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1995:4
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"THE CENTURY OF THE CHILD"

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In the first year of the twentieth century, Ellen Key wrote her book *Barnets århundrade* (1900). It was a sharp attack on the way children were looked after, among both the upper classes and the working class. The book contained a vision of a better society, expressing the hope that the twentieth century would be, as the title put it, the *century of the child*. Other people shared her vision. The first decades of the twentieth century saw a great mobilization of private interests and municipal and state forces to rescue children from unsuitable environments and to improve their conditions. Much of the discussion bore the stamp of a conflict between different ideals of childhood, between the romantic useless childhood and the working child. Childhood has indeed taken on new meanings. Today childhood is a long period in a person's life in Sweden - youth unemployment are defined up to 26 years of age. Childhood is filled with schooling and organized leisure activities. Many children - a majority - spend their early years in some form of pre-school care from around one year of age. School though is not started until 6 or 7 years of age. There has been a dramatic change in the view of how to bring up the sort of children who would have been regarded as delinquent in the first decades of this century. There has also been a great change in the care and definitions of physically and mentally handicapped children. We have very little historical knowledge about these processes of change and perhaps not much about what new images of childhood are created as a consequence of these processes of change. It is obvious that new ideas about where and how children should spend their growing years were formulated by the new professional and political groups that emerged during the twentieth century. It is also clear that new ideals have been formulated by the commercial interests for whom children and parents are an important market. New and old media also create new images of children. State initiatives to safeguard the health and well-being of children, such as road safety information, also influence the picture of the child, as do the children we meet in literature intended for children. But these notions is not to be taken at face value. It is images that stand in conflict to each other and notions containing inner contradictions. Many questions can be asked. What indeed has the development during the twentieth century meant for the children? What were the unintended consequences of the welfare programmes that were launched? How were new reality and new visions shaped? How does this childhood look like and by whom was this new childhood created? How, for instance, does the picture of children in literature relate to the picture of children created in the writings of psychologists and medical doctors? How does the commercial exposition of children differ from the construction of the child in school and leisure organizations? How does school's picture of the child relate to the family's perception of childhood and to the practice that is developed within the framework of the social welfare service? It is important to stress that childhoods is never unambiguous or homogeneously constructed. Most childhoods are built up with internal contradictions and conflicting messages. The romantic childhood, that of an innocent, free growing child was combined in reality with the requirement to spend many years in school - hardly
a very free and unregulated period. There are naturally also differences in the perception of girls' and boys' childhoods. With this overall ambition I will present a synthesis of changes of childhood during the 20th century as it is constructed by social, economic, and political processes. The debate about the conditions of children and young people often arises in our own day. It is often in terms which we recognize from Sweden at the turn of the century: the crisis of the family, the inadequacy of the home, the deficiencies of school, young people's behaviour in public places, and a supposed increase in criminality. Then as now, there were calls for more institutions for the growing generation, support and advice for families, and the need for school reforms. It is therefore important to reflect about why children were or are singled out --in fact discovered -- as a political and social problem. For it is not just a matter of children who had real problems or who were a real problem. It is at least as much a matter of the emergence of new professional groups and about changed relations between adults and children, men and women, between different social classes, and about children's chances of obtaining work, or about children as an object of commercial interests. These are precisely why new ideals of childhood are created.

The Century of the Child -- a perspective

In the early nineteenth century, the upper classes began to see childhood in a romantic glow, as a state of natural, indestructible genuineness and immediacy. For the children of well-off families, however, childhood was also a time when they were deliberately taught the behaviour and attitudes they needed for their future social status. The children were not given responsibility until late in life, and, unlike the situation among the manually labouring classes, child-rearing had no connection with the work of the adults or an early transition to adulthood. Upper-class voices in the public social debate criticized the free, less controlled child-rearing of the working class and the peasantry and the fact that these children often worked or roamed the streets. A connection was seen between popular child-rearing and the popular culture from which the upper classes wished to distance themselves (Sandin 1986). In particular the rowdy behaviour of apprentices in the streets was seen as a sign of an autonomous subculture and a rejection of the adult world. The ruling classes saw it as alien and menacing. Among the prosperous citizens, children's existence was no doubt more strictly controlled by the demands and expectations of the adult world (Sandin 1986, 1987, Edgren 1987, Ohlander 1990).

