

**D.S. Kothari Centre For Science,
Ethics and Education**

**Children As Self-Educators, Parents
As Coaches:
Disciplined Freedom And
Democratic Spaces**

Shanti George

Working Paper Series 2012-2013/ III



**University of Delhi
2012-2013**

Working Paper Series 2012-2013/ III

©Shanti George

Shanti George is an independent researcher based in The Hague, the Netherlands, and an Associate of the Learning for Well-being network, Brussels.

E-mail : shanti.research@gmail.com

For copies and information on Working Paper Series, please contact:

Professor Meenakshi Thapan

Co-ordinator, D.S. Kothari Centre for Science, Ethics
and Education,

Third Floor, Academic Research Centre, Patel Marg (Opposite S.G.T.B. Khalsa College)
University of Delhi, Delhi-110 007

Email : dskotharicentredu@gmail.com

Children As Self-educators, Parents As Coaches: Disciplined Freedom And Democratic Spaces

Shanti George

Many distinguished writers on progressive education – Tagore, Krishnamurti, Dewey, Montessori and a host of others – extrapolate from the child and the school to the world. Recent approaches to education in this broad sense include reflections on meditative education (Kumar 2012) and explorations of otherness and intersubjectivity in dialogue (Baniwal 2013). The present paper complements these discussions by examining education as a process that occurs within homes as well as in schools and kindergartens. Although frequent reference will be made to literature on early childhood development and education, this paper will challenge the lines usually drawn between children and adults. It will take Schön's writings on adult learners as self-educators in professional settings, with faculty acting as coaches rather than as instructors, and will use Schön's approach to illuminate how children and parents' relationships within the home can presage the 'disciplined freedom' that is associated more widely with democracy.

The literature that links interactions within the home to wider political tendencies often focuses on negative relationships, notably on the domestic basis of authoritarianism: 'hierarchical and authoritarian parent-child relationships..., conventionality, exploitative dependency, rigidity and repressive denial... may culminate in a social philosophy which worships strength and disdains the weak' (Abercrombie *et al* 1994: 24). The classic example is of course from Adorno's work: 'authoritarian attitude clusters were... linked, using Freudian theory, to family patterns... of rigidity, discipline, external rules and fearful subservience to the demands of parents' (Marshall 2004: 30).

The use of Schön's writings on self-education-supported-by-coaching in this paper allows us to explore positive political relationships between democracy and domestic sites, as we reflect on democratic daily practice between children and parents. Schön's notion of 'disciplined freedom' is critical here, as the basis both of relationships within democracies and between parents and children.

Our starting point will be the difficulty that most adults experience in acknowledging that children grow up and develop as protagonists and persons, rather than as creatures that parents 'bring up.' The term child-rearing is used as though children are animals to be reared, and references to raising children suggest that they are crops (George 2009). Children are not taken seriously enough as social

beings in their own right, let alone as humans embedded in power relations and as participants in democracies. Power imbalances between adults and children are generally taken for granted, as is the autocracy that parents routinely exert over children. The term 'childish' is used pejoratively in everyday parlance, 'foolish or petty, puerile,' as the Chambers English Dictionary puts it. Although adults can behave in foolish or petty ways, semantically such behaviour is attributed only to children. 'Petty' in turn is explicated as 'minor or subordinate,' and these descriptions are regularly applied to children. Children's studies represent a relatively new and underdeveloped field, unlike for example women's studies where protagonists are now relatively organized and vocal (and adult).

Children are perceived as located on the periphery of democratic society, and as connected to it through the adults who are responsible for them. Debates about early childhood and democracy that focus on children in the quasi-public spaces of the childcare centre are useful here (Vandenbroeck 2006). Moss has urged that politics be brought into the nursery and that the nursery be recognised as a political space, with childcare institutions transformed into places of democratic practice, through visions of 'the early childhood institution as a public forum in civil society... as a place of encounter and dialogue between citizens, from which many possibilities can emerge... and most productive when relationships are governed by democratic practice' (2006: 9; also see Moss 2007).

Parents are included as participants and protagonists within the 'public forum' of creches and kindergartens, as citizens and not as consumers (Moss 2006: 5, quoting the Power Inquiry). Parents 'have and develop their own experience, points of view, interpretation and ideas... which are the fruits of their experience as parents and citizens' (*op. cit.*: 11, quoting pedagogues in Emilia Reggio). Yet most analyses stop short of discussing parents on what is literally their home ground, in direct interaction with their children in domestic settings. If parents interact as citizens with multiple other actors in creches, and if children should be treated as citizens from the age of one year (*op. cit.*: 5), how do these two sets of actors interact on their shared home ground?

