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CHILDHOOD AND WELL-BEING: SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONS, EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES, AND COMMUNITY INNOVATIONS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Abstract

This study explores the interrelation between the concept of child well-being and contemporary educational practices, with a particular focus on the 21st-century socio-cultural context and the interpretation of childhood as a social construct. The author argues that child well-being is not merely a sum of physical and cognitive indicators but a complex experience shaped by culturally and socially embedded meaning systems. This recognition calls for the development of new pedagogical paradigms. The paper highlights well-being-oriented and community-based educational models as potential environments for fostering children's autonomy, emotional safety, and social relationships. Through the examples of alternative pedagogies, community spaces, and parental cooperation, it illustrates how education can become a site of social participation and a redefinition of childhood. The study also emphasizes the significance of the teacher's role from a mental health perspective, demonstrating that the educator's well-being is essential for supporting children's emotional and social development. The approach is both theoretically grounded and supported by practical examples, contributing to the development of a child-centered, empathetic, and reflective educational culture.

Introduction

This study explores the diverse interpretations of childhood and their cultural, social, and psychological contexts. My aim is to examine how images and understandings of childhood and the state of being a child have evolved, what factors have influenced them, and how various theoretical attempts have sought to define this pivotal life stage in terms of its social, psychological, and biological dimensions. How can we understand that, while humanity shares many universal traits, we still differ profoundly in our interpretations and experiences shaped by social and cultural contexts? I analyze this question from the perspective of childhood by employing the theoretical frameworks of psycho-biological development and the social construction of childhood. I highlight that children's development is not solely driven by biological determinants and external expectations, but is deeply embedded in the social and cultural contexts that shape them.

Furthermore, this study pays particular attention to the impact of increasing social individualization from the 19th century onward on childhood and educational practices. Social individualization not only transformed the role and position of the individual, but also radically reshaped expectations regarding children and the strategies used in their

upbringing. Emerging approaches to child-rearing—such as reform pedagogies and child-centered educational models—opened new horizons, placing individual well-being and communal responsibility at the center of educational efforts.

Understanding childhood as a social construction allows us to go beyond a narrow focus on individual biological development and to consider the child's lived world, the nature of education, and the role of the community in which children form their most significant values and behavioral models. Educational strategies and institutional cultures—such as well-being-oriented pedagogical models and the mental health of educators—are essential for enabling children to develop optimally and achieve emotional and social balance.

The goal of this study is to uncover these complex interconnections and to interpret the issues of childhood and education through both theoretical and practical lenses, taking into account biological, social, psychological, and pedagogical aspects—all from the perspective of children's well-being.

Defining Childhood

According to cognitive psychologist Alison Gopnik, childhood is a distinct developmental phase in human life—a prolonged period of immaturity during which *"the young human being depends on the care of older individuals." (*Gopnik, 2009, p. 15) From this perspective, the child is not a miniature adult, as it can be clearly stated that children possess biological and psychological characteristics that are fundamentally different from those of adults. In contrast, adulthood is nothing more than the outcome of childhood. *"Our brains are shaped by childhood experiences; we begin our lives as children, and our conscious memories reach back to that period."* (Gopnik, 2009, p. 19)

It is essential to recognize, on the one hand, the fundamental and exceptional importance of childhood, whose understanding ultimately serves the betterment of adult society. On the other hand, we must also acknowledge that the concept of the child and childhood, in and of itself, is only partially interpretable—primarily from a biological perspective. We can certainly make statements about the child's physical and psychological characteristics, which may be studied in isolation from many angles, but childhood cannot be understood apart from the prolonged relationship between the vulnerable child and an adult caregiver. One might say that the child and childhood are, in essence, incomprehensible without adults—without adults, there is no child. This is precisely why it is crucial to understand childhood within the complexity of both its immediate and broader social environments.

