Abstract: Developments in pedagogical regimes are described from about 1890 until today. Around 1900, an omnipresent, austere supervision and checking of authoritarian rules prevailed in strict hierarchical relations, and trust in internalised codes was small. This strict pedagogical regime was, of course, closely connected with a strict regime in the families of these children and to the strict regime of the state. During the period of informalization, from 1890s onward, school regimes have loosened up, the balance of power between children and parents, and between pupils and teachers, has become less uneven, while the balance between hierarchical external social controls and internal self-controls has shifted towards the latter, self-controls.

Within the relationships in which they grow up, children are confronted with demands for self-regulation according to the regimes of manners and emotions prevalent in their particular era, group and society. They develop types of self-regulation that are more or less attuned to these regimes. In the twentieth century, these regimes have changed significantly and in a particular direction. Children increasingly had to adapt to codes of behaviour and feeling that allowed a wider range of socially accepted alternatives in behaviour and feeling, constituting a process of informalization. The turn of the twentieth century, the Roaring Twenties, and the Expressive Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s were periods with strong spurts of informalization: manners becoming increasingly relaxed, subtle, and varied, while displays of superiority and inferiority were increasingly tabooed. They were also periods in which power differences rapidly decreased; accordingly, manners expressing large differences in power and respect were banned and even came to provoke moral indignation. The twentieth-century informalization process has been triggered by a spurt of collective emancipation of lower classes in society and by an emancipation of ‘lower’ impulses and emotions in personality. As lower classes came to be represented in the centres of power of Western societies, lower affects came to be represented in the centre of personality – consciousness, whereas before they had been repressed from consciousness by a more or less automatically functioning conscience.

As children grow up and become less dependent upon their parents, the balance of power between them changes towards lessening inequalities. It is a generally accepted fact that such a shift has also occurred over the generations: throughout the twentieth century, parents increasingly took more of their children’s needs and longings into account, a change in the direction of greater intimacy and warmth as well as greater circumspection and sensitivity. Relationships between the generations (parents, teachers, and children) became more equal, more open and more intimate, and a warmer and more cautious control on the development of children’s self-control was stimulated by a more permissive and trusting attitude towards their capacity for self-steering or self-regulation. By appealing more powerfully and compelling to the value of establishing more loving,
intimate, reflexive, and long-lasting relationships, parents have equipped their children with a sharper sensitivity for relativity and the intricacies of relationships. It was a shift from an emphasis on obedience to institutional and adult authority, sanctioned by corporal punishment, to an emphasis on qualities linked to the self-regulation of children, sanctioned by reasoning and differentiations in warmth and permissiveness (Alwin, 1988).

This growing emphasis on capacities for self-steering or self-control signifies a change in the balance of controls from an emphasis on external social controls to an emphasis on self-controls. As the level of mutually expected self-control was rising, the representatives of external social control such as chaperones or dancing masters have become internalized. People increasingly became obliged to navigate under their own steam, that is, they came to rely on their own and each other’s self-control. The decline of general and formal social rules and an increase of behavioural and emotional alternatives, signalling the informalization of manners, not only allowed for but also demanded a more flexible and reflexive self-regulation. They triggered the rise of more flexible guidelines for deciding which option to choose. These guidelines were to be used in accordance with one’s feelings and with an appreciation of the relationship and the situation: from an emphasis on fixed social formalities or external codes and regulations to an emphasis on the individual and relational fine-tuning according to internal and relational data, among which shared emotions are crucial.

The regimes of parents and schools overlap; children who do not live up to the expectations of their school regime also disappoint their parents. Nowadays, both teachers and parents emphasize the wish that children will become adults with a gratifying job and a happy (love) life, and they feel their pedagogical regime is directed at helping children to develop the needed discipline and efficiency. Thus, they express one side of a coin, with on its other side the wish that children will not experience social and psychic degradation. The latter motive however, they clearly hesitate expressing directly. Asked to motivate their decision to send a child to an expensive private school, Dutch parents concentrated on their children’s lack of self-discipline and did not mention fear of status decline and other status motives (Regt and Weenink 2003). Thus, they avoided to express their fear of their children’s loss of power, status, prestige, and value.

This avoidance is a recent expression of a long-term trend. In the twentieth-century, status motives came increasingly to be hidden, repressed, and denied. In his book on *The Civilizing Process*, Norbert Elias mentions the fear to lose social and personal value as one of the major motives for the transformation of social controls into the self-controls of a more or less automatically functioning conscience, into self-controls functioning as a ‘second-nature’ (Elias, 2000: 395–6). Once these external social constraints have been transformed into habitual, second-nature self-restraints, the social constraints from which they originated and that keep backing them up are no longer experienced or perceived as such, and the same goes for the status motives that were a most powerful driving force in the transformation. This means that from then onwards, the taboo on displaying status-related feelings of superiority and inferiority is internalized and no longer experienced as an external social constraint, but as an internal ‘natural’ impulse, while it has in fact become a counter-impulse emanating from conscience.

