

Nothing Becomes Alone

The Conditions Lens™, interdependence, and the universal ecology of becoming

By Thomas Mountney

Part One: The Core Claim

Section 1: Opening

The world already knows that everything is connected.

The law of interdependence tells us that nothing exists in isolation. The soil affects the tree. The tree affects the soil. The weather shapes the field. The field shapes the insects. The insects shape the birds. The birds shape the seeds. The seeds shape the future forest.

This is not a new discovery.

Science, philosophy, ecology, developmental theory and systems thinking have all named this in different ways. They have shown us that life is relational, ecological and interdependent. The principle of interdependence shows us that nothing exists alone. The Conditions Lens™ goes further: nothing becomes alone.

But knowing that everything is connected is not the same as knowing what to do with that truth.

This is where the Conditions Lens™ begins.

The Conditions Lens™ does not claim to have discovered interdependence. Interdependence is the foundation. The Conditions Lens™ is the human, practical and ethical application of that foundation.

It asks what happens when conscious human attention, care and agency are placed inside the interdependent web.

A tree cannot pause and ask what conditions are shaping the forest. Soil cannot step outside itself and ask what is missing. A child may not yet have the words to name the pressures shaping their distress. A tired parent may not immediately see how money, work, policy, noise, screens, fear and exhaustion have entered the room.

But a human being can pause.

And in that pause, something extraordinary happens.

The person is no longer only shaped by conditions.
They become capable of shaping conditions.

This is the central movement of the Conditions Lens™: from passive interdependence to conscious stewardship.

Interdependence says that A affects B, and B affects A.

The Conditions Lens™ says yes — but a conscious human can notice that relationship and introduce C and D, which may attract E, F and G, which then support A, strengthen B, and change the whole living pattern.

A person notices poor soil and a struggling tree. They plant wildflowers. They create shelter. They protect water. They add deadwood. They reduce cutting. Insects return. Birds return. Fungi return. The soil improves. The tree strengthens. The system becomes more alive.

This is not just interdependence.

This is care entering the web.

The same is true in childhood.

Adult presence affects the child.

The child's response affects the adult.

The environment affects both.

Child agency changes the interaction.

Policy, economy, culture and digital pressure enter the home, the setting and the adult nervous system.

These are not separate forces waiting politely in separate academic categories.

They arrive together.

They become atmosphere.

The Conditions Lens™ asks one practical question:

What conditions are shaping what we see?

And then it asks the human question that follows:

Where can care enter the web?

Section 2: Beyond the Play Box

Begin in the soil.

A child is standing beside an adult with seeds in his hand. He is three years old. The patch of earth is real. The seed is real. The weather is real. The waiting will be real. The consequence will be real.

He is not pretending to plant a seed.

He is planting a seed because he wants to see a flower grow.

This matters.

There is joy in it. There is curiosity in it. There may be laughter, mess, imagination and freedom. But there is also purpose. There is intention. There is consequence. There is relationship with reality.

If he digs the seed up every day, the flower may not grow.

That is not a punishment. It is not a worksheet. It is not an adult-imposed learning outcome. It is reality speaking back to him through soil, time and life.

And this is where the language of childhood can become too small.

Play is vital. Play is one of the great languages of childhood. Children think through play, process through play, connect through play, imagine through play and become through play.

But children are not always playing.

Sometimes they are helping.

Sometimes they are watching.

Sometimes they are resting.

Sometimes they are listening.

Sometimes they are working.

Sometimes they are caring.

Sometimes they are participating in the ordinary seriousness of life.

When every meaningful action is absorbed into the word “play,” something important is lost.

The child’s agency is softened.

His intention is hidden.

His contribution is made decorative.

His relationship with consequence is blurred.

He is not merely “playing at gardening.”

He is entering the real craft of gardening beside an adult guide.

That difference matters because the child knows when something is real. He knows when his action carries weight. He knows when the adult is not simply setting up an activity, but inviting him into participation with the world.

The Conditions Lens™ does not remove play from childhood. It protects play by refusing to make play carry the whole weight of childhood.

It refuses to make play the box that holds all of childhood.

Because a child is not only a player.

A child is a meaning-maker, helper, observer, contributor, learner, carer, risk-taker, problem-solver, companion, citizen, and living participant in the conditions around them.

The child is not always playing.

The child is always becoming.

