

Alliance for Childhood Forum 20th March 2007

Those who took part (in no particular order):

Maria Robinson is an early years' specialist, lecturer and author of 'From Birth to One' with another book on development from birth to eight years in press. Her presentation will highlight early emotions, factors which influence emotional well being/mental health and the crucial influence of emotions across all aspects of development.

Sally Schweizer taught young children for 30 years. Teacher trainer 20 years; Early Childhood Consultant for Local Authority and Steiner Waldorf settings; Author of 'Well, I Wonder, Childhood in the Modern World' (Rudolf Steiner Press 2006). Forthcoming books: 'Under the Sky, Children Outdoors' and Fairy Tale Plays and Ringtimes (both Hawthorn Press).

Pippa Smith, member of Executive Committee, Mediawatch-uk (formerly National Viewers & Listeners Association). Also co-founder of Mediamarch, a mother of three and formerly a part-time teacher of French. Her main concern is the effects of the media on children and teenagers and the wider implications for society as a whole.

www.mediawatchuk.org Tel: 01233 633936 or email: PippaSmith16@hotmail.com

Angela Marciano, as a communications specialist working at the Pre-school Learning Alliance, contributes towards the development and delivery of a range of communications activity including national campaigns and initiatives like the *Feeding Young Imaginations* Healthy Eating campaign. I manage specific fundraising and marketing projects, events and launches with overall responsibility for branding, design and print production for the organisation.

Professor Del Loewenthal and Dr Richard House, of the Research Centre for Therapeutic Education, Roehampton University, will discuss their Centre's potential to spearhead collaborative research into children's wellbeing from a "relational" perspective, which views the quality and authenticity of real human relationships as central to children's developmental, educational and life experience.

Tim Gill is one of the leading thinkers on childhood. His book *No Fear: Growing up in a risk-averse society* will be published in 2007. In 2002, Tim led the first ever Government-sponsored review of children's play under the chairmanship of Rt Hon Frank Dobson MP. Tim's website is www.rethinkingchildhood.com

Richard Bowlby worked in various medical institutions where he produced visual aids to communicate research findings. In 1999 he retired, and now promotes work on attachment theory started by his father, John Bowlby. His present concern is the psychological impact on babies of being in daycare where they do not manage to develop a long term secondary attachment to one carer.

Chris Ponsford, Development Director of What About the Children?, has worked in statutory and voluntary services for children in Bristol, Exeter and Kent variously as a children and families social worker, play leader, development officer, trainer, lecturer, school governor and as an inspector of childcare and nursery education.

www.whataboutthechildren.org.uk

Sally Goddard Blythe MSc.FRSA, is Director of The Institute for Neuro-Physiological Psychology, an organisation, which specialises in the identification, assessment and remediation of physical factors underlying specific learning difficulties and behavioural problems. Author of the books: "Reflexes, Learning and Behaviour", "The Well Balanced Child" and "What Babies Really Need" (due to be published 2008) .

Penny Wilson has worked as a Playworker for the last twenty years. Much of this time was spent as Senior worker at Chelsea Adventure Playground, which was the first playground to be established to provide play for disabled children to play with their siblings and peers. Since leaving Chelsea, she has been employed at the Play Association Tower Hamlets as Inclusion Worker. Her job is to create sustainable play places for disabled children to play within their communities. She writes and trains playworkers in the UK and the Alliance for Childhood in the states has funded several trips for me to go and work with a community in Chicago, with universities, museums, hospitals and design and action groups in Chicago, Washington DC, Michigan and New York.

Julieta Albert - Community Midwife - SSA
Mina Mistry - Speech and Language Therapist- SSA
Alda Counago - Senior community nursery Nurse-SSA
 All from Sure Start Acton

Margaret Edgington – Early Years Consultant

Joan Almon Alliance for Childhood USA

Michiel Matthes Ecology of the Child



Name:	Mr Michiel C. Matthes, 56 years old
1968-1976	University: agricultural economics for developing countries
1976-1980	For FAO in Ethiopia and Kenya
1980-2005	Rabobank / Unico Banking Group in the Netherlands; in 2002 Brussels
1997-	Next to bank activist for the quality for childhood; More information on www.ecologyofthechild.org

Christopher Clouder Christopher Clouder FRSA is currently chairman of the Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship for the UK and Ireland and the CEO of the European Council for Steiner Waldorf Education, registered in Brussels. He is a co-founder and international director of the Alliance for Childhood. Previous to this he taught adolescents for 5 years in the state system and EFL in a Waldorf school he was instrumental in founding in the Netherlands and then for 18 years in Waldorf schools in England. He writes and gives public lectures widely throughout Europe and beyond on educational matters, contemporary issues and cultural evolution. He is a visiting lecturer at Plymouth University and Emerson College, UK and gives presentations at many other conferences, universities and Steiner teacher education courses, as well as representing educational issues with policy makers. He has produced various books and articles on education and childhood, and has also recently been appointed to lead an international commission to write a report on the status of Socio-Emotional Learning worldwide by a prestigious Spanish trust.

