Tell me! The right of the child to information
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Chapter 2

The role of information in a child's development

Long before a child is born, a lot of communication about him has already taken place. He is an object of information exchange between the future parents: they express their expectations; think about a proper name; make arrangements for a new division of work and time at home; and, discuss the preparations of room, furniture, tools and clothes. The future mother tells the doctor about her health and is informed about diet, exercises and other health measures. Family and friends are informed about the coming new being. Long before a child is born his story has already begun, told by others. This unknown being gradually makes himself known in a world still unknown to him. What can he expect? Will his first view of the world be in the vast landscape of the desert, the home of Bedouin, or the crowded city of New York or Bangkok? Will the first faces he meets be those of a large family or those of doctors and nurses or, finally, his single mother? What should he do? Whatever the circumstances may be, all newborns have one thing in common: they have no choice but to grow and live in this world. But how should a newborn develop? How is the child informed about this world and himself? How does he gather the information to make up his own story of his life?

Central question
The central question in this chapter is: What role does information play in a child’s development? The purpose of this section is not, nor is it possible, to give a complete account of how a child develops and how information is involved in the many aspects of development. Nevertheless, a general idea of information related to development should be offered as a background for a deeper understanding of the role information plays in a child’s life, and hence the importance of a right to information.

Theories about child development, the contribution of maturation and experience to development, and the different stages of development will be briefly touched upon. At each stage, a short description of the most important characteristics relating to information in the fields of cognitive, emotional and social development, will follow. Finally, the role of information in the development of a child’s personality and social participation will be explained. In some concluding remarks, these findings will be related to the role of parents and teachers and the notion of an authentic human being.

Different approaches
As theory of human development is so closely linked to ideas and implicit or explicit values of human life, a generally accepted theory of human development is not available. On the contrary, many theories seem to approach development from more
or less different sides which as a consequence stress different aspects, such as mental or social development. As a result, some theories focus on human development in general or on one ‘simple’ aspect. Some stress the external side and study behaviour, or try to explain environmental influences and human ecology. Others attempt to describe development from within: psycho-analytical and existential aspects. Yet, others see development as a form of information processing, of attributing causal explanations to behaviour, or of executing developmental tasks.1

The search for a theory of development has lead to a development of theories. Although theories and studies of the early stages of human development – especially infancy and early childhood – dominate, human development is supposed to include adulthood and old age, the entire lifetime. With a growing number of people in this last stage of life, at least in Western societies, new problems accompanied by pragmatic and academic questions come up. As some parts of child development seem to find a corresponding development ‘in reverse order’ at the decline of life, this new area may contribute to the knowledge about both stages of development.

Another point which one should bear in mind when analysing or applying development theories is their limitations with respect to certain types of societies and cultures. In general, ethnographic studies or cross-cultural studies focusing on the differences and similarities in the development of children of various cultures and different circumstances are lacking. Most literature on child development covers the, mostly middle-class, children in Western societies.2

One method of categorising theories of human development is to discern two kinds of development: those which already have been indicated above; and, those which are embedded in religious traditions. The latter contain more implicit theories of development. It is remarkable that these theories are much more focused on human development, and do not differentiate much between children and adults. Both have the same tasks as human beings. These embedded theories are not only descriptive in depicting what life is like as people grow up, but also prescriptive – what people should be like if they are to achieve the ideal human condition – in character, whereas most secular theories are descriptive, giving account of how development proceeds.

Thomas noticed the one-sidedness of most secular theories as they originated in the Christian Western hemisphere. Subsequent studies to respond to this omission show findings, which can be useful and are probably necessary in multicultural societies and in Third World countries. In particular, Western style secular schooling gains rapidly in popularity over indigenous religious forms of education. ‘In governmental plans for modernization, beliefs underlying efforts to achieve technolog-


ical and socio-economic progress often conflict with traditional religious beliefs. For example, the goal of producing "good" (meaning "moral") people; and, the aim of achieving a satisfying life of material well-being on earth takes precedence over attaining a peaceful and painless life after death through obeying God's dicta.3

In comparing theories on child development, attempts have been made to label each of them with a striking metaphor. These attempts lead to images of the growing child in a large variety. According to the theory of Piaget,4 the child is a young scientist, who successively constructs more powerful logico-mathematical tools. The theory of Vygotsky stresses the influence of the social environment on child development, hence children in this scheme are social beings whose intellectual processes are tools acquired from their special historic and cultural settings.5 Case proposes the image of the child as a traveller through life, a problem-solver motivated by natural desires. The child can overcome barriers through his capacity to refine and recombine innate procedures.6 Others have portrayed children as labourers performing a sequence of tasks during the successive periods of life; sexually, hedonistic beings; and, peripatetic translators, constantly interpreting the meaning of every environmental setting they pass through.7

In social learning theory, children are regarded as actors and as members of the audience in the daily dramas that make up life's social experiences. They learn by acting and witnessing the consequences of playing particular roles in different social settings. In humanistic theory, children are explorers in search of a unique personal identity and activities that promote need fulfilment.

Kohlberg's theory of moral development depicts the child as a magistrate who, with the passing of time, increasingly adopts more socially oriented, rather than self-oriented, principles for distinguishing right from wrong moral behaviour. Thomas argues in his integrated theory of moral development, that children are like architects and builders, continually reconstructing the patterns of their moral values. The process of reconstruction is governed by (1) the history of the child's cognitive and moral development up to the present time, (2) the level of maturation of the child's nervous system, and (3) the nature of the moral events that the child currently encounters in the routine of daily living.8 A suitable metaphor-like description of the role of information in child development, would label the child as an information seeker. The purpose of his search can then be described as his search to know how to live as an authentic human being. Knowing in this sense is not a mere mental

activity, but ‘knowing by heart and head’ and willingness to perform and to live this knowledge. There is a severely felt urge to find this information, as there is a need to grow up, to become ‘full-grown’.

Stages of development

The development of a new human being relies on the interaction of two factors: maturation and experience. At an abstract level ‘pure’ maturation can be defined as development resulting entirely from internal forces that are not influenced by the environment. Maturation refers to changes which occur regardless of training and practice, to inner processes which proceed spontaneously. All children follow more or less the same pattern of behaviour in eating, drinking, locomotion, talking, social behaviour. At the practical level, environmental influences cannot be eliminated. Therefore, the discussion remains unsettled on the extent to which heredity (nature) and environment (nurture) contribute to human development.

Early genetic psychology posited that every individual repeated in itself the evolution of the human race: ‘Ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny’.9 Therefore, adolescence had to be attained before a young human being reached the social phase and was susceptible to cultural and social influences. The eugenics movement, however, focused attention on the early years of development. ‘The early emphasis on the first years of development was fostered by society’s needs to exercise control and guidance over the young during a time of rapid, disconcerting socio-economic change.’10

Experience or learning is based on external influences, basically interpersonal relationships. The learning of language, for example, is a development which includes both maturation and learning. Between one and three years of age almost all children show elements of speech. The brain of a three-month old is not sufficiently developed to permit the infant to understand or speak a language. Yet, even when the brain is mature, a child will not speak unless he has been exposed to speech by others.

Nowadays, the possibility and necessity of influencing human beings, at a very young age is well founded. Here again the true nature of the child is controversial. Some theorists consider children to be active beings, who explore the world around them. They select by themselves their interests, as children have an inborn tendency to be curious, to seek for themselves and find out, structuring their experiences and creating their own worlds. Other theorists view children as rather passive beings, not unresponsive, but entering the world ready to absorb whatever knowledge is provided by their environment. Children are moulded by stimuli in the external world and driven by internal needs over which they have little control. In such theories carefully structured teaching methods are therefore favoured.11

An understanding of maturation is considered to be of highly practical importance in dealing with the questions of caretakers and educators about the right time to train the child to feed himself, to teach him how to read, to explain mathematical concepts, to give sex education etc. In the general tendency of stressing the malleability of life, the question is generally put in this way: what kind of maturation is needed before a child can understand different kinds of information? When information is given before a child is susceptible to it, he will not be able to use it, or not use it effectively. It might even damage him, resulting in unpleasant feelings, distorted notions or confusion.

