
This article is based on a verbal presentation given to the Quality of Childhood Group in the European Parliament. Notes taken during the presentation were formulated into the article below, which has been updated, checked and approved by Christopher Clouder.

The Changing Conditions of Childhood

by Christopher Clouder

Director, Botin Foundation Platform for Innovation in Education

The book *Toxic Childhood*, which was published in 2006 by Sue Palmer, made a great impact in that it highlighted an issue of growing concern in the U.K. At about the same time there was an article in *Le Monde* that stated that Britain was now, in football terms, in the post-hooligan phase, having had tragic experiences in this area and having had to learn from mistakes, whereas in some other European countries the phenomenon of hooliganism was just picking up. So occasionally the U.K can serve as warning to other countries about certain negative developments in society. This is certainly true for questions around childhood.

The last few years have been remarkable in terms of the attention given by the British media to the subject of childhood. Until comparatively recently childhood was mentioned only when an emergency situation emerged or when a scandal was exposed. Today it is very different with many articles, research reports and books being published, for example on the theme of the threats to childhood well-being in the U.K. The remainder of this article provides a snapshot of some of the threats to childhood that have received attention in the media in the U.K over the past three to four years.

Lack of play

Professor Michael Shayer, of the Economic and Social Research Institute in the UK, stated in *Learning Intelligence: Cognitive Acceleration Across the Curriculum from 5 to 15 Years*, that research shows that children of 11 to 12 years old are some 2 to 3 years behind academically in comparison with children of the same age of 20 years ago. He speculated about the reasons:

- Is it the lack of play that has caused the changes?
- Is it because children spend substantial amounts of time playing video and computer games?

It is presently known that when children have learnt to move their bodies, for example, through games, sport or dance, this has a consequent positive effect on their academic achievements. Nowadays there are children who do not spend much time in physically active play and live a largely sedentary lifestyle. This is harmful for children on many levels because it will eventually hamper their physical and mental development and health.

Increase in Stress

Research has also found that many children in day care centres suffer from stress. In many day care centres the quality is not sufficiently high. The main parameters for the quality are:

- The level of competencies among the people working there
- The adult /child ratio.

Sue Gerhardt has covered this in her seminal book on this phenomenon entitled '*Why Love Matters, How Affection Shapes A Baby's Brain*'. You cannot replace love by allowing children to play video games or watch television. And she questions the quality of some early childhood settings in not being able to fulfil a young child's emotional needs. Steve Biddulph, the well-known author on parenting, has recently changed his position in this respect and also expresses great concern about adult/ child ratios and inadequate and damaging care facilities. The conclusions that a number of researchers have come to on this issue are as follows:

- It is important to pay people working in childcare sufficiently and the job should also have a good status;
- The people working in childcare should have been well-trained;
- The group size should never exceed 16 and the ratio between children and adults should be 2 adults per 16 children. If the group is larger than this and there are fewer adults, then the child may have difficulties in forming attachments with the adults in question.

Another source of stress is the rigorous testing system of English schools. Warwick Mansell in his book "*Education by Numbers*" (2007) points out the English child encounters a high profile test or exam virtually every year while at school. Children spend a great deal of school time preparing for these and such assessments are never very far from the teachers' thoughts. This creates an overwhelming pressure on all concerned.

Professor Jonathan Bradshaw recently published a report entitled *The Well-being of Children in the U.K* (2007). In this book he explains that today's children are more often than previously unhappy, pressurized and obese. The 2007 *Innocenti Report*, however, was even more critical and the U.K was one the worst of the 21 economically advanced countries which they studied when researching the quality of children's happiness.

Socially Pressurized

The American author Dr. Madeline Levine has published a book ('*The Price Of Privilege, How Parental Pressure And Material Advantage Are Creating A Generation Of Disconnected And Unhappy Kids*') about the damage done to children who have been given a tight extramural schedule for the entire week by their parents (this is also known as hot-housing). When the children are not at school they have to play sport, go to dance lessons or play a musical instrument, for example. These children have no time for themselves and do not have the chance to experience how it is to live without such a schedule. They do not have the opportunity to play, to rest, or to become personally creative outside of a class of some kind or another. These children experience high levels of stress.

Is the World of Technology changing the Brains of Children?

Professor Susan Greenfield of York University has published '*The Private Life Of The Brain*', in which she explains that our technical world is changing the brains of children. Their brains are less able:

- To recount stories
- To use words, as they are more focused on pictures;
- Children are less able to control their impulses and emotions.

Jane Healy in '*Endangered Minds: Why Children Don't Think, and What We Can Do About It*' explains that with the modern lifestyle children lose their imagination and originality. Many boys, in particular, get fully involved in computer and video games and live partly in a virtual world. The U.S Association of Paediatricians now recommends that children under two years old should not watch television. For children from two to six years old the watching of television should be severely limited. A draft document of the Australian government's guidelines for parents and carers states that screen time "*may reduce the amount of time they (children) have for active play, social contact with others and chances for language development which could affect the development of a full range of eye movement and... reduce the length of time they can stay focussed.*"

A Chemical Environment

Although the effect of lead and mercury on children's brains is accepted and has brought about legislative action, recent research indicates that many other chemicals have a similarly negative impact to lead on the brains of children. It has been calculated that 202 industrial chemicals have a capacity to damage the brain, with the developing brain being much more susceptible to these chemicals. These industrial substances are not regulated with children in mind. In the U.S.A one in six children have a developmental disability usually involving the nervous system. The EU is beginning to take action and the latest investigation from the Danish Environment Protection Agency into gender-bending chemicals claims there are dangerous levels of hormone-disrupting chemicals in everyday products like rubber clogs, soft toys and sun creams. Furthermore a foetus around 8 to 12 weeks can be demasculinised by exposure to certain chemicals prevalent in common products.

Depression and Manipulation

According to Julia Margo and Mike Dixon in '*Freedom's Orphans, Raising Youth In A Changing World*' the number of children with depression is rising. Their findings are startling. There is evidence that mental health problems and psychic disorders are increasing in young people. It is calculated that one in ten girls has self-harmed. Antisocial behaviour and teenage pregnancy rates are high in the U.K compared to other European countries. Child obesity is increasing. Young people in Britain drink more alcohol and from an earlier age than in most of Europe.

In what has been termed the "commercialisation of childhood" it has become visible how the business world is increasingly using children to expand their sales. Researchers have discovered that children can already recognise brands at the age of two and that brand loyalty can already be attained with children as young as four years old. Children are not only targeted by companies trying to sell toys, computer games and other goods to children, but also by companies trying to influence parents through their children. For example, car manufacturers try to expand sales by aiming their advertisements at children, because they have discovered that children greatly influence their parents' purchasing decisions.

"Media-isation"

Another area in which children are manipulated is through the media. Influenced by the illusory world presented to them in magazines, television and film many girls become prematurely sexually aware earlier and earlier, but their social and emotional development lacks behind.

Dr Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury, recently launched an attack on what he describes as "*corruption and premature sexualisation of children by a consumer society.*" Increasingly children grow up in a culture of peers, which alienates them vis-à-vis adults, with concepts of cool and uncool manipulated by the media. However, when they have become adults themselves they tend to have difficulties in assuming the responsibilities that go with adulthood due to a lack of positive adults models. Family rituals and expectations, such as having set meals, are in demise causing children to feel less secure and expecting gratification whenever they wish.