Janni Nicol Alliance for Childhood; Steiner Waldorf Schools Early Years Advisor

Costantino Giorgetti Alliance for Childhood

Marion Briggs Alliance for Childhood

Miranda Suit mediamarch co-founded mediamarch, a voluntary protest group seeking stronger obscenity laws, on the basis of research linking violent 'entertainment' and pornography with crime. Parents are undermined by the media, and Government should do far more to support them. Miranda runs a Soup Kitchen, is a Christian and has 4 children. Contact details: miranda.suit@gmail.com Tel: 020 8467 6452 www.mediamarch.org.uk

Ruth Livesley Advisory Teacher for the Private Sector, Jersey

Sandra Mountford Department of Education Sport and Culture, Jersey

Lydia Keyte What About the Children

Adrian Armstrong Iona School, Nottingham

Sarah Woodhouse Right From the Start

Thais Bishop Emerson College Education Department

Dianne Dean

Melian Mansfield What About the Children

Intending to come but unable to due to illness or for other reasons:

Melanie Gill Common Sense Associates

Raising our heads above the parapet. March 20/3/2007

Society has turned its back on children, the Government's strategy for nurturing the next generation is not only non-existent but entrenched in the denial of the problem, the evidence which could help and the empathy needed to institute the radical changes that are needed. Solutions are out there, we need to take action.

Denise Roberts My Child Magazine

Emma Hiwaizi* is the co-editor of Juno, a natural parenting magazine dedicated to supporting parents through the joys and challenges of parenting. She has a degree in anthropology and has also co-created the Green Guide for London and the Children's Garden, a Waldorf kindergarten in London. She lives in Sussex with her husband and three beautiful daughters.
www.junomagazine.com

Joan Brinch

Bernard Spiegall Playlink

Bonny Etchell-Anderson

Liz Attenborough Talk to Your Baby Campaign

Contributions from people unable to take part due to other commitments:

To the editor, The Independent, London 14.2.2007 - Reclaiming childhood

The startling UNESCO verdict on the low levels of well-being of Britain's children is a challenge for inquiry and holistic action. One tip from Sweden is to protect children from intrusive

commercialisation by banning TV advertising to children. If it takes a village to raise a child, then why do we in Britain allow advertisers to manipulate children through peer pressure, make them dissatisfied and make family life a misery through activating pester power?

The banning of advertising directed at children would be a powerful, simple and effective action the government could take to increase children's well-being. It would start reclaiming childhood and give families a real break.

Martin Large

(Author of *Set Free Childhood, Parents Survival Guide to TV and the electronic media-now translated into four languages*)

Obviously many different (and interacting) factors are likely to be contributing to the apparently poor health and wellbeing of the UK's children relative to those in other developed countries - and these are very well reviewed in Sue Palmer's book 'Toxic Childhood' (Orion 2006). Numerous cultural factors - and in particular, the role of our media in promoting and celebrating unhealthy lifestyles - appear to put UK children at a disadvantage that successive governments have failed to tackle. However, it is my view that the fundamental and very serious implications of poor diet really are not yet appreciated and understood.

- Type B malnutrition (i.e. a lack of essential micronutrients despite an adequate or excessive intake of energy / calories), can have serious detrimental effects on the health and wellbeing of both mothers and children.
- Some of these effects may be reversible (by improving diet in later life), but others are not. Worse still, some of the detrimental effects of poor diet appear to be magnified down the generations.
- An adequate supply of essential nutrients is fundamental to the proper working of our brains - and thus to our behaviour, learning and mood.
- The latest available data from national surveys suggest that micronutrient deficiencies are in fact alarmingly widespread in UK children; and yet research into the effects of this on children's mental performance and wellbeing remains conspicuous by its absence (largely because of the commercial forces that distort research agendas).

Further information can be found in my recent book - *They Are What You Feed Them* (Harper Thorson 2006) - or from the website of the Food And Behaviour Research Charity, details of both of which are below.

Again, I'm very sorry I can't join you on March 20th, but I do hope that your meeting is a fruitful one.

Very best wishes

Alex Richardson

I certainly am very interested in the report and its implications, particularly as I am working with UNICEF at the moment, on a post-tsunami programme in the Maldives.

Unfortunately, as I will be there until the end of March, I will not be able to get to your event. I'm so glad you are following up the report, and would dearly like to stay in touch with your thinking, and any further events that may result from your meeting.

I think I would probably want to make some points about the way that the curriculum for older children is being eased and personalised in recognition of the way that formalised, decontextualised study is turning children off school, while at the same time four year olds are to be subjected to whole group teaching of phonics, and one of the early learning goals that is consistently achieved by the lowest percentage of five year olds is to be raised - so more will be made to feel failures earlier, and all will be betrayed by a highly inappropriate programme at the expense of the sorts of activities that would genuinely raise achievement later.

Wendy Scott former early years adviser to the DfES

This is a multi-layered issue. There is no one factor that could be addressed that would make a difference but an amalgam of deep seated issues that have built up over the years. I personally believe that a serious contributory factor (but not exclusively so) has been the highjacking of the early years curriculum with too much prescription putting *things* to be learnt at the heart of what needs to be *taught* far too early rather than paying attention to what the children demonstrate

through their play and exploration *how they can be encouraged to learn and develop*. This has had a consequent effect on parents who then get anxious because their children are not learning as fast as others or reading better, quicker etc and this then adds anxiety to the children which then affects their learning and how they see themselves. There has been for too long a lack of attention in training colleges with regard to getting students to understand about child development and the implication for education and all round development. Until we can get the Govt and Civil Servants to understand, really understand, that getting children into school early does not mean they will learn more and faster - in fact quite the opposite - not much will change. This is having a profound effect especially with regard to emotional, self-esteem and behavioural issues. They seem incapable of seeing the link between these kinds of early years issues and what is happening with young people, especially boys. I have written a great deal to various Ministers about this and committees, especially the Rose committee on Reading. I accused them (not quite in the way I am putting it to you) of masquerading as "Interactionists" by stealing and using the language of early years people while really being at heart, "Transmissionists", in their belief that children are "empty vessels" as seen by the prescriptive models and outcomes they legislate for. I could write pages! Do keep in touch and let me know how things go. I would love to be with you but another time perhaps.

