

CARE FOR YOUNG CHILDREN<sup>\*)</sup>

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*Begrebet omsorg diskuteres. Et centralt punkt er, at omsorg vil sige at handle ud fra, hvad et andet menneske – her barnet – har brug for. Et afgørende punkt i forbindelse med omsorg er derfor refleksioner og analyser m.h.t. hvad barnet har brug for. Der fremlægges en model, der er udviklet med henblik på at fungere som et teoretisk redskab i sådanne analyser.*

*Desuden diskuteres omsorgens rolle i barnets liv og udvikling i perioden 1½ til 6 år. Denne diskussion illustreres ved observationer af børn i daginstitutionen.*

*Endelig diskuteres nogle spørgsmål i forbindelse med omsorg og den pædagogiske proces.*

In society we are dependent on each other.

The baby is born unfinished. It is dependent on adults for its existence. And only after a long period of bodily (physical) and psychological development it begins to take part in the productive life of society.

The adult persons' responsibility and that of society as a whole for the development of the child is realized i.a. through *care*. The child cannot look after its own body, it needs emotional contact with adults and to feel welcome into the human context, and it needs understanding and support when beginning to explore the world.

The child also needs introduction to knowledge, values, ways of life and so forth in the society into which it is born, and to incorporate all these things into its own personality. This process is generally referred to by the concept of *education*. We educate the child.

Care and education are interrelated, but they also differ. In *care* the interests of the child are the focal point in the psychological development. The concept of *education* stresses the programmes or the objectives in the efforts of the adults.

However, in connection with education the child also needs a caring attitude, in which attention is paid to the child's perspective. And in con-

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nection with care the child needs an educating attitude and to be brought into contact with the culture of society.

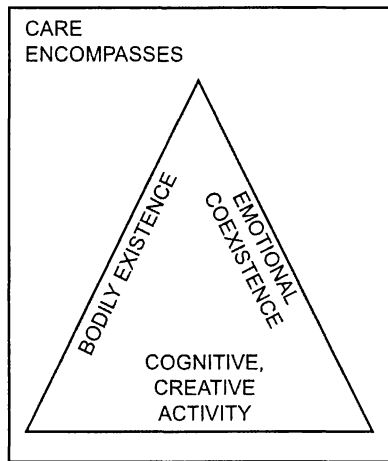
From the very moment of birth the child needs care. Left alone the child will not develop, let alone survive. The need for care exists not only for the newborn but throughout childhood, and even through adulthood and in old age. But as the child develops it shows itself in different forms. Care and interdependency among people are essential in human life and development.

The aim of this article is to discuss the content and specific features of care in the development process of child-adult relationships.

### What is care?

Essential in care is to act from the needs of another human being.

The child's, as well as the adult's, life evolves in three fields (see figure 1), and in relation to these fields it may need care (Nielsen m.fl., 1995):



*Figure 1*

The infant cannot see to its own bodily needs. It also needs emotional contact with adults. At the same time the look in its eyes is evidence of its active position. And early in its life it becomes an active agent in the processes where care is given by the parents. With its incipient play activity together with other children in the day nursery the creative life of the child begins. Together with other children and with support from the adults the child begins to create a special environment the content of which i.a. is the incipient play activities of the children.

The figure may be summed up in the following way:  
 The child has a body which it feels and uses – and which is cared for. The child also has an emotional co-existence with other people – without which its psychological and motor development is damaged. The child also acknowledges its world, itself – i.e. its body, its relations to others, what it can do with its body and its mind and what it wants – and the child acts in its world in an active and by and by creative way.

*Care* as an activity in relation to the child may be characterized as actions directed at and supporting the child and what it needs in the unified whole containing the fields in which its existence evolves; its bodily existence, its emotional co-existence with others and its acknowledging and creative activity.

Care involves a personal relationship. The adult's relationship to the child can be family-like and based on sentiments and love. It may also be professional and based on other feelings, i.a. a general sympathy for children and a sense of responsibility.

