The Tact of Teaching

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Philip L. Smith, Editor

The Tact of Teaching

The Meaning of Pedagogical Thoughtfulness

Max van Manen

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Cover photo: Ghirlandajo (1448–1494), *Grandfather and grandson.* In discussing this well known painting by Ghirlandajo, Klaus Mollenhauer says: "The scepsis of the grandfather and the glance of the child—questioning and full of trust—stand in a certain relation to each other. It expresses an open, uncertain future, and a waiting for knowledge that is passionately desired, to become 'grown-up.' Between child and grandfather there lies a life of development, learning, and formative growth. In their loving relation they are together and true to each other, but with respect to the future, that they anticipate in accordance with their own abilities and possibilities, they are separated from each other." (Mollenhauer, K. 1983. *Vergessene Zusammenhänge.* München: Juventa Verlag, p. 95).

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to Judith, Mark and Michael

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TOWARD A PEDAGOGY OF THOUGHTFULNESS

Introduction

What is a child? To see a child is
to see possibility, someone in
the process of becoming.

Jan's parents did not get along. Even at age six Jan knew this; it created tensions and sometimes an unpleasant feeling at home. Then, one day, her parents announced plans to break up their marriage. They decided for the sake of the children not to live too far apart; Jan and her brother could choose whether they wanted to live with their father or with their mother.

That was several years ago. The father has moved away. Jan now lives with her mother.

Jan is in sixth grade. The teacher finds Jan remarkably mature. Or is it that she seems so much more experienced than some of her other classmates? Every day the children spend half an hour writing in their individual journals. Sometimes children write poetry, sometimes they write a story, and sometimes they use the journal as a place to express their feelings and communicate to the teacher. At the end of the day the teacher takes all the books home and writes a response to each child. The teacher reads Jan's story: "Today I'm a little blue. I wrote a letter to my Dad last night and I really miss him. Usually Trisha will cheer me up but she's sick. I know my Dad misses me, but I just wish that I could be in two places at once or that I could live normally with parents that live together. I'm glad that now, when they talk on the phone, they sound more like friends, but that still doesn't change the fact that my Dad lives too far away. I

know I live normally — like I got my health and a loving family ... but then again, not really. I guess today you have one lonely kid!" As the teacher responds to Jan with some thoughtful lines, she is again amazed at herself. As a teacher she knows many children like Jan, many worse off than Jan. But why does the teacher in her always want to respond as a mother?

Compared to their parents and grandparents, young people today live in a severely fractured world — families are less stable, divorce has become commonplace, neighbourhoods tend to be more in flux and less community-minded, schools are less personal and more competitive, and peer groups set up conflicting loyalties. Moreover, television, radio, newspapers, and other media rush images of adulthood into the living space of young children — images beset with violence, sexuality, drugs, global crises and conflict. Many parents and educators feel uneasy about the frenzied, intensely eroticized icons of some music videos on the developing minds and bodies of young viewers. They believe that children prematurely see and experience too much in our consumer-oriented, information-based, and advertising-driven culture. Technology, in the form of computers, video, and other communication innovations, also radically alters the modalities of modern living. Aspects of adult life that previously remained secret from children until they had mastered more sophisticated reading levels and until they had obtained access to more mature literature now have become dominant themes of the lives of children. This has led some educators to suggest that the boundaries between childhood and adulthood are eroding and that childhood itself, in its development phases, may be disappearing.

It is this reality of change, complexity, plurality, fragmentation, conflict, and contradiction of beliefs, values, faiths, living conditions, aspirations, and life-styles, that makes the lives of young people today an experience in contingency. Contingent life is indeterminate, unpredictable, subject to chance, impacted by events and unforeseen circumstances. The youngster born into the modern social world often must respond to early pressures and premature expectations to grow up faster than seems possible or advisable. And yet, in spite of — or because of — this contingency, the lives of young people are often full of stimulation, interest, and challenge.

The modern child is born into a world that can be experienced, within limits, as a life of possibilities — though the possibilities are certainly not the same for all. Yet even children who are raised in situations affected by poverty, youth unemployment, alcoholism, drug abuse, prostitution, violence, crime, and other dangers of modern living nevertheless may be able to experience a certain openness of choice and possibility in life.[1]

The Possibility of a New Pedagogy

Unlike the ages when one knew, by being born in a particular social niche, what one was expected to become, whom one could count on, what one could do, present-day children must live with uncertainty. They must make active choices in their lives for fear of not becoming anything or anyone. The modern child must actively realize that he or she is born into a condition of possibilities. He or she *is* this body of possibilities. To become a person, to grow up and to become educated, is to transform one's contingency into commitment, responsibility — one must choose a life. This means that the vocation of pedagogy, of being educationally involved with children, is to empower children to give active shape to their life's contingencies.[2]

To be a contingent person can be seen both negatively and positively. Negatively it means that many present-day children are growing up in an uncertain world, a world with too many conflicting views, values and aims; this predicament can mean that children drift into (self-)destructive lifestyles. Positively it means that each young person must make choices and commitments in life, that they all must come to terms with their possibilities. The child is in a real sense the agent of his or her own destiny — at both the individual and the social level. So a new pedagogy of the theory and practice of living with children must know how to stand in a relationship of thoughtfulness and openness to children and young people rather than being governed by traditional beliefs, discarded values, old rules, and fixed impositions. The pedagogy of living with children is an ongoing project of renewal in a world that is constantly changing around us and that is continually being changed by us.

Indeed, as we ask ourselves what it means to belong to this

earth, we must seriously ask ourselves what it means to belong to our children. Living at the turn of a new millennium poses unforeseen and unforeseeable challenges to parents and to teachers and other professional educators. This does not mean, of course, that we should dismiss or abandon every valued cultural construction that appears presently under siege. For example, in a new age of commercialized social mores and more fluid interpersonal relations, the family has experienced difficulty maintaining its former cohesiveness. This does not mean that the more close-knit familial structure is or was wrong and that we should give up on the idea that children need, if possible, a mother and a father, as well as other kin relations, all playing active roles in the child's journey to adulthood. A new pedagogy must face the challenge of change but also be prepared to defend, or reconstruct in new forms, values and value frameworks that growing up seems to require.