Sally Barnes Writer and Consultant

...the more and more I think about it the more I am convinced that the markets and consumerism are at the root of our malaise...and the UNICEF list seems to confirm it

Tim Brighouse

I have long been sceptical about the findings of international studies. They are important, not for the spurious league table positions they generate, but for the questions they raise. The latest UNICEF report ('The unhappy generation', TES February 16) makes for unhappy reading. There must be very many factors contributing to British children's unhappiness and dissatisfaction but a major one must be the damage done by an assessment system which regularly and remorselessly compares them one with another and finds so many lacking. No wonder an eleven-year old, when asked about her likely Key Stage 2 test results, said "I'll be a nothing". Too many others - confirmed "nothings" or "nothings" in the making - have their self-esteem damaged on a systematic basis.

Professor Colin Richards

In his poem 'Dumbness', Thomas Traherne writes of the time before speech, that brief time of silence when the infant child's 'non-intelligence of human words' affords it 'ten thousand pleasures'. The speechless child, he writes, inhabits the world alone, undisturbed, reigning in silence, singing a [babbling] song; listening to its inner oracle while feeling and measuring the excellence of outer things. This is a time when the world 'speaks' to the child: '*And every stone, and every star a tongue. And every gale of wind a curious song.*' Traherne had the greatest respect for the uninterrupted state of early infancy believing that things take their deepest root at this time.

The latest proposals on baby care from the DfES contain much sound advice (though a newborn might be disconcerted to find that while lying babbling within its cot it also lies within the jurisdiction of a 'Department for Education and Skills' and is already under scrutiny). Beverly Hughes, the children's minister, suggests that the proposed guidelines, which will monitor babbling and toe-touching amongst other things, will provide practitioners with a 'rigorous approach.' I wonder what Traherne would have made of that phrase? Must try harder at babbling.

As well as the need babies have for time to 'inhabit the world alone' (and will practitioners with some 500 developmental milestones to record between 0 and 5 have time to be mindful of that need?), they also need periods of genuine social interaction. Indeed, when good relationships are in place, developments of all kinds flourish. Babies need interactions with people who take delight in them, who look and smile at them when changing nappies, who speak warmly to them with humour and form relationships with them. People, who notice, because they are attuned to the child, when developmental stages have been reached and celebrate these things, and who also notice when something is amiss and take action. The best teachers/carers are those who understand the children in their care with empathy; they are people who closely observe children

because they couldn't do otherwise, they are interested, fascinated by them. There is a danger that an over emphasis on rigorous recording may produce a clinical observer who, intent on the obligatory task, is forced to become distant rather than close to the subject, and is consequently less able to appreciate the baby's daily needs.

It is so important to get these things right, to set the right tone in the first months and years of life and to embrace the complexities of infant need. I urge a careful appraisal of these guidelines and in particular the way they may be implemented. What happens in infancy doesn't necessarily show on the surface, but to return to Traherne's words, it is the child's early experiences, which take the deepest root.

Sally Jenkinson

Author: The Genius of Play;

Member of The Alliance for Childhood

Obviously many different (and interacting) factors are likely to be contributing to the apparently poor health and wellbeing of the UK's children relative to those in other developed countries - and these are very well reviewed in Sue Palmer's book 'Toxic Childhood' (Orion 2006). Numerous cultural factors - and in particular, the role of our media in promoting and celebrating unhealthy lifestyles - appear to put UK children at a disadvantage that successive governments have failed to tackle. However, it is my view that the fundamental and very serious implications of poor diet really are not yet appreciated and understood.

- Type B malnutrition (i.e. a lack of essential micronutrients despite an adequate or excessive intake of energy / calories), can have serious detrimental effects on the health and wellbeing of both mothers and children.
- Some of these effects may be reversible (by improving diet in later life), but others are not. Worse still, some of the detrimental effects of poor diet appear to be magnified down the generations.
- An adequate supply of essential nutrients is fundamental to the proper working of our brains - and thus to our behaviour, learning and mood.
- The latest available data from national surveys suggest that micronutrient deficiencies are in fact alarmingly widespread in UK children; and yet research into the effects of this on children's mental performance and wellbeing remains conspicuous by its absence (largely because of the commercial forces that distort research agendas).

Further information can be found in my recent book - They Are What You Feed Them (Harper Thorson 2006) - or from the website of the Food And Behaviour Research Charity, details of both of which are below.