In June 2009 an article appeared in the journal of the American Medical Association which described the stress factors experienced by children and highlighted the phenomena of "toxic stress". This is engendered by extreme poverty, recurrent abuse, chronic neglect, maternal depression, parental drug dependence and family violence "*These adversities establish biological memories that weaken physiological systems and make individuals vulnerable to problems that can lie dormant for years.*" The UK experience supports this view.

The references in this short overview are not there to create a false romanticism about the past conditions or just a doom-laden scenario of childhood today, but rather to serve as a wake up call about modern tendencies in the so-called affluent world. There are, of course, a majority of children who experience their childhood in a fruitful and positive way. But an increasing number do not, and every child has the right to a quality of childhood that enables him/her to fulfil his/her full potential. Finding effective ways of dealing with the negative phenomena as a parent or educator is a shared and complex social task.

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The Quality of Childhood: Exploring a Pedagogical View of the Role of Parents

by Hans Van Crombrugge

SUMMARY

In general, parents are prepared to do whatever it takes to ensure the well-being and development of their children. These good intentions go hand-in-hand with many questions on the part of parents concerning whether they will manage to bring up their children, whether they are doing the right things, whether they are really capable of bringing the task of upbringing to a happy conclusion. Parents must organise the world as well as they can to allow the child to develop and discover him- or herself.

Parents are not the only ones who are responsible for their children. Equal responsibility belongs to the society that is the source of the diverse influences that impact on the child. Governments have very important responsibilities. Governments must not and cannot fulfil the parents' role, but they can support the parents in taking up their responsibility. We note that governments are increasingly more active in assisting parents and more explicitly assuming responsibility for raising children. There are various causes and circumstances behind this. One factor that should not be underestimated is the International Convention on the Rights of the Child. In signing this, the public authorities committed themselves to helping to realise the rights of the child in all possible ways. Supporting parents in raising children is an important element of this.

Parents can use all the help they can get in realising their good intentions, within the space structured by the rights of the child. The attention given by governments to education, to childcare, to the socio-economic conditions of the family is important. We have also argued for the necessity of public rituals in civil society such as an 'upbringing pledge' for new parents. An upbringing pledge would contain not only a statement of lasting commitment concerning care for the child, but also an explicit declaration of commitment to recognise and implement the rights of the child as a person.

The quality of childhood is a matter of the quality of parenthood, which itself is a matter of the quality of public support of parents and families.

Parents and children

We may assume that most parents want the best for their children. They are prepared to do whatever it takes to ensure the well-being and development of their children. The good intentions of parents also go hand in hand with many questions on the part of parents concerning whether they will manage to bring up their children, whether they are doing

the right things, whether they are really capable of bringing the task of upbringing to a happy conclusion. Parents know that they are not the only significant people engaged in the raising of their children: numerous other societal influences also play an important role. For that matter, not all societal influences can be controlled by parents. This conclusion, however, does not diminish the responsibility of the parents. On the contrary: Parents are faced with the additional task of taking these uncontrollable influences and situations into consideration, of finding meaningful ways to deal with them and to continue to look for growth opportunities for the children, for themselves and for their relationship with their children. Children did not ask to be born into this world. Parents must organise the world as well as they can to allow the child to develop and discover him or herself.¹ It is the parent's responsibility to make the world 'meaningful' for the child.

In the upbringing relationship, the child is an active partner, an active, self-willing, giver of meaning. The parent or guardian is obliged to allow the child to participate actively in looking for sense and meaning in the world in which he or she lives. The child will often also add elements to the world of the parents. This is the child's right. The child must also gradually learn to assume responsibility for this contribution and for his or her reinterpretation of the world as well as for the way in which the relationship with his or her parents develops. In this sense, upbringing is searching together for the most meaningful world for all concerned. However, the responsibilities of the parent and the child are not equal. The parent retains the primary responsibility for creating a situation in which children can learn to take responsibility – gradually, according to the development of their opportunities and their experiences. As a person, the child is entitled to be recognised as a discussion partner. The child must be listened to, a dialogue must be entered into. However, in order to be recognised as discussion partner and to engage in dialogue, a person must receive a name and learn a language. Without a name, the child can never say "I"; without language, the child cannot speak. Naming the child and deciding which language will be spoken with the child are the responsibilities of the parents. In this the child not have a say, but if he or she later has problems due to this (and what is puberty if not the person wrestling with all of these given elements – such as language, one's name, one's parents, and the like – that one did not choose but that one must integrate and take responsibility for), it is the obligation of the parents to assist the child in resolving these problems.

In short, the fact that there are many influences that the parent does not have control over, that the child influences the parent, that the child must be able to actively participate in his or her upbringing, takes nothing away from this parental responsibility: it does not diminish it, rather it makes it more complex.

The private and the public child

This is not to say that parents are the only ones who are responsible. Equal responsibility belongs to the society that is the source of the diverse influences that impact on the child.

Governments have very important responsibilities. Governments must not and cannot fulfil the parents' role, but they can support the parents in taking up their responsibility. This occurs in many different ways, each of which must be judged on its own merits. We note that governments are increasingly more active in assisting parents and more explicitly assuming responsibility for raising children. There are various causes and circumstances behind this. One factor that should not be underestimated is the International Convention on the Rights of the Child. In signing this, the public authorities committed themselves to helping to realise the rights of the child in all possible ways. Supporting parents in raising children is an important element of this. According to these rights of the child, the child not only has the right to parents, but especially the right to good parents. And the convention puts forward a substantial view of what the essential qualities of good upbringing are. An essential aspect of good upbringing is a relationship with the parents. Another aspect of good upbringing is the recognition of the child as an active participant in his or her own upbringing with a unique position that requires specific protection.

According to the International Convention on the Rights of the Child, the child not only has the right to parents, but especially the right to good parents.

It would be incorrect to assert that the convention does not impose a normative model of upbringing on governments. The measures that governments take, the institutions that governments set up for this purpose, all imply a well defined vision of children and upbringing. In this, participation is indeed a central concept. Because of this participation, clear norms can be imposed on governments and on parents with respect to assuming their responsibilities. For that matter, participation implies normative and communicative ethics, which means that the actions for enlarging the active participation of all concerned in the upbringing of the child are not only supportive, but also normative and regulative. The normative framework of children's rights creates a space in which the subject is still able to place many of his or her own accents and can have many different convictions concerning what 'good upbringing' is.

But children have more rights than these. As children, they are humans who need (1) time and space to develop; and (2) concerned adults who take care of their learning needs. To be fully human, we have to protect children from influences which they cannot handle because they have not yet developed all their capacities. To cope with the world children have to acquire also many competences (skills, knowledge, attitudes) which can only be taught by organized learning processes. Therefore children have the right to specific provisions, which are at the same time a support for the parents, for example, schools, childcare, health services, etc. So children are indeed active participants in their education, but at the same time they are in need of specific protection because of their right to develop and to learn to be flourishing human beings

Parents may have the best intentions and still have different views of what good upbringing is; in taking up the responsibility for the upbringing and development of their relationship

with their children, they must do justice to the child as a specially placed discussion partner. Governments must support them in this task as much as possible, but in so doing is bound by the way in which the CRC (Convention of the Rights of the Child) interprets this 'image of the child'. Again, all of this does not diminish the responsibility of the parents, but makes it more complex. In the same way, the responsibility of governments is also greater and more complex. And again: this recognition of pedagogical responsibility in no way takes away from the position of the child as a person who is entitled to active participation. On the contrary, in this model of upbringing, the child is more quickly given a greater responsibility for his or her own upbringing.