The present paper takes Moss' arguments beyond the 'public forum' of childcare institutions to the private arena of what is the longest established and most influential childcare institution, albeit an informal one, namely the home. Why should not the home also become a 'place of democratic practice... of encounter and dialogue... from which many possibilities can emerge... and most productive when relationships are governed by democratic practice?' This repeats the ideas above, but now with specific reference to relationships between parents and children.

Moving these ideas into the micro-arena of the home fits with presentations of multiple levels of democratic political practice: 'each level should also support democratic practice at more local levels, ensuring those more local levels have important decisions to make and are supported in doing so – in other words, creating “democratic space” and conditions for active democratic practice' (*op. cit.*: 5). The home, it can be argued, is the most local level – how then to nurture it as a space for active democratic practice?

'People come to the democratic process not only with different perspectives, but also with different interests and power; conflict is likely, in which the weaker may lose out' (*op. cit.*: 5). The huge power imbalance between parent and child is exemplified by the difference in physical strength, to the point where a child can be dragged along by the hand or strapped into a car seat even though crying and resisting -- and neither of these situations is classified as child abuse (George 2009). 'Democratic participation is... a means of resisting power and its will to govern, and the forms of oppression and injustice that arise from the unrestrained exercise of power' (Moss 2006: 2).

Yet the home is a social site where power imbalances, injustice and oppression are intertwined with intimacy, affection and care. Surely these latter features should strongly support opportunities for democratic political practice within the home?

Children as citizens

The argument that children are citizens from early on in their lives is increasingly heard in discussions of children's rights and development, but runs counter to established views of citizenship as attained when an individual is old enough to vote, usually at the age of eighteen or twenty one. The conventional legal terminology of reaching the 'age of majority' and of children as 'minors' militates against current progressive visions of childhood as full personhood, rather than some diminished form of it.

The concept of children's 'evolving capacities' is useful here (Lansdown 2005). In their civic abilities, children do not suddenly leap at the age of eighteen to being mature individuals. From birth onwards, children are embedded in political relationships. It is not suggested that they crawl to polling booths in their first year of life or walk there in the decade and a half thereafter. Where 'democratic political practice' is urged in childcare centres, it is through listening to children's opinions on issues that concern them (Lancaster 2003) and through eliciting their perspectives through appropriate and sensitive exchange (Clark 2005). A perceptive pediatrician notes that from an infant's first days, the decision whether to listen and respond to crying as a request for feeding, or whether to impose a strict feeding schedule on the infant, is a political choice (personal communication from Dr Leela Chacko).

How best can we conceptualize 'democratic political practice' within the family and the home? Most theoretical frameworks for domestic relationships are focused on gender relations between adults, rather than on relationships between adults and children. Incorporating apparently unrelated discussions from outside current debates on children can expand and enrich these debates, and this is attempted below.

As the parent of a child who was seven years old at a time when I was writing on Schön's concept of coaching in professional education (George 2001), I gradually became aware that what Schön said could be applied as usefully to the relationship between parent and child as to the context that he addressed, namely relations between teacher and student.

'Coaching' is the term used by Schön (1987) to describe the teacher's role in the education of reflective professionals, a process that he visualized as self-education facilitated by faculty, rather than the one way transmission of ideas from teacher to student. A framework of children as self-educators and parents as coaches – derived from Schön – yields a philosophy that wraps around and justifies strategies respectful of a child's personhood, and argues that parents should be facilitators rather than autocrats. Schön's ideas on self-education and coaching will now be linked to daily democratic practice between parents and children, and thus to a vision of home as a place of preparation for a wider democratic society.

Meaning-making, world-making and 'framing'

Schön's arguments about relationships that will be extended here to debates on children and democracy are located within processes of 'world-making.' Moss similarly talks of 'meaning making' as part of a democratic language within childcare centres (Moss 2006: 10). The two concepts have much in common, as is clear from the explication of each. Meaning making discourse accepts

that it may be just one way of seeing and understanding... that there might be more than one answer to a question, that it is just one of many perspectives (Moss *op. cit.*: 3).

Schön contrasts 'world-making' with 'objectivist' views of reality which hold that 'facts are what they are, and the truth of beliefs is strictly testable... All meaningful disagreements are resolvable... by reference to the facts. And... knowledge rests on a foundation of facts' (1987:36). Schön instead supports 'constructionist' views: 'our perceptions, appreciations, and beliefs are rooted in worlds of our own making that we come to *accept* as reality' (*ibid.*, citing Goodman 1978, emphasis given). Schön encourages 'constructivist' pedagogy, where experiences are reflectively 'framed', whether one's own or other people's experiences.