Many twentieth-century changes in pedagogical regimes can be illustrated by a 1998 newspaper report on an Islamic primary school in Amsterdam. The school was reported never to allow teachers to leave their pupils alone in the classroom. Children were not allowed to wear short sleeves or trousers, nor tight clothing. Officially, corporal punishment was banned, but what about ‘having to stand for an hour in a corner on one leg’, a teacher wondered. According to another teacher, school management had no faith whatsoever in discussion or consultation, ‘only in authority and intimidation’ (*NRC*
Handelsblad 5 December 1998). Here, an omnipresent, austere supervision and checking of authoritarian rules prevailed in strict hierarchical relations. Bodies should be covered, their presence not even suggested. Trust in internalised codes was small. This strict pedagogical regime was, of course, closely connected with a strict regime in the families of these children and to the strict regime of the state in the country of their (parents’) origin.

Regimes of comparable hierarchical strictness used to prevail all over the Netherlands and over all the other countries of the industrialized West. Particularly from the second part of the nineteenth century onwards, Western regimes of state, family, and personality gained in strength, resulting in (among other things) sizeable police forces, the legally defined power of heads of family, and in the formation of an authoritarian personality. This type of personality is characterised by an ‘inner compass’ of reflexes and rather fixed habits which function as a ‘second nature’. A vigorous and unquestioned state monopoly of power over the means of violence and taxation thus ran in tandem with an equally inviolable paternal authority within families and an equally unquestioned reign of the personality over individual impulses and emotions. The pedagogical regime was ‘rigorous but fair’, and it did not excel in producing confiding relations and intimacy. Children growing up in such authoritarian circumstances usually developed an authoritarian conscience, with a strong penchant for order and regularity, cleanliness, and neatness. Righteous life started, so to speak, with a straight parting of the hair. Negligence in these matters indicated an inclination towards dissoluteness; without rigorous control, ‘first nature’ might run wild.

Throughout the twentieth century, this type of authoritarian pedagogical regime was contested, and young people increasingly succeeded in escaping from under the wings of parents and their representatives. A most radical spurt in this direction occurred in the 1960s and 1970s. In that era, relations between family members rapidly lost rigidity and hierarchical aloofness as they became attuned to a more flexible and varied social traffic. Unthinking or imposed compliance was replaced by ‘made-to-measure’ pedagogical forms. Couples had fewer children, and those they had were for the most part consciously desired. Affective investments by parents in their children mounted, thus bringing family ties to higher levels of warmth, mutual trust, intimacy, and intensity. Social experiments to allow children a wider scope for living in accordance with the emotional and libidinal urges of the moment – treating them more as equal human beings – strongly accelerated in the 1960s and 1970s. In fact, this trend in the relations between parents and children can be discerned from the last decades of the nineteenth century onwards. During this trend, the extremes of what counted as authoritarian standards of upbringing and what as negligence or laissez-faire diminished. Simultaneously, on the basis of mounting affective investments, increasingly large groups tended towards a pattern that came to be known as a ‘love-oriented discipline’ (Bronfenbrenner 1958; Klein 1965). Commanding children and presenting them with established decisions, came to be seen as plainly damaging. Anxious acceptance of authority – ‘you obey because I tell you’ – came to be perceived as a symptom of blind submissiveness, estranging children from their own feelings. In a more equal and affective regime, parents (and others) appealed more strongly and compellingly to affection and reflection, thus teaching their children to direct themselves more according to their own conscience and reflections than to simply obey the external constraints of adults. The new ideal in raising children is aptly summarised in the dialogue:

‘Even when we were angry, we never punished you.’
‘Your anger was punishment enough’ (Goudsblom, 1998: 84).
These changes in family regime ran in tandem with changes in the regimes of state and personality. In each of these three regimes, relations came to be more equal, open, flowing, and flexible. On the level of the personality, a ‘second-nature’ type of authoritarian conscience made way for a conscience attuned to more equal, flowing, and flexible relations. This attuning did not automatically engender a weaker conscience, rather the opposite – just as parents who never punish, whose anger is punishment enough, do not automatically lose any power over their children in comparison to more authoritarian parents.

