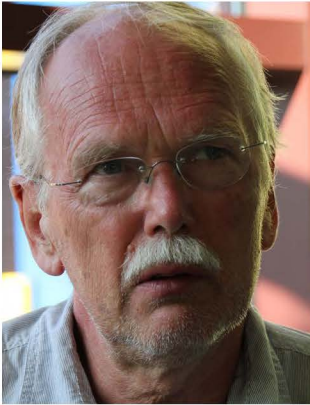


There is a Need for Young and Old People to Read Books Together

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At an early stage of development most *children believe in fairy tales* and in magic moments like Christmas Eve. In his book "Children need fairy tales" (1), Bruno Bettelheim established a connection between the fairytale world and childlike experience and thinking. He was arguing on different levels and connected the structure of

the fairy tales with childlike thinking, and their content with developmental stages of children and related to them with fairy tale themes concerning developmental crises during childhood. One of the key messages of many fairy tales is the assumption that *wants and wishes* of people may have a good chance to become reality if the *belief* is strong enough. This philosophy is of course highly attractive for young children.

Old people no longer read fairy tales for their own pleasure; however, they love to read them for their grandchildren. Do old people no longer believe in *magical dreams*? When grandparents meet their grandchildren and start telling stories of their own past, they like to use the words "*Once upon a time, I was...*". However, this may sound like: "A long time ago, I had wonderful times which unfortunately will not come back." It is possible that this sentimental feeling of old people is transferred to young children and these may feel sorry for their old grandparents. How about using a different sentence: "Let me tell you a story which happened in my youth, *when wishing still helped... wonderful, isn't it?*" This sounds like hope, like an encouraging statement that miracles may happen - not only in fairy tales.

Wishes are an expression of the human hope and will. Wishes are full of energy and creativity. Are old people suffering from a lack of wishes, thus, indicating a lack of hope, will and energy? If fairy tales will not fascinate old

people how about the role of *fantasy literature*? Fantasy is a genre of speculation set in a fictional universe inspired by real world myth. Oral traditions became later on fantasy stories. Fantasy expanded to film and video games. Fantasy is distinguished from *science fiction* by the absence of scientific themes. *Utopian literature* is aiming for an idealistic world where everything is perfect. Could literary fiction help young and old people to cope with everyday life? In fantasy stories the world seems to be separated from reality and science. Thus, the readers can develop their own world. Could fantasy literature establish a connection between a fictional universe on one side and child and adult like experience and thinking on the other side? I conclude that transferring imagination into reality could become the basis for creativity of young and old people.

Is adult thinking different from child thinking? "Curiosity, imagination, fantasy, and continuous questioning: the child seems to be a natural philosopher until the age of eight to ten years, when the initial spirit of inquiry mysteriously seems to fade. What happens to them? Innovative ideas, dreams and endless speculations: adolescents and young people start creating and planning their own new world. Have they reached the level of becoming experienced philosophers? Rational decisions, pragmatism, disillusion, lack of time for thinking, and poisonous competition seem to rule the life of adults. Has the adult world missed the chance to practice philosophy and more importantly to understand the child as a philosopher?" (2) Gareth Matthews took up these concerns in "*The philosophy of childhood*" (3). Philosophy is orientation in thinking and at the same time orientation in the world through thinking. From this perspective, doing *philosophy is an essential task for survival*.

Philosophy puts a strong emphasis on methodological as well as logical aspects. Philosophy can be practised or trained. If old people practise philosophy with their grand

1. Bettelheim B (2006) Kinder brauchen Märchen. Deutscher Taschenbuchverlag.

2. Brock B (2018). Philosophy aims at the health of the soul: the role of philosophical practices for children. In Ehrich J, Corrad F, DeSanto NG. This I think should have priority in child healthcare services. The personal philosophies of people involved in child healthcare services. Barke, Medizinische Hochschule, Hannover p. 138-141.

3. Matthews GB (1994) The philosophy of childhood. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

children, ideally both parties can profit from the training because children are doing philosophy differently from old adults. Old adults possess greater experience in thinking, so that they can guide the children in the thought process. By contrast, childlike thinking is more naïve – innocent, as Nietzsche put it (4). Infantile thinking distinguishes itself through a form of refreshing naivety, which adult thinking has lost over the years. This naivety can sometimes have an unmasking quality.

Thinking does not blindly accept common knowledge. While old adults are inclined to comfortably confine themselves in a shell of pre-established truths, children are not as quick to settle for common sense explanations. They do not accept explanations that are contrary to their own worldly experience. Children cling to what they have seen, no matter the parental assurance that “such and such is definitely the case”. Persistently questioning children are able to help the old adults to get to the deep meaning of things by hindering the old from coming up with prejudices or immediate answers that prevent a deep illumination of the matter in question.

Those old adults who do philosophy with children should ask what a child has seen and what answers it has given

to questions. Old people should not patronize children. It is absolutely essential in education “to give children responsibility in accord with their level of development – also for their thinking”. “Patronizing - even based on a nurturing intention - is the death of child philosophers whose central organ is imagination” (5).

A philosophical education for children emphasizes responsibility. Philosophical education is an invitation to think for oneself in a twofold manner: on the one hand through the practice of thinking, the “capacity to use one’s own intelligence”, as Kant phrased it (6); and on the other hand, through imparting a fundamental disposition of openness. Basically, everything can be questioned and put into different perspectives. To wonder in this context is not so much an expression of naivety, as the precondition of an incipient mode of thinking, which does not only operate logically, but also creatively.



4. Nietzsche F. The child is innocence and forgetting, a new beginning, a game, a self-propelled wheel, a first movement, a sacred ‘Yes’. In: Thus spoke Zarathustra, Book 1, On the three Metamorphoses; Translation Kaufmann W, New York 1966, p. 27.

5. Saner H (1977) Geburt und Phantasie. Von der natürlichen Dissidenz des Kindes. Basel.

6. Kant I. Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung? Gesammelte Schriften (Akademie Ausgabe). Vol. VIII, Berlin 1912; p. 33-42.