Children engage keenly with the world around that they are perceiving anew, with constant questions and perceptions that are strikingly different from those of adults and that could be described as fresh and arresting. Adults must allow children to explore these perceptions, not close conversational doors with:

How funny you children are! Of course it's not like that, I'll tell you what it's really like. And don't talk back to me, I know what is actually going on. You're a child, I'm a grown-up.

Schön's ideas can be applied to interaction between parent and child: 'With their different ways of framing the situation, they tend to pay attention to different sets of facts, see "the same facts" in different ways, and make judgements of effectiveness based on different kinds of criteria. If they wish, nevertheless, to come to agreement, they must try to get inside each other's point of view' (1987: 218). Schön calls this 'frame reflection':

We may still talk about true statements and effective actions, but only within a frame...' (*ibid.*).

Schön has in mind a mid-career student and supervisor sitting across a table from each other in discussion, but with different perspectives. We substitute a child and a parent who have to 'try to get inside each other's point of view,' often even a different physical perspective, so that the parent might lift the child to share the parent's viewpoint or can kneel down to survey the scene from the child's eye level:

When we think of truth or effectiveness across frames... things become much more difficult (*ibid.*). In order to come to agreement, they would... have to try to enter into the other's world to discover the things the other has named and constructed there and appreciate the kind of coherence the other has created... In such a process of frame reflection, each might discover how arguments compelling to him seemed utterly inconclusive to the other... (*op. cit.*: 230).

In the context of the lives of parents and children, we can easily visualize situations where arguments that seem compelling to one seem senseless and threatening to the other.

'But why do I need to eat my vegetables before I eat the ice cream? Why can't I eat the ice cream first?'

'You have to finish your vegetables first. That's the way it is.'

'Why?'

'Because I say so.'

'I won't.'

'Then you don't get any ice cream.'

'I hate vegetables! I hate you!'

In my daughter's case, the 'frame' that she constructed around the vegetables/ice cream situation, in terms of the world as she perceived it, appeared to be:

If I eat the ice cream first, then I am happy and I'm ready to eat the vegetables.

We acted in terms of her 'frame' rather than the one that I had constructed as an adult, which was:

Children have to be taught to do things in the right order, otherwise they won't learn and will grow up to be social misfits, and I will have failed as a parent.

Ultimately, as she has grown older and perceived that the world is generally ordered as vegetables to be eaten first and dessert to follow, she has accepted this frame. She has not resisted this other construction of the world, probably because it was never thrust on her; instead she has adopted 'vegetables first' of her own will, as a 'frame' that applies widely at mealtimes. The experience of having her 'frame' examined and affirmed in its own terms has probably encouraged her to examine other people's 'frames' and to affirm them in those people's terms.

Not all children's and adults' different perceptions can be easily resolved, even with efforts on both sides:

...often, the more we work at trying to understand one another, the more profoundly we experience the differences among our ways of seeing things. (Schön 1987: 230-31).

Schön describes 'the very feelings of mystery, confusion, frustration, and futility that many students experience in their early months' – and that we see children experiencing from their first moments of life onwards. Yet there are the good moments:

the image of frame-reflective entry into one another's world suggests the experience we have (much less often) of passing from misunderstanding to mutual understanding (*ibid.*).

Children can be encouraged to follow an explicit process of moving between different 'frames,' in order to 'reconcile, integrate, or choose among conflicting appreciations of a situation' (Schön 1987: 6). For example, when stories are read aloud, the point of view of different characters can be identified and discussed in simple language. Some stories lend themselves easily to this, for example the familiar story about the several blind men and their different perceptions when feeling an elephant.

Meaning-making or world-making is part of a democracy of perceptions, awareness of which (from an early age) contributes to the everyday practice of democracy and a daily language of democracy. But then adults have to accept a democracy of perceptions too.

The everyday practice of democracy within the home – as elsewhere – rests on people's abilities to relate their own meaning-making and world-making to that of others, in this case on children's abilities to accept that their parents see the world

differently as well as parents' capacities to understand their children's differing perceptions of the world. This is a radically altered approach to relationships from the more conventional one that 'parents know and children learn things from their parents.' It is part of a vision of childhood as a process of self-education, in which adults play the role of facilitators and coaches.