Parents can use all the help they can get in realising their good intentions in their own special way, within the space structured by the rights of the child. The attention given to education, to childcare, to the socio-economic conditions of the family is important. A very good development is the efforts to develop systems for family and parental support (such as parent education, family enrichment programmes, etc.). We have also argued for the necessity of public rituals in civil society such as an 'upbringing pledge' for new parents.

The upbringing pledge²

The upbringing pledge means a declaration in favour of a lasting commitment with respect to the child. A formal, public declaration cultivates intentions that are undoubtedly present, but these receive added societal value via the making of the pledge. By pronouncing it, the new parents acknowledge the responsibility placed on them by the child.

The pledge affirms that the child has the right to a fundamentally indissoluble relationship with his or her parents. The parents commit themselves to always being available to the child and not to interfere with the relationship with the other parent, whatever the relationship between the partners themselves might be. 'We will be there for you.' 'In good days and in bad, we remain the parents of our child.' When registering the birth or adoption of a child, the parents would formally make such a parental pledge. This presupposes that the symbolic civil and public character of the declaration is preserved. In the case of remarriage or concluding a cohabitation contract or marriage of partners with children, the upbringing pledge can be pronounced in the presence of all the children involved. In the case of divorce, the ex-partners will reconfirm the parental pledge. The upbringing pledge contains not only a statement of lasting commitment concerning care for the children, but also an explicit declaration of commitment to recognise and implement the rights of the child as a person.

As such, the upbringing pledge also affirms the government's responsibility: public authorities have to support parents and children. In signing the Convention on the Rights of the Child, states have, after all, committed themselves to doing everything possible to ensure that children can grow up in a dignified way. According to the Convention, this implies (1) that for the full and harmonious development of the child's personality, he or she must grow up in a

family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding; (2) that the child is brought up by parents who are recognised in their common responsibility for the child's upbringing. Governments must do all they can to ensure this. Instead of sanctioning parents who appear to fall short in taking up their responsibility (we are thinking here of the proposal to withhold child allowance or a part of a scholarship in the case of a child skipping school), governments would be better off creating a positive climate that cultivates commitment. The institution of the upbringing pledge could be a step in the right direction.

The birth of a child and caring for a child are not private matters. The child, as a person who has a right to recognition of his or her human dignity, engages all of society.

It appears from everything said above that the birth of a child and caring for a child are not private matters. The child, as a person who has a right to recognition of his or her human dignity, engages all of society. There are people who, for all sorts of reasons, are more involved with the child and for whom caring for well being and upbringing are, as it were, self-evident (because of affinity, or because of affinity on the part of the child with a person with whom one is intimately involved). At an individual level, these people have diverse intentions. Giving people the chance to articulate these intentions before society is not without importance. By articulating personal subjective feelings, these intentions are as it were objectified into actual societal commitment, in several meanings of the word. First, the human person who pronounces these words identifies with what s/he says. Putting something into words causes one to reflect on and give shape to what one feels. By putting something into words, I become aware of what I feel and I become more aware of myself: I am the person saying this. In this, words are not neutral means, but rather they force the person to give personal form to his or her intentions. In this way, it also becomes clear for other people what I feel and who I am. The articulation of feelings in itself is often a struggle, not only with what one actually feels, but also with the way in which you come across to the other. Thus, putting something into words is never superfluous and self-evident, but rather a non-evident reflection about oneself and the other. This also means that a person opens him- or herself up to judgement. It is clear to the other that you actually intend to commit yourself to the child. Not only does this create the opportunity to be judged in the future, but in this way, you also appeal to the other and, by extension, to society. 'I want to be there for this child' is both a demand for recognition of this commitment, and a demand for the commitment of the other. In the parental pledge, parents not only engage themselves, but also society and the government before whom the commitment is pronounced. 'I will be there for you' is also 'I wish to be recognised as the one who will be there for you and in this capacity wish to be recognised as someone who has a right to genuine support in realising this commitment'. Because of these characteristics, the pronouncement of a pledge in itself already contributes to community building.

Cultivating a pedagogical culture in society

When people are asked to pronounce the upbringing pledge, this is not a mere formality. Time and space are made available for a witness to express a deep conviction. If parenthood is not self-evident, then it is fitting here to reflect briefly on this, as an individual and as society. From this point of view, abolishing the personal registration of a birth at the city hall before a civil servant in the presence of witnesses is a bad thing. By giving form to the pronouncement of the pledge as a formal event, the seriousness of parenthood is put forward and cultivated. It is entirely possible that a feeling for the community-founding significance of such ceremonies is no longer self-evident in these post-modern times, but this is precisely an argument for establishing such ceremonies. Society has every interest in the cultivation of suitable words and feelings concerning this living together as a society, in which expression is given to that which is really important and worthy.

By connecting the pledge 'I will be there for you' with the normative convictions contained in the rights of the child, one is not tied down to the mere application of a model of upbringing imposed by the public authorities. The pledge expresses the desire to give shape to the concern for the well-being and development of the child within the framework created by children's rights. Such a commitment is nothing other than expressing the desire to recognise the child as a person, with everything that this entails. Governments commit themselves to do everything they can to assist parents in fulfilling this pledge. Both the parent or guardian and governments open themselves up to a judgement concerning their commitment to a dignified relationship with the child.

The quality of childhood is a matter of the quality of parenthood, which itself is a matter of the quality of public support of parents and families.

The benefit of the upbringing pledge is not to be sought in quantifiable effects (for example, fewer problems with bringing up children). For this, other resources must be employed. On the other hand, the meaning of symbols for the quality of a society is underestimated. Symbols help determine the culture and the quality of a society. They create the framework to work within. The upbringing pledge is a symbol connected to many existing developments, and as an expression thereof, helps to support them. Developments in law allow the regulation of parent-child relationships to be increasingly a question of a freely taken decision. The institution of the (explicit) pledge expresses this. When parents break up, the principle of co-parenthood applies. In the pledge, this principle – used if problems should arise – is already pronounced beforehand. In the case of blended families and in other situations, a way must be sought to organise the different parental responsibilities (between biological parents, new partners who must be able to assume responsibility, and so on). The pledge can be an important tool here. In regulating the relationship between biological and 'foster' parents in general, there is a need for institutions that regulate the relationship between child and parents. The pledge does not

solve the problems, but it does provide a framework within which to deal with the problems. In this sense, the parental pledge must be linked to the establishment of parenthood, which is pivotal to the quality of childhood, according to the Convention of the Rights of the Child.

The quality of childhood is a matter of the quality of parenthood, which itself is a matter of the quality of public support of parents and families.

