REACTIVATION OF CULTURAL MEDIATIONAL PRACTICES

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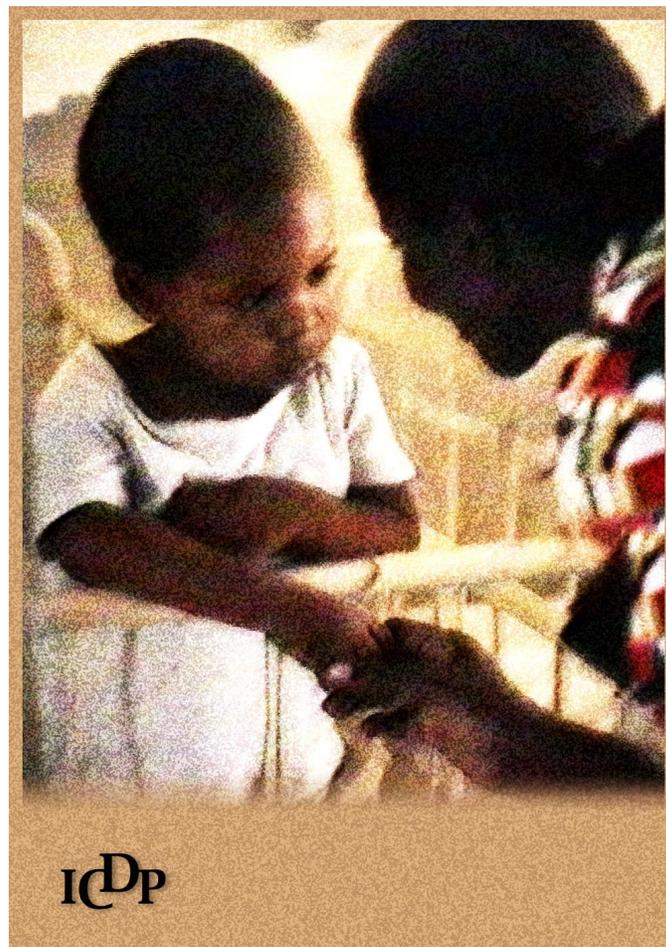
Reactivation of cultural mediational[1] practices

"Deprive children of stories and you leave
them unscripted, anxious stutterers in their
actions as in their words. Hence there is no
way to give understanding in any society,
including our own, except through the stock
of stories that constitute its initial dramatic
resources. Mythology, in its original sense,
is at the heart of things..."
(MacIntyre 1981, p.201)

Poverty and the significance of human meaning

As human beings we need a "script to live by"; a coherent scheme, preferably a story, that can integrate our past and present experiences and that can project our lives into the future in a way that creates a basis for predictability, order and self-respect. I prefer to call these life-narratives. These are like typified blueprints for living that are taken from the social stock of knowledge and tradition, which we appropriate and accommodate to our life as references for identity and sense making.

But life-narratives are not always optimistic and constructive in the normal sense, when life is difficult and there are recurrent experiences of failure, a more pessimistic conclusion may emerge: "We always try, but we always fail" as one of the slum-dwellers in Jakarta used to say (Hundeide 1992). Under such conditions one tends to adjust ones life-theory accordingly and the "worst scenario alternative" becomes part of ones life-expectations. Such disillusioned conceptions of life are probably most prevailing under extreme life-conditions in areas that Lewis describes as "cultures of poverty" (Lewis 1966). But the same difficult life-conditions can also produce radical counter-definitions of the total situation, as we can verify in radical ideological-religious movements like "black Muslims", Rastafarians and in different nationalistic movements.[2] These are like collective counter-moves aiming to redefine

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[1] Mediation refers to Reuven Feuerstein (1980) and Pnina Klein's way of describing interaction between caregiver and child that presumably promotes a child's cognitive development (Klein 1994). Rogoff's concept of "guided participation" has some similarity with Feuerstein's concept.

[2] The Palestinian concept of "sumud" - to endure and never give up and "jihad" - holy war, are examples of situations of demoralisation that are turned into situations of challenge and request for courage and hope.

prevailing conceptions of life in order to promote a more empowering and positive self-definition and understanding with dignity and self-respect - "black is beautiful".

Life-theories and life-narratives are important because they are tools for meaning making; for understanding the "what, how and whys" of ones life and sometimes also how to get out of it... It is these structures of meaning that direct our psychological reactions - as commitment and coping on the one hand, or as resignation and failure, on the other (Kelly 1955, Seligman 1992).

In other words, i**t is the meanings conveyed in these stories that are important because they provide a reference for interpretation of ones life and situation as failure or success in accordance with some standards or honour system that are contained in the stories as evaluative, normative assumptions. Such assumptions seem to constitute the basis for civilised human life.[3]**

From this wider conception a poor environment is not necessarily an environment that is poor in socio-economical terms, rather it is a symbolic environment that provides no groundwork for meaningful life-constructions that can organise human lives within a moral order of identities, life-careers, standards and values that give a feeling of direction, self-respect and meaning - "something worth living for…"!