Childhood as self-education and as 'disciplined freedom'

When discussing the role of academic faculty members, Schön makes a critical point about education for a reflective practitioner or -- in our case -- a child: 'Others may help her, but they can do so only as she begins to understand for herself... And although they may help her, *she* is the essential self-educator... this... is consistent with an older and broader tradition of educational thought and practice, according to which the most important things... can only be learned for oneself' (*op. cit.* 84). He quotes Carl Rogers on the significance of "'self-discovered, self-appropriated learning'" (*op. cit.*: 89), and Thomas Cowan on the difference between 'training' and 'education': education is 'the self-learning process' and training is 'what others make you do' (*op. cit.*: 92). In everyday parlance, both animals and children are trained, as for example in the striking case of what is called 'potty training' (Priebe 2008).

In the context of professional education, Schön talks about 'students' capacity to manage their own education' and 'students being 'reflective designers of their own education' (Schön 1987: 341), as well as about 'students' active management of their own learning' (*op. cit.*: 342).

Such ideas seem radical in the case of students, including university students, and even for those who have returned to study as practitioners in mid-career. What then about applying these principles to children well below the age of ten? Schön's essential point holds. Learning is more effective, more useful and more creatively adapted later in life if the person who learns is actively involved in managing his or her own learning, rather than the passive recipient of a body of knowledge that is transmitted by some authority. From my observations, children to whom Schön's type of thinking has been extended learn well, both in terms of life skills and formal education. Such children enter adolescence in a climate of relative personal and domestic calm, possibly because they do not then have to claim or struggle for a degree of freedom that they have long been used to.

Children's 'freedom' is a concept that generally sets off alarm bells in adult minds, even more so than the talk of students' freedom that generates explosions in faculty meetings. What self-educators need is however not freedom as such -- which they temporarily surrender -- but 'disciplined freedom' (*op. cit.*: 125). The student's role has paradoxical aspects: (s)he must temporarily 'give up freedom... in

order to gain the freedom that comes with new levels of understanding and control' (*op. cit.*: 123).

Thus, we are not talking here about 'unlimited freedom' nor about 'a degree of constraint that demands "one right way"' (*op. cit.*: 210). We confront 'the twin issues of freedom and discipline' (*op. cit.*: 123), and bridge them through 'a kind of "disciplined freedom"' (*op. cit.*: 125).

The notion of 'disciplined freedom' should assuage adult panic at the association of the words 'children' and 'freedom,' and also quieten the mocking that is often triggered off if the word freedom is used in the context of children's early years when they are very dependent developmentally:

'Yes, give a three year old a knife if she asks for it!'

The idea of disciplined freedom means that the knife can be withheld in the clear understanding on both sides that this will change when the child is older -- in the same way that civilized countries control the use of guns by adults. Ideally, an implement that is both more age-appropriate and engrossing should be proffered in place of the knife. A Swahili proverb actually suggests: 'If you take away a knife from a child, offer a piece of wood to play with instead' (personal communication from Auma Okwany).

Often no radical change is required in the behaviour of the adult – knives are generally withheld from young children, and many adults try to do this in a tactful way that avoids confrontation. This issue is not so much the behaviour as the philosophy that underpins the behaviour, thus not 'Children cannot do certain things and adults know best,' but 'There are things for all of us that we are not ready to do at particular ages and this will change over time.' If parents keep this principle in mind, they will more readily allow children to take over activities and tasks that their developing capacities allow, including the decision making that adults generally like to retain under their own control. A gradual evolution will then take place from 'disciplined freedom' to more and more freedom based on self-discipline – with far fewer painful and noisy domestic revolutions.

A child whose 'disciplined freedom' is accepted by his or her parents from early on will grow up aware of this and will be less likely to question each and every experience of discipline (not to be confused with regimentation). In other words, the child's capacity for self-education will be strengthened and enhanced. As Schön puts it, the self-educator accepts 'an initial imposition of an order which one can always break open later... she feels confident of her ability to evaluate it *once she has understood it*... She can relinquish control for a time and leave the direction of her development open-ended because she feels confident in her ability to control the larger process that includes this temporary loss of control' (*op. cit.*: 122-23).

To move from children's everyday lives to democracy more widely, 'disciplined freedom' is surely the undergirding principle – neither 'unlimited freedom' nor 'a degree of constraint that demands "one right way"' (*op. cit.*: 210). By acknowledging children's disciplined freedom within the home, we prepare them for democracy from birth onwards and recognise them in this way as citizens. We also strengthen democracy, by ensuring that the disciplined freedom of individuals and groups that democracy both rests on and protects, is practised and exemplified in the micro-arena of the home.