Of course, life will be carried into the twenty-first century by new realities and new visions. Some of these realities will be exciting and positive experiments in human living. But we must recognize also that spheres of human intimacy increasingly come under strain from consumer, economic, bureaucratic, corporate, and political technologies and ideologies. The notion of education, conceived as a living process of personal engagement between an adult teacher or parent and a young child or student, may well disappear in an increasingly managerial, corporate, and technicized environment. How can educating and bringing up children remain a rich human and cultural activity?

This text is addressed to both beginning teachers and experienced educators. But the perspective and approach is somewhat unusual in that it takes the *in loco parentis* relation as a source for exploring pedagogical understandings and insights that maintain a holistic focus on the lived world of professional educators and children. In my ongoing conversations with teachers and young people I have been intrigued by the fact that when teachers and children talk of meaningful educational experiences, these experiences often seem to occur on the margin or on the outside of the daily curriculum experiences of the classroom. One should not make the mistake, however, of supposing that the pedagogical life on the margin of the "teaching/learning process" is not fundamentally connected to the central processes of curriculum and teaching.

Remembering educators' in loco parentis *relation*

Even in these times of eroding parental and family influence, parents carry the primary responsibility for the child's well-being and the child's development. Does anybody have a right to diminish the rights and abilities of parents to be responsible for their children's welfare and growth? Yet we are living in an age when many children and young people experience very little parental support and influence in their lives.[3] Working parents who are largely absent, families in various stages of disintegration or breakup, single-parent families without adequate resources or child care, family violence and child neglect, poverty-ridden neighborhoods, alcohol and drug abuse, all are contexts for the lives of many children we meet in our schools.

At the same time there are children growing up in a variety of modern family settings, surrounded by a stable atmosphere of parent(s) and other adults who are present to them and with whom they share and interact in significant ways. Yet even these children are living in a time of crises and a sense of doom about the viability of the human race and the survival of the earth. Teachers are living with children who come from very diverse backgrounds and with widely varying experiences. These teachers exercise a responsibility *in loco parentis*[4] toward all those children entrusted to their care. Naturally, teachers are expected to educate these children in the various curriculum subjects. Other child professionals too have particular educational tasks. Their pedagogical responsibilities are associated with their specialized tasks as counsellors, school administrators, psychologists, child care workers, and so on.

The implication for teachers is that they are constantly being reminded to be mindful of their status *in loco parentis.* Professional educators, if possible, must try to assist parents in fulfilling their primary pedagogical responsibility. In other words, out of this primary responsibility of parents flows the teacher's charge as a responsibility *in loco parentis.* So what is relevant for the relation between parents and children may be informative for the pedagogical relation between teachers and students. As schools and other child care institutions have taken on more and more responsibilities previously dealt with within the family, professional educators need to become more reflective about what *in loco parentis* entails.

Indeed, the school, as a cultural-political institution, needs to come to terms with its *in loco parentis* responsibilities. The responsibility of the adult resides in children's need for a protective sphere in which they can develop a self-responsible maturity. The school institution also has legally defined *in loco parentis* responsibilities. The school's boundaries were traditionally commonly considered as a transitional space between the secure intimacy of the family and the more risky public openness of life in the outside world.[5] But in modern society we cannot assume that this secure family exists for the child; and to the extent that it exists, it cannot be assumed that this family "intimacy" grows out of the right kind of love for the child. And so, the *in loco parentis* responsibility of the school does not only consist in preparing the child for the larger world, it also consists in protecting the child from the possible risks of abuse and shortcomings in the intimate sphere of the family.

Some have argued that increasing selfishness and greed in modern society requires that professional educators develop caring school environments, for the sake of the children and ultimately for the sake of society.[6] Similarly, schools struggle with the task of preparing children, not only for the challenges and dangers of the larger world, but also for the demands of intimacy and moral responsibility that successful family life presupposes but that families find increasingly difficult to impress on their children. In other words, the institution of the school needs to orient itself increasingly to the norms of parenting that parents themselves seem to have forgotten as it were. While parents are excused, the schools are often accused of improperly preparing children for the responsibilities of their own parenthood.

There exist deep connections between the nature of teaching and of parenting, yet these connections are rarely explored. In the North American educational literature the parent is remarkably absent. It is as if in the minds of education theorists the education of children is not an integral part of the whole process of growing up. Even the English language reflects this separation between education (largely an institution process of teaching/learning in schools) and child rearing (usually considered the process of parenting in and around the home). There is no single word in English that describes the entire moral, intellectual, physical, and spiritual complex process of bringing up children.[7]

Parenting and teaching derive from the same fundamental

experience of pedagogy: the human charge of protecting and teaching the young to live in this world and to take responsibility for themselves, for others, and for the continuance and welfare of the world. Moreover, there are other similarities often overlooked between the world inside and outside the school. For example, how often do educators tend to forget that the children who are before them in school are the same children they see in the street and that the way children learn in school is essentially no different from the way they learn at home or in the street?

Children are not empty vessels who come to school merely to be filled with curricular content by means of special instructional methods. Moreover, children who come to school come from somewhere. Teachers need to have some sense of what it is that children bring with them, what defines their present understandings, mood, emotional state, and readiness to deal with the subject matter and the world of the school.

Educators may be able to learn about pedagogy not only from what they share with parents but also from the differences between being a parent and being a professional educator. For example, like parents, teachers often develop deep affection and love for their students, they feel responsible for the young people in their charge, and they cherish hope for the children they teach. Eventually teachers have to let go of their children, and yet they may live on in the memory and in the lives of the students they have taught. Professional educators may need to reflect on the question of what is similar and what is different in these experiences between the pedagogical relation of the parent and the child, on the one hand, and the pedagogical relation of the teacher and the student, on the other.

In this text, I will constantly consider examples of the pedagogical experiences of parenting and of teaching in order to keep reminding ourselves of our *in loco parentis* relation to the children we teach. As parents and as teachers we need to keep open the question of the pedagogical meaning of our vocation, and we need to remain aware of the total life world in which young people grow up, learn and develop.