Therefore, economical poverty does not necessarily mean poverty of culture. We know from studies of Jewish ghetto culture in East Europe, from studies of migratory hunters and even studies of low cast Indian "untouchables", that economical poverty does not necessarily mean poverty of culture and lack of mediational-narrative resources (Hundeide 1999). Certainly the contents of culture can vary and the ways mediation and guided interaction between caregiver and child take place may also vary; sometimes it is more indirect and implicit in the sense that a child is invited as an apprentice to participate in the everyday practices and chores of the family, and in this way he is directly or indirectly guided into the shared system of values, knowledge and skills that constitute culture (Rogoff 1990, Lave and Wenger 1991).

But under condition of extreme poverty and cultural change, this normal process of enculturation may be disrupted. We know from the studies of Oscar Lewis, Schepper-Huges, Robert LeVine and others, that under conditions of high survival stress and infant mortality,

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[3] Research on the ways inmates in concentration camps and prisons cope, substantiate the significance of this point. (Bettelheim 1943, Punamaki 1996).

even the normal process of bonding between mother and child, which is assumed to be a precondition for normal mediation and care, may not take place. Maybe the mother needs to protect herself from the emotional impact of losing a child, and by withdrawing her attachment she also prevents the sufferings and the mourning-process that naturally takes place when an attached infant dies and the mortality rates approaches between 30 - 50 %. Or, maybe the child was not wanted in the first place, and when it appears, it is considered as another competitor for the family resources that reduces its chances of physical survival (Schepper-Huges 1980, LeVine 1987). As LeVine points, out there is a tacit calculus or "logic" of survival that starts to operate when life conditions become extreme and the survival of the family and even the community is at stake, and this calculus may also include parental bonding and care (LeVine and White 1985).

Promoting "flexible minds" or a moral framework to live by?

In Vygotsky's developmental theory mediation refers to the acquisition of cultural tools.
This can be physical-technical tools or symbolic tools like speech and literacy that are later "appropriated" or internalised as tools of thought - "what was external interaction becomes internal operations" (Vygotsky 1978). This is different from Feuestein's conception of mediation, which refers to some formal features of what he describes as good interaction between caregiver and child that he specifies by some mediational criteria like focusing and reciprocity, mediation of meaning, transcendence, regulation of behaviour and mediation of competence etc. (Klein 1994). According to Feuerstein and Klein, high mediational interaction and care between caregiver and child is the key factor in promoting a child's cognitive development and in developing "flexible minds" (Feuerstein 1980,Klein and Feuerstein 1984, Klein 1992).

But what is the sense of developing modern, flexible minds when there is nothing to live for, to strive for? When the worst scenario alternative is threatening, is acceleration of cognitive development and flexible minds the solution?
What is needed in addition is the mediation of meaning structures and social networks that can make life worthwhile living and that supports an identity that can use a differentiated and flexible mind for a meaningful life. [4] If we only focus on developing a flexible mind and

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[4] This is not only a question of meaning and moral mobilization, it is also a question of providing relevant skills, what I have called "access-competence" to relevant and possible life-careers inside this person's "opportunity situation" or socio-ecology (Hundeide 1991, chapter 5)

intelligence and cognition in the narrow sense, we ignore a dominant problem of our time, namely the **loss of meaning and the alienation and meaninglessness that seems to be part of globalisation and modernism** (Bronfenbrenner 1975, Gidden 1991). One manifestation of this we can see in the rising incidence of suicide among children and youngsters in Western societies and the demoralisation that is taking place among traditional people when they live in the cultural vacuum between two cultures - people with "homeless minds" (Berger and Kellhner 1984). An American Indian who participated in an international conference that I attended once raised this problem. He emphasised the need for "healing the indigenous population's inner worlds" that had been destroyed through the symbolic hegemony of Western modern conceptions of reality and values. He also emphasised that the most important point in this respect was "how we mediate and conceptualise our inner life" - which includes the traditional spiritual and psychological aspects of life, what we believe in and what gives us a conception of ourselves that generates self-respect, courage and hope to face the future… A moral framework to live by.

In a poor uprooted environment full of hopelessness and despair, which we sometimes see in shanty-towns and in refugee camps all over the world, it would be, from this point of view, more appropriate to revive conceptions of hope that support the process of coping, promoting self-respect, empowerment and mediation of meaning, than the promotion of isolated cognitive or social skills out of context. Such skills can only be sustained if they, in some way, are instrumental in attaining essential and relevant life-goals inside that society. If these goals are missing; I am afraid there is no motivating force to sustain the skills when the intervention is over. We are here talking about mediation or socialisation of "worlds of value", or value-oriented conceptions of life - something to believe in and to live for. It appears that these macro-conceptions or contexts have to be restored or reactivated in some way if interventions at a micro-level are going to be sustained. Feuerstein touched briefly upon this question when he included the promotion of an optimistic outlook on life as one of his criteria of mediation.