This serves to illustrate that there is more than one kind of childhood. It is different for boys and girls; a rural childhood is not the same as an urban one; childhood differs from class to class.
Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the difference between these different childhoods became increasingly clear. Children in both town and country helped the family income by looking after the younger brothers and sisters so that the mother could work. They collected coal that had been dropped in the railway shunting yard; they gathered fruit and firewood; they delivered newspapers or worked as errand boys. The money they earned was handed over to support the family, and it gave status and self-esteem. At the same time, children were in the focus of public opinion. Many children of the day were idle, it appeared. They drifted around with no adult supervision. According to an article in the newspaper Oresundsposten in 1888, coal-gathering spoiled the moral development of the children, since it gave them a lax sense of property (Sandin 1992).

In Sweden there were early demands that all social classes should go to the same school -- a comprehensive school. The demands were formulated by a middle class for whom it had become more difficult and more expensive to send their children to private schools. The new childhood had its price for these parents; private tuition for the boys, piano lessons for the girls cost a lot of money. Public elementary school had to be changed to suit all social classes. These demands were formulated by the corps of elementary school teachers. They were interested in having children from all social classes attend their schools. The children of upper-class families brought particular status.

In the 1860s and 1870s, the national debate thus was about how to get the children of the working class to school and develop the school system to include all ages up to the age 14. This was not explained in relationship to the developmental needs of the child but rather as a result of the ambitions to control the urban environment and to bring childrens schooling and the schoolages closer in accordance to the protective legislation and the regulations in the penal code. The debate in the 1880s was largely about the need for and appropriateness of a comprehensive school for all classes of society. The arguments is primarily political and practical. This debate mainly concerned the cities, but a debate in these terms eventually had consequences for the way rural schools were handled. In the 1880s, however, these were perceived as a separate problem.

In the 1890s a partly new debate began develop but it had roots in the changes that took place already earlier. These changes was largely to be about the internal conditions and administrative development in school. We see in this debate the consequences of having children from different social classes attending the same schools. To understand these we must look closer at the program for a comprehensive school - a school for all classes as it was developed by Fr Berg and others. How was it possible to have the labourers child in the same school as the better of children? Was it really the case that all children should go to this new school? The school administrators saw this clearly as a problem. The inspector in Malmö commented on these issues in a little report on education and orphanages in foreign countries written during the very first years of the 1880s.
"Public school cannot select its pupils. It has to accept them as they are when they are sent to it, and to keep them no matter how they shape up. School has no more right to turn away the intellectually disadvantaged than the depraved. On the contrary, it is the duty of school itself to seek out and gather up all those children, regardless of which category they belong to, who do not come to school of their own accord. Anyone who has had anything to do with public school knows how harmful this circumstance is for the success of the school's work, how the ungifted children impede the progress of the gifted, how the depraved children have a detrimental effect on those who are as yet unspoiled.

These nuisances are increased in every society in pace with the growth of society itself; they are naturally most serious in the large cities with a comparatively numerous unattached population. In such places it has generally been found necessary to resort to special measures, not only to facilitate the work of the public school, but also to help the element which is abnormal on one way or another with the more energetic treatment which they require for their development. For such reasons there have arisen segregational schools, penal schools, children's homes, and rescue homes, all of which are intended to take care of such children as cannot be taught in the public elementary school on account of moral defects. On the other hand, children who cannot be kept together with other pupils because of intellectual deficiencies have been taken care of through the foundation of idiots' homes or by assembling them in special classes, known as repeat classes or segregational classes." (Stenkula A.O. Om folkskolor och barnhem. Anteckningar under en resa (Malmö 1879)

And he concludes that the school administration has found it necessary to separate delinquents and children living under morally and material depravation withdrawing from influence of education and having an early start into a criminal life. During the 1890s a couple of committees were set up with the purpose to develop a delinquency legislation. The driving force in this work was without any doubt the elementary school teachers. The consequence was a law (1902) regulating the work of a committee under the schoolboard with the authority to separate children from parents if they were facing the danger of moral deprivation or crime. It is quite obvious that adherence to normality defined by an ordered schooling was the criterion for not being delinquent.