What do we look for in pedagogues?

Another obvious feature of the *in loco parentis* responsibility of professional educators is found in the expectations that parents

hold for the teachers of their children. In everyday life parents look for certain qualities in the teachers of their children. What might those qualities be? Parents often have a difficult time articulating relevant standards. Generally they are concerned that the teachers "like" their child because parents sense that a positive affective relationship may benefit the child's school experience and the child's success in school. Parents' particular expectations are usually more concretely tied to the daily experiences their children have in schools and classrooms. Often expectations become more clear when things have gone wrong at school, when the child has been let down, hurt, neglected, misunderstood, misjudged, or mistreated.

In this text it is suggested that the following qualities are probably essential to good pedagogy: a sense of vocation, love of and caring for children, a deep sense of responsibility, moral intuitiveness, self-critical openness, thoughtful maturity, tactful sensitivity toward the child's subjectivity, an interpretive intelligence, a pedagogical understanding of the child's needs, improvisational resoluteness in dealing with young people, a passion for knowing and learning the mysteries of the world, the moral fibre to stand up for something, a certain understanding of the world, active hope in the face of prevailing crises, and, not the least, humor and vitality.

Of course, teachers of the young should know what they teach, and should take responsibility for the world and traditions which they share; moreover, they need to know how to hand over this world to the child so that he or she can make it his or her own world. In other words, pedagogical thoughtfulness is a multifaceted and complex mindfulness toward children. This is a tall order for any human being. And yet underlying this suggestion is a crucial question: Does a person who lacks any of these qualities possess the pedagogical fitness required for educating young people?

The idea and nature of pedagogical fitness as a certain thoughtfulness and tact is offered, described, and interpreted in this book in a manner that may contribute to the thoughtfulness and tact through which the reader can come to see, act, and interact with children and young people. This book offers a (self) reflective approach to teaching children. However, "pedagogical thoughtfulness and tact" are unlearnable as mere behavioral

principles, techniques, or methods. So one will look in vain in these pages for simplified sets of effective teaching techniques, or for sure methods for managing classrooms.

Pedagogy is primarily neither a science nor a technology.[8] Yet it is often treated and researched in an empirically scientific way. Science and technology by their very nature cut knowledge off from experience by producing generalizations and technical principles that abstract from experience. This is quite all right in a field like engineering where students can learn the scientific principles of bridge building from an expert who in fact may never have built a bridge. Similarly, a technological approach to education assumes that teaching can be taught by means of generalizations and general techniques. Only recently has anyone recognized that education needs to turn back to the world of experience. Experience can open up understanding that restores a sense of embodied knowing.

Of course, it is not being suggested that aspects of teaching cannot be learned as special instructional techniques (for example, how to tell a good story, how to conduct a class discussion or seminar), or as organizational skills (for example, how to plan a stimulating lesson, how to organize a field trip), or as diagnostic competencies (for example, how to assess the child's cognitive abilities or school achievements). Yet, the essence of education is less a technical or production enterprise than a normative activity[9] that constantly expects the educator to act in a right, good, or appropriate manner. Accordingly, a pedagogical text like this one should not be composed and studied as if it were a technical handbook that specifies effective procedures for the productive management of learning environments. Rather, a pedagogical text needs to possess an inspirational quality together with a narrative structure that invites critical reflection and possibilities for insight and that leads to a personal appropriation of a moral intuition.

It is possible to learn all the techniques of instruction but to remain pedagogically unfit as a teacher. The preparation of educators obviously includes much more than the teaching of knowledge and skills, more even than a professional ethical code or moral craft. To become a teacher includes something that cannot be taught formally: the most personal embodiment of a pedagogical thoughtfulness.

The preparation of professional educators in institutions of higher learning tends to rely heavily on bookish approaches. But vicarious experiences provided by these texts tend to go to our heads, so to speak. Especially books that offer mostly "information," abstract concepts, and theoretical explanations and classifications may often be poor substitutes for the experiences provided by life itself. Pedagogy requires practical rather than intellectualized forms of knowledge. Through practical examples of experience, this text hopes to stimulate a reflective thoughtfulness and a sense of improvisational tact that actively speaks to our whole embodied being. As Dewey pointed out almost a century ago, it may be more important in the long term for educators to develop an orientation to children conditioned by ongoing reflection on the pedagogical meaning and significance of experiences in their lives, than to acquire an external set of behavioral competencies that enables one in the short term to improve "the mechanics of school management... [but with which one] cannot grow as a teacher, an inspirer and director of soul-life."[10]

To write about pedagogical thoughtfulness and tact courts the dangerous presumption that one claims to know how to behave with moral superiority. By definition pedagogy is always concerned with the ability to distinguish between what is good and what is not good for children. Many educational thinkers are uncomfortable with this assumption, they try to pursue educational problems and questions in a value neutral or relativistic manner. It is wrong, however, to confuse pedagogical discourse with moral diatribe or preaching. Preaching is an act of moral exhortation on the basis of some unquestioned dogma. But pedagogy does not aim to deliver diatribe. Pedagogy is a practical discipline. On the one hand, educators need to show that in order to stand up for the welfare of children, one must be prepared to stand out and be criticized. On the other hand, pedagogy is a self-reflective activity that always must be willing to question critically what it does and what it stands for.

Becoming reflective about pedagogy as the practice of living

In this text there are two main thrusts. One is an attempt to rescue the idea of pedagogy from the wordmongers. For many decades the term "pedagogy" has been in disuse among educators in

the English-speaking world.[11] Recently there has been an upsurge in the currency of the term *pedagogy* and the renewed popularity of this word may have something to do with the growing North American interest in West European philosophical, social, and educational theory. But present usage for the term *pedagogy* has added few new understandings to the field of education, and may have become little more than a new packaging of old ideas.