In their work The Social Construction of Reality, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann describe childhood as a period of existence outside of society, and simultaneously as the stage during which the mechanisms of society are gradually learned. This includes what they define as the dialectical process of externalization, internalization, and objectivation. However, they do not portray this acquisition of societal functioning as a one-way process. The child is not a passive recipient of its environment. Members of the new generation influence society just as much as the social patterns and schemas they acquire influence them. (Berger & Luckmann, 1967)

The Significance of Environmental Influence

Research has confirmed that the stimuli a fetus experiences in the womb can have long-lasting effects on later stages of life. Studies suggest that by the third trimester, the fetus is capable of responding to external sounds, such as the mother's voice, and these auditory experiences may influence future language development and attachment patterns (DeCasper & Spence, 1986). Furthermore, prenatal stress and the mother's emotional state have been linked to the child's later psychological sensitivity, behavior, and cognitive functioning (Van den Bergh et al., 2005; Glover, 2011). Thus, the intrauterine environment shapes the individual not only in a biological sense, but also through early experiential imprints that may form the basis of later developmental states (Schore, 2001).

In addition to the child being the result of a unique, random combination of the parents' genetic material, the influences encountered in the womb also contribute to the individuality of the child to be born. Universally, the uterus is not only the place where human form and organ systems begin to develop, but also where experiences start to exert influence even before birth. Therefore, infants are no longer regarded as *"blank slates" (*as John Locke and the empiricists imagined in the 18th century); they are not solely shaped by experience, but come into the world with innate schemas, processing abilities, and expectations about how the world works. Beneath surface-level similarities, individual differences emerge from the very beginning due to both biological and environmental factors. *"The similarities and differences among people ultimately arise from the interaction between environmental and genetic factors."* (Cole & Cole, 2023, p. 74)

For children to develop their unique abilities within a supportive environment that meets their needs and individual characteristics, the surrounding socialization context—and its embeddedness in the broader society—plays a critical role. Equally important is how this environment responds to the child's emerging needs. Therefore, biological and environmental influences must be considered together when analyzing child development, and contemporary theories increasingly integrate both perspectives.

A child cannot choose their primary environment of socialization. For the child, this environment does not represent one of many possible worlds—it represents the world. Identification with close family members and the reality they embody is inevitable. The family environment predisposes children to inequality, both biologically and in terms of their perception of reality. For the child, the image of society is doubly filtered: first through the immediate family, and second, more specifically, through the primary caregivers. Thus, a child born into a lower social class inherits a working-class perspective of the world—mediated through the lens of their parents' particular experiences. As a result, not only do lived realities differ across social strata, but even within the same stratum, children begin the process of secondary socialization with vastly different attitudes and perceptions of reality, shaped by uniquely filtered and transmitted experiences. (Berger & Luckmann, 1967)

Childhood as a Universal Developmental Stage

The interpretation of childhood as a universal developmental stage appears in numerous theories describing the stages and characteristics of human development. Every person who has ever lived has passed through these stages, and it is likely safe to assume that future generations will as well. These theories generally trace individual development through a sequence of predetermined steps that tend to appear in the same order and manner in every human life, regardless of cultural or societal context. The process of physical and psychological development is always gradual and cumulative. Classical developmental psychology theories—such as Jean Piaget's model of cognitive development and Erik H. Erikson's theory of psychosocial development—agree that human development unfolds in stages that appear in a similar order across all individuals, regardless of cultural setting (Piaget, 1952; Erikson, 1963). These models are built on the idea that human development consists of incremental steps, with the abilities acquired in each stage forming the basis for the next (Flavell, 1963). Although contemporary cultural psychology has added nuance to this universalist view, the existence of basic developmental schemas remains widely accepted (Case, 1992).

The first attempts to observe children with scientific rigor began in the late 19th century. From the early 20th century onward, the emergence of "*child study*" as a field marked a growing interest in understanding children through both their biological and psychosocial developmental milestones. These early, fragmented areas of research aimed to offer a general, depersonalized description of childhood based on observation, measurement, and testing. At the dawn of child study, for example, Édouard Claparède (1905) approached child development from the perspective of general human development. Jean Piaget is still considered one of the founding figures of modern child psychology. His observations on psychosocial development in children have become foundational to modern pedagogical movements.

