Socialisation as behaviour management and the ascendancy of expert authority
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Lay out: beeldvorm, Pijnacker

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SOCIALISATION AS BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT AND THE ASCENDANCY OF EXPERT AUTHORITY

FRANK FUREDI
The Kohnstamm lecture

Parenting and education require a critical and lively public debate. The educators and researchers at the Amsterdams Instituut voor Onderwijs en Opvoeding (Amsterdam Institute for Education and Pedagogy), a co-operative effort by educational and research institutions in Amsterdam, work to combine social commitment with high-quality study programmes and thorough research.

In doing so, they continue a tradition that began in 1919, when Kohnstamm accepted the endowment chair for Education with his speech ‘State educational theory or personality educational theory’. He argued that educational theory as a science could ‘only truly bear fruit’ if it maintained contact with issues related to philosophical doctrines and world views. In this conviction, Kohnstamm developed concrete methods for improving arithmetic and reading, and he was a practical supporter of each child’s individual learning ability. In that same year, Kohnstamm was appointed director of the Nutsseminarium voor Pedagogiek (Public Institute for Pedagogy), which offered an advanced pedagogical education for teachers in secondary education and teacher’s colleges, and which performed research in the field of educational practice. Both branches eventually went on to become parts of the institutions that currently make up the Amsterdams Instituut voor Onderwijs en Opvoeding.

Kohnstamm was a multifaceted scholar: philosopher, experimental psychologist and theologian. Educated as a physicist, he succeeded his mentor Van der Waals as Endowment Professor in Thermodynamics in 1908 at the age of 33. In his inaugural address, he questioned the dogma of determinism. And yet it was more than intellectual scepticism that prompted him to become active in social and political activities before the turn of the century. A combination of liberal free-thinking and his deep Christian convictions formed the foundation of his ideas. Kohnstamm was in no way a sectarian: he was a great supporter of public debate with people from varied and opposing factions.

In the spirit of Kohnstamm’s life’s work, we continue the tradition of public debate on education and parenting. The annual Kohnstamm lecture is a good example. For
the tenth annual Kohnstamm lecture – ‘Socialisation as behaviour management and the ascendency of expert authority’ – we hand over the lectern to Frank Furedi.

Where schools in the past used to introduce young people to the norms and values of society, today it seems that schools are there primarily to deal with students’ difficult behaviour. The school has become a course in Life Skills. Students have to be taught to control their behaviour. This shift in priorities has been fed largely by experts in education and other fields, and in so doing they have often pitted schools against parents. This is one of the dangers of the trend, but this kind of therapeutic education also leaves insufficient time and resources for teachers to intellectually stimulate their students.

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Introduction

Although my examples are drawn from the Anglo-American world, I am convinced that the socialisation of children represents a significant challenge to all western society. Schools have always been concerned with this issue, but in recent decades these institutions have been charged with dealing with an ever expanding range of problems. For example, a review of the curriculum of English primary schools carried out last year notes that problems such as ‘drug abuse, obesity, sex and relationship, violent behaviour, “e-safety”, financial capability and so forth, press for an educational response in primary schools with children at an ever earlier age’.¹ The obsession with teaching primary school children the most basic life skills may be a peculiarly Anglo-American phenomenon, but the concern with the weakening influence of family and community on the socialisation of children is also evident in Holland. Dutch studies find such anxieties about young people and their values, which reveals ‘concern for social disintegration in particular’.² What's interesting about the contemporary diagnosis of the problem is the frequency with which the conclusion is drawn that the socialisation of children into a distinct set of values is unlikely to be effective and that therefore we need to opt for a radically different approach.³

Socialisation is the process through which children are prepared for the world ahead of them. This is a responsibility which is carried out by adults at home and their communities but also in the formal setting of the school. Although the purpose of education is to acquaint children with their intellectual and cultural inheritance, it also attempts to socialise them into the ways of behaviour of the culture they inhabit. However, as we shall see, the devaluation of adult authority has complicated this task and called into question parents’ capacity to socialise their offspring. During the past century the responsibility for socialisation has gradually shifted from the parent to the school. The depreciation of adulthood has been paralleled by the rise of professionals who claim that they are the ones who possess the expertise required to socialise children. What has emerged is a more pragmatic form of socialisation that often relies on experts who transmit values by directly targeting children. Despite a partial loss of authority to the expert, parents are still held responsible for the socialisation of their children.