Second, this text aims to explore and offer a more experience-based interpretation of pedagogical reflection on the one hand, and of the practical pedagogical moment of teaching (and parenting) on the other hand. Indeed, it is the reality of these pedagogical moments that much literature has been trying to grasp and clarify under the labels of *reflective teaching, teacher thinking, the teacher as reflective practitioner, teacher as problem solver, teacher as decision maker, teacher as researcher.* Using the notions of pedagogical thoughtfulness and pedagogical tact, this book attempts to show that the interactive practice of pedagogy has a subtle and highly normative character. Pedagogical reflection plays an important part in the life worlds of parents and teachers with children; but the reflective nature of the actual pedagogical moments in parenting and teaching may differ markedly from the interactions of other professional practitioners, such as the medical doctor, with those in their charge.

Most books on education are agogical.[12] They direct themselves to the adults, to the parents or to the teachers, and not to the children. They preoccupy themselves with the question how educators (should) think, act, feel, and interact with children. But such a focus neglects two important considerations. First, this emphasis on the adult fails to consider how particular situations appear from the child's point of view, how the child experiences his or her world at home, at school, and in the community. From a pedagogical perspective the most important question is always, "How does the child experience this particular situation, relationship, or event?" Because this text deals with pedagogical tact, it must consider how things are for the child.

Second, an emphasis only on the adult's dealings with children neglects the direct and indirect influence that children have on adults, and especially on their parents. Many parents know how powerfully children transform the adults' sense of themselves, their priorities in life, and their preoccupations with the concerns of the world. Many teachers, too, experience the trans-

forming effects young people have on their professional and personal lives. This powerful influence of children that transforms personal existence and that radiates throughout the life of the adult is what kindles the topic for this text: pedagogy.

Pedagogy Is Sensitive to the Context of Life Stories

Life stories prompt pedagogical reflection.

Pedagogy as a discipline is always concerned with the question of what one should know, what one should be capable of, what kind of person one should be, in order to orient and deal practically with children in specific pedagogical situations. The problem is that it is usually quite impossible to deal with specific pedagogical relations unless one has some understanding of the context of the pedagogical moments in those situations. Teachers who are pedagogically sensitive to children also tend to be sensitive to the backgrounds, the life-histories of the children, and the particular qualities and circumstances of the children for whom they have responsibility.

Here follow some anecdotes that teachers tell about their children and about their lives as teachers with children. These anecdotes do not necessarily describe situations in which something is immediately expected of the teacher, as in our example of pedagogical moments. Rather, they describe the context in which pedagogical action, such as teaching, occurs.

Missing. "He hasn't come home since he left school on Friday," said one of the two policemen to the teacher. "At first his mother thought that he might be sleeping over at a friend's place. But when Kenny still hadn't shown up by Saturday afternoon she got worried and started phoning around. I don't know why she waited so long; the boy is only nine years old." "No one seems to have seen him since Friday," the other policeman added, "and he didn't check back home Sunday morning either. We still feel that he may be staying with one of the kids from school."

"What other boys in your class does Kenny associate with?" asked the first policemen. "Mostly with Darryl, huh?" The policeman jotted things down. "Address? Okay, we can find that soon enough. Did you see him leave with this Darryl, by any chance? Was Kenny playing with anyone else at school on Friday?"

"Well, we'll let you know if we can still round him up before the end of the day. We understand you are worried too ... being

his teacher and all .... But we'll do our best .... Thanks for your help, anyway. And sorry for having to bother you on a Sunday." The law men left, leaving behind them an atmosphere of foreboding.

But in less than an hour there was a phone call. "We just thought we'd let you know that the kid has been found. Kenny, I mean .... You were right. He was with Darryl. We found them camping out in a bushy area near the tracks. They had built a hut. You know, the kind of stuff young kids do. Apparently it hadn't really occurred to them that people might be worried about them.

Kenny said something about his mother's boyfriend. They don't seem to be getting along. I guess the little kid is quite a handful. And the ... what do you call it ... stepfather, he has started to take a belt to the kid, for lying. That worries me a bit. There is a fine line between discipline and abuse here, I suspect. Not that I don't believe in an occasional spanking.

Anyway, we found them as soon as we started to search the field .... We'd first gone to Darryl's place. Apparently that kid hadn't come home to sleep, either. But we only found that out later from Darryl himself. At his house nobody had noticed that he had not been there. Hard to believe. And yet not surprising, since everyone in the house was staggering drunk. The kid had been missing for two solid days! But no one had missed him. A real shame."

Home. The new teacher has moved into a house close to the inner-city school where she has started a new job. She is planting some flowers in a window box in front of the house. A little boy comes by on a tricycle and he strikes up an animated conversation with the woman. "Hi, I'm Jossey. What's your name?" Then, out of the blue, he asks, "Do you have a mother? Where does she live? and is she asleep too?" The teacher explains that her father and mother live far away in a different city; then she inquires after Jossey's parents. "Oh, I don't have a father," he says. "And my mom, she is always sleeping." "Well, maybe you should wake her up because it is almost suppertime," suggests the teacher. "No she won't wake up. But don't worry, my big brother, Hank, looks after me. He gives me stuff to eat." "How old is your big brother?" asks the teacher. "He's six! Hank goes to

school already," Jossey responds with obvious respect for his big brother.

When the next day the teacher tells the little incident to a community liaison worker, she nods and says, "Yes, I know these kids. The mother is an alcoholic." Then she adds, "It's sad. Such a nice little kid. So open and communicative now. But in a few years Jossey will have hardened and be forever beyond our reach."

Absenteeism. She is such a waif of a child. Small for a nine-year-old. Undernourished. Poorly dressed. And smelly! She hasn't had a bath for weeks. It is April already, and since Christmas Gail has not been in school for more than eight days altogether.

I have tried many things: phoning the mother (there is no father); getting the liaison worker to go out; calling social services. Finally, the social worker came to the school to talk with me.

"There isn't really anything we can do," she said. "We have threatened the mother. She promised that she will try to have Gail attend school. But the woman is really not in control. She claims that she cannot get her daughter to go to school. We could get the police involved and charge the mother. But she is on social assistance. So what good will that do? And removing the child from the home would not wash. It is just one of those cases."