On the one hand care means attention to the child and empathy in order to understand what the child needs and on the other hand it means knowledge of the child's developmental process as well as an attitude concerning long-term aims. This attitude encompasses universally human values in relation to what is good for the child.

Giving care to the child means on the one hand that the child must feel loved and appreciated, understood, respected and feel connected to the people among whom it lives, and on the other hand that it must develop psychologically.

Fundamentally, care is rooted in the fact that the life of human beings is social. The new members of society – the children – are born unfinished and weak and their development into becoming active participants in the social and productive life of society is dependent on other people.

Care means taking responsibility for another person. A crucial issue in care is therefore reflection on *what the child needs*.

### **Early development and care**

The infant needs care in the shape of attention to its bodily needs. It also needs emotional communication, where you establish a personal contact to the baby as a person you like. And you also relate to the baby as a thinking person, by 'understanding' its utterances as speech and finding meaning in its incipient activity (Bowlby, 1988; Spitz, 1945).

Through emotional communication with the baby the adult establishes a relationship with the child which forms the basis for the following development in its entirety (Lisina, 1985). We know that if this relationship

is not established the psychological (and also motor) development of the child will suffer.

In this way the baby joins the human community *before* it begins to explore the physical world. This relationship becomes the basis for the child's exploration of the world. It leads to the child's exploration of the world from the *human* point of view.

The adult brings the child into contact with its close surroundings, showing the child things, manipulating blocks and other objects before the child, trying to catch the interest of the child, talking to the child and so forth.

At first, the child mainly explores the physical attributes of things, for instance looks at the blocks, fumbles with them, puts them into its mouth and so on, but soon (when the child is about 18 months) the interests of the child are mainly in the use of the things, i.e. their functions, and the child is interested in what other children and adult *do*, i.e. in their activity: The child watches what they do, and tries to join their activities by doing something similar or adding new ideas. But the adult also endeavours to bring the general meaning of things in focus for the child. E.g. the adult uses the spoon in a way that makes its general function clearly visible to the child.

Again and again, the developing child is in a position where it reaches the boundaries for the world it masters. It is interested in what is beyond the boundaries, but in order to have nourishment for this interest it also needs experience emanating from personal activity in these new areas. Often, however, its own notions and ideas may not be sufficiently elaborated to give rise to activities that will further develop the new interests. Here the adult is necessary. The adult may inspire by supporting and even taking part in the new activities in a way that makes them richer. Spontaneously, peers may also give a similar support simply because they share the interest emerging.

In its further development the child needs a *caring culture* in order to develop a life with peers characterized by mutual sympathy, interest and attention. Playing together with peers is important for the development of fantasy and other spheres of the child's personality.

In the following concrete forms of care will be described. This will be done by means of examples of concrete care for 18 to 30 months old children in a day care centre. The examples stem from a day care centre characterized by high quality care.

### Care for the 18 to 30 months-olds

The concrete care of 18 to 30 months old children in day care given by kindergarten teachers manifests itself in the following ways (Thyssen, 1995):

1. Care for the child's body
2. By expressing fondness for the children you show interest in them and relate to them. You endeavour to make them feel welcome. You attach importance to the children showing interest in and empathy for each other.
3. You let the children's own activities develop. You show interest in what engages the children. You participate in activities. Enter into them and enrich them. You also initiate activities.

*re. 1:*

You attend to the children being clean and that they wear appropriate clothes. And, of course, you see to the fact that they have nourishing food. But when attending to the children's bodily needs you focus not only on these needs.

When, for instance, you change the diaper of a child you talk to the child about what you are doing and about what the child may be engaged in, and at the same time you express fondness for it.

You also see to protecting the child and that it comes to no harm. For instance that it does not climb where it risks to fall down and hurt itself. On the other hand even the youngest children are also allowed some opportunity to climb so they may learn to take care of themselves and master challenges.