The devaluation of the status of adult authority is frequently conveyed through the argument that grown-ups do not have all the answers facing the world.
In recent times this downbeat assessment of adult wisdom has mutated into an outright condemnation of the moral status of the older generations. ‘Adults have ruined our world’ was the headline of an article published by an online magazine targeting children. It warns that ‘adults are ruining the world we are growing up in’ and asks, ‘how is climate change going to affect us as the next generation’? A similar message is communicated by the green crusader Jonathan Porritt who informed children that ‘your parents and grandparents have made a mess of looking after the earth’ and added that ‘they may deny it, but they are stealing your future’. Instead of serving as role models, grown-ups are often castigated for setting a bad example for children. One head teacher who was charged with carrying out a review of behaviour in English schools in 2008 pointed the finger of blame at grown-ups for setting a bad example for young people. He observed that we ‘live in a greedy culture’, and ‘we are rude to each other’, and ‘children follow that’. If indeed adults are so prone to setting a negative example, how can they be entrusted with the task of preparing their children for the world they face? The condemnation of adult behaviour is paralleled by a tendency to flatter children through suggesting that their values are more enlightened because they are more up-to-date than those of their elders. In some cases this has led to the development of what can be most accurately described as socialisation-in-reverse – a phenomenon where children are entrusted with the mission of socialising their elders.

The problems of socialisation

A lack of confidence in the capacity of ordinary adults to undertake the duty of socialising the younger generation has been evident since early modern times. According to one account, in the eighteenth century in ‘all stations of society and in all sorts of countries the decline and feared disintegration of society was linked to the dire need to correct the manners of badly behaved adults, and sturdy appeal was made to the upbringing of children to prevent the future likes of them’. The philosopher John Stuart Mills, the author of On Liberty, linked his call for the compulsory schooling of children to his mistrust of parental competence. He regarded state-sponsored formal education as possessing the capacity to free children from the ‘uncultivated’ influence of their parents. He asserted that since ‘the uncultivated cannot be competent judges of cultivation’, they needed the support of enlightened educators to socialize their children. Lack of confidence in the capacity of ordinary
parents to develop their children led many nineteenth-century reformers to uphold formal education as the principal institution of socialization. Others, such as Emile Durkheim (one the founders of the discipline of modern sociology), argued that though the family had an important role to play in the socialization of children, so too did the state. Durkheim insisted that ‘education consists of a methodical socialization of the young generation’. Indeed, he took the view that the very purpose of education was to ‘adapt the child to the social environment in which he is destined to live’.9

Durkheim’s close association of education with socialization stemmed from his pre-occupation with overcoming the fragmentary tendencies that prevailed in nineteenth-century industrial society. He looked upon education as a potentially powerful force for social integration. He was adamant that ‘society can survive only if there exists among its members a sufficient degree of homogeneity’ and concluded that ‘education perpetuates and reinforces this homogeneity by fixing in the child, from the beginning, the essential similarities that collective life demands’.11

The objective of social integration outlined by Durkheim was thought to be far too important to leave in the hands of parents. Institutions like those of religion which had traditionally contributed to this task had lost significant influence in an increasingly secular modern world. In such circumstances the newly created institutions of public education were assigned a leading role in the socialisation of children. ‘Education,’ noted Durkheim, ‘far from having its unique or principal object the individual and his interest, is above all the means by which society perpetually recreates the conditions of its very existence.’12

By the turn of the twentieth century many educators shared Mills’s ambivalence about the influence of parents and the home on children. They took the view that parents not only lacked the authority but also the intellectual and moral resources necessary for socialising children. At a time when many parents felt insecure about the task of rearing their children, they faced pressure from professionals to acquiesce to their expertise.