My face must have shown growing anger. "Believe me," she sneered, "Some people you just cannot change. It is no use putting yourself out." Another teacher in the staff room, who overheard the discussion, nodded: "No point beating your head against the wall. We are here to teach, not to run after kids who don't show up." I became really annoyed. I could not believe that a social worker would give up on a child that easily. I also felt that they were mocking my naive indignation. I am still a new teacher in this school, and some feel that I am unrealistic or idealistic: You just do not expect of these inner-city children what you would at your nice suburban school where I had been teaching for many years.

Anyway, that was yesterday. Today was a fantastic day. Our fourth grade class competed in a music festival and we actually won first prize in choral speech. We beat three other schools. And

you should have seen the difference in presentation. The kids from the other schools were all dolled up. And then there was our troop. Many of my children had dressed in their best. But we still looked like a pauper representation from the United Nations! Every possible social and ethnic group.

Yet those kids had a determination to win, and they did their utmost. In our practising I had never seen them so attentive, so keen. They really came through!

The principal was there to watch and take pictures. He had been skeptical about the wisdom of involving our kids in this kind of choral speech event. But I told him that, even if we did not win, it had already been worthwhile. I have seen a change in the children. They are learning to articulate and stand up straight when they talk to you; they look you in the eye rather than standing stooped and mumbling. And even when they are much older these kids may forget grade four but they will never forget the lines of our poem.

So the principal was almost more thrilled than we were at our victory. He is going to photocopy the Certificate of First Prize and laminate a copy for each child to take home to remember this by. That is when I took stock. Of course, Gail was not there, even though she had been at school the day before. And I had impressed on her to be there and help us do well in the competition. Even though Gail has missed many practice sessions, she is a bright little girl, and it is amazing how in her sporadic school attendance she can still manage to somehow keep abreast of what we are doing in grade four. So I said to the principal. "Too bad that Gail did not show up again. This would have been a good experience for her too — to be part of this group effort." And then he told me what he did not want to mention until later. They had gone over in the morning to get her to school. They found Gail at home. The mother was out but there was a man in the house. And the little girl? She was bleeding. She had been sexually abused by her Mom's boyfriend.

Choosing. It is recess time and I am on playground supervision. This means that I must forego a well-earned cup of coffee. But there are benefits. Walking among the children in the school yard tells me about their lives: their joys, moods, needs, strengths, and conflicts. Some things you just see by being there: Who is playing with whom? Why is Carl sauntering there all by

himself? Should I strike up a conversation with him? Or does he need some time alone?

Already there are some kids hanging on my arm. Marie is just content to hold on and walk with me, quietly. But Crystal is chatting away. She pulls my arm, steps half in front of me, and looks into my face. Am I listening? Her voice has a gossipy tone. "Her parents are always fighting," says Crystal. I realize that Crystal is talking about Nicole, her best friend and grade four classmate. "Where is Nicole?" I ask. But Crystal ignores my question. "And Nicole has told me a secret — she and her mom may be running away soon. Please don't tell her that I let you in on the secret." (I promise my oath of honor as a fourth grade teacher.) "It was really weird," she continues. "Two cars pulled up at the park where we were playing yesterday. The car doors flew open almost at the same time. Nicole's mother was in the one car. Her father in the other. Each was shouting for Nicole to come into their car."

Crystal is silent for a moment. Her face reflects a strange serenity. Both Crystal and Nicole are so much alike, both children of poverty, family violence, and abuse. "You know I felt terrible for her," says Crystal. "I know that Nicole loves her mother so much more than her father, who beats her. She is really scared of him. And he beats her mom too. Anyway, Nicole's mother called her to get into her car. She was yelling really loud. 'Quickly! Come on! Quickly!' she cried. But, you know, Nicole's father. He was cursing and telling her to come with him. And oh, Nicole started bawling too. For a moment she just stood there, looking at them, crying. She was screaming really .... Isn't it awful to have to choose between your mother and your father?" Crystal looks really distressed. "And you know what was so weird?" She halts for a moment as if to add drama: "The car Nicole got into ... it was her father's car."

Pedagogy asks us to reflect on children's lives

Pedagogy always looks to the
larger context.

What do we make of anecdotes such as these?[27] Admittedly, the anecdotes are not happy life stories of children. But it is espe-

cially (although not only) in cases where we feel concern about a child's welfare that we are prompted to reflect on the meaning of those life experiences for that child. As an initial response we may simply feel distressed about the predicaments of some children. But this is a passive reaction, understandable but not very productive. Or we may feel the urge to make reflective sense of the anecdotes by considering the pedagogical significance of those experiences for the children involved.

It is a crucial feature of teaching that the educator understands a child's learning and development in the context of the larger biography of the child. Indeed, understanding the significance of these children's lives may go some way toward appropriate future pedagogical action in one's relations with such children.

In a way, the stories of Kenny and Darryl, Jossey and his brother Hank, Gail, Crystal and her friend Nicole, are all stories that call into question the meaning of what it is like to be a parent, what the significance is of family life, and what it means to be a child in our culture. These stories make us mindful that in our technologically advanced culture there are many radically different forms of life, different communities, different political realities, different family structures. Of course, there are people who may simply shrug their shoulders. "Sure, for many kids it's tough growing up in this society." Other people may grin mockingly about the naivety of those who would expect all children to grow up in "nice middle-class families. ... Besides, are there still such families?" This is the new age. There are children worse off in other countries. Think about the prevalence of child prostitution, street children; think about the ravaged images of children whose bodies are riddled by disease, starvation, or malnutrition. What does it mean to develop a theory of pedagogy in this context? Should pedagogical theory be able to be universally relevant to all children?

Thus, it is important to be aware of the larger context of our pedagogical interest in children when these children are neither our own nor like our own. We must not be naive and ethnocentric by assuming that we know what is good for children, all children, these particular children. And yet it would be equally wrong to refuse to address the pedagogical responsibility we feel when we are confronted by children in predicaments obviously not of their choosing and undoubtedly constraining their possi-

bilities to become what they might want to be in a humanly desirable world.