Parent as coaches

If children are 'designers of their own education', what then is the role of a parent?

Schön makes a distinction here between a 'teacher' and a 'coach': 'the interventions most useful... are more like coaching than teaching' (*ibid.*). 'The student cannot be taught what he needs to know, but he can be coached: "He has to see on his own behalf and in his own way... Nobody else can see for him, and he can't see just by being 'told', although the right kind of telling may guide his seeing and thus help him see what he needs to see"' (*op. cit.*: 17, quoting Dewey 1974: 364).

Why does a self-educator require a coach? Schön describes a coach as 'a paradoxical teacher who does not teach but serves as... midwife to others' self-discovery' (*op. cit.*: 92). This is probably the most difficult shift for a parent, to break with the role of progenitor, and move from relating to a child as 'flesh of my flesh and bone of my bone' to acknowledging separate personhoods. Emotional bonds linger long after physical independence has been established. Emotional bonds should endure, but not in the dangerous form of projection of the parent's perceptions, desires and ambitions onto a child.

Instead, parents need to take distance in order to respect the personhood of a child, and the image of a midwife is indeed a useful model of someone who facilitates major processes in another person's life from a near distance that allows constant assessment of the situation, with relevant advice and encouragement. A midwife is both critically involved and critically detached.

The need for a coach is temporary, related to a phase of life, childhood in this case. The stage of self-education with coaching is one chapter in a longer story of self-education, 'serv[ing]... primarily to set the stage for later more nearly independent learning' (*op. cit.*: 170).

What is the difference between a coach and a teacher? A teacher focuses mainly on substance or on 'product', whereas a coach directs energies more to 'process'. A 'coach' is a partner in the learning process rather than a fountain of knowledge. Wise parents have for some generations now encouraged children to

think about the problems that they encounter in their daily lives, rather than rush in to impose some parent-devised solution. For example, a child says:

It's difficult when I'm with both Swati and Roshan. They don't like each other but both want to be friends with me.

A parent who is setting himself or herself up as the authority would respond:

You'll have to choose between them. Chose Roshan. Her mother takes you both to dance class and Roshan does better in exams.

The product of this exchange is a decision that is taken by the parent. In contrast, a parent could stimulate a child to go through the process of exploring various options that the child herself can identify.

Parent: How do you feel about Roshan and Swati?

Child: I like them both. Swati and I have been friends since we went to school and I know I can trust her. Roshan is more fun though. But when the three of us are together, it just doesn't work. One of them always gets left out and then gets upset.

Parent: Hmmm.

Child: It's all right when I am with just one of them. Like when I sit in the school bus with Swati because we live nearby or when I meet Roshan at dance class. I think that's what I'll try to do from now on, not be a threesome, just do things with one or the other.

The relationship with a coach is more lateral whereas the relationship with a teacher tends to be vertical. In the second example above, parent and child are engaged in shared inquiry. In the first example, the parent is delivering a judgement from far above the child's head.

Schön's words elaborate on this: 'the relationship constructed was... of partners in inquiry' (*op. cit.*: 181); coaches 'take up a position next to the student, sitting side by side with her before the shared problem' (*op. cit.*: 213). The coach's stance is: 'I will become your co-experimenter, helping you figure out how to do what you want, demonstrating for you how you might achieve your goals' (*op. cit.*: 153). Where the process works well, student and coach become 'engaged in a dialogue of increasing intimacy and effectiveness and... reciprocity' (*op. cit.*: 207); 'the coach listens and then responds with criticisms, questions, advice, or demonstration' (*op. cit.*: 209). 'The coach works at creating and sustaining a process of collaborative inquiry' (*op. cit.*: 296).

The coach 'communicates the idea that technique is not a matter of following rules but of trying out and evaluating alternative methods of production' (*op. cit.*: 213). Such an exchange is radically different from conventional ideas of parenting as 'teaching children the rules.' There is in any case increasing awareness today that processes of change continually accelerate both globally and locally, that rules change, and that learning must be adaptive in order to survive and more so in

order to thrive. These ideas should be extended back into childhood, and children encouraged to build judiciously on their evident abilities to question and to experiment.

Schön quotes a self-educator describing a coach: 'he works with your own ideas and never imposes his own except in the most positive way of helping you to extend and see the implications of your own ideas' (*op. cit.*: 122). 'Through qualitative description, technical instruction, and demonstration... [the coach] shows [the student]... how to make *more* of what is there' (*op. cit.*: 190-91). Transcriptions of exchanges between parents and children in homes around the world can illustrate that these processes of coaching already take place: the question is how they can be consolidated and widely extended in an explicit framework of self-education and disciplined freedom.