However, this question is too broad to be answered in detail. Most of the research relating to child psychology and pedagogy has been written from the point of view of the parent/caretaker and educator/teacher, not from the perspective of the child. This view accounts for difference between giving, imposing information and asking for, seeking information. This latter perspective should be taken more into account.

Linked to the concept of maturation is the concept of stages or periods of development. In Piaget’s theory of mental development, organic maturation of the nervous system and the endocrine system is considered to be a necessary factor for intellectual growth. Research has shown that maturational factors determine chiefly the time when children first walk, can be toilet trained, and start to learn their mother tongue. Biological factors also dominate physical and mental growth in early adolescence, which on average takes place two years earlier for girls than for boys.

In general, the following seven stages of development have been distinguished: prenatal development; infancy; early childhood; later childhood; adolescence; adulthood; and, old age. Although for practical reasons, the tendency is to equate such stages with fixed age limits, such practices can have severe consequences. Firstly, in that case a child is not considered to be a unique being, but an example or representative of a certain age group. Such an attitude shows a lack of respect for the uniqueness of the child. Secondly, expectations about certain skills to be developed, which are not realised can be used as an indication of defects, and give rise to early intervention. Such early indications can be regarded positively if intervention helps, but one can never be sure what would have happened without intervention. The child may have chosen his own rate of development with a particular pattern of sensitive periods of intensive growth. Thirdly, focusing on age indications puts more weight on maturation processes than on the variety of experiences a child may have and their influence on biological processes. Finally, in some cases, the expectations of parents and teachers are lowered because of a child’s handicaps. They then abstain from following the normal curriculum, and continue to compare the child with the original age group. Lower expectations may very well condition poor results, causing sometimes unnecessary suffering and low self-esteem. In his approach of stimulating cognitive and social development of people with retarded performance levels, Feuerstein considers the modifiability of human beings as fundamental. In the guidance of the child, the adult fulfils the role of mediator, the interpreter of the unstructured world which imposes itself on the child, hence the term ‘mediated learning’. Therefore, it is not enough to impart information to the child. The question is wheth-

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er the child can use the information he gets, to gain new information himself. In this way creative processes are stimulated and self-esteem is acquired.\textsuperscript{13}

Returning to age indications, if they are used, they should be treated carefully. Since they cannot give more than a global indication of the function of expected development. This restriction should be kept in mind when the following stages of development are described. These stages will take into account development until about 18 years of age, as is the scope of this study.

**Prenatal development and birth**

Pushed by medical technology, the question of when the life of a new being begins has become quite complex. The more one knows about the complex process of life's origin, the more difficult it is to draw lines of decisions between life and non-life, and life and death.\textsuperscript{14}

The general idea of the beginning of a human being is the uniting of sperm and ovum. These first two cells contain the genetic information, the hereditary code, for the modelling of the new being and even his development after birth. The general hereditary code leads to the development of characteristics that are strictly human; the specific hereditary code is related to the varieties within the human species. Some characteristics are determined more by interaction with the environment, for example personality and certain intellectual abilities.

In some traditions, the uniting of sperm and ovum is not enough to explain life. According to Christian tradition, a third factor is involved, the soul which represents God's essence.\textsuperscript{15} In an older tradition, an explanation is given for characteristics of the new being, which cannot be reduced to characteristics of the parents or former generations. In this case, the third factor is the heredity of former lives, the results of karma, concentrated in rebirth consciousness.\textsuperscript{16}

During the prenatal period, the basic body parts and all internal organs develop. The ear is the first sense, completely developed after four and a half months; and very much used by the foetus. In fact, prenatal communication is possible: 'Toute mère doit savoir, doit sentir au plus profond d'elle-même que, avant d'entendre l'environnement, l'embryon commence par percevoir sa propre existence dans un


\textsuperscript{14} See for the ethical implications, for instance: Asperen, G. van, Het bedachte leven. Beschouwingen over maatschappij, zingeving en ethiek, Boom, Amsterdam, 1993.

\textsuperscript{15} According to pre-existence theory, intuitive ideas about space, time, causality, right and God are innate and not the result of experience in the world: therefore, there must have been a soul prior to an individual's conception and birth. Or, according to the creation theory, God is the creator of the human spirit and the marked individuality in the child cannot be explained as a mere reproduction of the qualities existing in the parents. Thomas, R. (ed.), The Encyclopedia of Human Development and Education. Theory, Research, and Studies, Pergamon Press, Oxford, 1990, p. 152.

\textsuperscript{16} Marek, J., Buddhist Theory of Human Development, in: Thomas, R. (ed.), The Encyclopedia of Human Development and Education. Theory, Research, and Studies, Pergamon Press, 1990, p. 146: 'The Mahatanha Sankhya Sutta in the Majjhima Nikaya explains that the conception of a new individual or psychological being comes about through the conjunction of three things: coitus of parents, the mother's period of fertility and the presence of a rebirth consciousness (gandhabba).'}
groupe organique qui va se complexifiant. Ce processus d’information qui module vibratoirement la vie s’installe sur un tout autre mode relationnel que celui lié aux simples besoins et nécessités métaboliques. Il y a, en effet, plus qu’un échange, il y a communication.¹⁷ The foetus is apparently eager to hear whatever gives sound: he is all ears and grasps for sounds, for life.¹⁸ He not only hears and feels the rhythm of the blood pressing through the veins, he listens to the heartbeat of his mother. He hears her voice and for him this is the sound he associates with life. He is even able to hear the sounds, the noise, the conversations that take place in his mother’s environment.

During the long night in the uterus, the foetus is not a passive, waiting being, but develops and uses all possible means to make himself known. Some prenatal reflexes, movements with arms and legs, may be felt by the mother. From the very beginning, the foetus is active. The foetus lives on his environment: the food eaten by the mother is his food and is used to develop his body; the physical and psychological health of his mother; her age; and, her habits, all affect his coming into being. Alcohol, cigarettes, drugs and certain types of music during pregnancy can also exert a severe negative effect on fetal development. At birth, the foetus has not only developed into a complete human being, but he has also started to gather the first information from his environment by using his senses.

Birth
Birth is a complicated event, as two human beings, who have been together for a long time, are separated. This separation does not take place without pain. The moment of arrival – delivery for the mother – is associated with pain and suffering. The persons involved necessarily hurt each other.¹⁹ This process is seen as the normal human condition, but there is a vague memory that this event should occur without pain and tension. The traditions record that the prototypes of humanity, such as Jesus or Buddha, were conceived and born in a special way. When the child arrives in this world he raises his voice in a scream. He hears the voices of others. They call him by his name and they speak to him. This communication is the first symbolic activity of the child. Psychoanalists have pointed to the significance of language for a human being, from the moment of birth. Although the child cannot yet speak, various functions of his body express his symbolic activity. Adults often think that these young children will not understand language, and speak as if the children are not present. Eliacheff shows in her therapy with young infants that ignoring children is disastrous. They understand language from a very early moment and can find relief in an honest communication, as she describes in her epilogue.²⁰

¹⁷ Tomatis, A., La nuit utérine, Éditions Stock, Paris, 1981, p. 139. The German edition gives a double explanation: Der Klang des Lebens, Vorgeburtliche Kommunikation – die Anfänge der seelische Entwicklung, Rowohlt, Reinbek, 1987. Tomatis explains the fascinating development of the ear, which brought him to the ‘pedagogic of hearing’. He used the mother’s voice, as was heard by the foetus, to help children to hear again. This therapy has later been elaborated in sound therapy, which is also helpful for children with dyslexia. (With thanks to Catherine Harotte.)

¹⁸ This has led to the expression: Das Auge ist nicht zum Sehen, sondern vom Sehen; das Ohr ist nicht zum Hören sondern vom Hören. The organ develops according to the desire of man.


Implications
The mother, and all her characteristics such as body, psyche, social-economic circumstances, form the first environment of the new being. His development will prosper in healthy circumstances. This healthy development makes demands primarily on the mother, but also on the father and other family members. These demands include attention of good nutrition, healthy exercise and the creation of a positive atmosphere. In fact, such circumstances should even be present long before the conception, as they influence the very conception and hence the genetic information code.