Society may undergo radical postmodern changes, but the pedagogical fact is that children are naturally conservative: They need security, stability, direction, support. Do we understand what these needs mean and require of us? It seems that, in Canada and in the United States, governments and child care professionals are less interested in what children need than in what children are able to endure or tolerate. Many children eight or nine years of age have to care for themselves after school. Two decades ago this would have constituted child neglect. In the real world there are children who simply do not have parents, or who do not have parents who act like parents, or who lack a father or a mother in their family. But, in a humanly desirable world it may still be preferable for children to have both a mother and a father, or at least to have some person dedicated to take extraordinary and lifelong interest in them.

How can we understand the significance of having to choose between mother and father? This is a relevant question, since separation and divorce are the modern condition of family life — at least in North America. We sense the severity of such choice in Nicole's distress and in her seemingly incomprehensible choice. The child of divorce may be better off than the child of neglect, such as Darryl. But even a neglected child such as Darryl, usually lives in a natural, taken-for-granted relationship with his or her home and parents. In Darryl's case there is neglect due to alcohol abuse by the adults. And yet his immediate relation to his parents offers him a certain atmosphere of security and stability even if parental neglect threatens the security and positive family environment that the child needs. We should not forget, of course, that while a child may live in conditions that are objectively marked by instability, the child nevertheless may not suffer from feelings of insecurity. Also, it is the quality of security-insecurity that ultimately matters in children's lives. But how much do we know about the nature and pedagogical significance of security in children growing up in the modern world?

Psychologists sometimes argue that it is healthy for a young child to come to terms with the feelings that accompany parental neglect and abuse. And so they help to bring the experience of neglect to explicit awareness. This may be valuable in some

sense. But to help the child articulate and reflect on the forms of neglect from which he or she suffers is to break through the natural immediacy with which he or she experiences life. Distancing may bring with it a new form of insecurity and discontinuity that things can no longer be experienced in a taken-for-granted way. It is the profound sense of insecurity that, as in Nicole's case, comes from having to choose between the parts of what seemed most natural and most stable — having a mother and a father both. In the case of some children, the insecurity is felt as a strange sense of loneliness in their awareness of the fragility of their relation to the mother and the father due to the broken family structure, while in Gail's case, the insecurity arises from having in some sense not really any parent at all.

So what we may learn from anecdotes such as these is the deep meaning that adults' presence may or may not have for children's lives. In the positive case, the presence of adults may make it possible for the child to experience a sense of safety, support, stability, and direction. These qualities are pedagogical themes that recur in the literature of child care and pedagogy. Yet knowledge of these themes does not enable us to make generalized judgments about how particular children experience divorce or loss. But understanding the pedagogical significance of security, support, and purpose for the child's healthy growth and development may allow us to interpret the meaning of those conditions in the specific life contexts of specific children. Reflecting on the life contexts of children, and on the significance of the values embedded within them, may help us to heighten our pedagogical thoughtfulness and increase the likelihood of demonstrating appropriate pedagogical understanding in our everyday living with children.

Children need security and safety so that they can take risks

Stefan is ten years old. When his parents "have words" with each other, or act angrily toward each other — as parents sometimes do — then Stefan goes off to some part of the house and cries. This has made the parents feel bad, and they ask Stefan why he gets so upset when his parents have some disagreement. "After all," they say, "we do not cry when you and your brother have a

little fight." But Stefan says, "I cannot help it. When I hear you shout at each other, then I get so afraid that you are going to get a divorce — just like Tommy's parents." It is hard for children to feel secure in the modern world where divorce is so common. Some children do not ask, "Are you getting divorced?" but, "When are you getting divorced?"

Jim is an older fellow now; he has several children of his own. But he admits that he was a reluctant father at first, and he feels that it may have something to do with his own childhood. As a young child and throughout his teenage years he experienced a deep-seated fear of his father. To Jim his father was an unpredictable, sour, and ill-tempered man. "I was most afraid when he would get that 'look' in his eyes," Jim recounts. "Sometimes my father would get this strange look when he became angry. Other times, he would have this look when he simply opened the door. Just in the way he opened the door for them made my friends feel uncomfortable and unwelcome in our house. Therefore, I seldom brought friends home with me. . . . And now, having kids of my own, my greatest fear is that my kids may distrust me in the way that I dared not trust my father."

Parents may sometimes feel that their presence does not make that much difference in a child's life. Parents who leave their children for long hours in day care tend to rationalize that it is more important to give small amounts of high-quality time to children than simply being around children most of the day. And parents who are separated or divorced may try to maintain a presence from a distance. But long-distance parenting is highly unsatisfactory for children. Children are concrete: If you are there you are there; if you are not then you are gone. In addition to spending time with children by being attentive to them, it is important to be present to them, to surround them with the secure feeling that you are there, present and accessible.

The notion of safety and security in modern life has become invested with heavy meaning. It seems that the sense of well-being associated with human safety is threatened in so many realms of daily existence: income, jobs, shelter, peace, health, the environment. Some adults may feel that they are cracking under the weight of it all. Others seem to celebrate the thrill of living in the constant play of risk and insecurity. For a child to grow up and explore the world in the context of security means that the

child feels protected by the love and care of some adult(s). It is significant that the term *security* is associated with *caring.* Children who feel that somebody worries about them do not have to worry unduly themselves. The Latin *secura* means free from care, free from worry. The term *sure* is also derived from *secure,* meaning *safe.* Security brings a needed amount of surety, certainty, and solidity in our lives.

In providing a loving atmosphere of safety and security for their children, parents give and teach the very young something without which growing up and living becomes quite impossible. Parents who surround the child with intimacy, the relation of closeness wherein their presence is felt in a protective way, make available space and ground for being. They teach their children that the world can be experienced as home, a place for safe dwelling, a habitat in which human beings can be, where we can be ourselves, where we can have habits, our ways of being and doing things.

So to bear children is, in a broad sense, to provide place and space for them to live, to be. The child is carried, borne inside the womb at first, then it is born into the world where it remains, for a while at least, most helpless, dependent, in need of nurture, warmth, caressing, holding fast, and safe outside the womb. Conversely, it is in the experience of separateness, lostness, being without a bearing, without a sense of direction, without the security of safe ground, that the primordial nature of parenting can be intuited.