However, recent research emphasizes that childhood and human development are far more diverse and culturally influenced than most early universalist child study models suggest. Representatives of cultural psychology, such as Barbara Rogoff and Lev Vygotsky, argue that child development cannot be understood independently of the cultural practices, norms, and interactional patterns within which it unfolds (Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978). Rogoff, in particular, stresses the concept of "*participatory learning*", whereby the child acquires knowledge and skills as an active member of the cultural community, embedded in everyday life. At the same time, the original goals of child study—with its detailed examination of various segments of childhood—laid the groundwork for a systematic approach that allows for the most sensitive and complex understanding of childhood (Deák, 1998).

Childhood as a Social Construction

Understanding childhood as a social construction means recognizing that the concept and meaning of childhood are shaped by society and vary across time and place. At first glance, this perspective appears to contrast sharply with the view of childhood as a universal developmental stage, which portrays children and adults as individuals situated on distinct biological and psychological levels of development. It is commonly accepted that children must reach specific developmental milestones at certain stages of maturity. When such milestones are achieved, one can be confident that the child is progressing within healthy developmental parameters, without the need to further investigate possible causes of delay. Clearly, one cannot expect the same behavioral or cognitive efforts from a one-year-old as from a three-year-old (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). Biological differences—such as age and gender—strongly influence the development of social norms and expectations. However, there is a growing societal effort to move beyond these biologically grounded social conventions.

It is also crucial to consider that historical, sociocultural, and even economic factors shape the definition of childhood. From the perspective of social constructionism, childhood is not the outcome of a predetermined biological or psychological process but rather a socially and culturally defined state. This means that the meaning of childhood and the expectations surrounding children may differ across societies and historical periods. What is considered part of childhood in one social or cultural context may, according to another context's standards, already be regarded as part of adulthood.

This approach allows for a deeper understanding of the diversity and complexity of childhood, freeing it from narrow, biologically determined interpretations. Viewing childhood as a social construction highlights the existence of multiple conceptions of childhood, each potentially reflecting divergent social values. It also draws attention to expressions of childhood that deviate from Western-centric norms.

The image of the well-behaved, morally inclined schoolchild of the 19th century (Pukánszky, 2015), or the "*consumer child*" of the 20th century (Sulyokné, 2002), are examples of social constructions shaped by the societal, economic, and cultural conditions of their respective eras. In the digital age, new concepts such as "*online childhood*" or the "*digital child*" have emerged, driven by the proliferation of the internet and digital technologies (Golnhofer, 2022).

The Concept and Meaning of Child Well-being in Social Discourses

Interpreting childhood as a social construction also implies that notions of child well-being cannot be regarded as universal norms independent of time and culture. Child well-being is not merely a measurable psychological or medical condition; it is a category shaped at the intersection of societal values, educational ideals, and cultural expectations—one whose meaning is constantly evolving (James & Prout, 1997; Ben-Arieh, 2008). The dimensions that define well-being—such as autonomy, safety, learning, or emotional support—are interpreted differently across societies and change over time

in response to prevailing understandings of childhood and social policy directions (Fattore, Mason, & Watson, 2009). As such, the concept of well-being is itself a construct that reflects the societal representations of how children are perceived and treated.

In contemporary Western societies, the emphasis on child well-being is increasingly prominent in education, policy-making, and community-level initiatives. Such efforts are often underpinned by a holistic approach that focuses not only on children's physical health or academic achievement but also on psychological stability, emotional security, social relationships, and cultural identity. At the same time, it is observable that the notion of well-being is sometimes linked to economic productivity, future employability, or institutional expectations, highlighting once again that the concept of "*well-being*" is not free from ideological influence.