This point of view has quite radical implications for most developmental theories in the cognitive and psychometric tradition and also for most enrichment programs, because these theories tend to isolate human development from human goals, social reality, identity and existential meaning contexts. For this reason such theories become trivial and irrelevant in practice (Smedslund 1977). There are two reasons for this, one is that they do not relate to the practical situational contingencies or "opportunity situation" of the person (Barth 1987), and the other is that they do not face the dominant problems relating to socialisation and development of our time; namely **the loss of structures of meaning that can provide a basis**

for meaningful lives and prevent the deterioration of social caring networks. The problems of meaning, values and identity are key questions in any theory of human development that face current problems of our time (Giddens 1991). Splitting up cognitive development from these issues is to take away the motivation behind cognitive development. Even programmes that try to promote the development of altruistic behaviour in children tend to be too narrow from this point of view; because altruism is part of a wider pattern of human values within a society and should not be promoted as a "skill" apart both from the practical situation and from this wider conception and context (Zahn-Waxler and Radke-Yarrow 1992, Eisenberg 1990). [5]

We therefore need a broader view of human development and mediation, where the emphasis is not on the development of skills, tools operations or even cognitive structure as such, but on **the mediation of our shared cultural and moral conceptions of the world, of life, of values of persons, identities and human relationships… within which cognitive skills and individual coping strategies becomes meaningful and worthwhile.** [6]

From this point of view one can speak about conception of reality or "life-theories" as more or less adapted to the challenges people are facing. These are conceptions that make coping and psychological survival more or less plausible and meaningful in relation to the existential challenges that people have to face in different societies.

Mediational discourse and patterns of care are part of a cultural practice

Mediation in the sense indicated above is something that is necessarily present in any culture that reproduces itself: Mediation of knowledge, values and norms that guide a child into a world of shared social knowledge, values and skills. The question is not whether there is such mediation or not, but rather: **How does mediation between caregiver(s) and child take typically place within this community?**

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[5] This does not only apply to cognitive enrichment programs, it applies equally to therapeutical interventions techniques like debriefing and ventilation of pent up feeling in trauma treatment etc.; when this is separated from their moral and existential context and framework, there is the possibility of "making things worse" (Bracken and Petty 1998).

[6] Gidden's book on identity is an example of a perspective that has this broader outlook. (Giddens 1991).

One way, which seems to be quite prevalent in many societies, particularly in the majority world[7], is through story telling and dramatisation of persons and events in the child's environment. A friend of mine who stayed for many years in New Guinea told me how children used to gather around the mother in the kitchen while she was preparing sweet potatoes and at the same time singing stories with repeating refrains about the history of the village, the mountains, the animals, and how the first human beings arrived in the valley from a hole in the earth. The children were enthralled and participated in the refrain while the mother developed new topics in the narrative line between the refrains. Through singing and telling, these children came to know the stories of how and why things in their surroundings were as they were. Singing and story telling were part of a cultural practice involving both caregivers and children. Early education was so to speak an implicit part of traditional activities that all children enjoyed and took part in. (Hundeide 1991).

This example also shows that natural forms of mediation are usually content related, we tell stories to children about things in the environment about persons, actions and events, and the more we are able to present our knowledge in a storied or dramaturgical form with content, the more interesting it becomes. It seems as if our minds are more like mechanisms for assimilating stories and dramas than for manipulating decontexualised deductive operations (Donaldson 1978, Sarbin 1986), and it is probably a mistake when we try to turn education the other way around by focusing on formal abstract aspects and leave out the content and the meaning of our social world. This is like leaving out the essence of culture namely our storied traditions, mythologies and folklore. Bruner (1990) makes the same point when he states that "I want to make it clear that our capacity to render experience in terms of narrative is not just child's play, but an instrument for making meaning that dominates much life in culture - from the soliloquies at bedtime to the weighing of testimony in our legal system..." (op.cit. p.   )

Thus any viable culture seems to have, in some form, its own narrative resources, ways of mediating, style of caring and bringing up children that are packaged into traditional practices and routines which are deeply connected with the values and the challenges that human beings within that society have had to face (Whiting and Edwards 1988, Jamais 1989, Heath 1983, Laosa 1979). Therefore psychological and educational interventions, if any, should be based on these realities and as far as possible, facilitate and work along with these established values and practices. (LeVine 1989, Rogoff 1990, Greenfield).

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[7] As Woodhead rightly points out "majority world" is a more appropriate term than "third" or "developing world", because this is where the majority of mankind live (Woodhead 1998).

Sometimes these practices may degenerate or they may be overlaid and replaced by other more alien and abusive patterns. In such cases the original practices may only exist as potentials or as **dormant patterns of care and mediation** (that can be reactivated). In some cases such alienation from the traditional practices may be due to the caregivers' own psychopathology and childhood experiences, but in many more cases this is due, not only to personal pathologies, but to general social and cultural change and uprooting and to the stresses linked to a life in poverty and marginality (Huston 1991).

