

A Happy and Carefree Childhood

Pedagogic Policy

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INTRODUCTION

You are a happy expecting parent-to-be, or perhaps already a proud parent. The birth of a child is an experience you will not forget. It makes you happy, turns your life around and at times might make you feel insecure. You want to choose what is best for your child, without always knowing exactly what that is. For example: where can I find a reliable and child minded care for my child? And what should I keep in mind while making that choice?

Or you are a certified pedagogic employee. You have chosen, from your heart, to work with (young) children and have acquired the necessary basic knowledge and experience. Now you would love to work as a professional. But where? Which day-care centre fits you best? Where can you work with children the way you prefer it?

But perhaps you have already made it through the tough selection and thus deliberately chosen for our day-care centre. In that case you have already been introduced to the pedagogic policy of Dikkedeur and you are just beginning to learn how to apply this policy properly.

In '*A happy and carefree childhood*', child-care centre Dikkedeur sums up her pedagogic mission and method. We hope it will help you in your search.

As an (upcoming) parent you will find out how we guaranty that your baby is in the safe and caring/loving hands of its own regular pedagogic caretaker ('zorgleidster'). She is the one to cherish and cuddle your child, to comfort it, change diapers, feed it, and to play baby-games. She understands your baby's body language and signals and responds lovingly to them. In this way attachment will naturally arise. Every day, at the end of the day, she will tell you what your baby has experienced.

As an (upcoming) employee of Dikkedeur you will come across various useful points for practicing a respectful and child minded approach that ensures a safe attachment with sufficient challenge for the child, without punishment or reward. You already know why punishing and rewarding is damaging for children. Now you will learn **how** to care for children without punishment and reward.

The pedagogic policy of Dikkedeur is scientifically founded on the concept of *nature*: human nature and his natural environment. We understand the complexities of early development of children, of the interconnection of the many aspects of this development and, last but not least we are fully aware of the life-lasting effects of the child's experiences in early childhood. This requires a carefully elaborated, child-centred approach.

This is not easily explained in a few pages. However, we tried to write it as clear and familiar as possible and hope to keep your attention throughout the document.

1 SCIENTIFIC BASIS OF OUR PEDAGOGIC POLICY

The pedagogic policy of Dikkedeur is based on validated knowledge of expert scientists renowned in the scientific world for many decades. Though more than half a century old, this knowledge is reputed in its field of psychology and has never been scientifically invalidated. So, it is the most plausible and reliable body of knowledge about the child and its development and thus is best (not to say: the only) suitable as foundation for a sound pedagogic policy.

We derive our scientific knowledge of all aspects of the development in the growth from baby to adult to: Piaget (cognitive development), Bowlby (attachment), Erikson (social-emotional development), Kohlberg and Freud (moral development). Integration and interconnection of their insights enables us to approach the child as a coherent or unifying whole, with attachment as the basis to get through the cognitive and social-emotional stages of development in a proper manner, which in turn is defining for the moral development that follows.

We have added an important new component to this body of knowledge: the motivational theory of prof. R. Wentholt. This theory explains what drives us (in this case: a child) and why and how the social environment has an impact on these drives. A child never acts haphazardly but always from some basic needs that motivate/incite certain behaviour. These basic needs are innate to everyone, we all have them, and it causes (a lot of) stress if these needs remain unsatisfied. In their behaviour children express the satisfaction or frustration of these basic needs. We call this behaviour *signal-behaviour*: the child asks for attention for an underlying need. Signal-behaviour gives the environment of the child important clues: they make you as caretaker understand whether or not you sufficiently responded to the basic needs of the child. As caretaker you should recognize and understand these basic needs and be able to place them in the child's stage of development, in order to correctly respond to them. This practice prevents you from judging, rejecting, even punishing the child because of behaviour that reflects something it is not able to influence: the biological basic characteristics of the human species.

Dr. Patricia Huisman, director of Dikkedeur and former university teacher of social psychology, created this integrated theory of early child development and refined it into concrete methods and options for action.

2. VISION ON CHILD AND DEVELOPMENT

The human being is a mammal.

But he is not an ordinary one: a late bloomer with a special brain.

Many mammalian cubs are able to stand on their own feet right after birth or within a few weeks. A new-born calf or colt is up on its feet in 10 minutes. During gestation everything needed for survival has been developed: muscles, senses, and also the brain have been fully developed. The brain is also ready to determine what is dangerous, or edible. Thus, the new-born can start immediately after birth. In a few weeks' time they can hunt prey, fight, flight.... !

The human brain is very different to other mammals' brain. It is exceptional in its build (especially the neocortex), and needs many years to mature, during which it is also vulnerable. At birth a child's brain is basically there: every part of the brain functions, but is not mature. Many essential connections still have to be made. The first 4 years of life are crucial in this process. In order to grow, the brain depends of life experience. Lack of experience, or threatening experiences disrupt the growth of the brain, while, on the other hand, sufficient and fitting experiences stimulate its growth.

The new-born child, the human-pup, is unable to do anything by its self; it is in no way self-sustaining. What a colt can manage in 10 minutes, takes a human-pup about 15 years. This late flourishing implies that a child stays dependent on care for a long time. And that requires a stable, lasting, loving bond that incites (motivates) to such lasting and continuous care.

Balancing between dependency and independency

This mammalian basis is a shared basis: here each child is the same. So in this respect we are less unique than we think! However, there are also differences. Although long lastingly dependent, the human child is at the same time an independently existing being with its own body and mind, and its own character and temperament. Unlike other mammalian cubs, every experience has to be processed by the child itself and every child has its own pace and intensity with which that happens. These individual differences grow stronger with the child's development and are visible, for example, in choices we make, and in reactions we show.

The base for this difference can again be found in the brain: other mammals start with an innate blueprint containing a fixed way of responding to anything that matters. They have no options, no choices: situation X will inevitable and without reflection cause response Y. We do not have this blueprint. We have to learn, interpret, judge and make choices by ourselves. Thus the core of the life condition of children is that they are *independent* beings but none the less strongly *dependent* of others. As independent beings, with their own body and disposition, children are capable to and dependent on their own processing of stimuli. As dependent beings, unable to survive and blossom without help of others, they rely on care by and learning from others. It is in this paradoxical living situation that children come to develop.

Raising a child with respect for human nature

A healthy development needs a continuous tuning of dependence and independence. This creates more or less tension, depending on the fit between what the environment has to offer and what the child needs psychologically: a better fit increases the chances of a healthy development.

To realise a better fit, the social environment needs allow for human nature, with its basic characteristics that are inevitable, anchored in every human being. This requires a certain level of awareness with the caregivers. Caregivers can, for instance, set conflicting demands: you should obey but at the same time you should think (critically) for yourself; or demands that contradict the innate human needs and possibilities: a toddler is already required to allow for others whilst the

development of no toddler enables it to do so. Contradictory or non-fitting demands are the root for dysfunction, both individual and social.

The quality of social life is entirely dependent on the quality of psychological life. The more attention we have for the emotions and needs of the child, the more obvious his selfless social commitment and social responsibility will be as an adult. The more a child has been respected during childhood, the easier it is to respect others in adulthood. Again there is a paradox, this time on the importance of need satisfaction and good citizenship. What becomes apparent is that less effort is needed to realise socially desirable behaviour if we put more effort in a good fit with human nature. In other words: to allow for children pays off, not only for the child, but most definitely also socially!

A healthy development is a balanced development

Every child is born with basic needs and possibilities: his potentially present desires, capabilities and skills, which call for fulfilment and development. This often comprises a two-edged blade between needs (what does the child need?) and capabilities (what can the child do?). For instance, the child *needs* affection. Is this need satisfied, it can develop its *ability* of showing affection. A proper attachment and affective development are on their part an important condition for the development of other, such as social and moral, abilities and skills. The same goes for the other basic needs and abilities, such as cognitive, motor and sensory needs and skills.

Because needs and abilities and the abilities themselves are so intertwined, it is of utter importance to pay attentions to each of them; one is not more important than the other. A healthy development means: a *balanced* development. This applies for every child. The actual balance is different for each child, depending on his innate capabilities, nature and preferences.

The quality of the environment determines the quality of the learning processes

The development of children goes through various *learning- and experience-processes*. Often this learning does not need help and involvement of others. Children learn a lot of experiences and try. *Playful learning* is a key in their development and also a way of learning that gives pleasure. The more pleasure, the more the child feels the need to go on and try new things. Of course a lot of learning does require the support of others. Then the influences of the environment on 'what' they learn and 'how' they learn it is substantial. The stronger the influence of the environment on learning, the more important the quality of that environment becomes, in particular the environmental living situation.

3. QUALITY OF ENVIRONMENT: POSITIVE, SUPPORTING, STIMULATING

Both children and their caretakers function better if they are able to attach themselves to each other. This is the basis of a good **upbringing relationship**. Realising this relationship requires *continuity* in the child's relations with a small number of *regular* caretakers. In daily or regular contact, caretaker and child become familiar with each other and easily develop a bond between them. A good attachment-relationship is a loving and safe relationship, with attention for the child's basic needs and developmental challenges, which are met responsively and respectfully. For a versatile affective development it is also important that a child can gradually attach to other children and to his physical environment. A good **upbringing environment** addresses this by regular caregivers who offer security and support, by creating opportunities for children to play together in small groups and by creating a 'homely' environment that gives the child a sense of safety and protection.

However, attachment alone is not enough. A child may have a loving bond, but can still languish by lack of challenge, which is another basic need of children. So, the environment needs to offer sufficient opportunities for play and discovery. The natural environment is part of this, as an endless source of wonder, an object for exploration desire, and a practice area that is always available.

In a good **upbringing climate** we find knowledge of the biological similarities between children, allowing good insight in the individual differences, the uniqueness of each child. Predisposition and living conditions are different for every child, leading to divergent pace, interests, talents, needs and responses of children. Good caretakers bare in mind these differences, to make sure that each child's individuality can be fully appreciated. This requires caregivers who are capable adjusting their responses to fit the individual child by *passive* and *active responsiveness*. Active satisfaction of needs is then alternated with passive, expectant attention. We must give children the chance to experience themselves and the world around them in their own way, without involvement of others. But we cannot just leave them to themselves. Where support or stimulation is needed, it should be granted. Children develop best when they can do things in a way that suits them and at a moment they are interested. Thus, interventions of caretakers should be based on and be consistent with the needs and perceptions of the child. A child will always naturally trust the caretaker that succeeds with this approach, because the child feels safe, protected and respected.

