

**‘What is a life embittered by envy
and hatred, quarrels and disputes,
child? The hours of love, of
gentleness and peace, they alone
are hours of life.’**

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Playtime. Four boys have surrounded Luke, escape is impossible. He knows he's in for it now. 'Let him have it,' one of the boys shouts and the blows rain down on him. What has he done? Stupid question! He's just Luke, the dimwit, the fatty with the squint, the big baby. He knows what violence means.

The bell sounds — end of playtime. Luke creeps back into the classroom, quietly crying.

What happens next? There are three possibilities.

Teacher A: 'Open your atlases, page 27.'

Teacher B: 'What's wrong with you? Have you been in a row again? It's always the same.' *Luke,* 'They hit me again.'

Teacher B, 'Well you'll just have to learn to defend yourself, otherwise you'll never grow up to be a man. Open your atlases, page 27.'

Teacher C: 'You've been crying, Luke. Something's wrong.' *Luke,* 'They hit me again.'

Teacher C, 'Again? It can't go on like this. Put your atlases away. Get your chairs and sit round in a circle here.'

Teachers earn their coffee break; after all, teaching is demanding and tiring. And playground supervision usually works. Fortunately not all our colleagues share the view that we shouldn't interfere in children's arguments. 'The children will sort it out themselves. They need to learn to look after themselves.' If you want to know where that leads, you only have to look at a chicken run. The law is clear: the strong rule the roost, the weak keep their heads down.

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It is true that there are many places where bullying at school or on the way to and from school has not become an issue. But in many other places it has, and a very serious issue at that. Fights are a regular occurrence, and the boys don't just use their fists, they kick and even hit their opponents right in the face with knuckle-dusters, unconcerned about injuries they might cause. And even worse, today they have worked out how the Mafia operates, extorting protection money or little services. And after the money's been handed over: 'Don't you dare tell on us or you'll really be for it.' So some remain silent, while others lord it over them.

And the girls are following suit. The spread of such behaviour is a new phenomenon, which leads us to the question of how it could happen. The answer that the social environment has changed is true, but too general. I see the following factors:

- The system that for centuries required and supported moral behaviour has almost completely lost its effectiveness: the Ten Commandments from the Old Testament. Even fifty years ago the spirit and the letter were binding for children and adolescents. Not wanting to fall into sin was definitely a motivation to eschew violence and show consideration to others. That is largely a thing of the past.
- It is definitely connected with this, that our society has turned into a dog-eat-dog society. The slogans are: 'Look after number one.' — 'Get on.' — 'The end justifies the means.' — 'Might is right.' — 'If you get hurt, that's your problem.' Naturally not everyone thinks or behaves like that, but there are too many who set that kind of example. And young people simply lap it up.
- The range of the mass media has grown beyond all imagining. However many of those involved in production behave in a responsible manner, there will always be many others who will do anything for money. Consequently we have a mass culture in music, television, computer games and the Internet which is characterised by aggressiveness, violence and brutality. Regular, or even addictive immersion in such scenes cannot be without effect.

- Sport, too, has to a great extent lost the element of play. The idea of fairness, in which winning is secondary to observing the spirit of the game, has largely fallen by the wayside. More and more brutal martial arts are invented. Clearly people still regard it as sport when one participant kicks his opponent as hard as possible in the face and knocks him unconscious. It is enough for one person to be a supporter of the other team for another to beat him senseless. Given the huge number of young people whose only interest is sport, this culture of violence associated with it sets a disastrous example.
- Our society has not managed to assimilate the many immigrants from other countries and cultures. I am not trying to point the finger at anyone, simply to note that in the context of ethnic conflict individual readiness to resort to violence becomes collective. There is little that education can do about this, since individuals who refuse to join in violence may suffer sanctions from the group they belong to.

As a result there are — quite rightly — calls for the *prevention of violence*. These are directed first and foremost at parents, but schools are also expected to contribute. If I were to be asked what schools can do to prevent violence, my answer would be short and sweet: the whole concept of education presented in this book *is* violence prevention. It does not make sense to organise schools in a way that ignores psychology and the demands of the learning situation, with the result that they become a breeding ground for violence, and then to think the problem can be solved with a few supplementary measures. On the contrary, teaching must be organised in a way that allows the school as a whole to lay the foundations for living in a community that is free of violence. In practice this means that the syllabus must take second place to building up a sense of community. Classes need to be stable communities that foster the gradual development of a network of emotional relationships. We need institutions that are on a human scale, so that the individual pupil does not get swallowed up in the mass and lose all sense of responsibility. We need lasting relationships between teachers and pupils who know each other and take each other seriously. And we need enough time so that the conflicts, that occur daily, can be resolved in a way

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that is psychologically and educationally correct. The division of teaching time into 45-minute periods, the excessive use of subject specialists (which may be justified at secondary level), the concentration of senior pupils in large campuses, the constant regrouping of pupils in different-level courses for the individual subjects (comprehensive school), the reduction of teachers to simple organisers — all that has a tendency to favour the emergence of violence. We must finally stop education going in the wrong direction.