From the moment of the conception, a third being is present. He has come between the parents. Attention also means an awareness of the new being that is growing within, in all daily activities and noticing bigger and smaller differences during the growth process. Although his presence is hardly perceivable in the beginning, parents should consider that the foetus is able to hear sound, conversation, and noise. Harsh words and loud music will have a detrimental effect, but a mother can have a friendly talk with her invisible baby and sing a song for him. Such communication will establish the necessary warmth and create a welcome atmosphere for him.

Although parents, in preparing for their child, may speculate about what he or she looks like, the newborn is already a person. He may not live up to or change himself according to the parent's expectations. This fact of life requires parents to accept the child as he is and to respect him fully. Such an attitude might be more difficult to achieve in affluent societies where children have become 'wish-children', and adults are used to the planning and malleability of life.

Infancy

In this first period of the newborn infant-life which lasts about two years, development takes place in a number of areas. One can distinguish different areas, such as cognition, perception, motor activity, emotions, sociability and language. These facets, however, are all interrelated and make up the development of the infant. Although newborn infants seem to do nothing more than eating and sleeping, they are more active than was thought until recently. They perceive and respond to things going on around them. Infants have well-developed senses, which are used to gath-

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21. The auditory sense is the first one that appears completely in life, and the last one that disappears. The ear is the last help for dying people. A practical example is found in The Tibetan Book of the Dead, or The after-death experiences on the Bardo-plane, Evans-Wentz, W.Y. (ed.), Oxford University Press, London, 1957. It is known that in the Tibetan tradition a dying person is helped by priests and lay people who whisper guidance in his ear. The act of hearing has an important role in the transitions of life. In his psychological commentary, C.G. Jung makes a reference to the possible memories of intra-uterine origin.

22. Nossent, S., Een beweeglijke psyche. Over epigenese bij baby's, Kok Agora, Kampen, 1985 (Dissertation University of Utrecht). Nossent stresses the co-action between mother and baby, both before and after birth. The baby is a social being which actively reacts to his environment and tries to organise and control it.
er information, as all humans do. In looking at faces, in hearing voices and sounds, the infant interprets this information, and he develops strategies to seek and process information. His eye movements, for example, become more efficient: he perceives more details. Former information can be stored and recalled for recognition. In this way, familiar faces and voices are recognised, and preferences are developed. The infant not only responds to the environment, but also receives responses. This experience opens up the possibility of interaction. By exploring the environment, touching and manipulating objects, experimenting with movements, the infant gradually gains competence in a larger area.

**Physical development**
The infant's physical growth begins in the head and continues on down in the torso, arms and legs. He starts to lift his head when he lies on his stomach: this gives an other perspective. Later on he can sit. His motor ability develops gradually in crawling, standing and walking. The environment which can be physically experienced increases with his possibilities to move himself. His hands, which are in the beginning mostly closed, open up in reflexes, but at four-six months, he reaches for and grasps objects, he turns them around and drops them. Later on, at 18-24 months he can stack blocks and his movements are so elaborated that he can turn the pages of a book one at a time. Both genetic factors and the environment, e.g. culture and economic status, create differences in the rate in which motor ability is developed.

**Emotional development**
From the very beginning the infant gathers information about the world around him through his senses. His hand touches the face of his mother, he responds when somebody blows softly over his hair. Young infants have a preference for sweet smells, which slow down the heart beat and respiration rate. An infant learns to discern the odour of his mother's milk, which he prefers over prepared surrogates. He is sensitive to sounds, he likes sounds of a greatly patterned variety and recognises easily the voice of his mother or the one who always takes care of him. The continuing and consistent interaction with his mother gives the infant a feeling of warmth and security. The way he is held and nurtured are evidence of mother’s reliable presence. ‘Acts of human reliability make a communication long before speech means anything – the way the mother fits in when rocking the child, the sound and tone of her voice, all communicate long before speech is understood.’ In the very first month, the infant's eyes follow slowly moving objects such as a mobile. His eyes do not yet see a whole face, but focus instead on the upper part, later he fixates eyes and mouth, until he knows what a normal face looks like and can recognise it. His focusing capacity is then about as flexible as an adult's.

23. Such a description which is now common in cognitive psychology can in its original form be found in a much older tradition: Thomas, R. (ed.), Oriental Theories of Human Development. Scriptural and Popular beliefs from Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Shinto and Islam, Lang, New York, 1988, p. 82-83 (American University Studies, Series XI Anthropology and Sociology, Vol. 19).
formation infants prefer regards contour, pattern and movement; they desire more complexity as they grow older.

**Cognitive development**

When infants start to move around, they grasp at toys and manipulate them. When such a toy, which they have seen before, is hidden they will not search for it: what they do not see does not exist. After 8-12 months, they have learned to form a concept of such an object, a mental image, and with this information they will formulate searching strategies. Some months later, they will understand that objects continue to exist even if one does not see them, they experience object permanence. The ability to form mental images or representations is thought to be a prerequisite to solving problems mentally and using abstract symbols as words.

Yet, an infant still has to learn to vocalise and to speak a language. Birth starts with a cry. Philosophical questions can be raised about the possibly symbolic beginning of life, but crying is considered to be the first vocalisation of the infant. Other sounds like 'ooh' and 'aah' follow. The infant continues to exercise the muscles of his lips, teeth, tongue and throat and this results in quite a variety of sounds. He seems to enjoy the sounds he is making and responds to them in a mono-babbling. He listens to sounds in his environment and gradually his free sounds are replaced by the ones he hears in his environment as his native language. He imitates not only sound but also the rhythm, intonation and stress pattern of his native language. He even uses gesture to make his intentions clear when uttering his first one-word sentences. Now he is able to express a thought or wish. And, when he starts to use verbs and nouns he is able to convey meaning and to get his thoughts across. The passive understanding of language precedes the active use of vocalising thought. This is true for infants, but is also well known to adults who are trying to learn an additional language. Infants have to solve even a larger problem as they still are not familiar with the structure of language. They have, however, a remarkable ability to analyse language structure, which goes beyond imitative learning by passively listening and mechanic reproduction.

**Social development**

The infant might seem helpless and dependent on the person who takes care of him, but he soon finds out that he also influences this person. A cry results in attention, being changed or feeding. A smile is answered by a smile, babbling invokes other sounds. The baby's influence on parental decisions is from birth un-planned and unconscious. But by 8-14 months the child knows how to influence the activities of adults. The presence of the mother or caretaker is associated with positive feelings.

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and through the frequent interaction the infant develops emotional and social ties with the person who takes care of his basic needs. An attachment relationship supports the infant in asking for help, seeking comfort and finding security in this person. An infant meets not only a caretaker, but also other adults, other children who might be not familiar to him and cause social fear. An infant also fears separation from his caretaker. Such social fears might differ from culture to culture, depending on how children are reared: alone, with others, or with other children; on attachment relationships and cognitive development. When an infant has experienced such uncertainties, he can use this information to solve problems mentally, and make predictions which help to overcome his fears. One of the functions of information is the reduction of (subjective) uncertainty.

**Implications**

The rapid changes that are foreseen in the short period of infancy, demand highly attentive parents. Biological factors which are responsible for the enormous growth of nerves, organs and limbs, are likewise partly directed by environmental factors. To stimulate the development of the senses, a variety of shapes, patterns and movement should be offered. As a result, the infant learns to discern characteristics and to accommodate different positions.

Attachment to the mother or primary caregivers is based on dynamic feedback between mother/parents and child during the first six months. Such an emotional bond is extremely important as it forms a prototype for all later interpersonal exchanges. As much of the world is still unknown to the infant it is important to offer him security and trustworthiness. Parents should be reliable in their handling and be present. Only when parents show the child that they understand that the situation might be scary, can they assure and calm him. This approach will require much on the part of the parents to imagine the child’s perspective.

The infant rapidly grows, parents should attentively offer objects which can be manipulated, felt and classified. These objects should be colourful, soft, warm and cold, etc. Infants will show, without prodding, when they are ready for more complex objects. Playing games is another necessary ingredient in child-rearing and requires a variety from peek-a-boo, horseback-riding to name-giving. It is considered a psychological need of the infant, of human beings in general, to exert control over their environment. This control gives a feeling of assurance and competence.