*re. 2:*

The kindergarten teachers endeavour to make the children feel welcome and appreciated:

After having changed the diaper for Sharon (18 months), the kindergarten teacher, Joan, takes her into the room. Here the kindergarten teacher, Gwen, is sitting: »Hello Sharon«, she says and takes her on her lap. She sits with her for a little. Speaks to her: »Have you been to the woods?«

Susan's mother arrives with Susan (21 months). The mother takes off her outdoor things and puts on her indoor shoes. The kindergarten teacher, Joan, passes by saying »Hello« to her, cuddling her a little.

You attach importance to that the children show interest in and empathy for each other. You direct the children's attention towards each other and endeavour to make one child's experience become interesting in the eyes of the other children.

Julia (21 months) walks to the kindergarten teacher, Liz, with the doll and its cardigan saying in an almost ordering voice: »Cardigan on, cardigan on.« At the same time Kenneth (16½ months) begins to cry and Liz takes him on her lap. Julia looks as if she is going to grumble but Liz anticipates her: »Look, you can have the other knee and help comfort Kenneth.« Julia crawls up while Liz supports her. At once Julia begins to stroke the cheek of the crying Kenneth while saying: »Pat, pat«. Liz: »Oh – is Kenneth sweet?« Julia: »Sweet, sweet.« Kenneth stops crying and Julia says: »Sweet – not annoyed anymore.« Liz: »No – he may just be a little tired.« Julia: »Tired, tired.«

The kindergarten teacher, Kelly, assembles the children around the table. Juice and biscuits are served. A father, Kelly and the kindergarten teacher, Eva, sit with the children around the table. »What is that?« Eva says going on to say »Biscuits«. »Yes«, one of the children says. The children are given juice in large white cups, eating and drinking quietly.

Eva mentions the children according to the register – after first having said to the children that it would be good to know who is present. She involves the children: »Where is Chris?« and some of the children point: »There, there.« Anita (34½ months) says about another child »Home.« Such a small dialogue takes place about each child.

*re. 3:*

The children are engaged in their world, they are active. The kindergarten teachers let the activities of the children develop.

Sue (22½ months) and James (23 months) are rocking away enthusiastically on the rocking horse, smile at each other, and uttering little screams.

Then Nat comes running from the playroom – with short, small screechingly sharp screams. James follows him, screaming in the same way. They run along, Nat in front, towards the chute and crawl around under it. Sue and Samantha (19 months) join them, screaming in the same way.

Alan (22 months) arrives and joins with a couple of screams.

Then Nat and James begin to run to and fro between the hall and the mattress in the play-corner where they throw themselves – continuing to scream while running – James with flapping arms and smiling eyes. Down under the chute and back to the play-room, throwing him-

self on the mattress. During one trip he meets the kindergarten teacher Inez by the door, stops short, looks up at her and claps his hands, radiantly happy.

As the example illustrates it is important for the child that the the adult shares his joy.

The following example shows how the adult's expressions of emotional participation may stimulate the child:

Matt (27 months) and Jim (28½ months) run back to the hallway with the chute and Ron (18½ months) follows them immediately. Matt chatting: »Up and sit.« Ron follows Matt up the steps and sliding down. Up and down. The kindergarten teacher, Ida, has sat down on a chair opposite, a little away, saying as if frightened: »Oh!« when Ron slides down. Ron's face immediately lights up. He runs around even more, happily pattering before climbing up again. Now Jim and Matt are mostly sitting beside the chut but Ron goes on sliding. Radiant, happy.

In the age around 2 years the children's play activity with pretended actions is being developed.

