

What attitude should parents have towards their children's future flourishing?

Theory and Research in Education
2018, Vol. 16(1) 82–97
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sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav
DOI: 10.1177/1477878518765017
journals.sagepub.com/home/tre



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Abstract

This article explores how parents should relate to a particular (ideal) aim of education, namely, their children's future flourishing lives. The article asks three (sub)questions: (1) What does 'aiming for flourishing' mean? (2) In what sense should parents have expectations? (3) Is hope an appropriate attitude for parents with regard to their children's flourishing lives? It is argued that although there is also a place for expectations, an attitude of hope best captures how parents should relate to the educational aim of flourishing. Hope not only refers to the commitment and desire of realizing the object of one's hope but also implies a recognition of the limitations of human powers and of the uncertainties inherent in striving for an ultimate aim.

Keywords

Aim, education, expectations, hope, human flourishing, parents

Perhaps the only happiness we can attain is a hope that it will arrive.

Terry Eagleton (2015: 45)

Introduction

In his book *Far from the Tree*, Andrew Solomon (2012) tells the stories of children who turned out very different from their parents. There are chapters about deafness, children who became criminals, gay children, and more kinds of apples that fell far from the parental trees. What all these families have in common is that the lives of their children

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were not what their parents had expected them to be, and Solomon describes with much eye for detail what the parents *had* expected from their children's (flourishing) lives, which hopes have flown out the window, what parents expect from themselves as parents, and what others (professionals, peers) tell them they should do, or be like, as parents.

Philosophers of education John White (2011), Harry Brighouse (2006), Kristján Kristjánsson (2015, 2017), and Doret de Ruyter (2007, 2012, 2015) defend human flourishing as an, or even *the*, ideal aim of education. Human flourishing can be understood as *autonomous, wholehearted, and successful engagement in worthwhile relationships, activities, and experiences*, in which 'success' is defined in the broadest sense of achieving what one has aspired to achieve (see White, 2011; see also Wolbert et al., 2015). These scholars focus primarily on education in schools and by teachers, but education for flourishing also includes parents – they argue that also for parents human flourishing is an ideal aim of education (for which the term upbringing is also used).

This article is concerned with the question what the notion of flourishing as an aim of education might imply for the way parents relate to that aim.¹ We think that most parents *hope* that their children will come to lead flourishing lives and that they also might have *expectations* about what that means for and asks of their children and of them as parents. What kind of attitude should parents have toward their children's future flourishing lives? Philosophers of education do not tend to write *for* parents, so the claim that parents ought to aim for the flourishing life of their children is not likely to be intended or read as direct advice to them. Nevertheless, the idea that flourishing is the (ideal) aim of education does suggest that parents should pursue the ideal of a flourishing life for their children, which leads to the question in which way they should do that.

Taking that into account, we have formulated three (sub)questions: (1) What does 'aiming for flourishing' mean? (2) In what sense should parents have expectations with regard to the flourishing of their children? (3) Is the attitude of hope more appropriate for parents with regard to the flourishing of their children? 'Appropriateness' has two senses here; on one hand, it refers to what is good or better of parents to *do*, and on the other, it refers to the 'fittingness' of speaking in terms of expectations or hope in connection with (the concept of) flourishing. The latter, conceptual, sense points toward an intrinsic connection between hope and flourishing and the former to an extrinsic, empirical connection.

We will first give a detailed description of one of the families that was interviewed by Solomon: Emily and Charles Kingsley, whose son with Down syndrome was born in 1974 in the United States. The significance of the story for this article is not so much the fact that Jason has Down syndrome, but that we think it is an illuminating example of what parents' hopes and expectations can be like.²

Emily Kingsley

Jason Kingsley was born in 1974 in the United States and diagnosed with Down syndrome. His parents Emily and Charles were told that Jason should be institutionalized immediately because there was no chance that he would ever learn to 'speak, think, walk, or talk' (Solomon, 2012: 169). Emily recalls that

they said he'd never be able to distinguish us from other adults. He would never be creative; he would never have an imagination. I was collecting a first edition of Lewis Carroll and putting aside all this Gilbert and Sullivan stuff that I love; I had boxes of things that I was going to do with this kid, all of it sophisticated and terrific. (p. 170)

Charles and Emily were devastated. But they heard of an early intervention program that could maybe teach Jason some basic skills and decided to give it a try, in their own home. They were told to stimulate Jason in every way they could, especially his senses:

Charles and Emily ripped apart the elegant, pastel baby's room they had created, painting it blinding red with stenciled green and purple flowers. Emily persuaded the local supermarket to give her the giant lacy snowflakes they had used as Christmas decorations, and those went up, too. They hung things from the ceiling on springs, so they were always moving and bobbing. [. . .] They put in a radio and a record player so there was music all the time. They talked to Jason day and night. (p. 170)

And it seemed to work. Jason was able to read when he was 4 (sooner than most of his peers), and when he was 7, he could count to 10 in 12 languages (p. 171). Jason became famous because he had a regular appearance on *Sesame Street*, arranged by his mother. 'Emily felt that she had licked DS; she lived in triumph' (p. 171). Jason's parents began to coach other parents with newborns with Down syndrome, telling them that they would have to work harder than other parents, but shouldn't let anybody tell them that 'it' is impossible (p. 171).