30. It is noteworthy that the Tauripan-Indians in Venezuela rear their children in a natural way relying on the inherited expectancies of the human race. These Indians-mothers continue to carry their young infants during all their daily activities, which offers a much wider variety of sense-impulses than when the infant lies, remote from motherly warmth, in his cradle. A plea has been made for this continuum concept of human phylogensis in: Liedhoff, J., *The continuum concept*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1986.


As the child is a good observer and imitates quickly, parents should be well aware of what they are saying and doing. The child wants to be respected as a full partner, when he communicates with others. Parents can further the process of acquiring language by asking questions, taking turns and using more simple speech without sounding childish. A child recognises early on dishonesty on the part of adults. The parents’ models of behaviour can be extended by telling and reading about other beings and their adventures. The time for songs, rhymes, short stories and picture books should be well-used, offering the child new worlds, new feelings, new words.

Early childhood

The short period of infancy is one of tremendous growth and change. This is also true for the period of early childhood which covers the development of children between two and five years old. In most cultures this is called the pre-school period.

Physical development
When children are well-nourished and live in hygienic circumstances they show an astonishingly rapid growth. They are absorbed in fastening clothing, making strings or holding a pencil. Such intricate muscular tasks require patience and endurance. Children learn to walk and gradually start running around, climbing and jumping, and expanding the space they can explore.

Emotional development
Emotional development varies widely according to cultural differences. In Western cultures, children of pre-school age supposedly strive for self-assertion, meaning that they seek to gain autonomy and attain an independent identity. With their larger radius of action and their growing verbal competence, children of four and five years of age start to undertake independent action and reach out to the world beyond the family. In a physical sense, they may leave the garden at home and explore the next street and the neighbourhood. They also explore socially how other families function: how they eat, hold animals, and how they speak. Children also become interested in the use of tools and how they work. In many cultures, children of this age also get more tasks in the household. For example, they may be assigned care of the younger children.

Emotional development may show alternating periods of emotional stability and instability. If one thinks of the orderly and sequential growth which takes place in these periods, these developments might well be interrelated. All changes have to be ‘incorporated’ in new behaviour, attitude and activities.

Cognitive development
As children are able to move around in a larger area, they often have opportunities to meet other children. Such frequent meetings do not only lead to play, but also to

enlarged language use. Adults help them to acquire language by using special forms of simplified speech, so that children by age three have a vocabulary of around 1000 words and can use the basic structures of their native language.

Because children are more mobile, they have ample opportunities to explore new objects and new forms of play. Most of these activities and interactions are still bound by perception. Such behaviour means that the child decides and reacts on the basis of what he sees, hears and experiences; he has not yet integrated his thoughts into a full system of rational decision making. When a child observes an object or activity, he concentrates his attention on one aspect, for example size or speed. He cannot hold up two ideas, for comparison in his mind, which is necessary for some reasoning tasks, like classification and perception of relationships between parts and totality. But, as the child speaks and understands language better, he is able to substitute objects by symbols, which supports his cognitive development.

Social development
This period of childhood is typified by the universal occupation of children to play, varying in kind and quantity from culture to culture. Playing, games and rites are ingredients of tradition, as indicated in Chapter 1. Such playing often includes an imitation of adult activities which have been observed by the children. By observation and imitation children gather information and experiment with it. These are two tools for learning in a social environment.

In the beginning, children often play alone, rather than with other young children. Social skills start at the age of three and this is when the children, in pleasing adults, respond with appropriate social behaviour towards other children. Later, they enjoy playing with others, using their imagination, taking turns and changing roles.

Small group role-enactment activities and small group cooperative activities both seem effective in increasing children's ability to understand others' thoughts and feelings. Confronting children with the differences between their viewpoints and others' different viewpoints seems to be an effective means of increasing spatial perspective-taking and improving the ability to take the role of the listener in communication tasks.

In some cultures, children are soon assigned tasks in the family and the household. They help taking care of their siblings; cultivating vegetables or tending to the chickens; and, fetching water or collecting wood. Such early responsibility seems to support non-egoistic, altruistic, helpful behaviour. Egoistic behaviour like seeking help, being dominant, and demanding attention, was seen more frequently in children who did not have the welfare of others depending on them.

34. It seems that the time children start to walk and to talk is about the same in all cultures, see: Slobin, D., Children and language. They learn the same way all around the world, in: Psychology today, Vol. 6, 1972, p. 71-74.
Implications
A prerequisite for good development is healthy nutrition and hygienic circumstances. This prerequisite causes concern not only in developing countries, but also in Western countries, where, for example, artificiality in food, clothing and housing can cause allergic reactions, which heal with difficulty.

As rapid changes take place, parents have to be alert to take measures, that allow for broader risk-free movement, for example at the staircase or in the kitchen, and later on in the garden or in the street. Ample safe space to play and run around in, should be given in order to further motor development and social interaction.

The child’s need to feel secure should be met in order to make the child participate in the family, by doing small tasks and offering opportunities to imitate adult roles and occupations. The child will then also learn words and expressions appropriate to such activities.

Alertness is also required for the advancement of speech and expression. Children start to enjoy talking and using new words and expect to be listened to carefully, in the same way as they become disciplined to listen to others. This behaviour requires parental patience particularly when it comes to reading aloud the same story time and again. The child’s joy of recognition, his exercise of memory should take precedence over parents’ wish for something new. Parents should be attentive to periods of learning and periods of digesting. The child should be given time to assimilate new concepts. He might therefore ask the same questions over and over again, using his beloved: ‘Why?’ This behaviour demands an extra effort on the part of the parents to answer honestly and realistically in words that can be understood and processed by the child.

As young children come into contact with other children, for example in kindergarten, the child may notice differences and comment on them. Cultural and other differences are a sensitive subject, which cannot be ignored, but should be explained, based on acceptance without judgement. It is the life experience of the parents’ and other adults’ attitudes, which inform the child how to behave and deal with such differences.

Later childhood

The period of about six to twelve years old is the time of the schoolchild. The child is a unique personality, but it is believed that there are also some common characteristics for children in this period. It is not certain, however, that this is true for all cultures. Ethnographic studies of children from various ages in different cultures are still quite rare.

Physical development
Children grow in height and weight. Although there are only slight differences in height and weight between the average boy and the average girl, genetic endowment, nutrition and living conditions generally cause differences between children. The weight of the brain has increased enormously until about the age of five and gradually reaches 90% of the adult weight at age ten. As the children grow and ma-
ture, they increase in agility, strength, speed, and grace. Children can do physical exercises to stay healthier and become more resistant to stress and fatigue. Exercising has positive effects on social development and learning. Children are also capable of learning about health and nutrition. They like to learn about many things. They are open to a wide variety of games. The finer movements, necessary for handwriting and other intricate skills, are gradually learned. The rate and quality of motor skill development depend on and are influenced by motivation and opportunities to learn.

**Emotional development**

The interrelation of the different types of development is also perceivable in the development of emotions. Children are glad or get angry, they feel guilty or ashamed. Emotions are displayed as internal feelings and thoughts, expressions in the face and postures of the body. Emotions become more complex; basic feelings can be mixed in new emotions, as cognitive and social development progress.

Later on children learn which expressions are acceptable within the culture, and gradually they become aware of the subtle rules regarding the expression of emotions. Such development may be different in various cultures. Children from minority groups, immigrants and refugees are confronted with an extra complication as the rules of their own culture may differ from the dominant culture. It is only when the dominant culture becomes a multiculture that these children may have more opportunities in general social life.

As the children grow older they begin to take responsibility for their daily life. In order to be accepted socially, they exert greater control over how they express their emotions. According to Erikson, children try to achieve ego identity at different stages of their development. Such a striving is accompanied in later childhood by a crisis in achieving an industrious personality or by suffering a feeling of inferiority. Children need support from adults to cope with these and other developmental tasks, and in order to be self-confident. This type of support might be more difficult to give to children who attend a school that is very competitive. Such children may then experience failure, accompanied by negative feelings of shame, distress, embarrassment, and incompetence.

Children still like to play games and to use their imagination, but they are also looking for more productive activities that are worth the effort and perseverance. Therefore, adults need to provide appropriate tasks which encourage competence.