Dr A.J.Richardson

Senior Research Fellow, Department of Physiology, Anatomy and Genetics, University of Oxford
Founder Director, Food And Behaviour Research: see www.fabresearch.org

Author of 'They Are What You Feed Them' (Harper Thorson 2006): see www.theyarewhatyoufeedthem.com

People who are unable to come and who send there best wishes for the meeting:

Ron Best, Roehampton University; **Philip Pullman** Author; **Julie Jennings** RNIB; **Michele Elliott**, Director Kidscape; **Heather Ransom** Networks Coordinator Early Childhood Unit, National Children's Bureau; **Barbara Isaacs** Montessori Centre International; **Cathy Nutbrown** Sheffield University; **Aric Sigman** Author; **Sami Timimi** Consultant child and adolescent psychiatrist; **Brian Godfrey**; **Dharmavidya**, Order of Amida Buddha; **Diana Watkins** ISIS, the independent prep schools organisation; **Christopher Houghton Budd** economic historian; **Marion Dowling** British Association of Early Childhood Education; **Colin Richards** HMI (ret.)

Presentations and discussions

Joan Almon - has been travelling the world and has seen changes taking place in children since the 70's. There is an increase in allergies, childhood obesity and for the first time the life expectancy of children is less than for their parents. The mind set has to change. No-one she knows wants to harm children. People want to get children to develop faster. It's difficult to find children's institutions which promote play. Academic instruction begins with the three to five year olds. One third of Kindergartens in California (and all of Los Angeles) uses a method which is called 'Open Court'. Joan criticises this method, because it limits a real interaction with the children. In the instruction manual of 'Open Court' it prescribes the teacher not to respond to certain questions, but to go instead back to the script. It is mandatory for teachers to follow the script. This method was researched in 2001 with the outcome that the method is ineffective and counterproductive and yet it is used widely. Some directors want more play. Penny Wilson (present at the forum) is working in out of school venues in London to introduce play. The situation is changing.

Richard Bowlby - Babies and toddlers in non-parental day care can avoid chronic separation anxiety if they develop an attachment bond with one carer - but what happens when they don't?

In any situation where they are separated from their parents, babies and toddlers younger than 30 months only feel safe when they are with someone else with whom they have an affectionate bond. Throughout human evolution, mothers have been helped to care for their young by members of the extended family. Some of these will have known the baby since birth and become secondary attachment figures, and their motivation to provide care would have come from shared attachment bonds. Then, the carer and baby would have had ready access to mother and would usually have been within sight or earshot of her - also for feeding on demand and co-sleeping at night. As recently as a generation ago, non-parental childcare for babies and toddlers was usually provided by people the family knew really well such as granny, father, neighbour, nanny or childminder. This simple detail turns out to be of the utmost importance because the babies and toddlers formed a secondary attachment bond to these people and this bond gave them a protective factor when their mothers - or primary attachment figures - were not accessible.

Many researchers, academics and clinicians are now worried about the psychological effect on babies and toddlers younger than 30 months who do not manage to develop a lasting secondary attachment bond to one person who always cares for them during non-parental daycare. If neither their primary nor a secondary attachment figure is accessible, most babies and toddlers will usually protest by crying and searching for an attachment figure, sometimes for an hour or more, (although some appear to manage better). If this does not result in reunion, the instinctive reaction of some babies and toddlers is to become rather subdued or withdrawn, quietly occupying themselves alone. This is emergency coping behaviour which is often very compliant and may be seen as toddlers settling in and accepting their new surroundings, but their cortisol levels are usually elevated above normal which indicates that they are stressed.

NOTE It's been observed that kidnapped children instinctively appease their captors and survive by surrendering: they avoid causing trouble or being noticed.

Whilst the chronic stress of this situation may show in subtle behaviour changes, most parents and carers either do not associate these changes with the daycare experience, or do not realise that they could become a significant risk-factor that increases the likelihood of children and adolescents developing social and emotional problems in the future. The combined effect of having three or more significant risk-factors can be overwhelming and lead to child and adolescent mental health problems, educational difficulties and antisocial behaviours.

Currently, Sure Start has an excellent model for childminders which encourages babies and toddlers to develop a long term secondary attachment bond to the childminder. However, Sure Start has a very different model for childcare in Children's Centres where babies and toddlers are in day-nurseries. Despite having a Key-Person policy, there is rarely continuity of personalised caregiving and little opportunity for developing a long term secondary attachment bond to an individual carer. With so much focus on cognitive educational attainment, there's a grave danger that the *emotional* wellbeing of babies and toddlers is being overlooked. For positive emotional health during this most sensitive period of brain development, it is absolutely essential that continuity of personalised caregiving is available to babies and toddlers at all times, either from their primary attachment figure or from a secondary attachment figure.

Margaret Edgington - Pressures on Children's Development and Learning in the Early Years

We now have a growing body of evidence which shows that children's first six years (at least) should offer (amongst other things: - chance to make strong attachments with adults who know them well and care about them - time to explore their environment (indoors and outside) and play and to develop at their own pace - practical contexts for learning which connect with real experience - an emphasis on the development of communication and language skills (speaking and listening).

Children right to a stress free childhood is being seriously threatened by current Government policy including:

- the emphasis on outcomes and targets some of which are totally unrealistic for young children
- the over-emphasis on some aspects of learning and development at the expense of others (e.g. literacy skills (synthetic phonics) rather than language and imagination). This is particularly damaging to the development of young boys.

- the development of an Early Years Foundation Stage which requires that the curriculum for babies and toddlers is planned under the same 6 headings as the curriculum for 3-5 year olds
- the 'dumbing down' of the workforce in early years settings and, ultimately, the loss of best practice – Early Years Professionals instead of teachers, inconsistent and inadequate NVQ qualifications, nursery schools closing to be replaced by Children's Centres which do not have a strong nursery education core.