- 1 This aspect of parental responsibility is beautifully depicted in the film *La vita e bella* ("Life is beautiful"). The father is not responsible for the fact that his child lands in a labour camp. However, he considers it his responsibility to follow the child into captivity and, as far as possible, to imaginatively translate for the child everything that occurs into situations that provide growth opportunities for the child.
- 2 For a detailed discussion of this proposal, see: H. Van Crombrugge, W. Vandenhoele & J.C.M. Willems (Eds.). (2008). *Shared pedagogical responsibility*. (Maastricht Series in Human Rights, 8). Antwerp-Oxford-Portland: Intersentia.

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Education in the European Union – Systemic Changes Required

by Luc Stevens

Director of the Netherlands Institute of Educational Matters

Introduction

Our current school system is still based on the model of the assembly-line of the 19th century factory

Our school-system was developed in the 19th century when everybody was enthralled by the success of industrialization and standardized processes. The industrial-age assumptions about learning can be summarized as follows (derived from Peter Senge et al, 2000):

- Children are deficient and schools fix them
- Learning takes place in the head, not in the body as a whole
- Everyone learns, or should learn, in the same way
- Learning takes place in the class-room, not in the world
- There are smart kids, dumb kids, problem kids etc
- Schools are run by specialists who maintain control
- Knowledge is inherently fragmented
- Schools communicate the truth
- Learning is primarily individualistic and competition accelerates learning.

However, in this way we not only created an educational system but at the same time a **social system**. In the past decades scientists have found that the characteristics of this social system are hampering the very process of learning itself and all efforts to improve the effectiveness of the learning process will fail if we maintain the old elements of this social system.

In short the system itself should be changed in order to improve the learning environment. That is the theme of the second session of the Working Group on the Quality of Childhood.

A new system of learning is based on the following:

We should create an educational system, that is characterized by a good pedagogical climate with the following elements:

First component: Create the conditions for development:

- In the first place teacher and student should establish a normal human relationship with each other as one human being to another and respect each other in that way; intuitively we all know this because when the relationship between the teacher and the student is

disturbed the learning stops or is highly disrupted. Said in another way: the attitude of the teacher to the student or of that of the student to the teacher influences in a very significant way the quality of the learning process;

- The child develops himself or herself and the teacher should create an environment that is conducive for this process;
- Children are individuals and differ regarding their talents, their tempo and their temperament. The school should accept this as a precondition and not force the children into a rigid framework;
- The three basic psychological requirements should be fulfilled, i.e. the need for relationships, the need to feel competent and the need for autonomy.
- The child is a subject and not an object. The child orchestrates his or her own development.

Second component: ensure the self-reliance of the student and that he or she can take responsibility for his /her own situation and own development.

- If we don't create these conditions it is harder for children to cope with the requirements, which are defined by the teacher and educational policies. Consequently the child may feel helpless and become indifferent, and ultimately decide to drop out all together, not only from school, but also from striving to build a meaningful life.
- The teacher should communicate high expectations to the child and ensure that the child feels confident and self-reliant because he or she succeeds in meeting the expectations and also experiences real progress. The children should have the experience that it is worthwhile to do one's best.

Third component: support, challenge and emancipate

- The school should, on the one hand give the student structures, support, encouragement and motivation and on the other hand challenge the student to explore the subject in question in his/her own autonomous way.

Creating a pedagogical climate in schools to encourage development

by Luc Stevens

Director of the Netherlands Institute of Educational Matters

SUMMARY

*This is a report about a research project which the Netherlands Institute for Educational Matters (NIVOZ) undertook regarding the mismatch between supply and demand in five primary and nine secondary schools in the Netherlands. The conclusion of the survey: students and schools suffer from **under-achievement** because of the following:*

- *There are permanent problems in the match between the curriculum and the demands and possibilities of the students;*
- *With regard to autonomy and responsibility there is a great discrepancy between what the students could be expected to desire on the one hand, and on the other hand what the teachers think that the students are able to handle and consequently the room for manoeuvre that the teachers dare to give to the students. This is a main point of conflict;*
- *Teachers find it difficult in the work situation to really grasp the perspective of the student; students experience that it is difficult to reach their teachers in the work situation.*

Recommendation: If only we would abandon the strict time schedule in our schools and give the students more freedom in this respect, it would already mean a major change. In my view there is not one reason to keep this current school system as it is today.

I will introduce some new insights about the subject at hand by presenting a recent survey conducted in the Netherlands in five primary schools and nine secondary schools. Both students and teachers were interviewed:

- The students were interviewed about their well-being and their views with regard to their work and the educational process;
- The teachers were asked three questions:
 - What are your ambitions?
 - What are your competencies?
 - In which way is the school an obstacle for you to attain your ambitions, and utilise your competencies, or in other words: what is wrong with the school?

Paradigm shift: the position of the student changes from object to subject

The survey was done in the framework of a larger project called 'School Ethos'. A number of schools, both primary and secondary, participate in this project, all of which have the

intention to reach a higher level with regards to ethical standards. In addition these schools want to put the student at the centre of their activities. To put it another way: they want to shift from a position where the student is an **object** to a position where the student is a **subject**.

The overall outcomes of the research are as follows:

- Most of the students do not find the classroom or the school unpleasant;
- However, there is a mismatch between, on the one hand, the cognitive wishes and possibilities of the students and, on the other, the curriculum supplied by the school;

The main findings of the research project were as follows:

Space for personal initiative and activity

Students want:	Teachers want:
Desire for more choice and self-regulation	Are ambivalent with regard to the needs and wishes of the students
Want a teacher who is available to challenge and help	To be in control
Want a teacher who talks less	
Have a need for more responsibility	

Working and learning in the classroom

Students want:	Teachers want:
Appreciate in general the atmosphere in the class	A good atmosphere is most important
The programme is very often unsuitable	To contribute to the development of children as human beings
Teachers should not explain everything, but assist if required	To take into account the large differences between children, but the rigid school systems are not very helpful in this respect. To give students more responsibility, but they do not do this because of the rigid programme which they have to implement.

Peace and quiet in the classroom

Students want:	Teachers want:
A good atmosphere in the classroom	Strictness and consistency with children
Dislike fuss and angry teachers	
Teachers who trust students and who are fair	

The student-teacher relationship

Students want:	Teachers want:
A teacher who is happy, makes jokes and is fair	Teachers do not trust themselves to give the students more room to manoeuvre and the students are asking for this Attention for informal contacts
Appreciate the efforts of the teacher on behalf of the student; the teacher should be available	That children feel safe and trust their teacher
For older students: a teacher with whom you can have a short talk	Children who are honest
At work teachers do not always understand you	

The student-student relationship:

Students want:	Teachers want:
Friendship with other students A good ambiance	Are ambivalent with respect to the wish of the students to work together
Cooperation and helping each other	

Conclusions of the survey:

1. There are permanent problems in the match between the curriculum and the demands and possibilities of the students;
2. Regarding autonomy and responsibility there is a great discrepancy between what the students could be expected to desire on the one hand, and on the other hand what the teachers think that the students are able to handle and consequently the room of manoeuvre, that the teachers dare to give to the students. This is a main point of conflict;
3. Despite the fact that teachers are interested in their students, the research showed that teachers find it difficult in the work situation to really grasp the perspective of the student; students experience that it is difficult to reach their teachers in the work situation.