However, by the time Jason turned 8 regular children caught up with him and went past him (p. 172). For Emily, and for Jason too, this was an 'unbelievably horrible readjustment' (p. 172). During that time, Emily wrote the text 'Welcome to Holland' which describes how someone plans to go on a wonderful vacation to Italy but the plane lands, unexpectedly, in Holland. Although one can learn to appreciate Holland, it is not, and will never be, Italy, and it is not the vacation one had expected to have.³ This is how she felt being Jason's mother.

Emily was disappointed because her efforts did not result in Jason leading the flourishing life she imagined. 'Emily said with a mix of enormous pride and terrible regret, "Jason has no peers"' (p. 174). In his 20s, Jason suffers from two depressions, and Emily 'reflected with concern on her original attempt to make Jason the highest functioning DS kid in history' (p. 176). Would she have done it differently, knowing what she knows now? She recognizes that children with low functioning Down syndrome are often happier, but as she says, 'his intelligence has enriched our relationship so much and I would never want to give that up', and it is clear that Jason, too, takes pleasure in using his mind (p. 176).

What does 'aiming for flourishing' mean?

Before we can discuss what kind of attitude would be appropriate for parents with regard to the flourishing of their children, we first have to clarify what exactly 'aiming for flourishing' implies. Emily was collecting a 'first edition of Lewis Carroll' and looking forward to immersing her child in 'sophisticated and terrific' stuff. This is not a desire that

every parent sees vanishing into thin air when their child is diagnosed with Down syndrome, but it is rather a desire that is typical for a certain social class position, argues Annette Lareau (2011) on the basis of her sociological research. Lareau (2011) observed a difference among families in the United States in what she calls ‘a *dominant set of cultural repertoires* about how children should be raised’, and she connects these repertoires to the families’ social class positions (p. 4). Upper- and middle-class parents, like Charles and Emily, tend to

see themselves as ‘developing’ [their children] to cultivate [their] talents in a concerted fashion. Organized activities, established and controlled by mothers and fathers, dominate the lives of middle-class children. By making certain their children have these and other experiences, middle-class parents engage in a process of *concerted cultivation*. (Lareau, 2011: 1–2)

To which end the parents ‘develop’ their children is not specified in Lareau’s study. Neither does Emily Kingsley clarify what she means by ‘it’ when telling other parents that nobody should tell them ‘it’ is impossible. It seems plausible that ‘it’ refers to an implicit conception of aiming for flourishing which is embedded in this particular cultural repertoire of childrearing: ‘in order to equip my children to be able to live a flourishing life, “I” (as a parent) ought to engage in a process of concerted cultivation’.

Lareau (2011: 31) observed that working-class parents and poor parents have a different cultural repertoire, which she calls *accomplishment of natural growth*. Good parenting here consists of caring for children and *allowing* them to grow. ‘For working-class and poor families, sustaining children’s natural growth is viewed as an accomplishment’ (Lareau, 2011: 5). In other words, ‘in order to equip my children to be able to live a flourishing life, “I” (as a parent) ought to sustain their natural growth’.⁴

The middle- and upper-class strategy of concerted cultivation seems reflected in how Dutch psychologist Jan Derksen (2009) describes current (Dutch) children growing up as the *achterbankgeneratie* (backseat generation), which refers to a generation of children who can be characterized as sitting in the backseat of the family car, driven around by their parents to and from their extra-curricular activities. An extreme or excessive form of the strategy of concerted cultivation can be seen in what Frank Furedi (2002) calls ‘paranoid parenting’, and what in popular literature is called (as a caricature) ‘helicopter parenting’ or ‘snowplow parenting’, in which parents function as a helicopter to monitor the development of their children or as a snowplow to take every obstacle out of the way so that their children will succeed in life.⁵

These examples of ‘parenting strategies’ illustrate that there are different ways in which parents (can) aim for the flourishing life of their children. Although these are a few examples out of many strategies across the world, and while we realize that not every family fits neatly in one of Lareau’s clusters, because they are generalizations, we choose to elaborate on these because we recognize these clusters in our own lived worlds of parenting and educational research. Moreover, we agree with Lareau (2011) that professionals, such as educators, child care workers, and social service agencies (and, we would add, many educational researchers and philosophers as well), tend to endorse the strategies of concerted cultivation. It remains a question whether it is legitimate for professionals to do so or whether this perhaps reveals a social class-related bias.

