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Pickney Power and Politicised Childhoods

Adele Jones

Inaugural Professorial Lecture
The University of Huddersfield March 4, 2008



The University of Huddersfield
March 4, 2008

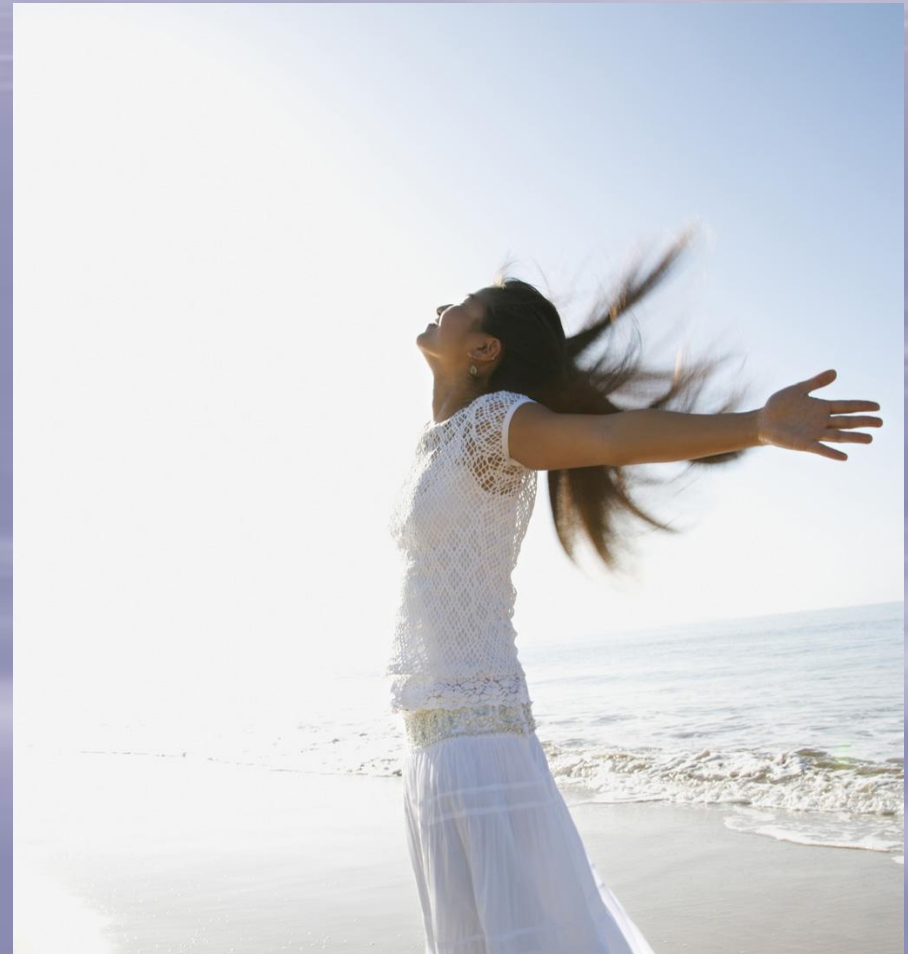


It is in recognition of the special position children are in and the fact that by virtue of their social, emotional and physical dependence on adults they are at risk of exploitation and harm at the hands of adults that there is worldwide recognition that children's rights require particular attention.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child is the most endorsed human rights treaty in the world, ratified by all but two countries. Adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 20 November 1989, it celebrates childhood and codifies in international law the rights due every child.

Article 2

Children must be treated “... without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of ... race, colour, sex, language, religion ... or other status.”



Article 3

**In all actions concerning children ...
the best interests of the child shall
be a primary consideration.”**



March 4, 2008

Article 6

“... every child has the inherent right to life ... survival and development”



Article 12-14

the child who is capable of forming his or her own views [has] the right to express those views [and] the right to freedom of ... thought, conscience and religion.



Strengths of CRC

- applicable across wide-ranging legal systems and cultural traditions
- Provides a universally agreed set of non-negotiable standards for children's health & wellbeing
- Ratified by almost every country (all except Somalia & the US)
- Requires governments to put in place the laws and systems necessary to protect children's rights
- There is ongoing monitoring of how countries are doing
- It is a good policy tool – provides standards that can be translated into targets and measures

A global language?

‘Pickney’ – patois for ‘child’ is an expression which not only means ‘child’ but at the same time conveys both the relationship of adults to children and also, adults’ responsibility for children – “Dem pickney dem” doesn’t simply mean ‘those children’, it constructs and expresses a meaning about the status of childhood in a specific context.

universal assumptions that underpin the language of children's rights mask inequalities

it is the way in which children are viewed in a particular situation that determines the extent to which their rights are upheld

Politicized children

- The involvement of children in changing the world
 - Acknowledging children's wisdom
 - Not just listening to but *hearing* children
-
- Moving from a position of 'adult certainty'

Being prepared not to know
acceptance that children may know





Children's rights

Children's rights are both general *and* specific but they are *always* situated in the reality of the child's life

Rights as fixed 'objects' to be claimed or bestowed exist only at the level of discourse and ideology

Children's rights are important not because children should be regarded as a distinct group separate from adult human beings but because they experience particular forms of oppression and subjugation. The importance of the attention to children's rights therefore, lies not so much in adults determining what is best for children but in effecting real change in addressing the oppression of children.





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