The uneasy relationship between adult authority and experts

Since the late nineteenth century the exercise of adult authority has existed in an uneasy relationship with the claims of scientific expertise. At the very time that different forms of pre-political authority lost influence and legitimacy, the prestige of
science was in the ascendance. For many educators and psychologists the success of the promise of the authority of science appeared as an effective and positive alternative to the apparently outdated and irrelevant child-rearing and teaching practices of the past. As one study of this process wrote: ‘the vagaries of casual stories about children, the eccentricities of folk knowledge, and the superstitions of grandmothers were all to be cleansed by the mighty brush of scientific method.’

A new group of experts claimed that their science entitled them to be the authoritative voices on issues that were hitherto perceived as strictly pertaining to the domain of the personal and family life. As one study of this group’s ascendancy notes, ‘the authoritative voice of “scientific experts” on child development repeatedly advised that the correct training of children required an expertise that few modern parents possessed’.

From their perspective child-rearing, education and relationships needed to be reorganised in accordance with the latest findings of scientific research. The new cohort of experts possessed a powerful crusading ethos and did not confine themselves to the presentation of research and observations. Kessen writes that:

‘Critical examination and study of parental practices and child behaviour almost inevitably slipped subtly over to advice about parental practices and child behaviour. The scientific statement became an ethical imperative, the descriptive account became normative. And along the way, there have been unsettling occasions in which scraps of knowledge, gathered by whatever procedures were held to be proper science at the time were given inordinate weight against poor old defenseless folk knowledge’.

Nor did these experts merely provide advice. Often with the backing of official institutions, they could impose their proposals on schools and directly influence the conduct of family life. Against the authority of science, the insights and values of ordinary people enjoyed little cultural valuation. This outlook was clearly communicated by a British expert Jean Ayling in 1930. She observed that ‘most of the children of my acquaintance are already badly damaged at an early age’. Her solution was to limit the role of parents since they have a ‘strictly bounded domain of usefulness and to assign the wider task of child socialization to the helping professions’.

In passing it is worth noting that the record of science in the domain of child-rearing, education and relationship has proved to be one of the ever recurring
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fads that rarely achieve any positive, durable results. Nevertheless, at a time when adult authority was on the defensive, the scientific expert gained an ever increasing influence over the conduct of inter-generational relations. Typically, educational experts claimed that since their proposals are based on the findings of purely objective science, only the prejudiced could possibly disagree with them. Frequently, pedagogic techniques were promoted on the grounds that they are based on the latest psychological research into child development or new objective theories of learning. As far as the American educational philosopher John Dewey was concerned, only an incorrigibly superstitious traditionalist could object to the new scientific pedagogy. He could not comprehend how anyone could resist what the latest discoveries of the ‘science of individual psychology’ showed about the way people learn. He wrote that ‘it was a little as if no one had been willing to put radios on the market, because it was obviously an absurd idea that sound can be transmitted through vast distances’. And with a hint of incomprehension, he exclaimed that ‘although these psychological discoveries are …well established today as the facts of the radio, they are still temperamentally abhorrent to a great many schoolmasters and parents’. Dewey like many of his enlightened colleagues clearly felt frustrated by what they perceived as the unholy alliance of prejudiced parents and unimaginative traditionalist teachers who questioned the new science of the curriculum.