In general, to have a certain parenting ‘strategy’ is (among other things) to believe that doing particular things (e.g. organize piano lessons for their child, setting boundaries) will contribute to their child’s flourishing life. This need not be an explicit or deliberate pursuit. Parents might simply be caring for their children’s daily needs without ever doing anything with the explicit purpose of contributing to their children’s chances of living a flourishing life. We suggest that aiming for flourishing can be seen as occurring on a continuum of explicitness, where ‘aiming’ minimally implies that parents have their children’s flourishing ‘at heart’ (see White, 2011: 3), meaning that parents act with good intentions without reflecting upon them in light of the aim of flourishing. The most deliberate form of aiming is where parents have the explicit intention to do certain things precisely *because* that will contribute to their child’s chances of a flourishing life. Not many parents will be explicit in such a way though, but when asked, they might say that they do particular things because they believe them to be good for their children (showing some reflectivity in this regard, but without entertaining a fully articulated idea of flourishing and what contributes to that). This could be considered as in the middle of a continuum of explicitness. Lareau’s (2011: 65) research confirms that across the social classes most parents were not explicit about their parenting strategy, nor about the aim(s) of their strategy; they rather seemed to take for granted that what they did was good for their children.

Both strategies described by Lareau can be practiced more and less deliberately, but they differ in what they require in ‘active involvement’ of the parents. Parents who adhere to the strategy of natural growth might be very explicit in their conviction that this is the best way to raise flourishing children, but that does not lead to the kind of proactive structuring of the child’s activities which is typical for the strategy of concerted cultivation. It is in such a case rather a deliberate choice *against* such active involvement. Emily Kingsley, on the other hand, actively aimed for the improvement of her son’s cognitive abilities; she put in a lot of effort and demanded a lot of herself as a parent in aiming to contribute to a better life (from her perspective) for her son. Also, the examples of hyperparenting, which can be typified as both very active and very deliberate striving for the flourishing of one’s children, are therefore to be seen as extreme forms of the strategy of concerted cultivation.

White (2011: 17) also emphasizes that flourishing as an aim of education does not necessarily imply aiming for something that might occur in the (far) future because he is convinced that when schools and parents have flourishing as their overarching aim, what they have to do is *embody* it, rather than prepare children for a future flourishing life. Children should engage in worthwhile relationships, experiences, and activities *now*, in the present, and that will hopefully contribute to their flourishing lives throughout because it adds to their well-being now, and they learn how to continue their life in this way. So, whereas flourishing as an aim of education certainly has a future-oriented aspect in that education also aims to equip children to lead flourishing lives as adults, flourishing is not something that *only* lies in the future. In this article, we focus on the future flourishing (life) of children, in the sense that we focus on what parents might imagine (hope, expect) such future flourishing lives to look like, but these parental images of the future will often take into account the present well-being and potentiality of the particular child as well, as we saw with Emily and Jason.

The aim of flourishing: Ideal or goal

In explicating aiming for flourishing, it is also important to clarify what *kind of aim* flourishing is. In educational theory, flourishing is mostly described as an overarching, ideal aim of education. In being an ideal, it is meant to give direction to people's actions, but it is improbable or even impossible that such a type of goal will ever be reached completely (De Ruyter, 2007: 25; Rescher, 1987: 120). However, in popular literature, in some policy texts, as well as in positive psychological discourse, it is often presented, or seems to be presented, as a realizable *goal*, henceforth simply to be called 'goal'. For example, the title of positive psychologist Martin Seligman (2011) book reads, *Flourish: A New Understanding of Happiness, Well-being – And How to Achieve Them*. Such a type of goal is understood as something that is (1) achievable and of which it is (2) more or less clear what needs to be done to achieve it (in an extreme case it would be like following a recipe to bake a cake). We recognize that in everyday usage the term 'goal' does not apply only to realizable goals, but this is how we use the term here, not just for the sake of convenience but also to draw attention to an important feature of a certain discourse about flourishing, in which goals are typically understood as realizable in a more or less programmatic fashion.

There are a number of reasons why flourishing should not be conceived of as a goal. The first two are derived from the comparison of flourishing to what Dorothy Emmet calls a 'regulative ideal'.