It is a serious problem, which affects not just our schools, but the whole of society. If we do not give the resolution of conflicts precedence over the material of the syllabus, the potential for conflict will continue to rise until it comes to the point where we have no idea how to deal with it. The atmosphere in society will be marked by a lack of consideration for others' points of view, by argument, fighting and violence. All our finer feelings — sympathy, affection, understanding, helpfulness, friendship — will be blotted out. Learning will be no pleasure, merely a response to pressure and threat; at best it will satisfy the ambition of the good pupils.

A few more words on the *resolution of conflict*. First of all it is important to be aware that the squabbles or outbreaks of violence we encounter are not the actual conflicts but attempts — unsuitable attempts, it is true — to resolve the conflict. The actual conflict goes deeper, smouldering, latent, always seated within the emotions. Fears, feelings of aggression, resentment, hurt, disappointment, inferiority all feed and dominate the conflict. In the surface disagreements these feelings pressurise and determine our behaviour.

Seen from the perspective of Pestalozzi's three modes of existence, violent clashes are the resolution of conflicts in the *natural condition*. Each of those involved uses the means of power available to him to force through his opinions or intentions. It starts with subtle manipulation, continues with argument, which can be anything from clever to obstinate, intensifies in psychological pressure and ends with naked physical violence. The result is always clear: the stronger one wins.

Institutionalised strategies for the resolution of conflict in the *social condition* have been devised to prevent this war of everyone against everyone else — at least as far as physical violence is concerned

— in order to protect the weak. They can avail themselves of the power of the society to receive what the law says they are entitled to. The one with right on his side wins.

When resolving conflict in the *moral condition*, we get to the bottom of the true causes of the conflict by taking the whole situation of the individuals concerned seriously. We all engage with the feelings, needs and concerns of those involved, forgo selfish advantages and make every effort to meet the others in understanding and love and find a creative solution. There are no losers because all are in favour of the solution that is found.

Conflict resolution in the moral condition is only possible in relatively close personal relationships. They are part of our ‘individual existence’. Collective conflicts of interest cannot be resolved on this basis, but are a matter for the social mechanisms of conflict resolution. The aim of both the moral and the social resolution strategy is to prevent or replace the strategy based on the right of the stronger.

Schools — in which teaching is on a personal level, but which, as public institutions, are subject to the rules and regulations of the social condition — also have the task of replacing the pupils’ attempts at conflict resolution based on personal power with solutions on the moral or social level.

Moral conflict resolution concentrates on the *education, the mental and psychological growth* of the individuals concerned, while the social concentrates on *protecting the weaker members*. As far as the problem of violence is concerned, the moral strategy aims at *prevention*, the social at *suppression*. That is always necessary when for whatever reason prevention does not work. And since, as we know from experience, prevention does not always work, it is unavoidable, if regrettable, that we must resort to punishment or other measures provided by law to set limits.

For teachers that hurts, which is why we persevere with prevention for as long as possible. And that consists of permanently cultivating conflict resolution on the moral level. From the outset we abandon the idea that we must find the guilty person and punish him. What we are looking for is mutual understanding and solutions for the future. We refrain from using our power, but what we do require is the teacher’s authority. That comes from taking the pupils seriously, from acting in a way that is based on the values we proclaim so that they trust us as

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individual people. Discussions that are conducted in that spirit can not only resolve the conflict in question but can also bring all those involved closer together, which will improve the general atmosphere and lead to a constant reduction in the sources of conflict. There is, therefore, no need to fear that learning will be adversely affected by putting the development of the community first. The opposite is the case.

This is where Thomas Gordon comes in with his ‘no-lose method conflict resolution’. He has become well known through his books *Teacher Effectiveness Training* and *Parent Effectiveness Training* plus other writings of similar import. They are all based on the same principle: conflicts should be resolved in such a way that there is no winner or loser. No one should emerge victorious but every one should be a winner — a winner in terms of quality of life and humanity. But that is only possible when our feelings — our own and the pupils’ — are taken seriously.

But we must also recognise the limits of this method: fundamental to it is the assumption of the good will of all those concerned and that is not just important, it is the decisive factor. Unfortunately, it is often very difficult if not impossible to arouse good will in adolescents who up to that point have enjoyed the success of their physical superiority. The only thing capable of relaxing such a permanently truculent posture is a strong personality with convincing authority, which is founded on love and speaks directly to the heart of a young person like that. Otherwise that leaves just the measures on the social level, in order to protect the others.

Perhaps the day will come when people will recognise that what the world lacks is not people who are well informed, but people who are well brought up. Then our schools will be organised in such a way that they can educate children to help them develop into full human beings. And then children like the Luke mentioned at the beginning of this chapter will no longer have their lives made a misery.