**Model of intervention through reactivation of dormant caring practices
in situations of social change and uprooting**

Disruption
through
and social
change   Demoralization
                                                and child neglect
                                                abusive patterns
Intact   (Dormant
cultural   indigenous
caring   caring
practices   practices)

                Intervention: Arousal of
                reactivation/   new adapted
                facilitation   patterns
                of dormant   based on
                patterns   earlier ones.
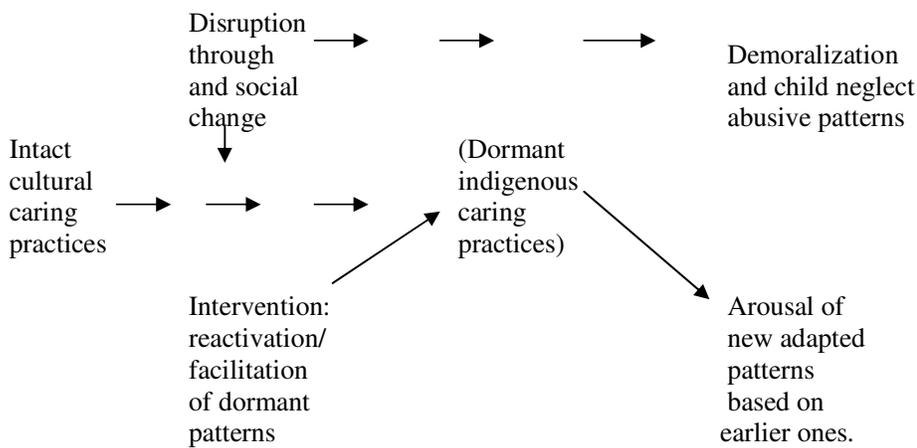
The figure above illustrates a situation of demoralization linked to social change and the process of reactivation/facilitation when normal patterns of care and mediation are disrupted. The typical cases are rural families migrating to slum areas in modern capitals in majority countries. With the breakdown of the traditional family and supportive networks, traditional values and codes of conduct combined with unemployment, family stress and high survival pressure, there also tend to be a breakdown in the traditional patterns of care and mediation. These traditional patterns or practices no longer seem relevant and valid in the new situation, and they tend to be replaced by more abusive, power-assertive patterns reflecting the pressure and stress of the caregiver (see arrow from disruption to abuse in the figure above) [8]. However this early care and its mediation and narrative resources may still be available in

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[8] Also some research has shown that rural mothers migrating to the city from the countryside tend to have less confidence in their caring practices than rural mothers who have not been exposed to cultural change (see Werner 1989).

dormant form, and one way of providing help in this situation is to try to reactivate these earlier patterns of care and help the caregiver to adapt and adjust them to the new realities and challenges that she and her children will be facing. In our program[9] we do this by helping the caregiver to redefine her negative conception of her child and of life in general, by helping her to see the child in a more positive way, requesting her to give examples from her own experience of good caregiving and by supporting her confidence in her caring skills by pointing out and confirming what she already does well, and sharing these experiences with others in groups of caregivers in a similar situation.[10]

In addition there is usually a need for a parallel action in order to improve and help her cope with her general life-situation; because caring practices and life-opportunities are closely interlinked (see McLoyd and Wilson 1991).

Using the mediational criteria[11] for reactivation of cultural forms of mediation

The question is then whether and how the mediational critiera could be used to reactivate existing caring and mediational practices.

These criteria specify certain general conditions for interaction and communication between caregiver and child that seem to be, so to say, implicit in the concept of socialisation itself and for this reason these criteria can be explicated as universally part of socialisation (Smedslund 1984).

Still the way these conditions are implemented or practised, is a matter of cultural variation - For example, I cannot imagine any culture or any socialisation taking place without some

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[9] The ICDP Program (Hundeide 1996)

[10] The detailed strategies that are used for reactivation and faciliation in the ICDP Program are described in Hundeide (1996).

[11] The MLE criteria are according to Klein's minimal version: 1. Focusing with reciprocity, 2. Meaning and enthusiasm, 3. Trancendence,expansion and explanations, 4. Mediation of competence, 5.Regulation, planning and limit setting. Other similar critieria describing quality of interaction between caregiver and child, like Rogoff's criteria of "guided participation" (Rogoff 1990) and the ICDP guidelines for good interaction (Hundeide 1996) can also be used.

shared focus of attention between caregiver and child when interaction is going on. Also I can see no possibility for socialisation to take place without some intentionality on the part of the caregiver to convey meaning, expansion, regulation. So the questions is not whether these criteria are present or not in the cultural communication between caregiver and child, it is more a question of how useful it is to see interaction in this way and how useful it would be to use these criteria to activate different cultural ways of mediation: How do you, in your community achieve shared attention or intersubjectivity in your interaction with your child? How do you focus your child's attention to an object? How do you mediate meaning, expand, regulate a child's action, confirm and mediate competence to a child?