A child can use a parent as a sounding board to test out verbally ideas that she has for addressing particular situations or relationships. Often the opportunity to listen to herself think aloud to a trusted adult about possible options can help her in making a decision. Sometimes the parent can ask for clarifications as an impetus for the child to think something through further, or can make suggestions. These consultations will become less frequent as children graduate to working out options largely in their own heads.

The coach adapts to each student, 'tailor[ing] his understandings to the needs and potentials of a particular student at a particular stage of development. He... give[s] priority to some things and not to others. He must decide what to talk about and when and how to talk about it' (p. 176). 'A different student with a different mix of strengths and weaknesses might have elicited very different responses' (*op. cit.*: 202). 'He may treat one student with gentleness and indirection, barely hinting at issues that call for change; with another, he may be direct and challenging' (*op. cit.*: 107); 'a good... coach has at his disposal and is capable of inventing on the spot many strategies of instructing, questioning, and describing -- all aimed at responding to the difficulties and potentials of a particular student who is trying to do something' (*op. cit.*: 105).

Similarly, a parent who is interacting with more than one child tailors the approach to the personality and needs of particular children, rather than maintaining, 'I treat you both/all exactly the same.' If the household is one where meaning-making, world-making and 'framing' (discussed above) are routine activities, children will understand rather than resent varied responses to different perceptions among them.

The coach's attitude is that 'there is no one right way... but many possible right ways, each of which must be worked out both in its global structure and in the

most concrete details... indeed, much... coaching... seems aimed at opening up possibilities for interpretation that students have not as yet imagined' (*op. cit.*: 9). The opening up of possibilities seems a far cry from the tradition of parenting that announces to a child, 'There is only one way and that is my way.' Obviously presenting a three year old child with ten options is not a good idea, but the process of a child choosing between three options that she or he has identified can be very educative.

Schön's descriptions of the learning process ring true here, whether of 'he', 'she' or 'they':

Their discoveries did not progress in a straight line. It was as though they periodically returned to the same issues, at different levels of difficulty, by reflections on... discussions... (*op. cit.*: 284).

And as she learns..., she also learns to learn... (*op. cit.*: 102), both in the particular task at hand and in the generic process it illustrates (*op. cit.*: 112-13).

[Students] seem to learn here to observe in a finer-grained, more differentiated way... (*op. cit.*: 153) ...to become aware of the choices implicit in what they already know how to do (*op. cit.*: 182).

...the boundaries of reflection... have been stretched (*op. cit.*: 242).

Schön quotes a student: 'It was not easy. It was good. There are dilemmas you must experience' (*op. cit.*: 336). Children should respond in the same way after experiencing opportunities for self-education with coaching.

Schön also describes 'the teaching and learning processes gone wrong' (*op. cit.*: 119-156). Teacher or student or both 'strive... to impose his or her way of seeing on the other rather than enter the other's world so as to understand'; 'each... perceives the interaction as a conflict rather than as a failure of understanding'; 'each perceives the other... as defensive and as unilaterally bent on winning' (*op. cit.*: 134-36). The teacher may seek to exhibit 'mastery' and cloak the research process in 'mystery' (*op. cit.*: 132).

Such situations are all too familiar in domestic settings, whether with children or with adolescents, or between parents who cannot enter into each other's frames of reference nor understand the world as the other has constructed it. Failures of understanding between parents may indeed set the scene for similar failures between parent and child. The largely unbridled power of a parent, however, allows extensive displays of 'mastery' over a child, for example through withholding permission or pocket money – an easy short-term 'win' but one that can lead to long term losses on both sides.

Children may react in ways that hijack leaning processes. In the learning situations that Schön describes, the student may 'engage... in an ideological battle

with... her teachers' (*ibid.*). 'Some students feel threatened by the... [supervisor's] aura of expertise and respond to their learning predicament by becoming defensive. Under the guise of learning, they actually protect themselves against learning anything new' (*op. cit.*: 119). Children who feel their freedom under threat may claim it negatively, and may assert 'I can do it myself' when in fact they cannot do it without coaching. A good coach is able to interact in ways that make a child feel enabled, rather than vulnerable and therefore defensive.

Or: 'Some students expect to be told what to do at each stage of their journey and become panic-stricken or enraged when a coach fails to meet their expectations' (*op. cit.*: 299). Disciplined freedom can be frightening for those who are not used to it, and the idea that there are many ways to choose from can feel threatening to those who have internalized the belief that there is only one way. The parallel in the case of democracy is when the end of a dictatorship or colonial rule generates an independence that is unfamiliar and leads to widespread feelings of insecurity. In the case of children who are supported in self-education from their early years onwards, passive dependence and clinging to authority is less likely.

