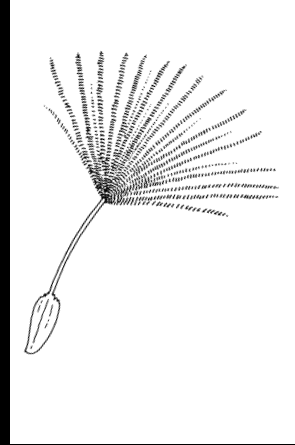


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# **Pupils' School Failure or Schools' Failure?**

A combined theoretical and practical model  
for teacher training in Europe





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## Foreword

This project was economically possible by an allowance from EU – Comenius (no 71574-CP-2-2000-DE-COMENIUS-C3.2). It is a co-operation between three European universities, whose logos are presented below. The main goal for the project was to prepare pedagogical guiding materials for a comparative face to face course for European teachers on school failure. One part of these materials is this book which contains the theoretical frames belonging to the course. Together with this book, videotapes, describing different perspectives on school failure in Sweden and Germany, were prepared. By sharing these experiences in the course with participants from European countries, new ways for ‘solutions’ of school failure are meant to be opened.

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## Introduction

This book focuses on the theoretical and practical background for the project *“The problem of school failure and its implications for teacher education”* (Comenius no 3.2) and is meant to be used as a ground for comparative course discussions among teachers about school failure in Europe. The authors come from three European countries: Sweden, Germany and Italy. They are all teacher trainers and researchers with long theoretical and practical experience in the field of school-failure.

The text in general is critically discussing (special) education knowledge using historical as well as recent examples, to illustrate problems with one-sided technical and instrumental approaches in teaching-situations. In this context discussion, some distinctive features of modern society and modern school are discussed to understand frequent use of technical and instrumental approaches in teaching at schools (Part I).

The focus of the discussion will point out that teaching knowledge can gain in understanding school-failure using different perspectives in the daily pedagogical schoolwork with children. It is argued that one-sidedness in the perception of teaching situations excludes a balanced comprehension of other method-, teaching- and learning possibilities. It is also argued that it leaves out possibilities for changes of “frozen” pedagogical traditions.

One of the book’s central themes is a critical analysis of traditional attitudes to learning and of methods dealing with pupils who start their school careers as “normal” children and are gradually labelled as “failures”. Following a constructivistic general basic approach in the three parts of the texts, the phrase: “this pupil has difficulties”, or: “this pupil is conspicuous” will be “deconstructed” into a perspective

in which the child's behaviour is looked upon as appropriate in the specific situation.

In one of the texts (Part II) learning is seen as a cybernetic process of self-regulation and this has, it is argued, consequences for the pedagogical structure of the teaching and learning processes. The idea of self-determined learning in so called didactic "drifting zones" (freedom within frames), is developed and created by the processes of constructivistic education. Learning is dealt with as a situation for "co-operative learning" by illustrating its basic principles and 'ingredients', together with the role of the teacher.

Finally, it can be said that all texts will refer to the work of different researchers and teacher trainers in the field. The theoretical frames will be discussed by examples in each part, where difficult classroom situations are described and analysed within this constructivistic theoretical background.

One example (Part III) of this theoretical approach is an action research-based teacher development programme on co-operative learning will be given. The principles, the main components and the evaluation of the programme will be illustrated. As examples, co-operative learning-based activities will be described. These were produced by Italian teachers for their classroom situations.

# PART I

by ROLF HELLDIN

# Special Education: Perspectives, Social Sciences and Ethics<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

A good pedagogic method, which is frequently used in pre-school methodology to teach groups of children visual perspective, is to let them draw a boot from different directions and to let them discover that the boot looks different depending on from which view point it is drawn. It is, however, not enough to have the children draw the boot from only one direction for them to understand the principle of perspective. The understanding of "the boot" is broadened by having it drawn from many different perspectives.

The text below is permeated with the following hypothesis which can also be illustrated by the above descriptive statement: specific educational problems, for example reading- and writing problems/dyslexia, problems in the cognitive area, or problems with 'the students' uncontrolled behaviours/ADHD, MBD etc. can be interpreted, and thus handled pedagogically in many different ways. Two statements in particular hold the text together: 1. Special education knowledge is of the type that gains by using several academic areas in its analysis of the field and in its training of special educators; 2. Its knowledge has, when viewed from a historic perspective, been of a *technical/instrumental (influence) type*. The field has thus had its fo-

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<sup>1</sup> This part has also been published in a revised form in Swedish in Jonsson, B. & Roth, K. (2003; in press): *Valfrihet, gemenskap och överläggning*. Lund: Studentlitteratur

*cus on the individual*<sup>2</sup>, as its identity determining foundation, which entails that:

Individually focused and technically oriented methodological models have driven work in the pedagogic field. Examples of this are the goal oriented "individual treatment programs" or the "diagnostic evaluations", two related concepts, which have their foundation in the medical area. The individual/student as an isolated entity is in both cases the main object of the educational analysis and of the pedagogic influence;

The self image/identity, research, and development discussions in the field have been tied to these and similar models;

*An ethical reflection*, where the critical capacity of reflexive activity may be used, has largely been missing during certain periods in internal, but maybe more significantly, in external debates concerning the problems of the training of the professionals.

The text is organised in the following fashion: First, I discuss the need for a *holistic* approach within the special education field – both its theoretical and educational relevance and its educational relevance within the field's professional training. I describe in what I mean ought to be a theoretical foundation for the nowadays worn out expression and I discuss, from the point of the concepts "supplement" and "critical analysis", my view of the concept *holistic*. I then go on to present alternative analyses of interpretation frameworks, which are

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<sup>2</sup> Habermas (1995 B) characterises the concept *instrumentality* as a "mechanism" which *excludes co-operation* in the "co-ordination of action" between two or more actors: "It is not possible for communication processes to *simultaneously* be undertaken to reach agreement with a participant and to have influence over him i.e. to evoke something from within him. From the perspective of the participants, an agreement cannot be coerced, cannot be forced by one party onto the other – either instrumentally through immediate intervention within the situation of the action, or strategically, by result calculating influence of the attitude of the opponent." (p. 114)

medically based, instrumental, and focused on the individual. This presentation is a concrete attempt to make a draft of the need for supplementation, which I argue for, and to demonstrate the need to show the comprehension of the so-called whole picture. I want to stress that it is a question of a draft where I only include certain initial analytical threads, which I am not completing in this paper.<sup>3</sup> My intention here is focused on giving the reader a picture of what I mean by *an ethical supplemental approach* to the instrumental/technical philosophy. In conclusion, I sum up in Part 2, with the first part as a backdrop, by discussing in an ethical present day perspective, the goal oriented individualism which characterises today's curricula.

## A broadening of instrumental approaches

Technical/instrumental approaches are traditionally introduced with their universal demands into modern society at the onset of the Age of Enlightenment and the accompanying industrial development connected to this era. This period also sees the introduction of the beginning stages of social sciences. This attitude is the dominating foundation of the thought and discourse of the whole educational field. It also makes it possible for the scientific paradigm, which falls within its domains, to stubbornly keep its position and regain temporarily lost domains. In addition, this means that solidarity arguments, which are important sides of the ethical discourses, risk becoming more or less "blind spots" or frozen clichés in educational analyses and instructions.

It is therefore, in my point of view, often important, in order to broaden and deepen the understanding of educational problems, to

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<sup>3</sup> For thorough investigations on the same theme, see Helldin (1997; 1998).

have this insight based on different interpretations, which "complement" each other and thus present a complete picture of the problem. An example of such a supplemental starting point, taken from special education research, is Gunnar Kylén's holistic model (Kylén, 1979, Björklid & Fischbein, 1996). The main argument presented by these educational researchers is that supplements are often necessary since similar perspectives frequently lack aspects, which may be present in one of the other more diverse perspectives.

One example of this, which I elaborate on below in the analysis of Fridtjuf Berg's comprehension of deviation, may be the theoretical explanations of the medical perspective and practical, individually oriented treatment of "physical ethology" of a problem.<sup>4</sup> (See also below p. 8). In the worst case scenario, these explanations do not present any understanding of the ethical aspects of the problems or their emotional aspects. These are important aspects of pedagogic practice. "The gap" between the theoretical explanation and practice is too wide for the pedagogy to be able to gain from the explanations. The gap is also too wide for complete comprehension of the pedagogic situation. It is at times such as these that ethical supplemental attempts become especially important.

Henceforth, I will primarily discuss the auxiliary sciences, which, with their rational knowledge demands, have been the theoretical backdrop for special education intervention. What characterises these

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<sup>4</sup> Fridtjuf Berg (1851-1916) started his career as elementary school teacher in Finspång in 1875 and eventually became the Minister of Education. He was also during a long time a member of, and later the president of the Swedish public school teachers' association. He was a very committed and active debater in issues on education particularly in the Swedish Teachers' Journal for a great number of years. It is thus possible to assume that he had a great influence on the opinions held by the members of the teaching profession on educational issues especially those involving the remedial school organisation which he debated for with great favour at the beginning of the 20th century.

auxiliary sciences, where medicine, biology and psychological behaviourism historically have been the most common, has at times been a despotic instrumental use of knowledge where the collaborator/pedagogue has not been given the opportunity to ethically evaluate the nature of intervention. The subject of the intervention has, for good or for bad, become a manipulated object of the educator's knowledge.<sup>5</sup> This type of use of knowledge has become the predominant one in the modern specialised society and it influenced the special education field early on.<sup>6</sup> It follows *the instrumental pattern*: 1) *Point out* 2) *Carefully define* and 3) *Introduce remediation and remove obstacles*. An example of a strong expression of the above has been the diagnostic method where intervention follows this pattern. If one is to believe many researchers within the field of social education, the regular education system too, is dominated by this instrumental approach represented in methodological, but also in bureaucratic and organisational procedures.<sup>7</sup> (See for example: Heshusius, 1982, 1995; Kiel, 1995; Skrtic, 1995; Tomlinsson, 1995; Willis, 1977.)

The English educational sociologist Sally Tomlinson (1982, 1995) writes that the dominating social groups and professionals have always categorised, classified, and unilaterally discussed, in their work, the so called weak or deviant. Ideologies, argumentation and support systems for remediation of these groups vary from country to country.

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<sup>5</sup> I have in Helldin (1997) demonstrated that parents have often opposed this despotic significant interference with people's lives. This resistance was widely debated within the remedial school profession where it was often dismissed as poor knowledge. See p. 36.

<sup>6</sup> I analyse in Helldin (1998), p. 174 on, the role of the special education expert in the present day school.

<sup>7</sup> According to Habermas, we refer to an action as instrumental when: "...we view it in reference to the adherence to technical rules of action and evaluate it in reference to how effectively it intervenes in a physical condition" (Habermas 1990, p. 164)

However, the most important, shared international aspect is that other people, than those involved, are speaking for and about them. Socially weak people are, according to Tomlinson, frequently unable to speak for themselves or organise their own defence when necessary; i.e., significant ethical questions, emanating from social injustices and brought up by those concerned by them, have not been possible or have been pushed aside.

## 1

### Pedagogic problems as "illness"

The *pathological model* defines impairments according to the presence or absence of observable biological symptom. Biological processes that interfere with system preservation are "bad", or pathological, those that enhance the life of the organism are "good", or healthy. Thus, the pathological model is bipolar: At one pole is normal (i.e., the absence of pathological symptoms and health), at the other pole is abnormal (i.e., the presence of pathological symptoms and illness or "unhealth"). (Skrtic, 1986, p. 4).

According to Skrtic, the risk involved with medical or biological labelling of a problem, which is *also* educational, is that medical terminology is confused with educational terminology: the "sick" becomes the "abnormal" also in pedagogic situations and the "healthy" becomes the "normal". Education too, in the way the teaching is done, thus gets a medical tilt. For example, diagnoses strongly legitimise pedagogic methodology. This reductionist and absolute interpretation

of a problem require a supplement where ethical points of view are included. The way I view it, Skrtic develops this type of criticism in connection with the quoted expression "system preservation" in the rest of his text in the article. Briefly, the core of this criticism involves the following: because of the traditional overrepresentation of pathologically focused interpretations within the field, the ethical interpretations are in danger of being completely pushed aside. The social system, which these pathological models support, is thus maintained and prospective demands for change in pedagogy, organisation, and administration are eliminated. The whole system is, according to Skrtic, *functional*<sup>8</sup> (ibid.).

A one-sidedness in the perspective excludes (it is in this way active) therefore comprehension of other methods and prevents in its activity a more productive, versatile comprehension of the problem. The measures of change which are accepted treat the "problem of the individual" but rarely focus on the need for the system to bring about change. This deadlock is, according to Skrtic, a common form of (*special*) *education fundamentalism* where the focus is on the individual.<sup>9</sup> A well-known assertion in this type of criticism is that the individual in a case of this unilateral attitude becomes the "carrier" of a problem, which can be exclusively defined in constitutional terms. The student

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<sup>8</sup> For a good description of the traditional, functional analysis of education, see Karabel & Halsey (1977, the introduction). Simply stated, the most distinguishing trait of a functionalist attitude is a circular discussion of the type: That which has historically existed for a long time has worked and therefore, it will/must always exist.

<sup>9</sup> This is how Cherryholmes (1991) discussed the concept fundamentalism; it is to have an eye: "...to problem-solving or for short run instrumental gain or for purposes of economic or social efficiency". (p. 4) "A fundamentalist interpretation entails that its meaning is 'forever fixated': ...outside of time, and that the time bound languages of research, for example, statistical, mathematical, verbal or computer, convey that meaning so directly that it can be discerned without interpretation." (ibid., p. 4)

has (physically localised/identifiable) reading- and writing disorders. Similar discussions can be held concerning other perspectives than the medical.

### **The necessity of perspectivisation in the educational situation**

It is crucial for educational institutions providing pedagogic, social and, social science training, to bring forth the main arguments of different perspectives for theoretical comprehension and treatment of deviation problems. In my point of view, these main arguments are the educational main source of power for professional normative positions at different levels.<sup>10</sup>

For example, a (special) educator must regularly, as part of his/her ongoing daily work, consider critically his/her own activities and professional decisions. He/she must also be able to analyse his/her work globally, i.e., the special education activity *as an entity* – as an analysed object – must be the object of reflection. A special educator's work is not only work which attacks the student's "flaws". Ethical attempts to define the problem are necessary in this instance. Ethical reasoning presumes that diversity of thought processes is available to the student. It therefore also forms the basis for the professional discussion. Special education teachers frequently find themselves in discussions, which penetrate aspects of justice with regards both to the educational organisation in their community, and at the level of society as a whole. Special educators, but also other teachers, must constantly consider their own ethical viewpoints when they determine the conditions for impartial treatment of the students who make poor pro-

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<sup>10</sup> For example the attitude towards the students, the theoretical understanding or the more practical side of the operations.

gress in their educational endeavour. This fact should also be considered in the training of special educators. This training must be designed to give the students the possibility to *critically weigh different perspectives* against each other and against the usefulness within the professional situation, which will exist for the student in the future. This must take place in a democratic setting supported by relevant research and by the students' empirical experience. Different "partial interpretations" must, *on a solid foundation of good arguments*, be allowed to constitute a complete part of the "total" understanding, which can then be created. The parts do, so to speak, obtain their meaning in the dynamic of the whole.<sup>11</sup> In educational situations, being able to view different perspectives is thus necessary in order to create a diverse picture of the comprehension of the problem. By discussing several perspectives, the educator and the student are both given the opportunity to reflect on everyday practice from their own work and study situation and experience. In addition, they can criticise, on an ongoing basis, both the conditions of (special) education and the thought and actions of others. To view, from different perspectives, is a pedagogic procedure used to retest, among other things, the persistent guilt question: is the origin of the failure the concern of the "system" or of the student? In other words, perspectivation makes the ethical reflection possible (Kiel, 1995). On several occasions, I have used the concept "critical" and will briefly explain below how I define this concept.

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<sup>11</sup> In a different work (Helldin, 1998, chapter 4), I have discussed with theoretical reference to among others Jürgen Habermas theory of the communicative

## A critical analysis

Walter Benjamin views the comment of the "factual content" presented separately by different perspectives as a preliminary, but necessary, prerequisite for philosophical criticism of current problems within a specific research or educational area.<sup>12</sup> The goal of critical analysis is to present the "degree of truth" with the help of the content of several different interpretations. He states, if I have understood him correctly, that the prerequisite for creating and understanding a total entity is to be able to discriminate the perspectivised parts. Discrimination is also a prerequisite for the critical analysis of a phenomenon in a comprehensive fashion (Bolz & van Reien, 1993). It is, in my opinion, also a pedagogic condition which characterises comprehension processes: Knowledge is constructed by "placing side by side" different perspectives and discussing them in the light of each other. This is one of the basic conditions for analysing the knowledge within a professional field. Many people, no doubt, agree with this relatively obvious discussion which is also a type of basic intention in interdisciplinary research. An undifferentiated bias can thus be counteracted by supplementary perspectives.

A comment on the concept supplement is necessary here. The connotation of the concept is based on a consensus, which adds some complication. It may, of course, *also* be the case that perspectives in certain situations are *more or less suitable* as interpretation frameworks within a specific professional area. By this I mean that perspec-

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action, a pedagogic procedure that guarantees these democratic situations within the field of (special) education.

<sup>12</sup> Walter Benjamin was a German Jewish social science philosopher who was loosely connected to the so-called Frankfurt school. He was persecuted by the Nazis at the end of the 1930's and committed suicide in a hotel room in Spain. He fled from the Germans after the occupation of Paris where he was in exile at the time.

tivation can never disregard the presence of a procedure which is at the same time critical, interpreting, and comparing where all the current perspectives used within a professional field are constantly studied in the light of each other. Such an analysis can raise questions about the suitability of the perspective or indicate how certain perspectives have been allowed to dominate at the expense of others.<sup>13</sup> Such analyses must, from time to time, use a historic approach and require, among other things, the treatment of questions regarding *power relations between the prioritising of knowledge within different professional groups*.

### **Special education as a social problem**

An example of what I mean by critical knowledge analysis can be found in the special education story I relate in my book *Specialpedagogik som ett Socialt Problem* (Helldin, 1997). In this book, I have analysed the ideological view of and organisational suggestions for "solutions" of different deviation problems in education in older (19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century) educational discourses.<sup>14</sup> The text describes, using this focus, the compulsory education in Sweden, in particular, but also in the U.S., Norway, and Denmark.<sup>15</sup> It is my opinion that it is possible to distinguish certain strongly dominating sources of knowledge concerning the theoretical discussions of explanation. An exam-

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<sup>13</sup> An analysis of this kind of the special education field in the U.S. has been carried out by the American researcher Thomas Skrtic. (Skrtic, 1991, Skrtic, 1995.)

<sup>14</sup> By the concept discourse, I mean what people "think, say, write, and read about what they do". These discourses are "shaped by anonymous, historically situated presuppositions that organise and give meaning to thought, language, and activity". (Foucault in Skrtic, 1991, p. 27.)

<sup>15</sup> Empirical material has been articles in the journal *Hjälpskolan* (The Remedial School) which was an instrument for the Scandinavian remedial school group from 1923 to the end of the 1950's.

ple of such a dominating source is what, at the time, *was called the neuro-psychopathological scientific field* which discusses students' learning- and behaviour problems using theoretical references from the neurological research debate which characterises the period at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>16</sup> Medical science may be viewed as an adhesive compound, which characterises the theoretical background horizon of the first perspectives within the special education field.