Section 3: Becoming, Not Fixed Labels

The Conditions Lens™ does not treat words like “dysregulated,” “independent,” “resilient” or “withdrawn” as fixed labels placed on the child.

It asks what conditions are shaping that child's becoming in this moment.

A child is not simply "dysregulated" as a finished description.

They may be becoming dysregulated because the room is noisy, the adult is rushed, the transition is sudden, the emotional climate is tense, or the child has had too little agency in what is happening.

This matters because the label can make the child look like the problem.

The Conditions Lens™ asks us to look at the living conditions shaping the response.

It asks us to move from:

"He is dysregulated."

to:

"What conditions are shaping this dysregulation right now?"

That shift changes everything.

A child is not simply "independent" as a fixed trait either.

They may be becoming independent because the adult trusts them, the environment is accessible, the task is meaningful, the rhythm is calm, and the child has enough safety to try without fear of shame.

Or they may appear "independent" because they have learned not to expect help, comfort or attention.

The label alone does not tell us enough.

The Conditions Lens™ asks what conditions are shaping that independence.

It does not remove responsibility.

It restores context.

It allows the adult to ask what can be softened, slowed, changed, offered, removed, protected or repaired.

This is why becoming matters.

Children are not fixed outcomes.

They are becoming within conditions.

Part Two: The Four Doorways

Section 4: The Four Doorways as Entry Points

The four doorways of the Conditions Lens™ are not separate boxes.

They are entry points into the living web.

They give ordinary people a way to begin.

Not because life can be reduced to four categories.

But because without entry points, the web can feel too vast to touch.

The Conditions Lens™ begins with the conditions closest to the child's lived experience.

Emotional Climate

The emotional climate is the felt atmosphere around the child.

It is not always spoken.

It may live in tone, pace, silence, tension, warmth, predictability, humour, softness, hurry or fear.

A child feels the emotional climate before they can explain it.

They feel whether the room is safe.

They feel whether the adult is available.

They feel whether mistakes are survivable.

They feel whether their body can settle.

They feel whether their voice has somewhere to land.

The emotional climate is shaped by many things: adult regulation, stress, workload, family pressure, policy demands, grief, joy, time, space, culture and relationships.

But once it is noticed, it can be tended.

A softer voice can change the climate.

A slower morning can change the climate.

An adult who repairs after rupture can change the climate.

A setting that protects time for real connection can change the climate.

Adult Presence

Adult presence is not simply the adult being physically nearby.

It is the quality of the adult's availability.

A child can be surrounded by adults and still feel unseen.

Presence means the adult is able to notice, respond, guide, protect, delight, wait and remain steady enough for the child to borrow some of that steadiness.

But adult presence does not appear from nowhere.

It is shaped by conditions.

An adult under constant pressure may love deeply and still struggle to be present.

An educator buried under paperwork may care deeply and still have little time to sit beside the child.

A parent worrying about bills may be physically in the room while mentally fighting a storm.

The Conditions Lens™ protects the adult from simplistic blame.

It asks what is shaping the adult's capacity to be present.

Then it asks what can be changed so presence becomes more possible.

Child Agency

Child agency is the child's lived sense that they matter in the world.

Not as a slogan.

As a daily experience.

Can they choose?

Can they help?

Can they test?

Can they refuse?

Can they repair?

Can they move?

Can they contribute?

Can they be taken seriously?

Can they affect the world around them?

The child planting a seed is not only developing fine motor skills or engaging in play.

They are experiencing agency.

Their hand enters the soil.

Their action matters.

Their care matters.

Their patience matters.

Their relationship with consequence matters.

Agency is not the absence of adult guidance.

Agency grows best when the adult is present enough to guide without controlling, protect without suffocating, and support without stealing the child's ownership of the moment.

Environment

The environment is never neutral.

It teaches.

It invites.

It restricts.

It regulates.

It agitates.

It shelters.

It opens or closes possibility.

A room full of noise creates one kind of childhood.

A field full of mud, insects, sticks, wind, risk, shelter and time creates another.

A setting designed around compliance may shape children differently from a setting designed around participation.

A home shaped by stress may feel different from a home shaped by rhythm, repair and belonging.

The environment includes more than furniture or outdoor space.

It includes time, sound, light, movement, materials, weather, technology, rules, expectations, access to nature and the emotional meanings attached to place.

The Conditions Lens™ asks us to look at the environment not as background, but as an active participant in becoming.