We must bear in mind that the comprehensive school idea meant preparing children for different positions in society. It was not a matter of a general circulation of the estates; any circulation was based on individual talents. There were also demands for higher standards in the schools to suit all classes. One implication of this was that "abnormal" children -- that is, intellectually handicapped and socially maladjusted children -- should be weeded out, classes should be smaller, and education for national citizenship should be introduced. Ability to follow the teaching in the ordinary schools became indeed also a criterion of normality and a way of defining handicap.

The objective of creating a school for all classes not only required reconciliation within the nation - a new national curriculum - but also absolute essentials such as improved tuition, smaller classes, better teacher training, new teaching materials, and the weeding out of all pupils who were, according to bourgeois values, socially maladjusted and intellectually handicapped. Thinking of national citizenship in terms of an organism easily led to the development of a code common to
all the social classes, in which everyone has his or her given role. The nation consisted all of Swedes, though at different stations in the social system.

A large number of social programs was developed for the lower class children in the schools. We can see the development of programs for feeding hungry children; programs to improve hygiene of the individual child as school baths on Saturday afternoons while their clothing was gased against vermin of various kinds. The argument was put forth that one could not expect better of parents to send their children to the schools if they were in danger of bringing home illnesses etc and that hungry children indeed create an unruly school environment. The afternoon play of children that had no parents at home to take care of them was to be organized. Holiday camps for the poor children was also founded to get the children of the streets during the long summer vacations and more classes was introduced to fill out the spare time of the otherwise idle children.

At the bases of all this one can find a different type of school than at the midnineteenth century. Towards turn of the century 1900 the requirement of the school law of 1882 began to resemble the reality. Boys as well as girls begun their schooling at the age of 7 and finished the year they became 14. Thus the differences between boys and girls that could be noted for example during the 1860s and 1870s was strongly reduced to almost none. The deviation from this new normality was easily detected and could be described and measured. The fact that children from different classes were seen in the schools together made the difference even more clear. In an address to the philanthropist of Stockholm the organisation for children summercamp made a point of that the visible difference between children of different classes would make the heart of the mother in the better of family bleed ... and give money to the poor. The children of the poor became visible not only from the pulpit and as an item in the registers but as a overt contrast to all other children. In this project the teachers and philanthropist begun to try to transform the children of the poor into children of the nation, subjects in the new nation. For that objective teachers, doctor and philanthropists could toward the turn of the century take advantage of the techniques of the newly emerging medical and psychological sciences. The children in the schools as well as at the summer camps begun to be described and measured in all different ways. The stated purpose was to find out the effects of the policies developed to help children. The classical image became the picture of the child before he/she was helped and after. The "before and after" paved the way for a medical and psychological definition of normality based on a childhood without physical labour, middle-class type family and standard -normal - educational achievements.

For working-class families this development must have had palpable consequences. The new demands on the children also involved demands on the families. The mothers were expected to be able to send clean, healthy children to school, at the right time. It was important to create a childhood -- a long childhood. The men were expected to be able to provide for the whole family,
wife and children alike. The higher demands presumably reinforced the trend towards men being paid the wages needed by a sole breadwinner. It is also possible that the new demands had the effect that families became smaller, since the burden of providing for a family had grown with the longer period the children spent as dependants.

The ideal of motherhood which was so strongly emphasized in the national sentiment at the turn of the century corresponds to this development of a new childhood -- a non-useful child, dependent on a breadwinning father and a caring mother. The new emotionality in the family -- the caring element -- is a consequence of this kind of change. The moral demands also increased, now that a new "normal" childhood of general validity had been established. It was now essential for everyone to benefit from what were considered to be the blessings of childhood. At the same time, a new view of the family was created, with new roles for all members, not least for the children, and a new normality, a new childhood which did not always agree with reality, but which could at least be measured against it (Sandin 1992). Steps were taken to change the curriculum, to delouse children, to tighten control of absence. Childhood was normalized and standardized. It was now important to weed out the "delinquent" and "morally depraved" children (Lökke 1990, Sandin 1991, Sundkvist 1989).