The self-educator therefore 'adopts a particular kind of stance -- taking responsibility for educating herself in what she needs to learn and at the same time remaining open to the coach's help' (*op. cit.*: 164). Self-educators have both a 'capacity for cognitive risk-taking' and a 'strong sense of self' (*op. cit.*: 139), 'more challenged than dismayed by the prospect of learning something radically new, more ready to see their errors as puzzles to be solved than as sources of discouragement' (*op. cit.*: 294). If these stances and capacities are encouraged in children from early on – instead of anxiously discouraged by overprotective parents who fear 'cognitive risk-taking' and 'a strong sense of self' on the part of young children – self-education is likely to prove successful.

The coach must give the self-educator moral support: "'You keep going on," he says, "you are going to make it"' (*op. cit.*: 107). In Schön's writing the coach is always 'he' (George 2001). In the case of parents and children, there is something of a dilemma here. Referring to the parental coach as 'she' acknowledges that mothers generally play a key role in their children's development, especially early on, but this usage then continues to load the prime responsibility onto them. Using 'he' to allude to the coach – as, following Schön, has been done throughout this section – does indeed extend the arguments put forward to fathers as well as to mothers, but at the risk of highlighting male protagonists at the expense of female (as is too often the case anyway). We return then to gender relations within the home and elsewhere, and to wider discourses on family relationships and democratic spaces.

Self-educators may not be the only beneficiaries of the learning processes involved in 'coaching', if the coach is a co-learner (Schön 1987: 92). Parenthood as well as childhood can provide unparalleled opportunities for self-education, and in the context of our discussion here, for self-education in the everyday practice of democracy.

Conclusion

Vygotsky's presentation of how adults can 'scaffold' children's learning has been widely influential in debates on education and especially early childhood education. The present paper has attempted to link discussions of such 'scaffolding' to democratic daily practice in homes and to democratic societies more widely, drawing on Schön's body of argument that was developed in the context of adult professional education.

Current explorations of multiple literacies and children's competences (UNESCO 2006; Sijthoff *et al* 2013) are relevant here. Earlier in the present paper, reference was made to 'meaning making' as part of a democratic language that is linked to a democracy of perceptions and is essential to the everyday practice of democracy (Moss 2007: 10). We might then talk of 'democratic literacies' that are best acquired in childhood through interaction with adults who lead by example. 'Democratic literacies' would extend beyond the basic literacies of reading and writing and also beyond the formal capacity to distinguish between political parties and their platforms during elections. Following the argument in this paper, democratic literacies in everyday interaction would include the ability to relate one's own meaning making to the meanings that others have constructed (however similar or different); to be prepared to move from 'world-making' from one's own viewpoint to try and see the world as various other people perceive it; and to be aware of how experience is differently framed by diverse individuals. Paakhari and Paakhaari's (2012) imaginative analysis of health literacy in school children's everyday lives does not limit itself to practical information and theoretical knowledge about health matters but incorporates debates on critical thinking, self awareness and citizenship, thereby providing a useful example of multiple literacies that cover what we have here called democratic literacies.

Similarly, Biggeri and Santi's (2012) insightful discussion of children's capabilities emphasizes participation in public deliberation (citing Sen 2009 and Crocker 2007). The present paper complements this by examining private deliberation within the home and between parent and child, both as a counterpoint to public deliberation and as a necessity for building the democratic abilities and mindsets that constitute the communicative competences (Habermas 1981) of capable agents within democratic societies (Bonvin and Galster 2010; Nussbaum 2011). In this case, learning definitely begins at birth.

Acknowledgements

The author thanks the D.S. Kothari Centre at the University of Delhi for its hospitality in February 2012 and August 2012, and the opportunities provided then to present earlier versions of this paper. Professor Andre Beteille presided over a public talk there in August 2012 and Professor B.S. Baviskar introduced the author and her work. Professor Namita Ranganathan chaired the seminar in February 2012 and contributed valuable insights. Professor Vivek Suneja's presence and encouragement on this occasion are appreciated. Both events were made possible by Professor Meenakshi Thapan as coordinator of the D.S. Kothari Centre and as editor of its working paper series; warm thanks are extended to her.