The authority of experts rested on the claim that they possessed insights into the development of children and their education that was far superior to the traditional practices of teachers and parents. These experts did not confine themselves to the advocacy of their science, they also implicitly and in some cases explicitly called into question the competence of parents. Indeed, they regarded the ‘old-fashioned’ teacher with equal contempt and insisted that education had to be modernised along new scientific principles. One important theme advocated by the modernising expert was the necessity for education to become more socially useful and relevant to a changing modern world. Their focus on social utility disposed them towards reframing education as more or less the institution of socialisation. This emphasis was further reinforced by a one-sided Heraclitean obsession with change and a dismissal of the past. For the new pedagogic expert, traditional education was outdated because it was traditional and therefore unlikely to be useful. It also followed that knowledge which was not deemed to be socially useful could only be allowed a marginal role in the modern curriculum. The new pedagogy wedded to the project of socialisation showed little interest in academic knowledge-based learning and
regarded the cultivation of intellect as far less important than providing a curriculum that was socially relevant. Ever since the turn of the twentieth century, this philistine fusion of education-as-socialisation and an instrumentalist orientation to knowledge has had a significant influence over mainstream pedagogy.

Of course, children do need to become socialised and gain an understanding about what it means to become a member of their society. But the way in which many education experts represented this issue was to turn the school into an institution where the child was to be shaped to adapt to the demands of society through careful social engineering. This approach was systematically formulated by Edward Ross, a leading American sociologist who argued in 1901 that free public education was ‘an engine of social control’. He stated that it was the mission of schools ‘to collect little plastic lumps of human dough from private households and shape them on the social kneading-board’. Not all experts embraced the rigid social engineering doctrine promoted by Ross. But what they all shared was a common conviction that the role of schools was to extract children from their family so that they could come under the influence of enlightened professionals. Socialisation required saving children from the deleterious influence of their home life.

John Dewey, along with most progressive educators, took the view that schools should not simply socialise children to accept the norms and values that prevail in society. Unlike Ross, he believed that the school had a duty to provide children with an outlook that was more enlightened than the ones that they would encounter in society. He wrote that ‘it is the business of the school environment to eliminate, so far as possible, the unworthy features of the existing environment’. Moreover, he hoped that as a ‘society becomes more enlightened, it realizes that it is responsible not to transmit and conserve the whole of its existing arrangements, but only such as make for a better future society’. Dewey concluded that the ‘school is its chief agency for the accomplishment of this end’. Nevertheless, he was no less insistent than Ross that the school had to correct the impoverished moral and intellectual influence that parents exercised over their children. His advocacy of nursery education was motivated by his belief in its potential for weaning children away from the negative influence of their life at home. ‘They will forget to imitate the loud and coarse things they see at home, their attention will be centred on problems which were designed by the school to teach better aims and methods,’ he noted.

The advocacy of educational expertise was transmitted through what Kessen has characterised as a ‘salvationist view of children’. According to this view,
children were by nature innately good, with impulses that needed to be allowed to flourish and develop. In the 1920s English progressive educators believed that children could play a vital role in the moral regeneration of the nation. ‘This regeneration was to be achieved through developing the spiritual life of the child, primarily by means of promoting individual creativity,’ notes a study of this movement. From this perspective the exercise of adult authority at home and in schools tended to be seen as a potential problem since it could serve as an obstacle to the spontaneous development of a child. Consequently, traditional education was indicted because it was not only outdated but also damaging to the development of the child. The salvationist view of the child was systematically promoted by advocates of what is often called child-centred education. In 1926 Harold Rugg, one of the leading American proponents of this approach, declared ‘the need for building the curriculum around the activities and interests of the children’. As far as Rugg was concerned, the child-centred curriculum represented the future, whereas the subject-based curriculum was steeped in the past.

The salvationist perspective of children has often upheld the emotional well-being of children as a key priority. Experts argue that since unhappy children grow up into unhappy adults, it is necessary to use the insights of the latest scientific discoveries to solve the emotional problems of childhood. Experts also claim to have a unique competence to deal with the emotional problems of children and that they are likely to be far more effective than their parents. As Ravitch noted, guidance experts in the US asserted that ‘they knew how to “adjust” youngsters’ personality; knew better than their parents how to turn them into the right sort of persons, with correct values, appreciations, attitudes, behaviours, and feelings: could if only the curriculum was revised, shape society infinitely better than the one that existed’. In more recent times, the call to introduce behaviour management in schools in order to offset the problems caused by emotionally illiterate parents is regularly voiced by experts. Moreover, the belief that parents lack the competence to nurture the emotional development of their children is far more widespread today than in the past.

