ON EMPOWERMENT AND DISEMPOWERMENT OF PARENTS AND TEACHERS

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More and more frequently families are supported by professionals. Policies meant for a small group of problem children and problem parents have unintentionally developed into a policy of preventive youth care with risk assessments, monitoring and professional interventions and lead to growing waiting lists. A complete set of instruments has been developed to get an idea of children who are at risk – for example, if their single mother is still a teenager or addicted, or both. Or because they grow up in poverty. We have accumulated more and more knowledge about indicators, diagnostics and interventions, which enables us to identify children as cases at risk at an ever earlier stage and it seems more and more attractive to offer them an action plan. This development has gained ground rapidly.

The idea that children are permanently at risk has become a cultural dogma since the 1980s. In her book *It takes a village*, Hillary Clinton emphasises threats, problems and risks children are faced with (violence, neglect, disintegrating families) without making it sufficiently clear that by far the greatest part of parents are responsible and caring.

Making oneself dependent on experts has a number of disadvantages. As a result, the stakeholders in the primary process (the parents and the teachers) no longer feel they are in charge of the problem. In the classical professionalization model, a layman’s knowledge is not relevant. The care professional is the most competent person and responsible for solving the problem. If any task has been reserved for the layman, it is as an extension of the professional’s work. Proper care in pre-school and school, however, requires professionals that are prepared to run risks, that do not evade risks, that use their room to manoeuvre.

Professionals working in youth health care, sports and recreation, and education should be focused to a greater extent on the social environment of children and their families (universal prevention). There will continue to be room for risk assessments and interventions in problem families, but at the same time a different approach should be encouraged. What it is about is an environment-oriented policy that should support families and children in improving the quality of parenting.

*Keywords*: Parental empowerment; Parental disempowerment; Expert authority; Families at risk; Family support; Grass-roots programs; Environment-oriented policy
References:

