them and their implications for the future of childhood. The consequence of not protecting children leads to future social failure.

MAIN IDEAS

- 🧩 Children's rights are based on the idea that the child is a human being; an individual who deserves dignity and a healthy life.
- 🧩 Child rights are a way to ensure children are protected, hold everyone to the same standard, and keep everyone accountable for their treatment of children.

CONCLUSION

While they are not really clear-cut, child rights made ideas a reality. They began to equalise social classes and emphasised a need for respect, protection, and a form of autonomy. They've changed the world and benefitted many individuals in some way. As knowledge of development evolves, so should rights.

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Source: <https://www.unicef.org.au/stories/poster-convention-on-the-rights-of-the-child>



A PERSON IN CONTEXT

by VJ Tlakula

In 1979, a psychologist named Urie Bronfenbrenner developed something called an ecological systems theory, which he later revised into a bioecological model in 2006. The theory says that there are various levels of society (or environmental systems) which are all impacting on a child's life and development in one way or another, and the child themselves is acting on these levels too. He mapped out 5 levels from closest to most distant:

The microsystem (the child's immediate environment that they directly interact with). The mesosystem (the interaction point between the various microsystems, e.g. home and school). The exosystem (not directly interacting with, but still influencing, them, e.g. parent workplace, government). The macrosystem (the social, cultural, and ideological values of the society). The chronosystem (the historical age they're growing up in).

A child is a complex individual. They are not living and developing in isolation. Their biological development is always "interacting" with their external environment. This means that the environment will influence/affect biological development, and biology can influence the environments the individual is in and how they respond to those environments.

RELEVANCE

This model is an excellent way of understanding childhood and development across multiple contexts. It can help us with applying our theories of child development relevantly, especially when studying children or doing intervention work. This demonstrates how everything works together to produce outcomes.

MAIN IDEAS

- There are 5 interacting systems in a child's environment, influencing their development in different ways.
- For development outcomes to happen, a unique Person, unique Context, Process (interaction between the two) and Time are required.

CONCLUSION

Many factors influence a child's development. No child (or individual) exists independently of their context. They exist, and therefore grow/develop influenced by, and as a consequence of, the context they exist in. We need to consider individuals beyond face value.

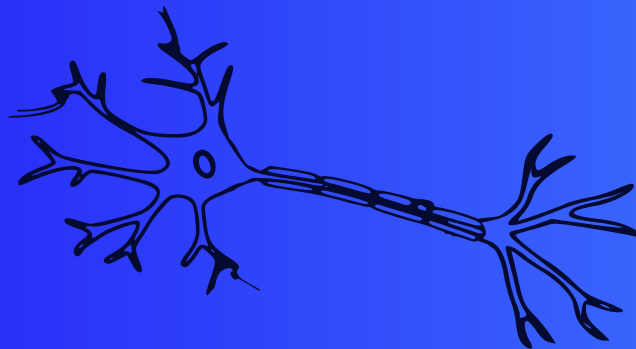
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BRONFENBRENNER'S BIOECOLOGICAL MODEL



Read Issue 2: In the Brain
May 2025
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