The salvationist view of children not only sought to protect youngsters from the damaging influence of parents and traditional children, it also claimed that their approach would also help solve the problems of society. Many of them took the view that through the adoption of a scientific child-rearing society, the reform of education would lead to the reform of society. This sentiment, which was par-
particularly influential among child psychologists, endures to this day. Kessen wrote that ‘child psychologists, whatever their theoretical stripe, have taken the Romantic notion of childish innocence and openness a long way toward the several forms of if only we could make matters right with the child, the world would be a better place’. He adds that the ‘child became the carrier, of political progressivism and the optimism of reformers’.  

Since the early twentieth century the tendency to bank on children as the vehicles of social reform has become more and more widely practised by policy-makers. In the UK all the main political parties are wedded to the idea of ‘early intervention’ in a child’s life. In August 2006 the then Prime Minister Tony Blair announced that since potential troublemakers could be identified even before they are born, the government would intervene to head off future problems. Early intervention through government-run programmes like Sure Start is designed to offset the parenting deficit that apparently afflicts English families and to produce the kind of children that will turn into good citizens.

It was in the US in the inter-war period that the tendency first became prevalent for schools to assume responsibility for the nurturing and socialisation-related activities traditionally carried out within the family. These policies were originally developed to deal with the problems facing immigrant parents who found it difficult to socialise their children into the American way of life. Hofstadter wrote that ‘immigrant parents unfamiliar with American ways, were inadequate guides to what their children needed to know, and the schools were now thrust into the parental role’. But the schools were not simply in the business of socialising the children of immigrant families; they also took the view that their pupils could in turn help socialise their parents into the American way of life. Hofstadter noted that ‘the children exposed to Yankee schoolmarm’s in the morning were expected to become instruments of Americanization by bringing home in the afternoon instructions in conduct and hygiene that their parents would take to heart’.  

The agenda of Americanising the parents of immigrant children through the school was also observed by Arendt. She believed that this expansion of the role of schooling had a significant influence on the way that socialisation would be conceptualised. If the schools could successfully undertake the task of socialising immigrant parents through their children, what was to stop them from extending this project to other sections of society? Arendt argued:
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‘The political role that education plays in a land of the immigrants, the fact that the schools not only serve to Americanize the children but affect their parents as well, that here in fact one helps to shed an old world and enter into a new one, encourages the illusion that a new world is being built through the education of the children’.

The salvationist view of a new world built through the education of children was systematically promoted through the project of assimilating immigrant communities into the American way of life. However, in a world where the legitimacy of adult authority was constantly questioned, it was only a matter of time before a similar model of socialisation was adopted towards other parents.

In early twentieth century educators and child experts sought to bypass parental authority through assuming responsibility for the socialisation of young people. It was only a matter of time before their conviction that parents had little to teach their children encouraged some to take the argument further to suggest that perhaps parents could learn from their children. As a result, children are not simply socialised, they are also encouraged to wean their parents away from outdated prejudices and to adopt the latest wisdom provided by expert authority. The outcome of this development is the encouragement of socialisation in reverse – this is a reversal in authority relations with dramatic consequence for inter-generational interaction.

The socialisation of children involves a delicate transaction between parents and schools. Even the most arrogant and complacent curriculum expert cannot be indifferent to the status of adult authority overall. Educators who are otherwise dismissive of parental competence understand that they cannot challenge parental authority too overtly without provoking a potentially damaging conflict. They know that unless parents successfully manage the behaviour of their children, the schools will be crushed by an impossible burden. Consequently, the rhetoric of school-parent partnership prevails, and there is little open discussion of the relative weight of expert versus parent authority. Back in 1967 the Plowden Report into English primary education drew attention to the reluctance of educators to speak plainly on this subject:

‘An aim, which was hardly mentioned by head teachers and yet one which, if challenged, they would almost certainly have admitted, is the cooperation
of school and home and, with it, that of making good to children, as far as possible, the deficiencies of their backgrounds. That this aim found so little expression is significant. The implications of the relationships between school and home have still to be worked out; some teachers are anxious about the extent to which the school is taking the responsibility for the child’s welfare and thus undermining the responsibility, as some would put it, of parents’.  