Section 5: The Giants Holding the Doorways

The Four Doorways of the Conditions Lens™ are not invented from nowhere. They are held by long-standing bodies of knowledge across early childhood, attachment, ecological systems thinking, children's rights, emotional development, sensory experience, relational pedagogy, trauma-informed practice and ecological restoration.

They are not random categories placed around the child.

They are doorways into deeper bodies of knowledge.

Each doorway carries the influence of theoretical giants who have already shown, in different ways, that children are shaped through relationship, body, meaning, environment, power, culture, time and care.

The Conditions Lens™ does not claim these giants were wrong.

It asks what happens when we bring them together.

John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth showed the deep importance of attachment, secure base relationships, sensitivity, separation, repair and emotional safety. Their work reminds us that children do not grow through instruction alone. They grow through felt security. They need adults whose presence helps the world feel safe enough to explore.

This lives inside the doorway of Adult Presence.

Donald Winnicott helped us understand the holding environment: the emotional and relational conditions that allow the child to feel real, safe and gradually separate without being abandoned. His work reminds us that children become within the quality of care that surrounds them, not only through what adults directly teach.

This lives between Adult Presence and Emotional Climate.

Lev Vygotsky showed that children learn and develop through social interaction, language, culture, scaffolding and participation with more knowledgeable others. His work helps us see that a child planting a seed beside an adult is not merely carrying out an activity. The child is learning through guided participation in real life.

This lives between Adult Presence and Child Agency.

Albert Bandura showed the power of modelling and observational learning. Children learn not only from what adults say, but from what adults repeatedly do. A child watching an adult garden, repair, comfort, care, regulate, apologise or persist is receiving a living model of what it means to be a person.

This lives across Adult Presence, Emotional Climate and Child Agency.

Jean Piaget helped show that children actively construct knowledge through exploration, action and experience. Even where later theorists have challenged or expanded his stages, his central insight remains important: children are not empty vessels. They make sense of the world through active engagement with it.

This lives inside the doorway of Child Agency.

Urie Bronfenbrenner gave us one of the most important ecological maps of childhood. He showed that children develop within nested systems: family, setting, community, policy, culture, economy and time. The Conditions Lens™ honours this foundation, but asks us to keep the map moving. In lived reality, the macro does not stay outside the home. Policy, housing, work, poverty, digital culture and economic pressure enter the room through adult stress, emotional climate, available time, space and capacity.

This lives across all four doorways.

Loris Malaguzzi and the Reggio Emilia tradition helped show the environment as a “third teacher.” This matters deeply within the Conditions Lens™ because the environment is not background. Space, materials, beauty, order, light, access, risk, nature and freedom all shape what the child can notice, feel, attempt and become.

This lives inside the doorway of Environment.

A. Jean Ayres and later sensory integration thinkers helped show that children experience the world through sensory systems that shape regulation, attention, movement and behaviour.

What adults call behaviour may sometimes be a child's body responding to noise, light, texture, crowding, movement, hunger, tiredness or overwhelm.

This lives inside Environment and Emotional Climate.

Pierre Bourdieu helps us see that children are shaped by social fields, cultural capital, habitus, class, expectation and the invisible rules of belonging. His work reminds us that childhood is not lived on equal ground. The conditions around children carry social meanings that influence what feels possible, valued or out of reach.

This enters through Emotional Climate, Adult Presence and the wider conditions surrounding the child.

Michel Foucault helps us see how power operates through institutions, norms, categories, surveillance, discipline and knowledge. Within childhood, this matters because children and adults are often shaped by systems that classify, observe, measure, regulate and normalise. The Conditions Lens™ asks what these systems do to the atmosphere of care.

This enters through policy, adult pressure, emotional climate and the environment.

Gillian Tronto and other care ethicists remind us that care is not sentimental. Care is practical, relational, political and moral. It involves noticing need, taking responsibility, responding well and considering whether care has actually been received. This matters because care cannot survive as a value unless the conditions around people allow care to be practised.

This lives inside Emotional Climate and Adult Presence, but it also runs through the whole framework.

Donna Haraway and more-than-human thinkers remind us that humans do not become apart from the living, material world. Children become with soil, animals, weather, tools, objects, technologies, food, insects, water, places and more-than-human relationships. This helps move childhood beyond a human-only frame.

This lives inside Environment and Child Agency.