In fact, what we have presented as the criteria of mediation, especially mediation of meaning and expansion (transcendence) represent **an abstract description of the activity of storytelling and dramatisation that naturally take place between caregiver and child as part of a cultural practices.** It is important to recognise this connection otherwise mediation may appear as something artificial and detached from the natural practice of child rearing and child culture. [12] By making this link, mediation in the form of stories and dramatisation, becomes a natural activity that may help parents revive their cultural resources and traditions, In fact, the narrative discourse seems to be the culturally appropriate way to convey meaning, to expand and co-construct reality with the child. Each culture has its own repertoire of stories that contains an essential part of the cultural heritage (Engel 1995).

By seeing the mediational criteria in this way, a rich field of cultural research opens up that has not yet been explored - namely the subtle ways that these criteria of meaningful communication are being realised in the caregiver-child interaction in different cultures and how they can be used to facilitate and activate indigenous child rearing practices and interactions. **Instead of imposing these criteria on a " target group" as an alien component in an intervention program, they may instead serve to facilitate and activate and raise consciousness of those qualities in the indigenous practices that seem relevant according to the mediational theory.[13]**

In order to do that we have to approach a new community or culture with respect and interest, and provide a basic ethnographic mapping of their existing practices of mediation and care. By making video-recordings of normal mother-child interaction and by interviewing

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[12] For that reason "mediational discourse" may be a better term.

[13] There are certainly a normative aspects of this, but in extreme situations of neglect and abuse, such question tend to fade into the background because larger issues relating to children's psychological and physical survival may be at stake.

caregivers, it is possible to identify the typical caring practices, settings and also the typical forms of mediational discourse within that community. This knowledge represents a basic prerequisite for any intervention or sensitisation to take place.

When a new community is approached in this way, the mediational criteria can in fact become useful instruments to uncover the characteristic mediational aspects of traditional child rearing. [14]

As an example; if we take the criterion of **intentionality and reciprocity, or focussing:** In Javanese child rearing, we will find that most mothers seem to play a relatively passive role in relation to their infant; mostly following the initiative and activity of the child, especially when it is an infant. When mothers are asked about this, they will explain that according to their tradition, infants are still close to God, and for that reason their activity is still guided from within, from their soul etc[15]... and for that reason one has to show respect and follow and support the infant's initiatives and activity. To a large extent it is the infant's initiative that is guiding the interaction**,** and reciprocity of attention is achieved by the mother's adjustment to the child's activity. An imposive intentionality from the point of view of the mother would be in conflict with their traditional conception of how good interaction with an infant should be. If we accept this conception and practice as a baseline, then it is possible to facilitate positive mediation by emphasising and focussing the caregiver's awareness of this and by praising the caregiver for good reciprocity with the child, and more generally, pointing out how she can learn to select and support those initiatives that are important for the child's social development - accepting and confirming those initiatives from the child that she judges to be worthy of support ... **In this way, by operating inside existing child rearing practices, we facilitate at the same time positive mediational discoursive practices.[16]**

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[14] Thus, before we come up with recommendations, we have to learn about the typical settings, the typical caregivers, their conception of the child and of appropriate care, the typical ways of interaction and mediation that is taking place within that community. By having this knowledge as a baseline, the mediational critieria may become an instrument of consciousness-raising and sensitisation of their traditional child rearing practices.

[15] In a similar way, when babies are making sounds when they are alone, this is interpreted as communication with spiritual being with whom the infant is still in contact.(Timor 1993).

[16] Certainly not all initiatives from a child are worth supporting, or all indigenous practices. Still the important point here is not so much the revival of what was, as the establishment of an authentic basis for development, and this requires some bridging between what was established before and what is new. (See Rogoff 1990, on "bridging" within the concept of "guided participation")

By supporting the caregivers', usually the mother's, self-confidence and competence as caregiver, we also help her to take a more active and responsible role both in relation to child rearing and to her life in general (Hundeide 1991).

When it comes to mediation of competence, most Javanese mothers would say that they normally don't praise their child - this would so to say break the tacit contract of authoritarian respect that normally exists between parents and children. On a closer look however, we will see that competence is mediated, but in a much more indirect and subtle way, by an approving nod, touch or a smile, or even by communicating to a neighbour how good the child is....

When it comes to mediation of meaning and expansion, this can better be dealt with as different forms of mediational discourse and narration. This is a broad subject that will be dealt with in the following section.

Different cultural forms of mediation[17]

Through seminars and discussions with educators and parents in different traditional societies, I have found that there are different forms of cultural mediation - some of which may be just as informative and important for us, as ours may be useful for them:

Below a tentative taxonomy is suggested:

a. The analytic-inquiring mode

This mode is implicit in many intervention programs like "Head Start" and others educational enrichment programmes (Feuerstein 1980, Lombard 1986, Zigler. and Berman (1983). This mode seems to represent a typical Western scholastic style linked to our conception of school intelligence.[18]

Below follows an example of a typical format of a dialogue between a «high mediational» caregiver and her 3-4 year old child:

  Focussing: «Look here!»

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[17] In many contexts the more fashionable expression "discourse" can replace "mediation" (See Harre 1995, Shotter 1995)

[18] In many traditional societies the concept of intelligence seems to be closer linked to wisdom and moral integrity than to "clever", deductive reasoning (Kagitcibaci 1996).