The core of a good **upbringing method** is *play*. As we wrote before: children enjoy using their abilities. That pleasure is biologically anchored in the *intrinsic ability-motivation*. The crux is to let them retain that pleasure. That is why playing is so important: children learn best through play. But not every playing is satisfactory though, and not all children play equally well. Children only enjoy playing and learn from their playing if it is directed and tuned to their own capabilities. 'Learning to play' is therefore equally important as 'play and learn'.

4. PEDAGOGIC CORE THEMES

Three core themes arise from the scientific knowledge and insights on which the pedagogic policy of Dikkedeur is grounded. Each caretaker should be aware of those, even if she or he holds a different opinion on the matter. The themes are: secure attachment, adequate stimulation and guiding without punishment and reward. No caretaker can ignore these themes, as you will see. Yet hardly any day-care centre takes knowledge of these core themes and integrates them in its pedagogic policy.

PEDAGOGIC CORE THEME I

SECURE ATTACHMENT

People have long thought that physical care for young children: to feed them, change their diaper, keep them warm, let them sleep, safeguard them from illness, etc. was sufficient. The physical needs of the body, that is what it was all about, nothing else is needed in that first period of life was enough. Now we know this could not be further from the truth...

In 1940 the psychoanalyst R. Spitz already reported about the fate of orphans. At the time orphanages mainly focused on prevention of contamination, the babies were fed and clothed, kept warm and clean, but not cherished. Although physically cared for, large numbers of children were lean and fell ill. Ironically enough, many of them died (on average 75%) of the infections that people were trying to prevent by the sterile treatment. The lack of touching, cuddling, playing and verbal communication proved to be fatal for the babies.

Not just the physical needs, but also the psychological needs thus appear to be vital. And for the psychological wellbeing human nature is also the main drive. Many of the psychological needs are rooted in biology, in the organic nature of the mammal Human.

The biological basis of attachment

The need for attachment has two cornerstones: the need for affection (love) and the need for security. The need for affection (and the ability to give affection) is controlled by the limbic brain, in which our emotional life resides. Evolutionary it is the second part of the brain and is thus only found in mammals. If the limbic brain gets damaged, the mammal will become incapable to love and care and will therefore no longer gain pleasure from anything anymore. So the limbic brain is essential for mammalian pups who are pre-eminently dependent on love and care.

The need for security is rooted in the reptilian brain, evolutionary the oldest part of the brain. This part of the brain is found in every animal and is focussed on survival. Vital functions such as heart/nervous system/hunger and thirst are regulated here. Failure of these functions will result in death. Our defence-system is also located in the reptilian brain: called the amygdala, this kicks in when a threat presents itself and brings the entire system in a state of readiness. This

readiness makes sure everything is on edge in order to optimise our possibilities to save ourselves, either by attack or by flight. The emotions accompanying this defence-reaction (anger or fear) are typical to mammals and have only arisen with the development of the limbic brain. Reptiles do have a defence-system but lack the emotions that come with it.

Lack of affection or variable/inconsistent and conditional affection alone creates insecurity. The child cannot rely on the love of his caretakers and that is frightening. Lack of responsive reactions to a child's need is also a source for feelings of threat. The baby cries but no reaction follows, or the toddler fearfully starts slapping around and is not being understood but punished instead. Yet another source is continuously being stopped in your need to explore, which creates feelings of anxiety and insecurity and is strengthened when this curtailment stems from the own fears of a caregiver.

Incidental insecurity is no problem for a child, as long as the caregiver is sufficiently capable of offering renewed security. If she is not and the feelings of insecurity become structural, it will hinder the establishment of a secure attachment. The child then will grow up with a chronic sense of fear, insecurity and mistrust, with all the stress that comes with it. And this will remain that way up to adulthood. Currently, for more and more emotional problems in adults, a link with attachment problems in childhood is assumed. Thus, secure attachment is of vital for young children.

Attachment to whom or to what and of what nature?

By nature, the human pup seeks contact with conspecifics, on which he completely relies. These conspecifics are first of all the primary caretakers (such as parents, 'zorgleidsters'). With them the child finds his basic attachment, which, as we saw before, is vital. Fulfilling this attachment need is however not exclusively the domain of the mother. Everyone who mothers the child can function as an object of attachment. The founding father of the theory of attachment, Bowlby, has at this point often been misapprehended. Contrary to what is often claimed, Bowlby pointed out that not 'the mother', but 'the mother figure' is important for attachment. That can thus be the father, or another regular caretaker. The child is able to attach to more than one object and will do so when multiple caretakers (but not too many!) play an important role. So we have every reason to make this a priority in the day-care centre.

Besides and gradually a feeling of close ties can arise with secondary attachment objects, such as other adults (grandfather/grandmother/neighbour), other children (sister/brother, peers), the physical environment (the house, the room at child-care, the street, neighbourhood, town and even country) and toy- and cuddle-objects. But these are not simply interchangeable. Attachment to peers does not make attachment to a significant primary caretaker redundant and vice versa, although a shortage in one area can be partially compensated by the other. The following statement by Dr. Elly Singer demonstrates little insight in the issues of attachment: when it comes to childcare, you must not stimulate the attachment between adults and child, but focus on the peer attachment. The mother or pedagogic employee, according to Singer, must not become too important. Why this is, remains a mystery. Especially since only under the

condition of a successful and safe attachment with reliable and for them significant adults, children are capable of successfully relating to other children, and then only after a certain age. This cannot be expected of a baby or toddler. And day-care centres are simply populated by children from 0 to 4 years!

In which period is the basic attachment finalised?

A secure attachment relation must become effective during the first four years of life. Therefore child-care centres should as much as possible work with a regular zorgleidster, someone who, from day one, cares for the child, cherishes, comforts and stimulates him and understands his signals so he can trust that caregiver and can really attach to her; a safe beacon in the sea of new, unknown impressions.

And that is exactly what we do at Dikkedeur: we strictly stick to childcare with set 'stamgroepen', a regular pedagogic crew, and a zorgleidster for each child, as a basic condition for the establishment of a secure attachment-relation between children and pedagogic crew.

Prof. Tavecchio shares this vision. For that reason he heavily protested a new trend in the childcare, that first surfaced about 10 years ago, in which these stable factors were let go. Here we refer to what is known as the 'open door policy'. The main idea of the 'open door policy' is to let go of the regular 'stamgroepen' in the way they have been around for many years within day-care centres.

What exactly is a 'stamgroep'?

That is the core group in which the child is placed, with its own room and a regular pedagogic crew who, every day and all day, cherish, nurture and guide the child and, at the same time, serve as first contact for you as a parent. The pedagogic crew of a stamgroep follow the development of the children in their group and register the most important events during the day. Characteristic for a stamgroep therefore is that the child resides in that group practically the entire day and that during the week always the same children are present. It is **his** (or her) group and **his** (or her) own pedagogic crew. On quite days two stamgroepen can easily be merged: together with the own stamgroep, children and pedagogic employees meet the children of a different stamgroep. A safe and exciting adventure.

In the 'open door policy' the idea of the stamgroep is replaced by functional-rooms, where specific activities are offered, such as a reading-room, music-room, gym-room etc. Upon entrance the child can thus choose what he wants to do and shortly goes to the designated room. Each day it is unknown who else is going to be there. There are day-care centres that have specifically built a new venue according to this principle and consequently have no more rooms for stamgroepen. In itself this concept provides a nice alternative for older children, in after school care for instance. In the day-care, however, it is detrimental because children in that age-group need the structure of a regular room, pedagogic crew and peers. That creates trusts and safety, the preconditions for attachment. Moreover, making choices (in this case about what activity they want to participate in) is a skill children in day-care have barely really mastered.

The distinction between the classic stamgroepen and the function-groups of the 'open door policy' is thus fundamental and large. But be aware, because by now, in the childcare, there is a lot of confusion about the stamgroep. It has been listed as a quality requirement; a requirement no day-care centres with an open-door-policy can comply with. This has been solved semantically by branding the function-groups also as stamgroepen. They are not though. So be wary with a day-care centre that advertises an open-door-policy in combination with stamgroepen. Those stamgroepen are only virtual stamgroepen.

Since 2003 Dikkedeur has its own approach which we call (with a wink) 'ajar policy'. This approach basically means that every now and again children (those who feel the need to) can go a bit beyond their own stamgroep. There are, for instance, toddlers who love to 'help out' with the babies every once in a while. Or children in the baby-toddler group who would already like to visit the exciting toddler group. Moreover, it is pleasant for toddlers to, at set times, be able to choose between activity X in their own group and activity Y at the neighbours. None of this requires any extra pedagogic efforts, although it needs careful organisational coordination between the groups involved. This way, the children can broaden their horizons or easily choose a preferred activity, without letting go of their stamgroep. It concerns relatively short trips after which they always return to their own group and room.

Of course we have a few moments a year that children from different stamgroepen participate in a joined activity, a Christmas- or 'sinterklaas' celebration for example. These activities are very nice indeed, but have nothing to do with a pedagogic policy, no 'open door policy' nor an 'ajar policy'. It serves no purpose other than a joint celebration, similar to those in schools.

What about attachment after the first 4 years?

As key-theme, attachment is not only relevant for the children in the day-care. Also after those first 4 years it keeps playing an important role, albeit in a different manner.

Attachment: the basis for morality and identity

A successful attachment is the general prerequisite for a balanced growth where the child, in the certainty of acceptance, can be himself and can develop to his own abilities and in his own pace. That includes discovering the world and acquiring knowledge, 'knowledge-learning'. More specifically however, a secure attachment forms the basis for 'desirability-learning', for learning things that adults value and which they want their children to strive for as well. This desirability-learning process is not a transmission of knowledge, but works by means of imitation and identification.

Young children like to copy what they see others do. A baby even fully relies on that for his first knowledge-learning, unable to think yet. As soon as a child is able to cognitively think about something, imitation is discarded as a source of

knowledge-learning. A new version does arise though, in the form of identification: wanting to be and act just like an important object of love (often a parent or caregiver). This starts from the 4th year of life. Via identification they adopt what is desirable and what is not from their examples, which in turn stimulates the *moral development*. With this, the social or moral learning follows a natural course and requires little extra instruction.

The discovery of the self depends heavily on a successful attachment: to dare and try things that are specific for the child, belong to him, but are still new and different. This discovery is of great importance for the *development of identity*, the experience of a distinction between 'the self' and 'the environment'. Children like to have a sense of belonging; they like to feel similarities between themselves and (significant) others. But at the same time they perceive personal differences, situations in which they think, feel and respond differently from their caregivers or playmates. In this as well, they want to feel respected, so that they are able to develop a *positive self-image*. For a healthy identity development, the realisation of 'being one with your environment' is just as important as the realisation of 'being separate from your environment'. A tension-free process of identity formation therefore builds on a secure attachment with room for a positive sense of self about the one's own identity: I am worthwhile the way I am.