**Cognitive development**

During school age, the attention span of children widens and their ability to observe details simultaneously is increased. The information of the various aspects of an event they perceive are integrated into a more complete picture of what is occurring. Children are also able to classify objects in subtle characteristics or descriptive words. Such classification helps them to process information more rapidly and efficiently. Children learn more about the world around them. This knowledge permits them to be more specific in what they wish to seek or what they can expect in their environment. As their selective attention improves, they can discern objects or sounds separately. Perception also becomes more accurate.
As children become better able to pay specific attention, to perceive more fully and to organise various information, they become more advanced in coding and storing information. This advancement helps them to better memorise, recognise and associate the information of their experiences. Such abilities stimulate the desire to find explanations and draw conclusions: their reasoning ability. They start to understand the relationships between more complex phenomena. Children profit from learning through direct experiences.

A motive which stimulates children to acquire skills and knowledge is curiosity, which is described as ‘an intrinsic need to deal effectively with their environment.’ However, children are also affected by the way they themselves think about their cognitive competence, and this assessment is, in turn, greatly influenced by how importantly others as parents, teachers and peers appreciate their abilities. The relationships involved in learning, both at home and in school, have a great influence on the child’s cognitive progress.

**Social development**

School life becomes an important part of the child’s experience. He meets other children, learns new skills, tests his abilities and is confronted with new tasks. The child makes a subtle change in his patterns of socialisation: he shifts towards greater independence from parents and turns at the same time to others, who have a growing influence. His peers are not just playmates, they also teach him about rules, trends, the way to get along with difficulties, how to plan adventures, etc. Friends become a valuable source of information. Due to the frequent contacts, teachers also become more important. They not only offer an example of gender roles, but also through their reactions and feedback, teachers give answers which might help the child to develop a concept of self. Such a concept is important for social development. When a child is positive about himself and how he relates to other people, it is easier for him to develop positive self-regard and be self-assured. He is not afraid to express his ideas and to follow his own decisions.

Self-concept is based on a child’s own evaluation of himself and the ideas of others which are expressed in the form of feedback to him. During school-age, this process of feedback comes from an increasing variety of sources. Home-life and parents no longer dominate such judgements, instead other adults, teachers and peers also contribute to the image of self. The peer group is used for exchanging experiences and comparing the standards set by others and society at large. Honest and supportive feedback is important to the child’s adjustment in the larger world and his formation of adequate self-concept.

In the peer group, children learn social skills, such as practising roles, expressing feelings, exercising power and control, cooperation and individual responsibility. Children learn to deal with anxiety about social acceptability in games that represent simple life situations. Such interaction with peers offers the opportunity to build social skills and promote adjustment.

Implications

Even more than for young children, the assignment of appropriate tasks is welcomed by school-children. Such tasks should require imagination and creativity, which permit the child to find his own way of self-expression and problem-solving, when the necessary information is given.

These children are conscious of belonging to the family, and they should be given responsibility in the household and activities of the family. In doing things together, ample opportunities are available to communicate habits and rules, but also the values in practical things and daily life. Children can develop a caring attitude for others and for materials when they are taught by living experience. Children in this stage of development notice easily inconsistencies in adults' behaviour, and as a result, parents must take extra care to be aware of their actions and responses.

As the children start to engage in peer groups, they need supportive feedback with respect to their role and activities. Even here reliability and honesty are precious aspects of parents' communication with the child, when he encounters children from different backgrounds and has to present himself in the peer group. The feeling of acceptance at home gives strong support in exploring new social contacts.

Adolescence

Adolescence marks the transition from childhood to adulthood. In some cultures, this passage is explicitly indicated by performing rites or special activities. In other cultures, like Western culture, such rites are lacking and the development is not explicitly marked. The end of adolescence is controlled by social and cultural factors and is more difficult to define.

Physical development

The transition from childhood to adulthood is marked by physical, mental and emotional changes, but the passage is defined by the physical transformations which bring about sexual maturity. These changes take about two years, during which time primary and secondary sexual characteristics begin to develop. The rate in which the average boy and girl physically change is generally different, but the individual differences within the same-sex group can be enormous. Physical appearance is an object of great concern and adolescents have to learn to be either attractive or to accept who they are and what they have. Communication in the peer-group is important to the formation of an acceptable image of oneself.

Emotional development

As the physical growth and the psychological development do not necessarily keep pace, difficulties may rise in the field of sexual expression and communication. Adolescents are faced with bodies that have matured to their full adult sexuality, but their knowledge about this aspect of life, and the social and cultural rules that surround it may cause confusion. Societies may be sexually restrictive and keep children ignorant of basic sexual functions. When parents do not feel at ease sharing the necessary information, adolescents turn to their peers. Sometimes, this source may
provide the wrong information. Because adolescents still have fragile identities, relationships are very important. The fear of losing a friend may force them to engage in sexual intercourse before they are ready. New questions arise when it comes to dealing with consequences of such activity.

**Cognitive development**
Adolescents have reached the stage where they can think abstractly. They can perceive relationships between abstract concepts, and are no longer bound by pure perception. They can cope with many types of information; they can collect data, set up hypotheses and draw logical conclusions. Intellectual discoveries are enjoyed in applying these new abilities. They can also conceptualize and solve problems in new ways, and see consequences beforehand, relating past, present and future. The basis for intellectual functioning is complete by adolescence, but growth will continue throughout adulthood.

Adolescents have enough experience and cognitive ability to form for the first time in their lives a real picture of how the world functions. They start to form their own ideas and opinions and try them out in peer-groups and at other opportunities.

One of the subjects that adolescents clearly perceive and think about is the difference between what is and what could be. They are able to see that they have inherited a far from perfect world. In their introspective image of the world, violence, war, and poverty should not exist. When they feel that initiatives could bring about a change for the better, they can define a role for themselves to work for such a change. Involvement in ‘idealism’, or defining one's ideologies, is a healthy way of defining one's identity. Adolescents may also be disenchanted with the state of the world when confronted with the poverty and suffering in life. This disenchantment may lead them to seek comfort in drugs, antisocial behaviour and sometimes even suicide.

**Social development**
Adolescents are faced with the job of establishing their own independence and to find their own way in life. They have to make decisions about relationships, vocations and careers. With their new cognitive abilities, they have to find a place in society where they can work and live as they wish. Their ideas about their future role, and about the human being they want to be, are taken from the systems of belief and ideals of their parents, their experiences with other people and interaction at school. Peers form a support system in which to exchange daily news, but also to discuss issues of more philosophical and psychological values. The peer-group is an intermediary for the world, offering possibilities to try out ideas and new roles. For the adolescent, striving for more independence from home, teachers become an important alternative to parents. In some societies where the nuclear family unit disintegrates, schools are used as social meeting places. However, schools find it difficult to perform both the educational role and the nutritional role. In the normal situation

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the role of parents also changes. They start to function as guides and counsellors, who help and stimulate their children in their efforts to try different roles in the wide world.

Theories differ in the way they regard adolescence as a period of necessary crisis, confusion and opposition to parents; or, as a period of adapting to the expected adult role, including independence from parents. In the former situation, the relationships between parents and children are marked by mutual respect and caring.41

Implications
In building up an identity and personality, the adolescent needs feedback on his actions and expressions. What he expects from peers differs from his expectations of teachers or his parents. Parents may feel a need to protect, to set rules and to negotiate with respect to various aspects of the adolescent's life. Nevertheless, above all, an understanding of the turmoil and confusion that an adolescent faces is needed. Support can also be given through counselling on social contacts, schooling and vocation. At this stage of development, the adolescents may wish to discuss values and question their parents' belief or non-belief. Honest and clear answers are also required for normal sexual development. Such a development demands an attitude of openness in which to speak about relevant issues in a respectable manner. When parents accept that adolescents are trying various roles, they can also encourage them to form their own opinions and to develop their own ideas. A variety of sources can be referred to, including family, media, clubs and associations. Parents can advise the adolescent on what appears to be reliable and promising. As long as the adolescent feels he can still come home after his explorations, and will be accepted, he has a place of contact and support which will help him to explore the world around him and to obtain a feeling of self and self-esteem.

