

**The aim of good parenting, as of good teaching, should be to so inculcate in the growing child a range of skills, attitudes and behaviours that, at an appropriate time (sooner, rather than later) the child can be progressively weaned of its dependence, so that parents take pleasure and great reassurance that their child is now “well-launched” to go wherever, and however, it needs. Bonds of love remain, and are probably strengthened, but bonds of control have disappeared.**

It is a bad teacher, said the German philosopher, Nietzsche<sup>1</sup>, whose pupils remain dependent on him. Parents who try to “rein in” an adolescent child who they had earlier spoilt beyond belief, have only themselves to blame when that youngster runs into difficulty. Remember that the word “education” is derived from the Latin “educare” meaning “to lead out”, as in the sense of a general preparing his troops to go out of the security of the camp, and on to the field of battle. So, “to educate” is an evolving process of leading a child out from the security of the home and the classroom, by way of drilling grounds of early learning, to face on its own the challenges and turmoil of adult life. As the growing child demonstrates its new-found competencies, so the role of the school has to change as well; “teacher” nicely defines the relationship in the early years, while perhaps “tutor” (which came into use in medieval times when students of only thirteen or fourteen years of age went to university, meant a “watcher/guard”) seems more appropriate as young people struggle to take responsibility onto their own shoulders<sup>2</sup>.

The adolescent is not naturally amenable to being taught, but they are amenable to being guided. Here parents and teachers are similar — we feel that if we are not controlling, we’re not doing our job. Political systems can work in just the same way. They try to micro-manage people who ought to be thinking for themselves. Communist leaders in Eastern Europe sought to forbid any discussion critical of party dogma<sup>3</sup>. Catholics appealed to the Pope for help who in 1931, responded with a powerful statement of what is called Subsidiarity. It was simple, but vastly significant; “It is wrong for a superior body to hold to itself the right of making decisions which an inferior is already able to make for itself”<sup>4</sup>. Not to let people think for themselves is to deny much of their human nature. Subsidiarity is now held as a guiding principle of the European Union as a way of holding many strong-willed, independent-minded nations together to achieve agreed goals; “A central authority should have a subsidiary function, performing only those tasks which cannot be performed at a more local level”<sup>5</sup>.

Subsidiarity is *not* the same thing as delegation, that much used concept beloved as a critical component of management by objectives. To delegate is to assign a pre-designed task to a junior to carry out on your behalf, largely in the way you have defined, and to be answerable to

you at some stage to show how well they have completed the task *to your satisfaction*. The achievement (as such) rebounds to you, the person who did the delegating. The person you have delegated to remains tied to you. If they don't succeed, by the standard you set, you then cut them loose. English education today is riddled with delegation. Hard-pressed people try to ensure that they meet someone else's objectives. Subsidiarity could not be more different. Just as parents "let go" of their children, and a shipbuilder has faith in how he built a yacht which may well sail into seas he knows not of, so Subsidiarity is a relationship of trust, not control. The difference is absolutely fundamental<sup>6</sup>.

England is not always an enthusiastic member of the European Union which may explain why English educationalists have not shown much, if any, interest in the implications of subsidiarity on schooling. They need to do so, urgently! Subsidiarity is about something very basic to learning. If you equip yourself to be able to do something, and you are constantly overruled, you will fast lose interest, and motivation. Isn't that exactly what is happening to so many of today's teachers, and to their pupils? As teachers (including the very best) or parents (again including the very best), we are nothing like as good as we should be in letting children experiment, and take responsibility. They are so often ready for it, but we hold back, and the opportunity passes. We build good ships, but never let them sail<sup>7</sup>.

Think what could happen if Subsidiarity became the organising principle for education. Think what it would mean in a school, in a home. Think what children who had been taught how to think responsibly in everything that they did, would look like. Especially think what it would be like if the youngest children were to receive an education that consistently sought to give them a progression of skills and attitudes which, as they grew older, would put them more in charge of their own learning, and so return to them that deep-seated urge to be really responsible for themselves. We have to stop trivialising youngsters by preventing them from growing up<sup>8</sup>. Then speculate on what it would mean if the more lavish resources normally allocated to secondary schools were given instead to the primary schools, and the lower staffing allocations of the primary sector were to go to the secondary schools. Immediately it would probably be chaos, but with time for this to build up slowly over several years education could be transformed.

"Ah! Now I get it", exclaimed one listener a while ago, "That would mean that it would be the children who would be tired (healthily) at the end of the term, not the teacher (unhealthily)". That is what Subsidiarity means. Subsidiarity is the antidote to endless overdoses of scientific management, both in education, and in civic life in general. We all want to feel that we are "good enough" not to have to be told what to do. Free-standing craftsmen have so much more dignity and sense of purpose, than ever does an employee answerable to somebody else. 97:30/8