First, Emmet (1994: 8) argues that 'regulative ideals' have means and ends that are not clearly distinguished. She clarifies the idea of a regulative ideal by comparing it to trying to do philosophy; one can get better at it while doing it and by 'following internal critical standards' which can be realized in the actual practices. However, there is no point in time at which one 'has successfully done philosophy', no point at which the philosopher is done, once and for all. As with 'trying to do philosophy', flourishing is something one can get better at and succeed at (more and less) in actual practices, but even if a life seems to be quite a flourishing one for quite a long period of time, there is no specific point in time at which the aim of flourishing has been reached (at which one reaches 'a grand climax' as Emmet writes).⁶ Flourishing conceptualized as a regulative ideal thus implies that flourishing is not achievable. This is not severely damaging for those who do see flourishing as a goal, however, since they may have no difficulty in conceding that they can never say they have fully 'realized' or accomplished 'flourishing', if they are by all reasonable criteria doing very well.

Second, as a regulative ideal, (aiming for) flourishing, as well as 'trying to do philosophy', cannot be precisely specified in advance (how many or which relationships one should have, how healthy one should be) (see Emmet, 1994: 8). This reason why flourishing should not be conceived of as a goal is arguably more important since it severs the ties between what in a goal-conception of flourishing would be the building blocks of or stepping stones toward flourishing and the goal of flourishing. We can see why if we turn to a 'satis concept' of flourishing. Kristjánsson (2017: 97) describes human flourishing as a 'satis concept' (or 'threshold concept', for example, Curzer, 2012: 400–401), by which he means that for someone to achieve flourishing, she has to be flourishing 'enough' (enough flourishing will 'satisfy' the concept). This is slightly different from

the idea of a regulative ideal as defined by Emmet. For instance, as a ‘satis concept’, ‘trying to do philosophy’ might be successful ‘enough’ when one, for example, has been able to write a dissertation, or has been able to publish an article, or something of the like. Yet, it does seem also to be in line with how we commonly speak of flourishing; we do say that someone is flourishing even though we at the same time realize that this person is not ‘done’ with flourishing (i.e. can ‘tick the box’ of living a flourishing life). So, interpreted as a satis concept, flourishing can be considered achievable, albeit that this does not preclude continuing and expanding flourishing (i.e. it is never ‘finished’).

Although Kristjánsson (2017) argues that a question about flourishing is usually a question about minimal requirements, what these requirements ought to be is a difficult question (p. 97). Human flourishing is such a complex concept, built up out of many satis concepts (e.g. happiness, success, autonomy), which in turn have both objective and subjective elements, that it is not possible to determine in advance how much one needs of which aspect, what the subjective ‘effect’ will be of actualizing particular aspects, and how these will (subjectively) affect other aspects. Therefore, also in Kristjánsson’s conception of flourishing as a satis concept, it cannot be made clear in advance ‘how to’ achieve a flourishing life. To see the many satis concepts (constituent elements) of flourishing as so many building blocks or stepping stones merely to be arranged in the right order to attain flourishing, then, is a mistake. Flourishing is more complex than that.

We argue, therefore, that it is problematic to conceptualize flourishing as a goal. Rather, to take flourishing to be a goal is likely to *conflict* with what kind of concept flourishing is. When people adopt an ideal, they should recognize from the start that its achievement (but not the pursuit!) lies beyond ‘the reach of practical attainability’. A ‘concrete objective’ or goal – something that is both realizable and more or less describable in a programmatic fashion – on the other hand we really expect to reach (Rescher, 1987: 120).

A different, third, reason is that in light of the above it should also be clear that the ‘attainment’ of flourishing (in so far as it *can* be attained) will to a considerable extent be dependent on luck, on good fortune. While to see flourishing as a goal (in the sense described above) does not exclude the possibility that one acknowledges the role of luck in attaining it, to see it as an ideal is clearly more sympathetic to such acknowledgment.

That said, the more concrete aims that parents generally strive for, because they believe them to be good for their children, can be understood as goals. For instance, it does not seem to be conceptually wrong to say that parents have a goal to ensure that their child will be enrolled in a ‘top’ university (set aside from the question whether such aiming is desirable, to which we will return). In other words, aiming for flourishing as an ideal aim does not preclude the possibility of aiming for certain goods that (are assumed to) contribute to flourishing as if those goods are goals.

Should parents have expectations with regard to their children’s future flourishing?

We have said in the introduction that we think that parents have hopes and expectations about their children’s flourishing (lives). In order to clarify what it means for parents to have expectations with regard to their children’s future flourishing, we will begin by

making a few general observations about ‘having expectations’. When a person has an expectation about something or someone, she is anticipating that something will happen – in other words, she who expects something believes that that something will *probably* occur in the future. Parental expectations can emphasize diverse *aspects of* flourishing (e.g. the success of their children or their subjective happiness, which are ‘satis concepts’ or ideals), which can be distinguished from prioritizing objective goods that they believe will *contribute to* flourishing (a good job, good health, education, and so on, which can be considered goals). Parents’ expectations can also differ in other ways. They can vary on a continuum from low to (too) high, from weakly held to strongly held, and from general to very specific (e.g. be successful *as a* lawyer; see also De Ruyter and Schinkel, 2013).