[See also power point presentation](#)

Tim Gill – (www.rethinkingchildhood.com)

On EBay you can buy 'out of pram' baby knee pads for crawling babies. 'When my daughter started to crawl she was always getting bruised and sore knees,' the seller says. 'These knee pads have stopped the bruises and she is now a lot more confident at getting around.' Apparently she has sold 300 pairs in the last month. Here are two more glimpses into 21st century childhood. Last month a school in Lincoln banned tag and chase games during break times. Still, it could be worse for children: on the other side of the Irish Sea in County Cork, half of all primary schools have banned running in the playground altogether. Last summer, the Willow Park Housing Trust in Manchester wrote a letter to a mother about her son. The letter said that 'Willow Park has received a complaint about anti-social behaviour perpetrated by your son Ben and his friends, who have been playing football and causing a disturbance.' The trust said that 'it takes all complaints seriously.' Clearly it does, because Ben Mann, the cause of the disturbance and the perpetrator of the act, was just three years old.

These are perhaps extreme examples, but they are part of a bigger picture: a picture of the inexorable extinction of everyday childhood experiences, caused in part by risk aversion and in part by wider changes in society.

To fill out that picture, here are three sets of statistics. First, in their unsurpassed survey of children's mobility *One False Move*, Mayer Hillman, John Adams and John Whitelegg compared the freedom of movement of English children in 1990 with that of their predecessors in 1971. They showed that in 1971, eight out of ten children aged seven or eight went to school on their own. By 1990 this had nearly dropped to less than one in ten. This suggests that in a single generation the 'home habitat' for eight-year-old children – the area they can roam around on their own - has shrunk to one-ninth of its former size. The study also found that German children enjoyed a level of freedom of mobility that their English peers had to wait 2 or 3 years longer for.

My second statistic takes a look at what's happening in the home. This is from a report on parenting by the Future Foundation. It shows that, contrary to what you might believe, and what the media might tell you, parents these days are spending more time with their children. Not just a bit more, a lot more. In fact, it has quadrupled from 25 minutes in 1975 to 99 in 2000. That is more than an hour extra, every single day. From children's point of view, this is a significant encroachment into their everyday lives and cannot help but limit their freedom and autonomy.

Third, a couple of statistics about play and break time in schools. Psychologists Antony Pellegrini and Peter Blatchford found that in just five years – from 1990 to 1995 – the lunchtime break in English schools had been reduced by 38 per cent in junior and secondary schools and 26 per cent in primary schools.

I think there's a link between these trends, the UNICEF international study and some worrying findings about the decline in the level of well-being of children here in the UK.

First, to remind you of what the UNICEF report says: in essence, the UK's children are the unhappy, have the poorest relationships with both families and peers, and are the most prone to risky behaviours as teenagers. Now look at what the big longitudinal child development cohort studies tell us: the troubles of childhood are growing. Dr Stephan Collishaw and colleagues from the Institute of Psychiatry found clear evidence of increases in both conduct disorders and emotional problems. Conduct problems over the period between 1974 and 1999 had doubled, with significant increases in emotional problems over the more recent period 1986 to 1999. The problems were widespread: by 1999 almost one in six adolescents showed what they called 'more severe' conduct problems, and over one in six showed more severe emotional problems.

What's going on with the UK's children and young people? The cohort studies suggest that the cause is not just poverty, and it is not just family breakdown: the trends cut across social class and family types. My hypothesis is that the heart of the problem is the loss of what psychologists call 'mastery experiences' and what I call everyday adventures. I suspect they are the kind of experiences that permeate your own memories of childhood. They include free play, but also lots of other types of activity: local trips, running errands, hobbies, keeping pets.

In other countries, and in the past here in the UK, pre-teenage children have (or had) much more freedom, and hence more everyday contact with their community, peer group and friends beyond home and school – with adults taking a bit part role. These experiences are critical to childhood. In particular they promote the development of key higher order adaptive competences: on the one hand - coping mechanisms and resilience, and - on the other – effective self-regulation of behaviour and a sense of responsibility.

So what do we do about all this? I think we have a lot to learn from the continentals – especially the Scandinavians and the Germans – about creating opportunities for children gradually to extend their experiences and assume greater everyday responsibility across all areas of their lives. With more time I could talk at great length about their approach to - for instance – school playgrounds, out of school childcare, town and city planning and the design and management of public space.

But time is short. So in summary, what I am calling for is the urgent and wholesale revival of some longstanding, sound, progressive ideas about how children learn and grow: through their own efforts, engaging with the people, places and objects around them, with adults to support them where needed. Back in the 1970s the childcare expert Mia Kellmer Pringle – the first director of my old employers, the National Children's Bureau - wrote a book called *The Needs of Children*. In this short publication, which some of you may recall, Pringle identified four

developmental needs. Two of these were new experiences and responsibility. On the latter need, she posed a question that goes to the very heart and soul of the problem of childhood: 'how can responsibility be given to the immature and to the irresponsible?' Her answer is unequivocal: 'there is no way out of the dilemma that unless it is granted, the child cannot learn how to exercise it.'

Realistically, I don't think we can isolate children completely from the wider world, with all its new technology, commercial and competitive pressures. What we can do is give them the chance to engage with it at their own pace and on their own terms, in ways that allow them to develop their own competences and coping mechanisms. We need to give children the space and time to get the hang of being an autonomous and engaged human being.