I will give some examples below of the medical interpretation primacy and its consequences. Two of these are from the development of Swedish special education (see Helldin, 1997, especially chapters 3 and 6) and one is from the education history of the U.S. as interpreted by Franklin (1994). All three are examples which actualise the neuro-psychopathological interpretation of learning problems which dominate Swedish educational debate of today. Among other things, I will show that the medical question is neither new nor specifically Swedish. It has a long and definable history. The examples are chosen to reflect the risk of one-sided interpretations and to point out the need for alternative analyses including ethical comprehension components. These examples may also be viewed as discussions analogous to the discourse collisions taking place between medical and ethical discussions today – in other words, they are included in similar contexts as the historically selected examples point out to us.

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<sup>16</sup> There are, however, mostly less prominent people who already in these earlier stages when the knowledge of the special education field is in its introductory phase, point to the risks involved with a one-sided, medically oriented approach to the budding special education discipline. The arguments against this orientation are relatively weak, however. (Helldin, 1997, p. 38.)

## **Pathological analyses: Three historic examples**

### **Example 1:**

#### **Fridtjuv Berg and the arguments for the remedial class**

Theories of pathology have interested even very strongly socially engaged debaters within the field. One example that can be mentioned among others is Fridtjuv Berg who, in his persistent struggle for an integrated school for all social classes, won the acceptance of many teachers. If one reads works by this democratically engaged debater and minister of education, it is possible to detect in his discussion how interpretations based primarily on psychopathological theories legitimise the "line of demarcation" he wants to draw between "the sick" and "the healthy" in schools. This line is materialised in his various detailed suggestions for separate courses of study within and outside the framework of the compulsory school.

The difficult research question here is of course *why* he chooses the specific theories he chooses and when (in which situations) he chooses them. Given his, in other ways, strongly coloured social rhetoric, one is surprised by the fact that his reasoning does not place the deviant child in the school in an ethical perspective where his analysis *also* takes into consideration the questions of power in conjunction with the hierarchical society of the time. He notes, only in passing, the risk of having the poor over-represented in the remedial classes. Why doesn't he carry on a discussion politicising the medical elimination? He made that analysis concerning the basic right of the poor to public education. Why doesn't he also critically consider the social, political, or moral philosophical issues regarding deviant behaviours of different types within the educational system? I.e., does not the social theorist Fridtjuv Berg have, in his discussion, foundations anchored in so-

ciety. When viewed within what he characterises as the abnormal field, the deviation thus becomes de-ideologized and tied in a neutral medical or biological fashion to each individual. The critical aspect is thereby removed. The point of the risk I bring up is that the bias may leave the field open to overgeneralizations e.g. in instances regarding the number of students who should be considered deviant in some way. It is this type of overgeneralization, which may be encountered by a supplemental or alternative analysis.

Berg, who thus in certain situations strongly maintains the democratic right to meet even the children of lower socio-economic groups in the classroom setting, can strangely enough, in the same contextual situation, when his perceptual schedule obeys different laws, strongly advocate for segregation. Issues of ethics appear to regulate certain zones but not others for him. Is this possible since he makes a distinction in what he calls the "fair division", which is based on scientific arguments from the growing psychopathological and psychological fields? Is this "fair division" a prerequisite for the political arguments within the liberal equality movement he belonged to? These do discuss integrated education. The scientific segregation of the "sick" appears to be the moderator for these possibilities. Ethics and facts are directed to their own isolated domains, which are not encountered in Berg's analytical procedures. In this respect, he reflects the modern society's fragmented condition. The present time has made this division possible. Is it possible that science is so strongly connected to Truth and Justice that the ethical analysis is set aside and cannot rub shoulders with the Truth? It is unrighteous to exclude the socially and economically poor but the mentally poor "sick" individual can, in the name of scientific "objective" criteria, be excluded according to this point of view. The ideological basis of this democrat is, concerning

where he stands on segregation, certainly not unambiguous. The medical (psychopathological) overgeneralization in Berg's case can be summed up as follows: My hypothesis is, to put it briefly, that it has to do with the general status of different sciences in society. Berg simply "borrows" the status component in question to legitimise his reasoning and to develop a, for him, acceptable identity on mined land. Elimination was for him a politically very sensitive area. His political goal is to handle "the heavy dead weight" in the public school for which he is the advocate. The pressure from overworked teachers also weighed heavily on him. In addition, he had to bear in mind his chairmanship of Sveriges Allmänna Folkskolläraryörening (Sweden's teachers' association). He wants, through his actions, to save the idea of a public school for future generations.

## **Example 2:**

### **A. Tamm and S.E. Henschen**

An essential person in the field with both a psychological and medical interest was the head school physician Alfild Tamm, active in Stockholm. In her writing, the separation is often brought up in ethical, decontextualised, and technical terms. Tamm is obviously not primarily the person who creates the attitude towards science but she points out the current trends among the representatives in the field at the time.<sup>17</sup> She demonstrates in her articles that she is strongly influenced by a scientific personality active within the remedial school movement during this period. This is the neuroscientist professor S. E. Henschen who, in several articles, has demonstrated an interest in speech and writing from a neurophysiological perspective. He was

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<sup>17</sup> She has also presented Sigmund Freud's psychodynamic theories in detail in a couple of general articles. See *Hjälpskolan* 1925, pp. 11 and 42.

thus one of the early researchers in the field of dyslexia in Sweden. Tamm uses Henschen's theories to determine the connections between intellectual deficits and reading and writing problems in the school. She states that she is frequently faced with the problem that many of the children who are referred to her by teachers are referred for an evaluation primarily for reading and writing problems, not for intellectual deficits.

Henschen presented his neurological research in depth in one single long article in the middle of the 1920's. The article is relatively general and attempts to draw up guidelines for the understanding of higher psychological activity and its connection to the physiological structures of the brain; the discussion deals primarily with the localisation of sensory input. He does, however, mean that the goal of neurological research, in the long run, is significantly broader than the sensory physiological focal point, which is the foundation for the research, since "...neuroanatomy is only a means, like neuropathology, which is primarily of a practical nature". Of specific interest to the remedial teaching group in Henschen's articles was probably his interest in the establishment of the capacity, in the brain, for reading.

We have, with regards to the occipital area, a corresponding presence in the so-called angular gyrus (A) located in the lateral bark of the posterior hemisphere. If this is destroyed, the pat. loses the ability to interpret the physical meaning of letters and words, i.e. *read*. The pat. sees the shape of the word but does not understand its meaning. (*Hjälpskolan*, 1924, p. 42, my translation.)

The practical methodology, which is suggested in connection with special education, also shows dominating approaches, which can be related to those prioritising a medical interpretation approach.

In my book (see Helldin, 1997), I point out how different scientific areas strive to introduce their own view points within the special education field which in the 1920's was at the initial stages of development. *One* form of historic analysis, which may shed some light on today's situation within the special education field, must follow this striving for *a territory of expert knowledge* which at that time was developed within the fields of neurological research, psychology, and special education. According to the reference system found in professionalisation research, the attitude, argumentation, and actions of the professionals within the field are focused on the processes which result in the distribution and status hierarchies, the "market" where the professions are being established. Sarfatti Larson writes:

I see professionalisation as the process by which producers of special services sought to constitute *and control* a market for their expertise. (Larson, 1977, p. XVI).

All that is needed here is a rough outline to show the elements of Larson's discussion which may illustrate the contexts around the students who are identified as having different types of educational difficulties. I.e. the students who are also considered difficult to teach.

An important aspect to consider in order to understand the remedial teachers' interest in neuroscience is to direct the spotlight towards the *professional establishment processes* which were in use – that is, the processes where a professional authority and a clear identity are developed within a professional field – in other words, the basis for reaching an established position in the educational political discourse. This process is among other things connected to the possibilities of standardising the professional field. The knowledge areas in the present example were both parts of an expansion period and needed nour-

ishment and expert identity, as well as an operations domain, for its knowledge. Standardisation means a demarcation and definition concerning other allied professional areas and is, according to Larson, necessary in order to "stabilise the internal hierarchy" within the profession but also to stabilise relations of power to other competing fields. The standardisation process is also a part of the development of a basis for the "cognitive superiority" of the profession compared to the layman's knowledge of the field. This standardisation process is also necessary in order to create an identity concerning other "allied professional fields" at the occupational market where other professions, according to this research tradition, are fighting for *recognition and control*. These efforts (collective gatherings) are accentuated during times of restraint.<sup>18</sup> The market is a "foundation" that the profession has to adjust to, in order to operate in the modern competitively based society. I want to point out that the struggle in question can, in the worst case scenario, have disastrous effects on the students. For example, the earlier mentioned "over diagnostisation" with an inaccurate increase of identified "cases" may be the result. One can speculate whether status filled diagnoses in overheated expert situations may also, in spite of good intentions, result in carelessly executed evaluations and therefore have very negative effects on the future of certain students.

The auxiliary professions which, completely or partly, have had, or have, their livelihood in the educational field and who have represented the students in complex learning situations are primarily physicians and nurses, remedial teachers, learning specialists, psychologists, and guidance counsellors, but also administrators involved in

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<sup>18</sup> In Helldin (1998), by using interviews among other techniques, I have attempted to empirically cover this assertion.

special education such as principals and the those belonging to the relatively recently established position of department heads etc. Physicians have traditionally been important for the school's theories behind deviant behaviour because of their actual long professional presence in school settings. The medical profession has conveyed the medical interpretation of school related problems to the educators. The latter have probably been less powerful. It is the professional relationship of power between these fields, which is *also*, in my opinion, relevant to consider when analysing the special education role of knowledge.

### **Example 3:**

#### **The medicalization of American schools**

Berry Franklin (1994) gives an example of this criticism when he discusses the historic development of the field of American remedial education. In the 1960's, something strange happened to the American school system according to Franklin. *First*, there was a discourse change. What had earlier been referred to as "retardation" was now viewed as "full-fledged neurological impairment" labelled "learning disabilities". Second, the source of support of special education programs was changed. Franklin's analysis shows that before 1960, schools were mainly supported by school bureaucrats and leaders. Their support was primarily founded in an increased bureaucratic complexity within the American educational system. The remedial education organisation diagnosed the students who caused the greatest educational and behaviour disruptions in the school. In the 1960's, the parents of the students, formerly referred to as retarded, made themselves increasingly heard. Especially middle class parents played a significant role in this change of discourse and support for the children

who were considered difficult to teach. During the 50's and 60's, the prosperity of the American middle class increased. The Second World War was over and families could spend more time on their children and especially on their education. The dream of the successful child was given an intense interest but opportunities in the form of a good economy or good, well furnished schools took time. Many of the children of the middle class failed in school:

By explaining the school failure of their children as learning disabilities suburban parents were able to rescue from imminent collapse the dreams that they held for their children and for which they had sacrificed their financial resources and emotional well being. (Congress, Hearings, 1969, In: Franklin, 1994, p. 71, 72).

There were, according to Franklin, several reasons why a neurological explanation keeps hope alive. First it is comforting: a neurological "illness" removes the parents' as well as the school's responsibility for the problem. Second, the diagnosis is free of the stigma of the negative connotation connected with "retardation". The third reason, according to Franklin, is that educators "routinely" "...claim that special education can remedy the academic deficits associated with learning disabilities" (p. 72). These are rather familiar explanations. What makes Franklin's discussion interesting is his statement that the neurological explanations have been what have driven the discourse change, which paved the way for how the educational system started treating learning disabilities. In 1969, the medicalization of learning disabilities was given official status as handicap. The categorisation could therefore help the children:

We are the parents of the children who, until recent years, had no official name for the kind of disability that handicapped them. Our chil-

dren were relegated to the category of the mentally retarded or emotionally disturbed. Or, if they were not so severely handicapped, they were written off as lazy or branded as delinquent. (Ibid.)

In this hearing, one is careful to stress that the proposed "Learning disabilities" bill is *not* meant to:

.... serve children in poverty areas of the nation. The assistance which this bill will make possible will be available not on the basis of the average annual income in a given area but on where the problems are. I do not want to be misunderstood. I have supported programs which are designed to help our disadvantaged citizens. I have sponsored in their behalf and will continue to do so. But I really do believe that too many of our educational programs have been overly directed to reaching the poor per se rather than reaching out to solve problems where they exist regardless of the economic conditions of the person the area affected. (Ibid., p. 74, 75)

Behind the label, learning disabilities were several professional groups with several contradictory goals. It is not reasonable here, if one wants to understand the total picture, to only concentrate on the medical problem, which underlies certain difficulties. So to speak, one cannot only object to *the phenomenon as such* but must, as I argued earlier, use several perspectives in order to understand why the object of the investigation adjusted the way it did. In this case, when discussing the phenomenon "learning disabilities", Franklin states that we need to include in the analysis, among other things, demographic, economic, scientific theoretical, class determined, social, and professionally directed perspectives in order to fully understand what is included in the network of conditions which affect the final result. In my example above from Berry Franklin, parents, school administrators, medical specialists, psychologists, and educators were involved in the case.

In summary, it can be stated that just like in Fridtjuf Berg's analysis, the deviation definition is causing the groups to be torn between self-interests, protection of the socially disadvantaged, or direct help to those students who lived with school problems on a daily basis. In addition, *maintenance of order* in the school was a central underlying argument. In this case, special education problems are contradictory and difficult to describe and they need several analytical approaches. Maybe Berg, in the case described above, falls into the status and domination trap. We do not know for sure. As I have hinted, it may also be a political strategy from his liberal viewpoint.<sup>19</sup> The romance between the medical and educational fields has possibly met with success. The ethical analysis has taken place. Berg legitimises his demands for segregation primarily by using medical arguments and thereby temporarily puts the social, critical analysis on the back burner. The academic psychopathology has, like so often in the past, been allowed to legitimise control and segregation in the school.

### **The psychological movement and the school**

The psychological movement has also started to show an increasing interest in the educationally based activity. Here it is possible to detect initial connections between neuroanatomy and the expanding experimental psychology in the field of pedagogic deviation. The instrumental themes of pathologically based analysis are introduced and strengthened by the powerful and rapid psychological "conversion" during the second half of the 19th century. The view of early academic psychology on knowledge forms the primary basis for the psychopathological insights and action programs, which develop during

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<sup>19</sup> Regarding the difficulties of liberalism in an educational context, see below p. 38 in my description of Lynch (1995) and her objections.

this period. It is therefore important to study these early psychological attitudes in order to find alternative explanations of the early expansion within the field, an expansion that has long lasting effects on the individualisation question and on the remedial school pedagogy among others.

O'Donnell (1985) shows that primarily German research within the fields of sensor-motor physiology, neuroanatomy, and neurophysiology are the most important sources of knowledge for the physiological, experimental psychology. Within these three disciplines, it has been possible to demonstrate that mental processes were connected to neuromuscular function. It is difficult to isolate the underlying reasons for a rapidly growing interest and for the swift status recognition gained by the psychological movement within the academic tradition. In order to find the answer to this popularity, several aspects of this historic development must be highlighted. O'Donnell states that the psychological field is not exclusively:

...a body of knowledge; it is also an organisation of knowers... Legislation as well as logic, social influences as well as scientific insights shape the course of disciplinary development. (ibid., p. 1)

The development and the expansion of the discipline as an auxiliary science must also be connected to the rapid urbanisation and industrialisation of society. The great need for an increasingly better educated workforce demanded an answer to old questions why some can and others cannot, why some learn fast and correctly and others are slow.

According to Cohen (1983), the rapidly growing psychiatric movement in the U.S. shows great interest in public school education during the most therapeutically expansive period in the 1920's. This was – he states – "virgin territory" for psychiatrists and here were possi-

bilities for them to win the battle against mental illness. The advantage of the school as a place of operations was that it offered the possibility of prevention. The school was the place where the possibility of success was the greatest: it gathered all children, this is where the greatest thrust must be made. The hope of overcoming the genetically based mental problems was put on the school. The social control of internal problems was placed in the domain of public education. (p. 127)

In the text above, I have attempted to show that a dilemma exists between the goal rational, instrumental/technical, individually focused discussion and the discussion, which has a joint ethical point of origin.<sup>20</sup> Dilemmas are, by definition, difficult to solve. An orientation, which focuses too heavily on the goal rational influence approach easily, overshadows the ethical discussions while a focus towards the opposite pole may have the opposite effect. It appears difficult to find "a third route", a balance between the two extremes.<sup>21</sup> This dilemma may also be treated philosophically in a similar fashion from the viewpoint of polarised concepts which, in my opinion, are variations on the same theme, such as: individualism/collectivism, freedom (of choice)/solidarity, isolation/community, authority/agreement, ego-tism/altruism, nationalism/pluralism, etc. This dilemma is today, and has been in the past, a common theme in philosophical discourses perhaps especially those of a political nature. All of these problematic intersections of the polarities may be discussed using the concepts individualism and freedom as a foundation. The concepts are more topical than ever in today's pluralistic society and in today's pluralistic school. They are multi-faceted and include more aspects than the ones

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<sup>20</sup> See also my discussion concerning this question in Helldin, 1997, p. 153.

I have already presented in part one. I will discuss polarities of this type below in an educational context, more specifically by using curriculum texts as a main empirical foundation and placing the topical concept freedom (of choice) at the centre. In conjunction with discussions of individualism in the context of education, one must confront many basic problems of a philosophical and ethical character. In the following, I therefore broaden the discussion regarding the concept individualism and treat the concept from other viewpoints than the purely instrumental. In this respect, the philosopher and sociologist Jürgen Habermas (1990, 1995 A, 1995 B) has been an important theoretical source for me.

## 2.

### Freedom (of choice) or solidarity – an important ethical question for the future

#### Introduction

Jürgen Habermas points out some central distinctive features of modern industrialised society. It is a society, which *stresses the individual's right to freedom* before that of community. A part of this distinctive feature is the undeniable right to promote one's own interests, i.e. to "realise oneself", as long as this does not interfere with the freedom of others. If we place this modern distinctive feature in an educational context, we can for example discuss the right to an individual-

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<sup>21</sup> Anthony Giddens (1999) has in an interesting discussion, in a political context, tried to find "a third path" – i.e. a conciliatory "union" between the concepts individualism and solidarity.

ised educational setting or demand that students' specific, unique backgrounds be considered and that these backgrounds be respected in the pedagogic situations which students encounter. This focus:

... paved the way for emancipation from age-old dependencies, were experienced at the same time as abstraction, as alienation from the totality of an ethical context of life. (Ibid. p. 83)

This idea of freedom is expressed among other places, in the 90's freedom of choice philosophy within the field of education and in the individual high school curricula where the intention is that each student is to plan his or her own individual course of study:

The school is to strive towards allowing each student to:

*Develop his/her own self knowledge and ability to plan his/her individual course of study*

Consciously consider continued academic and professional direction based on gathered experience and knowledge as well as on updated information, increase *his/her ability to analyse different possibilities of choice* and to determine which consequences these may have (Lpf 94: 1994 Års Läroplan för de Frivilliga Skolformerna,<sup>22</sup> p. 14, italics and translation mine).