Attachment: a lifelong need

In the subsequent stages of the development the child retains the need for attachment. After all, the human need for attachment never ceases to exist. At this point that need does not focus specifically on the primary caregiver, since that would have been established in the first 4 years, but instead focuses on others, like family members and peers and a bit later on an independent love affair with a life partner. But also the material environment (the city you live in or the nature) is object of attachment, and even the work environment or the country you grow up in. Moving or emigration can have a significant impact on the existing attachment. Therefore we need to provide children with enough attachment possibilities, also after the fourth year.

A child can better profit from these opportunities if he can build on a secure attachment with his caregivers in early childhood. Has this basis not been established, however, the child will be extra distrustful and thus cautious in entering in bonds/relationships. Insecure attached children also tend to show more irregular behaviour, at once, but also in the years following. Hence it is very important to recognize this signal-behaviour, instead of merely responding to the visible behaviours. This is a task reserved for our pedagogic personnel at the BSO (after school care).

CORE THEME II

ADEQUATE STIMULATION

Secure attachment is not the only thing that counts when it comes to the growth of children, even though it forms the base from which the chances of an optimal development are best. Such an optimal development is, however, not reached by fostering alone. The child also needs to get the chance to develop his basic

abilities and further improve his skills. Lack of stimulation, just like an insecure attachment, leads to a lot of stress and not only challenges the growth of the brain, but also makes a child unhappy.

Fostering and stimulating are not at all inconsistent with each other; they do not interfere with one another. On the contrary, they need each other. After all, we do not have to choose between giving warmth and comfort *or* offering a challenge but we need to make sure the child feels safe and secure in order for him to dare to explore and is not afraid to try new things. And the more the child learns and discovers, the more comfortable the child feels and the more it dares to trust himself and his environment.

What is adequate stimulation and how do you go about it?

A stimulating environment starts with enough possibilities for a child to explore on its own. Nature is a good example of such an environment. A baby lying in the grass can easily follow the interplay of clouds, endure the caress of the wind, study the flies and butterflies, perceive the sound of birds and study the structure of the grass. Even a light drizzle or a bit of snow is a miracle to undergo and discover. Thus, not a lot of effort needs to be put into this. It is just there. That is different for the rooms indoors. So, when decorating a room we need to make sure there are enough but not too many stimuli for the child. You can have too much of a good thing.

These stimuli do need to have enough *variety* and thus not only focus on sensory stimulation, for example. The child, indeed, desires stimulation in every developmental area and does so in diverse ways. Decoration alone is often not enough to achieve this. Therefore, caretakers have to provide additional stimuli by means of play, toys or activities. That requires deliberate choices: what do I offer and why? What is most important is that all areas of development are covered in a way that fits the child's age, developmental stage, and accounts for the individual aptitude. So, besides being sufficient and varied, the available stimuli need to be *tailored* to the children.

Stimulation should not be unilateral but provide opportunities for all abilities to develop and not just haphazardly: with the risk of over-stimulation or under-stimulation.

For that very reason, we, at Dikkedeur, work with an *activity planner*, categorized by developmental area and age, and with periodical *child observations* to determine if a child receives the stimulation that suits him/her best.

Key point in our approach is that children are not continuously restricted in their search for and practise of skills by cautions about danger or 'disturbances', neither by removing everything from the environment that might pose a risk. At Dikkedeur, children have the right to learn by trial and error, they may stumble and rise again or make erroneous assessments. And do not forget: the more sterile the environment, the less challenging and the less skill improvement. A young child benefits from learning to climb those two steps by himself, even though he might fall the first time round. He learns a lot from that. These experiences are captured in the brain, including the 'knowledge' about what went wrong and how to improve this. The connections between cells necessary for this

are immediately made in order for the child to be better prepared the next time he encounters a similar situation. It is the pedagogic employee's job to guide him in his attempts to safely climb the steps and get back down again, not to keep him away from it. The older children, like in the BSO, need, for example, to get the chance to learn how to safely climb a tree. By overprotecting children you take away necessary experiences and thus possibilities to develop which causes them to remain dependent longer than necessary and desirable.

CORE THEME III

NO PUNISHMENTS AND REWARDS

The final core theme probably draws the most attention if only because it addresses an element of upbringing that everyone is so familiar with that hardly any conscious thought is put in to it. Punishment and reward, we have all been brought up with it.

For decades we have been told that punishing and rewarding is a useful method to make a child behave the way you would like it to. Or even better: that a child wants to behave the way we want it to. But why do we want that? Why do we often put so much effort in making a child obey our wishes? Is it because we ourselves, as a child, have been subjected to the imposed demands of our parents? Or are we afraid our children will come to no good? Or does it feel as a lack of respect when a child is disobedient? And why do we think only punishment and reward help us with that?

The idea of punishing and rewarding is an adaptation of an older movement in science, the learning theory, with the Russian psychologist Pavlov as the most important and best known representative. Pavlov discovered that he could make dogs drool at the sound of a bell. His method is called: classic conditioning, where the animal awaits what happens and then behaves in a certain way. The psychologist Skinner elaborated on this with rats. He taught rats to push down a lever in order to get to a treat that was placed behind it. The term 'time-out' comes from an experiment by Skinner who, in 1958, made pidgins pick at certain signals. After the experiment an assessment was made whether this behaviour disappeared if the pidgins were punished by taking away their reward: it was a time-out of a reward. Skinner's approach is called: operant conditioning, you manipulate the manifestation of a specific behaviour by varying the reward. The animal is inclined to perform some sort of action in order to create an effect. So, it started out as a means to control animal behaviour. Not long after this was also applied to children, without allowing for humankind's specific mammalian disposition however, which of course is fundamentally different from that of a rat, dog or pidgin. B. Watson was the first to apply conditioning on human children: little Albert, a baby 9 months of age. Later this experiment was deemed highly unethical, since little Albert turned out a total wreck mentally. Despite all this, the theory and method of conditioning via punishment and reward gained popularity and became known as Behaviourism.

The ground-principles behaviourism are:

Reward desirable behaviour – *Ignore* undesirable behaviour – *Punish* behaviour that for some reason has to put to a halt immediately (dangerous behaviour for instance).

Rewarding or withholding of rewards is the core of this approach. Paying attention to a child is seen as a reward and will make sure the child will repeat the desired behaviour next time. Therefore you should never pay attention to a child when it displays unwanted (negative) behaviour, but instead ignore that behaviour. Punishing is a form of attention after all. A punishment is an emergency measure to acutely stop certain behaviour. With punishment you do not teach the child anything, you only stop the behaviour at that specific moment. Rewarding, ignoring and punishing should be sustained 100% consequent, otherwise it will not 'work'. This is an almost inhuman task in the daily practise of raising a child, since nobody is that strictly consequent.

For daily use, this approach has been simplified: up-rearing by punishment and reward. Only few make use of ignoring, and in most cases the emphasis is on punishment. In practice, punishing and rewarding is used to, but rarely limited to, train children (with eating, sleeping, potty training etc.). Each behaviour that the adult experiences as unwanted or inappropriate tends to be subjected to punishment.

But does it really work, punishing and/or rewarding?

Nearly every parent/caregiver will whole-heartedly say 'no'. Experience has taught us that they encounter the same behaviour over and over again and therefore time and time again respond with increasingly severe sanctions in order to, at least for that specific moment, have any impact. Also when you ask them if they feel comfortable treating their child that way, usually the answer will be a whole-hearted 'no'. Nobody likes to fulfil the role of police-officer or judge for his own child. Nevertheless only few wonder why it does not help and if it might be wise to search for something that does work, something that is more successful *and* does more justice to the child *and* makes him feel more comfortable.

Knowledge about the mammalian predisposition of humans and the conditions for attachment (Bowlby), children's developmental stages (Piaget and Erikson) and their basic needs (motivational theory Wentholt) makes us understand why punishing and rewarding does not work as a method for upbringing, why it is unsuitable and even damaging. It is not without reason that the concept of being raised by conditioning has already been up against serious scientific challenges in the 1950's and has never really been able to refute the fundamental criticisms. It is therefore even more remarkable that behaviourism, and especially conditioning by means of punishment and reward, has been able to hold its ground for so long in social reality: in pedagogical education programs, therapies, children's education, and thus also in the way people raise their children at home as well as in day-care centres.

In this abundance of punishing and rewarding it is hard to believe that it can be done differently. When you have been brought up with punishing and rewarding it

is hard to accept that this has not been necessary, undesirable even. You look at yourself and think: it has not made me a lesser person, or you think back to the past and conclude: my parents really did not have a choice, I happened to be a difficult child. In that case it helps to try and imagine what you felt like at the time, or if you are not able to recall, how you would feel now if someone you love would ignore or punish you for behaviour that the other does not approve of. Or if you are rejected or temporarily do not receive that love until you do what the other desires. Try that and you know: punishing and rewarding is unnecessarily hurtful, forceful, threatening, disrespectful. You shall be able to explain how that other person should treat you: unconditionally loving and understanding, accepting and supportive. And indeed for children this is no different.

Than how?

Stop punishing and rewarding does not mean that children can do whatever they please and need no guidance what so ever. Children need safe boundaries and an adult who can make decisions about what is best for them. Without boundaries the child fills the void and will take charge. That is just as threatening as being wedged between rules and being corrected by punishment, because the child has to rely on himself completely, which goes far beyond his abilities. In order to regain his safety the child will show extreme behaviour, hoping that an adult steps up and introduces some boundaries. Only then the child is able to relax. So in every family and in each group basic rules are needed to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the children. These boundaries, however, should not be too restrictive since the child still needs the space and opportunity to move freely, explore, practice and be himself.

Offering enough structure *and* freedom are not an end in itself but do serve the balanced development of children. Rules are a means for this, but the same applies to rules: they do not exist, simply because there are rules to be nor because they make sure caregivers get what they want. Only when boundaries/rules are necessary they should be set and enforced. Not by punishing when these boundaries/rules are breached but by helping the child gradually comply with it. And you help the child best when you consider the conditions for attachment and the basic biological needs, in line with the developmental stage the child is in.

Thus a good balance between structure (including rules) and freedom (to discover and for the child's own character) is not enough. Recognising the biological basic-needs, understanding and accepting those needs and acting responsively to them, is at least as important. So, always try to find the basic need (nutrition, sleep, love challenge, etc.) that drives your child's behaviour. This might be different for every child. So adapt to the child in front of you.