Also, an important distinction is to be made between descriptive and normative expectations. Consider the following example. In an interview for their university magazine, two children of immigrants tell that their parents saw their migration as a means to give their children a chance of a better life.⁷ Their parents chose to give up their familiar life for the benefit of their children in this new country. As a consequence, the immigrant children felt they were expected to be successful, particularly in the narrow sense of getting a good (high) education and a good job. In this example, the parents’ expectation would be descriptive if it were simply based on the idea that now that their children live in Europe, they are bound to be headed for a successful life, like all European children who are as smart as theirs. The expectation would be normative if the parents believed that their children *ought* to be successful. A normative expectation is not ‘just’ an observation or the conclusion of reasoning, it is an assignment or prescription or even an order, disguised or explicit. Parental expectations can be both (at the same time), and it can, in practice, be hard to distinguish one from the other. Also, parents can have such strong descriptive expectations that they exert pressure upon the child, in which case the expectations, from the child’s perspective, are prescriptive (and thus de facto normative).

Openness to the unforeseen

Charles Larmore (1999: 98) argues that having a rational ‘plan’ in life is wrong because if our attitude toward life is dominated by control, we fail to recognize the ‘unexpected’ as ‘the revelation that discloses new vistas of meaning [and] new forms of happiness and understanding’. Larmore appears to be arguing for an attitude which is not only concerned with planning and anticipating but which also values simply awaiting what is going to happen. This is similar to what Michael Sandel calls an ‘openness to the unbidden’ – an openness to the unexpected (Sandel, 2009: 80, after May, 2005). Sandel suggests that parents who have expectations also need the ability to remain open toward their child and their child’s life, because if parents lose this openness to the unbidden, this would ‘disfigure the relation between parent and child, and deprive the parent of humility and enlarged human sympathies’ (Sandel, 2009: 80).

It is self-evident that the more strongly held expectations parents have, the more this is likely to interfere with an openness to the unforeseen. If, for example, a child is expected to take over the family business, and that is seen as the only way that leads to a successful and therefore flourishing life, then one can imagine that parents are not open to other, unforeseen, options.⁸ However, having expectations in itself does not

necessarily exclude an openness for the unforeseen; parents may well expect things from their children (in the descriptive and the normative sense) and be open at the same time, that is, they may be flexible with regard to their expectations and their fulfillment.

Expectations and flourishing as a goal

As discussed, we believe it is reasonable to assume that the more strongly parents hold expectations, either low or high, of their children, the less flexible the parents become. This is problematic if the child has different ideas about what constitutes a (her) flourishing life or when, as a result of the parent's inflexibility, it is not possible for the child to explore different – perhaps unforeseen – ways of living a flourishing life. This problem is inherent to (strongly held) expectations.

But what we particularly want to argue for is that a combination of (active) striving for flourishing as if it were a *goal* (as opposed to an ideal) and having expectations with regard to that flourishing life creates an undesirable way of pursuing a flourishing life for one's children. When parents have high descriptive expectations, they believe that their children's flourishing is probable because they have reason(s) to believe so. Or, when they have high normative expectations, they believe strongly that it should be the case that their children lead flourishing lives. But in either case, they *cannot know for sure*, which calls for a certain humility and therefore also flexibility. If, in addition, flourishing is seen as a goal of which it is more or less clear how it can be reached – in other words, of which the attainment can be *ensured* if 'all goes well' – parents come to believe they have a way of *ensuring* their expectations come true. This is problematic, as we have seen that realizing the ideal of flourishing cannot be ensured. Such aiming for flourishing can only lead to hubris (overestimating parenting skills or the capabilities of one's children), high pressure on children (something Lareau, 2011, observed as well), and eventually disappointment on the parents' side.

With regard to goals that parents pursue that they (implicitly) believe to contribute to their children's flourishing (e.g. organize their sports and piano lessons, and their enrollment in 'top' universities) that *can* be considered as achievable goals, it is therefore important to emphasize that flourishing should not be seen, in advance, as the sum of these achieved goals. As argued above, it cannot be planned in advance which activities, and to which extent, will give the child (the best chances to) a flourishing life. That is, to achieve the goal of studying at Harvard might turn out to contribute to a child's flourishing life, for various reasons, but it would be a mistake to expect that 'if my child gets into Harvard, she will come to lead a flourishing life'. In other words, parents can have expectations about Harvard being achieved (although that, in itself, is problematic too if the expectations are too high and held too strongly), but they ought not to expect something (i.e. a flourishing life) *of* it.