At the same time, the conglomeration of political, administrative, and commercial authorities opened up as contacts became more flowing, just as the relations between them and their supporters or subordinates became less hierarchical and more open. This development would have been impossible without a far-reaching integration of all social classes, including the lower classes, into society. Although this integration process stalled from the end of the 1990s onwards by a wave of xenophobia, particularly in smaller European countries like Austria, the Netherlands, and Belgium, these more equal and open relations in the political and economical domains were extended to the domains of education, upbringing and personality, allowing for more open and less formal regimes.

In growing up, children are at first mainly preoccupied with their own feelings and impulses. Only gradually do they internalise the commandments and prohibitions of parents and others upon whom they are dependent. In this process, their fear of being punished is transformed into a fear of being ashamed, a shame-fear that, after transgressions, may manifest itself as a feeling of guilt. The shame-fear of a tender conscience manifests itself in rather authoritarian ways: for a while, children live up to the newly learned rules in a rather rigid way. Only after having gained fuller command of these rules, at a time when they are also better able to take the feelings and experiences of others into account, do they learn to apply the rules in more flexible ways. In the relatively complex societies of the modern West, they learn to do this from the age of 11 or 12 onwards.

A similar sequence, ‘learning to control’ precedes the possibility of ‘controlled decontrolling’, can be discerned in the broad social and psychic processes of recent decades. The transformation from rather formal to more informal and flexible manners depended upon a relatively high level of integration of all social classes in welfare states. On this basis, in the 1950s and 1960s, the level of mutually expected self-restraints rose to a point allowing for more open and flowing family and personality regimes – a controlled decontrolling. The dominant mode of self-regulation apparently reached a strength and scope that enables people to admit ‘dangerous’ emotions and impulses to themselves and each other, without provoking the fear of losing control and of having to give in to them. Only when the level of Mutually Expected Self-Restraints has risen to this level, do experiments in loosening restraints stand a chance of becoming successful. Otherwise, the ‘decontrolling of emotional controls’ is not sufficiently ‘controlled’ and is thus too risky.

As most social codes became more flexible and differentiated, manners and emotion regulation became the more decisive criteria for status or reputation. People have pressured each other to become more conscious of social and individual options and restrictions, and this has put social and self-knowledge in greater demand. The same goes for the ability to empathise and to take on others’ roles. Respect and respectable behaviour have become more dependent upon self-regulation, particularly on the functioning of internal social controls. Thus, the pressures of social controls on each individual have intensified, which means that the fulcrum of the balance between external and internal social controls has moved in the direction of the latter. In this sense, self-controls have increasingly become both the focus and the locus of external social controls.
In a lecture in 1970, Norbert Elias used the expression ‘controlled decontrolling of emotional controls’. Various experiments in allowing children a wider scope for living in accordance with their emotional and libidinal urges of the moment tended towards such ‘controlled decontrolling’. They were part of a wider process in which people were becoming aware of deeper feelings and learning to surmount hidden fears, a prerequisite for an ‘emancipation of emotions’ – a representation of these deeper layers at the centre of personality or consciousness. They increasingly became conscious of emotions that, as a rule in the past, had been either ignored or concealed for fear of parents and others on whom they were dependent.

As a rule, most parents who took part in the social experiments of raising children in an affectively warmer parental regime that was more tolerant of ‘animalic’ or primary urges and impulses had themselves been raised in more rigid and severe regimes. To a greater extent, they had learned to control their own primary urges and impulses more strongly via the automatically functioning counter-impulses of a rather rigorous conscience. This second-nature type of personality had resulted from shaming processes which fuel the shame-fear of being unable to constrain affects in accordance with the prevailing regimes of manners and emotions. This shame-fear concerns social degradation, loss of respect and self-respect, with total social expulsion and loss of all meaning in life as an extreme. To avoid these sanctions, most people in the generation of these parents developed the habit of avoiding certain parts of themselves. They developed counter-impulses that discharged the potentially connected affects and at the same time kept them from becoming conscious. Thus, the fear of others was changed into the fear of parts of themselves. What was kept in the dungeons of their inner life might break loose, so they also feared being tempted. In this light, participation in these social experiments, as is the case in informalizing processes in general, involved voyages of discovery into one’s own closer or more distant past, in pursuit of the reasons why and the ways in which impulses and emotions were led into the paths they took.