From a social constructionist perspective, child well-being is not merely about whether a child is "*doing well*" in a general sense, but also about the value systems that define what a "good life" means for a child. What image of childhood do we invoke when we claim a child is "*well*"? Do we associate well-being with quiet, rule-following behavior, academic progress, or the freedom for creative self-expression?

It is also worth examining how concepts of well-being differ across cultures and social strata. In some communities, the child's integration into social relationships and their sense of communal responsibility are seen as primary indicators of well-being, while in others, individual autonomy, self-assertion, and personal achievement are more highly valued. This diversity suggests that child well-being cannot be fully described through universal psychological or pedagogical indicators—its interpretation is inseparable from the social context in which the child grows up.

Such an understanding of child well-being offers new perspectives for examining educational practices. The key question is not only what tools can be used to promote well-being, but also what societal goals are served by the strategies employed in its name. Childhood—and with it, the concept of well-being—must be seen not only as a life stage that needs protection but also as a symbolic and institutionalized space in which society expresses its self-image and its vision for the future.

The Effects of Social Individualization on Childhood

When examining the historical transformations and functional shifts of the family institution, attention is often directed toward how children were prepared for specific familial, gender, and societal roles within a given cultural context at a particular time. Historical family models not only reveal typologies of childhood representations but also shed light on the types of influences children encountered within informal educational settings. In The History of Pedagogical Problems (Németh & Pukánszky, 2004), the chapter on the history of the European family and childhood provides a broad overview of the many factors shaping family-based childrearing practices, encompassing not only parental influence but the socializing role of the entire household.

From this historical overview, a clear trend emerges: throughout history, the family has gradually become more nuclear and isolated, a development that parallels broader processes of social individualization. Consequently, the child has increasingly had to

navigate both immediate and extended social contexts alone. What we now understand as "*childhood*" emerged alongside the rise of the bourgeois family. The process of bourgeoisification and individualization gave birth to a new maternal role and attitude toward childrearing. This transformation was supported by the era's child study movement, which laid the foundations for early childhood education principles—many of which remain influential and are still applied in contemporary families.

This new maternal role assumed exclusive responsibility for caregiving and early education. Mothers began to see childrearing as their primary duty, guided by contemporary scientific insights and emerging pedagogical knowledge. Drawing on the growing body of educational theory—often coinciding with the establishment of kindergartens, primary schools, and boarding institutions—mothers prepared their children for social integration (Danis & Kalmár, 2011).

"*One of the most significant anthropological developments of modernization was the increasing 'distance' between childhood and adulthood and the emergence of a distinct children's world.*" The reform pedagogical movements that emerged as a response to social individualization and the growing emphasis on the child as an individual provided an answer to these transformations within secondary socialization. These reform movements, which sought to renew pedagogical thinking and educational practice with a child-centered focus, began in the last decades of the 19th century and continued into the mid-20th century (Németh, 2002, p. 21).

Interestingly, the reform pedagogical approach has also come to influence the practices of primary socialization in response to the educational challenges of the 21st century. Within this process, the impact of the life reform movements can also be observed. We will return to this phenomenon later. First, however, it is necessary to examine the image of childhood in 21st-century Western culture.

The Effects of Social Individualization on Childhood

When examining the historical changes in the institution of the family and the transformation of its functions, the primary focus often falls on the child's role as a central figure in early socialization. This perspective helps illuminate how, at a given time and within a specific cultural context, children were prepared for certain familial, gender, and societal roles. Historical models of family not only reveal typologies of childhood images but also indicate the kinds of influences children were exposed to within informal educational settings. In The History of Pedagogical Problems (Németh & Pukánszky, 2004), the section on European family and childhood history explores the diverse factors of familial educational influences, including not only parental but also broader household socialization impacts.

The historical overview reveals a clear tendency: as the process of social individualization advances, the family becomes increasingly narrow and isolated, and children are expected to navigate both their immediate and broader socialization environments more independently. The modern understanding of childhood emerged alongside the development of the bourgeois family. The processes of bourgeoisification and individualization fostered a new maternal role and a novel attitude toward child-

rearing. This was reinforced by the era's burgeoning child-study movements, which laid the foundation for early childhood education theories. Many of these views continue to exert significant influence and are still actively applied in numerous families today.