Children seem often caught in their desire to venture out, court danger, and engage in daring behavior, while at the same time they seek to free themselves of risk and uncertainty. Even as adults we often seem to be consciously engaged in the struggle between our desire to exercise our freedom by taking risks and our desire to enjoy security by reducing risk. Modern society has striven to reconcile certainty and security on the one hand, with freedom and risk on the other. But we have been less intent on developing the conciliatory creativity to face and resolve the contradictions and conflicts which inhere in that striving.

What kind of security do teachers need to offer children? Good schools share certain features with the family, such as a certain intimacy and security. The school provides the kind of in-between, transitional stage between the close intimacy of the

family and community on the one side and venturesome exposure to the public world on the other. Students learn best, are willing to extend and risk themselves in an educational environment that is experienced as safe and secure.[28] A school should even be safe enough (like the family) for problems to be experienced and worked out, and to tolerate questioning, protest, dissent. School administrators or teachers who try to avoid problems and difficulties at all cost are pedagogically unrealistic. To live as a young person is to live with difficulty. To be alive is to be in difficulty. In fact, all adults do well to remain sensitive to childhood's problems and difficulties.

It is common wisdom that nothing breeds success like the experience of success. What makes a school insecure for children? We already know that uncaring schools produce students who do not care,[29] and that caring schools can make a difference in students' lives.[30] For example, students do best when teachers show that they care by teaching in a personal manner and by demonstrating that they believe in their students by setting challenging expectations. Of course, inappropriate or unrealistic challenges can be experienced as negative and contribute to students' unnecessary and unhealthy stress under teachers who create overly competitive environments, overtest, overevaluate the students by constantly relating every assignment and every learning situation to the determination of grades and competitive standing. Indeed, learning cannot be positive in schools where testing madness reigns and where many students regularly and inevitably experience failure.

Children need support so they can become independent

A teacher recently moved from a suburban school, where family support is strong and positive, to an inner-city school where for many children there is little parental support. The teacher is soon touched by the affection she receives from the children at the inner-city school. Every morning some kids come early and wait for her to arrive. They are smiling and waving as she drives up, opening her car door. Then they walk with her, carry her things, and accompany her to the classroom where they just hang around, talking, asking questions, and generally enjoying the chat. After school, too, the teacher has great difficulty getting various students to leave and go home. Do these inner-city kids just enjoy school so much more than the children she used to

teach? After a few weeks the teacher realizes the answer. For so many of these children life at home is chaotic and frequently marked by violence, abuse, and neglect. At home there is really nobody to talk to. And many children basically learn to "grow up fast" and fend for themselves. Often the school is the only stable support in their young lives. This school and this teacher whom the children feel close to provide them with some sense of stability, steadfastness, reliability, and general support that they miss elsewhere in their lives.

Another teacher who had to move away from a similar inner-city school admitted that leaving the school gave her a feeling that she had never experienced in leaving other schools: the feeling of betraying the children. She felt in a sense that her leaving caused a crack in the children's experience of the school as a stable support. She knew that as a teacher she had been for some children the only person who was always there when they needed her. Throughout the years children would come and drop by even after they moved on to higher grades. Now, after so many years of teaching at this school, she felt she was abandoning children who needed the continuity of her presence.

The anecdotes are drawn from real experience, and yet these teachers do not mean to suggest, of course, that all inner-city children lack supportive home environments. Nor do they want to suggest that the wealthier suburban schools and families necessarily provide better child support for the development and education of children. It is sometimes the professional or career parents who give the least time and commitment to building a supportive family sphere for their children. Interestingly, "child support" has become a term applied in situations of parental separation and divorce. But of course child support is not just a matter of providing money for the necessities of life. To provide support to a child means that the adult is reliable and can be counted on to be there dependably and in a continuing way. This is no doubt a major challenge for many modern families and schools.

Children need direction from us to find their own direction in life

Should I suggest that Steve opt for the academic courses even though he may have to work very hard to be successful in an academic program? Which courses should he take? Should I per-

suade Inge to continue with the violin even though she would rather play with her friends instead of practicing? How much practice is appropriate for her? Should I let Dave quit school and take a job, even though he may later regret not possessing a high school diploma? If so, what kind of work should I encourage Dave to explore? Should I respond to Marlene who is constantly asking what she should be doing? Or, at the risk of her getting quite frustrated, should I encourage her to depend more on her own resources to decide for herself? Should I try to steer Jim's interest away from girls because he seems rather young for it? Should I encourage Karin to play with friends outside in the fresh air? Or should I let her stay inside again to read a book? Should I give in to the requests of the kids for a more relaxing afternoon? Or should I insist that we need to get a certain task accomplished?

Pedagogical action and reflection consist in constantly distinguishing between what is good or appropriate and what is not good or less appropriate for a particular child or group of children. In other words, pedagogical life is the ongoing practice of interpretive thinking and acting — on the part of adults, but also and especially on the part of the children who continually interpret their own lives and who constantly form their own understandings of what it means to grow up in this world. This does not imply, of course, that every single thing we say and do with children places us in a situation of moral choice. But it does mean that our living with children is oriented in certain directions and that, as adults, we are accountable with regard to the reasonableness or goodness of our influencing of children.

Some adults may feel reluctant to make it clear to children that they have a set of expectations that they value as important. Other adults may feel no hesitation imposing their definite views on children or young people. Some children experience no sense of orientation from their parents or teachers, and other children experience adult direction as tyrannical. But the children who are not guided by adults (because they are brought up in a permissive, an open, or maybe a negligent environment) may experience the lack of direction also as a tyranny — the tyranny of being abandoned to the sole influence of their peers and of the culture at large. The point is that all children should be able to expect from their teachers and parents a sense of involvement in

life because all children need direction — if only the direction that confirms that the choices they have made are good choices.

But this pedagogical requirement to provide a sense of direction to children's lives poses the additional requirement of the adult that he or she stands continually accountable for the goodness and appropriateness of the orientations and commitments he or she makes in living with children in the home or the school.