It was mainly an intermediate generation that took part in experiments of this kind. For their children, the fruits of these expeditions were already perceived as ‘normal procedure’, part of the regime of manners and emotions they were raised in. But their parents had had to face and learn to control the dangers they experienced in stirring up such feelings as violent rage, anxiety, lust, greed or aggrandisement. In doing so, they feared bewilderment, loss of control, and crossing the borders of propriety. It is the ‘fear of falling’ (Wouters 2004: 79, 152–55; 2007: 48-9). This fear and the danger of losing self-control is also demonstrated in proverbs like ‘don’t trust the cat to guard the cream’, but also by people suffering from fear of heights: their fear of falling can become so intolerable that they jump, just to escape from this fear. In the process of facing and overcoming these fears and dangers, subsequent generations have brought deeper and more

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1 Elias gave these lectures at the University of Amsterdam where I was a student. He and Eric Dunning had used similar expressions in their contribution to a conference in July 1969 in Magglingen (Switzerland), published as ‘Leisure in the Spare Time Spectrum’ in 1971. Their use was restricted to sport and leisure, and was an account – in terms of social and psychic processes, very Eliasian – of what others at the time usually called the ‘safety-valve’ function of sport and leisure: ‘De-routinisation goes farthest in leisure activities but even there it is a question of balance. De-routisation and the de-controlling of restraints on emotions are closely related to each other. A decisive characteristic of leisure activities, not only in highly ordered industrial societies but, as far as one can see, in all other types of societies, too, is that the de-controlling of restraints on emotions is itself socially and personally controlled’ (Elias and Dunning 1971: 31). In my unpublished Masters thesis I took Elias’s expression ‘the controlled decontrolling of emotional controls’ from its more limited context and used it to indicate the overall direction of social and psychic processes in the twentieth century. The first publication in which I used it in this sense was in a Dutch sociology journal (Wouters 1976), and a year later in an English publication (Wouters 1977).
concealed emotions and motives up to the surface of consciousness, along with the fears linked to them, and learned to control these feelings in such a way that they became increasingly capable of expressing them both verbally and by acting upon them at the appropriate place and time, depending on such variables as mood, situation and relation. On the whole, therefore, the process of informalization has been accompanied by increasing levels of social and psychic knowledge: people have come to know more about themselves and others, about their relationships and interdependencies, and about the variety of manners and life styles.

All this helps one to understand changes in the practices and ideals in raising and educating children. In the old and new middle classes, parents who themselves had learned to behave in a rather reserved, inhibited and indirect manner and to conceal their ‘innermost feelings behind a restrained observance of conventional forms’ (Goudsblom 1968: 30), became charmed and fascinated by the more outright, spontaneous, straightforward and direct behaviour of children. This attractiveness of the (more) ‘natural’ functioned as a catalyst to the emancipation of emotions. In this trend, demands on the self-regulation of not only parents but also of teachers were raised significantly. Grading pupils also became more difficult because grading accentuates hierarchy and selection.

The attempt to raise children in affectively warmer parental regimes, more tolerant of their primary urges and impulses, signifies also that parents had come to expect more emotional gratification from family life. Throughout the century, but particularly since the 1950s, the bond that may turn couples into parents had been developing in the direction of greater equality, mutual trust, and emotional warmth. And in the 1960s and 1970s, within the borders of family life and to a somewhat more limited extent also in schools, the relational ideals of being close and frank intensified. The more these ideals spread, the more immediately was the exertion of authority – in the sense of issuing commands or expecting special treatment on the grounds of some claim to superiority – experienced and exposed as an unnecessary humiliation. And ‘breaking the will’ of a pupil or a patient changed from a pedagogical advice into a spectre (Israëls 1989; Rutschky 1977). Increasingly, traditional ways of ‘pulling rank’ or ‘playing the authority card’ were soon made ridiculous and thus became counterproductive. The growth of the desire for closer and emotionally more satisfying bonds thus heightened the sensitivity to whether manners show personal qualities, merits, and respect, or whether they reveal ‘remnants of the power and status aspirations of established groups, and have no other function than that of reinforcing their power chances and their status superiority’ (Elias, 2000: 446).

In recent decades, the extremes of an authoritarian and a free or laissez-faire pedagogical regime have largely disappeared, while demands of commitment and discipline have been raised. A graphic illustration of this trend is found in changes in school furniture and school (time) schedules. Nowadays, school furniture that used to be fixed to the floor has become movable, children that used to have fixed positions are allowed more freedom of action, while fixed time schedules have become more varied and fine-tuned to the educational level of each individual child. On the whole, however, children spend significantly more time at school. Similar transitions occurred across the board, in all western societies all regimes of organizations and of manners and emotions changed from rather fixed and rigid to more loose, varied, flowing and flexible. Socially accepted behavioural and emotional alternatives increased, while the pressures of competition and cooperation on the whole intensified
References