### **The general consequences of freedom of choice**

According to Englund (1993), this freedom of choice will result in disintegration of an old Swedish fellowship and solidarity tradition within the field of education. The Swedish well fare model has been based on the central democratic idea of citizenship for everybody. The educational system's intentions have, ever since the end of the 1960's, been based on what Englund (1986), in his discussions regarding different curriculum codes, referred to as the democratic conception. A

central task for our educational system – brought forth in our curricula until Lgr 80 (Curriculum guide for 1st through 9th grade from 1980) – has been to "foster" i.e. to bring our children and youth up in professional agreement in a democratic direction. An important fostering aspect has been to ensure that the pedagogic situations created in education, in their content and construction, clearly reflect the idea of solidarity with the less fortunate in society. Another important aspect has been integrated education for different groups and classes in society. Education has been intended for everybody. "A school for everybody" has been the catchword. From the perspective of this curriculum, the student support personnel and others have been able to speak for the rights of less fortunate children and adolescents. The curricula have also placed a significant responsibility on teachers and parents concerning sharing democratic intentions. Democracy, in this context, means co-operation between professional groups in education to allow all students to opportunity to experience community and kinship with others. Democracy involves rights as well as obligations. The parents have thus been expected to participate in the school's fostering aspect. The new curriculum paradigm creates, with its stress on freedom and market competition, different conditions for a situation of loyal co-operation. Even if the solidarity with certain groups still exists in the text of the curriculum, the stress on freedom creates different conditions for pedagogic co-operation. There are, in my opinion, risks of disintegration and uncertainty in the co-operative processes, which support neglected groups if "supervision rules" in the form of curriculum directives are toned down or are diffuse or dissolved according to the decentralising trend. The risks increase if the

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<sup>22</sup> Curriculum for Upper secondary Schools

communities on the basis of their own freedom prioritise the work dealing with complicated learning situations<sup>23</sup>. Future elimination in education and professional life is dependent on such a choice.

With regards to the competition created by the freedom of choice in the form of the necessity to keep or attract students to schools characterised as "repellent schools", Skolverket – the National Agency of Education – 1996 points to significant negative effects caused by the competition – even if, in the evaluation, "there are also signs that competition between certain schools has resulted in stimulating the school development". The most negative effects for these schools are a deteriorating economy emanating from reduced funding with dismissal of teachers as a result. Another very negative effect of the competition is that those schools which are considered better tend to attract the most affluent students and their parents with a resulting "performance erosion" for the school which has not been able to stand up to competition.

What is then the main factor determining if a school succeeds in changing the negative effects of competition? There are schools, which have transformed a negative depopulation trend and have become "attraction schools" – "schools which have succeeded in their ambition to recruit students". What has become evident in the examination of these schools is:

.... a notion that the school's pedagogic direction and a clearer focus on results and knowledge has been attractive. In addition to this, there are several assumptions involving attractive factors, which cover the range from the school's economy and environment to choice of friends. (Skolverket 1996: *Att välja skola – effekter av valmöjligheter i grundskolan*, p. 85. My translation.)

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<sup>23</sup> I have developed this discussion in Helldin, 1997, primarily chapter 7.

Other important factors have evidently been the image of the information and the presence of possibilities from the onset to present an image against attractive activities in the school. In these instances, the principal's ability to engage the staff in presenting distinctive images and in disseminating information plays an important role. In other words, to jointly create a "we-feeling" around "more fun and interesting work activities". (ibid., p. 87)

In my opinion, it is of great importance to pose the question regarding what the interesting work activities actually can consist of. This is not elaborated on in the report. There is, the way I view it, a great risk that the frequently demanding work with children in complicated learning situations can easily be considered as falling outside the "interesting" tasks. What happens then in a school where, for example, the social problems are great? Is it possible here to accomplish a determined offensive, strategically enticing PR activity and vigorous projects? Is it possible that this solidarity with the less fortunate groups is the "risk and challenge" that the report is discussing? Perhaps but one may assume that the difficulties are great. One reason for these difficulties is that the attitude of solidarity does not fit the necessary strategic influence calculation, which is an important aspect in competition situations. Another counteracting aspect is that in the dynamic field of competition, there is an additionally great need for support from engaged and forceful parents who – as pointed out in the report – prefer to place their children in the already strong schools. It is therefore, because of many contributing factors, difficult to turn trends around and the education agency has only been able to define five schools of 38 examined as breakers of negative trends. The competition easily creates concurring problem processes, which in the end affect those already weak in the competitive game.

## Solidarity

Modern society is also, according to Habermas, a society *where the solidarity creating a sense of community has become increasingly weak*, which has, in among other places, been shown in the fragmented expert areas where co-operation has become more and more difficult (Helldin, 1998). This relationship is the reverse of individual praise. In modern society, solidarity energy has dissolved and has been replaced with more egocentric forms of relationships. Just like in the so-called primitive societies, the expression of the integration of premodern times was the mythical thought patterns, which comprised socially connected energies. The *in itself* positive emancipatory freedom which was legitimised in the sensible rational human being thus has a negative reverse side in the sense that it tones down the connection between human beings. This negative side tends to go away. Those individuals who have the greatest need for a society where fellowship is emphasised tend to cope least well in an individualistic, unprotected society. We can easily imagine that in such a society, it is important to protect the rights of the so-called weak groups through legal measures. It is important to secure this protection through educational directives and curricula.

The risk inherent in a society where the integrative forces no longer play a decisive role has been brought up in the political philosophical discussions during the entire modern period. An opinion held by among others Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1779-1831) and the representatives of the Romantic era, Friedrich Schlegel (1772-1829) and Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling (1775-1854), was that the mythological uniting force, replaced by the modern forces with the individualistic attitude, needs to be revived through the medium of

art<sup>24</sup>. These philosophers envisioned a nation consisting of an "ethical totality" – a new kind of human being where human affinity was of central importance. This affinity can best be expressed through aesthetic means in the modern – the aesthetic is viewed as a free forum for creating a feeling of community. For Schlegel, poetry for instance, becomes the same uniting force as "mythology was for the ancients". (ibid., p. 89)

### **The educational traps of education**

According to Kathleen Lynch (1995), a perspective, which is too one-sided and individualistic in connection with investigations of educational problems, may lead to injustices in the area of equality among others. Equality is a final goal, which entails the intention of a good life where equality exists between people with regards to the good aspects of life – both materialistically and socially. The individualistic attitude can, she states, imply that the ethical dialogue necessary for democracy is reduced or disappears completely. The ethical reflection stops short, so to speak, when the liberalist justice concept "equal opportunity" is applicable. Equal opportunity is a less radical approach than the demand for equal conditions. A classical economic equality condition is the justified demand by women to equal pay for equal work. I will present an educationally characterised example of what I mean. If all students, from the viewpoint of individual attributes, are given equal possibilities with regards to education, the problem tends to become localised, i.e., when the individual does not "grab" the opportunity, to the individual's own initiative. He/she has not grabbed

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<sup>24</sup> In his theory on the communicative action, Habermas discussed the origin of fellowship in a society via the French sociologist Emile Durkheim. Durkheim has,

the opportunity and "has only himself to blame". Individual attributes are blamed for possible failure. Lynch is critical of this attitude and means that it basically accepts that society consists of people who succeed or fail depending on their own innate strength or weakness – in other words depending on their own individual attributes. Acceptance of this kind also forms the cornerstone in the acceptance of a hierarchical society. The analysis of the guilt issue is here concentrated on the individual. To understand an educational problem from the viewpoint of individual attributes favours those individuals or groups who have the best starting points since equal opportunity cannot be "given" to all. For example, the reputation in society of the professional groups involved, as well as the parent generation's basic prerequisites economically (or why not linguistically or socially), play an important role when viewing the initial possibilities for the individual student's success in education.

In conclusion, I would like to stress that it is, of course, often positive and necessary for the student to have the pedagogue analyse and carry out the educational program with the individual's uniqueness – for example by considering medical and biological characteristics – in the focus of analysis and action. A reason for critical examination of this relationship is, however, present if the individual analysis becomes too dominant and biased and is done at the expense of the critical ethical analysis.

After this discussion of usual trends in modern societies and their connection to failures in the school system, we now will move to analysis of the possibilities in the theoretical context of the 'decentralised' teaching role. The key concept is "respect" for the pupil.

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using the support of analyses in religious rites of ancient times, defined the origin of fellowship. Habermas, 1995 A, p. 47

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## PART II

by BÄRBEL VÖLKE

# It is all a Question of Viewpoint: Child's Behaviour is Appropriate

## 1. Preamble

The results of the TIMSS as well as the Pisa Studie verify the necessity to reflect the German school and education system critically, again. The discussions, to be followed up to now, rise to the supposition that the positive approaches being arranged by the report of the education commission, North-Rhine Westphalia, have got into a nearly insurmountable tension by a return to more product orientated understanding of performance initiated by education policy. Looking at the high number of pupils, which have to repeat a year or leave school without school leaving examination the question, raises whether the planed intervention measures are adequate to comprehend these problems in their entire spectrum.

The following expositions refer to pupils who had to overcome breaks in their school career, which are not to put down to a lingual or cognitive disturbance but they had started their school career as 'normal' children but 'failed' as problematical pupils, then.

The theoretical framework of reference is built by the cognition model of constructivism and its specification to pedagogic processes. Knowing that this is an extraordinarily controversy discussion (Diesbergen 1998, Terhart 2000: 3), it will not be continued but left to the readers own discretion.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>The implementation of constructivistic ideas in pedagogic processes is just establishing slowly. Against this background, the literature available is not very comprehensive. It is completely different in the English-speaking area.

Moreover a *sceptical attitude* (v. Foerster/Pörksen 1998: 45) against the well known is recommended. As a consequence, people might be prepared to call the usual and daily, the apparent objective and true into question in order to gain individually new realisations and insights, which shakes and makes one's own constructions of reality question-able.

It has to point out that the represented considerations describe the phenomenon of school failure against the background of *one possible* approach of interpretation. Where the train of thoughts can be followed, a chance exists to confer one's own accentuation to the attitude to 'problems' and to reflect educational practices in class or school.

In addition to this, the research results of flow-experience evaluated by the American motivation psychologist Csikszentmihalyi, seem to be helpful for supporting the described ideas.

Finally, considerations, which emphasise the aspect of self-determination as a regulatory idea for the structuring of lessons, are brought up to discussion.<sup>26</sup>

## 2. School-Failure as a Non-Intended Side-Effect of Scholastic Efforts

In the German "Fünften Jugendbericht" (Fifth Youth Report) school failure is seen as a result of institutional processes of assimilation and definitions as it is arising in school, a place of publicly organised education and responsible for it. Phenomenon like, e.g. school tiredness, school refusal, premature school leaving, denial of school perform-

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Especially in America constructivism is already established as an integrating idea to pedagogic processes and is considered in the teacher training.

<sup>26</sup> The represented ideas can substantially be found in: Völkel, Bärbel: *Wie kann man Geschichte lehren? Die Bedeutung von Konstruktivismus für die Geschichtsdidaktik*, Schwalbach/Ts. 2002).

ance, apathy, fear for school, truancy, school withdrawal and school dissociation can be summarised under this term. So-called failures in school are confronted with a number of institutional accompanying measures: They are exposed to be kept down, have to expect school-internal sanctions must possibly assimilate a downgrade in the school system, will be left from school without examination or have to undergo educational psychological or therapeutic measures.<sup>27</sup>

As the term of school failure is often treated as equivalent with children or youths not having an appropriate deserve for aid in the present situation and place any longer, an ad hoc change of place seems to be a comprehensible solution. In this case, it is placed into the background that in the term of support a more passive role of the child or the youth as well as its substantiation in pedagogic processes come to fruition.<sup>28</sup>

As the child or the youth always evades the pedagogic efforts for what reasons ever, they seem to be in better keeping hands at another place. By such an action the pupils are blamed because they have to change school, they are not moved, they are treated – with a word-stigmatised. In the following, an alternative interpretation of the phenomenon ‘school-failure’ shall be represented which tries to deal with the term literally and where the responsibility lies with the school.

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<sup>27</sup> Heinermann, K.-J.: Schulversagen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, *European Journal for Teacher Education*, Vol. 21, Numbers 2 & 3, 1998, p. 219-241.

<sup>28</sup> Benkmann, R.: Soziale Konstruktion gravierender Lernschwierigkeiten und sonderpädagogischer Förderung, ersch. in: *Zeitschrift für Heilpädagogik* 11/98, p. 482-489.

### 3. Human Beings as a Non-Trivial Beings

The allocation 'this pupil has difficulties to learn' or 'this pupil is conspicuous' do get an interesting problematic nature especially against the background of a constructivistic interpretation.

In the following the essential ideas of this model of knowledge are briefly explained: Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela, biologists and neuro-physiologists put forward the theses that living systems do have their very own interest in the maintenance of their vital systems. They are able to show an exclusively internally organised permanent flexibility, which allows them conformity within their environment. Thus, the structure of the system decides how changes are realised or how a reaction to them shall take place as the cognitive system is subject to an operational unity. All kind of external pulses can only be treated in a self-referred relation. Both of the biologists conclude that living system can only realise what their structure allows them to. Consequently, reality in its ontic so-to-be is unapproachable to human cognition in principle, because nobody can say how it "really" is.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, what people call reality is nothing than a construct, which everybody develops on his own, in order to base one's own connections of living on a coherent pattern of explanations.

Here, the psychologist Paul Watzlawick differentiates between a reality of first and a reality of second order. Reality of first order is the level in which we can not make statements because of our structural determination and the operational closed working procedure of our cognitive system. These do only become possible in the level of a second order, where in the framework of communication procedures so-

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<sup>29</sup> Maturana, H. u. F. Varela: *Der Baum der Erkenntnis - Die biologischen Wurzeln des menschlichen Erkennens*, Bern u. München 1987.

called structural coupling, consensual areas are built, which do have a certain character of truth for the user. Allocations of sense, value and meaning take place in the level of second order. They are subjective and culturally different.<sup>30</sup>

Therefore, in a constructivistic argumentation the term 'truth' is replaced by the term 'viability', which means something like 'suitable', and so – it is put on an even modest level. Knowledge adapts to reality in a way that it does not conflict. Therefore the functionality of knowledge determines its quality – i.e. quality is like a key, which can open a door. It is not important how the door will be opened, but that it is finally open.

By communicative processes, such subjective viabilities are extended into inter-subjective viabilities, which lead to a stabilisation of the experienced reality in a higher level. The fundament of socialisation is built here, giving instructions how the world has finally to be realised.<sup>31</sup>

From the expositions made above constructivists conclude, that all statements made are always the observer's statements. The site bound of people determines his perspective – i.e. all statements made are subjective statements and have also to be answered subjectively.<sup>32</sup>

### 3.1. Learning as a Cybernetic Process of Self-Regulation

Following the results of Maturana and Varelas as well as those of the cognition psychology of Piaget, the mathematics Ernst of Glaserfeld

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<sup>30</sup> Watzlawick, P.: *Die erfundene Wirklichkeit - Wie wissen wir, was wir zu wissen glauben? Beiträge zum Konstruktivismus*, München 1999/11.

<sup>31</sup> Glaserfeld, E.v.: *Radikaler Konstruktivismus - Ideen, Ergebnisse, Probleme*, Ff.a.M. 1998/2.

<sup>32</sup> Maturana in: König, E. u. P. Zedler: *Theorien der Erziehungswissenschaft - Einführung in Grundlagen, Methoden und praktische Konsequenzen*, Weinheim 1998, p. 228.

and the cybernetist Heinz von Foerster developed a cybernetic model of the structure of knowledge. In the framework of this model learning creates itself as a self-controlled process, where self-control is understood as a principle of negative feedback, with which a disturbed balance shall be re-constructed.

In this connection v. Foerster differentiates between trivial and non-trivial systems. Trivial systems are distinguished by a predictable output following certain input. This output only takes place in the same way. Non-trivial systems, where the human being belongs to, do react unpredictable because of their operational comprehensiveness. Their cognitive systems work like a 'black box'.<sup>33</sup>

Non-trivial systems are able to learn – because they are distinguished by history and can fall back upon a memory. On the basis of trial and error the made experience are saved and referred to later as reference values. The non-trial system's objective is keeping its cognitive system in balance in addition to the maintenance of its vital functions.

### 3.2 Conspicuous as Allocation

Starting from the constructivistic premise that all statements made are always the observer's statements only, Mrs. Lindemann/Vosseler determine that the allocation of a disturbance occurs because an observer always describes his opposite person different in certain abilities and character compared to himself. From this point of view, the being-different and the restriction of the opposite person do not result from a disturbance but from the observer's expectation. Consequently, this means that people who are exposed to such an observer's description

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<sup>33</sup> Foerster, H.v. u. B. Pörksen: *Wahrheit ist die Erfindung eines Lügners - Gespräche für Skeptiker*, Heidelberg 1998/2.

are perceived under this aspect and in expectation that they are showing a restrictive behaviour in their environment.<sup>34</sup>

Now the question arises whether these allocations do finally lead to the Pygmalion-effect, where in the sense of self-fulfilling prophesies the result of the prophecy is even created by the selective perception and the pupils concerned start to behave in the framework of this expectation.<sup>35</sup>

Against this background allocations made in school (You are lazy! Didn't you understand this? You're always disturbing! Really, you can't do it!) can be allocations creating a reality, which do have substantial effects on the self-portrait. Pupils have to be very strong in order to distance themselves from such allocations, especially if they are made by different teachers who possibly are 'warned in advance'. In all probability the pupils will take over such portrait presented to them, will be increasingly convinced of their own misbehaviour and will finally live this behaviour.<sup>36</sup>

Thus, school would have a significant part of responsibility in the restriction of the pupils' self-portrait. Lindemann/Vosseler give a more detailed explanation of this problem of reality creating allocation with the example of the diagnosis MCD (Minimal Cerebral Dysfunction):

With children who show a diagnosed conspicuous behaviour that can not put down to an obvious privation in socialisation it is assumed that this behaviour must have organic reasons. Search for such a reason

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<sup>34</sup> Lindemann, H. u. N. Vosseler: *Die Behinderung liegt im Auge des Betrachters - Konstruktivistisches Denken für die pädagogische Praxis*, Neuwied, Krißtel 1999, p. 108-109.

<sup>35</sup> Watzlawick, P.(Hrsg.): *Die erfundene Wirklichkeit. Wie wissen wir, was wir zu wissen glauben? Beiträge zum Konstruktivismus*, München 1999/11, p. 91-110.

always starts, if an explanation for the behaviour of the concerned cannot be found in his environment. According to Mrs. Lindemann/Vosseler the term MCD is combined of word parts which do very clear show the allocating character of such a diagnosis: As a dysfunction cannot be attested after a very detailed medical examination this must be minimal. And as behaviour is controlled by brain, there must be a cerebral dysfunction. Both of the authors conclude that such a principle of explanation, which is used to the behaviour of people in such a situation, corresponds to the description of trivial machines. Therefore, it seems to be consequent if 'conspicuous behaviour' is put down to damages. Proceedings of diagnoses and test are based on such principle of triviality because they prove whether people are able to show the expected output to certain input. As such proceedings are underlying provisions of scientific methods, their results get the character of being objective and independent from the observer.<sup>37</sup>

Usually the fact, that even scientific methods and scientific formulation of questions are developed by scientists who are also structurally determined and working in their operational cognitive systems is not self-critically reflected and that the results are always being perceived in the way that the respective cognitive system of the tested persons permits.

Therefore, allocations in the sense of restrictions will only be possible if the restriction is exclusively localised in the respective person. If it succeeds to install a reflective level between the observed and expected behaviour, the observer can come to the conclusion that he is the one who feels disturbed and that he is convinced of his behaviour's normality and is also convinced that it can be transferred to the 'rest of the world'.

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<sup>36</sup> Lindemann/Vosseler 1999, p. 121-124.

<sup>37</sup> Lindemann/Vosseler 1999, p. 110.

This observer might be in the position to accept that his opposite is an individual person and behaves adequately in the framework of the observed situation.<sup>38</sup>

A systemic viewpoint takes places, in which the individual relations are set into the focus of observation. In the framework of such a viewpoint it is inquired according to which standards and behaviour patterns members of a system (school, class, family) enter into relations. In such a connection of interpretation, a conspicuous behaviour is understood as a bearable approach of solution to conflicts within the relation system. Therefore it can only be handled and accepted within this relationship (conference of the concerned).<sup>39</sup>

### **3.2 Learning subject to Standards of Non-Triviality**

The determination in structures of vital systems causes that learning processes should not be initiated linearly causal, as such approaches do prerequisite influence-able people.