Gregory Bateson and systems thinkers remind us that life moves through patterns, feedback, relationship and context. No action stands alone. The adult affects the child. The child affects the adult. The environment affects both. Policy affects the adult's capacity. Digital culture affects attention. The whole pattern moves.

This is the web beneath the four doorways.

The Conditions Lens™ gathers these giants not to flatten them, but to make them usable.

But the giants did not all live in the world children live in now.

Many of their insights were formed before childhood was surrounded by smartphones, algorithmic feeds, constant digital distraction, platform design, online comparison, commercialised attention, data extraction and the quiet arrival of screens into the emotional climate of the home.

This does not make the giants outdated. The giants still matter. But the conditions have changed and that makes their insights even more necessary.

Attachment still matters, but attachment now unfolds in homes where adult attention can be pulled away by a device.

Adult presence still matters, but presence now has to survive interruption, notification, exhaustion and digital absence.

Child agency still matters, but agency now exists alongside platforms designed to capture attention, shape desire and narrow patience.

Environment still matters, but the environment is no longer only the room, the garden, the school, the street or the field. It now includes the digital atmosphere surrounding the child and the adults around them.

Policy still matters, but policy now has to respond to conditions that change faster than traditional systems can easily understand.

This is why the Conditions Lens™ does not simply preserve the giants.

It carries them forward.

It asks what Bowlby, Ainsworth, Winnicott, Vygotsky, Bandura, Piaget, Bronfenbrenner, Malaguzzi, Ayres, Bourdieu, Foucault, Tronto, Haraway and Bateson help us see when childhood is no longer shaped only by family, setting, community, policy, culture and place, but also by an engineered digital environment competing for attention, rhythm, relationship and meaning.

The Conditions Lens™ brings the giants into the future by asking the same living question:

What conditions are shaping what we see now?

It does not ask a parent, educator or policymaker to hold every theory in their head at once. It asks them to begin with four living entry points:

What is the emotional climate?

What is happening in the adult?

What agency does the child have?

What environment is shaping this moment?

Behind those four questions sit decades of theory, research and lived knowledge.

But at ground level, where the child actually lives, the questions must be simple enough to use.

This is the synthesis.

The Conditions Lens™ takes the depth of theory and returns it as a way of seeing.

It says: do not abandon the giants.

Bring them to the soil.

Let Bowlby speak to Bronfenbrenner.

Let Vygotsky speak to Malaguzzi.

Let Winnicott speak to sensory theory.

Let Bourdieu and Foucault speak to policy and adult pressure.

Let Tronto speak to care.

Let Haraway speak to soil, insects, materials and the more-than-human world.

Let Bateson remind us that the whole pattern moves.

Let the child be seen whole.

The four pillars are not boxes around childhood.

They are doorways into the conditions through which childhood becomes.

Part Three: Theory Returning to Life

Section 6: The View from the Academic Towers

The academic giants matter.

Developmental psychologists have shown us that children grow through relationships, attachment, language, regulation, cognition and experience.

Sociologists have shown us that childhood is shaped by culture, power, class, institutions, identity and social structures.

Ecologists have shown us that life depends on webs of relation, not isolated parts.

Post-humanist childhood researchers have reminded us that children are not separate from materials, places, animals, objects, weather, soil, technologies and more-than-human worlds.

These insights are valuable.

The Conditions Lens™ does not reject them.

It gathers them.

The problem is not that the academic towers have seen nothing. The problem is that each tower often sees only from its own window.

One field sees play.

One field sees attachment.

One field sees rights.

One field sees sensory processing.

One field sees policy.

One field sees ecology.

One field sees discourse.

One field sees the more-than-human world.

But a child does not live in separate departments.

A child does not experience attachment theory on Monday, ecological theory on Tuesday, sensory theory on Wednesday, policy on Thursday and digital culture on Friday.

Life arrives whole.

The unopened electricity bill on the kitchen counter is not merely an economic issue. It enters the adult body. It changes breathing, patience, tone of voice and emotional availability.

A compliance audit is not merely a professional requirement. It enters the educator's nervous system. It changes the room. It changes how much time the adult has to sit, notice, listen, respond and remain calm.

A policy document does not stay in an office.

A digital algorithm does not stay inside a phone.

A housing crisis does not stay in the housing market.

A cost-of-living crisis does not stay in the economy.

These forces enter childhood through conditions.

They enter through adult stress.

They enter through rushed routines.