In this sense, there is a place for parental expectations. Not expecting anything of one's children seems impossible for most parents and might be equally negative for children because the child feels unseen or not supported. We can compare this to how May (2005: 230) argues that both 'accepting love' (accepting the child as she is) and 'transforming love' (encouraging the child's development) are entailed in good

parenting: ‘Accepting love, without transforming love, slides into indulgence and finally neglect. Transforming love, without accepting love, badgers and finally rejects’ (May, 2005: 231).

Therefore, in sum, we argue that parents should have expectations regarding the things that they think contribute to their child’s flourishing, if parents at the same time remain open to the unforeseen. Expecting one’s children to lead a complete flourishing life is, when descriptive, unlikely or, when normative, unreasonable, because in the case of children, the future is too long and too far away to reasonably oversee whether it will probably be a flourishing one or not. An interpretation of flourishing as a goal in combination with such an expectation is very problematic.

Stefan Ramaekers and Judith Suissa (2012) show that the current ways of speaking and thinking about childrearing (in Western culture) are dominated by the language(s) of (developmental) psychology and neuroscience. We can see this in the example of the strategy of concerted cultivation, which clearly reflects dominant ideas in developmental psychology, for example, about the merits of specific ways of parental involvement.⁹ We suspect that these ‘languages of parenting’ encourage the problematic combination of high expectations and goal-thinking because it (1) tells parents what children ‘need’, that is, how they *should* develop/be developed, which is susceptible to creating or raising parent’s expectations of a particular kind, and (2) it depicts flourishing as a goal (or isn’t clear about that it can’t be a goal).

Parental hope with regard to the future flourishing of their children

When Emily learned about early intervention programs that could possibly benefit her son, one could say that she ‘got her hopes up’ and that this activated her ‘transforming love’. According to Patrick Shade (2001), hope indeed implies an ‘active commitment to the desirability and realizability’ toward the object of hope (p. 70); in other words, when a parent hopes, she will do what she can to contribute to fulfilling this hope. Or, as Terry Eagleton (2015: 84) writes, ‘there is a sense in which hope is performative as well as optative’. Hope is not merely a passive desire, but to have confidence in the form of hope may help to commit to the realization of one’s hope. How, then, is having hope different from having expectations?

‘Philosopher of hope’ Ernst Bloch (1963) considers hope to be *the* most important and fundamental attitude that human beings have. It is, in his sense, not so much aimed at anything in particular, but it is more like an attitude of being aimed at success rather than failure, which he considers an inherent aspect of being human. According to Bloch, an attitude (or virtue) of hope is attained through the proper cultivation of ordinary day-dreaming. We can understand parents’ desire to have children with flourishing lives as an example of ordinary day-dreaming. For Bloch to deal with such day-dreaming appropriately is to cultivate the virtue of hope – aiming for success, but being aware of being ‘dreaming’. From the perspective of an Aristotelian conception of virtue, we could add that when hoping is the proper mean, ‘undeveloped’ day-dreaming is the accompanying deficiency, but having expectations can be considered as an excess, as we have discussed in the former section.

This fundamental attitude of hope is what Halpin (2003: 17, after Godfrey, 1987) calls 'absolute hope', which he describes as a kind of basic faith in the future. It is, as with Bloch's hope, not aimed at anything in particular. When parents hope for the future flourishing of their children, they do have a 'specific' aim. This is what Godfrey and Halpin call an 'ultimate hope'. Ultimate hope aims at an ultimate aim, which is difficult to achieve, in the sense that often there are obstacles in the way of its fulfillment (Godfrey, 1987: 14). It can be distinguished from 'common-or-garden hope', which is not ultimate (e.g. hope it's going to rain tomorrow). Ultimate hope and absolute hope are complementary, so an ultimate hope can be said to necessarily include the more fundamental attitude of absolute hope (see Halpin, 2003: 17).

Hope and expectations certainly bear similarities. As said, they are both ways of anticipating the possibility of realizing some future object or event. One difference between hoping and expecting, however, is that when one hopes one *desires* the object of one's hopes to be fulfilled, whereas with expectations – at least with descriptive expectations – this is not necessarily the case. A parent might expect that their teenager will get into trouble, but not want this to happen, whereas when a parent says that she hopes that the child gets into trouble, she must desire this trouble somehow, for example, because it will teach the child a lesson.¹⁰ Yet, as the flourishing of children is a desirable outcome, parents' hopes and expectations do not differ in that respect.