This new maternal role entailed exclusive responsibility for the care and upbringing of the child, with early childhood education regarded as the mother's personal duty. Attitudes and methods related to child-rearing were shaped in accordance with contemporary scientific findings, and mothers used emerging pedagogical knowledge— or acted in its shadow (during the emergence of early kindergartens, primary schools, and boarding schools)—to prepare their children for integration into social life (Danis & Kalmár, 2011).

"*One of the most important anthropological developments of modernization was the increasing 'distance' between childhood and adulthood, and the separation of the world of children*." The emergence of reform pedagogical movements within the context of secondary socialization provided a response to the rising prominence of the child as an individual and to the dynamics of social individualization. These reform efforts aimed "*to renew pedagogical thought and educational practice in a child-centered way and emerged from the last decades of the 19th century through to the mid-20th century*" (Németh, 2002, p. 21).

An interesting trend is that, in response to the child-rearing challenges of the 21st century, reform pedagogical principles are increasingly influencing the educational practices of primary socialization environments as well. Within this process, the impact of life-reform movements can also be observed. This phenomenon will be discussed in detail later, but first, it is important to review the 21st-century Western cultural conception of childhood.

The Image of Childhood in 21st-Century Western Culture

Alongside the fact that, since the 20th century, a significant improvement has taken place in the situation of children in modern, economically developed countries (e.g., children's rights, the extension of compulsory education, the expansion of higher education), by the end of the 20th century, attention was drawn to the problem of the "*hurried child*" in the context of the American middle class (Elkind, 2016). The concern over the disappearance of childhood and its merging with adulthood emerged as a result of children's increasing exposure to mass media, which brought to light the growing societal expectations placed upon them (Golhofner, 2022). The emergence of new media introduced an unprecedented system of expectations for modern societies. Adults also face enormous pressure—tasks that previously took weeks, months, or even years to complete are now expected to be done in far shorter periods. The requirement to multitask and the exponential increase in screen time have influenced how adult society perceives children and what is expected of them. In this context, it is also important to highlight that children are becoming increasingly autonomous in their cultural acquisition processes, which, in extreme cases, can become uncontrolled.

The topic of children's presence in online spaces is now repeated to the point of exhaustion, yet still often not taken seriously. While in the early 2000s in Hungary the use

of digital devices by young people was still relatively balanced—likely due to the technological limitations and restricted accessibility—by the 2010s, data revealed a notably high rate of internet addiction and problematic internet use among young people (Galán, 2014).

The 21st-century image of the child differs significantly from those of earlier centuries, as societal (e.g., individualization), technological, and cultural transformations have reshaped the concept of childhood. Children of the 21st century are "*digital natives*" (Prensky, 2001). Today's children grow up under the direct influence of the internet and digital technologies, which affect their communication, learning habits, and modes of entertainment.

Children increasingly appear as "*mini-consumers*," actively participating in consumer society, where consumption and branding play a major role in shaping their identity. This impact has become so significant that, due to the changing media environment, regulating marketing activities aimed at children became necessary in both nature and extent.

Children today may appear to gain a certain degree of independence at an early age, engaging in activities outside the reach of adult control (largely due to the online space), but this independence is often only superficial. Their decisions and opportunities are constrained by adults, societal structures, and the lack of economic independence.

Children's culture refers to the unique interests and cultural practices of children, but it is most often defined by content and products created by adults. In today's digital world, value transmission increasingly slips out of the hands of parents. The rise of influencers has introduced an unexpected shift in children's areas of interest. Previously predictable childhood activities and interests have been supplemented by domains that are foreign to many parents—domains where children explore and engage under the guidance of outsider "*experts*", typically influencers perceived as adult role models.