Growing up with information
As a child grows, matures and develops, he demonstrates at every stage of his life his need for information, which is in both a broad and narrow sense the driving force of his very being. Starting as a hereditary code, he opens up his senses to his environment, to feed himself with more information. Information gives energy. Gradually his ability to gather, select and process information improves. He branches out to more varied sources of information: he communicates with other people. All these experiences are coded and stored and can be recalled. Information is classified and is used to form concepts and new ideas about the environment, the world outside. Information allows a person to be creative. However, information is also coming from within: personal thoughts and feelings can be observed. Information is reflexive and makes one reflective. The child is not only a name for others, or an I who speaks, but also a self to himself.

A main element in the child's development is communication. Various forms will be discussed in Chapter 3. From a pedagogical point of view, it should, however, be noted here, how important the role of the child's partner in communication is. In the general pedagogical model, the pedagogue speaks and the child is trained to listen to the other, at least the pedagogue/parent, mainly in the sense of acknowledging the other's authority, i.e. obeying him. Some pedagogues and philosophers have, however, pointed to the other side of this process. Communication is in the first place listening to the other. The other comes first. The place of the other is the place of the dialogue. One can only communicate and hold a conversation, when one can 'hear'. This approach has also its consequences for the pedagogical dialogue. Instead of surveillance and supervision which show the modern domination of the eye, the ear should be restored. Not in the sense of requiring obedience but in the sense of an honest dialogue: listening to each other and talking to each other.

Based on these reflections, Kirchner summarises the way in which Korczak, as one of the great pedagogues of the twentieth century, listened to the child. Korczak was convinced that one can only educate a child when one communicates with him. However, the intentions of the educator are balanced with the rights of the child, to which belong the right of the child to respect, and the right of the child to live in the present. Every pedagogy requires a precise diagnose, which means to listen to what the child tells as his story of life. Listening in such a way means that the adult has attention in the sense of even hearing before he hears. He has to open up himself and to have an open ear. Listening also means to have patience and take time. One should be careful with verbal interferences as they can have an element of coercion. Pedagogues should refrain from having the first or the last word.42 These requirements underline the notion of communication as being only possible in an equal relationship. To this may be added the consequences drawn by Levinas: 'Notre pédagogique ou psychagogique est rhétorique, dans la position de celui qui ruse avec son pro-chain. (...) Elle aborde l'Autre non pas de face, mais de biais; non pas certes comme une chose - puisque la rhétorique demeure discours et que, à travers tous ses artifices, elle va vers Autrui, sollicite son oui. Mais la nature spécifique de la rhétorique consiste à corrompre cette liberté. C'est pour cela qu'elle est violence par excellence, c'est à dire injustice. (...) Renoncer à la psychagogie, à la démagogie, à la pédagogie que la rhétorique comporte, c'est aborder autrui de face, dans un véritable discours.'43

**Information as energy and nutrition**

Information seems to work like a nutrient which gives energy and enables the child to develop in the fullest sense. Nutrients, however, must be well prepared and offered in the right place and at the right time in order to be effective.

The short descriptions of the five stages of development demonstrated that at every stage information is used and needed. Likewise it is evident that information plays a role in physical, emotional, cognitive and social development. In the scientific literature

pertaining to child development, there is an abundance of research on cognitive development. The cognitive approach even seems to dominate other fields, such as social development. Remarkably less is written about emotional development, although this type of development appears from the very beginning to influence all other aspects. 44

Emotions can take control over reason. They can cause disappointment, but also a sense of feeling for others. They bring order to human experience and provide a sense of security. Emotions often provide the motivation to act in a certain way and affect, for example, school performance in a positive or negative sense. Stress and pressure cause an inability to think clearly and process information needed to complete a task. Emotions also influence the child’s view of the world and the role of himself in society. Memories of childhood are carried with human beings for the rest of their lives and influence their relationships, social skills and life orientation. Especially in the case of emotional deprivation, the role of emotional (non/under) development becomes significant: ‘Emotional deprivation, the prolonged absence of sufficient stimulation from personal interactions and experiences of attachment and affection, inhibits the child’s overall development. Children who are denied opportunities to experience love, joy, happiness, and contentment during infancy and in the early years have less opportunity for optimal physical, mental, and social development, resulting in possible delay of motor, language, and intellectual skills. When intimate social interactions are denied, the child has little basis on which to build a repertoire of positive emotional experiences that lead to healthy personality formation and a sense of self-esteem.

Furthermore, the child tends to be self-centred and demanding, with a poorly developed self-concept formation. The behavioral results of prolonged emotional deprivation include listlessness, emaciation, undue quietness, general apathy, loss of appetite and a variety of psychosomatic illnesses. Young children deprived of love and caring in their daily lives tend to exhibit manifestations of disturbed interpersonal relationships and inadequate social skills such as avoidance of others, aggression, and hostility.’ According to Draper, the reason for a less systematic study of children’s emotions in children seems to be that emotions are experienced at a pre-cognitive level and therefore do not readily lend themselves to description according to the strict canons of empirical scholarship, which relies on what is observable and verifiable. 45 Nevertheless, emotions and thoughts are interlinked and form an interactive process of energy exchange, their development should keep pace with child rearing practices in the information that is offered.

Information takes various forms and compositions at the different stages and during the development of the different aspects of a child. A serious discussion with parents about what they think of a family member who is seriously ill, offers an older child the possibility to gain information about how to deal with illness, taking medicine, relying on doctors or others or no one at all; and, to find a way of communicat-

44. A recent exception is Goleman, D., Emotional Intelligence, Bantam Books, New York, 1995. The title, however, still refers to modern pre-occupation with cognition.

ing with people in such circumstances. Such a discussion, however, has little to offer to a toddler who tries to understand family relationships, to behave accordingly, using the right words for it: an uncle is not only uncle but also has a first name and can even be a brother. There is an enormous variety of possibilities for gathering information: using the senses, especially hearing and viewing; manipulating objects; crawling and climbing; non-verbal and verbal communication, being alone and in the company of others; and, the use of various media. It is impossible to grow up without information. As far as the nutrient-like function of information is concerned, the child grows up by feeding on information.

The enormous flow of information which the child encounters at first sight demonstrates how the child is part of a global process of energy. Energy manifests itself in the form of all kinds of vibrations. By using his senses, the child starts to discern these energetic currents in sounds, forms and colours, smells and tastes, and impressions. Gradually these energy currents crystallize into concepts, ideas and thoughts. The global approach of the world is replaced by a personal view, based on limited concepts, which condition adherence to certain views. They can inhibit attention and accurate perception, and are sometimes then called prejudices. The importance and far-reaching impact of the first impression, the first information gathered, is well-known to job-applicants or to people on first encounters in unfamiliar situations.

This development shows a transition from a global, all pervading life process into a limiting, crystallising process in which a human being considers himself to be the core of the matter, perceiving the world from his point of view. The heart of an authentic human being, however, is to live with to respect for all living beings. Such an approach based on the values of human rights is essentially global, comprising all living beings. The development of a child envisages a 'return' to the original or authentic human being.

The development of personality and social participation
The role of information for a child's development can generally be described as contributing to a child's development of his personality and his social participation. Some aspects will be considered here.

With respect to his environment, a child gradually discovers the group of human beings to which he belongs: his family, and in a larger sense the cultural community. They give him a feeling of security and safety, a place of refuge, and space in which to develop. It is in response to his early questions that he learns that he is a separate being with a name of his own, yet also with a name which refers to his family. In this way, knowledge about his lineage is established. The name is not only a point of reference for others but also the expression of his individuality. Children are sensitive to names and sometimes change their names and choose one that fits them more.46

In playing and undertaking activities, the child learns about his capacities and

46. Such examples can also be found in children's literature: Gripe, M., Josefin, Bonniers, Stockholm, 1975, p. 4. The girl finds her name Ann Grey not fitting to her - she is still too young for it, she thinks - and writes this name on the bottom of a carton, which she hides in a cupboard until later. She sets off with an other name: Josefin Johandersson, combining the unique Josefin with the common Johansson and Andersson of many others.
how to use them. In his contact with others, he will also learn about other aspects of his personality: his temperament and his character. Impulsive behaviour on the part of a child results in parental reactions that differ from those that an introverted child might experience. Equally, a self-centred child receives treatment from his peers that is different from that which a child with a more moderate image of himself might expect. Such reactions not only give information about oneself, but also about desirable social behaviour. The image of self functions as an ordering, structuring centre that needs the continuous approval of other human beings, which also leads to adaptation. In this way, the image of the self is both the cause and effect of a child’s search for information in his social activities.