There is no ready-made formula for childrearing without punishing and rewarding. It remains tailor made. And that requires more effort from the caregivers than merely 'fining' undesirable behaviour. But the caregiver who, in this respect, successfully creates a good 'fit' between the internal psychological needs of the child and his own demands, will notice that the felt urgency to punish and reward will disappear without a trace.

5 PEDAGOGIC GOALS AND RULES OF THUMB

Day-care has a broadly acknowledged high social relevance: the care of very young children in a period of life (the first 4 years) in which the foundations for the rest of their life are laid. Good or bad, the effects of this care are irreversible. Dikkedeur recognises these great responsibilities, which she has recorded in her mission, her social task:

"Offering a respectful and child oriented care that guarantees physical and emotional security (attachment) and sufficient stimulation in order for children to grow into balanced adults who can utilize their talents optimally, are capable to maintain full-fledged interpersonal relationships and show a natural social commitment and involvement."

This mission shows that Dikkedeur pays attention to the long-term effects – up until adulthood – of the practice of upbringing in those first years of life. If caregivers fall short in essential elements the risk of an unbalanced growth significantly increases. This creates a society with adults whose talents are only sub-optimally developed and who are, more than necessary and desirable, fearful or aggressive, insecure, lonely, self-centred, or morally wavering. Each day-care centre should take notice of these responsibilities and wonder in what way their caretaking helps or harms a healthy human development and therefore a healthy society.

Pedagogic goals

The following pedagogic goals have been deduced from this mission and our pedagogic vision; goals we want to realise in our daycare centre.

- 1 **Creating optimal conditions for attachment**, with sufficient attachment possibilities for pedagogic employee and child, for children amongst themselves and for the child in his physical environment,
- 2 **Working purposefully towards a harmonious development of the child**, including attention for his needs and abilities and excluding a predefined emphasis on specific competences, like the creative, the emotional, the cognitive or on social learning.
- 3 **Monitoring, addressing and stimulating the pleasure in things**, by stimulating children to develop playfully. In technical terms: children need to preserve their *intrinsic motivation*.
- 4 **Offering a proper balance between structure and freedom**, without unnecessary rules that do serve the pedagogic employee but not the child.

Pedagogic rules of thumb

Our pedagogic goals apply some pedagogic rules of thumb:

- The approach starts from a focus on actual children, not from dogmas, routine or personal beliefs and judgements.
- Attention for and unconditional acceptance of the individuality of each child and his signal-behaviour to which will be responded responsively.
- Needs behind the signal-behaviour is recognised and understood and distinguished from the pedagogic employee's own needs and desires.
- Sufficient facilities to enable such a child oriented care and guidance, amongst which: 'zorgleidsters', splitting of groups, a child tracking system (kindvolgsysteem), supporting staff, on the job training.
- Pedagogic employees continuously reflect on the question whether the chosen method really serves the child's wellbeing in the first place.
- Children are correct with respect; punitive measures or directing by withholding affection is unacceptable. The emphasis is on what *is* possible.
- Physical or verbal violence against children is prohibited and the social and emotional safety is guaranteed.
- Children are never forced to do or not do something, like eating or drinking or potty training.
- Children get the opportunity to explore and resolve things by themselves, assistance is only offered when needed.
- Communication with children is always positive in tone, both verbal and non-verbal.

It might seem redundant to make basic agreements or rules of thumb about the method of work and attitude of a pedagogic employee towards a child or group of children. It does however appear to be useful to continuously wonder if we, under the pressure of the daily practise or in the ease of entrenched routine, really always act accordingly. The rules of thumb offer a basis for a child-oriented professional attitude *and* for a continuing self-check on this. To support our pedagogic employees with this we employ a university educated pedagogic staff.

6 DEVELOPMENT-ORIENTED WORK

Child-oriented care, attention and guidance not only imply working with a focus on the basic needs, but also on the development of children. This requires sufficient knowledge about each developmental area. In the core theme 'stimulating' we briefly mentioned the developmental areas, on which children start to explore on their own, by nature and also that they should get the chance to do so.

These developmental areas are in fact *ability-areas*: they are the potentially present abilities of the human mammal that require development. So, we are all born with these same potential abilities.

These natural basic abilities are: cognition (the mind), affection (the abilities to love), the senses (ranging from taste to hearing), motor skills (muscle control).

In addition, we find combined competence areas that consist of a combination of basic abilities, such as creativity, independency or social skills, all of which also need stimulation.

We find pedagogic ideologies that have created an order in these abilities and choose in advance to stimulate a certain developmental area or a combinatorial competence, such as the senses or creativity. For children this is disadvantageous since, by nature, all developmental areas and all competences need stimulation. Nature does not differentiate: one is just as important as the other. From birth, the development starts by experiences and practice that the child itself searches for or undergoes eagerly. Even though the baby initially primarily discovers the world around him by his senses he also acquires cognitive, affective and motor experiences from the first day. His brain needs that too! Previously we wrote that a baby's brain is in scaffolds from birth and is not even close to being finished. Many cells still need to be created and connections between cells need to be made, which is crucial for being able to execute the necessary brain functions. And those brain functions are not limited to the senses or to creativity.

Thus it is imperative to stimulate all four basic abilities, either passively or actively. At Dikkedeur we take that very seriously and teach the pedagogic employees to get a better grasp of the nature of each ability-area and think about a fitting offer for the children.

Monitoring the development of the four basic abilities

For a balanced growth of the child enough attention to all four areas is needed. In addition, we should pay due attention to the **interaction** of the developments in these four areas. If, for instance, the development of the affective ability stagnates, what will happen to the development of the other ability-areas? And what are the consequences of motor retardation for the cognitive abilities (or the other way around)? How does one influence the other?

Similarly, we can wonder how impediments of one or more of these basic abilities have an impact on the elements of growth that are so dependent on the interaction between these abilities, like identity, consciousness, fantasy and creativity? Thus, it is important to keep track of the process of growth in all these areas.

For that reason Dikkedeur works with a **KIND-VOLGSYSTEEM (CHILD TRACKING SYSTEM)**, which consists of the following elements:

1. An activity planner filled with the weekly activities of a group, split into the various developmental areas and specified to the various developmental stages (ages).
2. A 'development list' on which pedagogic employees keep track of the way in which a child performed an activity and whether or not he enjoyed it.
3. An observation list with which children are, periodically observed in their development and functioning
4. A parent interview based on the observation report, where home experiences can be compared to the experiences at the daycare

5. A kindplan (childplan) for each child, with specific considerations in the interaction: what fascinates him? Where is a greater challenge needed?
6. A groeiboek (growth-book), showing the development of the child from the start as baby at Dikkedeur, up till the fourth year.

With these instruments we try to promote a harmonious growth and at the same time get and keep a clear image of each individual child.

A word about toys and playing

Offering toys is one way in which we can stimulate a child's basic abilities. A day-care centre should be equipped with sufficient and pedagogically sound toys. At Dikkedeur we pay due attention to qualified toys and materials. We use a 'toy-policy' including criteria for high quality toys and guidelines for a pedagogically sound way to offer these toys to the children. So, in the groups you will primarily find durable toys with a high playing quality. Our motto is: *Speel en Speel Goed!* (*Play and Play Well!*)

Playing is of great importance for a healthy development of man and society. In play, people learn an abundance of things without actually feeling they are learning. That is the idea of 'learning by playing'. Especially for children this is an important principle: by nature, children like to play. You don't need to motivate children to play, the innate curiosity continuously motivates to explore and try new things, practice and improve their skills. While playing they pick up and learn many things without realizing it. This starts from the first day after birth and continuous in every following year. So, before children go to school they have already learned a lot, just by playing. You *learn* everywhere, not just in school.

Of course, learning is not the only function of play. Enjoyment is another. On the one hand because 'playing' challenges you to fully use and expand on your skills, which feels good. In technical terms this is called: the intrinsic pleasure you experience when exploring, practicing and improving. On the other hand because the products used in the activities may also look beautiful. And that creates an aesthetic experience. The human need for this experience of aesthetics/beauty is often forgotten, especially when it comes to younger children. But: the younger a child experiences beauty for the first time, the more intense the aesthetic experience will be when he grows older and the more he will recognize beauty in ordinary objects in adulthood. So, toys need to be beautiful as well.

In addition we should not forget the social aspect to 'playing'. Especially in game play with others you enjoy the social contact and, when you're a little bit older, you parenthetically learn important social codes and get introduced to the experience of others. So, 'playing' is socially enriching.

As children get older, 'playing' will gradually disappear as a form of learning, enjoyment and communication. At least for most people it does. And that is a pity, especially since the functions of play mentioned before have not ceased to exist!

7 THE ABILITY-AREAS SUMMED UP

In this chapter we give an overview of the most important ability areas, subdivided in the basic abilities and combined abilities. The basic abilities precede the combined abilities. A successful development of the basic abilities is therefore crucial for successful development of the combined abilities.

THE FOUR BASIC ABILITIES

Affective development

As we wrote earlier, attachment and love are a prerequisite for all development and should therefore not be lacking in any childcare environment. The more loving care and attention a child receives (*need* for affection) the more it will become capable of loving others, in a diversity of bonds of love (*ability* of affection). So when it comes to love, you can never spoil children.

The quality of a bond of love with the primary caretakers sets the tone for the child's future abilities of love and affection. If you, as a child, have learned that the love of your parents is conditional, and thus contains pre-set conditions (I love you if you do as I say), then you will also expect that from others (and you will therefore always bend over backwards to meet expectations and demands of others) or demand the same of others.

The need for love will always be there, well into old age. The ability to love can however remain deficient by lack of developmental opportunities. This will affect our adult relations continuously. The need for attachment and the ability to attach is rooted in this developmental area.

Cognitive development

The cognitive growth already starts during pregnancy. The foetus is under hormonal and chemical influences that make the brain grow and that creates important connections between cells that are necessary for cognitive functioning. After birth this increases explosively. This is an autonomous process, anchored in the human organism. We do not really have to do anything to develop the earliest forms of thinking. At most we need to make sure we do not interfere with this spontaneous growth too much. Nevertheless children come further than that, get to a more complex level of development, when they grow up in healthy conditions and at the same time receive proper and sufficient stimulation. Under these circumstances the predisposed potentials get the best chance to mature and the innate cognitive abilities of each individual are then being utilized. A specific stimulation of the cognitive abilities presumes a) sufficient knowledge of the developmental stages, b) recognition of differences in pace, c) familiarity with the approach of disadvantages, less endowed or, in contrast, gifted and d) awareness of the importance of intrinsic motivation (the joy of doing) for the use and growth of the cognitive abilities.