Working children and women were now seen as a threat to the view of childhood that had been established among the higher social classes. The place for women was in the home and for children at school. Single women - unwed mothers were pointed at a source of moral and eugenic dangers. Their existence signified a problematic racial and social problem.

Children had to be saved from such harmful environments and saved from being useful. A useful child was by definition a used child. Zelizer (1985) discusses the conflict between the economically useful child and the emotionally valuable child in a number of examples from the USA at the turn of the century. The conflict between the different childhoods was revealed in insurance cases, in questions about adoption, and in the matter of compensation in the event of a child's death. As regards the latter issue, Zelizer shows how the valuation of children changed. Initially, a child's death could be valued in terms of how much the child could have been expected to earn for the family before moving away from home. This attitude became controversial after the turn of the century, and in a famous court case a judge ruled that a child had no value in economic terms. The child was worthless -- or priceless. It soon became clear, however, that a price could be put on the emotional value of a child, and parents in later cases sued for compensation with reference to the loss of emotional values -- translated into economic terms.

A corresponding development occurred in the case of adoption. Child labour was traditionally valued in financial terms, which both determined the price and influenced the gender of the adopted child -- boys of working age were preferable to girls. The new view of childhood now opposed this valuation of children. In Sweden the debate about the auctioning of poor children and
orphans led to a prohibition. In reality the practice had ceased, but the ban reveals a new attitude. Now children had to be taken care of for their own sake, not for their usefulness.

This new view of childhood is illustrated in Astrid Lindgren's novel *Rasmus and the Vagabond*. The book is about the despair of a little orphanage boy because no one wants to adopt him. The adults who came looking for children wanted only girls with curly blond hair. Boys like Rasmus with straight brown hair were of no interest to them. If the novel had been about the state of affairs a few decades earlier, Rasmus -- the makings of a good farm-hand -- would probably have been the first to be adopted. (Compare *Anne of Green Gables* from 1908, where the old couple really wanted a boy to help on the farm.) The little boy Rasmus runs off with a vagabond - during the adventures on the road his moral core is well shown. A well to do family with a big farm and no heir wants to adopt him and they do like - or love him -- After some hesitation he hit the road again and follow the good hearted tramp. Eventually it turns out that the hobo has a wife and a very small cottage. Rasmus decide to stay with these people that has nothing but love to offer him. Better cannot the new ideals be illustrated. The difficulty was not just a literary invention. In the 1920s an official at a child welfare office in Solna complained that they had so many boys but not enough interested foster-families. The few girls they had were not enough to satisfy the demand (Weiner, Dept of Child Studies, Univ of Linköping, Sweden. forthcoming).

This change in norms did not come about on its own. We have already hinted at the development of school as a background. School was a meeting-place for different childhood worlds, and the differences became all too clear. Other factors can be mentioned. The years around the turn of the century were characterized by social conflict. The emergence and demands of the labour movement provided the background against which the debate about children was conducted. Attention was drawn to the destitution among the working class, and the bourgeoisie saw that the working class had to be integrated in society and the gulfs bridged to avoid political unrest. Nationalism was held up as a common ideal for the working class and the bourgeoisie.

At the same time the whole history of the twentieth century is characterized by increased professionalization of child care in a wide sense. This development makes itself felt in child-rearing within the family. The broader social undertakings of the school, family counselling, and parental education are expressions of this process, as are maternity centres and child care centres. In many respects, this has also meant a questioning of the family's ability to meet society's elevated demands as regards children and child-rearing. The interest in social planning and the view of childhood formed by society's child experts in the twentieth century further stress this. Child-rearing transcends the boundary zone between public and private. In Sweden childcare also in the family is definitely a matter of public interest. Some scholars would describe this in terms of the state and the experts colonizing the family in the twentieth century (Hatje 1974, Halldén 1988, Olin Lauritzen 1990, Sidebäck 1992). Regardless of how this development is described, it is
obvious that the emergence of new professional groups -- professional child care personnel associated with institutions -- has changed social relations and relations of power between parents, children, and institutions and created partly new images of childhood. In many contexts the helplessness of children and their dependence of professional was pointed out as in the following government commission on childcare.