Therefore, learning, i. e. the 'making suitable' of issues for the own life can only individually take place in the first step. In order to be able to meet the cognitive structure of the pupil and throw it out of balance (perturbate) the path of learning should be kept open.

#### **3.2.1 Tests tests Tests<sup>40</sup>**

Both v. Glasersfeld as well as v. Foerster discuss the social request that school has to document success of education. The inevitable classification and categorisation of pupils' leads to the necessity to triv-

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<sup>38</sup> Lindemann/Vosseler 1999, p. 110-117.

<sup>39</sup> Voß, R. (Hrsg.): *Verhaltensauffällige Kinder in Schule und Familie. Neue Lösungen oder alte Rezepte?* Neuwied Kriftel 2000, p. 1-35

<sup>40</sup> v. Foerster/Pörksen 1998/2, p. 67.

lise them (i.e. to bring up predictable citizens<sup>41</sup>) in order to meet the requirements of comparability. Tests have turned out to be useful in this connection. According to v. Foerster, good test results do only give information about the circumstance that the linguistic areas of teachers and pupils suit together. That the system of questions, the exercise as well as the assessments, nearly exactly matched what the pupils could do very well. In its consequence this means that it comes to an univariate thinking (it is not important what I think, but that I'll find out what my teachers want to hear), that could finally lead to an abortion of creativity if it will appear relatively exclusively. Therefore v. Foerster suggests that tests shall not only be assessed linearly according to the categories 'right answer' and 'wrong answer' but that results and assessments of test shall also be admitted with multiple dimension. If a solution is wrong as a result, but interesting from approach, because new ideas are brought in, or a pupil is able to learn forms and rules by heart very well and produces fast results, or somebody is able to create good arguments, this should be considered in the assessment. So what has to be developed is a compromise between tradition, innovation, in which the cultural consent is taught and learned, and which is encouraging creativity and knows how to accept by handling diverging answers.<sup>42</sup>

### 3.3 Fascination of Learning and Flow-Experience

The flow-model of the American motivation psychologist Csikszentmihalyi turned out to be useful in connection with a constructivistic

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<sup>41</sup> Ebenda, p. 65.

<sup>42</sup> v. Foerster in: Renk, H.-E. (Hrsg.): *Lernen und Leben aus der Welt im Kopf. Konstruktivismus in der Schule*, Neuwied Kriftel 1999, p. 19-42.

lesson as the represented reflections can be examined against a motivational psychological background.

During a flow-experience, action and consciousness melt together, the awareness is focussed on a limited field of stimulus, a feeling of lost of time and self-oblivion as well as a strong consciousness of having the situation under control arise, which consequently lead to a strengthening of self-esteem. Learn requirements have to be adapted to the profile of ability of the individual, so that no fears (excessive demand) or boredom (no sufficient demand)) arises which can also be a trigger mechanism for the phenomenon of school failure.

If the requirements and abilities for action concur (where the requirements are a bit higher then the abilities, but are classified manageable) an optimal learning situation which can be felt as intrinsically very rewarding, takes place.

The examination of flow-withdrawal is very interesting in this context. The research scientists with Csikszentmihalyi found out, that people who do rarely or never have a flow experience feel more tired, sleepier, less healthy, tend to head ache, have a feeling of loosing their creativity. The experimentees also describe themselves as more stressed, hostile, annoyed, nervous, inhibited, indifferent, confused, restless, less concentrated, colder, less decisive, unfriendly, apathetic, and worthless. Pupils neglect their talents and attend to more pleasant activities in such a situation.<sup>43</sup> In the following, they are in the danger to become so-called failures at school.

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<sup>43</sup> Csikszentmihalyi, M. u. I. Csikszentmihalyi (Hrsg.): *Die außergewöhnliche Erfahrung im Alltag - die Psychologie des flow-Erlebnisses*, Stuttgart 1995/2 und Csikszentmihalyi, M.: *Das Flow-Erlebnis - Jenseits von Angst und Langeweile: im Tun aufgehen*, Stuttgart 1996/6.

The expositions about flow-experience make clear that in addition to the discussion about contents also the organisation of class has to be discussed.

## 4. Self-determined Learning in a Learning Sphere

The previous expositions show that in a constructivistic context of interpretation learning has the function of keeping oneself able to act in one's own environment.

A temporary individualisation of class seems to be useful because of the necessity of an individual generating of knowledge as well as the different abilities and skills, that pupils have. In this context, the essential didactical principle is the principle of 'self-determination'<sup>44</sup> or 'self-organisation' as long as the institutional framework conditions to not admit a self-determination. Decisions can be made in the fields of contents, methods and time as well as about the forms of feedback or support. Such a concept is 'focused on the learner' and accepts the learner as an expert of his own world where the teaching person as a 'know more' and not as a 'know it all' is accompanying the pupil in an interactive teaching-learning process<sup>45</sup>.

Research of Flynn/Rapoport (1976) and Goetze (1992) reveal, that pupils regarded as 'conspicuous' and 'hyperactive' have been less conspicuous in an open class situation.

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<sup>44</sup> Greif, S. u.H.-J. Kurtz (Hrsg.): *Handbuch selbstorganisiertes Lernen*, Göttingen 1998/2, p. 27

<sup>45</sup> Reich, K.: Thesen zur konstruktivistischen Didaktik, in: *Pädagogik*, 7-8/98, p.43.

An open class situation seems to be a useful instrument to create a trusting educational atmosphere in which 'difficult' pupil can get to be involved in educational demands.<sup>46</sup>

For this reason, the pedagogic drifting zones can be opened as zones of potential self-determination and self-control. According Siebert, these pedagogic drifting zones identify areas in which pupils act, learn, in which news is connectable and becomes assimilable into cognitive systems.<sup>47</sup> A flow-experience becomes possible for the pupils in principle because the pupils do have the opportunity to exercise their activities in a promising relation of action demands and action abilities within these drifting zones.

Recovering, problem-orientated as well as action-orientated learning concepts accompanied by traditional class elements as supporting elements seem to be very useful in this context.<sup>48</sup> Essentially is, that these are formulations of questions which can produce the learners interest. V. Foerster differentiates between legitimate and illegitimate questions Legitimate questions are those which do contain unsolved problems, whereas the illegitimate question is already answered so that the learner even has to comprehend. According to v. Foerster school is mainly dealing with illegitimate questions. Thus, there is no sphere left for the intellectual creativity.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Jürgens 1998/4, p. 62-63.

<sup>47</sup> Siebert, H.: *Pädagogischer Konstruktivismus - Eine Bilanz der Konstruktivismusdiskussion für die Bildungspraxis*, Neuwied, Krieffel 1999, p. 159.

<sup>48</sup> Mandl, H. u. G. Reinmann-Rothmeier in: Renk, H.-E. (Hrsg.), 1999, p. 61

<sup>49</sup> v. Foerster/Pörksen 1998/2, p. 73.

## 4.1 Construction, Reconstruction and Deconstruction as Elements of a Constructivistic Education

In order to evade the primary principle of comprehend learning, Kersten Reich claims that as often as possible construction has to take place in school.

These construction can correspond to the legitimate questions demanded by v. Foerster and are to be connected i.e. to Klafki's 'key problems'<sup>50</sup>, as regards content, because good references can be created to the life experience of the learners, which are imperative for the necessary follow-up learning. Reich's concept remains very abstract with regards to this issue. What has to be developed is how these constructions could look like, whether it is useful to separate them into subject specific elements at all or whether another educational structure has to be developed, where the corresponding elements of different subjects have to be allocated to the constructions to be dealt with. Reich's expositions can already be embedded into known concepts of class, e.g. into forms of the so-called open class with the substantial aspects of problem orientation, action orientation and project orientation.

As school doesn't get by on the comprehension of questions already solved respectively without the necessity of comprehending learning, because it is also obliged to traditionalise the cultural consent, Reich claims that reconstruction may not be done for its own sake, but it should be derived from the construction and should always be in the service of the learner. This idea really disturbs the way school sees

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<sup>50</sup> Klafki, W.: *Neue Studien zur Bildungstheorie und Didaktik. Zeitgemäße Allgemeinbildung und kritisch-konstruktive Didaktik*, Weinheim, Basel 1991/2 und Klafki, W.: Schlüsselprobleme in der modernen Welt und die Aufgabe der Schule - Grundlinien einer neuen Allgemeinbildungskonzeption in internationaler/interkultureller Perspektive, ersch. in: Gogolin, I u.a. (Hrsg.): *Pluralität und Bildung*, Opladen 1998.

itself. Contains of subjects do not any longer legitimate themselves against this demand for a potential future of up growing adults but they get into an acute force of legitimisation which orientates to the needs of the learner<sup>51</sup> and should be verified by them. The pupils question: "What is it for?" or "What's that got to do with me?" give information about the lack in communication which can also have in influence on the preparedness to get involved into certain subjects.

In accordance to a constructivistic access Reich demands that each construction has to be irritated by a deconstruction, in order to avoid the impression that a final and valid truth has been found.<sup>52</sup> The idea of contingency ('it could also be different') is seen as an important objective of a pedagogic process of sense development as it is suitable to keep the individual development and the social changes open, in which changes are realised as guaranties of stability. After finding a solution e.g., this could take place as regards content by a development of common problems, which again have to be handled and solved individually. It becomes clear that further conceptual developments and concretions are necessary in order to offer ideas to the teachers, which can be recognised as practicable and can be integrated into the existing curricula.

## 5. Concluding Remark

In the traditional view, the respective pupil who can be observed as relatively educational resistant in the present education system is blamed with failure. If the child has been diagnosed as a failure at

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<sup>51</sup> Put in such a context the 'illegitimate' questions of v. Foerster, do get their value and rank in daily school live.

<sup>52</sup> Reich, K.: *Systemisch-konstruktivistische Pädagogik - Eine Einführung in die Grundlagen einer interaktionistisch-konstruktivistischen Pädagogik*, Neuwied, Kriftel, Berlin 1997/2.

school a variety of 'proved' accompanying measures and consequences will start that are often suitable to demoralise the already disturbed self-portrait even more. In order to break the circle of these reality-creating allocations it has been supposed, to accept humans as non-trivial beings also in school, to realise creative potentials and use it in class. This can take place by opening up of so called learning spheres or didactical drifting zones, in which pupil can move self-determined in order to find their own access to the subjects offered. The expositions above contain the attempt to draw up a critical impression of the allocating function of school by putting the thesis forward against a constructivistic background that in every situation people always behave individually suitable – but that it is always the observer who feels disturbed by such behaviour.

Therefore, it is matter of realising conspicuous behaviour in a context of relation and that solutions have to be found contextual with the objective to extend the scope of action. Obviously, it is finally a matter of a changed attitude, which is characterised by self-reflection and co-operation. Here it is referred to the research results of Mandls/Reimann Rothmeiers about implementation of constructivistic learn environments. On the basis of their research both of the researchers demand a multivariate implementation in order to strive for a systemic change. This includes that not only learn environment has to be changed correspondingly, but that

- all of the participants (politics, school administration, education authority, principals, teachers, parents and pupils) are convinced of this innovative idea and are informed about it sufficiently,

- all of the participants must be convinced of a necessity of change and must be prepared to co-operate actively and have to receive feedbacks about success and failure,
- all measure have to be planned for the long term and all typical obstacles have to be taken into consideration,
- a corresponding learn-, communication-, and co-operation structure is strove for.<sup>53</sup>

Even in this case the path of small steps will finally lead to far-reaching changes (butterfly effect) if teachers and others, nowadays acting in the educational process, do already use all the freedom in the sense mentioned.

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<sup>53</sup> Mandl, H. u. G. Reimann-Rothmeier in: Renk 1999, p. 61-78

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# **Constructivism and school failure: A new perspective of a known phenomenon? (An Example)**

## **1. Introduction**

The following remarks deal with the phenomenon of school failure of students in public education. An example shall show which interpretation can be assigned to the participating persons.

First, the phenomenon will briefly be classified. Then the example will be presented, completed and analysed by theoretical arguments at the different relevant phases. The theoretical remarks are based on the radical constructivist model of knowledge as Ernst von Glasersfeld, mathematician and Heinz Von Foerster, cyberneticist have developed it. The results evaluated with a research of the function of the nervous systems by the neurophysiologists Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela are also taken into consideration. Finally some possible consequences will be developed.

Because a concrete situation will be described, the radical-constructivist model of cognition can also be presented only in the frame of this situation. This means, that not all relevant aspects will be presented.

However, perhaps this example will give a motivation to attempt to come to terms with these constructivist ideas also in other educational connections.

The transfer of the radical constructivist model into educational processes is sometimes very harsh criticised. Nevertheless, here I

found the first time an explanation for me as a teacher, which seemed to be compatible with my daily experiences in the classroom.

The following comments will give a suitable idea, so my opinion, which can set the system 'school' in new interpretative connections. These new connections could be helpful to react more appropriate on the changes in the society than the more traditional education can do.

You as the readers will have to decide for yourself, if the following model of explanation will be coherent to your own experiences and could so be useful in the sense of considerable.

## 2. School failure as an unintentional side effect of pedagogic efforts

School failure is an awkward side effect of pedagogic efforts. Usually it is treated by institutional accompanying measures.

Set out in the German "Fifth Youth Report" is "that the problem of school failure arises in school. The site were public organised and responsible education and formation take place". Therefore it is "the result of institutional coping processes and definition" (Bundestags-Drucksache, 1980, Heinermann, 1998).

The phenomenon of "lastitude, school failure, refusal of performance, leaving school, failure in performance, apathy, truancy, school terminator and dissociate etc." (Heinermann, 1998) are summarised.

There are various institutional accompanying measures: deferment, school internal sanction in case of conspicuous behaviour, referral to school for children with learning difficulties or also in the common lesson, repeating a class, downgrading in the school system, school leaving without certificate, psychological accompanying measures, therapeutic measures, etc.).

Interestingly enough the term "school failure" does not exist in legal German texts (Heinermann 1998).

Even if depriving conditions of life do have demonstrable effects on learning and development, school failure as defined above is not only a phenomenon in the disadvantaged classes of society (Benkmann 1998).

School failure is equated with a non-adequate supporting ability of the child with the present educational situation. In this case, the term of support is spread with the idea of a passive child's role and its objectivation in the pedagogic process (Benkmann 1998).

According to this opinion, the child, evading from the pedagogic efforts for any reasons, would be in better hands anywhere else. The child is blamed for the failure.

This idea corresponds to the traditional linear understanding of the teaching - learning - process that expects an anticipated output on certain input. The teachers task is here to procure abilities and skills to the pupils, task of the pupils is, to accept these offers and to develop their abilities and skills more and more in the progress, the system demands.

In the following, an alternative interpretation of school failure shall be introduced, which takes the word "school failure" literally and passes this phenomenon into the school's responsibility.

### 3. Students as non-trivial-systems

Both, Heinz von Foerster and Ernst von Glaserfeld criticise the traditional teaching at school, in which just imparting of knowledge is practised and its putative quality can be verified by tests.

In this case, von Glaserfeld is talking of dressage. The intention to condition a certain behaviour in order to establish, the teaching prin-

ciple based on the behaviour-conditioning model is making the reward for the reason of performance and is essentially based on the extrinsic aspect of motivation (Glaserfeld 1998/2).

The advantage of these methods is the predictability of educational performance. It is successful or even not. For Heinz von Foerster it is a simplification of children in order to bring up "predictable citizens" (Foerster/Pörksen 1998/2). In contrast, v. Foerster describes human beings as non-trivial systems, which are characterised by their creativity and unpredictability. Their cognitive system does likely work as a black box.

### 3.1 A last chance

*Sven was a student in 8. class. In order to relieve his teachers, his former classmates and finally himself from an unbearable situation he had the final chance to change into a parallel class.*

*Sven was characterised as renitent and rebellious, provoking and partially aggressive, unwilling to learn and weak to perform. He appreciated the change and realised it as an opportunity "to change course".*

I now want to talk about a successful pedagogic situation in a history lesson, which is offering a starting point to observe and interpret Sven's behaviour from a radical-constructivist perspective. At this point I want to introduce the concept of the 'observer', which is a very important concept for the constructivist model of this sort.

According to constructivist ideas all statements that are made, no matter in which context, are made from an observer. This observer can only do and interpret his observations in his subjective framework. In the course of this, the structure of the observer defines the structure of his questions and therefore the structure of the potential answers. That is, the observer will only ask those questions which do correspond to

his structural framework and will only realise those answers, that fit into this framework. Against this background, an objective observation can not take place, even not if it is defined by strict criteria for the observation.

The claim to give an objective statement would include that those ones who are giving this objective statement would be able to comprehend the object in its notice "so-to-be". The constructivism rejects this possibility and refers all observations in the fields of describing a description.

V. Foerster trenchant objectivity, even the scientific demanded objectivity, as "the delusion that observations can be made without an observer. To refer to objectivity means to reject responsibility" (v. Foerster/Pörksen 1998/2).

Thus, the constructivism is laying the responsibility for every action and every thought into the individual – also the responsibility for the observation of students and the consequences, which are pulled out of this observations.

*The teacher had planed a teaching sequence about the history of the Investiture Dispute.*

*It is about the dispute between Pope Gregory VII and King Henry IV about the investiture of clergies (Investiture). Both, the Pope and the King did claim this right for themselves and for this reason a struggle for power took place and found its end in Henry's pilgrimage to Canossa.*

*In the lesson, this dispute shall be investigated for its significance as an exemplary historical conflict by certain categories and factual deducting questions.*

*The teacher explains that this dispute is a kind of historical detective matter and its has not been clear until today which of the opponents was the stronger one.*

*Sven is not interested and shows it. He says that he doesn't want to. The teacher asks him what exactly disturbs him.*

*Sven explained that the big class is getting on his nerves and that he doesn't want to work in a team.*

*The teacher suggests to Sven that he could withdraw from the class into another room.*

*Sven accepts this proposal and says that he would like to do that.*

*Two other students' sign up, give to understand that they are in the same situation, and would like to leave the room. The teacher asks Sven if he could image to co-operate with these two students. Sven agreed and the group withdraws into the adjoining room.*

Sven's refusing manner can be seen as a provoking behaviour to the teacher. Now she has at least three possibilities to react to this conflict:

She can ignore Sven and accept more or less that he had already given up this lesson, hoping that he will not disturb. She can put pressure on him and insist on his participation because he is in school and has to fulfil certain standards. She can also threaten him and make clear that his behaviour is a further step out of school, because she has to report about his behaviour. A third possibility is that she can take Sven seriously, concede that he expressed his true condition, and take this seriously. Against this background, she asks him for the reasons of his rejection.

In view of his situation, the answer, that he would not like to work in such a big group seems to be understandable and the teacher accepts it by offering an alternative that is defusing the situation. This is to be realised by Sven's acceptance of the offer.

In the way the situation has been solved two other students are encouraged to reveal themselves in the same way.

To all appearances, the teacher has acted clever in this situation. What exactly has happened?

In a situation that usually is seen as a conflict, what takes place in school the teacher has accepted Sven's right of self-determination. She

decided for a learner focusing behaviour (against a teacher focusing behaviour), that is characterised by understanding and acceptance. At this moment, she admits that learning can only be sensible if it is wanted and therefore is an individual learning. She assists him by advice and offers alternatives that are institutionally acceptable. Sven can give up his opposite standpoint without losing face because a freedom of choice had been offered.