Sensory development

The sensory perception has a developmental process controlled by nature. The baby is born with sharp senses: the sense of smell causes him to, in a very short

amount of time, be able to recognize his mother's scent out of many others, his hearing does the same for his mother's voice and with his mouth the baby thoroughly investigates the world. All of this is needed for his survival.

Not all senses are at full strength immediately. A baby's sight for instance is very weak at birth. At a distance larger than 20 cm the baby only perceives fuzzy contours. His mother's face will thus remain a mystery during this first period. The newborn perceives the world in contrasts of black and white, dark and light, since those are best visible. Colours and nuances escape him; the basic contrasts draw his attention. The baby gradually learns to distinguish the primary colours and only from toddlerhood will his ability grow to see the first colour-nuances.

However sharp the sense of smell and hearing are from birth, the richness of perception of scents and sounds still needs to grow, just like the understanding of the direction where the sensory stimulus originated from, or its meaning. The maturation of the sensory apparatus thus first requires progressing growth of connections in the brain. Fundamentally, this follows a strict biological rhythm, just like the cognitive development: it is an autonomous growth that is genetically determined. And only severe calamities in the upbringing of a child might compromise this process.

Nevertheless, knowledge of the different stages of this development is needed in order to allow for these stages and tune to them. The more because expanding and refining the perception does require stimulation.

Here two comments are appropriate, one about taste and the other about beauty.

The **development of taste** takes place in spurts, combined with a preference for or an aversion to certain products. A child tastes – just like adults – by means of a combination of taste buds, the sense of smell and the texture of the product (puréed or in pieces for instance). They, however – other than adults – still need to get used to numerous varieties and get to know and learn to appreciate taste-combinations. This requires biological growth of smell and taste buds where 'bitter' for instance is not being tasted more strongly than 'sweet' or 'sour' and the child also likes more poignant flavours. That growth takes time.

Consequently, forcing food on children is useless and even disadvantageous. The child will associate that flavour with force or food in general with tension and maybe even with punishment. Give the child's biological development time and it will gradually and naturally expand his taste.

This is a basic rule at Dikkedeur. At every meal, including the warm meals, a diversity of flavours is offered, but a child that is not ready for it, is respected in his development.

The **perception of beauty** is an important part of perception. It is a general human need to experience beauty in the things that surround us. It brings satisfaction and peace. To improve this experience of beauty we must experience objects of beauty, preferably starting at an early age. Since: as the twig is bent, the tree is inclined! And, often forgotten, children can experience beauty too. It really does matter to them and they like beautiful objects more than ugly objects.

That is why we at Dikkedeur choose toys that are not only of a high quality for playing purposes but that also looks good. When it comes to the decoration of rooms we keep in mind the beauty of it. In the rooms we, for instance, strive for as little posters as possible and instead try to use paintings. Our conviction is that the more children get in touch with beauty the more easily they can, later in life, experience beauty in a multitude of objects.

Motor development

Moving one's body often feels benevolent. That is no coincidence. Mother Nature managed things in such a way that everything necessary for survival also feels pleasurable doing. Running, climbing and clambering could make a vital difference between life and death. Now, it is particularly important for moving as such, the flexibility and health of the human body. The need for and pleasure in utilizing our body remained, however. Unfortunately, fewer children come to this pleasure of moving enough. This is not only too bad for their well-being, but also undesirable for their motor skills and body weight. Moreover, these children will miss the more broad learning experience offered by movement, like the cognitive skill of estimating a distance whether or not in combination with speed.

At Dikkedeur, we made movement a key point, in the day-care as well as the BSO, with three gymnasia available for the day-care and the youngest BSO-children (4 to 7 years) and an outdoor play policy that specifies daily outdoor play for the children. The playgrounds are spacious and equipped with challenging possibilities for movement and exercise. Additionally we visit regularly with our children the 2 community playgrounds at walking distance. For the elder BSO-children (from 7 years) we have day-care locations in the Kralingse Bos, a true paradise for experiencing nature and physical activity. The children go there by bike, after school hours, accompanied by our pedagogic employees and cycle back at the end of the day.

We have to make a distinction between fine and gross motor skills. Gross motor skills are all movement-actions that require muscle power and flexibility. Fine motor skills are all movements that are used for more specific actions and thus appeal more to hand-eye coordination. For the latter Dikkedeur offers many specific activities and play-objects to help children along with this.

THE COMPOUND ABILITIES

The compound ability-areas are elements of growth that depend on a healthy development of the basic abilities. Each of them appeals to a combination of those basic abilities. Stagnation or unbalance in the development of basic abilities unavoidable leads to suboptimal development in their areas of application.

We will briefly discuss five of these compound capability-areas: attachment, formation of identity, fantasy and creativity, independence and moral development.

Attachment

Every human being starts life with the potential ability of attachment to significant others, to your children, family and friends, the neighbourhood you live in, work and even your country. We have seen that the development of this

ability to attach depends on how much of your early *attachment needs* have been met: has, in the first four years of life, a secure basic-attachment been established?

The ability to attach primarily builds on the ability to love (the affective basic-ability) and to cope with insecurities with a certain amount of self-confidence.

Crucial here is if your childlike offer of love has been answered (and thus not ridiculed, rejected or ignored), if the love you received was obvious or conditional (which causes your ability to love to develop unstable) and if you could practice to cope with threats, starting from a safe basis (so you do not feel the need to fearfully avoid numerous attachment bonds).

So, in the primary attachment phase many things can go wrong, which results in a more prominent place for aggression and anxiety and an immature affective ability. The attachment relation can, for instance, become *avoidant* instead of secure (the child doesn't seek any support or comfort any more), or *ambivalent* (the child clings onto the caregiver a lot but is unable to really accept support or comfort) or *disorganised* (the child is unpredictable and lapses into extremes).

The first attachment relation does influence later relationship as well; it becomes the emotional basis for all your reactions. You grow up with ideas and expectations about yourself (which have either given you self-confidence or insecurity) and about others (who are trustworthy or not). And that will remain the same, no matter how old you get.

Formation of identity

The awareness of one's own identity only comes to existence after the child's awareness of himself as an individual, as a person with his own needs and his own will. The awareness of oneself starts around the 2nd year. From that moment the child sets the first fledging steps towards a consciousness of his own 'characteristics'. This usually starts with simple things, such as age, sex, family ties (I am the brother/sister of...), complemented with where you live (street, city) etc. Not until primary school age will this process expand to its own emotional life and its own preferences and convictions. At first an intermediate step is needed of identifying with important others, usually the father or mother, but just as well a family member, teacher or good neighbour. A good identification object offers points of recognition with one's own life and experiences in the world (connectedness) and at the same time allows for differences that are equally specific to the child. The final big step in the formation of identity follows during puberty, with special emphasis on the sexual and social identity.

This formation of identity is mainly about finding a good balance between 'the self' and 'the environment', between what differentiates you from others and what connects you to others. Enables the environment the child to be who he is and to feel what he feels? Then he can choose an identity that fits him perfectly, the differences do not interfere with the connectedness. However, if the child is forced to choose between himself and his environment, then it will either violate himself and adapt completely or remain true to himself and grow lonely because he loses ties with the environment.

So, a balanced formation of the identity requires:

- 1) A secure affective base that gave the child confidence in himself and the world around him and from which the child dares to explore other people and opportunities,
- 2) An awareness of one's own desires and needs, and the experience that these are respectable and not something to be ashamed of or feel guilty about,
- 3) An undoubted positive self-esteem: I am okay the way I am! This allows the child to autonomously come to self-judgements and not to stay dependent on the judgement of others.

However, during the development prior to the formation of the identity many things could have gone wrong, because of defective affective relating, unsecure attachment, fearful denial of the child's own needs and feelings, unrealistic views of his self-esteem or guilt, for example.

Fantasy and creativity

Fantasy and creativity draw from the same source, which is the reason why we combine them here. That source is more or less richly filled, depending on the cognitive developmental stage, the rich or limited range in the sensory development, the conservation or loss of pleasure in discovering new things (intrinsic motivation) and the freedom given to the child to follow his own promptings. In human functioning both fantasy and creativity play a major role and we should guard them well. Fantasy and creativity are often confused, even though they are different qualities.

A fantasy is a figment of our imagination. **Fantatising** therefore refers to the power of imagination, the art of making things up, things that do not exist, though they can be an adaptation of reality. Fantatising has an important psychological and developmental function: during play, it helps recognising and learning many social and cultural classifications, expectations etc. (like in role-play) and is a psychological outlet, a means to express experiences and feelings: it can reassure, make fuzzy anxieties concrete or overcome them, help to process problems or to fulfil impossible wishes just a little bit. A fantasy or imagination can be more or less creative.

With **creativity** we mean the ability to create something new, to come up with an unexpected angle of approach. Creativity is invaluable for human society, both artistically and cognitive. Innovations in all areas of life ask for creative minds that can look at well-known, familiar things in a different way.

Artistic creativity means artistry, which, if it grows and blossoms uninhibitedly, offers many aesthetic pleasures, experience of usefulness and outlets.

Cognitive creativity means original and multifaceted thinking, also out of the box, which is needed for problem-solving abilities, finding creative solutions.

In the development of children, fantasy and creativity have a natural place. In the first 4 years of life the need for and ability to pretend-play automatically arises. In the following years the original pretend-play subjects are gradually replaced by a more reality bound adaptation. It is then important to retain the fantasy world by, for example, offering new forms and themes. Creativity follows more or less

the same path. Children often tend to naïvely and uninhibited come up with many interpretations or angles new and unexpected to adults. The more we let them free and support them, the richer the creativity. Avoid asking a child to colour within the lines or making approving or disapproving statements about artistic work (drawings, paintings, objects made from clay etc.). Let them find out the possibilities of play of new playing objects by themselves and support them by asking questions. Be aware that giving instructions or answers undermines their own creative thinking process.

Independence

Independence is often seen as: being capable of accomplishing something without help of others, like putting your own shoes on. This interpretation of independence is too narrow. In our analyses we distinguish a threefold of independence:

social

(standing on your own feet, caring for yourself)

cultural

(making your own choices and judgements and living life according to your own insights and responsibilities)

psychological

(being free of internal-psychological, emotional dependencies).

Independence in one of these areas does not automatically bring about independence in the others. Being able to fulfil a task on your own (social) doesn't mean that you are able to think, judge and choose independently, without any cultural expectations or emotional dependency on others. Particularly the ability to think independently often remains unmentioned. Nevertheless it frequently is insufficient and a lot can be gained in that area, especially with young children. What does it entail: thinking independently? That we don't allow others to influence or manipulate us, don't parrot but think for ourselves, don't just take anything as the truth but wonder if something is correct. This ability starts with sufficient affection and attachment and a balanced development of the identity during childhood. With a too strict, demanding, rejecting upbringing the child develops a strong tendency to listen to and do as others expect him to. The child is (still) unable to meet these expectations and failure is unavoidable. This causes negative emotions about the self-worthiness and provokes an identity formation that goes against the child's own nature but does fit what others like to see. A positive self-perception on the other hand, arises in an environment that accepts personal needs and ways of expression and calls for a difference of opinion, creates sufficient security to dare to rely on your own judgement and have your own view of the world.