Children frequently face pressure to reach certain developmental milestones more quickly, which can cause stress and anxiety. This issue may affect the entirety of childhood, beginning with the acceleration of particularly sensitive early stages like infancy and toddlerhood, which can be especially harmful.

As a result of all this, the role of parents has changed, particularly in terms of attitudes toward child-rearing. There has been a strong shift away from the authoritarian parenting of earlier generations (sometimes swinging to its complete antithesis), and a growing effort to "*slow down*" childhood once again. This new approach to parenting centers around responsiveness and is often paired with the adaptation of reform pedagogical perspectives into family education practices (Holloway & Pimlott-Wilson, 2014). Responsive parenting based on secure attachment has become the flagship of child-centered informal education (Sears & Sears, 2001; Bowlby, 1988). Reform pedagogical approaches that emerged in formal educational settings are increasingly seeping into and shaping the educational practices within the primary socialization contexts of the Western middle class.

Reform pedagogies such as Waldorf, Montessori, and Freinet emerged around the turn of the 19th to 20th century and continue to influence educational practices. Their core principles include child- and personality-centered approaches, the use of alternative

(often creativity- and discovery-based) learning methods, and the support of children's freedom, autonomy, and dignity within a framework of democratic values. According to Jürgen Oelkers' (1989) critical perspective, the greatest achievement of these reform pedagogies is the formulation of a new image of the child. In this view, "*the essence of childhood is self-directed activity; child development follows a natural, autonomous teleology, whose optimal conditions are ensured through negative education, which protects the process from obstructive external factors*" (Németh, 2002: 25).

Contemporary family education in the 21st century complements this negative education with efforts to minimize children's exposure to digital devices. Where exposure is unavoidable, it seeks to filter content according to age-appropriate guidelines. From the Oelkersian perspective, such exposure can be considered an external factor that hinders natural developmental processes. The dominant child-rearing strategy within families today is built on responsiveness and the resulting secure attachment. Based on these foundations, this societal context adapts the child-centered vision and philosophy of reform pedagogies, complementing them with the practice of organic education. This is particularly influenced by the Scandinavian (Swedish, Finnish, Danish) branches of life reform movements, which integrate a close-to-nature orientation alongside the pedagogical principles mentioned above.

The Changing Image of Childhood in the Light of Cultural Practices

The image of the child is not merely a theoretical construct but a form of social engagement that takes shape within everyday cultural practices, institutional norms, and media representations. As societies transform, so too does their relationship with children—along with the child's role, legal status, and the image we construct of them as individuals or social beings.

In contemporary Western cultures, representations of children reflect both idealizing and functionalist tendencies. On the one hand, the child appears as a "*pure soul*", a symbol of naturalness and sincerity—an embodiment of values that the adult world nostalgically longs for. On the other hand, the child is often framed as the bearer of future societal hopes, whose development and success serve as guarantees for the reproduction of national economies, welfare systems, or even cultural identities. This duality—the idealized child and the child seen as an investment—is clearly visible in various cultural products, whether in educational campaigns, children's literature, television programs, or discourses around child-friendly urban planning.

Children's literature and visual culture play a particularly important role in shaping the image of childhood. Whereas children's books were once primarily didactic, today an increasing number of works explore the child's subjective world, social dilemmas, and emotional complexity. This trend not only transforms the content directed at children but also influences adults' perceptions of childhood. The child's voice, as presented in literature or contemporary theater—especially through themes such as social exclusion, domestic violence, or identity exploration—elicits new, reflexive relationships toward children.

Another significant field of cultural practice is museum education and the growing presence of community arts, where children are no longer passive recipients but active participants, creators, and opinion-shapers. Such initiatives implicitly emphasize the child as a value-bearing, thinking being and help ensure that children's voices are heard not only as subjects of pedagogy but also as active contributors in society.