"Psychology and child psychiatry have taught us how early disturbances can continue through many years with changed symptoms. Damage of a serious nature during the first years of life can continue as contact difficulties and aggression among pre-school children, as discipline and learning problems among schoolchildren, and as asocial behaviour and criminality among adolescents; it can also lead to disease of psychophysical type among adults. This is one of our most powerful and noticeable chain reactions. Behavioural science has shown that many personality disorders, character disturbances, and illnesses are due to unsatisfactory emotional conditions during our long, helpless childhood, when personality and character are established.

Barnstugor, Barnavårdsmannaskap, Barnolycksfall (SOU 1967:8, p. 46).

The raising of the school leaving age has helped to segregate children from the adult world and working life. One purpose of the school reforms of the 1950s was to create a school for all social classes and the same opportunities for every child. Torsten Husen argued in the 1950s that children had few contacts with adults inside and outside the family. Due to the fact of working mothers, the children meet no grown ups when they come home from a day of schoolwork (nyckelbarn).

The childrearing task of the family has decreased and the public sector (schools) have had to take on greater responsibility. However one balances the relationships between school and home in terms of childcare, it is obvious that the educational system has to take an essential part of the social and moral care of the children which the schools in certain ways are better equipped to handle than the homes and their limited contacts (social network) within the framework of the one and two-parent families." Husén 1987 pp 12-14

Within the framework of this new school, however, children from different classes continue to follow different educational paths. A single school for all children has been created, but it contains different childhood worlds and different child and youth cultures (Arnman and Jönsson 1987). What they have in common is that their dependence on adults has grown longer, and that schooling has taken on increased importance for their future.

Applying a long perspective, we see how the start of working life has been postponed and how participation in work is regarded as unsuitable for children. Ironically, this takes place at the same time as school exerts itself to bridge the gap between school and work through the work
experience programme. Children's incomes from work outside the family is replaced by pocket money distributed by family heads.

Thus, in the twentieth century the state has intervened on an ever larger scale to protect and care for children. In government enquiries into parental education, the need for kindergartens, nursery schools, and the like, we find articulated views of children and childhood, of the family as a problematic unit of socialization. State activities, with central state councils on matters like children's environment, play, and so on, also give a clear idea of the way the state perceives its role as a protector of children's rights in relationship to parents negligence and abuse. Since the 1970s is not only smacking of children by parents outlawed but children are also carefully informed about their rights. So the child is created as an individual protected by the state against malhandling in the hands of parents, teachers, commercial interest etc. As a consequence sometimes the voices are heard that children should be given the right to vote from 14 years of age, that they would be paid a proper wage for their work at school - thus making them independent, and that children should be given the right to divorce from parents they do not get along with. Children's rights should be those of the adults.

The attitude of the state is not wholly unambiguous as different agencies may present conflicting advice. Different attitudes find expression in the advice issued by the National Road Safety Office about children in traffic or at sea, the need for supervision of children and in the way other public committees advise parents about children's need for free play. All children on bicycles must wear helmets. In general, much of the institutionalization and adult supervision is based on the ideal of creating the conditions for things free play, but within the framework of the institutions.

There has been a great improvement in the material conditions of children as a result of the general development of welfare and special supportive measures. In the latter half of the twentieth century, more and more women have once again begun to work outside the home. Female participation in the labour force outside home in Sweden is among the highest in the world. This development has been made possible in part by new forms of child care. At the same time, this has meant that the significance of the home and the family in children's lives has declined in favour of other forms of care: childminders, nursery schools, and leisure centres. For the children it means that the adult behaviour -- control of emotions, keeping times, adapting to large groups, and so on -- which was previously learned when children started school, is now encountered at an earlier age. This development has other consequences. Child care and the lower stages of school recruit mainly female personnel. To a greater extent than before, and for more years, children spend their time in a largely female environment.

Yet the increasing importance of public institutions does not mean that children have lost their importance for men and women; on the contrary. This is very important. In today's Swedish
Society nearly all women have children, unlike the early nineteenth century, when many women remained unmarried and never had children - more women give birth to fewer children. Having children has become a much more required part of a woman's life-cycle than before. This makes having children a normal expectation for women and men. Deviation from the pattern is regarded as abnormal and underline the criteria for normalcy. This is most likely the reason why adoption centers can get their cost covered for bringing children of foreign extraction to Sweden. To finance the emotional child is an expensive endeavour. For homosexual couples of both sexes the struggle for the right to adopt children or for the female homosexual couple to become fertilized has become an important symbol on social acceptance and indeed on being a normal family.