The rigid supply structure of schools leads to under achievement

Summary: the rigid supply structure of schools leads to under achievement

The development of the students whom we interviewed and the role of the teacher as their guide is strongly dominated by the supply side, for example, by the curriculum and its standardised performance expectations. The supply is fully standardised with regards the following:

- the time schedule;
- the space;
- the content / the curriculum;
- the goals,
- the norms and the results;
- the relationships between teachers and students and among students.

There is no room for individual differences and there is no room for a dialogue between students and teachers and the school.

The students challenge the teachers and the schools to give them more space, more flexibility and more dialogue about what to do and how to do it.

Our research has shown that the students are prepared to do the work, but they want more freedom in the way that they do it.

Research in the USA and Europe shows that there is a serious and structural underachievement in our schools, because of the mismatch between supply and demand. The Americans use the term the 'under achievement syndrome' of our schools for this .

There is not one reason to keep this current school system as it is today.

If there is not one reason to keep this current school system as it is today, what could then be the alternative? What could we do in a concrete way?

Abandoning the strict time schedule would already mean a major change

There are many alternative approaches. Take, for example, the work of Prof. Ferre Laevers, the director of the Experiential Education Project. The current school system is fully standardized on the basis of a time schedule. If we would only abandon the strict time schedule and give the students more freedom in this respect it would already mean a major change. Some students need more time for a certain task , and certain others less time. When the time standard has been set free both types of students can move ahead at their own speed. This does not mean that a student can choose at any given moment anything he/she wants to do. There is freedom, however within a certain framework.

Planning one's own time enhances motivation

Students don't tend to waste their time in these circumstances. If they are allowed to plan their own time they can find their own way of doing things, they can choose with whom they want to work and because of these freedoms they become motivated.

At present, NIVOZ is working with two large school networks to make the transition from a school based on supply to a school based on the demands of the students. The schools that are in transition are characterized by the following:

- It is more quiet in the school;
- The students use their time more efficiently;
- Raising achievement occurs more quickly;
- Disappearance of behavioural difficulties (this is the experience of NIVOZ in the 45 primary and secondary schools in which they are currently carrying out the project);
- Better school climate
- The children are better motivated.

In schools for children with learning difficulties the transition to the new approach is also characterized by higher achievement of the students, because the children are more challenged than in the former situation.

Class size and homogenous age groups are less important parameters

Does it make sense to put children of the same age together? In a standardized system it does, but in a non-standardized system it does not.

What is the impact of class size? The class size can be between 10 and 30 children, and the exact number in this range does not matter that much. What is important is that the children feel responsible for their own work and for the quality of the climate in the classroom.

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Luc M Stevens (1941) was a professor of special education at Utrecht University till 2002. His research addressed the quality of teacher student interaction as a prerequisite for learning, motivation in education, school ethos and school reform. He was strongly involved in the development of a more adaptive education in the Netherlands and in educational policy. At the moment he is the director of the Netherlands Institute of Educational Matters (www.nivoz.nl), a think tank on education.

Date: 9th January 2007

This article is based on a verbal presentation given to the Quality of Childhood Group in the European Parliament. Notes taken during the presentation were formulated into the article below, which has been checked and approved by Professor Ferre Laevers.

The Experiential Education Project

By Professor Ferre Laevers

Department of Education, University of Leuven and Director of the Research Centre for Experiential Education

SUMMARY

When we talk about the Quality of Education we distinguish three elements:

- 1. The context in which the education takes place*
- 2. The output of the education (objectives, outcomes)*
- 3. The Process to bring us from (1) to (2).*

The Experiential Education Project has a consistent approach to enhance the Context. With regards to the Output Mr Laevers pleads for a paradigm shift: it is not important what the child learns, but how he or she uses what was learnt. Furthermore he advocates deep-level learning, including intuitive intelligence.

With regards to the Process Professor Laevers explains that before asking whether students have learned something, we should focus on their well-being and their level of involvement. They indicate, at the level of the process, if we can expect any outcome.

When we talk about the Quality of Education we distinguish three elements:

1. The **Context** in which the education takes place
2. The **Output** of the education (objectives, outcomes)
3. The **Process** to bring us from (1) to (2).

It is not just about making a few changes to the educational framework, but we will have to look at education, and the three components mentioned above, in a new way. We are talking about a paradigm shift.

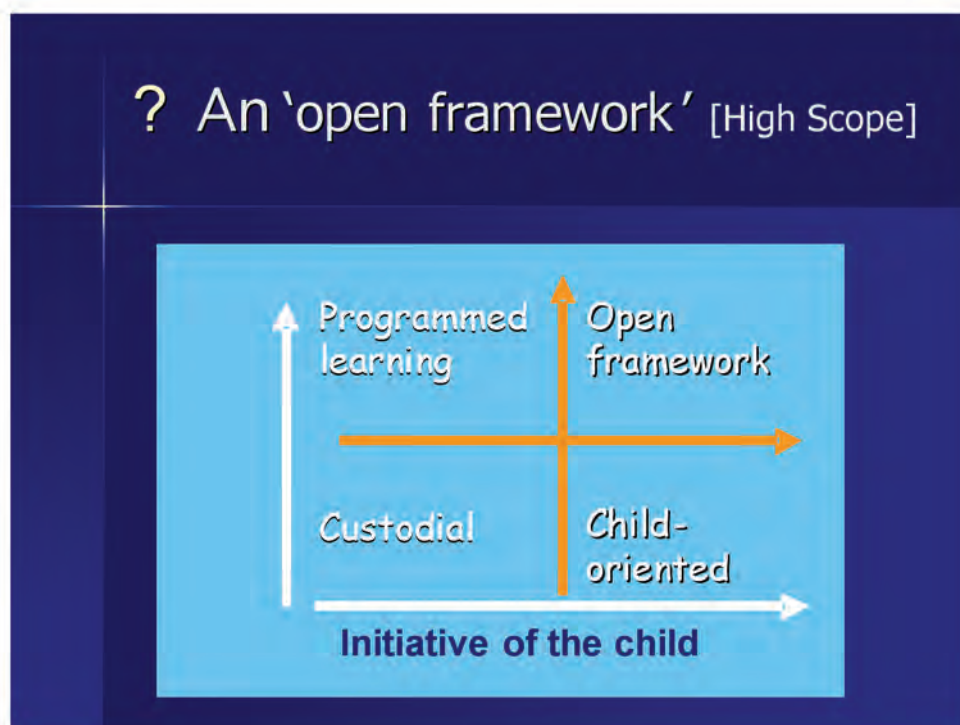
1. What kind of context should we create?

The basic qualities of the context should be:

- **Respect for the child.** This means the emancipation of the child. With this the child will also start to look at him/herself in a different way. This process develops in the same way as the emancipation of women in the 20th century.
- **A rich environment,** with many things to discover and lots of challenges. Some schools have such a poor environment. I dream of a tool which I can use to measure the richness

of an environment of the school in a similar way that you use a Geiger-counter.

