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## ADULT/CHILD

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What is a child? What is an adult? These might appear simple to answer. You might refer to the law, for example: a child becomes an adult at the age of 18. But what informs the law? What counts as 'a child' differs historically and geographically, and philosophically is deceptively complex (Matthews, 1994). So, would another definition help? Attempts to define child use the adult human body against which to measure child, and child is found wanting. The etymology of *infantia* – in-fans, 'not speaking' – implies an adultcentrism (Kennedy, 2020) because it measures child against what s/he does *not* have compared with a fully adult human. A child is regarded as a human that cannot speak yet, or as well at least, as an adult, and speech is used to measure intelligence. Child is defined by what she lacks, through an absence or deficit of linguistic competence ('illiteracy').

Like poststructuralists, posthumanists resist the idea (central in objectivist epistemologies) that experiences and objects have inherent properties that can be captured by abstract definitions. Philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein already warned against using abstract concepts without the contextualisation of everyday language and a 'form of life' – a way of doing things. Language only has meaning because of human's situated, non-linguistic activities (Wittgenstein, 1958). Posthumanists also include the nonhuman and the material when investigating how concepts work (a doing of concepts) and what is 'going on'. They trouble the centrality of 'the human' and how the Adult/Child power-producing binary works to keep children at a distance and exclude them, epistemologically, ethically and politically. The Adult by which the child is measured is an Adult of a particular kind. Not only of a particular age ('mature'), but also male, heterosexual, ably bodied and White. Mutually exclusive gender identifications (you are either boy or girl and not both at the same time) and patriarchal child-rearing are typical in the West from Ancient Greece to modernity. The child is of Nature, a wild being, primitive and needing Culture to be tamed, domesticated, normalised and colonised. This process of 'moulding' the individual 'savage' is like 'undeveloped' nations in need of development: each child *recapitulates* the history of the species. The Adult/Child binary leaves child wanting and is deeply rooted in Western theories and philosophies with the Culture/Nature binary as its exclusionary mechanism (see [www.youtube.com/watch?v=-LeW-0xN3nQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-LeW-0xN3nQ)) (Murriss & Reynolds, 2018).

Posthumanist research invites us to disrupt this speciesism, and reconfigures knowledge-making as a process that does not already assume normative, Man-made binaries that include and exclude before research has even started. Posthumanists do not consider individual child bodies as the ontological starting point, but the child-as-phenomenon (Murriss & Reynolds, 2018). Tracing the human and nonhuman relational networks that child is always already a part of, helps to do justice to a world that is much more complex than can be captured through language alone. For this reason, posthumanist research adopts rhizomatic, *nonrepresentational* and transmodal arts-based

pedagogies that include nonhuman bodies such as sound, clay, fabric, light, water, sand, paper, pen, to break down adultocentrism.

*Would another definition help? This question caught my (Candace's eye) and caused me to pause. How we define something matters, literally. It shapes what comes into matter(ing) in the world. So, what is it in how we define child – as lacking in relation to adults – that brings about relationalities to/with/for children? The etymology of infantia – not speaking – also caught my eye. I thought about my daughter, as an infant she was so verbal, communicating through speech as an infant. I can't remember a time that she wasn't speaking! So even a word that attempts to measure the child as lacking adult speech, is lacking or insufficient itself. Anyone who is around children, taught children, birthed children, knows that they are not 'not' speaking.*

*Karin's writing on the child of Nature and the child of Culture provokes my thoughts as well. Often in teacher education classes, pre-service teachers discuss whether a lesson plan went well, whether they were able to stick to the plan or script and if they were able to control or manage the children. But is it our job as teachers to control and manage children? Why would we? Why would we want to stick to a lesson script? Wouldn't we rather follow lines of inquiry in the moment? How did these notions of scripted lessons and controlling children becomes a discourse for 'successful' or 'good' teaching? Why would we want to tame children, domesticating the spontaneity, the wildness, the experimental, the play-fullness? So, would another definition help? What might that be? And what might it produce?*

## Further reading

- Kennedy, D. (2020). Becoming child: Wild being and the post-human. In *On childhood, thinking and time: Educating responsibly* (pp. 191–131). Lexington Books, Rowman & Littlefield.
- Matthews, G. (1994). *The philosophy of childhood*. Harvard University Press.
- Morris, K. [Project: Decolonizing Early Childhood Discourses], & Reynolds, B. (Producer). (2018, September 5). *A manifesto posthuman child: de/colonising childhood through reconfiguring the human* [Video]. YouTube. [www.youtube.com/watch?v=ikN-LChBawQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ikN-LChBawQ).