When the adult enters directly into the child's activity the children may become engaged in play activities which otherwise would be borderline to what they can realize and what might fascinate them. The participation of the adult is accompanied by a growing engagement on the children's part:

Jimmy (23 months) and Suzie (19 months) are sitting looking in a book close to a table at which the kindergarten teacher, Lillian, now 'dishes up'. Enthusiastically Lillian says to Nicky: »Put the banana on the stove« (a plastic banana), placing the banana on a frying pan on a toy stove. Now Jimmy gets up. Standing beside the stove where several of the children from the play-room are now gathered. With pretended impatience Lillian exclaims: »Now can we have something to eat?« Jimmy rearranges some forks. Lillian says enthusiastically: »Uhm, what lovely food.« Pretends to 'taste' the food saying: »Jimmy, do you want to taste?« She pretends to scrobe something onto his plate. Happily he puts the fork into what 'is' on his plate and moves the fork to his mouth, as if taking something to eat. Then Lillian 'feeds' Jimmy something from the pot which he happily accepts, including the plastic banana which he pretends to eat. Lillian: »Jimmy, may I have some tea?« And happily Jimmy 'pours' from his teapot into Lillian's cup. Then Lillian makes John 'pour tea' for Jimmy, herself and the others from his pot. There are now many chil-

dren gathered around Lillian and the stove. There is great activity 'pouring' and 'serving'.

If the adult participates in the play the actions of the children become more organized, they go on for a longer time and they are accompanied by a higher degree of enthusiasm.

Thus the adult supports an activity the children have yet difficulty in realizing by themselves. A few months later they are able to do so. The children e.g. now act jointly within the theme of the play:

Michael (31 months): »Then we cannot read anymore. Then we must sleep.« At once all three of them lie down on the mattress, pretending to sleep and making sleeping noises – they almost snore. Paul (32 months): »Blanket too«. Paul and Michael get up and take pillow and blanket to cover themselves. Minnie (31½ months): »Me too«. Paul gets up and takes a small pillow with which he covers Minnie. They lie down pretending to sleep, lying quite still. »Sleep« Paul says smiling at me. Shortly Michael gets up and goes over to the doll's pram, fiddling with the cover. »Do you want to sleep, do you want to sleep?« Paul says to Michael. But Michael continues to fiddle around with the doll's pram. Then Paul lies down again quite still by Minnie's side.

The kindergarten teachers do not separate the before-mentioned three areas of care. They are an integral unity, even if the emphasis is on one of the areas. For instance, when you see to the child's body at the same time you express fondness for the child and you also engage yourself in matters of interest for the child. In short: You relate to the child as a person.

### **Care and children aged 4-6 years**

With newborn babies care is a basic condition for their life.

2-year-old children are still dependent on adults in all three spheres of their life processes. But they are also beginning to live a life of their own within the frame of the care given by the adults. They explore their immediate world and they develop play with their peers.

When looking at 2-year-olds the care for the individual child thus is an integral part of the adult's activity towards the children. At the same time it also appears in the shape of specific actions and initiatives directed at the children. These are often characterized by an extreme expressiveness.

The 4 to 6-year-olds display an extensive individual life within the framework of the care:



Three 4 year-old girls are playing outdoors. Sarah shows the adult a snail they have found. They put grass in a small carriage in which they have put the snails.

Sarah: »This one is asleep, this one is not asleep.«

Suzie picks one of the snails with a leaf of grass.

Sarah shows the adult: »We give them some of this, they like that.«

(A dandelion).

Sarah asks the adult if he would like to join (the play). Suzie puts a leaf in the carriage for the snails.

Then they run around a little.

Lena: »Now I have built a house for them.« A heap of leaves. Sarah and Suzie pick leaves. Sarah, talking about some big leaves: »This is an ice cream.« Shows it to the adult. Lena gives the adult some leaves.

Then the two other girls show the adult their leaves. »I gave him this«, says Lena.

4-year-old children have developed their own activity: play activity. I.e. they have developed a life content of their own and created a special culture within the culture of the society and based on subjective relevant material from the general culture as they meet it through the adults caring activities and through the media.

As the example also shows the children want adults to understand their particular world and share their experiences, and they see the adults as partners in their (the children's) activities.