But it seems as if the leisure centres and leisure associations are organizing more and more of the children's time. Leisure time in the sense of truly free time has shrunk. Organized leisure time is mostly planned and defined by adults. Municipal authorities encourage leisure pursuits with an educational content, since they keep children and young people off the streets. Parents use similar reasons to justify sports or club activities: they are seen as preparing children for the future. Leisure has not just been organized but also educationalized as a consequence. There is an educational value seen by parents to organized sports. Children must not go idle. The organizations also appeal to new and younger age groups. Very young children are now being encouraged to practise sports. The day-care are also liked for its educational value. A recent study of parents attitudes to different forms of daycare for children indicate a preference for the school-like professional institution rather than for having the children cared for by another private homelike care. The institutions it was argued increased the competence of the child and prepared them better for life as a schoolchild.

Schools has also in recent decades assumed greater responsibility for children's spare time. It is a task of the educational system to inform and channel children into suitable leisure activities. This is in part an extension of the schools role as an important institution for social policy, where medical considerations and preventive health care have been crucial for the way of defining children (Sandin 1992, Johannisson 1991). The educational system assume responsibilities for the overall cultural integration of children also during their spare time.

The institutionalization of the younger children's lives is one of the more significant features of childhood today. This is accompanied by the growth of new professional groups -- pre-school teachers, recreation leaders, paediatricians, child and family psychologists, and administrators at a state and local level who can supplement, support -- and for that matter question -- the way parents look after their children. These groups have an interest in showing that they are needed so that children will be well taken care of. Recreation leaders are experts at organizing leisure time. Child care personnel are experts in child care. All these professional groups feel a need to define their competence in relation to the way parents look after their children and in relation to other
professions. It is in their professional interest to show that they are needed. They have professional interest in questioning the competence of parents and to protect the rights of the child. As a result they are also given the task by the state to discover deviant behaviour and social maladjustment at an early stage. It is important to stop a possible criminal to develop already in the daycare center or at the maternity wards. Profylactic routines has to be developed to discover families at risk to stop the creation of children at risk.

The Swedish school system put great stress on cooperation with the parents to help with the homework and to facilitate the instructions in school in different ways and to get the childrens to accept the system of discipline in schools. In some cases parents are seen as - defined as - helping pedagogs - educators and have to adhere to the rules and methods of instruction defined by the schools. The family is defined as an educational entity in order to meet the demands of the educational system. Those who cant meet the requirements are looked upon as bad - careless, or at least thoughtless parents whith little or no interest in the welfare of their offspring. So is for example reading instruction done - according to latter days educational practice - in first grade, in close cooperation with the parents, who are obliged to fill in report cards about their reading with their children every day.

Ironically, as the childhood tend be more and more organized - litterature for children - depict - as the most popular figures little children that revolt and refrain from following the rules and regulation of adult society. If these figures I suppose Astrid Lindgrens "Pippi Longstocking" is the most well known. And as some sociologist argue the growth of institutions and early socialisation create children competent in finding loopholes in the system of integration and free space of their own. (Solberg A in Constructing)

At the same time, the late twentieth century has seen an increase in what we demand and expect of children. Parents learn from scientific reports and articles in the press that they should let their children listen to music while still in the womb, so as to develop their musical talents. Other psychological experts say that infants have a much greater competence than we think (Schaffer 1991). A new concept -- the competent infant -- puts all this development in a new scientific framework. The old models of developmental change are revised and reframed - perhaps and that is my speculations to explain the experiences of children interaction in institutional settings. A lesson to be learned from this is naturally that learning can start at a much earlier age. And it is almost a moral imperative. Do not waste your child's talents and abilities be in school or at the tennis court. In the name of the child, in the name of family pride and for the good of the export and import. So it is important to develop a child's abilities.