References

Blatchford P and Pellegrini A (2000) *The Child at School: Interactions with peers and teachers*. London: Arnold.

Collishaw S, Maughan B, Goodman R, and Pickles A (2004) 'Time trends in adolescent mental health', *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 45 (8), pp 1350-62.

Future Foundation (2006) *The Changing Face of Parenting: Professional Parenting, Information and Healthcare*. London: Future Foundation.

Hillman M, Adams J and Whitelegg J (1993) *One False Move: A Study of Children's Independent Mobility*. London: Policy Studies Institute.

Pringle M K (1975) *The Needs of Children*. London: Hutchinson.

Pippa Smith MediaWatch UK - Child poverty and the environment are much in the news but we hear little about poverty of mind because of the media environment which children inhabit today. Seductive outside influences have taken control of our young. Left too much to their own devices they are subject to a barrage of 'cool' anti-social media messages from Big Brother and Little Britain to ultra violent films, games, lyrics and pornography. So much is accessible now from the unregulated internet via mobile phones, Ipods, computers play stations etc. This assault on childhood by TV and media is incalculable. The youth market is big business. The damage they are suffering as a consequence is evident in many ways: poor educational development, eating disorders, obesity, sexual health crisis, depression, ADHD, bullying and the dreadful rise in adolescent aggression and murder. Following recent shootings of teenagers in South London and the "Gun Summit" mediawatch-uk has once again called on broadcasters and film makers to embrace a more socially responsible attitude. In some respects firearms and knives have become a fashion accessory and are glorified in films DVDs etc. The government has recognised the damage caused by smoking and is beginning to recognise the connection with junk food advertising and obesity. This gives us hope and our Conference on children and the Media in Portcullis House on Monday 23 April seeks to raise awareness in Parliament to the negative effects of the media.

Miranda Suit The negative effect of the media on parenting

- The Government suggests that many of the current problems with children in the UK are a result of bad parenting.
- But many parents feel they have to counteract the effect of the media to bring up their own children successfully.
- mediamarch agree and founded mediamarch in 2000 to facilitate peaceful public protest (e.g. a petition of 121,000+ and annual marches).
- Many families, often the more vulnerable, are not aware of possible harm from the media, e.g. the link between violent 'entertainment' and pornography and violent and sexual crime and family breakdown (see 'Television Violence and Behaviour: a Research Summary', Educational Resources Information Centre, Syracuse, NY, & 'Meta-analysis of published research on effects of pornography', E Oddone-Paolucci, M Genuis & C Violato, Calgary University).
- If they do realize, they find it hard to monitor the media and regulate their children's exposure.
- Even if parents adequately protect their own children, other children who may not be protected, can adversely affect others, e.g. through criminal activity. Crimes of children against other children are at high levels.
- Government should be regulating the media to protect children, but they appear to be more interested in protecting the media industry.
- When I first started campaigning 30 years ago for safer media content, the main response I had from broadcasters was that there was too little proof that the media had any effect on viewers. Now there is a somewhat greater degree of acceptance of the power of the media, but I am told we cannot unduly limit one person's freedom of expression in order to protect another. At present there is still some sympathy for limiting the freedom of adults in order to protect children – I sincerely hope we can make progress before that also is eroded.
- All concerned parties must work together for stronger government regulation of harmful media content – for the sake of our children and our society.

Discussion 1

Opportunities for children to engage with the real world are vanishing.

The work of Arild Sigman shows that higher definition in computer and television screens causes more addiction. There is more difficulty in entering real relationships. Happy and outgoing children don't like watching. It triggers something in children who are angry and upset. In the US it's recommended that no children under two years watch television. 26% of two year olds have television in their bedrooms. Some children prefer blank screens to interaction with other children. There have been experiments with inflatable dolls which showed that violence affected their play. It's more difficult now to limit what children watch each day.

There is an effect of the technology itself and then there is the effect of the content.

There is nothing childlike in what is shown on children's programmes. For example, Sean the sheep does disco dancing. Childhood is being taken away. The physiological effects on the brain and presentations are in the under three's and ADTT children. The television predisposes and the content feeds in.

Attachment theory

Richard Bowlby's father, John Bowlby, wrote 50 years ago about attachment theory. The brain doubles in the first 20 months. What is set up during this period influences the person for the rest of life. Frittering away the area of the brain affects relationships. Joseph Chilton Pierce drew together neurological research. The frontal cortex begins to grow the moment a child sees his/her mother (or prime carer). He looked at the cells in the heart and saw that there is a connection between the brain and the heart which builds up a protective sheath. Electromagnetism in the body matches the earth's force field. It envelops the baby in a protective system, linked with the mother's pre-frontal cortex. It's an inspiring picture. Richard aims to make this accessible to everyone. This bond is the basis of love. We need to talk more about love.

In his introduction, Del spoke about the way that adults project on to their children. It's necessary to start with the adults. They spend hours in front of the television computers and have their mobiles. They can't manage relationship and getting to happiness and wellbeing.

Anxiety and fear in a risk averse society

Children are bombarded with sexuality – this makes it more difficult. There is anxiety over paedophilia to the extent that men are no longer working with children. On the one hand sexuality is in our face; on the other, we don't want to think about it. Some men can't cope with their daughters growing up. They leave home.