Parental hopes and expectations with regard to the flourishing of their children do differ in an important other respect. As discussed, expectations involve a belief that their object will (probably) come true. For hope this is not necessarily so. Rather, 'hope falls within a range of physical probabilities which includes the improbable but excludes the certain and the merely logically possible' (Downie, 1963: 249). In other words, to hope that something will happen in the future logically implies the belief that this something is *possible*, whereas to expect something to happen in the future implies the belief that it is *probable*. Hope and expectations thus differ (among other things) in the degree to which the agent believes in the probability of the realization of the future object or event. When the agent has a role to play in bringing the object or event about, hope implies a lesser confidence in her own capacity to contribute to its realization. Therefore, if it is the case that the agent can contribute to the possible realization of the object or event (which is true for parents and the flourishing of their children), to say 'I hope so' 'is to concede that there are limits to one's power' (Eagleton, 2015: 69).

In sum, in comparing hope to expectations, what strikes us most is that expectations are more easily connected to parental pressure, competitiveness, and terms such as hyperparenting and the like. As we have shown, hope can also be performative; in the sense that when one hopes, one not only desires that the object of one's hope comes true but is also actively committed to contributing to its realization. But contrary to expectations, to say 'I hope so' implies an awareness of the limits of human powers and as such is intrinsically connected to a sense of humility and openness to the unforeseen. An ultimate, abstract, and many-sided ideal aim such as flourishing 'requires' such humility and flexibility; therefore, we argue that anticipation in the form of hope captures better how parents should relate to it.¹¹ Even when flourishing is mistaken for a goal, humility requires bearing in mind the fact that realization of the goal is not certain. Second, hope embodies an important characteristic of the idea(l) of a flourishing life, namely that it is

always a combination of effort and good luck (Aristotle, 2009; Nussbaum, 1986) – in other words, something that cannot be *ensured*. Third, we think that hoping that one's children will do well is beneficial for the parent–child relationship, as we have said with Bloch that hope aims for success rather than failure. To have hopes regarding the flourishing of one's children expresses a belief in the possibilities of children, which encourages the confidence children have in themselves without expecting them to succeed in achieving flourishing lives.

Concluding remarks

The theoretical claim that parents ought to aim for the flourishing life of their children leads to the question in which way parents should do that. This article first explored what it means for parents to aim for a flourishing life for their children. Most parents tend to wish their children well, and seem to have some kind of view on the 'end-product' of their upbringing, and (implicit) ideas about how they should contribute to their children coming closer to a flourishing life. We have shown that aiming for flourishing can be done in various ways, and that it need not, but can be, a deliberate or active pursuit. We have argued that it is problematic to aim for flourishing as if it were an achievable goal, of which it is known how it can be effectively reached.

We have compared parental hopes and expectations with regard to anticipating their children living flourishing lives in the future. To conclude, how would one describe an appropriate attitude for parents with regard to aiming for flourishing? We have argued that it is good for parents to have expectations about things or events that can be overseen, planned, and achieved, provided that they remain open to the unexpected as well. However, with regard to an ultimate, uncertain, and unending ideal as a (future) flourishing life for one's children, it is appropriate to show more humility and flexibility, which is better expressed in the form of having hope. An appropriate attitude of parents toward their children's flourishing is therefore characterized by an attitude of hope, accompanied by reasonable expectations when dealing with less ultimate goals of which one can oversee the expected outcome.

By starting with the example of Jason and his mother Emily, we hope to have illustrated that such an attitude of parents is easier said than done. Child rearing is always about particular cases; there is no *the* parent who raises *the* child. Child rearing is always about me and my child or you and your child (Ramaekers and Suissa, 2012). Just as there can be no universal prescription for (aiming for) flourishing, nothing detailed at least, let alone a step-by-step guide, there are no precise universal guidelines for the reasonableness of hopes and expectations. Nevertheless, there is in particular cases like Emily's much that others will be able to relate to.

Emily showed us how hopes can slide into expectations – and especially expectations of the parent of herself – until the question arises in how far these expectations are still appropriate. Emily exemplifies how a particular (real-life) parent, with particular ideas about childrearing, in a particular country, and with a particular child, has coped with her hopes and expectations about the future flourishing of her child. To us, the example of Emily shows how understandable her choices are. We have not aimed to use the example to explain to the reader how exactly to think about Emily and Jason – whether she should

have done different things, whether she is an example of ‘hyperparenting’ or not, or should have showed more or less flexibility or perseverance because there is not one way (the way) of having appropriate hopes and expectations. We rather aimed to stimulate discussion.

As said in the introduction, although philosophy of education is limited to making claims *about* parents and is usually very careful not to give advice *to* parents, these forms of theorizing might also be susceptible – eventually and indirectly – to influencing parents and their expectations of themselves and their children. Ramaekers and Suissa (2012: vii) argue that claims argued for in the dominant languages of parenting, such as psychology and neuroscience,

become blurred in the sense that the claims that are made *about* and *on* parents can eventually become claims that are made *by* parents themselves, as parents gradually come to see themselves in the ways implied in the predominant languages of parenting.