- **An open framework approach** (see slide below – based on the HighScope Model). This is the educational programme of the future, where the educational process is the result of the interaction between the teacher and the student. Both the child and the teacher take a lot of initiative in a circular way. You don't know who is 'programming' who. You cannot even tell who is learning most.
- **Representation.** Part of the learning process is the process of having an impression, internalizing this impression, developing mental symbols of it and finally expressing it again. This is called the impression-expression cycle. Take the Reggio Emilia approach for children of 0 to 7 years old, where artists work with the children and where the children are encouraged to express themselves in the form of pieces of art. The famous book on the subject is appropriately entitled 'The hundred languages of children'. It is in the act of expression that the child really makes the subject his or her own and really creates a mental expression for himself. To say it another way: to express is to impress.
- **Communication, cooperative learning, inclusion, dialogue.** When children learn in a heterogeneous group all students learn more.
- **Observation.** Sufficient observation is part of the open-framework approach.



2. What kind of output should we get?

A new paradigm is emerging within the educational field. This new paradigm consists of two new approaches to learning:

- competency based learning;
- deep-level learning.

Competency based learning is characterized by:

- Competences are life skills. In the dictionary: competency = the sufficiency of means for living;
 - The learning is not the point, what is important is how the learning is used.
- Integration of skills, insights, attitudes, practice;
- Bloom's taxonomy revisited: the old way: start with reproductive learning and finish with problem-solving and evaluation. The new practice: let learning take place at all levels all the time;
- The concept of implicit learning and 'stealth education'. A stealth fighter plane is a plane that cannot be seen on the radar. If we use this metaphor we suggest that a lot of learning, in and outside of school, is not spotted by the educational 'radar' and therefore not valued. An example: most will look down on 'computer games', but research shows that youngsters develop a number of skills through playing computer games, such as fine motor skills, making sense of a situation in an instant, identifying obstacles, acting without delay... not just in front of the screen but also in real life situations.

The concept of deep-level-learning is characterised by the following:

- A holistic approach;
 - far from a checklist of isolated skills
 - grasping the essence
 - speaks to the imagination and gives a sense of direction.
- Valuing intuitive intelligence;
 - to give an example: in kindergarten allow children to play with a tunnel of one meter in length, then they will learn intuitively what a meter is.

3. How to upgrade the educational system, so that we attain the desired outcomes

In the third part of this presentation I will focus on the process of moving from one phase to another.

The Quality of the Process depends on two areas:

- The well-being of the students and the teachers;
- The involvement of the students.

Wellbeing:

When children and adults:

- feel at ease;
- act spontaneously;
- are open to the world and accessible;
- express inner rest and relaxation;
- show vitality and self-confidence;
- are in touch with their feelings and emotions;
- enjoy life

we know that their mental health is secured.

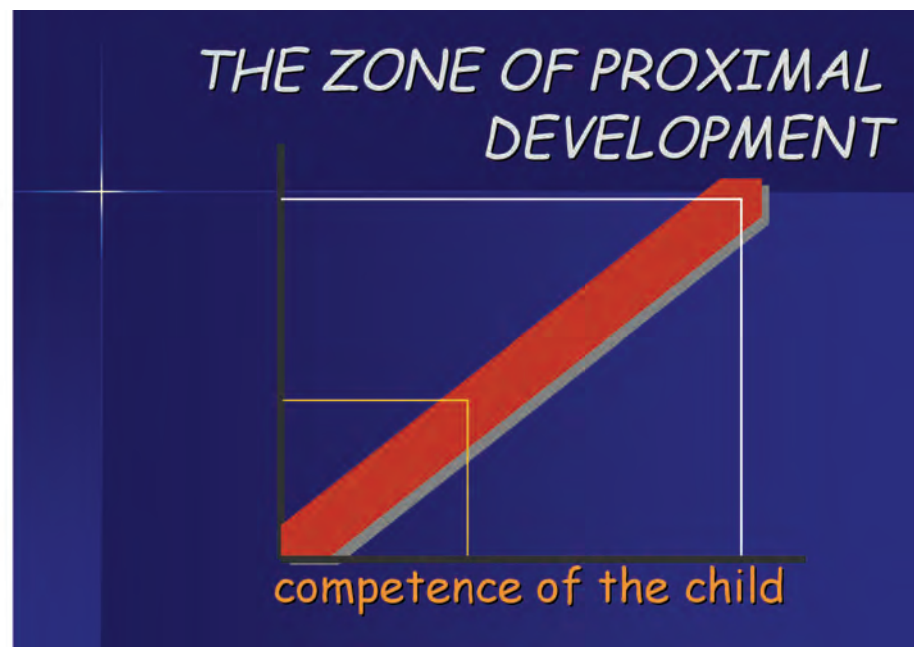
Involvement:

When children and adults are:

- concentrated and focused;
- interested, motivated, fascinated;
- mentally active;
- fully experiencing sensations and meanings;
- enjoying the satisfaction of the exploratory drive;
- operating at the very limits of their capabilities

we know that deep level learning is taking place.

The diagram below shows how involvement occurs in that small area where the difficulty of the task matches the capabilities of the learner and the latter feels challenged.



The Leuven Involvement Scale (from low to high) is a useful scale to be aware of:

1. no activity (lowest level of involvement)
2. interrupted activity
3. activity without intensity
4. activity with intense moments
5. continuous intense activity.

Monitoring wellbeing and involvement gives good results

The Experiential Education Project has developed several tools to assess levels of well-being and the involvement of children. One variant fits into a scanning procedure in which a sample of children of a class or school are observed for 2 minutes each and given a score. The other variant is used by practitioners to screen their children and express in a 5 point scale how they are doing in the setting – both in terms of well-being and involvement. The assessment is based on the observations over the last few weeks and repeated 3 times a year.

Observations regarding the monitoring:

- It contains key information to improve the quality;
 - It is equally a measure for the quality of the learning environment;
 - It provides immediate feedback and it is the shortest way to interventions
- It is a conclusive tool to detect risk of stagnation;
 - It tells who is (not) taking advantage of our efforts;
- The survey is universal:
 - It is not connected with any educational model or innovation;
 - It offers a common point of reference for the whole of the educational system.

Our aim is: the true emancipation of children

We are, in fact, talking about the emancipation of children. The process of the emancipation of children is the same as the process of the emancipation of women. When society started to perceive women in another way, the women started to perceive themselves differently and started to act differently. The same is now true for children.

To conclude with an appeal to the European Institutions:

Give Europe a Future:

- Install a process-oriented monitoring system:
 - use well-being and involvement as key-indicators;
 - quality improvement through immediate action;
 - from babies up to adults in professional training;
- Select key-targets for critical outcomes:
 - emotional health;
 - social competence;
 - self-organisation and entrepreneurship;

- intuitive intelligence and creativity;
- the basic attitudes of linkedness;
- Support the development of new instruments:
 - re: for the context, the process and the outcomes;
- Stimulate a specified kind of research:
 - bout good practice;
 - with a pre- and post test design;
- Help to create fair funding:
 - why is there an imbalance between the human and the positive sciences? If we really want to have an impact on improving our societies, greater research efforts are necessary in the human sciences;
 - regulations can be simplified without losing control;

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Prof. Dr. Ferre Laevers is member of the academic staff of the Department of Education of the University of Leuven, director of the Research Centre for Experiential Education and co-founder and former president of EECERA [the European Early Childhood Education Research Association].

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This article is based on a verbal presentation given to the Quality of Childhood Group in the European Parliament. Notes taken during the presentation were formulated into the article below, which has been checked and approved by Jesper Juul.