There is fear of litigation. A child fell off a toy with three steps and hurt himself. There was aggression from the parents. Children were no longer allowed to play on it unsupervised. Children are growing up in a risk averse society. There is anxiety about attempts to things better for children and allow children to act within their competency. The more protection, the more danger children are in. The relationship between adults and children is being poisoned because of the fear of abuse. It may come to the point where only state sanctioned relationships are allowed. There are examples of teenagers teaching computers to older people, of volunteers taking children to sports fields. CRB checks have stopped this. In Switzerland the children don't learn to read and write before they are 7. Before that, school is about play. Four year olds walk to nursery school. In this country, 4 to 6 year olds travel with screens on the back seat of cars. There is no talk in the car. This is understandable in a way. Things like playing I-spy can be draining.

Janni Nicol spoke about the NUT conference and an organisation called Playlink which is encouraging real life experiences and relationships. Teenagers want to be involved in taking risks and violence. This may not happen if risk-taking is allowed earlier in play. Children can feel secure in nursery if a key person system is in place. There was a discussion over the nature of this key person and the effect of them being in an administrative or an attachment relationship. Toddlers like to play with toddlers.

Afternoon Session

Sally Blyth – Developmental Readiness for Education and for Life

Developmental readiness is the foundation for successful learning and social integration. Children who are immature in aspects of their physical development enter the school system at a disadvantage which will eventually show up as under-achievement and/or behavioural problems.

Early signs of immaturity include difficulties with:

- Attention
- Sitting still
- Receptive and expressive language
- Holding a pencil in the correct grip and controlling the writing hand
- Eye movements necessary for reading
- Body awareness (self) and the ability to read and respond appropriately to the body language of others.
- Coordination –using a knife and fork, catching a ball etc.
- Immature behaviour including poor impulse control, ability to take turns etc.

Some of these problems can be the direct result of social factors while others stem from primary or secondary neuro-physiological immaturity. Secondary neuro-physiological factors can be the result of failure of the environment in the early years to provide the stimulus and opportunity for the normal process of physical development and neurological maturation to take place. It is my belief we are seeing in an increase in this last category.

In 2005, INPP published the results of a study which had examined the physical skills of more than 800 children across mainstream schools in the UK and Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland study revealed that 48% of 4 – 5 years olds in the sample and 35% of 8 – 10 year olds still had traces of infant reflexes, which should not be present above the first 6 – 12 months of life, together with immature control of balance, coordination and visual-perceptual skills. If this sample is representative of the general population, it suggests that **nearly a half of our schoolchildren are not “ready” for school in terms of their physical skills at the time of school entry**, and although some of them catch up with time, **more than a third still have problems at 7 – 9 years of age.**

[**Comment [SB1]:** Goddard Blythe SA, 2005. Releasing educational potential through movement. Child Care in Practice. Volume 11/4:415-432.]

The study also showed that there was a correlation between physical immaturity and educational achievement at baseline. In other words, the children with immature physical skills performed less well on educational tests.

Over the last 11 years, INPP has provided training for teachers in how to detect signs of physical immaturity in the classroom, and how to use a developmental programme of physical exercises with classes of children to improve the physical basis for learning. Results indicate significant improvements in:

- Maturation of physical skills
- Coordination
- Playground behaviour
- Reading
- Drawing
- Self-confidence

The programme has highlighted the need for:

1. Developmental testing (physical) of all children at the time of school entry and at key stages through education.
2. Implementation of an effective (researched) daily physical programme to address the underlying problems.
3. Improved awareness amongst parents, teachers and trainee teachers of the importance of physical development for successful learning.
4. Improved cooperation between the services (Education, Medicine, Educational Psychology), which should be in place to identify children at risk.
5. Improved education of the general public in **what children need** in the early years to develop the physical skills that are necessary to support cognitive learning.
6. Political will to implement these changes.

Further information may be obtained from Sally at:

The Institute for Neuro-Physiological Psychology (INPP)

1, Stanley Street

Chester CH1 2LR

Tel/Fax 01244 311414

Email: mail@inpp.org.uk

Website: www.inpp.org.uk

Chris Ponsford - Presentation from What About The Children? (www.whataboutthechildren.org.uk)

Secure attachment from infancy: the key to UNICEF dimensions 4, 5 and 6

The UK is making some progress in tackling child poverty, but this may well be at the expense of family relationships, friendships and happiness, failures in which are directly related to the abuse of sex, drink and drugs. These are the three measures in which UK is bottom of the league and they are the result of the lack of value placed on families to nurture their own children.

It is in the first two to three years of life, when children's brains are developing most rapidly, that the foundations of trust and empathy are laid. During this time children develop a view of the world and the people around them. This view can develop positively and make them feel confident, secure, loved and able to trust people. Or it may be negative and make them feel angry, fearful, insecure, unlovable and suspicious of other people. If infants are not given sensitive, reciprocal loving care, talked to, played with and soothed individually when they are in distress, something which most parents are naturally able to do best, the pathways in the brain needed for responsive sociability do not develop and it is much harder to form them later.

The first six months are the most vital, yet this is when many mothers are post-natally depressed and funding for midwives and health visitors, who are best placed to refer them on, is being cut; there are long waiting lists for counselling and, for those in most need with underlying problems, a great shortage of psychotherapists who can promote healthy parent/child interaction.