We think that the (theoretical) claim that parent *should* pursue a flourishing life for their children (and related claims about *how* they should do this) might also be susceptible to what Ramaekers and Suissa describe, in the sense that it raises expectations *by* parents with regard to their possibility of ensuring the flourishing of their children. Flourishing as an aim of education does not have to imply more than parents having their children’s well-being ‘at heart’, but parents might be inclined to attach much further-reaching conclusions to such a claim. For example; the title of this article might evoke the expectation of a much more precise description of how parents should pursue a flourishing life for their children, which – when, for example, referred to in a popular magazine or used as an inspirational source to develop a method (‘the hope method’) – can easily be turned into a claim made on parents, and subsequently internalized by parents.

Also, Wolbert saw herself cited as a proponent of education for flourishing in a report on a popular discussion on future education in the Netherlands, in which it was completely unclear who the intended audience for this publication were and what kind of concept flourishing (ideal, goal, or else) was proposed (De Joode et al., 2015: 15). If parents were to read this report (which is quite probable), what should they make of it, other than that they ought to aim for the flourishing of their children? In addition to contributing to recent theory on education for flourishing by exploring carefully how parents should aim for the flourishing of their children, we also hope that this article contributes to an awareness of how (both theoretical and empirical) claims about childrearing can turn into claims internalized *by* parents, with accompanying (problematic) strategies of fulfilling these claims.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank two anonymous reviewers and the editor for their helpful comments on an earlier draft.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Notes

1. In this article, ‘parents’ should be read to include other main caretakers in the role of parents.
2. We do not want to imply here that we think that parents of children with disabilities do not face other and often more difficult challenges with regard to their children than parents of children without such disabilities, because generally speaking they do. The point here is that Jason’s story is not exclusively an example of what it is like to have a child with Down syndrome.
3. See the last sentences from Emily’s text ‘Welcome to Holland’:

[. . .] But everyone you know is busy coming and going from Italy . . . and they’re all bragging about what a wonderful time they had there. And for the rest of your life, you will say, ‘Yes, that’s where I was supposed to go. That’s what I had planned’. And the pain of that will never, ever, ever, go away . . . because the loss of that dream is a very, very significant loss. But . . . if you spend the rest of your life mourning the fact that you didn’t go to Italy, you may never be free to enjoy the very special, the very lovely things . . . about Holland. (Solomon, 2012: 168)
4. To be clear, these are clusters of behavior that Lareau (2011) observed that varied according to the social class of the family. Of course, not every family exactly fits Lareau’s observed patterns. As observed clusters of behavior, none of them is argued by Lareau to be intrinsically better than the other. Rather, Lareau endorses the view that both of them have certain advantages and disadvantages. Notably, children raised within concerted cultivation not only seemed to develop a sense of entitlement (i.e. expecting others to suit their preferences, acting as if having the right to certain things) but also seemed stressed more often and were granted little autonomy. Children raised within ‘natural growth’ were usually less stressed and granted more autonomy (and free time), but were not or less equipped to handle other adults, institutions, and so on. They generally did not develop this sense of entitlement.
5. See <https://www.todayparent.com/blogs/snowplow-parenting-the-latest-controversial-technique/> which describes snowplow parenting as the successor of ‘tiger moms’ and ‘helicopter parents’.
6. Naturally, flourishing is also a different ‘activity’ in important respects. Whereas doing philosophy is an activity, flourishing is better seen as a dynamic state (Wolbert et al., 2015) and as such also depends on what happens to a person, as opposed to what this person does or makes.
7. https://issuu.com/advalvas/docs/nr_13_22_februari_2017/16
8. In Dutch research on the prevalence of child abuse, very high expectations of parents that are inappropriate for the child are regarded as a form of ‘emotional neglect’ (Alink et al., 2010: 41).
9. An example of the dominant claims from psychology here is the (classic) work on ‘parenting styles’ (e.g. Baumrind, 1971) in which the ‘best’ parenting style is a style of active involvement and responsiveness, with respect to the child’s (developing) autonomy. This parenting style strongly resembles the strategy of concerted cultivation.
10. This does not mean, though, that the hope of the parent is necessarily good; that a parent desires that something be the case does not mean that it is desirable (from a more objective standpoint). If, for example, the parent hopes that the child gets into trouble, because the parent desires ‘to get back at’ the child, because she is angry with or disappointed in her child,

her hope would not be desirable as this hope is harmful for the child.

11. Although we see a difference between (reasonable or proper) hope and expectations, it is possible that parents express such strong ‘hopes’ toward their children, that such hopes are really more like expectations. In such cases, parents may use the word ‘hope’, but in fact hold expectations.

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