Tensions and contradictions belong to the pedagogical experience

Life is full of contradictions, which means that it is full of tensions among contrasting principles: freedom versus control, security versus risk, self versus other, right versus wrong, real versus ideal, the interest of the person versus the interest of society, and so on. Especially in the pedagogical lifeworld this antinomic structure of experience is probably the foremost factor that prompts us to continually reflect on questions of how we should act with children and students. The conflicting feature of everyday life also seems to lie at the root of many of our pressures, problems, conflicts, and uncertainties in dealing with young people — in families, in schools, as well as in society in general. We may sigh, "If only these contradictions and tensions did not exist, then everything would be so much simpler." Indeed, many theories of education, many approaches to child rearing, many ways of organizing schools seem motivated by the desire to exaggerate the importance of one approach to life in order to reduce the tensions and contradictions that follow when contradictions are more appropriately seen as unavoidably contradictory life forces, values, or qualities. Yet, rather than decrying or trying to deny these antinomies, we should celebrate them. They are what gives life its dynamic impulse, its normative structure and moral nature.

One of the most fundamental conflicts in the pedagogical world consists of the tension between freedom and control. Associated with freedom are notions such as autonomy, independence, choice, licence, liberty, room, latitude. In contrast, the language of control is associated with ideas such as order, system, discipline, rule, regulation, precept, organization. All parents and all teachers know something of the tensions and pulls asso-

ciated with the antinomy of freedom and control. Often this antinomy is experienced as a crisis of order. To what extent should child rearing or education be based on a sense of order? What does "order" mean? What should we make it mean?

In education two models of child care have attempted to reduce the conflict between freedom and control to a single value. On the one hand there is the behaviorist model founded on the theories of John B. Watson and his influential book, *Psychological Care of the Infant and Child*, and on the other hand there is the psychoanalytic and humanistic model of Benjamin Spock's *Baby and Child Care*, which became extremely popular. The behaviorist model led to an authoritarian, unemotional, manipulative, and controlling approach to bringing up and educating children. By contrast, the humanistic model led to a more laissez-faire, permissive, loving, and soft orientation, giving almost total licence and latitude to the child's wishes and movements.

In the literature of curriculum and teaching the basic antinomy of freedom and control has led to very different types of school: those organized on the ideal of maximum order such as the British "spanking schools" depicted in David Leland's film, *Birth of a Nation;* and those that strive for minimum order, as found in some examples of open education in the tradition of the progressive education movement. Even the most recent discourses in education raise this issue of order and control — think, for example, of the implied valuing of order or control in those who advocate "a return to the basics" versus the implied critique and distrust of order or control in the model of "emancipatory pedagogy."

Therefore, it seems pedagogically problematic for the antinomy of freedom/control to be interpreted exclusively in favor of one or the other. Children need both freedom and order in their lives. They need controlled freedom as well as control that pushes freedom forward. An environment of high permissiveness and the almost complete absence of control ironically does not appear to contribute to the kind of development of cooperativeness, gentleness, positive self-concept, and self-discipline in young people as some have suggested. And a highly regulated environment of severe rules, blind obedience, imposed discipline, and strong punishment also has detrimental effects on the positive development of young people. Both highly permissive and highly regulated environments

have been associated with destructive, conflict ridden, and disorderly behavior in young people.

So a difficult issue for teachers and parents is often the question of the extent to which one should actively intervene in a child's life or leave the child to his or her own devices. The dual role of actively guiding the child and of letting the child find his or her own direction is a constant challenge to pedagogical reflection. We try to be aware of this antinomy by, on the one hand, giving active direction to a child's life while, on the other hand, being sensitive to the requirements of letting go or holding back. Young people desire both independence and a sense of order from their teachers. As teachers (and also as parents) we need to learn, for example, that sometimes it is appropriate for us to help the child learn to do something new, while at other times it is more important to be patient and let the child work it out for himself or herself, even if this inevitably involves making mistakes or encountering problems.

There are endless contradictions, conflicts, polarities, tensions, and oppositions that structure the pedagogical experience. The child wants to do something him- or herself but the parent feels responsible to assist or restrain the child in order to avoid a dangerous or undesirable situation. An idealistic teacher has vowed never to say "no" to a child but finds it impossible to live up to this determination. An adolescent struggles with the tension between what she would like to be and what she is, between what she would like to be able to do and what she is capable of at present. A young boy wants a father but no one assumes this responsibility. Supper is on the table but the kids would rather eat junk food. Most parents or teachers know by experience the challenges that these antinomies pose to everyday living with children.

While life is full of contradictions, not all of these contradictory values are constantly at odds with each other. The landscape of our world is made up of regions of order and disorder; each order has its own disorder in the background, and this disorder creates the possibilities for a different order. As we travel laterally in and across these regions, we encounter and internalize different views, norms, truths, expectations, rules, and principles. For example, family life is differently ordered than life at school or at work. We are not quite the same with our friends as with

strangers. We will tolerate, even enjoy, experiences through cinematography or literature that we would not find acceptable in other contexts. We learn to move easily in and between these worlds, each of which possesses its own order, limits, and disorder. A contradiction or tension in one region may not be experienced as a contradiction in another. Thus, we tend to experience contradictions more vividly within these ordered regions than between the regions of our landscape. And when we describe the tensions and contradictions that we encounter at home, at school, in the neighbourhood, in society at large, then these contradictions need to be described from below, from the concrete reality of daily experience (as well as from some critical theoretical distance above).

Pedagogical antinomies not only challenge us in daily living, they also require of us a reflective response. For example, we are often caught between the demands of our ideals and the demands of "reality": On the one hand we need to strive for higher values (such as unwavering honesty in social affairs, perfection in the accomplishment of a task, fundamental respect for the dignity of all humans and living creatures) and on the other hand we need to realize that life is complex, never perfect and that living requires compromise with pragmatism. No theory of pedagogy can satisfy if it does not offer a perspective for the contradictions of daily life. By identifying and clarifying the ordered and disordered norms and antinomies of the pedagogical life, we may find a basis for more thoughtful pedagogical action.