Identification (meaning): «What is it?»

Describing qualities,(meaning):» What is its colour, sound, taste etc.»

Evaluative reaction (meaning): «Do you like it?»

Functions (meaning): «What can you do with it?» Telling or demonstrating its use

Explanation - why (transcendence): « Why is it…? Why do you think? Because……»

Comparison - similarities (transcendence): «Have you seen this before? Where and when? What does it remind you of?»

Comparison - differences (transcendence): « How is it different from…?»

Explaining the deviant case (transcendence): «Why is this one different from the other?»

Origin (transcendence): «How is it made? Where does it come from?»

Future (transcendence): «What will happen next, or when….?»

Number (transcendence): How many are there…?

This discourse has clearly an educational intention. Objects are described and analysed for the purpose of teaching children. This type of discourse is quite different from the more pragmatic discourse in traditional communities,[19] and also different from the more entertaining discourse that Brice Heath describes from lower class Afro-American communities.[20]

There is a special framing or contextualising of this type of mediation and discourse (Edwards and Mercer 1989, Walkerdine 1987) that seems to be part of the Western educational tradition and that is not automatically part of any culture's way of communicating. As an example, when we did some interviewing with some beggars in one of the slums of Jakarta, they seemed unable to answer questions if they were not part of a story, so that the question came as a natural response to what had been presented in advance. In other words, a question out of the narrative context was not possible for them to answer.

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[19] As Jamais (1989) points out; in a survival context communication between caregiver and child tends to be more pragmatic and regulative like "Give me the scissor" or "Fetch some water to your mother!"

[20] In her ethnographic work among white middle class and a black working class community families in the US, Brice Heath (1983) describes their different ways of telling stories: In the white community parents tell stories for educational purpose to convey religious and moral values. In the black community they tell stories to entertain themselves and they learn stories through participation without any explicit didactic teaching.

Similarly, as Luria (1970) pointed out, in many traditional societies, questions are normally considered as concrete requests for information, not as tests of competence. In other words, in our school and achievement oriented culture, questions are often used to assess and control competence. Such questions do often have double meaning; at the same time as they refer to some realistic situation, their answer presuppose that you look away from that the realistic context and consider the question in a pure formal deductive way:

> Peter and Paul are always drinking beer together.
>
> To-day Peter is drinking beer,
>
> What is Paul doing?

Some of the respondent from non-literate societies were quite cautious, emphasising that they did not want to lie and some answer something like: "I was not present so I cannot say" or "We cannot be sure, maybe Paul had to help feeding the cows that day…"

The "correct ",decontextualised way of answering such questions and problems is in fact quite alien for most non-literate people - not that they are incapable of deductive reasoning, rather they misunderstand the framing and take the questions to be a request for concrete situational information. (See, Edwards and Mercer 1987, Cole and Scribner 1975, for many examples of this.)

b. Story telling - the narrative mode

Story telling is different from the inquiring analytic mode because stories do not generally have an analytic educational intention. Stories link separate persons, objects and events into a story line focussing on the protagonist's intentions and goals, conflicting ambitions, obstacles, frustrations and reactions. In a story there is a story line of intentions and goals that creates continuity and consistency in the protagonist's separate actions. This is what Bruner describes as «the landscape of consciousness»; intentions, interpretations and reactions. «A story is usually about how protagonists interprets things and what things mean to them» - the landscape of consciousness. (Bruner 1990, p.51). Through stories we become participants in other person's inner drama of intentions, hopes, emotional reactions, of honour and loss of face, of revenge and the restoring of honour, of love and loyalties that are broken in order to achieve some opportunistic goal etc. This is the inner story of consciousness that is close to

our common sense psychology and which dominate our understanding of persons whatever our ideas are about behaviour and consciousness. [21]

In most societies there is a treasure of stories and myths with a moral heroic content: The hero goes through all kinds of difficulties and temptations and finally wins and gets the appropriate reward (the princess) for his virtue and endurance.[22] In these traditions moral virtues and values are convey through story telling. In most traditional societies of the majority world parents seem to be more concerned about promoting moral values and good behaviour in the child than conveying knowledge and intelligence. When parents are asked what are the qualities they would like to see in their children, the usual answer is obedience, respect and good behaviour (Dybdahl and Hundeide 1998).

This is also reflected in their story telling which is about good and bad characters and human virtues. In a way story telling is an indirect way of conveying knowledge; through the example of the hero or the protagonist's actions, a message is conveyed but not always explicated in detail - the "moral of the story" has to be personally constructed. Generally, story telling tend also to take on a more personalised form where the caregiver tells the child about his childhood; " when I was a kid like you we used to...."

c. Dialogic story telling

I first experienced this form of story telling in Zimbabwe, where a pre-school teacher demonstrated how they used to tell stories in the traditional way. She collected all the children around her and started to tell a story about a well-known topic; a child that had been taken by an animal. She told with great dramatic expressivity and passion as the tension of the story raised. The children were fascinated and completely absorbed in the way she expressed and partly demonstrated the main features of the story.