This teacher's pattern of leadership can be called social - integrative. It includes Sven actively in the process of decision and learning and complies with his desire for self-determination.

Against this background Sven's behaviour can quite be interpreted as the behaviour of a strong personality, which is able to enforce a claim (and not to be made trivial).

The way the teacher deals with the situation can also encourage other students to express their interest in the same way. In this situation she has represented an open teaching-learning concept, by offering individual choices in the field of organisation and opened here a drifting zone for the students in which learning had been made possible. (If Sven had given reasons content-wise the offering of choice concerning content had also been possible).

*During lesson, she can observe the three students through a window. All three students work intensively.*

The behaviour of the students seems to be interesting regarding the beginning of the lesson and its critical situation. One reason could be that just the opening of the situation has arisen this enthusiasm for work. Another reason could also be the content of the work.

As already pointed out the teacher introduced the historical content as a dispute that is not been settled until now and encouraged the stu-

dents to come to their own estimation of the situation. For this reason, an intensive examination of the material was necessary. Obviously, this intensive examination took place. The students have been invited to think, to refer, to discuss and reflect on their own, because they know that the teacher will not present the "right" result. In this connection v. Foerster talks about legitimate and illegitimate questions in lessons. "Most of the time in lessons is spent on illegitimate questions and to demand answers. I like to define as follows: a question is illegitimate, when the answer is already known. ...Legitimate questions are real questions: an answer to them does not yet exist" (v. Foerster/Pörksen 1998/2).

By students becoming researchers as well as the teachers and have to reflect and verify their results between them, the conceptual thinking is built up by legitimate questions. They do this by discursive negotiate. As the answer is not known, the teacher isn't the "know-it-all" but just a more-knowing one. This can offset hierarchic patterns of a linear learning-teaching process.

As legitimate question also content challenges their examination can only take place with an intrinsic manner of motivation, because of the missing of a solution no "right" answer can be given.

Satisfaction results from the realisation that the own given argumentation is be seen conclusive by the others. Finally this experience creates more confidence and willing to perform as the students have a sense for their own abilities and their own knowledge and are able to challenge furthermore (Glaserfeld 1998/2 and Csikszentmihalyi 1995/2)

*During a working phase of the class, the teacher is going to Sven and his team. She asks if they are able to deal with the subject, the boys confirm. At her request to present the results, it can be noticed that a*

*few approaches could be broadened. Carefully she draws the students' attention to it. All of them show themselves co-operative, even Sven. In a common discussion, they approach more and more to the content. By doing so, the teacher takes care that all statements of the students are taken into consideration and are discussed. When it is about by which means the both opponents want to push their claim through Sven suddenly blurts out: "That's the same with my mom. She is always doing it that way!" Everybody is surprised about this statement. It follows a discussion about the means and measures used by parents who want to induce their children to a certain behaviour and about mechanism that young people developed to assert themselves. Both other students enter the discussion quickly as they are having similar experience. Also the teacher feels herself remembered on her own childhood and – because she's a self-critical woman – she can see her own airs and graces as an adult. During the further examination of the historic situation, it becomes evident that certain strategies can even be useful in conflicts.*

Again: What had happened here? Has here been something learned?

Constructivists start from the assumption that knowledge can not be imparted but that every individual has to generate it on the basis of his own subjective experience. According to this knowledge is not received passively but built up actively and serves for the organisation of the world of experience, in which the individual has to behave suitably (Glaserfeld 1998/2).

Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela, neuro-physiologists, define the living system as an unfolding (self-preservation) organised system. Its very own matter of concern is the preservation of its vital living functions. This requires a permanent exclusive internal flexibility (plasticity) that allows the system to adopt to the changes in the environment. This adoption takes place on the basis of given structures (determined by structure) and does exclusively grow out of the system and does only have an effect on this (operational closed and circular working method). Against this background knowledge has a

functional character and proves itself by its usefulness and appropriateness in daily live. V. Glasersfeld is talking of viability.

According to the constructivistic approach knowledge shall fit and not match an independent reality, as we do not have criteria for justifying what is "right" or "wrong" (Glasersfeld in Watzlawick 1999/11). Therefore external impulses as e.g. learning matters represent, can only be received in the meaning of subsequent learning.

Definitely by this background this is the reason that it can not be planned in principle how a certain content will be transported into the single student's reality of life, but that the structure of the student causes which part of the particular content can be assimilated. Constructivist orientated educators then talk about the "make it possible didactic" (Siebert 1999). By doing this, the teacher is a kind of "irritation artist" and tries to "disturb" the cognitive system of the students in that way, that it becomes essential to even out an internal imbalance (Glasersfeld 1998/2).

Therefore it is important to consider the emergence of cognition (sense and meaning "emerge" within a cognitive network", which can lead to unpredicted reactions). In the vernacular, this is called an "AHA-experience".

For Sven, emergence manifests itself by the sudden association of his own familiar situation during the examination of the historical content. Because of this conversion, one can conclude that Sven has found a link between the historical content and his own structure. Due to this, it has become relevant for him and the conflict solving strategy has become viable for him. At this moment Sven has generated knowledge and added to his own structure.

In the discussion with his two comrades, who can report about similar experience, the phenomenon is risen up onto a level of inter-

subjective viability, which lend it an impression of a greater reliability.

In this connection, constructivists talk about 'structural coupling'. While people are interactive with each other, they change their structure mutual. Within homogen cultural groups develops what we call socialisation.

In our described learning group the common understanding had been worked out, that conflicts can develop an own dynamic, but that they also have a recognisable structure. Looking through this structure, the person will be able to come across the conflict more reflective and to steer it in a way.

Sven had realised this for himself and he lifted it within the communication on a consensual level.

Against the background described above, the central thesis of the constructivism is: people are self-creating, self-referring operational closed systems. The external reality is sensory and cognitively unapproachable. We are just structurally linked with our environment, i.e. we exchange external impulses structural - determined in our nervous system. That is on the basis of biographic formed psycho-physical cognitive and emotional structures. The reality built by this process is not a representation, not a reproduction of the outside world but a functional, viable construction, which is shared by other people and has turned out to be vital in a biographic and generic-historical way. Human beings as an independent "system" cannot be determined by the environment but can be disturbed and stimulated (Siebert 1999).

*Sven decides to talk to his mother, the teacher and his classmates encourage him to do so. All students are lively. They show a great inner participation and can hardly realise that the stroke of the gong has*

*finished the lesson. Sven expresses his emotions by saying: "I enjoyed it. That was a great lesson!"*

The loss in perception of time, the fact of viability and concentration as well as the feeling of great satisfaction at the end of the lesson show that Sven had been in the state of flow-experience."

The American Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, professor of Human Development and Education at the University of Chicago, describes actions which "give the feeling of discovering, of scouting and solving problems for the acting person, in other words the feeling of novelties and challenge, as autotelic actions. Accordingly "a person who is able to enjoy what he is doing regardless if he will have an external reward for it, is an autotelic person. Generally the extent of intrinsic joy depends on the structure of the action concerned". In the fields of school, it depends on to underlie such a structure to the construction of actions, which comply with such an autotelic personality. Autotelic experience does not produce anxiety, it is not boring but it's the experience of being completely taken up with the activity.

This can happen in that way that so called 'learning rooms' will be opened for the learners where they can move. It's also possible to open these learning rooms on a methodological level as well as on content levels. Condition hereby is, to consider the different learning-entrance-channels by J Bruner as well as the right of self-determination by the students concerning their interests to the content. "In such a situation the person can completely exhaust her abilities and receives a clear feedback to her actions. Therefore, she is part of a rational system of cause and effect. And her action is having realistic and predictable consequences in the framework of it" (Csikszentmihalyi 1996/6).

This definition is the foundation of Csikszentmihalyi's term of "flow". It is a state in which action follows on action, in fact according to an inner logic, which apparently does not need a conscious intervention on part of the acting person. She realises the process as a unique "flow", from one moment to the next. She is the master of her action and hardly feels a separation between herself and her environment, between stimulus and reaction, or between past, present and future. "Flow" is what we called "autotelic experience". Elements which are the basis of this experience are: "the melting of action and consciousness", the focus of attention on a certain stimulus-area, self-forgetfulness, with a feeling of loss in time and controlling of the situation. An experience that, by reflection, can become "an important component of a positive self-concept" (Csikszentmihalyi 1996/6).

The teacher in the described situation in all appearances was able to open such a situation for Sven and made it possible for him to have such a "flow-experience".

Csikszentmihalyi says:

A teacher who understands the conditions that make people want to learn – want to read, to write, and do sums – is in the position to turn these activities into flow experiences. When the experience becomes intrinsically rewarding, students' motivation is engaged, and they are on their way to a lifetime self-propelled acquisition of knowledge.

Fortunately, many teachers intuitively know that the best way to achieve their goals is to enlist students' interest on their side. They do this by being sensitive to students' goals and desires, and they are thus able to articulate the pedagogical goals as meaningful challenges. They empower the students to take control of their learning; they provide a clear feedback to the students' efforts without threatening their egos and without making them self-conscious. They help student's concentrate and get immersed in the symbolic world of the subject

matter. As a result, good teachers turn out children who enjoy learning and who will continue to face the world with curiosity and interest.  
(Csikszentmihaly, [http://www.newhoeizons.org/crfut\\_csikzent.html](http://www.newhoeizons.org/crfut_csikzent.html))

*The talk between Sven and his mother has really taken place and it had been a good experience for both of them, as the mother informed the teacher later. However, despite that, Sven got into difficulties because of different incidents, which he was accused of. Finally, this led to a change of school.*

At this state the question might be allowed whether Sven has not become the victim of the Pygmalion-effect. In the sense of self-fulfilling prophecies the result of the prophecies has been created by a selective realisation and Sven has behaved just in the expected manner (he isn't a good student, so the situation of misdemeanour has sooner been noticed than the successful behaviour). Sven is a student who repeatedly has been faced with the expectation of failure during his school carrier and who finally met the consequences of his actions. Or had the school system been helpless at many phases, was not able to understand Sven and to react on him adequately?

Thus one has to ask why the system school and the system Sven had been drifting apart that far, so that a separation has become necessary at the end? And it also has to be asked whether such a separation could not have been avoided if the system 'school' would have been flexible enough, to open up a learning room for Sven which would have allowed him a didactic drifting as the condition for connective learning?

## 4. Consequences

From the perspective described above the following assumption is possible: Sven's school failure has been caused by a linear teaching-learning idea that is based on a linear input-output principle, because Sven could not find the opportunity of adjunct learning and due to this he had success, which could have encouraged him.

In her research, Jeanne Nakamura, found out that students who rarely or never have feelings of success in the sense of flow experience distance themselves from the educational desires and give up (Nakamura in Csikszentmihalyi 1995/2).

The ideas according to constructivism show, that a possible starting point is introduced, at least. This makes it clear why students, even with engaged teachers, come to situations where they are getting increasingly offside.

Against the background that knowledge cannot be transferred from one head to the other, the necessity arise to open learning spheres in the sense of a 'making it possible didactic' (Ermöglichungsdidaktik), in which educational contents are connectable for the different children. This can be done by opening up drifting zones, in which the students can move self-determined.

The teacher acts as a creator for designing a learning sphere and as learning consultants, which provide for the prerequisite concerning the content and organisation. In these spheres, individual learning is made possible. The teacher also induce the process of reflection, in which subjective viability can be transformed to inter-subjective viability.

Due to this measure, subjective constructive processes to create their value from itself. During this state of reflection the teacher acts as a more-knowing-one, who can try to disturb the cognitive systems

of the students. Now the students are in the position to even out their cognitive dissonance again. Of course this is also possible in the interaction of student-student and student-teacher.

By opening the learning situation, a new space is created for the students to act in the framework of their own competence. I think that due to this, more and more children do have more often the possibility to get into the situation of flow experience.

Finally I like to present the result of a study about the flow experience, which in my opinion shows significant relations to the phenomenon school failure:

People who were not allowed to have the flow experience describe themselves as more and more tired, less healthy, more and more stressed and susceptible to headaches. The deprivation of flow experience also produced a feeling of monotony, stolidity, and above all "a loss of creativity".

Furthermore the experimentees describe themselves as more and more stressed, aggressive, nervous, annoyed, angry, self-conscious, apathetic, restless, easier to confuse, less concentrated, colder, less decisive, more and more annoyed with regards to problems, non-productive reading, depressed, more and more unfriendly and worthless" (Csikszentmihalyi 1996/6).

In the framework of scientific research the following fields of research can be developed:

- Which role do language and communication have in pedagogic processes, which connect to the constructivist model of knowledge?
- How can unpredictable (emergence of cognition) be integrated in didactic structures?

- How can the principle of self-determination educationally be prepared?
- Does the opening of learning rooms mean, that more students would have the opportunity of flow-experiences? The experience of flow could be an indicator for this.

In the following part the main principles of co-operative learning are presented and discussed. Here the theoretical frame of the whole book is brought forward by approach to teaching and learning based on the idea that learning is an active process in symmetric groups of learners. The teachers' role changes from the 'dispenser of facts and information' being the organizer of the learning context and consultant for the self-organized learners.

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## PART III

by SANDRA LUCIETTO

# Co-operative Learning or “You can’t do it alone”

## Introduction

What has become known world-wide as Co-operative Learning (CL) is an approach to classroom organisation and management based on learners working in small task-based groups, and learning from working co-operatively with each other rather than from listening to the teacher. In this sense, it can be said that CL focuses on *learning*, i.e. what the learners do and the process that goes on between pupils generating their own learning while they work together, rather than on *teaching*, i.e. what the teacher does or says in his/her teaching practice to simply instruct or transmit information.

Co-operative Learning was developed by different researchers in the United States and in Israel in the 1970s, building on the theorising of Kurt Lewin (1935) and Morton Deutsch (1949). Their assumptions were firstly that the type of interdependence structured among students determines how they interact with each other (which in turn largely determines instructional outcomes), and secondly that the quality of peer relationships has powerful impact on cognitive and social development. The approach was proven effective in dealing both with the challenge of mixed ability classes, and with the complexities of the change in the U.S. education system, where with the repealing of apartheid all classes could be made with pupils from different races and /or ethnic groups. From that context and time, thanks to a lot of research published by these authors (most of whom are university-based researchers), CL became known and applied in

many countries, and the number to teachers who use it in their classes is still increasing.

Working together to a common goal can have profound effects on student's learning (Johnson, 1974, 1978, 1989a; Johnson, Johnson, & Maruyama, 1983; Johnson, Maruyama, Johnson, Nelson, & Skon, 1981; Sharan, 1980; Slavin, 1983). Research studies on this matter began in the late 1890s, when Triplett (1898) in the United States and Mayer (1903) in Germany carried out a series of studies on the factors associated with competitive performance. During the past 100 years, an enormous amount of studies have been conducted by a wide variety of researchers with pupils of different age groups, in different subject areas, and in different contexts. This enables us to say that we know more about the effectiveness of co-operative learning than we know about lecturing, age grouping, or any other aspect of education.

The way students see each other and interact with one another in class during lessons is often a neglected aspect of education. Most teacher training courses have sessions where teachers learn how to organise positive interactions between pupils and materials (i.e. textbooks), or how they should interact with pupils, but they focus very rarely on how students should interact with each other. In some education systems, most teachers still think that students should not interact at all between them, and that what "the good teacher" should do is to be very competent in his/her own subject and *lecture* the pupils, who must listen and take notes in order to learn. In fact, how teachers organise and manage student-student interaction patterns is of great importance in how effectively students learn how they feel about school and the teacher, how they feel about their schoolmates, and how much self-esteem they have.

Whatever classroom management choices a teacher may make, pupils will interact with each other in class anyway. What changes in different settings is the quality of the interaction, and the outcome in terms of learning. Pupils can interact in three basic ways: they can compete to see who is "best", they can work individualistically toward a goal without paying attention to other students, or they can work co-operatively, i.e. with an interest in each other's learning as well as their own. Competition and individualistic learning are at present the most dominant of the three interaction patterns in many education systems. Research in the United States, for example, indicates that a vast majority of students view school as a competitive enterprise where one tries to do better than other students to "win". This competitive expectation is already present when students enter school, and grows stronger as they progress through school (Johnson & Johnson 1991). In Italy, the lack of a fully developed system of initial teacher training till 1999, and the purely academic lecturing tradition that has been continued at university have meant that the majority of teachers cannot see any other way than organising their lessons applying the principles of individualistic learning. This is the model they have learnt in their school years and has been reinforced by their university courses. Co-operation among students, who celebrate each other's successes, encourage each other to do homework, and learn to work together regardless of ethnic backgrounds or whether they are male or female, bright or struggling, disabled or not, is still rare.

The three different types of interaction mentioned above could be effectively summarised by three short definitions or *slogans*. An interpersonal, competitive situation is characterised by *negative goal interdependence* where, when one person wins, the other loses (e.g. spelling races, or getting the correct answers to a math problem on the

blackboard *against* other students). “*I swim, you sink*” could be the motto behind this interaction. In individualistic learning situations, students are independent of one another and are working individually toward set criteria. Their success depends on their own performance in relation to an established criteria, rather than on “beating” others; the success or failure of other students does not affect their score (e.g. in translating a text, with all students working on their own, any student who translates correctly, say, more than 80% of the text according to the set criteria passes). The working principle behind this kind of interaction could be “*We are each in this alone*”. In a co-operative learning situation, on the contrary, interaction is characterised by *positive goal interdependence*, with individual accountability. Positive goal interdependence implies that in a group each member “*sinks or swims together*” with the others. In a co-operative spelling class, for example, one way students will work together in small groups is to help each other learn the words in order to take the spelling test individually on another day. Each student’s score on the test may be increased by bonus points if the group is successful (i.e., if the group meets specified criteria). This way, each student is concerned with how not only he or she spells, but also with how well the other students in his or her group spell. This co-operative principle can also be extended over the entire class if bonus points are awarded to each student when the class can spell more words than a reasonable, but demanding, criteria set by the teacher. Studies have shown the effectiveness of co-operative learning over competitive or individualistic learning interaction. Results indicate higher achievement and greater productivity, more caring, supportive and committed relationships, and greater psychological health, social competence, and self-esteem (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1993).

Although the three interaction patterns (competitive, individualistic and co-operative) are not equally effective in helping students learn concepts and skills, it is important that students learn to interact effectively in each of these ways. Students will experience school situations in which all three interaction patterns are operating. They will therefore need to be able to be effective in each, and to choose the appropriate interaction pattern suited to a specific situation.

Group work structured according to CL principles differs from more traditional group work that many teachers have been used to organising in class. A group of students doing their own work around the same table, free to talk to each other about their individual task as they work, is not structured as a co-operative group. Perhaps it could be called individualistic learning with talking. Similarly, if a group of students has been assigned to write a report, but only one student does all the work and the others talk to each other taking advantage of a “free ride”, that is not a co-operative group. For there being a co-operative learning situation, there needs to be *positive interdependence*, that is an accepted common goal on which the group is rewarded for its efforts. The task the group will have to complete will have to be structured in such a way that no one can do it on his/her own, not even the brightest pupil in class. Putting students into groups, therefore, does not necessarily mean that the students will work co-operatively and will develop a co-operative relationship. Since a co-operative group is characterised by a sense of dependence from each other's commitment, which means that all students, for example, will need to know the material or spell well for the whole group to be successful, co-operative work has to be structured and managed by the teacher in such a way that this “positive interdependence” is there.