With the 6-year-olds the content in relation to the adults has changed. The children have become interested in fields of knowledge and skills within the world of the adults open to themselves. They are fascinated with these fields and may display great involvement when this interest is obliged with by the adult:

This: »I want to go and look at the sand-hoppers.« Sits down by the aquarium.

Thomas to the kindergarten teacher, Ben: »You know what? One of the fish is dead.« Ben sits down by them. Talks about the fish. About a male fish which has made a nest and about whether the female will lie in it soon. »Is that not now?« Ben: »Well, we don't know.« Ben talks about the fish. Thomas sits close by him, leans towards him, resting his arm on Ben's leg. 6 children are gathered. They have a good talk about what the fish are doing. Thomas says that he would like to touch one of the fish. Aske: »That one has blue eyes.« »Ben, have you caught that one?«

Thomas sits fascinated, watching.

As the example shows the 6-year-olds start orientating themselves at the world outside the life space they have created together with their peers. They turn to the world of the adults and they want knowledge and skills inherent with this world.

At the same time this interest has characteristics showing the relationship with the play world. The knowledge fascinating the children often has a dramatic and fairytale trait characteristic for play. The children are fascinated by and want to know more about vulcanoes, pirana, dinosaurs and the like.

Therefore, the relationship between adults and children take on a new expression: The adult appears like a human being whose world the child is eager to share. Thus, in a new way the child is open to inspiration from the adult.

### **Care and the educational process**

On the one hand care is about attention to the child as well as empathy and involvement into what the child needs, and on the other hand the point of departure for care is long-term considerations encompassing common human values.

Thus, care relates to:

1. Current interests and values of the child, which are meaningful for it and which it is involved in.
2. Common human values which are not inherent with the child but with the care person or society, which the child may know but to which it attaches no personal meaning and to which it is not emotionally attached.

In the discussions about education these two considerations related to care often appear like perspectives contrary to each other and incompatible: Is it possible, at the same time, to consider values and interests of current interest for the child and values inherent with the care person and society?

Will these two attitudes not get into conflict? Must it not be so that either the subjective endeavours of the child are followed, or you ignore its subjective endeavours and act according to long-term objectives? Is it not a fact that if you act from long-term objectives at the same time you are forced to act towards the child as if it were an object exactly because the long-term objectives are not the child's?

In practice no doubt sometimes such a conflict will appear. But at the same time there is another essential factor to be taken into consideration.

The care person does not act only from the child's or the surrounding world's interests but also from *values inherent with the togetherness and psychological community with the child*. Simultaneously with that the care person on one hand tries to understand the child and what it needs, and on the other hand acts from common human values, he or she also acts from the togetherness of the situation and from interest for the child. *Care is exactly an activity in which the care person relates to and takes part in the child's life*. This is especially evident where the infant is concerned and where the care appears like emotional communication with the child, and where the value of the activity lies in the togetherness itself. And it is from this togetherness that the child's basic life values and involvement in its world develop.

Concerning children who are a little older the care person so to speak stands by the child (and the group of children) and takes part in the activities taking place in the situation as an *equal*. The care person follows the ideas of the child/children *but also makes his own suggestions*. Becomes inspired by the children but *gives his own inspiration, too*.

Thus, care has three perspectives.

1. The subjective endeavour of the child.
2. The care person's reflections concerning objectives.
3. The care person's current involvement in and togetherness with the child.

All three perspectives are necessary in care. The child needs the adult to stand by the child and to involve him or herself in its endeavours, and at the same time to be especially responsible (i.e. taking long-term objectives into consideration). And the child needs a community with a fellow human being who is engaged in it.

Conflicts between the spontaneous interests and wishes of the child on the one hand and long-term objectives on the other are not just dissolved. But from an educational point of view a committed co-existence and common activities with the children seem to be both a value in itself for the children and a source of new interests and values enriching or even transcending the spontaneous interests and wishes of the children.

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