What should we pay attention to? During the growth to adulthood there are many phases in which children – if they are physically and cognitively ready – feel a strong urge to do something individually, to explore, experiment and manifest oneself. That *urge* is lost when external and in a too early stage *force* is being applied to make the child do something on his own, or if the child doesn't get

enough opportunities to try things out for himself. Threefold-independence can only blossom with a basis of emotional safety and retained ego-strength.

Moral development

We find few developmental aspects about which so many misunderstandings exist as the moral development. That development is often interpreted as 'behaving according to norms and values'. Rarely is explained what a norm is exactly, or what values are. Let alone which norms & values children do or do not need to live by and above all: how do you realize this best and why is that the best way. For that reason we will start with definitions.

Values are ethical desirability's that, in a society, have been formulated as worth pursuing, not by just a few individuals but by many, who all are expected to make an effort for realizing these values. For instance: good care for descendants, respect for human life, being free of physical insecurity/violence, respect for the truth, justice, freedom of speech, self-rule etc.

Norms are basically the realization of values. They are the precepts, in the form of commandments or prohibitions that need to make sure that the values are realized in daily life. So, with 'respect for a human life' comes the norm: thou shalt not kill. With 'respect for the truth', the set of norms about how true knowledge should be gathered (commandment) and the norm that you should not lie (prohibition).

People are only willing to take a norm as a guideline just from themselves, when they have adopted the underlying values, in such a way that they have become part of their conscience. They want nothing more than to act according to the values from that conscience. After all, violation of the values creates unpleasant feelings of guilt (failure in one's own eyes) and those are painful, stressful. In practice it can happen that someone acts completely in line with a value but not via the norms that have been devised for it. This sometimes occurs with violations of law. A law is a norm, but in practice not always the best fitting norm for the benefit of realising a value. Then, there is a difference between what is called: the spirit and letter of the law. The stricter one sticks to the letter (the norm) above the spirit (the value) the lower the moral level of justice. Simply forcing compliance with the norms/standards does not give any moral intentions, at most shame about being 'caught' (failing in the eyes of others) and calculating behaviour focused at the chances of being caught. That is moral imbalance. People can also come to see a norm as a value. The more, during childhood, people have been pushed to follow the norms instead of focus on the values, the more these people have started to experience the norm as though it was a value. This may go far: obedience might have been enforced as a behavioural norm, even though it has no underlying value. The child will see obedience as the greatest good and make no distinction as to what he obeys to. That too is moral imbalance.

Calculated behaviour (the norm is being seen, not the value) and a false sense of guilt (the norm feels as though it is a value) will arise easily and sooner if we bother children with values and norms too young. Asking too much of a child is always counterproductive. This is even more the case when we enforce our own personal social preferences on them, instead of values or norms. For example:

'don't speak with your mouth full', 'always empty your plate', 'say sorry!'. These rules are not related to morality at all.

Now try to envision a very young child's capabilities to think and act. They do what their development allows them to, no more no less. They are not little adults, not in any way. They are not able to do what we are as adults. Thinking and acting in a moral way exceeds the power of children from 0-4 years of age by miles. Acting and judging morally is judging and acting from a moral conviction that something is good or bad. To be able to do that you need to be sufficiently developed in at least three fields:

- cognitive (thinking and reasoning in an abstract way)
- affective (the emotional involvement)
- conative (the conscious, intentional wanting)

A 2 or 3 years old child, addressed about certain behaviour, such as taking a toy away or getting a tantrum, is cognitively unable to understand the meaning of what is said to him and what is supposed to be 'wrong' about it. Indeed, it is behaviour that entirely fits his (im)possibilities of the moment, of the stage he is in. Linguistic he is hardly developed: the active vocabulary of a 2-year old contains about 250 words, which are always about the here and now (there is no sense of time present yet) and are worded in telegram style. After that a spurt in vocabulary that leads to approximately 1000 active words and another 3000 passive words (able to recognise the word; knowing what matches the word; not fully understanding its meaning; not actually producing the words). In the age till 4 years, the vocabulary mainly contains words representing concrete, identifiable objects such as house, car, banana, horse, cow, tears, etc., or interpretations given by adults to concrete, identifiable phenomena like the word 'sadness' when someone shows tears. Abstract words, for which you cannot point to an object, are for a child in this age Dog Latin (what does 'respecting each other' look like? Where can I find that thing?). So, when toddlers are struggling about who gets a toy, negotiation is not an option, also because of his primitive thinking ability: he just starts to think in mental images and the thinking is illogical and magical. In technical terms: the thinking is pre-operational. Not a very good basis for a negotiation. Moreover, the child is still in the stage of narcissism (also known as egocentrism): the world revolves around him; he is actually the world. Cognitively he is not yet capable of seeing things from someone else's perspective. Thus, they often think that everything is alive, just like them, so also the clock and the doll and the moon are alive. They do not realize that another person has feelings too. Only from the age of 7 children are cognitively able to think from different perspectives, logically constructed and in concepts of a certain abstraction. In technical terms: 'concrete operations'.

Transmitting a norm or, even more extensive, a value, requires cognitively concrete-operational thinking schemas, which come into existence around the 7th year. Thus, mental maturation is indispensable for moral growth.

But also emotionally it is too much to ask. The child still feels and acts spontaneously, without reflection. If it is in pain, it cries, if it really wants to have something he takes it and if something doesn't work he feels frustrated, possibly

resulting in an uncontrolled huff. The deliberate volitions slowly grow, first focused on the child itself and not until primary school gradually focussed on 'wanting to do well'. The empathic ability (needed for the capability to take others into account, to empathize) is still quite far away. And the emotional identification with an important person (like a parent/caregiver) who tries to seduce the child to copy behaviour and views, requires a certain level of detachment and first steps toward an autonomous, own identity. Only from age 4-5 are these emotional processes start.

The conclusion therefore is unavoidable: children at a day-care centre are still unable to develop conscience, let alone to behave according to norms/values.

At the BSO-age (primary school age) this is obviously different. The moral development pre-eminently starts at this age, first with emotional steps, still without conscious cognitive frameworks, by means of mimicking a loved one (identification) who (should) teach the child desirable behaviour, social and moral; thereafter using their own perception (empathy) and concepts of values (cognition) in the form of a conscious. And only then can we speak of morality. The rest was still pre-moral.

If we nevertheless can't resist to demand behaviour of young children they are absolutely incapable of, what remains for the caregiver is to try and approach the child more or less heavy-handed. Try, it says, since human children aren't monkeys you can tame. The result of such an attempt is therefore very uncertain. And if, unexpectedly, it does seem to work a little, it is not about conscience or morality, nor about the transmission of norms or values. The child has merely learned a trick. And that trick has a price.

First of all the child has now experienced that the pedagogic employee or parent rejects behaviour the child could not do otherwise. After all: he was not yet able to explain in words what he wanted, discuss the matter or just quietly wait his turn. What he did entirely fits his biological development of that moment and had nothing to do with morality, with right or wrong. It was actually morally neutral. But he certainly saw and felt the rejection of his behaviour: apparently something is wrong, but he has no idea what that is. He heard the intonation in the voice, saw the expression in the eye, the frowning of the eyebrows, or he felt the hand that grabbed him. And the only thing he can 'think of' is: she doesn't love me; I am not sweet. And after repeating this a few times the child becomes convinced: I am a bad child.

Second, the child has experienced that different behaviour is rewarded with a friendly word, a smile etc. It has no idea why. After a few recurrences he has merely experienced a link between behaviour x and punishment and behaviour y and a smile. For a child, this is an unclear and threatening situation. He really needs that grown-up person and only wants to feel safe. Thus the child naturally starts to focus on meeting expectations; not because of moral considerations, not arising from a developed conscious, but only from self-preservation. The price: continuous insecurity by remaining dependent on the approval of others throughout one's life: is this the right way for me to act?

Thirdly this will thwart in advance the natural need to be ethically good, which the child will start to feel at a later age. After all: the child will only continue to do the things that harvest appreciation, love or safety. And, as mentioned before, this is

not guided by morality, but by the probability of detection, the fear of an external authority. The child can and will safely do what 'is not allowed' as long as the parent or caregiver does not see this.

If one doesn't allow for the cognitive and emotional component and if parents/caregivers thus impose ethical or normative demands on the child that exceed his understanding, then the development of conscience may stagnate or even derail.

So, in day-care, let's focus mainly on non-moral rules and save the norms, values and social-codes for primary school, and then still at appropriate pace with the development. In our day-care centre are such non-moral rules too. For example: washing your hands after using the toilet and before eating, or not throwing with food, or walking in line when going outside and holding on to the walking rope, or putting away the toys after playing with it, with more or less help of the children.

8 THE CARE OF OLDER CHILDREN: BSO

We devote a separate chapter to the after-school care, the care of children of primary school age who need care after school-hours and during holidays because their parents are working. The quality and content of this care have been a point of discussion for a while now.

Research shows that the *quality* often falls short because day-care centres work with under-qualified pedagogic employees, the rooms are not sufficient, nor are the activities. Especially the older children from 8 years of age, experience little pleasure at the BSO. But also the *content* is controversial. In the past two years the opinion has arisen that the BSO needs to be more than just care of children of working parents. The BSO-care could have an important function in reducing a child's learning-discrepancies. By touching on the principles of a 'community school' (in Dutch 'brede school') and attributing to the idea of the community being the social environment, the BSO could have a multi-functional position in the totality of facilities. In order to realise this, a neighbourhood-oriented design and a good collaboration between schools and (among others) social-cultural work are an important condition.

Recognising the importance of reducing learning-discrepancies, we want to relativize this issue with three arguments:

Firstly: don't let the BSO be an extension of school. National experiences have shown that children, especially the 8-plus children, don't like a school-like BSO. This was a reason why, until recently, locations were popular that didn't associate too much with school. We write here 'until recently' because by now across the country pilots have started where all forms of working with children have been taken together: the 'dagarrangementen' (English: 'day-arrangements'), where day-care, education and BSO are all situated in the same building. Here the school-building becomes a 'home away from home'. An abomination for children who benefit from a non-school related rearing-environment, more homely,

smaller and age-specific, with new and challenging stimuli, in nature for instance, where they can also explore freely.