As the story progresses new items were introduced and each time the storyteller stopped and had a dialogue with the children: "Do you know what that is? ... Yes, that is right it is a.... What do you use that for? Have you seen that before? "Etc. Then the story progressed further and at each new item she stopped and had a dialogue.

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[21] The stories of the TV- soap operas seem to be in process of invading our consciousness to the extent that they become like models and standards for what we aspire as "the good life".

Bruner (1986,90) also refers to "Burke's pentad" as characteristic of the narrative mode. This consists of an actor or protagonist, an action, a goal, a scene and an instrument plus trouble. A typical story format is the following: Hero ->mission ->action ->obstacle ->helper ->overcoming obstacle ->conclusion/reward. (See also Nelson 1997)

She also stopped and **asked the children to predict what they expect will happen next**, in this way the children became like co-constructor of a narrative line where they had to adjust and revise their expectations to the unfolding of the story.

Mediation was in this case naturally embedded in the dialogue that took place as the story progressed.

d. Dramatisation and role-playing

This is also a basic form of symbolisation and mediation that seems to develop particularly in the interaction between children. This seems to be the typical way children learn social knowledge - roles, norms and typical routines and characters of everyday life are exercises over and over again as a preparation for participation in adult life (Vygotsky 1978, Garvey 1984, Sutton-Smith 1986, Harris 1998).

We see this in very young children how they initiate simple imitative pretend plays where they imitate the typical routines and actions of the parents i.e. mother serving coffee or washing up dishes etc. When caregivers join in and use this interactive form as a tool for mediation it can be a powerful way of mediating social knowledge about significant events, routines, people and about contents relating to co-operation, fair play and moral aspects between. This is an alternative to story telling.[23] Also in order to promote language acquisition i.e. with minority children, dramatisation, role-playing and songs can be used by inserting typical phrases in dialogues representing typical forms of interaction in everyday life. **Using puppets to tell stories** or present a dialogue is an natural extension of this approach and represents a powerful way of attracting the children's attention and interest and to convey messages (Hundeide and Næshagen 1988).

In general, through story telling and dramatisation children learn about typical personalities, characters, events and routines, moral plots and conflicts and in ones family and culture. These are appropriated as "voices", "scripts" and "dramas" that children can later represent the typical moral features in a personified form. This is how children develop as cultural beings (Nelson 1997).[24]

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[23] In our work among rural caregivers in Angola, we find that they express themselves much more freely and easily in dramatisation and role-playing than through verbal presentations in an interview or school-like context. This was not the case with Norwegian caregivers.

[24] In fact, the traditional Javanese wayang-theatre contains figures representing different personalities/characters and also prototypical plots and conflicts in human life, and in some

e. Music, songs, dance and gestures

There are many different ways that mediation can take place in different cultures, some are mentioned above, but there may be other ways connected with dance, music and mimics that are used in more aesthetically and ceremonially oriented cultures. (Hall

1978). Training in the traditional wayang dance in Java is an example of a different kind

of cultural mediation where grace and aesthetic perfection is most important.

These more artistic expressions could also be characterised as forms of mediation although their messages may go beyond representations of external states of affairs to expressive feeling states that are shared within a culture.

These emotional-expressive forms of mediation are generally part of most societies cultural traditions and they play an important role in socialising children into the shared feelings, memories and aesthetic standards of their society. Javanese dancing is an example of how quite young children are being introduced into the graceful, balanced and controlled expressivity of the Javanese through dance.

Music, songs and dances are in fact the typical ways of expressing communality of feeling in most societies like sharing of emotional memories from the past and from special occasions where these modes are being used. Some progressive educators believe that these modes of expression and communication are generally underestimated in modern approaches to socialisation and education. (See Gardner 1993)[25]

f. Graphic and iconic forms of mediation

The iconic imagery and symbolism is another aspect of culture that is expressed in pictorial art, graphic representations and also in children's drawings. As Goodnow (1977) and others (Aronson 1996, John-Steiner 1987) has pointed out these graphic forms varies between different cultures - each culture seems to have its own characteristic graphic or pictorial world

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parts of the older Javanese population these characters are so internalised and appropriated that they are used to characterise persons in everyday life: "He has a noble character - he is just like Ardjuna"

[25] In his theory of multiple intelligences Gardner (1993) makes a distinction between eight intelligences among these; musical, spatial and bodily-kinaesthetic. In this context the point is not to make a final taxonomy of multiple intelligences rather the point is to indicate that there are different modes of communicating and mediating between caregiver and child (see also Vera John-Steiner on different modes (John-Steiner 1987).

of representations that reflect in some way typical features of this culture. Through apprenticeship under a "master" in different arts and handicrafts (Lave 1992, Rogoff 1991), children become socialised into the pictorial aesthetic world of their culture. Like music and dance this is another way of mediating the expressive, aesthetic feeling aspects of a culture. (Gardner 1993).

g. The cultural repertoire of metaphors and prototypes as interpretive background

Stories, sayings, poetry, mythologies, representations of significant events, heroes or typical characters, typical life-careers and identities etc. all these shared, typified forms of representation may constitute a collective narrative-dramaturgical repertoire that participants within a culture share can therefore directly or indirectly use as a reference and interpretive background when they communicate. This creates, in other words, a basis for metaphorical use of language, double meanings, allusions, jokes and symbolisms that may be difficult to penetrate for an outsider who does not share this collective interpretive background of stories, persons and events.... Being competent within a culture consists to a large extent in mastering these tacitly shared references.