The Quality of Child-Adult Relationships in Families and Schools

by *By Jesper Juul*

SUMMARY

Jesper Juul distinguishes the following key characteristics with regards to the quality of relationships:

- *equal dignity (Gleichwürdigkeit)*
- *integrity*
- *authenticity*
- *responsibility*
- *self-esteem and self-confidence*
- *migration from a subject-object relationship to a subject-subject relationship*
- *the process of the growth of a relationship.*

Key characteristics with regards to the quality of relationships:

1. Equal dignity

Relationships between adults and children have been improving decisively and qualitatively in the past 25 years, as the concept of equal dignity within family life has emerged. This change is perhaps most clearly illustrated by the fact that children and young people are now able to function in the world with a much greater sense of naturalness and self awareness. They are no longer automatically programmed to tolerate infringements and violations inflicted by parents and other adults that earlier generations were forced to accept. At the same time, however, both the family and society still fail to fulfil a crucial need of children and young people: to see them, and encourage them to see themselves, as valid members of the community.

2. Integrity

With the word integrity Jesper Juul refers to a collective concept, that relates to the wholeness and inviolability of our physical and psychological existence, which is related to issues like identity, limits and personal needs. Children can in fact set their own limits to a great extent, but often they will disregard their own needs if these needs conflict with those of their parents. They then choose to cooperate instead of thinking of themselves.

3. Authenticity

One of the basic ingredients for a healthy relationship between an adult and a child is the attribute of authenticity. A person who is authentic is reliable, trustworthy, genuine and true

to his inner self. Jesper Juul mentions in his book *Vom Gehorsam zur Verantwortung* (page 116, *From Obedience to Responsibility*) the example of a teacher who feels uncertain. He explains that there is nothing wrong with feeling uncertain. However, the teacher has the choice of how to behave when feeling uncertain. If he lets it be, he behaves in an authentic way. If he tries to hide it, he is inauthentic. The first way is better and children will relate to it. The latter behaviour creates a distance between the teacher and the children and the quality of the relationship will suffer as a result.

4. Responsibility

Jesper Juul distinguishes two forms of responsibility:

- Social responsibility
- Personal responsibility

Social responsibility is the responsibility we have for each other, those in our family, community, society, and the world. It enables larger groups of people to live together. We learn it from our parents and teachers.

Personal responsibility is the responsibility we have for our own lives, our physical, psychological, mental and spiritual health and development. Few of us have been raised to assume this type of responsibility, but it is one of the pillars of a healthy psycho-social development and consequently of healthy relationships.

For children it is important to live with adults, who

- Safeguard their personal integrity
- Intervene when they sense that children are cooperating to an excessive degree.

5. Self esteem and self confidence

Self esteem is our knowledge about, and experience of, who we are. It addresses the question of how well we know ourselves and how we look upon what we know. Self esteem can be envisioned as a kind of inner pillar, centre or core. People who have a healthy, well-developed sense of self esteem feel self-contained and at ease with themselves.

Self-confidence is a measure of what we are capable of, what we are good and clever at, or awkward and inefficient at doing. It refers to what we can achieve.

If one has a healthy self-esteem, then self-confidence is rarely a problem. The opposite, however, is certainly not the case.

6. Migration from a subject object relationship to a subject-subject relationship

One of the major themes in the books of Jesper Juul is the understanding that we should not treat children as objects, but instead as subjects. This means that we define the relationship between the adult and the child as a relationship between two human beings instead of defining ourselves as the parent or the teacher and the child as a pupil, who must obey, learn, fill in tests, be nice, be clever, adapt him/herself to our wishes etc.

7. The process of the growth of a relationship

*Jesper Juul explains in the book *Aus Erziehung wird Beziehung, Authentische Eltern, Kompetente Kinder* (From Upbringing to Relationship, Authentic Parents, Competent Children), that we should raise our children in such a way that the child is respected as a fellow human being, who wants to be who he/she is and to develop his/her inner potential. If we treat a child in this way we enable the child to get to know him or herself and to develop deep and healthy relationships with the parents and the teachers and other people.*

Conclusion:

We can only give our children a childhood of a good quality when we, as adults, first make the above-mentioned seven characteristics our own, because otherwise we will never be able to set them a good example. This is of course also true for our schools and other institutions.

What to do about the social/personal development of children?

We discover that all adults dealing with children face the same challenge, namely "What to do about the social/personal development of children?" Furthermore we notice that 'marriage' today is something completely different from marriage during the past 300 years. We have to reinvent marriage. New elements of this marriage relationships are:

- **Equal dignity**, this means something other than equality, because this is a political term;
- **Raising children**, means something different to educating children.

My parents raised me in what was then usual way: they rarely disagreed with each other and they also fully agreed with what the teachers said. They had a lot of support from the moral consensus in society, which no longer exists. My generation thought that if they did the opposite of their parents, it would be OK. But this also turned out not to be the best approach.

Young parents today are pioneers, who have to discover completely new ways of parenting that have not been followed before at any time in history.

Here are various characteristics that have an impact on the quality of the adult-child relationship:

a. Subject subject relationship

At the Kempler Institute we did not start with a particular theory. We wrote down our approach as our experience grew. However, meanwhile brain science has developed very quickly over the past decades and scientific discoveries about the brain nowadays confirm the approach which we took. The new paradigm that is emerging is: as soon as children are born they should have a subject subject relationship with their parents, instead of what we have been thinking until recently, that this was a subject (= the parent) -object (= the child) relationship. This paradigm was developed by professor Daniel Stern, a Swiss-American,

who works in the areas of medicine and psychoanalysis at the University of Geneva. As soon as we start to follow this approach with children and adolescents very often the difficulties will disappear.

b. Start to think in terms of relationships

Another important finding is that it is very useful to look at the relation-ship of the adult with the child, instead of looking at the behaviour of the adult or the behaviour of the child. If something is good for the relationship it is also both good for the adult and for the child.

c. What does the child bring?

- The reactions of children are always meaningful in the relational context
- The child is born with social skills and desires. One of the main objectives of education was and still is to enable children to become social beings. Recently we have discovered that children are social beings from the moment of their birth.
- The child is able to be (personally) responsible. Here the same is true: we thought that we had to teach this to children, but they have this ability also from the start, even at only a few days old. You see this, for instance, in families where a parent is an alcoholic. Here children tend to take on too much responsibility. To give another example, a longitudinal study took place over a 25 year period in which two groups of 60 children each were followed: the children in the first group were free to indicate how much and what they wanted to eat, the children in the second group were not given this freedom. The result: the children that had the freedom to eat in accordance with their appetites thrived much better and developed fewer psychosomatic symptoms later on in their lives.

d. Relational competence

Adult and/or professional competence is the ability to 'see' the child on his/her own terms and adjust one's behaviour in accordance therewith, without giving up the leader-ship. For example, Great Britain is being observed by teachers from all over Europe, because so many teachers in Britain suffer from burn-out. One of the reasons for this is that the teachers don't focus enough on the relationship with the child, but focus instead on the curriculum. If you want to improve the quality of childhood then do not give the extra means directly to the children, but instead treat the teachers and the parents better, because then the children will benefit in the most optimal way. A recent meta-study from the Danish Pedagogical University has gone through the conclusions of 175 studies and the conclusion is, that teachers' "relational competence" is THE most important factor in children's learning.