Secondly: don't let the task of reducing learning-discrepancies displace the original care-function of the BSO. Taking away impediments for parents who want to work remains a primary function of the BSO. And in most cases these parents don't need neighbourhood-oriented programs. A continuous lattice, however, where children are in school till 15.00 and afterwards, at the BSO, address the most important form of learning: free exploration. A win-win situation for all parties involved: teachers, parents and children.

Thirdly: create possibilities for children who are far ahead, the highly intelligent children. Research shows that this group of children too have a great need for tailored stimulation of their possibilities, which the primary-education often does not meet. Highly intelligent children are therefore at higher risk for school drop-out and they are present in all layers of society. Just like in each class we can find a child abused at home, we also find one child in each class that can do more and that needs more than an average child.

Implementation of Dikkedeur principles

We have subdivided our BSO groups by age. This way the youngest BSO children, the toddlers, receive directed attention in a safe environment with peers. Which is needed, since toddlers have already had to take a big step; going from the known day-care centre to a new and strange school, no longer being the eldest but instead being the youngest. The children aged 5,5 till 7 years need a somewhat more challenging offer and don't need to feel restrained by the young children, whom they otherwise need to take in account. After their 6th birthday they already really look forward to becoming one of the eldest BSO children and ride their bike to the outdoor location of the Dikkedeur BSO. From the age of 7, the children go to the forest BSO (Kralingse bos), by bicycle, which is another big step. At first still a little sheltered at the Groene Inval (7-8) adjoining the beach and with a lovely botanical garden, and from about 9 years to the tough water scouting of Stella Maris, where they can learn many things whilst surrounded by boats.

At the BSO the same pedagogical goals and rules of thumb apply as for day-care. Also the previously described developmental areas and core themes are just as important, although we find variations due to the age difference with children from the day-care. An example is the developmental tasks they face, especially social-emotional (Erikson).

Attachment and security, dependence and disengagement (individuality) play a central role in 0 to 4 year-olds. In 3 to 6 year-olds this is independence and initiative, in combination with tuning the inner life to external expectations and in children from 5 to 12 years the emphases is shifted to mastery of tasks and self-confidence as well as a balanced growth of identity. We will devote a few words to some of these developmental aspects.

Independence and initiative

The need for independence that arises around the second year still requires attention in the years following. The tasks a child works on more or less independently become, gradually, more complex. The pedagogic employee helps a child by offering a clear structure, without restricting the child, and by encouraging him without leaving him to his own devices. This way the child can practice his independence knowing that his desire to make his own choices is all right, that his attempts to do something on his own is appreciated and that the opportunities he gets are not unlimited. If we do not find the right balance here, the child might be at risk to get stuck in doubt and shame about itself.

Increasing independence also means: (a) searching for ways to tune your own feelings and impulses to the expectations of others and (b) daring to take initiative. So give the child the opportunity to find a socially accepted way to deal with the aggression he feels – if he loses a game, feels socially obstructed or gets frustrated when performing a task – without getting the feeling along the way that he is a bad child. The same goes for exploration and trying out the gender-distinction or finding the balance between self-centred needs and taking others into account.

With a healthy development the child will show more and more interest in socially accepted goals and types of behaviour and in displaying his own initiative. If on the other hand the environment doesn't succeed in finding the right balance, chronic feelings of guilt and a fear of punishment might arise, which nips in the bud every initiative.

Mastery and self-confidence

This is mainly about the emergence of a task oriented, diligent attitude in the child and the development of diverse **task-oriented competences**. The child likes to perform a task and actually finishes it. Pleasure in activities and increasing mastery of complex skills improve the task oriented diligence and self-confidence. The social environment positively contributes to this if it: a) matches the child's interests and developmental stage, b) offers enough learning- and practice opportunities, c) encourages the child to persevere and d) appreciates the child for its efforts and not merely for its results. Too little or too much stimulation and a lack of free exploration combined with an abundance of passive learning methods, undermine the feeling of mastery and self-confidence, whilst the pleasure in the activities vanishes as well.

Identity growth

At the end of primary-school age a period of transition starts between the dependence of childhood and the demands of adulthood. The task children face is to develop a strong sense of identity, sexually, socially and culturally. This is based in early childhood, but in this stage the child has to find an answer to questions such as: who am I, who expects my environment me to be (become), in what ways am I different from how my environment sees me (wants me to see), who am I similar to or who do I want to be similar to?

Successful formation of the identity creates clarity and security about who you are in relation to your environment (parents, siblings, friends) and offers you inner self-acceptation. A distorted process of identity formation on the other hand goes hand in hand with insecurity, disunity and self-rejection. For instance, who the child is or wants to be doesn't match with what his environments expects him to be. It is hard for a homosexual boy to reach a balanced identity formation if he lives in a context of strong macho or heterosexual expectations or even of a ban on homosexuality. Also being part of a certain societal or ethnical group may obstruct a natural positive sense of identity, especially if that group is viewed negatively. Moreover, the absence of a suitable example for identification can cause you to remain insecure about who you want to be and therefore to resort to caricatures: you behave excessively tough and manly or salacious and feminine.

Again the moral development and conscience

Pre-moral development starts from about the 4th year of life. The child does (and leave) things that seem fair to him, even though he doesn't see that in terms of abstract notions (such as justice) nor does he understand the underlying principles. The perspective is still highly self-centred, both in avoiding punishment and in lack of consideration of others. The rules (norms) that he follows for now remain external to him, imposed on him by an external authority. Initially the child sees no harm in lying for instance, as long as this is focused on peers. Since only the parents/caretakers forbid it. Later he understands the notion that the greater the gap to the truth, the worse the lie (regardless of his own intention to lie or not). He doesn't yet understand the meaning of 'truth' and the nature of 'lying'. He needs new cognitive constructs that require progressive mental maturation.

Until about the 6th year of life, breaking a rule (norm) causes feelings of **shame**. Shame, contrary to guilt, is about how other people see you. The child feels he is being assessed negatively, caught or rejected. Children may feel shame and suffer from it at an early age. From as early as toddlerhood there is a global consciousness of individuality (what the child is and what is wants) open for external judgement. The child recognizes a rejection or punishment as such and may feel inferior, measured by the standards of the environment. That calls for shame.

This 'moral' stage is characterised by: rules of conduct (norms) being guarded by external agents who correct violations, with or without punishment. The child obeys (or not) hoping to avoid the disadvantages (e.g. fear to lose someone's love or fear for punishment) or to gain benefits (e.g. approval). The behaviour is pre-moral.

The first truly moral stage doesn't start until the 7th year, when the conscience had been formed and feelings of guilt are possible.

Feelings of **guilt** can only arise after the parents' values have been internalised. If all goes well, the child will identify with his parents and from this love bond he will be strongly inclined to adopt their views about good and bad, their commands and prohibitions, in such a way that he no longer experiences them as externally imposed on him but instead as his own internal guidelines. In short: guilt only

exists if a conscience has developed. And feelings of guilt always reflect falling short in one's own eyes.

Thus, the emergence of feelings of guilt requires an advanced cognitive maturation. A certain amount of abstract thinking, reasoning, change in perspective and reflection is necessary. Also affectively a number of conditions need to be met, such as a healthy attachment foundation, allowing the child a certain detachment (individuation) and enabling him the development of sufficient affective capabilities. This gives the child a natural feeling of responsibility for his own actions and for the wellbeing of others.

The development of a solid moral basis requires a strong but flexible conscience, a conscience that is not too strict neither too weak. This means that in uprearing we need to make sure that:

- the child is offered enough chances to develop the empathic ability, based on a sufficiently loving (affective), secure and respectful environment.
- the caregivers discipline the child in a flexible yet consistent way, not too permissive but not too authoritarian or rigid either and especially not two-faced or ambiguous.
- the caregivers tune sufficiently to the cognitive and emotional development of the child and do not set any rules or demands that go beyond the child's abilities.

Key in the development of conscience is the home. Day-care and school cannot do much about it. They can, however, help and guide children in the details of their moral development. Also, they can give a signal when the formation of conscience show signs of imbalance and might grow into a too weak or too strict conscience.

No blame: growing up guiltless

For that reason the core of our approach is: the no blame approach. No 'perpetrators' or 'victims' are identified. Instead a conversation is initiated with all children of the group, in which is established what everyone does and doesn't appreciate and which rules are agreed upon. A child who is being bullied can then express his fear for the bully who, in turn, can be asked: How do you feel about the fact that he is afraid of you? What can you do to help him get rid of that fear? This increases the feeling of responsibility, maintains the self-respect and stimulates the development of empathy. Labelling the child as perpetrator would only make him feel like a bad guy. The bullied child is then asked: what could you yourself do to be less afraid? This increases the self-respect and feeling of control and with that the independence. Labelling the child as a helpless victim would only confirm the child's feeling of being powerless and is justifiable insecure. Afterwards the children can agree on rules of conduct, including signalling an offence. The 'no blame' approach addresses the potentials of child in a positive way and makes bullying and other unwanted behaviour a joint responsibility.

The offer at the BSO

At the BSO we offer a wide variety of activities, focused on stimulating all developmental areas. We are in the process of developing a stimulation-program specifically focused on the social-emotional development. This is an area broadly overlooked in educational curricula, even though it is the basis for a healthy learning development. We want to fill this gap with a child centered and age-specific offer that helps children accomplish developmental tasks, as distinguished by Erikson, and realise the necessary psycho-social competencies.

Basically, the general offer of the BSO follows three main themes:

- Art and culture
- Sport and play
- Nature and environment

Relaxation and play remain our fixed principles, also for the BSO. With the diverse and age specific activities, the children develop a greater awareness of their own interests and competencies and, whilst playing, get to know a broad pallet of what both nature and culture have to offer.

9 CORE PROFILE OF DIKKEDEUR: NATURE

With our main principles and their elaborations summed up, a common theme Dikkedeur stands for becomes visible: Nature.

Nature is our guideline, in two respects: 1) the human nature and 2) the natural environment of human kind.

Human nature

Throughout our pedagogic policy we have repeatedly pointed out the biological nature and characteristics of the human kind. Every human is characterised by these properties, since they are inherently connected to our species. Within these general characteristics there are of course gradations, the result of heredity. The one child will, for instance, go through the biologically set stages of cognitive development faster than the other, but even the fastest child won't be able to skip a stage.

We respect human nature. And we have learned that this pays off. Children benefit from caregivers who understand that they feel, need and do what their biological development dictates them, enables them. No more, no less. Children only feel understood and secure if their biological key information is being seen instead of ignored, if they are accepted and helped in what they need and can or cannot yet do. And security is the foundation for a balanced development. Our pedagogic approach starts from that nature and adjusts to it.

