

Gardener Parents

by Lauro Macías

Last week I attended a L.E.T. workshop taught by Kent Stickler who, as most of you know, is the most successful L.E.T. trainer in the world. Of course it was a great training which led a lot of learnings for me, and that's why I find it funny that one of the most important points came with a very common analogy, but this time it opened up a number of new ideas and a whole new context, in fact, it made something that was just a seemingly simple topic of the Gordon Model one of my favorites: Modifying the Environment, and it's what I want to share with you.

The analogy Kent used was this: as Parents we are like gardeners: we plant the seeds and then we have to take care of them... simple?, common?, I know, but I would like to give a new perspective this time with 2 main ideas:

1. We can't always be there, but the environment will.

Let's start making an obvious reflection, but one that is worth emphasizing: We as parents, won't always be with our children, but the environment they develop in will. The gardener sows the seed, but he doesn't sit there until the plant sprouts and he also doesn't set up a tend right next to it to sleep in and spend night and day until it does. He just leaves it in the environment he knows is the best for it, and at appropriate times he visits to water and check on it.

But even when we are "gardeners" when it is about our children, for some reason we keep trying to sit next to them 100% of the time. It is amazing to me all the effort and time spent by parents trying to supervise and control their children at every single moment; they want to be with them as much time as possible, they provide mobiles even with GPS locating systems, want to keep a close track on their social-networks accounts, ask teachers for special care, and so on... They do all this without realizing it will never be enough, people will always find a way to "elude the system". On the other hand it is impossible to get rid of the environment, our children will always be in it.

2. We don't have the nutrients, the environment does.

I would like to jump to my second point and link it to the first one: the nutrients come from the environment. If you think about it, the gardener chooses good soil, provides some fertilizer and provides appropriate water, air and sunlight. So, if parents want to be good gardeners, they have to provide an environment with good nutrients, in the correct amounts.

Since the environment will always be there, and it will constantly feed our children, we have to guarantee that it has the nutrients they need and the other elements we consider best for them. When we plant in an environment that we know is safe and appropriate, we can stay away from the plant longer, and be sure that it will have good growth, and will be stronger to confront threats on its own. Our responsibility as a parent then, is to provide this environment.

Fixing problems brought by the environment into our relationships

The problem is that we don't take into account the two previous ideas; we don't give the importance we must to the influence of the environment on the development of our children and on our relationship with them. As a consequence we find many problems in our relationships that are brought by a non-adequate environment: my child arrives very sad from school because she felt mistreated by her teacher, and now she doesn't even want to eat; the swimming class is not the appropriate for my son's skills, so he comes out very depressed every single time and now he doesn't want to try anymore; there is no garden close to home, so my child has to stay at home most of the time playing videogames...

I have a personal example I want to share: I grew up in a country which is in the 107th place in an OCDE list of 108 countries about the per capita books read per year, but my situation was different: when I was a child, in all the different houses we lived in we had at least 2 rooms completely filled with by books along every single wall from floor to ceiling there were books. Every time I helped my father move his office, we filled at least 3 huge vans only with books; and everywhere my father took me, he had a book with him. I can't forget him reading in the football stadium when he took me to watch my favorite team... where am I going with this?: My father never had a problem with me when it came to homework that involved reading or when he needed my help reading something and making a summary. Nowadays everywhere I go, I always have at least 1 book with me. My environment was always full of books, I was "fed" with them, now I can't imagine my life without them and all this without my father having ever said anything about it. On the other hand, if our children in a school with bullying, where teachers don't guide themselves with respect to others, a neighborhood with violence, the nutrients and not being the best.

My intention is not to point the finger at parents who operate differently or to state that this approach to "tending gardens" is an absolute. We all know that plants can grow strong in adverse environments and our children can grow and develop in difficult circumstances, but we definitely increase the chances for success and make everything easier with a good environment.

Which is the best environment?

All this bring us to the final question, "which one is the best environment?", and here is where we find our most important role as gardener parents. We must be aware that there are shadow and sunlight plants; others for dry or wet environments; others will need space to spread, and others will grow as if they were trying to reach the sky.

As parents many times we want all our children to perform the best in the same environment (isn't it the basic principle of schools and their grading system?), without realizing that a school with strong emphasis in sciences maybe is not the best for my daughter, maybe a school focused on arts is the best for her; maybe for my son is better to go to his training and latter do homework, after a shower and a nice dinner... we all are

different so our role as parents is to identify which environment is the best for each of our children, so they can perform at their very best.

Think about it, how many of our problems can be solved more easily in a better environment, which things can be communicated or completed more effectively in a positive atmosphere instead of employing constant oversight, orders and threats and having to deal with the resulting resistance and conflict? What can be done better with a different environment? What can providing a different environment accomplish? It's simple: with the appropriate environment our relationships will be stronger, and if committed fully to providing it, the possibilities become infinite.