No doubt many educators are devoted to the cause of using schools to help children overcome the ‘deficiencies of their backgrounds’ out of a commitment to social justice and reform. Many of them are also sensitive to the danger that the expansion of the role of the school may represent to the exercise of parental responsibility. That is one reason why Plowden was able to report back in 1967 that teachers tended to be careful to cultivate good relations with parents. However, in recent times, this restraint has given way to a far more aggressive affirmation of the role of expert authority for the socialisation of children.

Since the mid-1990s the implicit questioning of the ability of parents to socialise their children has become increasingly strident and explicit. As a result, there has been a gradual shift in the way that the uneasy partnership between family and school is portrayed by experts. Educationalists often assume that poor parenting and the fragmentation of the family are facts of life that necessitate that schools assume responsibility for forms of socialisation that were hitherto carried out in the home. This was the message communicated to the September 2008 conference of the Association of Schools and College Leaders by its General Secretary, Dr John Dunford. Dunford stated that ‘schools have a much stronger role in bringing up children than in previous years’. He went on to argue that the school is ‘the last moral force’, and that for some children ‘it is only the school that provides a framework that sets the line between what is and isn’t acceptable’. His point was reinforced by the union’s president, Brian Lightman, who asserted that schools were now often forced to parent children as well as teach them. Dunford’s and Lightman’s perception that schools are the last ‘moral force’ is underpinned by a lack of trust in the capacity of adults – particularly parents – to act as positive moral agents. Such attitudes indicate that the relationship between expertise and the exercise of adult authority has become more complicated.
Socialisation as behaviour management

In recent decades there has been a gradual shift in the way that the task of socialisation is transmitted through formal schooling. Historically, education contributed to the process of socialisation by helping to introduce young people to the prevailing system of cultural values. This involved learning about ‘rules of conduct and expectations about future behaviour’ as well as the ‘accumulated know-how for planting crops, making dwellings, dealing with sorcery or calculating logarithms’. 32 Those concerned with how socialisation worked were mainly interested in issues associated with the transmission of moral and cultural attitudes. These issues still retain their relevance. But there is one striking difference between the way that schools perceive the role of socialisation today and a century ago. Socialisation is increasingly perceived as a form of behaviour management. It is less about indoctrinating pupils into a way of life or familiarising them about a community’s moral code than instructing them about how to manage their emotions, conduct relationships with others and training in so-called life-skills.

The gradual reorganisation of socialisation around the imperative of behaviour management has been influenced by three distinct but mutually reinforcing developments. First, adult authority has always found the management of young people’s behaviour both bewildering and challenging. As a result, many parents have welcomed the support that schools and experts could provide them. Secondly, the problems of individual behaviour and of emotional development provided a complex of issues where experts could assert their scientific authority. In the domain of emotions, psychologists could highlight their expertise and claim authority for managing the behaviour of children. Consequently, experts had a real incentive to inflate and complicate the significance of the issue of a child’s well-being and to introduce it into the domain of formal education. In a sense the claim that experts could understand the problems facing children better than any one else endowed them with authority. Finally, the elevation of the importance of a child’s capacity to adapt to new circumstances resonated with the widely accepted belief that since change was constant, society required people who could flexibly respond to new conditions. This belief had a momentous impact on the way that socialisation was perceived. As one prescient study noted almost five decades ago, ‘the fact that society seems to be changing so rapidly is thought to necessitate the development of flexibility of outlook in children rather than the acquiring of knowledge’. 33 In edu-
cation the valuation on flexibility has acquired the status of a dogma. Cultivating a flexible personality drew on the techniques developed by psychology and turned adaptability into one of the central aims of the curriculum.