The natural environment of the humankind

Countless research has shown the importance of the natural environment for the wellbeing of humans. Children who play in nature develop more cognitive insight,

more motor and cognitive abilities and are more creative in solving problems (nature hardly ever offers obvious solutions). They are constantly encouraged to exercise, and run a lower risk of becoming 'overweight'. Moreover, 'green' (plants/trees/shrubs) has a positive effect on clean air and on psychological wellbeing.

We respect that natural environment of human kind. We want to add it to the environment of children in the city. Our outdoor-BSO and outdoor-day-care (both in the Kralingse bos), the green park-like play-areas at our city locations, but also our policy to make our rooms indoors green are examples.

Our Quality codes

With Nature as core-profile Dikkedeur chooses 10 core qualities.

Origin:

The origin of all human action is human nature: the human mammal with her species-specific specialization (compared to other mammals) as developed within evolution. The human brain (with its sophisticated neo-cortex) is a major aspect of this specialization, just as the biologically determined basic needs and developmental opportunities of our species. This biological origin is inescapable.

The main pedagogical question here is: do we want to overpower nature or do we respect her?

Dikkedeur adopts the biological origin as an inescapable and versatile basic principle. Dikkedeur is aware of the knowledge in this matter and is respectful towards human nature in the care for children.

We make no distinction between natural characteristics: one is as important as the other. We do not reject natural characteristics because they are undesirable, neither do we try to curb them as soon as possible. Our focus is primary to perceive them and to react responsively.

Pure:

Pure is the pristine uniqueness of a new-born; fledgling still, and packed with innate potentials. That pure uniqueness is a combination of general species-specific characteristics and distinctive individual-specific qualities, a result of heritability and thus different for each child. Sometimes the uniqueness is visible or noticeable at once; sometimes we gradually discover it. With their response to it, caregivers provide children more or less chances to let this uniqueness flourish.

The main pedagogical question here is: do we want to strengthen the pure uniqueness or break it down?

At Dikkedeur we do not simply postulate 'each child is unique' and let the reader find out for himself what this is supposed to mean. Still, you can read this postulate on almost every website, without explanation, as if it speaks for itself. Scientifically however, the exclamation is not accurate. Each child shares with all other children the same biological origin, with the same basic characteristics. A pure uniqueness adds to that. Therefore, the trick is to see the pure uniqueness in the whole of shared characteristics, to respect it and respond to it.

Growth:

This indicates natural growth that runs itself, in principle. To some extent, nature warrants the growth of our body, our brain, and our skills in many ways. Mother Nature, however, cannot entirely succeed by itself, at least not for the human mammal. Optimal growth requires sufficient possibilities to discover and practice, in a cherishing and supportive environment.

The main pedagogical question here is: will we stimulate or impede the natural growth?

Our pedagogical employees are trained to offer children a varying range of activities that fits age and developmental stage, every day. Through our 'kindvolgsysteem' we periodically and systematically monitor the growth of each child. We do not unnecessarily call children to order and do not impose unnecessary rules, so they feel free to explore the world, to discover and practice. We focus on what can instead of what should not, and offer alternatives. At Dikkedeur we say: 'come, let's do it this way or that', instead of 'no, that is not allowed'.

Discover:

From birth there is a lot to be discovered in life; nature for instance, both the human nature and the natural world surrounding us. Experiencing the natural environment is crucial for the child's development. A 'green environment': brings mental tranquillity, promotes health, stimulates our senses and our skills and increases consequently our self-confidence.

But human nature also needs to be discovered. First of all by caregivers of children and, ultimately, by children themselves: they have to be able to know themselves without restraint or predetermined normative limitations.

Our nature passionately wants to 'discover'. The urge to explore the world is innate, like an uninhibited lust that spontaneously incites children to find out what things are, how they work and, some time later, why that is. This urge gives children an endless supply of energy to practice and repeat. Children can,

however, lose that 'intrinsic motivation' if their caregiver does not recognize and understand this characteristic of the human kind.

The main pedagogic question here is: will we utilize or neglect and undermine that nature?

Dikkedeur provides children many chances to discover their natural habitat. We are one of six day-care centres in the Netherlands that participates in a nationwide project 'Groen Gescoord' ("Scored Green"), where the natural environment becomes a permanent part in the child-care. Our outdoor areas are green with vegetation and we even offer 'natuuroppvang' in the forest (Kralingse Bos). This year's (2013) theme at Dikkedeur is nature: Dikkedeur and Nature. Last year's theme was: Dikkedeur and Art.

Our pedagogic policy is founded on knowledge of human nature. If necessary, pedagogic employees receive extra support in understanding the complexity of this nature and its translation into appropriate practices.

Children also discover themselves and their own nature and we help them, whenever needed. The intrinsic motivation is in good hands at Dikkedeur, by means of fitting and challenging toys and playing-activities, but above all by avoiding rewards. Rewarding replaces the intrinsic by an extrinsic motivation.

Cherish:

Human nature calls for cherishment, just like our natural habitat. Well regarded, cherishing is the cornerstone for everything. Who doesn't love the natural environment will more easily cause her harm or let her wither by neglect. For human nature this is not different. The young child can only grow up healthy and let his talents blossom if it is being cherished. Secure attachment is cherishing, just like unconditional love. One cannot exist without the other.

The main pedagogical question here is: will we cherish or punish human nature?

Dikkedeur has made cherishment a priority. Secure attachment is paramount and is provided by our 'zorgleidster' (a personal pedagogic caretaker) for each child. She cherishes, comforts, nurtures, stimulates, guides and cares for the child, she is a beacon the child can trust and rely upon, under all circumstances. Our pedagogic approach also contributes to this: we do not punish. Punishment loads love with conditions. And conditional love undermines a secure basis.

Safe:

What do we do when we feel threatened? We try to cope with the threat and regain safety by either fighting or fleeing. Both reflexes are part of our 'emergency-equipment' and, as such, natural self-protective responses to threat. It is an evolutionary tool within each animal, controlled by the amygdala that resides in the lowest most primitive part of the brain.

In the evolution the amygdala has remained intact from reptile to mammal, which indicate that feeling safe or regaining a feeling of security is a primary need in life, for all species. Unlike reptiles, humans have emotions as part of their emergency-equipment: fear (flight) or aggression (fight).

The main pedagogical question here is: do we offer children a secure or insecure base?

Dikkedeur has a great awareness of the importance of emotional security. Sector-wide this is lacking in childcare. One has an eye for excesses, like abuse and physical safety (such as safe beds), but the day-to-day emotional security gets no conscious and well-considered attention. In consequence, one is insufficiently aware of the impact of our raising practice on creating or losing a secure base. Rejecting children (and their natural characteristics), blackmailing, manipulating (if you do what I want... then you're sweet, if not...) and punishing them are threatening to the child and will raise a lot of fear or even anger. Children who respond in emergency to those threats and start fighting or show other signs of aggression, will be rejected and punished again, which further enhances the feeling of threat.

Dikkedeur, however, is a secure haven for children. We do not punish, nor do we manipulate, blackmail or reject children in any other way. We recognise and understand the emergency response (of self-protection).

Health:

Nature offers and requires all that is healthy. Physical health is: eating healthy, movement and fresh air. Mental health is: emotional balance. The former is easier to achieve than the latter, although on a large scale we see children eating unhealthy too often, not exercising enough and rarely playing outside. Campaigns are launched, hoping for behavioural change. But there is a remarkable lack of campaigns concerning the mental health of children.

The main pedagogical question here is: can we guarantee both?

On the topic of health too, Dikkedeur chooses well considered. The children play outside twice a day, also when it drizzles or it is cold, they get healthy food,

including a daily portion of fresh fruit, and a healthy freshly made warm meal. We have three gyms and Dikkedeur sites in the forest (Kralingse Bos) for 0-4 years and for 7-12 year olds.

Our basic pedagogic principles guarantee sufficient attention for mental health and emotional balance. In the benefit of a child with remarkable behaviour, our employees use a well thought out and well-developed protocol. If necessary they can count on support from our pedagogic staff-member, child-psychologist, drs. Rimke Willeman.

Coherence:

The natural habitat is an eco-system, a set of interconnected parts. Human nature is the same: an independent organism with internal connectivity. Skewedness in one part impacts the growth in the other. Insecure attachment, for instance, hinders free exploration: the child wants to explore, but doesn't dare to anymore. Insufficient stimulation and challenge causes frustration, which, in turn, causes the self-preserving response to kick in and makes the intrinsic motivation disappear. A lag in the sensory development has consequences for motor development, while disturbances on the cognitive level may have repercussions on the socio-emotional level.

The main pedagogical question here is: do we perceive the complexity of what is related?

At Dikkedeur this connectivity obviously is the basic assumption, we do not think in simple unilateral relations. That is why no trend or ideology fits us. Trends and ideologies are always limited; they focus on and over-emphasis certain aspects, and ignore others. Children are then required to fit (forcefully) in that trend or ideology. At Dikkedeur we focus on the children with their individual complex connections, and that always fits naturally!

Interaction:

Dependency is inherent to human nature. New-borns cannot survive without their caretakers and even grownups need one another. We are slow learning mammals that are born not self-reliant, unlike for example horses, rabbits, dolphins or dogs. Many years pass before we are able to stand on our own two feet; years in which we depend on others, specifically our caretakers. As a consequence, the quality of interaction between the human-child and his social environment is of great importance. Every new born brings both species-specific as individual-specific characteristics with him; his social environment needs to react responsively, accepting and loving.

The main pedagogical question here is: are we prepared to and capable of fine-tuning of the inner life of the child and the external expectations of the environment?

Dikkedeur is willing and able to meet this challenge. The quality of interaction needed within our day-care is guaranteed by our professional knowledge of and respect for human nature, combined with our capacity of unconditional love and acceptance. This commitment is obvious, since it is the base of our pedagogical approach.

Durable:

Everybody knows: durability requires care for our natural resources. Less widespread is the awareness of durability referring to the long-term effects of our child rearing practice on the nature and development of each child and hence on his abilities as a grown up civilian.

The main pedagogical question here is: do we choose durability in balance or disruption?

During the opening of our outdoor BSO, now 4 years ago, Dikkedeur has planted her own tree in the Kralingse bos. We maintain the lovely botanical garden of our day-care at the Kralingse plas and teach the children what care and love for nature embodies. We buy durable toys with an ecologically responsible production process.

Moreover, we are well aware of the effects of pedagogical practices during childhood on the development to adulthood and take that responsibility seriously, as becomes apparent from our mission.