## Elements of co-operative learning

Co-operative Learning has not developed into a “school of thought”, i.e. a group of researchers believing in exactly the same principles and applying exactly the same techniques, so that they can be easily recognised as exponents of a group with one set of rules. Varieties of CL have been developed by different authors and researchers in the U.S. and in Israel. So, the Johnson brothers have been known for their *Learning together* approach, Slavin for the *Student Team Learning*, Kagan for his *Structural Approach*, Aronson for the *Jigsaw procedure*, Sharan and Sharan for *Group investigation*, and Cohen for her *Complex instruction* approach (Comoglio and Cardoso, 1996).

All these authors, however, share some core principles which characterise their work as belonging to Co-operative Learning. Strother (1990) asked the main authors in the field to tell him what they thought were the fundamental principles of CL. Deutsch used the terms motivation, individual and group responsibility, learning social skills, and mutual help. The Johnsons said they were positive interdependence, individual responsibility, overt teaching of co-operative social skills, face-to-face promotive interaction, monitoring of task-related behaviour and of social skills, individual evaluation and group processing at the end of the group work. Slavin saw as fundamental principles working structures that promote students motivation by means of rewards and incentives, the presence of positive reinforcement of effective co-operative behaviour, and a task structure which is implemented after careful preparation of the group work. Sharan mentioned the presence of heterogeneous groups, planning learning tasks, individual responsibility given by pupils' roles in the group, the importance of the role of the teacher in building

a co-operative climate in class, effective planning, processing and revision of what has been done. Cohen indicated individual and group responsibility, positive interdependence, building social skills, modelling the expected behaviour on the part of the teacher, revision of group work at the end of a CL activity.

From this overview, the elements that recur more frequently among the authors, and which contribute to a definition of the approach are:

1. positive interdependence (Johnson, Cohen);
2. individual and group responsibility (Deutsch, Johnson, Sharan, Slavin, Cohen);
3. overt teaching of social skills (Deutsch, Johnson, Cohen);
4. face-to-face promotive interaction / mutual help (Deutsch, Johnson, Sharan, Cohen);
5. individual evaluation and processing and revision of the work (Deutsch, Johnson, Sharan, Cohen).

### **Positive Interdependence**

As stated before, an effectively structured co-operative lesson is one where students believe that they "sink or swim together." In CL activities students have two responsibilities: they have to learn the assigned material, or carry out their task, and they have to make sure that all members of the group learn the assigned material or carry out their own tasks as well. They will do this because they are aware that their success depends on the success of others, i.e. that they cannot carry out the group task by working individually or by encouraging one person to do all the work. As mentioned before, the technical term for that is *positive interdependence*. Positive interdependence exists when students understand that they are linked with their group mates in such a way that they cannot succeed unless their group mates do

(and vice versa), and that they must co-ordinate their efforts with the efforts of their group mates to complete a task. Positive interdependence creates a situation where students see that their work is vital for their group mates and their group mates' work is in turn vital for them. Thus, they will work together to maximize the learning of all members, they will share their resources, they will put their competence (or specialism) at the service of the group, they will support and encourage each other, and they will celebrate their joint success. When positive interdependence is understood by all the members in a group, each pupil accepts that his/her efforts are required and indispensable for group success (i.e., there can be no "free-riders"), and that he/she has a unique contribution to make to the joint effort because of his or her resources, competence, and/or role and task responsibilities.

For the teacher who wants to start applying CL in his/her class, structuring positive interdependence is very often the most difficult task. There are a number of ways of structuring positive interdependence within a learning group. Here are the most common ones according to the Johnsons (Johnson, Johnson & Holubec, 1994c):

***Positive Goal Interdependence*** - Students realise that they can achieve the learning goals the teacher has assigned them if, and only if, all the members of their group attain their goals as well. They realise that the whole group has to work to a common goal. Students believe they can only "sink or swim together" and therefore care about how much each other learn. The teacher's task is to structure a clear mutual goal, such as, for example, "learn the assigned material and make sure that all members of the group learn the assigned material, because you will be tested as a group at the end."

***Positive Reward Interdependence*** - Each group member receives the same reward when the group achieves its goals. This is very often used to supplement goal interdependence. For example, teachers may wish to add joint rewards (e.g., if all members of the group score 90% correct or better on the test, each receives 5 bonus points). Other ways of rewarding the work of the group can be giving groups a group grade for the overall production of their group, an individual grade resulting from tests, and bonus points to each individual or to the group if all members of the group achieve the criterion on tests. This means that the success of the weakest can bring a better grade to the whole group. In this way, the brightest students are encouraged to help the weakest or slow learners, in order to get even better marks.

***Positive Resource Interdependence*** - Each group member is given only a portion of the resources, information, or materials that are necessary to complete the task. Only by pooling together and combining the resources can the group achieve their goal. Teachers may want to encourage co-operative interaction in this way either by giving students limited resources that must be shared (e.g. only one copy of the problem or task per group), or by giving each student part of the resources that the group must then fit together (as in the Jigsaw procedure).

***Positive Role Interdependence*** - Each member is assigned complementary and interconnected roles that correspond to specific responsibilities that the group needs to take and carry out to complete the task. Teachers create role interdependence when they give students complementary roles such as reader, checker of understanding, recorder, encourager of participation, and elaborator of knowledge. Such roles are vital to high-quality learning. "Checking for comprehension", for example, is one specific behaviour that was

significantly associated with higher levels of student learning and achievement (Rosenshine and Stevens, 1986).

***Positive Task Interdependence*** - Each group member is assigned a task which is interrelated to those of the others, so that the actions of one group member have to be completed if the next member is to complete his or her responsibility.

***Positive Identity Interdependence*** - This kind of interdependence is established when a mutual identity is created through a group name or motto.

***Outside Threat Interdependence*** - This happens when groups are in competition with each other, for instance during class/school tournaments. Some authors (Slavin, 1988b) believe that an element of healthy competition does a lot to encourage co-operative behaviour, although a teacher has to be very careful as to when and for how long to use it, not to encourage pupils' incorrect behaviour at other times.

The Johnsons have carried out extensive research, both on their own and with others, investigating the nature of positive interdependence and the relative power of the different types of positive interdependence (Hwong, Caswell, Johnson, & Johnson, 1993; Johnson, Johnson, Ortiz, & Stanne, 1991; Johnson, Johnson, Stanne, & Garibaldi, 1990; Lew, Mesch, Johnson, & Johnson, 1986a, 1986b; Mesch, Johnson, & Johnson, 1988; Mesch, Lew, Johnson, & Johnson, 1986). Their research indicates that positive interdependence provides the context within which promotive face-to-face interaction takes place. Only when positive interdependence is clearly structured do group membership and interpersonal interaction among students produce higher achievement. Goal and reward interdependence together increase achievement higher than goal interdependence alone, and resource

interdependence works only when goal interdependence is also present.

### **Individual Accountability/Personal Responsibility**

The second essential element of co-operative learning is individual accountability, which means that when the performance of individual students is assessed, the results are given back to the individual and his/her group, and each student is held responsible for contributing his/her fair share to the group's success. It is important that the group knows from the beginning both the evaluation criteria that the teacher will apply, and who needs more assistance, support, and encouragement in the group in completing the assignment. It is also important that group members know they cannot profit from the work of others. When it is difficult to identify members' contributions, when members' contributions are irrelevant or optional, and when members are not responsible for the final group outcome - in a word, when positive interdependence is not clearly structured, some members may participate as "free riders" (Harkins & Petty, 1982; Ingham, Levinger, Graves, & Peckham, 1974; Kerr & Bruun, 1981; Latane, Williams, & Harkins, 1979; Petty, Harkins, Williams, & Latane, 1977; Williams, 1981; Williams, Harkins, & Latane, 1981). It is important to remember that it is always the teacher's responsibility to structure positive interdependence, not the pupils'.

Individual accountability is the key to ensuring that all group members are strengthened by learning co-operatively, as the purpose of co-operative learning groups is to make *each member* a stronger individual, from the brighter pupils to the slower learners. By working co-operatively, everybody will improve from his/her own previous level of achievement. After participating in a co-operative lesson, group

members should be better prepared to complete similar tasks by themselves.

To ensure that each student is individually accountable to do his or her fair share of the work, teachers need to assess each member's contribution, and ensure that every member is responsible for the outcome. Common ways to structure individual accountability include (Johnson, Johnson and Holubec, 1994c):

1. Keeping the size of the group small. The smaller the size of the group, the greater the individual accountability may be.
2. Giving an individual test to each student at the end of the group work.
3. Randomly examining students orally by calling on one student to present his or her group's work to the teacher (in the presence of the group) or to the entire class.
4. Observing each group and recording the frequency with which each member-contributes to the group's work.
5. Assigning one student in each group the role of checker. The checker asks other group members to explain the reasoning and rationale underlying group answers.
6. Having students teach what they learned to someone else. When all students do this, it is called *simultaneous explaining*.

## **Social Skills**

Another essential element of co-operative learning is the use of social skills. Placing socially unskilled students in a group and telling them to co-operate does not result in them behaving co-operatively. Some of them may simply not know how to do it. *Social skills are learnt* – human beings are not born knowing how to interact effectively with others. Interpersonal skills do not magically appear when people need

them. They are learnt in social contexts; the most important of which are families and schools. In the fortunate case of highly socialised pupils, who have learnt appropriate social behaviour in their homes, teachers do not need to teach them. In the not uncommon case of children who come to school still deprived of them, however, it seems simply insensible on the part of the teacher to put the blame on pupils' unsocialised backgrounds, and act as they could acquire social skills simply "by osmosis" with the socially equipped students. Teachers must provide contexts for all children to become aware of the need of social skills, and to be able to learn them and practice them extensively. The whole field of group dynamics is based on the assumption that social skills are the key to group productivity (Johnson & Johnson, 1991).

There are many social skills that pupils need in order to work together towards mutual goals. The most important ones for the Johnsons are getting to know and trusting each other, communicating unambiguously, accepting and supporting each other, and resolving conflict constructively (Johnson, 1990, 1991; Johnson & F. Johnson, 1991). Other authors group social skills into categories. Comoglio (1999) considers five important categories: communicative skills, leadership skills, conflict negotiation skills, problem solution skills, decision making skills. My own categorisation includes:

#### Basic Interaction skills:

- Sharing material
- Using each other's names
- Making eye contact
- Sitting eyeball to eyeball
- Forming groups quietly
- Following role assignments

### Communication skills:

- Listening to the speaker
- Waiting until the speaker has finished before speaking
- Taking turns
- Keeping voices down
- Making sure everyone speaks

### Team-building skills:

- Disagreeing with the idea, not the person
- Encouraging each other
- Energizing the group
- Offering help
- Checking everyone understands

### Conflict resolution skills:

- Identifying causes of conflict
- Identifying common ground
- Creatively brainstorming any possible solution
- Evaluating possible shared solution
- Defining concrete procedures to implement solution
- Being aware of role expectation pressures

Although this list may not be seen as organised in hierarchical order, some skills need to be learnt and mastered before others can be acquired, i.e. it is generally unrealistic to expect that pupils will be able to apply conflict resolution skills when they have not yet developed basic communication skills.

The teacher can teach social skills in several ways: by modelling the sought behaviour him/herself, through role-play, or by using a “T-chart”. The T-chart is a sheet divided into two halves, or columns. At the top of the page, above the columns, the skill to be learnt is written down. The two columns below define the skill in terms of what it “looks like” and it “sounds like”, i.e. the behaviour that an observer

can see and the words he/she can hear when the skill is applied. The teacher who wants to do some work on social skills with his/her pupils will have reflected on the components, but will avoid coming to school with the T-chart of an individual skill already completed on behalf of the class. That way, he/she would not be able to raise any motivation, would not enable any involvement and ownership on the part of the students. A more successful strategy is to create a situation where the pupils themselves become aware of the need for the skill, and then work with the pupils, either with the class as a whole or divided into small groups, to fill in the T-chart with their words and ideas. After filling in the T-chart, the teacher can then go through it with the whole class and discuss every descriptor, deleting or adding the ones that are not appropriate or misplaced.

The teacher can develop awareness of the need for a skill in different ways:

- 1) the teacher divides the class into groups and gives them a CL activity to carry out. He/she does not intervene when he/she sees that some children do not apply a particular social skill correctly. At the end of the activity, he/she asks the groups to process their work writing down what has worked well in the group, and what they need to do better next time. This way, group processing is used to highlight the lack of a social skill that can be introduced and discussed as a follow-up to the lesson;
- 2) the teacher divides the class into groups and gives them a CL activity to carry out. He/she observes the class, and at the end gives feedback to the pupils by saying for example something like *"I observed the way you worked, and I could see that you were not listening to each other very well. What do people do*

*and say when they listen to each other?"* One or more pupils might realise that listening to one another can be seen when people look at each other, nod, etc. Thus, the teacher can introduce the T-chart and fill it in with the whole class;

- 3) the teacher introduces the activity and the group task, and asks his/her students which social skills they think they will have to apply to be able to carry it out. More than one will certainly be enumerated. Then, the teacher may ask which one they think they know least or are most unclear about. The one that is mentioned by the pupils will then be highlighted and discussed with the T-chart procedure.

The filled-in T-chart of the highlighted skill may be hung on the wall in class, so that it can be easily seen by every body and can remain as a reference point or a reminder of appropriate behaviour while working. If some time is dedicated in class every so often to find out what a particular skill consists of, by the end of a term the students will have shared the "meaning" of some skills, they will more easily remember their key elements, and, when asked to perform a task where they will have to apply it, they will "look for" behaviour that is clear in their minds. While working in groups, they may look at the skill poster hanging on a wall, or they may have observation sheets in their group, to tick the presence/absence of the appropriate behaviour, so that they are able to see whether they actually do what they defined the skill to be like. They will know what they are looking for, and what behaviour will help them interact with each other. If a particular skill is new to the students, it is then the teacher's responsibility to give the class plenty of opportunities to practise it before assessing and evaluating it. No change of behaviour takes place overnight. This

is true both for the learning of school subject skills and for social skills alike.

### **Face-to-Face Promotive Interaction**

Face-to-face promotive interaction, another core element of CL, may be defined as individuals encouraging and facilitating each other in their joint effort to complete their tasks, and/or produce a “product”. It is characterised by pupils helping each other, exchanging resources and processing information more efficiently and effectively, and giving each other feedback during activities and/or at the end in order to improve their present or future performance. Promotive interaction is very much connected to positive interdependence. With no clearly structured positive interdependence, group members will soon just not see the point of working together, the groups will split and there will be free riders on the one hand, and the brighter student/s doing all the work on his/her/their own on the other, as they can do it in the first place, probably even more easily and quickly. Especially if the reward at the end of the work is structured as a group reward, the pupils who will have done all the work on their own will be very reluctant to accept that their mates get the same reward at the end without having made any personal effort. In a very short time, the brighter students will refuse to work co-operatively with the others.

### **Group Processing**

The fifth essential component of co-operative learning, and one that is really so specific to this approach and important for its application that Comoglio (1996) considers it as the one elements that discriminates between CL and non-CL activities, is group processing. Effective group work is influenced by whether or not groups reflect on how well

they are functioning/have worked. Processing the group work means recalling the sequence of events, and reflecting on the effectiveness of individual actions/group behaviour to the achievement of the goal/task (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1993). Group processing may be defined as reflecting to describe what member actions were helpful and unhelpful, and to make decisions about what actions to continue or change in future group activities. The purpose of group processing is to clarify to the group members each other's impact on the common work with their behaviour, and to improve their effectiveness in contributing to the collaborative efforts to achieve the group goals.

There are two levels of processing, in small groups and as a whole class (Johnson, Johnson & Holubec, 1994c). Both procedures are important, so teachers will have to decide when to engage pupils in either. In small group processing, the teacher will allocate some time at the end of each group activity so that each group will be able to process how effectively members worked together. Groups will be asked first to describe what actions were helpful/not helpful in completing the task, and then to decide what behaviour they will want to maintain or to change in the future, as a group or individually. The teacher should periodically lead whole-class processing sessions as well. This procedure is preceded by the teacher monitoring the groups at work. The teacher will observe the groups, sometimes using formal observation sheets to collect specific data from each group, and record the problems they have in working together. At the end of the activity or of the week, the teacher can then share with the class the results of his/her observations. If the teacher had asked the groups to have an internal observer as well, the results of their observations may be added to the teacher's observations to have more than one point of view on the class performance.

Here are some examples of group processing questions:

#### Sample Group questions (1)

1. Write down two ways each member helped the group today.
  2. What are three specific actions we did that helped us do well on the assignment?
  3. How did each of us contribute to the group's success?
  4. What is an action that would help us do even better next time?
- (Johnson, Johnson & Holubec, 1994c)

#### Sample Group questions (2)

1. What did you do that helped your teamwork together?
  2. What can you do next time to help your team work together?
  3. How are you working as a group?
  4. What would you do differently next time?
  5. How did you feel?
  6. What did you notice?
  7. What was the best thing that happened in your group?
  8. What change would help you to be more successful?
- (Bennett, Rolheiser-Bennett, Stevahn, 1991)

#### Sample Individual Questions

INDIVIDUAL PROCESSING	Often	Some-times	Never
I contributed with my ideas and knowledge			
I asked the others for their ideas and knowledge			
I recapped all our ideas and knowledge			
When I had difficulties, I asked for help			
I helped my group mates to study			
I made sure that my group mates understood how to carry out their work			
I contributed to keep the group active			
I involved all my group mates in the work			

(Johnson, Johnson & Holubec, 1994c)

An important aspect of both small group and whole-class processing is group and class celebration. Feeling successful, appreciated, and respected builds commitment to learning, enthusiasm about working in co-operative groups, and a sense of self-efficacy in terms of subject-matter mastery and working co-operatively with classmates.

Two studies reported by Comoglio and Cardoso (1996) highlighted the importance of processing on the results of CL group work. The first (Yager, Johnson, Johnson, & Snider, 1985) was conducted on three classes for 25 days. One class worked in CL groups with processing, another one in CL groups without processing, the third one in individual learning mode. At the end of the study period, tests administered to students of the three classes showed how learners of all levels that had been working in CL with processing achieved better results than the ones that had worked in the other two modes. The second study (Johnson, Johnson, Stanne, & Garibaldi 1990) showed that the association of teacher and student's points of view in the processing is the most effective way of conducting processing.

## The role of the teacher in co-operative learning

In his introduction to the Italian edition of *The Nuts and Bolts of Co-operative Learning* (Johnson, Johnson and Holubec, 1994c), Comoglio defines CL as a “social mediation method”, juxtaposed to more traditional “teacher mediation” methods. The differences between the two categories are great, as they imply very different roles on the part of the teacher. The emphasis either on the teacher or on the class determines irreconcilable views about *place* and *source* of knowledge and resources (the teacher vs. the pupils), objectives and tasks (individual vs. group-based), discipline and modes of interaction (individual commitment vs. mutual help), assessment and individual responsi-

bility (individual assessment and evaluation vs. individual+group evaluation). In teacher mediated teaching and learning the teacher is the main source of knowledge, makes decisions and evaluates what has to be learnt, decides the “pace” of learning for his pupils, raises and/or enhances motivation, facilitates and individualises learning (Comoglio, 1996). His role may be described, we might say, as that of “*the sage on the stage*”. In CL, the teacher becomes more “*the guide on the side*”. Pupils become the centre of the learning process. They help each other, are given full mutual and individual responsibility of their own learning, decide their pace of work, correct and evaluate themselves, develop and/or improve their social skills for learning. The teacher becomes mainly a facilitator and an organiser of learning activities (Comoglio, 1996).