Conclusions

1. Throughout this paper I have taken as a basic assumption that human beings need to make some sense of their life and destiny (Giddens 1991). We all need a conceptual framework of meaning into which we can place ourselves and project a future. This is constituted by conceptions, narratives, scripts and explanations existing within cultures as part of our social stock of tacit knowledge and world-views - super ordinate meaning structures - that are taken for granted, still they constitute our interpretive background. By this I mean that we take them for granted as references for how we understand and communicate with others person inside the same cultural group.

From this cultural reservoir we construct our personal life-theories and values - successes and failures, and these construction form the basis both for our personal identity and moral

strength and for the ways we cope with life. Our experience of the world is mediated through such cultural meaning structures. In fact, as human beings we "feed on" meanings in the sense that we need to create a continuous story that can be projected into the future which gives a basis for self-respect, predictability and order in ones life. And the narratives of our culture, as Bruner points out, seem to be one of the important vehicles for this.

For this reason, **loss of meaning** is a serious condition. It is in fact possible to interpret Oscar Lewis' description of the "culture of poverty" as an example of such a situation where the cultural meaning structures of the dominant society are no longer valid and can no longer be used to contain and project individuals' lives into a future of self-respect. As Bruner(1990) points out: "When there is breakdown in a culture...There is breakdown that result from sheer impoverishment of narrative resources - in the permanent underclass of the urban ghetto, in the second and third generation of the Palestinian refugee compound, in the hunger-preoccupied villages of semi-permanent drought-stricken villages in sub-Saharan Africa. If is not that there is a total loss in putting story form to experience, but that the "worst scenario" story comes to dominate daily life...." . (Op.cit. p.96-97).

2. The current tendency to detach skills or cognitive structures from the broader framework and content of human life, is misplaced because our skills, cognitive or not, are by nature instruments for living, therefore it must be of prime importance to revive the cultural framework of values and meanings that make the development or "appropriation" of cultural tools worthwhile and plausible.

By doing this we see human development, not only in its cultural and situational context and variability, as most Vygotskians do, but in addition, we see it within **a framework where meaning, values and moral commitment plays the key-organising role.**

3. This point of view has radical implications for intervention: Instead of intervening in the traditional way by importing an external program into a cultural environment that may be in conflict with the program's assumptions, there is an alternative strategy, namely that of facilitation and reactivation of cultural forms of mediation. This can take place both at an individual and at a community level:

As pointed out earlier in this paper, intervention in the sense of instruction may not be very helpful under conditions of extreme survival stress and poverty. A poor mother with high

workload needs encouragement and support, not correction and instruction, and for this reason **the whole strategy has to be changed from one of intervention and compensation of deficits to one of facilitation and encouragement of strengths**. This presupposes that there are some rudiments of positive caring practices left in her repertoire of interaction with her child that can be used as a basis for selective confirmation and encouragement. So instead of the normal procedure of assessing (testing) deficits and weaknesses, our first task is to assess what are the positive resources still available that can be used for facilitation and encouragement.

But this goes beyond the individual mother and child and their biographies, because she operates inside a cultural framework and practice, which is more or less clearly expressed in her interactions with her child. Therefore the strategy goes further than individual facilitation to **cultural reactivation of cultural practices, values and ideologies that may be dormant within a community, like a refugee camp, but still relevant and applicable in order to mobilise a framework for moral commitment to face their current situation and challenges.**

4. When "early intervention" to improve the care of neglected and abused children is approached in this way, the mediational criteria (MLE criteria)[26] may in fact become useful instruments to uncover the mediational-narrative resources within traditional child rearing practices. But, as pointed out above, before going into patterns of interaction, it is also necessary to map the typical settings, and patterns of activity in a child's typical day, the caring network around the child, who are the typical caregivers and the caring roles, the typical ways of interaction and mediation that is taking place within that culture. By having this knowledge as a base, sensitive facilitation using the MLE or similar criteria (like the "ICDP guidelines"[27]) can be transformed into an instrument both for consciousness-raising and sensitisation of their traditional child rearing practices and for reactivating patterns of care that they all feel are important.

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[26] These criteria are used as an example, the principles of facilitation and cultural reactivation is generally valid beyond the domain of childcare.

[27] The ICDP guidelines of good interaction are similar to MLE criteria, but they also embrace the emotional expressive communication between caregiver and child.(Hundeide 1996)

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