They enter through shortened patience.

They enter through crowded rooms.

They enter through reduced freedom.

They enter through the emotional weather of the home or setting.

This is why isolated theory can fail the child.

A flawless academic paper on childhood and nature may still miss the living child if it cannot see the exhausted adult standing beside them.

A beautiful theory of play may still flatten childhood if it cannot see that the child planting a seed is not merely playing, but participating in real life.

A policy framework may speak of wellbeing while creating conditions that make wellbeing harder to protect.

The Conditions Lens™ asks us to bring the scattered pieces back to the ground.

Not because theory is useless.

But because theory must return to life.

Section 7: The Cage of Expertise

Modern life trains people to specialise.

This has brought enormous depth. Expertise matters. We need people who understand child development, psychology, sociology, ecology, medicine, law, policy, safeguarding, education, housing, climate, economics, technology and care.

The problem is not expertise.

The problem is what happens when expertise becomes a cage.

A person leaves school and enters a pathway. They study a field. They learn its language, its methods, its evidence base, its priorities and its way of naming the world. Over time, they become skilled at seeing through that lens.

This is valuable.

But it can also narrow the view.

The psychologist may see attachment.

The sociologist may see structure.

The educator may see play.

The policy worker may see compliance.

The inspector may see risk.

The ecologist may see habitat.

The economist may see cost.

The digital researcher may see platforms.

The therapist may see regulation.

The parent may see survival.

Each may be seeing something true.

But the child still lives inside all of it at once.

This is the danger of specialist isolation. Not that people know too much, but that the world they are trying to understand is wider than the lane they were trained to walk.

Childhood does not live in one discipline.

A child's behaviour may involve sleep, hunger, sensory overwhelm, adult stress, attachment, peer belonging, classroom design, family pressure, housing insecurity, digital exposure, cultural expectations, shame, agency, rhythm, movement, weather, policy and the emotional climate of the room.

But when each specialist only sees their part, the child can be sliced apart by expertise.

One professional names the behaviour.

One names the diagnosis.

One names the risk.

One names the developmental stage.

One names the policy requirement.

One names the sensory need.

One names the family context.

One names the social inequality.

All may be partly right.

But the child may still not be seen whole.

The same happens around adults.

A parent under pressure may be described as disengaged, inconsistent, resistant, difficult or lacking capacity. An educator may be described as burnt out, underperforming or in need of

resilience. A family may be described through deficits. A community may be described through outcomes. A childminder may be described through compliance status.

But the Conditions Lens™ asks what conditions are shaping what we see.

What is entering the adult's nervous system?

What is shaping their capacity to care?

What is being demanded of them?

What support is missing?

What pressure has become normal?

What system is being carried in the body?

What has been removed, weakened or overloaded?

This does not remove responsibility.

It restores context.

The Conditions Lens™ is not anti-expertise.

It is anti-fragmentation.

It does not ask specialists to abandon depth. It asks them to bring their depth into relationship with the wider web.

Because real life does not arrive as a department, a module, a framework, a strategy, a policy area or a professional lane.

It arrives as a whole atmosphere.

And children live inside that atmosphere before adults have finished naming it.

This is why the Conditions Lens™ matters as a way of seeing. It gives specialists, parents, educators and policymakers a shared question that can travel across disciplines without erasing them:

What conditions are shaping what we see?

That question does not belong to one profession.

It belongs wherever life is being shaped.

It allows the psychologist to keep psychology, but see policy.

It allows the educator to keep pedagogy, but see adult stress.

It allows the policy worker to keep systems, but see the room.

It allows the ecologist to keep habitat, but see childhood.

It allows the parent to keep love, but see the pressures around love.

It allows the specialist to keep depth, but recover the whole.

The cage of expertise opens when knowledge stops defending its own borders and begins serving life.

The Conditions Lens™ does not ask us to know less.

It asks us to see more.

Section 8: From Theory to Atmosphere

Once the giants are brought together, the child is no longer seen as an isolated learner, player, behaviour, diagnosis or outcome.

The child is seen as living within atmosphere.

This matters because children experience conditions before they can explain them. They feel the tone of a room before they understand policy. They feel adult tension before they understand money. They feel hurry before they understand workload. They feel digital absence before they understand algorithms. They feel restriction before they understand risk culture.

Theory becomes useful only when it helps us notice what is shaping that atmosphere.