This means that the role of the teacher in CL changes radically if compared to more traditional “teacher-centred” approaches, in that it is exercised mainly *before* and *after* the lesson takes place, rather than *during* class contact. According to the Johnsons and Holubec the teacher’s responsibilities are:

- making preliminary decisions (defining the objectives in terms of cognition, subject-related skills and social skills; deciding group composition and dimensions; assigning roles; organise the setting; organising learning materials)
- illustrating the task and the CL approach (explaining the task; explaining the evaluation criteria; structuring positive interdependence; structuring cross-fertilisation among groups; structuring individual accountability; teaching social skills)
- monitoring the class (promoting direct face-to face-interaction; monitoring pupils’ behaviour; intervening to improve group performance and/or task understanding; rounding off the lesson)

- assessing and evaluating (assessing and evaluating pupils' achievement and performance; evaluating group effectiveness and performance) (Johnson, Johnson & Holubec, 1994c).

## Conclusion

Research on CL has established that not only do students working together co-operatively achieve better results, but also that working in CL groups has positive effects on the classroom and school climate. This has been verified by teachers in classrooms from pre-school through secondary schools and universities in many countries, including in Italy (Chiari, 1995, 1996). However, the importance of emphasising co-operative learning in classrooms goes beyond just achievement, positive relationships, and psychological health. What seems important to many researchers, including myself, is the hope that the social skills that the pupils working in co-operative groups apply and practice regularly with their peers will continue to accompany them *beyond* their classes, and will characterise their social relationships in their families, with friends, with partners. Similarly, after the children have left school, they will hopefully continue to apply such important principles as individual accountability and positive interdependence to other social groups, where they as adults will be able to act as fully responsible citizens in taking responsibility for their own actions and exercising their rights.

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## A Teacher Development Programme

IPRASE del Trentino, a Pedagogical Institute based in Trento, Italy, organised from October 1999 to April 2002 a three-year teacher development programme (TDP) on Cooperative Learning (CL) and classroom observation for classroom teachers of all subjects who worked in primary, middle and secondary schools (age range 6-18).

The TDP aimed to enable classroom teachers to further develop their existing professional skills, so that they could help pupils who cannot manage their emotions or show disruptive or unaccepted behaviour to acquire social skills for learning. In Italy special provision was abolished in the late 1970s, and all the children receive education in mainstream schools, in mixed ability classes. The population of children we are referring to are considered “normal”, in that they do not have recognisable psychological syndromes nor physical deficits, and yet they do not seem to possess social skills for learning and show what we in Italy call “school uneasiness” (*disagio scolastico*). The ultimate goals of the TDP were: for the teachers, to experience being more effective in their daily work, to feel more satisfied and to increase their professional self-esteem; for the children, to learn more effectively in a school context, to increase their self-esteem, and to learn social skills for their adult life as citizens.

It was our hypothesis that many of these children do not necessarily need to be psychologically or psychiatrically “treated” (although this may sometimes be appropriate), but could be helped by their classroom teachers to learn more effectively by being consistently taught the social skills for learning that they need. A pedagogical approach

which entails the explicit teaching of social skills is Cooperative Learning (CL), a well-researched approach to learning and teaching, and an established methodology whereby pupils work extensively in groups of peers in order to learn. According to its literature, CL works very well in mixed ability classes, integration classes (Johnson, R.T., & Johnson, D.W., 1981; Johnson, R.T., & Johnson, D.W., 1982; Slavin, R.E., 1977a), and mixed race/ ethnic groups classes (Kagan, S., 1977; Kagan, S., 1980; Slavin, R.E., 1979a). We hoped it might work equally well with our target group of children, so we offered teachers a chance to become familiar with it and to apply it in their classes.

The TDP lasted three years. It was not compulsory to sign up for the whole period, although we informed the prospective participants that a two-year commitment would be advisable, given the complexity of CL, a methodology that needs some time to be mastered and applied with ease by the teacher. Most teachers attended the TDP for a year (starting in year 1, or year 2, or year 3), some for two, very few for three. There were new teachers every year, but the total numbers in courses remained generally stable (15 on average) because some left at the same time. In total, about 60 teachers attended in three years.

The methodology we followed in the TDP was task-based (*learning by doing*), with reflective practice (Schön, 1983) playing an important part, and had an action research (Kemmis, 1982) component. The teachers then (i) acquired knowledge and skills in the use of CL; (ii) planned, implemented and monitored CL activities in a particular class; and (iii) received feedback on what they had done in class in peer group tutoring sessions.

We documented the outcomes at two levels: at teacher level, through *materials* produced by the teachers themselves (lesson plans and

CL activities experimented in their classes); and at pupil level, by means of *case studies*.

The teachers were asked to write three *reports* per school year, following a common format, where they

- i) explained the initial situation in one of their classes (*Beginning of year Report*),
- ii) documented the changes they applied in their teaching practice – lesson plans, CL activities and materials (*Mid-year Report*); and
- iii) illustrated how the situation had changed by the end of the year in terms of modified behaviour and of improved achievement (*End of year Report*).

We collected 30 case studies in three years. One of them is given as an example in the following chapter of this book<sup>54</sup>.

Modification of behaviour was observed by the teacher over time by means of *social skills grids and field notes*; modification of level of achievement was recorded by the teacher on the basis of the results of *individual class work* and of regularly administered *achievement tests*. Looking at the collected case studies, these were the aspects that recurred more often:

- classroom climate had improved;
- children were more willing to work with each other; motivation had increased;
- “difficult” children were more accepted in class than before; most “difficult” children had been helped by their classmates and they had coped with their tasks better than they had ever done before;

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<sup>54</sup> See the text by Francesca Battaglia, p. 117

- instances of unacceptable behaviour had often reduced in number, sometimes in number and intensity;
- the teacher was less busy looking after the children with behavioural problems all the time, as had been the case before;
- she could more effectively take care of the children who really needed her help;
- her role was more at the level of organising and managing time and activities than to managing disruptive behaviour.

Quantitatively speaking, the “best” results came mostly from primary school (6-11), followed by middle school (11-14), and by secondary school (14-19) pupils in the order. Qualitatively speaking, a middle school teacher who applied CL only for a year in the last year of the project obtained the best ever improvement in academic achievement and the greatest change in behaviour from the whole class.

We collected data on the relevance and usefulness of our courses to the teachers in several ways. At the beginning of each year, we asked the teachers to share their *expectations* in writing. On the last session of each course, we asked them to write *what* they thought *they had learnt* in terms of new professional knowledge (*sapere*), new teaching skills (*saper fare*) and new awareness as people (*saper essere*), and to compare the expectations they had to what had actually happened. The task was individual, the sheets were anonymous and were handed in face down. Here are the words of some of the teachers<sup>55</sup>, divided by category:

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<sup>55</sup> My own translation, as the activity was in Italian

## A) Professional knowledge

1. *I have improved my knowledge of some techniques (Learning Together, Jigsaw...). I have seen for the first time how to plan and implement a classroom observation activity. I have seen how to evaluate co-operative learning activities and groups, but I need some more input on that.*
2. *I have learnt, and I have then used, some of the techniques developed by Kagan (ROUND ROBIN, "SCHOLE", MIX FREEZE PAIRS). I have also learned how to evaluate with CL: group and individual evaluation of content achievement and of social skills achievement.*
3. *I have learnt to concretely build an interactive relationship with my students, which has enabled me to work with them in a more "levelled" way and to learn from them. I have learnt that their learning can be autonomous if it has a "containing" structure.*

## B) Teaching skills

1. *I have organised and managed co-operative groups. I have prepared materials for the group activities in class. I have shown the children what social skills are with practical activities and I have been able to infuse in them the wish to adopt them in their work.*
2. *I have learnt how to apply CL, although I do not feel particularly confident yet. Every time I look at the curriculum, I immediately think of ways of delivering a topic using CL activities.*
3. *At the moment, I cannot manage all my lessons with this "active" methodology only, but I can organise co-operative games and revision.*

4. *I have become more skilled in preparing classroom materials. I have reduced my preparation time. The activities in class have become clearer and simpler to carry out.*
5. *I have learnt to become “an aside” while my children learn, whilst keeping my role as a teacher; to share my experience with colleagues; to use more formal CL techniques, to produce and use practical tools.*

### C) Personal development

1. *Reflecting on CL has involved my entire personal identity. I have continued something I had started last year, when I was studying for the exam to become a qualified teacher. I do not know what I am as a teacher, I feel like “work in progress” [her words, ed. note]. I have never divided being a teacher from being a person, because “you teach what you are”, and you learn from your learners.*
2. *This methodology suits my teaching style and myself as a person (which I try to build day by day). Attention to conflict resolution, to the way I relate to children and negotiation are gradually becoming part of my way of being with others.*
3. *I think I am now more able to pay attention to social skills: if they are useful to children, they are even more necessary to teachers. They too must have them, if they want to be consistent with what they preach. As a teacher, I have found it OK to accept my children's comments when I did not apply them myself.*

We also administered the teachers a *questionnaire* twice, at the beginning and at the end of each year, which measured their perceived

competence in dealing with unaccepted behaviour. By seeing the difference in their perceptions, they could “measure” their development.

Finally, we *interviewed* most of the teachers in our TDP at the end of each year. Their answers generally underlined their sense of professional frustration at the beginning, which mainly drew them to the TDP; they confirmed improvements in classroom management and pupils' levels of achievement; they showed appreciation for the climate that we had been able to establish on the course, so that they had experienced during sessions the same support and co-operation they had promoted in their classes; they expressed satisfaction and a sense of achievement for what they had been able to do.

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# Project Year Report

Francesca Battaglia, one of the teachers who attended the teacher development programme (TDP) on Co-operative Learning (CL) writes this case study. It also contains teaching plans and activities in CL.

## Beginning of project year

***Date: 24 November 1999***

### **Class description**

Primary school, 5th Form, 13 pupils.

Prior observations in structured and in informal situations have shown heterogeneity of school attitudes and levels of ability. The class results from two prior 4th Forms from two different school branches.

### **Description of the problem(s)**

*Pupils involved:* whole class.

*“Problem” behaviour:* pupils’ extreme liveliness; group denial; sticking to original 4th form mates only; nuisance behaviour which isolates some members from the rest of the class; refusal to work together in groups; passive acceptance of group pressure; quite regular exploits of irrational hostility and interpersonal conflicts, ending up in strong personal tendency to antagonism.

*Ways of perceiving and reporting the problem so far:* formal observations during school activities; observations during breaks; discussions with other class teachers.

*Effects of the “problem” behaviour/s on class climate:* tensions, conflict situations; constant need of teacher intervention to find solutions to conflicts among mates.

*Effects of the “problem” behaviour on individual learning:* extremely differentiated levels of achievement in class subjects.

*Effects of the “problem” behaviour on class learning:* social loafing, lack of individual responsibility, refusal to contribute to group work.

*The “problem” as experienced by the teacher:* awareness of the need for a different class organisation, conducive to a more collaborative class climate and higher motivation to learn.

*Solutions so far:* co-operative learning activities in History and Italian, co-operative games and role-plays in Physical Education.

*Results so far:* encouraging

### **How the problem is going to be looked at more closely/carefully (data gathering)**

Structured observation activities using field notes and grids (in association with the other class teachers as well).

## **Teaching Plan 1**

***Date: December 1999***

### **Social objectives**

Short-term (end of term):

- pupils are involved in a variety of activities where they can see and apply acceptable social behaviour;
- pupils tell peers their reasons of uneasiness (working in small groups).

Long-term (end of year):

- doing collaborative work
- trusting one another
- communicating with no ambiguity
- accepting others
- supporting each other
- solving conflicts constructively.

## **Cognitive objectives**

*Linguistic skills:*

- communicating effectively
- listening to one another
- producing written texts.

*Sensory/motor:*

- assuming correct posture
- consolidating space and time organisation
- using the concept of “distance” in different special situations.

*Art/visual Education:*

- using techniques and materials for the production of graphics/drawings.

## **Method**

Co-operative pairs; debriefing.

## **Process evaluation descriptors**

What has worked well during the activity? Why?

What has worked well during the activity? Why?

What does the feedback from the pupils tell the teacher?

## Time

Five 60-minute lessons.

## Activities (description, with materials and tools)

### Lesson 1

*Step 1:* The teacher introduces the social skills that the class will learn and apply: “I am going to explain what we will be doing in class from now on. We’ll develop some social skills together. I mean things like *listening to each other, asking questions politely, asking for a favour, and sharing something with somebody*. We’ll also look at *how we can deal with the emotions we all have when we talk about something that is important for us personally*.”

*Step 2:* S/he raises the awareness of the need for useful strategies: “First of all, we’ll have to write down a list of useful strategies to be able to do it. I will write the list on the blackboard”.

*Step 3:* “What happens when somebody is talking and somebody else starts talking too before the first speaker has finished?”

*(pupils' response)*

“We can then say that the first rule we have to respect is: *wait for your turn before you speak*”.

*Step 4:* “What can we do to help people to say what they think?”

*(pupils' response)*

“We can then write down the second rule: *listening carefully*, which means: looking at the speaker, not laughing at him/her, nodding”

*Step 5:* “But what happens if somebody wants to say something?”

*(pupils' response)*

“We can then say that the rule if somebody wants to *ask questions* is: asking oneself if it is the right time to ask, being sure of what we want to ask, being clear of who we want to ask the question to”.

*Step 6:* “Sometimes some of the things we are told, or some things others do to us are really upsetting for us. What can we do in that case?”

*(pupils' response)*

“Then, we can say that our rule for answering provocative behaviour is: stopping to think, counting from 1 to 5, and if we see that we are going to lose our temper, ask to leave the group”.

*Step 7:* Rounding off. “During this lesson we have discussed and agreed on some very important principles. We want to remember them. I will write them on a poster, and each of us will sign it to show that we all commit ourselves to respect what we have agreed. *(Teacher's note: you can also give each pupil an A4 copy of the poster as well.)*<sup>56</sup> Being committed is not enough. We need somebody that observes your behaviour. Today, I'll do it, and I will make some notes on how you apply these rules – in adult speech, this is called monitoring. At the end of today's work I will tell you what I have seen.”

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<sup>56</sup> See E. Mc Ginnis, A. P. Goldstein, R.P. Sprafkin, & J. Gershaw, *Skillstreaming the Elementary School Child*, 1984, Champaign, ILL, USA, Research Press (p. 106 in the Italian edition, 1986, Trento, Erickson)

## Lesson 2

*Step 1:* The teacher introduces the activity (to be carried out in the school gym):<sup>57</sup> “You will form a circle. I will divide it in two and ask you to form two parallel rows. You will turn so that each of you will be standing facing a person in the opposite row.”<sup>58</sup>

*Step 2:* The pupils form pairs, in which one has the role of SPEAKER, the other that of LISTENER.<sup>59</sup> The odd pupil (there are 13 pupils in the class) has the role of TIMER. He will have to say “STOP” every 3 minutes.

*Step 3:* Then the teacher says “GO” the speaker will start speaking. After 3 minutes, the pairs exchange roles. After that, the timer passes on his/her role to somebody else, so that new pairs are formed. This Step ends after all the pupils have met everybody else in the class. (in this class of 13, there are 7 exchanges of 6 minutes each).<sup>60</sup> The task is as follows:<sup>61</sup> “in 3 minutes the speaker says 1 thing s/he appreciates about the listener, 1 thing s/he does not like because it creates him/her problems, 1 thing s/he likes doing with the listener”.<sup>62</sup>

*Step 4:* 10 minutes' debriefing. Task: “Each pupil has the opportunity to say to the rest of the class what one has learnt (if one is willing to do it)”. Activity: pupils and teacher sit in a circle. One pupil has a

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<sup>57</sup> In this lesson the teacher will use an observation grid for each pair. See Appendix of part III, observation grid 1.

<sup>58</sup> In this way the teacher avoids the pupils to form pairs with their preferred peer in the class, and excluding the ones that would not be chosen by anyone.

<sup>59</sup> The Listener cannot contradict the Speaker. This is very reassuring for everybody.

<sup>60</sup> The number of pupils does not allow to meet everybody else (12 peers) in one hour.

<sup>61</sup> This activity enables a lot of conflicts and problems to come to the open.

<sup>62</sup> Inserting a piece of negative feedback between two positive ones helps reducing the anxiety of emotional situations

ball, and throws it to a peer. The peer can say something, or pass it on to another pupil saying “*Pass*”. If s/he decides to speak, s/he can say only one thing and then pass the ball to somebody else. Each pupil can receive the ball more than once, and add other comments.<sup>63</sup>

### Lesson 3

*Step 1:* The teacher introduces the activity (to be carried out in class).

*Step 2:* Pupils form pairs following this procedure: in a box there are as many cut out drawings of objects as the number of pairs that have to be formed. Each drawing is cut in two. Each pupil (eyes shut) picks up a piece. When everybody has done it, pupils open their eyes and go around the class looking for their other “half”.<sup>64</sup>

In the pair, one pupil has the role of REPORTER: he must write date, names of components, roles, and tasks on a sheet. He also has to check tone of voice and turn taking; the other has the role of ENCOURAGER: he must encourage his/her peer to contribute to the work of the pair.

Materials: 2 A3 sheets and 2 felt pens for each pair

Task 1: “the REPORTER takes his/her shoes off and steps on the sheet. The ENCOURAGER draws the outline of his/her feet”;

Task 2: they exchange roles and task

Task 3: each pupil takes the sheet with the drawings of his/her feet and writes at least 2 things s/he does not like about him/herself inside the outline of one of his/her feet.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> The observation grid for this debriefing activity includes space for field notes. See Appendix of part III, observation grid 2.

<sup>64</sup> We insist on random pair formation to avoid any pupil to be excluded by free choice.

<sup>65</sup> See Appendix of part III, observation grid 3.

Time: 10 minutes

*Step 3:* At the end of the 10 minutes (the teacher is the TIMER) the pair exchanges their sheets.<sup>66</sup> The other member of the pair writes inside the second foot something s/he knows the other class/group members appreciate about the peer.<sup>67</sup>

*Step 4:* Individual reading of one's sheet, pair comparisons and comments on their individual sheets.<sup>68</sup>

*Step 5 (if there is time):* class comments on the activity.

#### **Lesson 4**

*Step 1:* This activity is linked to the one of the previous lesson. The teacher introduces the activity. The REPORTERS will write the task on their sheet

*Step 2:* Each pupil will colour and decorate their individual sheet with the drawings of their own feet. When the teacher signals the time for a change, they will exchange their sheets and will continue colouring and decorating their peers'. Pupils are allowed to borrow different crayons from other class mates.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> See Appendix of part III, observation grid 4.

<sup>67</sup> This is a way of giving prominence to positive external feedback to develop self-esteem. The positive external feedback is written next to the negative self perception to show how complex a person is.

<sup>68</sup> For the comparison to be effective, the teacher will give the Encourager some prompting questions for the Reporter: What do you think about what wrote about you? Why did you write this about yourself? Do you want to know what I think about what you wrote about yourself? Do you want to know why I wrote these things about myself? What do you think about what I wrote about myself? Why did you write this about me?

<sup>69</sup> See Appendix of part III, observation grid 5.

*Step 3:* The sheets are hung around the walls (eye height). The pupils look at each other's works both from the point of view of the content and of the drawings as drawings.<sup>70</sup>

Homework: Individual essay writing "Myself and others".

## Lesson 5

*Step 1:* The teacher shares with the pupils the results of her observation activities. Each pupil receives a copy of a table that refers to his/her pair.<sup>71</sup>

*Step 2:* Pupils read their tables in pairs, and ask for clarification to the teacher if needed. Then, they sign their tables as a sign of agreement.

*Step 3:* They draw the same Table on the Reporter's sheet. They write as many + symbols as the times every single positive or negative behaviour has been observed by the teacher.