Children who grow up in different cultural contexts, as it is the case for the increasing groups of immigrants in Western societies, are confronted with different sources of information. These sources can be confusing and lead to learning a mixture of habits and norms at home and in school, which may be not satisfying for any of the parties involved. The ability to clearly express oneself, and to speak a language properly is of utmost importance. Language offers the possibility to formulate requests and to ask questions. Communication in different social contexts offers the possibility to meet new people with different values. They serve as new sources of information, which help the child to form ideas of his own and to adapt his former concepts.

In general, a human being seeks to maintain inner consistency: he assimilates easily information which is consonant with his concepts. Dissonant information requires accommodation: adapting one’s views to the new information. This process of accommodation is the case for all kinds of concepts, including the image of self. As a result of this selective learning, a child begins to make choices. These choices concern, for example, the social field: playmates, friends and social participation such as going to clubs or a party. Choices are also made with respect to beliefs, cultural experiences, and values. Much depends on the way children develop skills to seek and process information, and find and use reliable sources and adequate searching strategies.

Children will also learn how to form views and express opinions. In trying to form concepts of different aspects of life, they also form their own lives, which means that they gradually try to find answers to ‘underlying, deeper life-questions’, searching for real causes and final goals in life. When they are reared in one culture or tradition, they will try to evaluate its values against the other cultures and traditions that they meet. Such experiments and activities can only be undertaken successfully when adequate information is present. When children gain information about different cultures they begin to realise that these various cultures have different answers to fundamental issues such as the mystery of life and death; the causes of illness and suffering; and, attitudes towards life, nature and fellow human beings.

Children learn most by direct experience in different ways: by imitation, by trial and error, by conditioning or by reward. However, they can only learn when they feel accepted by others and are raised in an atmosphere of warmth, security and respect. Such an environment depends on a well-balanced mix of non-verbal and verbal communication. The main source of information are the parents of the child. They mould his first views and encounters with the outer world.

As the child grows up he learns to take care of himself. In a practical sense, he is taught how to eat with a spoon, how to do his shoe-laces and how to ride a bicycle.
He learns to be hygienic, to take care of his belongings and to plan his activities when he does not like to be hurried up. In larger families, children normally help in the household, taking care of each other and fulfilling small tasks. When these tasks include external encounters, the foundation is laid for participation in society: children learn to go on errands, to use the telephone, to make appointments, to write or draw in a competition and organise parties. Children in Western countries seem to follow the pattern of their middle or upper class parents and are called ‘diary-children’: they are overloaded with activities and appointments, already living according to the dictates of their diaries.

To take care of oneself means first of all that children gather information and develop skills in order to meet their primary needs: food, housing and (income) activities. In most families, parents provide for these needs, but in some cases and countries, children have to take care of themselves and are members of society at an early age. To meet their needs they may turn to begging, working in factories, or agriculture.

In society, children are confronted with a number of sources of information, and gradually learn that they can be useful and stimulating but also contradictory, unreliable and injurious. In general, children learn about possibilities and dangers, physically and psychologically. Riding a bike is a skill. Yet, participating in traffic means not only that a child can broaden his action radius, but also that he has to obey traffic rules, avoid risky manoeuvres and be mindful of the behaviour of others and possible dangers.

Reading skills offer the possibility of ‘travelling in the mind’, meeting people with different habits, experiencing adventures, romantic encounters and fairy tales. These skills also provide the opportunity to confront the drawbacks of life, prejudices, awkward thoughts and feelings, materialistic values and discrimination. Children need information and guidance on how to deal with these various sources of information and the dangers they are confronted with, living in this world. Such dangers include domestic and urban violence; all types of pollution; and, the manipulation by adults. Children can unconsciously be confronted with advertisements or hidden persuasive messages in youth magazines, films etc.

The ability to take care of oneself also gradually includes the capacity to know, what to expect of others and oneself: knowing about rights and duties. Such knowledge is gradually accumulated and nurtured by a feeling of justice and experiences of injustice. Open communication within the family fosters such moral and civic skills in a harmonious fashion. The importance of caring for oneself stems from the support it gives to one’s quality of life. An experiment with infants has yielded positive reactions, when the infants discovered they were able to put a mobile into motion by turning their head. 47 It is not enough for children to know that they can influence their environment, or participate in decision making in the family, they should also know how to make a useful contribution and decision. If the circumstances are right, children can and will express their views on their environment, the spaces to play and meet each other, safe roads and places, and the opportunities to engage in activities. At later age, children will also use these skills in choosing a profession, seeking a

job or working for democratic school and labour conditions. As the child grows up, his sphere of activity becomes larger and as a result his chances of meeting and living with others are increased. From the first prenatal encounters, the child notices more consciously the presence of others. This information is used to observe the similarities and differences in others. Later on, more deliberate decisions are taken about the persons with whom a child wishes to play, to communicate or to spend time with. Gradually, the child gathers more information about social roles from different sources and tries to practice them in fantasy play and meetings with peers. ‘Studies of cultural influence typically focus on particular agents in the society and how they affect development. The agents most frequently examined are the child’s caretakers; who, for the young child, are usually the biological parents and other family members. Beyond the immediate family, other agents whose influence becomes more prominent as the child grows older are neighbourhood companions, such mass communication media as television and newspapers, such community groups as clubs and gangs, and formal educational institutions. (...) Often the agents of cultural change are not people but communications media such as books, magazines, films, and radio and television broadcasts.’

Therefore, the first sources of information are parents and siblings. In small families, the possibilities for meeting and interacting with other children are more limited and provide for smaller variety of experiences.

Other sources of information are television and other media, other family members or adults, peers, clubs and school. All these so called ‘agents of cultural influence’ offer information about social life. Children compare such models, imitate and use them in their play, forming concepts of what a boy or girl could and/or should do, how to behave, feel or think. This assimilation of traditions and values also includes a more or less individual interpretation of them and a personal performance and expression. Such a transfer of information is the basis of a child’s cultural participation.

In summary, information plays an important role in helping the child to participate in society. This participation includes: social survival, which means being able to fulfil one’s primary needs; social life, especially the aspect of role-taking; social participation, which does not only include being member of several groups and activities, but also capacity for moral understanding and behaviour; knowing about rights and duties; and cultural participation, which means knowing about one’s history and tradition, and using skills to express them.

On a cognitive level, information plays a role in helping the child to influence his circumstances of life. It also helps him to make choices about his role and social encounters. It makes him less dependent on others.

The contribution information makes to the psychological aspects of a child’s social participation lies in the help it offers in caring for himself. The child will get a grip on his environment by knowing about himself and others, by information about expected behaviour and possible responses. It makes him more self-reliant. He also learns to understand others and will be informed about his dominant and minority culture and the underlying values.

In the pedagogical field, information from various sources offers the child a gradual orientation on his environment, his own role and the roles of others. By using and comparing information the child finally tries to find answers to the questions: in which world do I live and how do I live in it?

**Authentic human being**

After considering the role of information in the various stages and aspects of a child’s development and having sketched information’s contribution to the development of personality and social participation, the role of parents and teachers should be considered. The dialogue with the child is the natural means of communicating norms and values, i.e. education of character. This means accepting the child, not only as he is, but also as he could be. The latter forms an appeal to the child; one that takes him serious as a human being. ‘Precisely by helping the child to form qualities such as perseverance, honesty, soberness, public spirit, critical ability etc., one helps the child to become “full-grown, great” in the true sense of the word.’

The role of parents and teachers can be considered in the broad sense, as used in Chapter 1, meaning everyone in the role of caretaker or of educator. To the question what is expected of them, reference should be made to the narratives in Chapter 1. It will be noted that a lot of ‘natural’ or traditional knowledge and insight nowadays is missing. Hence the abundance of parents’ aids: books and counselling; and, teaching methods and training. All contain stories for parents and teachers about their pedagogic and educational roles.