The presence of Professor Beteille and Professor Baviskar at the seminar in August was particularly gratifying to the author because -- as her former teachers at the Centre for Advanced Study in Sociology at the University of Delhi, and in their different ways -- they exemplified what this paper describes as supportive and sensitive coaching. This paper is therefore dedicated to them with gratitude and affection.

An earlier version of this paper was presented in March 2012 within the monthly seminar series on the Anthropology of Children and Youth, chaired by Dr Sandra Evers of the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology at the VU University in Amsterdam, and the comments received at this seminar are gratefully acknowledged.

A useful discussion of the paper took place in April 2012 within an informal writing group on children and youth in development studies that meets regularly in The Hague. Thanks are extended to the members of this group: Kristen Cheney, Roy Huijsmans and Auma Okwany.

Des Gasper's thoughtful comments on earlier drafts deserve special mention.

References

- Abercrombie, N., S. Hill and B. Turner (1994). *The Penguin Dictionary of Sociology*, Middlesex: Penguin Books.
- Baniwal, V. (2013). *The Other and the Intersubjective in Dialogue: Reading Krishnamurti and Buber Together*, Working Paper Series (2), D.S. Kothari Centre for Science, Ethics and Education, Delhi: University of Delhi.
- Biggeri, M., and M. Santi (2012). 'The Missing Dimensions of Children's Well-being and Well-becoming in Education Systems: Capabilities and Philosophies for Children,' in *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities* 13:3.
- Bonvin, J.M., and D. Galster (2010). 'Making Them Employable or Capable: Social Integration Policy at the Crossroads,' in H.U. Otto and H. Ziegler (eds.) *Education, Welfare and the Capability Approach*, Opladen: Barbara Budrich Publishers.
- Clark, A. (2005). 'Talking and Listening to Young Children,' in M. Dudek (ed.) *Children's Spaces*, London: Architectural Press.
- Crocker, D. (2007). 'Deliberative Participation in Local Development,' in *Journal of Human Development* 8:3.
- George, S. (2001). *'Self-Educators' and 'Coaches' at a School of Development Studies: A Case Study of Third World Professionals in Europe*, Working Paper Series No. 345, Institute of Social Studies, The Hague.
- (2009). *Too Young for Respect? Realizing Respect for Young Children in Their Everyday Environments*, Working Papers on Early Childhood Development (No. 54), The Hague: Bernard van Leer Foundation.
- Goodman, N. (1978). *Ways of Worldmaking*, Indianapolis: Hackett.
- Habermas, J. (1981). *The Theory of Communicative Action, Vol. 1: Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, Boston: Beacon Press.
- Kumar, A. (2012). *Fundamentals of a Meditative Education*, Working Paper Series (No. 1), D.S. Kothari Centre for Science, Ethics and Education, Delhi: University of Delhi.
- Lancaster, Y.P. (2003). 'Promoting Listening to Young Children: A Reader,' in Y.P. Lancaster and V. Broadbent, *Listening to Young Children*, Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Lansdown, G. (2005). *The Evolving Capacities of Children: Implications for the Exercise of Rights*, Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.
- Marshall, G. (2004). *Oxford Dictionary of Sociology*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Moss, P. (2006). 'Bringing Politics into the Nursery: Early Childhood Education as Democratic Practice,' *Keynote Address*, 16th Annual Conference, European Early

Childhood Research Association, Reykjavik. (A revised version of this keynote address appeared, with the same title, as Working Paper 43 in the Early Childhood Development series of the Bernard van Leer Foundation, The Hague, and is cited in the present paper as Moss 2007.)

Nussbaum, M. (2011). *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach*, Harvard: Harvard University Press.

Priebe, M. (2008). 'Living Democracy in Day Nurseries. Part 3: Autonomy and Independence: Diaper Changing and Bathroom Routines,' in *Betriff Kinder* 8:9. (In German.)

Schön, D.A. (1987). *Educating the Reflective Practitioner*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Sen, A.K. (2009). *The Idea of Justice*, London: Allen Lane.

Sijthoff, E., M.. Meijers, D. Kranenburg, F. Smit and S. George (2013). "“Moving Moments” for Schools, Parents and Children: Critical Lessons from a Case of Resource Innovation in the Netherlands,' paper submitted to the European Research Network about Parents in Education for its ninth annual conference in Lisbon, Portugal.

UNESCO (2006). *Education for All Global Monitoring Report: Literacy for Life*, Paris: UNESCO.

Vandenbroeck, M. (2006). *Globalization and Privatization: The Impact on Childcare Policy and Practice*, Working Papers in Early Childhood Development (38), The Hague: Bernard van Leer Foundation.