By the middle of the twentieth century, many education experts argued that effective teachers needed to understand how to manage the emotional and personal problems facing their pupils. This standpoint was forcefully argued by American educators who took the view that behaviour management was the key to the successful socialisation of adolescents. Advocates of this ‘life-adjustment’ approach insisted that schools had to devote significant resources towards helping children deal with their personal and social issues. They believed that guiding students to cope with their emotions, personal problems and relationships would allow them to become ‘fit and happy members of contemporary society’. The rising influence of behavioural psychology acquired growing influence in the 1990s when the traditional problems associated with education were gradually redefined as the consequence of different emotional deficits. On both sides of the Atlantic, children’s low self-esteem was held responsible for virtually every educational problem. As one American study notes, ‘by the 1980s, self esteem was touted in the professional literature as both a means and an end of education’. The UK followed suit, and by the turn of the twenty-first century, the socialisation of schoolchildren increasingly assumed the form of emotional training. One government advisory group on ‘Education for Citizenship and the Teaching of Democracy in Schools’ considered self-esteem a key core skill. Policy documents regularly convey the idea that self-esteem and emotional literacy are values in their own right.

The values and aims outlined by the 1999 National Curriculum illustrate the way that socialisation is represented through the prism of emotional training. The document highlights the importance of education reflecting the ‘enduring values’ of society. However, the enduring values that it upholds have little to do with the kind of moral, cultural or political principles that are classically transmitted from one generation to the next. In line with the therapeutic ethos of our times, the weight of these ‘enduring values’ is towards emotional and behaviour management. First on the list is ‘valuing ourselves’, followed by valuing ‘our families and other relationships’. Finally, the list calls for valuing ‘the wider groups to which we belong, the diversity in our society and the environment in which we live’. The central role assigned to ‘valuing ourselves’ is further reinforced in the discussion on the aims of the curriculum. It states that the school curriculum ‘should promote pupil’s self-esteem
and emotional wellbeing’. Schools are also allocated the role of helping children ‘form and maintain worthwhile and satisfying relationships’.

The growing emphasis of the curriculum on behaviour management means that socialisation is increasingly perceived in a highly individualised and personalised form. The shift from valuing your nation, your religion or your way of life to ‘valuing ourselves’ is not simply one of emphasis. It represents an important reorientation from the idea that socialisation involves the intergenerational process of value transmission to one that relies on techniques of behaviour management supervised by experts. How children feel about themselves constitutes the main focus of pedagogic interest. One supporter of the 1999 curriculum has observed that its aims ‘place a good deal of emphasis on the pupil’s personal well-being, practical reasoning and preparation for civic life’. According to his calculation 60 per cent of the ‘items in the list are about personal qualities we would like pupils to have’ while ‘knowledge aims’ constitute 30 per cent.

Advocates of the application of behaviour management techniques to the classroom sometime explicitly recognise that their approach led to a form of socialisation that is radically different from the past. ‘While socialization is still vitally important, the challenge of socialisation is not the same as it used to be,’ observed Bentley. Why? The answer offered is that because we live in a constantly changing world where assumptions about the conduct of relationships are continually called into question, it is difficult to provide an authoritative guide to life. Under such circumstances socialisation needs to help people to acquire the soft skills necessary for conducting relationships and responding to events. However, there is one value – ‘one of the most important of the values of younger people’ – that must be addressed through socialisation, argues Bentley. That is young people’s desire for ‘authenticity’. From this perspective the servicing of the psychological drive for genuine self-expression becomes a fundamental object for successful socialisation.

The primacy that the curriculum attaches to promotion of the pupils’ well-being is often perceived as the response of a generous child-centred society devoted to nurturing its young. No doubt many psychologists and educators are seriously committed to the challenge of improving the emotional life of young people. But the refocusing of the process of socialisation towards a more personalised and emotionally directed approach should not be interpreted as representing an enlightened response to children’s emotional needs. As noted above, the embrace of behaviour management has been influenced by the weakening of adult authority and the as-
cendancy of the expert. In recent times the agenda promoted through behaviour management has also appealed to policy-makers and sections of business who uphold the ideal of a flexible workforce. Hence the growing tendency to depict personal attributes as ‘soft skills’ that are necessary for managing life in a changing world. In line with this development, official publications often prefer to refer to learning skills rather than studying subjects.