This coin has yet another side. Not all of us can meet the standards set. Some carry eyeglasses and are not so good at sports. Some people have handicaps that make it ever more problematic for them to cope with society the way it is constructed today. New medical science help to make it
possible for those without children to become parents but it also creates other dilemmas. Children with innate defects can be diagnosed at the foetal stage and aborted. Disabled children or children with incurable illnesses need not see the light of day – they might be spared a life of suffering but also of the joys of living. Choosing who should live and the criteria for the right to live is not easy for prospective parents, for medical doctors or for political establishments. (Tännsjö 1991a, 1991b, Valija barn 1986, Oakley 1984).

It is a difficult moral problem. Resolved or not the new scientific techniques have consequences. The demand for normality can be set and I think is set higher and be more narrowly defined with the aid of new science.

The changing role of women have had other consequences. At the start of the twentieth century the absent father was discussed solely as a problem of poor relief – how could he be made to pay maintenance to the mothers and children so that they did not become a burden on society? The children's need for their father, and for that matter the men's need for their children, received no attention. With the construction of the twentieth-century ideal of modernization and the fixed bond between a mother and her children, it is obvious that fathers who did not live along with their children were marginalized. It was only relatively late in the twentieth century that children's need for their father came to the fore in political discussions – the absent father was seen as a problem for the support child, but now a problem concerning emotions and identity. The transformation of male roles is naturally partly a consequence of women's greater participation in work outside the homes. A new male identity has to be defined in relationship to the children. The absent father has taken on new meanings and transformed from a poor relief problem to an emotional dilemma.

We have distanced ourselves from the turn of the century's romantic dream of an idyllic childhood – a long childhood free of demands, like a long summer holiday in Astrid Lindgren's Noisy Village. This ideology was shaped as a contrast to the tough reality and short childhood of working-class children. It was initially a building-block of Swedish nationalism, an element in the liberal and conservative ambition to use state and voluntary initiatives to improve people's reality. It was part of the art of social engineering, which later became an ideal of the Social Democratic welfare state. This development in turn created the professional child-carers who once again were to change the meaning of childhood. Now we have different conditions and a different childhood. The scientifically planned child, living a timetabled childhood shaped by a working father and mother and a corps of child care personnel and experts. But it is also a childhood with a quality guarantee provided by the various state agencies. The right to a childhood for each child.

This also means a change in the very meaning of childhood: being a child is not just a matter of being, of existing. Being a child is instead transformed into life's great project, for children and parents. (Halldén 1992). We thus detect the outlines of today's childhood: early maturity; sharing
the experiences of the adult world through the media; quickly learning adult behaviour and the
codes that apply in the adult world, by participating in institutions outside the home. A life of play
and spare time but no longer as innocent but as a way of conscious planning for adulthood. It is a
childhood full of demands for achievement and expectations - the interactive - competent child. If
children are to succeed, they must begin early. As the innocent, romantic view of childhood in the
nineteenth century presupposed a new kind of motherhood, so this new view of childhood also
presupposes a new kind of parent, educationally aware, responsible, planning. And slowly the
romantic childhood is eroding also as an ideal, a reality it has never been.
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The Department of Child Studies

Linköping University hosts an interdisciplinary Institute of Advanced Study known as the Institute of Tema Research. The Institute of Tema Research is divided into five separate departments, each of which administers its own graduate program, and each of which conducts interdisciplinary research on specific, though broadly defined, problem areas, or "themes" (tema in Swedish, hence the name of the Institute). The five departments which compose the Institute of Tema Research are: the Department of Child Studies (Tema B), the Department of Health and Society (Tema H), the Department of Communication Studies (Tema K), the Department of Technology and Social Change (Tema T), and the Department of Water and Environmental Studies (Tema V).

The Department of Child Studies was founded in 1988 to provide a research and learning environment geared toward the theoretical and empirical study of both children and the social and cultural discourses that define what children are and endow them with specific capacities, problems, and subjectivities. A specific target of research is the processes through which understandings of 'normal' children and a 'normal' childhood are constituted, and the roles that children and others play in reinforcing or contesting those understandings. The various research projects carried out at the department focus on understanding the ways in which children interpret their lives, how they communicate with others, and how they produce and/or understand literature, language, mass media and art. Research also documents and analyses the historical processes and patterns of socialization that structure the ways in which childhood and children can be conceived and enacted in various times, places and contexts.