The question is not simply whether a child is playing, learning, behaving, developing, communicating, regulating or belonging.

The question is what conditions are making those things possible, difficult, rushed, pressured, widened or narrowed.

A child may be surrounded by excellent theory and still live inside poor conditions.

A child may be described through accurate professional language and still not be properly seen.

A child may be assessed, documented, observed, supported and planned for, while the room around them remains too hurried, too tense, too controlled, too noisy, too disconnected or too burdened to truly hold them.

The Conditions Lens™ asks us to move from naming the child to reading the atmosphere.

What is the room carrying?

What is the adult carrying?

What is the child being asked to carry?

What systems have entered this moment?

What possibilities have been opened or closed?

This is where the Conditions Lens™ becomes practical.

It does not ask us to abandon theory.

It asks us to let theory kneel down beside the child, look around the room, feel the atmosphere, and ask what conditions are shaping what we see.

Only then can care know where to enter.

Part Four: Care Entering the Web

Section 9: The Human Variable: Where Care Enters the Web

Interdependence tells us that everything affects everything else.

The Conditions Lens™ agrees.

But it does not stop there.

Because if everything affects everything else, then the next question is not only “what is connected?”

The next question is:

What can now be changed?

This is the human variable.

A person can notice.

A person can pause.

A person can soften their voice.

A person can rearrange a room.

A person can protect rhythm.

A person can give a child agency.

A person can plant shelter.

A person can reduce noise.

A person can slow down.

A person can challenge policy.

A person can design tools differently.

A person can refuse to treat a child’s distress as isolated behaviour.

The Conditions Lens™ does not claim that humans are free from conditions.

No one is.

We are shaped by bodies, histories, economies, relationships, environments, cultures, technologies, policies and inherited pressures.

But we are not only shaped.

We can also shape.

We are not just caught in the tapestry. We are the ones holding the needle.

That is the ethical turn.

A child’s behaviour is not simply something to manage. It is information from the web.

A tired adult’s reactivity is not simply a personal failure. It is information from the web.

A burnt-out educator is not simply lacking resilience. They may be carrying impossible conditions.

A family under pressure is not simply disorganised. They may be metabolising systems that were never designed around care.

The Conditions Lens™ asks us to stop isolating the visible outcome from the surrounding conditions.

It asks us to stop pointing at the leaf while ignoring the soil.

In a child’s behaviour, we can ask:

What emotional conditions are present here?

Is the room calm, tense, hurried, noisy, crowded, unpredictable or safe?

What is happening in the adult?

Is the adult regulated, exhausted, distracted, under pressure, frightened, watched, judged, rushed or supported?

What agency does the child have?

Can the child choose, move, contribute, refuse, explore, test, repair, help and be taken seriously?

What environment surrounds them?

Is the space inviting, restrictive, overstimulating, barren, beautiful, natural, flexible, cluttered, rigid, warm or cold?

And then we widen the question again.

What policies are shaping the adult's capacity?

What economic pressures are entering the room?

What digital patterns are shaping attention?

What cultural expectations are narrowing what the child is allowed to be?

What systems are making care harder to practise?

This is not about blaming the adult.

It is about locating the conditions.

And once the conditions are located, care has somewhere to enter.

A calmer adult presence may change the room.

A slower rhythm may change the morning.

A protected outdoor space may change the child's body.

A real task may change the child's sense of contribution.

A policy written with human conditions in mind may change what families and educators are able to carry.

A planted hedge may change the wind, the insects, the birds, the child's play, the child's attention, the food, the shelter, the soil and the future.

Care is not sentimental.

Care is structural.

Care is ecological.

Care is practical.

Care is the human act of changing conditions so that life has a better chance to become.

Section 10: The Child as a Living Current

The child is not a passive object inside the web.

The child is not simply shaped by adult presence, policy, environment and culture.

The child also shapes the web.

A child changes the room by entering it.

Their energy changes the rhythm.

Their distress changes the adult's breathing.

Their curiosity changes the direction of the day.

Their question changes the adult's attention.

Their refusal exposes the limits of the system.

Their joy expands the atmosphere.

Their need reveals whether the surrounding conditions can actually hold life.

This matters because many models of childhood still quietly position the child as the one being acted upon.

The adult teaches.

The child learns.

The adult regulates.

The child receives.

The policy designs.

The child is measured.

The environment is arranged.

The child responds.

But lived childhood is far more alive than this.

