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Debate - Issue of the Day

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'Consumerist' fear for children is common

Friday, 12 Oct 2007 13:19

A former head teacher has agreed with research published today by the Primary Review, which outlines a range of emerging pressures facing children in modern society.

The interim report *Community Soundings* identifies excessive school testing, road safety and the impact of materialism, as the main concerns surrounding childhood today.

Former head teacher and author of the book *Toxic Childhood*, Sue Palmer, said she had heard these same concerns articulated

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“consistently” whilst on research trips across the country.

Speaking to BBC Radio 4’s *Today* programme, Ms Palmer said the consumerist message within the report was a particularly prevalent fear.

She explained: "Children are being sold this idea that happiness is ‘stuff’... rather than what you are and looking for fulfilling activities and relationships with friends and family.

"[It is] very worrying that children are feeling they're not safe, that they don't even trust their friends, that the world is not a safe place for them."

Ms Palmer conceded that every generation has its own set of pressures, but claimed modern life had thrown up “different pressures” not faced by parents and children in the past.

Particularly she contented that traditional childhood play had undergone a degradation.

She argued: "Children no longer are playing as they did in the past, they're not free-range creatures...able to go out and play and learn about the world that they live in through first-hand experience.

Ms Palmer claimed a mixture of "sedentary screen-based entertainment" had resulted in children being "closeted indoors and battery reared".

The research was compiled following a series of interviews with teachers, parents, children and school governors across the country. It began last year, and is the largest primary review of education and childhood in nearly half a century. □