At the same time, we must not ignore the fact that cultural practices can also contribute to the uniformization of the child image—particularly when dominant media content or educational policy discourses promote homogenized Western or highly nationalistic, middle-class norms. Representations of children circulating on digital platforms often portray the idealized, high-achieving, self-regulating, and aestheticized child as the desirable model, building on both neoliberal and individualist values. In this context, the image of the "*good child*" frequently becomes a projection of parental or institutional expectations, sidelining the unique needs and voices of children from different socialization backgrounds.

In light of all this, it can be said that cultural practices do more than reflect childhood—they actively shape it. The changing image of the child is not an isolated phenomenon but a sensitive indicator of broader societal transformations. It reflects the current state of adult society's self-reflection and, either directly or indirectly, influences how we understand child well-being.

The Teacher as a Well-being Agent: Mental Health and Institutional Culture

Beyond the development of children's knowledge and skills, the role of the teacher is also fundamental in promoting their mental well-being. In both the theoretical and practical approaches to child well-being, the teacher's own well-being and mindset are often overlooked—despite the fact that these two factors directly influence children's emotional, social, and intellectual development.

As a mental health agent, the teacher creates an environment in which children can feel safe, accepted, and motivated. The teacher is not only an educator but also an emotional support figure, whose behavior, attitude, and mental state deeply influence students' well-being and development. The teacher's personal well-being and psychological balance therefore indirectly determine the extent to which children feel valued, how they perceive their own abilities, and how motivated they are to engage in learning.

The teacher's mental health is closely linked to their working environment, which is shaped by the institutional culture. A well-functioning institutional culture—one that supports continuous professional development, collegial relationships, and a healthy work environment—is essential for ensuring teacher well-being. Workplace conditions that provide opportunities for professional support, training in stress management techniques, and collaboration all contribute to enabling teachers to perform effectively not only as sources of knowledge, but also as emotional and mental support systems.

Teachers' mental well-being is intrinsically connected to children's psychological and emotional development. A teacher who is equipped with effective stress management tools and inner balance to handle daily challenges positively influences students'

emotional safety and overall school experience. Conversely, a burned-out, overburdened teacher without appropriate mental health resources not only jeopardizes their own work but also risks undermining child well-being. Students can sense the stress and tension of their teachers, which can impact classroom atmosphere, learning outcomes, and their school experiences as a whole.

The teacher's perspective and pedagogical attitude are also crucial for child well-being. If a teacher adopts an approach that emphasizes children's individual needs, emotional safety, and social connections, it not only improves the quality of learning but also enhances children's psychological stability and overall well-being. Children learn not only the subject matter but also develop their social, emotional, and mental skills through their daily interactions with teachers, who serve as role models.

Therefore, teachers' mental health and mindset fundamentally shape the pedagogical environment in which children grow and learn. Emotional support, empathy, and a positive attitude not only improve academic outcomes but also contribute to the healthy personality development of children (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2016). Supporting teacher well-being not only enhances their own quality of life but also has a powerful indirect effect on children's lives, helping them to function mentally and emotionally in society (Roffey, 2012). Interest in this topic has grown significantly in recent years; in Hungarian literature, for instance, Zsuzsa F. Várkonyi (e.g., Tanulom magam [Learning Myself], Sors és sérülés [Fate and Wounds]) explores the close connections between personal self-awareness, inner work, and pedagogical relationships (F. Várkonyi, 2013; 2017).

Summary

As outlined in this summary, contemporary challenges in child-rearing have prompted responses similar to those of the 19th and 20th centuries. While those earlier periods saw the rise of reform pedagogy within institutional education and life reform movements in response to industrial social changes, the 21st century has adapted elements of these approaches to the family setting—particularly those that aim to preserve the time and quality of childhood. In parallel, the concept of child well-being has also taken on new meaning: it is no longer understood solely in terms of physical health or academic achievement, but also encompasses emotional security, social relationships, self-expression, and the right of the child to be an active participant in their own educational environment. Today's well-being-oriented educational efforts therefore not only prioritize the child's happiness and psychological well-being, but also foster the development of emotionally intelligent, compassionate, and socially aware adults.

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