Teachers' "relational competence" is THE most important factor in children's learning

e. Ethics

By ethics I mean the 'ability and willingness of the adult to take full responsibility for the quality of the relationship'. Children have social skills and can take personal responsibility, but they do not have the ability to take responsibility for the quality of the relationship between themselves and the adult.

To give a couple of examples:

- For centuries adults have been practicing a moral double standard in relation to children – i.e. When our relationship to children is successful it is our success – when it is not it is the fault of the child.
- In the Scandinavian countries the number of children and youth who are victims of public institutional abuse and neglect is now considered to be higher than the number of children being neglected and abused within their families.

I have been teaching teachers to take responsibility for the quality of the relationship. You cannot measure if it is present, but you notice it within 10 seconds after you enter a classroom. In the Nordic countries we no longer come across the phenomenon of five year old children who are afraid of adults. This is a real achievement. Children have become real human beings: they ask for respect before they will show respect. Of course, many teachers do not like this: they want to get their power back.

f. The values:

The following values are fundamental for the quality of adult-child relationships:

- Equal dignity. This does not have to do with equality or democracy. It means that the adult respects the child to the same degree as he or she would respect another adult regarding his/her actions, thoughts, ideas etc.
- Personal integrity (taking care of our personal needs and boundaries and respecting those of the child)
- Responsibility
- Authenticity. Parents try to be perfect parents. In that case the parent tries to be 'the role', but the child is looking for the real person inside, not the role that the parent is playing.

g. Cooperation versus integrity

Take a look at the following diagram:



During the past three decades many children have learnt both to cooperate and to maintain their own integrity. By the word integrity I mean a collective concept that relates to the wholeness and inviolability of our physical and psychological exist-ence, including issues such as identity, limits and personal needs. Children can in fact set their own limits to a great extent, but often they will disregard their own needs if these needs conflict with those of their parents. They will then choose to cooperate instead of thinking of themselves.

If people have not learnt to maintain their personal integrity and always try to please others they run the risk of destroying their physical and mental health, which may lead to burn-out. It is therefore of vital importance that children are treated in such a way that their integrity is respected. They will then copy this behaviour themselves and be aware of maintaining their integrity.

If people have not learnt to maintain their personal integrity and always try to please others they run the risk of destroying their physical and mental health, which may lead to burn-out.

h. Self-confidence and self- esteem

Self esteem = who I am and how I feel about me – a more Nordic approach

Self confidence = what I can do or achieve – a more American approach

Self esteem is our knowledge about, and experience of, who we are. It addresses the question of how well we know ourselves and how we look upon what we know. Self esteem can be envisioned as a kind of inner pillar, centre or core. People who have a healthy, well-developed sense of self-esteem feel self-contained and at ease with themselves.

Self confidence is a measure of what we are capable of, what we are good and clever at, or awkward and inefficient at doing. It refers to what we can achieve.

If one has a healthy self-esteem, then self-confidence is rarely a problem. The opposite, however, is certainly not the case.

It is of vital importance to help children to acquire self esteem. Let us take as an example a mother feeding a toddler. When the child does not want to eat any more the mother can say: Ah, you are full? You don't want any more food? With this approach the child learns the following:

- The mother gives the child a language for the body (there is a word for this feeling and that is 'full')
- It is OK to be full;
- I am respected as I am.

In earlier generations the mother defined when the child was 'full'. My approach is: do not define who your child is, but instead be interested in who your child is.

Do not define who your child is, but instead be interested in who your child is.

i. Social responsibility and personal responsibility

There are two different forms of responsibility that I would like to speak about:

- Social responsibility is the responsibility we have for each other, those in our family, our community, society, and the world. It enables larger groups of people to live together. We learn social responsibility from our parents and teachers.
- Personal responsibility is the responsibility we have for our own lives, our physical, psychological, mental and spiritual health and develop-ment. Few of us have been raised to assume this type of responsibility, but it is one of the pillars of healthy psy-chological development and consequently of healthy relationships.

For children it is important to live with adults who:

- Safeguard their personal integrity
- Intervene when they sense that children are cooperating to an exces-sive degree.

The old way: parents took away the personal responsibility of the child until he or she was 12 or 13 years old and then gave it back. I advocate the approach that parents leave the personal responsibility to the child as far as possible, but of course they should be present and support the child where necessary.

A young girl of three years old walks down the stairs. The grandmother wants to hold her hand, but the girl refuses: 'I want to do it myself'. When they are on the ground floor the little girl says: 'I did it myself, but not alone.'

A few examples:

- A young girl of three years old walks down the stairs. The grandmother wants to hold her hand, but the girl refuses: 'I want to do it myself'. When they are on the ground-floor the little girl says: 'I did it myself, but not alone.'
- Attitude to school: at some point children grasp the idea: "I don't like school, but in some way it is useful for me and I have to do it." Then they start to take personal responsibility for this.
- In 1989 I worked in Croatia and when I was there I spoke about 'personal responsibility'. My audience did not understand what this was because they had lived for so long in a society where the state took all decisions. From this example one can see that a strong democratic tradition is necessary for building personal responsibility.

Children speak in political terms. They say for instance: 'I want to take a decision myself'. In fact they want to say: 'I would like to take more responsibility'. The clue is that they can do it themselves but they need some help. It is thus our task to be creative in this process and let the child do as much as he or she can, without letting them be in risky situations. Of course, this is a dynamic process, because each day you can give the child more room to manoeuvre.

In this context we should distinguish two things:

- we are educating the child, and
- at the same time we have to pay attention to where the child is at this moment.

Take, for example, the school shootings that occur regularly in the USA, and also in Europe. At one of the incidents in Germany the adolescent who had just killed a whole group of teachers and students stated, before he killed himself: 'the only message that this school ever gave me was that I am a loser'. We should take the last words of this adolescent very seriously, because it gives us a powerful message about our school system. The pedagogy of the school system violates in a structural way the integrity of the student.

I advocate the introduction of some guidance for all parents regarding their parenting role, and not to limit this to the 5% of the parents that do worst. Nobody has the answer but all parents are eager to learn in this respect. It is important to find the right methodology for this.

Jesper Juul studied education and the history of European ideas. Later he combined the two. He also taught education. He has been working for the past 30 years as a family therapist and as the director of the Kempler Institute in Denmark, which is a post graduate institute which trains social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists and pedagogues. The Kempler Institute was one of the first institutions to focus on the theme of relationships. This is a very important element for kindergartens, schools and other pedagogical institutions.

At the Kempler Institute (which has 65 employees) they did counselling work and advised on the pedagogical development of institutions such as kindergartens and schools. Jesper has worked in many European countries, including working as a volunteer for 6 months per year in refugee camps during the war in the former Yugoslavia. For the last three years he has been working on his own, doing what he has wanted to do for many years, namely to work on a higher level in the area of psychotherapy and to make it available to the general public. This project for public education is called Family-lab.com. Jesper Juul has written a number of books of which the following two are best known:

- *Your Competent Child, published in 13 countries*
- *From Obedience to Responsibility (for professionals, not yet translated into English).*