In contemporary times the project of socialising children through behaviour management is closely associated with the promotion of skills in the classrooms. Virtually every personal attribute has been rebranded as a skill, and advocates of emotional education demand its further expansion. The fusion of the skills agenda with that of behaviour management was evident during a series of discussions charged with reviewing England’s primary curriculum in early 2008. It was reported that those 1500 people who attended the 60 seminars stressed the importance of skills training. According to a report they called ‘for a focus on lifestyle lessons covering issues such as drugs, sex, healthy diets and thinking skills’. It was claimed that those who were consulted wanted pupils to ‘study fewer formal subjects to allow more time for their social and personal development’.

The attachment to lifestyle and emotional management was most vehemently endorsed by John Bangs, the head of education of the NUT, who claimed that personal development was ‘shamefully neglected’ in recent times. There is now an influential lobby of policy-makers, pedagogues and school psychologists who are determined to redirect schools from academic subjects towards the provision of skills and emotional education. One leading advocate of this skills agenda, John White, wants the national curriculum to be focused on skills such as team building, public speaking and problem-solving, rather than what he scathingly dismisses as an ‘encyclopaedic knowledge’ of the world.

Thankfully, most parents and many teachers understand the importance of providing children with a high-quality academic education. There is a widespread awareness of the fact that schools providing a solid background in the main subjects are necessary for providing children with the foundation to make their way in the world and to respond to new challenges. From time to time parents react against the latest behaviour management gimmicks such as the recent introduction of emotional education and happiness courses. However, such reactions occur in a context where adult authority – particularly of parents – is very much on the defensive. In such circumstances there is a temptation to leave education to the experts. But the
experts are not prepared to return the favour. They know that if they are to assume authority for the socialisation of the child, they need to constantly call into question the authority of the parent.
Endnotes

1 The Department for Children, Schools and Families (2008), *The Independent Review of the Primary Curriculum*, London

2 See Heyting et al (2002) p. 382. They add that the ‘help of education is called for in reforming individual youngsters, but also in preserving the cohesion of society’.

3 This argument is developed in Furedi (2009), Chapter 4 ‘Socialisation in reverse’


5 Porritt cited in Williams (2008) p. 82


8 See E.G. West, ‘Liberty and Education: John Stuart Mill’s Dilemma’, *Philosophy*, April 1965

9 Durkheim (1956) p. 71

10 Cited in Giddens (1986) p. 176

11 Durkheim (1956) p. 70

12 Durkheim (1956) p. 123

13 Kessen (1979) p. 817

14 Loseke & Cahill (1994) p. 174

15 Kessen (1979) p. 818

16 Ayling (1930) p. 204, 213

17 See Chapter 10 in Furedi (2008)

18 Dewey (1934) p. 2-3

19 Ravitch (2000) p. 80

20 John Dewey (1966) p. 20

21 Dewey & Dewey (1962) p. 81

22 Kessen (1979) p. 818


24 Chung & Walsh (2000) p. 226


26 See for example Bentley (1998) p. 26

27 Kessen (1979) p. 818
Hofstadter (1964) p. 337
Arendt (1961) p. 174
See Sean Coughlin, ‘School is “the last moral force”’, BBC News Education; 3 September 2008
Cotgrove (1972) p. 74
Bantock (1965) p. 134
See Zachry (1940) p. 394
Ravitch (2000) p. 427
White (2006) p. 3
Bentley (1998) p. 160
See Call for skills lessons in school, BBC News; 24 September 2008
Ibid.
See Graeme Paton, ‘Schools should teach skills not subjects’, The Daily Telegraph; 3 June 2008
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