*Step 4:* The pair that has used the desired social skill most gets a certificate (one for each member). At the end of the ceremony, each pupil receives a self-evaluation form where s/he writes the emotions s/he had during the activities.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> This activity introduces the sharing of the work that involves every pupils emotionally. Hanging the drawings instead of discussing them as a group/class enables each pupil to become aware of how others feel; at the same time, it avoids lack of attention (on the part of peers) which can be experienced as negative feedback, resulting in low self-esteem, by the pupil whose work is being considered.

<sup>71</sup> See Appendix of part III, table 1.

<sup>72</sup> See Appendix of part III, sheet for pupils' feedback.

## Teaching Plan 2

***Date: April 2000***

### **Social objectives:**

- accepting everybody's contribution to the work
- carrying out a role in the group
- respecting other people's roles
- (final): valuing individual responsibility in reaching a common goal, so that pupils avoid passive acceptance of group pressure and individualistic attitudes.

### **Cognitive objectives**

*space/time awareness:*

- orienteering
- being able to locate facts and events in time and space
- reading maps

*linguistic skills:*

- summarising
- transforming images into narrative texts
- reading correctly
- understanding the logical sequence of a text
- classifying a text according to type (fantastic, narrative, argumentative)

*sensory/motor:*

- consolidating spatial/temporal mental organisation

### **Method/s**

JIGSAW, TGT, DISCUSSION GROUPS, STUDY GROUPS

### **Time**

4 60-minute lessons

## Process evaluation descriptors

What has worked well during the activity? Why?

What has not worked well during the activity? Why?

What does the feedback from the pupils tell the teacher?

Which social skill has not been applied correctly?<sup>73</sup>

Has the original plan been modified during the lessons? How? Why?

## Activities (description, with materials and tools)

### Lesson 1

*Step 1:* The activity, carried out as an interdisciplinary task, involves two classes (4th and 5th Forms), for 18 pupils. The teacher forms 6 HETEROGENEOUS GROUPS of 3 according to different levels of pupils' achievement ("base (or study) groups").

*Step 2:* The groups choose their names following these instructions:

"A group member says the name he would like for the group; the next member (clockwise) must repeat the name that have been said before his/her turn, and then s/he can add his/hers. When all the members have done it, the group as a whole chooses the name. Group names will last to the end of the activity".

*Step 3:* Role assignment. A pupil in a group assigns the first role to a peer, explaining why. The peer assigns another role to the third member of the group. The third member assigns the last role to the person in the group who chose first. At the end of this procedure, if

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<sup>73</sup> It is the teacher's responsibility to plan the next teaching plan focussing on the social skill that has not been applied correctly. It is important to consider the problem that the pupils experience in the activity as symptom of a clearly defined social skill.

a member has problems with the assigned role, s/he can ask the others if somebody wants to swap role with him/her. The roles are:

- **Leader:** must check the tone of voice, keep in touch with the teacher; manage his/her group members' movements in the classroom.
- **Encourager/speaker:** must introduce his/her group to the rest of the class, encourage verbally and non-verbally his/her group peers to the common work, keep on task the group members who tend to get off task.
- **Reporter:** must report on a sheet the group's name, the names of the members and their roles, the tasks; must fill in a Table with the results of the teacher's observations about the use of social skills and the cognitive results of the group.

*Step 4:* Class presentation and work in "expert groups". Each "base group" receives 3 numbered texts (one for each member). "Expert groups" are formed on the basis of the text the "base group" members have chosen from the 3 that had been distributed (2 groups of 3 pupils with Text 1; 2 groups of 3 pupils with Text 2; 2 groups of 3 pupils with Text 3).<sup>74</sup> Each "expert group" moves to a different table where all the pupils will have to understand the text. The "expert groups" work following these instructions and roles:

- the **READER** reads aloud to the group
- the **CONCEPT CHOOSER** chooses the main concepts to be underlined/remembered
- the **EXPERT** explains the chosen concepts to the others

*Step 5:* At the end of the activity, in each "expert group" the text is reconstructed from an "information hunt": in turn, each pupil adds a piece of information to the ones already given by the others.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> The Text-pupil correspondence is fixed by the teacher, so that "expert groups" are heterogeneous as well (1 pupil with high level, 1 pupil with medium level, 1 pupil with low level of performance in each "expert group").

<sup>75</sup> See Appendix of part III, observation grid 6

## Lesson 2

*Step 1:* pupils work in “base groups” again. Task: “In turn, each pupil from the previous expert groups shares the content of his/her text following this procedure:

- # the expert explains
  - # the others listen
  - # the expert asks whether it's clear to everybody
  - # the expert explains again”.<sup>76</sup>
- (20 minutes)

*Step 2:* Checking content learning, to see whether every member of each group has learnt the content of the texts. Procedure: the teacher asks the groups a question related to one of the texts they have learnt and waits; pupils in the groups discuss the answer, and when they are all certain they have identified the text and can give the answer, they raise their hands. The teacher chooses the pupil who will have to give the answer.<sup>77</sup>

## Lesson 3

### TOURNAMENT TIME!<sup>78</sup>

*Step 1:* 5 tournament HOMOGENEOUS GROUPS are formed (2 groups of 3, and 3 groups of 4), so that pupils can interact with peers of equal achievement level. Always forming heterogeneous groups on the one hand does not allow high achievement pupils to interact, therefore missing being challenged at their level; on the

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<sup>76</sup> See Appendix of part III, observation grid 7

<sup>77</sup> See Appendix of part III, Recording sheet for the evaluation of cognitive/subject skills.

<sup>78</sup> This mode of Cooperative Learning is called TGT (Teams-Games-Tournament). It is one of several procedures that have been developed at the Johns Hopkins University under the common name of Student Team Learning. The elements of this approach which differ most from other modes of Cooperative Learning

other, low achievement pupils will miss the opportunity to practice skills at their level (including social skills they need to practice more). Each tournament group, composed of pupils from different previous study groups, receives an envelope containing:

- 1 sheet with Questions about the content they have previously studied;<sup>79</sup>
- 1 sheet with the Answers to the Questions;
- a pack of numbered cards (1 for each question);
- a recording sheet (see below) where the name of the pupils, the name of their previous study group, their individual scores, and the number of cards they have played will be noted down. The name of the study group the pupils belonged to is important, because the scores will be added up attributing them to the previous study groups, NOT to the tournament groups. The study group, which will get the highest score after summing up all the different pupils' scores from the tournament groups, will be declared SUPER-TEAM.

Name	Study group	N. of cards	Score

### Tournament procedure

*Step 2:* The cards are shuffled in each group. Each group member picks a card. The pupil who has picked the one with the highest number starts the tournament. The pupil who starts has the Question sheet, the one next to him (clockwise) has the cards, and the third one has the Answer sheet. The first pupil picks a new card and

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are COMPETITION among groups, and HOMOGENEITY as group formation criterion .

<sup>79</sup> The questions are the same for all the groups. If the groups were not homogeneous, only the brighter students in each group would answer (in competitive heterogeneous groups this often happens).

reads the question corresponding to the number s/he has picked.

S/he will have to give an answer. Three scenarios are possible:

- the reader prefers to “pass”. The card will be put back in the pack;
- the reader gives an answer. The other group members think the answer is correct. The pupil who has the Answer sheet reads the answer aloud. If the answer is indeed correct, the reader can keep the card s/he has picked. If the answer is wrong, the card will go back into the pack;
- the reader gives an answer. The other group members think it is not correct. They can defy the reader. The defier will be the pupil who would play next (i.e. the one that has now got the cards). If the defier gives a wrong answer, s/he will lose a card, and the card will be put back in the pack.

Everything in the play (players and objects) rotates. At the end of the tournament, the cards each player has are counted. The total number of cards of each player is recorded on the recording sheet.<sup>80</sup>

*Step 3:* The pupils go back to their base (study) groups. In their groups, the pupils can check and clarify their answers. Meanwhile, individual scores are attributed according to the results the pupils have had in their tournament groups. The names of the study groups are written on the blackboard, and all the scores for each study group are summed up and recorded. The highest group score will identify the SUPERTeam. The superteam members will receive a certificate of achievement.

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<sup>80</sup> See Appendix, Observation grid 8.

## Lesson 4

Sharing the results of the teachers' monitoring. The following table is drawn on the blackboard:

Social skills	Cognitive/subject skills
Can listen carefully Can respect others' roles Can perform their role correctly Can use a tone of voice which does not disturb the work of others Can manage their emotions	Can read correctly Can explain clearly Can speak standard Italian Give correct answers Can highlight the most important concepts in a text

The teacher gives an account of the number of times she has seen the skills (cf. descriptors) applied in each group. The reporter will write the number of times followed by a+ or a- sign against each descriptor, according to how many times the skill was there/not there.<sup>81</sup>

At the end of the work, the teacher gives the pupils the following Questionnaire, to enable them to give their feedback on the whole activity:

## QUESTIONNAIRE

☺ write how you felt:

- working in the base groups
- working in the expert groups
- working in the tournament groups

☺ how did you feel during the celebration of the super-team?

☺ how did you learn the text you were expert about?

☺ how did you teach it to others?

☺ as to your role in the group:

- which was the easiest thing for you to do?
- which was the most difficult one?
- what must a person with your role do?

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<sup>81</sup> For example: listen carefully: 5+ 3-

# End of Project Report

***Date: 11 May 2000***

**Situation at the end of the project year.**

**Description of the class situation re:**

## **1. Pupils' problem behaviour**

My structured observation/monitoring during class activities over 7 months has shown improvement in the previous tendency to passively submit to group pressure. Pupils who showed a gregarious attitude at the beginning of the year now show a higher level of self-esteem and greater autonomy. As to social skills, my monitoring has shown fewer instances of refusal behaviour. There has also been the willingness, on the part of some pupils, to meet some of the weaker pupils after school to help them do their homework.

## **2. Pupils' achievement**

The greatest result is that the pupils regularly do their homework (most of all on the part of the ones who have the greatest problems).

The quality of their work has improved – reports, posters, drawings. The quality has gradually improved, and has produced greater motivation to work. Some pupils do extra work on their own or in groups after school, and bring to school very interesting unsolicited products.

## **3. Learning results**

Very good. All the pupils, including the ones who have learning difficulties, have improved their performance.

#### **4. Class climate**

The Co-operative Learning approach was tested during a 5-day school trip to Rome, which contributed to structuring and consolidating individual accountability within the group. This experience pooled the class together as a group. As a result, the class climate is now more serene, conflicts are less important in essence, and the pupils manage to solve them most of the times without the help/intervention of the teacher.

#### **My experience as a class teacher**

This has been the third year in which I have consistently used Co-operative Learning in my teaching practice. Once again, I can say that I cannot take anything for granted, and that It is always for me and a surprise to see how the pupils are able to work a lot and to find pleasure in what they do, if we give them the opportunity to work in a different way, including the “differently able”.

#### **Evaluation of the year's work in relation to the initial expectations about the class**

##### **1. Process**

The instances of problem behaviour have decreased in intensity

Motivation has increased

##### **2. Subject achievement**

Everybody has reached the planned cognitive objectives in my subjects.

## **Evaluation of the year's work in relation to the teacher's learning/awareness**

### **1.1 Learning**

I have built a CHECKLIST which I have used at the end of each activity as a self-evaluation tool both for my competence in managing the procedures of CL activities and my attitude to the pupils.

### **1.2 Awareness**

I need to simplify the observation grids I have created to record the social skills, as I have to give comprehensible feedback during activities.

## **Overall evaluation of the year's work**

I experienced Co-operative Learning for the first time in 1997, when I took part in a seminar at the University of Trento, in the Department of Sociology. I am now even more convinced than at the very beginning that Co-operative Learning can create the ideal learning context, because it structures situations where pupils see other people learning as well. Learning in such situations helps pupils to learn. In my opinion, pupils need a class climate conducive to higher motivation. This is possible only if the teacher values the role of interpersonal relationships in the "play" of active learning. Awareness of this, together with my enthusiasm for trying different things (only if you try you discover something big) make me say that there is no place any more for "the teacher behind her desk", who wants to be the centre of attention and talks most of the time. The teacher I identify myself with is more essential and less "visible". Being less visible does not mean being "less there", so that I can do my own things while pupils work. My role is

constantly redefined according to constant structured observation and monitoring, which tells me what I have to do to help pupils to learn effectively.

## Appendix of part III

### Observation grid 1

NAMES	BEHAVIOUR	TIMES
The SPEAKER	speaks clearly	
	modifies his words according to the listener	
The LISTENER	looks at the speaker	
	sits calmly	
	nods	
	expresses disagreement politely	

### Observation grid 2

NAME: when s/he speaks	Sends clear messages  Says something relevant  Says something irrelevant
NAME: when s/he listens	Shows impatience  Laughs with no reason  Talks to other peers  Looks at the speaker

### Observation grid 3 (writing inside one's foot)

NAME	works to the task
	does not pay sufficient attention to what he's doing

### Observation grid 4 (writing inside somebody else's foot)

NAME:	works to the task
	talks to somebody else

### Observation grid 5 for drawing activity

NAME:	asks for a favour politely
	asks for a favour impolitely
	refuses to share own materials
	shares his/her materials with others

**Observation grid 6 for monitoring “export groups”**

(there are 3 teachers working as a team, each monitoring 2 groups):

<i>fill in field notes as well after names</i>	<b>Cognitive skills</b>	<b>Social skill</b>
Reader's name	Reads correctly + -	Looks at the expert + -
Concept chooser's name	Selects important concepts + -	Looks at the expert + -
Expert's name	Explains clearly + - Speaks standard Italian + -	Asks whether everything's clear + - Explains again + -

**Observation grid 7****1. listening phase****2. explanation phase****3. roles and tasks**

1/3.social skills 2. cognitive	attention + lack of att. -	Uses specific language +/-	Uses standard Italian +/-	Performs role +/-	Respects others' roles +/-
Group n					
leader					
reporter					
enc/speak					

**Observation grid 8 for tournament groups:**

Names of tournament group members	Tone of voice +/-	Anxiety/stress level +/-	Negative competition – Positive competition +

**Recording sheet for the evaluation of cognitive/subject skills:**

name	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
Gr 1																		
Gr 2																		
Gr 3																		
Gr 4																		
Gr 5																		
Gr 6																		

**Table 1**

The teacher gives this with the descriptors taken from the different observation grids she has used for the different social skills. The second column reports the number of times the behaviour has been observed. The third column contains the conclusion the teacher has drawn as to the presence/absence of that particular skill (is there = ✓; is not there = x):

NAME:

asks for a favour politely			asks for a favour impolitely		
shares own materials with others			refuses to share own materials with others		
nods			talks to other pupils		
says something relevant			says something irrelevant		
sits calmly			laughs with no reason		
looks at the speaker			talks to others		
works on task			does not work on task		

**Sheet for pupils' feedback**

Drawing with a smiling face	<p>When did I feel like that?</p> <p>Who /what made me feel like that?</p> <p>Looking at the following list of emotions, which ones describe best the way I felt?</p> <p><i>Humiliated, happy, sad, angry, amused, intimidated, resented, proud, surprised, devalued, betrayed, frustrated, hurt guilty, despised, valued, embarrassed, not understood, ill treated.</i></p> <p>What did I think?</p>
Drawing with an angry face	<p>When did I feel like that?</p> <p>Who /what made me feel like that?</p> <p>Looking at the following list of emotions, which ones describe best the way I felt?</p> <p><i>Humiliated, happy, sad, angry, amused, intimidated, resented, proud, surprised, devalued, betrayed, frustrated, hurt guilty, despised, valued, embarrassed, not understood, ill treated.</i></p> <p>What did I think?</p>
Drawing with a "I can't accept what you're saying" face	<p>When did I feel like that?</p> <p>Who /what made me feel like that?</p> <p>Looking at the following list of emotions, which ones describe best the way I felt?</p> <p><i>Humiliated, happy, sad, angry, amused, intimidated, resented, proud, surprised, devalued, betrayed, frustrated, hurt guilty, despised, valued, embarrassed, not understood, ill treated.</i></p> <p>What did I think?</p>
Drawing with a surprised face	<p>When did I feel like that?</p> <p>Who /what made me feel like that?</p> <p>Looking at the following list of emotions, which ones describe best the way I felt?</p> <p><i>Humiliated, happy, sad, angry, amused, intimidated, resented, proud, surprised, devalued, betrayed, frustrated, hurt guilty, despised, valued, embarrassed, not understood, ill treated.</i></p> <p>What did I think?</p>

## A short summary of the articles

A common idea in the above texts focuses on the need to change pedagogy from teaching to learning. The three parts of the text look at this need of change from different levels:

In Part I the change is discussed mainly from a society level; in Part II the author is using psychological frames, and in Part III the author presents an approach to classroom organisation which, she argues, implies changes in the hierarchy and the power relationships in the classroom.

As a consequence of the presented ideas about pedagogical processes, attitudes to

- pupils
- teaching and learning
- teachers' role and
- teacher training

will have to be changed.

The basic question in this discussion is, the authors mean, about democracy at school and in the classroom. It is also a question about making “a school for all”.

Important parts of the approaches are critical views on current working practice, which traditionally locates “failure” in the pupil. The first part argues that this one-sided looking at children should be abandoned. This also means a big change in the traditional teaching and learning roles towards equality between all the subjects involved in the learning process, and of school organisation in society in a wider sense.

Since teachers teach the way they have been taught, this also means that this change has to be initiated in teacher training. Teacher training

works as a model for teaching in classrooms, and this also means, according to the authors, new attitudes to learners. School is not only a place where facts are “passed on” to pupils. It is a place where social behaviour in learning together with others is an important part of knowledge development.

Developing citizenship is currently seen as part of schools 'mission' – this means that schools are important in the development of democratic society.

## **Presentations of the authors**

*Rolf Helldin* is associate professor at Stockholm Institute of Education, and is working as researcher and teacher trainer. His main interests are educational philosophy and pedagogical theories for communicative teaching.

*Sandra Lucietto* is a researcher and teacher trainer at IPRASE del Trentino, a Pedagogical Research Institute in Trento (IT). She is a language teacher by education. Her main interests are the learning process, pedagogical approaches and teaching methods with specific reference to co-constructivist and interactionist theories of learning.

*Bärbel Völkel*, Ph.D. is a teacher trainer in the Studienseminar für die Sekundärstufe I in Paderborn. Her main interests are related to the question how teaching and learning can be structured, to open spaces where pupils can create knowledge by themselves. Selfdetermined and selforganized learning, activity based learning and communicative learning are main aspects of this learner orientated focus. The theoretical frame of her perspective is the Radical Constructivism and its transfer into pedagogical questions.



This book focuses on the theoretical and practical background for the EU-project “The problem of school failure and its implications for teacher education”, and is meant to be used as a ground for comparative course discussions among teachers about school failure in Europe. The text in general is critically discussing (special) education knowledge, using historical as well as recent examples to illustrate problems with one-sided technical and instrumental approaches in teaching-situations.

One of the book’s central themes is a critical analysis of traditional attitudes to learning and of methods dealing with pupils who start their school careers as “normal” children and are gradually labelled as “failures”. Following a constructivistic general basic approach in the three parts of the book, the phrase: “this pupil has difficulties” or: “this pupil is conspicuous” will be “deconstructed” into a perspective in which the child’s behaviour is looked upon as appropriate in the specific situation.

The authors come from three European countries: Sweden, Germany and Italy. They are all teacher trainers and researchers with long theoretical and practical experience in the field of school failure.

This report can be downloaded at  
<http://www.lhs.se/iol/publikationer/>



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