Instead of pouring money into day nurseries, giving tax subsidies only to those who go back to work and expecting single mothers to leave their babies six weeks after birth, we should give parents the support and information they need so that they can do their best to look after their own children, particularly during the first three vital years.

Maria Robinson - What is emotional well being/mental health?

In 1995, an NHS Health Advisory Service workshop¹ drew up a definition of mental health in young people, identifying four key capacities as the ability to:

- develop psychologically, emotionally, intellectually and spiritually
- initiate, develop and sustain mutually satisfying personal relationships
- become aware of and to empathize with others
- experience and integrate psychological distress without it hindering development.

All these emphasise the sense of being an individual secure in their separateness as a self, confident in relationships and able to tolerate the ups and downs of daily life and central to these 'capacities' is an understanding and respect for the role of emotions/feelings which are not only an aspect of development but are central to every part of it. In the early years, in tandem with a growing realization of self as person, there develops the 'theory of mind' which is how we can infer that as we know that we think, want, feel – we know that others do the same thing, i.e. as well as reaching into our own minds, we reach into the minds of others and this journey begins in our pre-school years. However, we are not able to understand and empathise with others unless we have literally 'lived through' such experiences ourselves.

The relationship between child and carer, the interpretation of the child's needs and the match between that interpretation and the child's actual needs will result in the child's feeling responses and translate into behavioural responses. Behaviour is driven by experiences and shaped by the strategies which are learned from the earliest days in an effort to deal with the internal feelings. These strategies arise from the patterns and networks of connections between the senses and the mediating brain – resulting in the ongoing sense of self as an 'active entity' – and the ongoing interactions with have with our carers provides the bedrock on which these strategies are ultimately based.

<http://www.geneticfutures.com/cracked/info/sheet2.asp>

Del Loewenthal and Richard House - Children's Wellbeing and the Relational

Professor Del Loewenthal and Dr Richard House, of the Research Centre for Therapeutic Education, Roehampton University, discussed their Centre's potential to spearhead collaborative research into children's wellbeing from a "relational" perspective, which views the quality and authenticity of real human relationships as central to children's developmental, educational and life experience. How, as a society, might we remedy our horrendous situation as reported by UNICEF, where Britain is ranked bottom out of 21 countries in terms of children's wellbeing? The report highlights how the UK lags on such indicators as the time spent talking or eating with their parent(s). Our society has unspeakable anxieties about, for example, a child and a teacher (particularly a male teacher) being alone together in a classroom. So much so, that the learning inherent in human relationships (and in particular the goodness that can come from them) is not a routine foundational aspect of the training of teachers.

At the Research Centre for Therapeutic Education, we are particularly interested in relational learning; and not only does the relational appear to be the most important common element of the numerous brands of therapy on offer; but it is also what appears so often to have gone wrong in a person's childhood, leading them as an adult to the therapists we are also involved in training. There is perhaps also a question about how much our concern for what is happening to our children is at least also a concern about what is lacking in the wellbeing of our lives as adults. At the Research Centre for Therapeutic Education we are also interested in Plato's notion of *therapeia*. The implications of this, for us, are that both children and adults need to learn from each other for our society to continue to attempt to ensure that scientific and technical learning, whilst important, is secondary to the resources of the human soul. Yet this is far less likely to happen if we give a primacy to other aspects, whether they be the horrors of starting with concerns about audit or paedophilia. If such concerns remain pre-eminent then our children and our society still will not learn, through the magic of the relational, sufficiently about the good in humanity.

2nd Discussion

What would we say to the government if asked what to do to overcome Toxic Childhood?

Take exercise, switch off the television, follow whatever the interests are, everything helps.

Get the minister and shadow minister and ask what we can do to stop premature development. Is it true children are growing up faster? There are conditions which show they do not.

What can we do now?

Richard and Del are organising policy forums at Roehampton University. [See www.alliancechildhood.org projects and initiatives page]. We need to ease out uncomfortable truths; find something meaningful in relationships with the people and the things we love. We can look at relationships. They are not perfect, but they are what we've got. The experience is an attack on the self.

Reference: *The Secret World of the Unborn Child* by Thomas Verny and John Kelly.

A pregnant woman was under stress during the painful illness and death of her husband. The child's health did not suffer – a sheath of love had been built up which prevented the stress to be carried through to the baby. Harry Potter's question: Why did I survive? The mother put a covering of love around him. There are many instances which show that love is a protective force we can give children.

Oxytocin builds up receptors for love in adult relationships. We can love more that need to be loved. It's necessary to experience it before we can give it. We are not coping with the spiritual and consensus on right and wrong. The concept of sin has gone. Anything is ok so long as we don't hurt anyone – original sin is toxic. There is a war for children's minds with the liberal rationalists. Children can come to moral judgements; we should not impose anything on them. We can encourage a positive attitude, listen more, take them seriously and respect the rights of the child.

Britain has signed up to the convention on the rights of the child, but does not implement it. Michiel Mathies has collected statistics on the indicators in the convention. We can do it for the UK.

Other things we can do:

- Produce a book from the Roehampton seminars
- Write letters to newspapers
- We can become more aware of needs; raise the status of parents, especially mothers with children. Love for parents can get lost – it's easy to criticise – see What About the Children website – www.whataboutthechildren.org.uk .

Through the Alliance for Childhood network we can listen to each other and send article and papers for the website – www.alliancechildhood.org. We can get together 2 or 3 times in the year.