All traditions share the capacity to give answers to the essential questions of life. These questions concern man’s attitude towards the extremes of life, birth and death – and beyond! – and everything that happens in between these poles. Whatever one may think of life, this in-between life is, at least, characterised by incidental or chronic illness, aging and decay. Traditions differ in the way they respond to these facts of life. To give just one example: what does the death of a child mean? How can a parent find an answer to such a deeply saddening experience? Two stories from different traditions explain how.

**Story of the daughter of Jairus**

Now when Jesus returned, the crowd welcomed him, for they were all waiting for him. Just then there came a man named Jairus, a leader of the synagogue. He fell at Jesus’ feet and begged him to come to his house, for he had an only daughter, about twelve years old, who was dying. While Jesus was still speaking, someone came from the leader’s house to say: “Your daughter is dead; do not trouble the teacher any longer. When Jesus heard this, he replied: “Do not fear. Only believe, and she will be saved.”

When he came to the house, he did not allow anyone to enter with him, except Peter, John, and James, and the child’s father and mother. They were all weeping and wailing for her, but he said: “Do not weep, for she is not dead but

sleeping.” And they laughed at him, knowing that she was dead. But he took her by the hand and called out: “Child, get up!” Her spirit returned and she got up at once. Then he directed them to give her something to eat. Her parents were astonished, but he ordered them to tell no one what happened.50

Story of Kisa Gotami

Kisa Gotami had an only son, and he died. In her grief she carried the dead child to all her neighbours, asking them for medicine, and the people said: “She has lost her senses. Her boy is dead.” At length Kisa Gotami met a man who replied to her request: “I cannot give you medicine for your child, but I know a physician who can, go to Sakyamuni, the Buddha.” Kisa Gotami repaired to the Buddha and cried: “Lord and master, give me the medicine that will cure my boy.” The Buddha answered: “I want a handful of mustard-seed,” and added: “The mustard-seed must be taken from a house where no one has lost a child, husband, parent, or friend.”

Kisa Gotami now went from house to house, and the people pitied her and said: “Here is mustard-seed, take it!” But when she asked: “Did a son or daughter, a father or mother, die in your family?” they answered her: “Alas! the living are few, but the dead are many. Do not remind us of our deepest grief.” And there was not a single house that had not experienced the loss of a beloved.

Kisa Gotami became weary and hopeless, and sat down at the wayside. She considered the fate of men: “How selfish am I in my grief! I thought I alone had lost a child, but in every village the dead are more in number than the living. Death is common to all.”51

Learning how to deal with facts of life is the essence of growing up. It forms the nucleus of a child’s rearing and education. Learning to be a human being is everyone’s profession. Learning a profession can have two functions or reasons: either it serves to provide a livelihood or it supports becoming a more worthy human being. Generally speaking, the results of child-rearing and education have been children who were raised as consumers. The increasing amount of advertisements directed at even very young children, is only one indication. Child-rearing, education and vocational training are focused on making a livelihood and material success. Such a goal is too limited for a human being, who has the potential of an authentic human being. Yet, in order to rear and educate children as authentic human beings, the educators themselves have to be authentic human beings.

What then is an authentic human being? A mature or authentic human being is a human being who has straightened out the essential questions of life for himself. Such a person can cope with the extremes of life and everything in between. Life, in

whatever form it may present itself to an authentic human being, will not cause any-
more problems. To live, which also means to die, is not a problem.

Such an authentic human being is not a supernatural or mysterious human being. He can be found in the prototypes of all religions. In essence, such prototypes have the same characteristics. Likewise, the essence of an authentic human being can be found in pedagogic systems, which have sprung from religious traditions. Such traditions have always been concerned with education and founded schools, for example Jesuits, Torah, Koran, and Bible schools.

How would an authentic human being respond to the needs of a child for information as a function of his development? An authentic human being accepts life as it comes and goes. There is neither an urge nor an intention to grasp or to hold on. He has understood that the image of the world that is made up by his senses is an illu-
sive image.\textsuperscript{52} Not only are the senses limited and selective, but every image is static and reality is essentially continual change. Therefore, his approach is realistic. He understands that a child’s development begins with grasping. By grasping sounds, images, objects and later on by grasping thoughts and feelings, desiring fulfilment a child develops his personality and interacts with others. An authentic human being can also teach a person how to let go.

An authentic human being knows what he is doing: his acts are not trial and er-
ror, learning by experience, but instead he acts as a matter of course, self-evidently. He will not follow precepts, methods or authorised guidance instead act on the par-
ticular situation itself. In his interaction with the child, he shows life as an art. Such an art can be learned by attention and discipline, by learning to discern adequately. Then a child will be able to develop and gain insight. Such insight is not a mere theo-
retical result, but an experienced value which can be applied in real life situations.

The life of an authentic being is without stories. He does not need narratives to live. Yet, he can understand the narratives, as others tell them and live by them, but he will not judge such stories. He knows that children, people in the process of growth, need stories to direct their lives, to follow a guide.

The best information an authentic human being gives is by being, by mere pres-
ence. It is information without language, apart from emotion or cognition. He him-
self lives without asking questions. However, the child needs language to learn about reality, to express himself and to interact with others. Nevertheless, language itself is considered a metaphor of reality.\textsuperscript{53}

For an authentic human being, a child is a unique human being, who lives here and now. Because of this uniqueness there is no absoluteness in education and its ef-
ficts. Educating means teaching how to cope with the facts of life. Nothing is ex-

\textsuperscript{52} In some traditions, reality is considered as an illusion, not reliable, not absolute, not essential, for example in Hindu and Buddhist traditions. The unreliability of human senses for objective perception, the impossibility of objective perception, has become a subject of discussion in modern physics. The introduction by means of new technology of what with a modern expression is called ‘virtual reality’, would mean in these older traditions: illusion raised to the second power?

\textsuperscript{53} Mauthner, F., Beiträe zu einer Kritik der Sprache, Meiner, Leipzig, 1923\textsuperscript{3} (three volumes), reprinted; Olms, Hildeshheim, 1967. See also: Gustafsson, Språk och lögn, Norstedt, Stockholm, 1979; in German: Sprache und Lüge. Drei sprachphilosophische Extremisten, Friedrich Nietzsche, Alexander Bryan Johnson, Fritz Mauthner, Hanser, München, 1980.
cluded as information, which can help the child to understand the questions of life. As life is considered a continuous processing of energy, such information requires certain conditions. Information must be honest. There is no reason to obscure the facts of life. Communicating information can only take place in a reliable relationship. Information should be gained in free perception. Such perception is free from projections, from prejudices. It is perceiving with attention, without colouring stories. Information is never fixed, but, instead, gives possibilities for various reactions. A child should know about life's capacity for change.

Growing up with information means learning to respond to the questions of life. In practice, this process means learning to make choices. An informed choice requires good information. Good information requires a good informer. Such an informer is honest and has integrity; he is authentic. Education, involving a response to the facts of life, is only possible then by authentic human beings. They communicate by their very being the value of information. Such communication takes place in a face to face human interaction. It needs a human informer and cannot be replaced by information technology or the media.

Conclusion

From the very beginning of life, information plays a role in the development of a human being. Information is not only a necessary factor in the different stages of development from prenatal development to adolescence, but also in the various characteristics: physical, emotional, cognitive and social. In the most general sense, a child in growing up is an information seeker. This process of information seeking begins with the use of the senses, grasping for salient signals. Gradually, information becomes more complex, originating from an increasing variety of sources. Much of the success of information seeking, of development in general, depends on the environment in which the child finds himself. The impact of early emotional attachment on further development should not be underestimated.

Information helps one to become less dependent, more self-reliant through self-knowledge. Self-knowledge is hardly possible without encounters with others. The information gathered from objects and persons in the environment stimulates development and enables the child to develop and express his unique being as a personality and in social participation with others.

When growing up is considered as becoming full-grown, the information seeking is related to becoming an authentic human being. Such a human being has solved the questions of life and can respond to the facts of life, which are revealed in birth and death, illness and the inevitable process of change and decay.

To become an authentic human being, a child has to be taught by an authentic human being. Such an information exchange relies on a reliable human relationship.