A child can reorder time.

A child can slow an adult down.

A child can pull attention back to the ground.

A child can expose the cruelty of a rushed system.

A child can reveal the poverty of an over-managed environment.

A child can show whether a policy actually protects wellbeing or only documents it.

The child is not outside the shaping process.

The child is one of the currents.

This is true not only in the room, but also in the systems built around childhood.

Policy is not made out of thin air.

It is made because children exist.

It is made because adults look at children and decide what children need, what they lack, what might harm them, what might help them, what should be measured, what should be prevented, what should be encouraged, and what kind of future should be protected.

In this sense, children shape policy through adult interpretation.

A child cries, and adults build theories of attachment, regulation and care.

A child climbs, and adults build rules around risk, safety and supervision.

A child struggles, and adults build systems of assessment, diagnosis, intervention and support.

A child plays, and adults build curriculum frameworks around play.

A child is harmed, and adults build safeguarding systems.

A child is seen as vulnerable, capable, risky, innocent, competent, needy, resilient, disordered, creative or unfinished, and each assumption shapes the policies built around them.

The child may not sit at the policy table.

But the idea of the child is always there.

This matters because policy is never only about children as they are. It is also about the child imagined by adults.

The protected child.

The risky child.

The learning child.

The measurable child.

The vulnerable child.

The playful child.

The future worker.

The citizen-in-forma-tion.

The child to be safeguarded.

The child to be prepared.

The child to be assessed.

The child to be managed.

These adult images of the child become conditions too.

They shape the regulations, frameworks, inspections, funding models, risk assessments, curriculum documents and professional expectations that later return to the real child as lived atmosphere.

This is why the Conditions Lens™ asks not only what policy does to children, but what idea of the child is living inside the policy.

Because when adults misunderstand children, policy can build the misunderstanding into the system.

And when policy builds from a narrow image of the child, the real child may be forced to live inside a box made by adult assumptions.

The child is therefore not passive in relation to policy.

By existing, needing, resisting, exploring, suffering, learning and becoming, children call policy into being.

But adults decide what their existence means.
That decision becomes one of the conditions children must live within.
This is why the Conditions Lens™ does not simply ask what adults do to children.
It asks what conditions are moving between adult, child, environment and system.
A child's dysregulation may deplete an already exhausted adult.
But a supported adult may meet that dysregulation with steadiness.
That steadiness may help the child regulate.
The child's regulation may soften the adult.
The softened adult may become more available.
The available adult may create a calmer environment.
The calmer environment may reduce the child's distress.
The whole pattern changes.
This is a living cascade.
But the opposite can also happen.
A stressed policy environment may exhaust the adult.
The exhausted adult may become reactive.
The reactive atmosphere may unsettle the child.
The unsettled child may become louder, more distressed or more oppositional.
The adult may feel judged, ashamed or incapable.
The room may become tighter.
The child may carry the tension in their body.
Again, the whole pattern changes.
This is why behaviour cannot be understood alone.
Behaviour is not the beginning of the story.
It is often the visible edge of a much wider web.
The Conditions Lens™ asks us to read the web before we punish the signal.

Section 11: Why This Is Not Just Interdependence

Someone may say:

“Isn't this just interdependence?”

No.

Interdependence is the foundation.

The Conditions Lens™ is what happens when interdependence becomes practical, ethical and human.

Interdependence tells us that everything affects everything else. It shows us that nothing exists in isolation, that life moves through relationship, influence and connection.

But interdependence alone can remain abstract.

It can tell us that the soil affects the tree and the tree affects the soil.

It can tell us that the adult affects the child and the child affects the adult.

It can tell us that policy, culture, economy, technology and environment are connected.

But the Conditions Lens™ asks the next question:

What do we do with that truth?

This is where the human variable matters.

Becoming is always happening. Children, adults, systems, places and living worlds are always being shaped by conditions. But human beings can notice that shaping. We can pause. We can ask what is happening. We can ask who is carrying pressure, who is being blamed, what has become too heavy, and where care might enter.

The human variable does not create becoming.

It makes becoming conscious.

It turns the living truth that “nothing becomes alone” into an ethical responsibility: if conditions are shaping what people and places become, then those conditions can be noticed, questioned, tended and changed.

This is the difference.

The Conditions Lens™ does not stop at connection. It asks what conditions are shaping what we see, which conditions can be changed, who is being blamed for conditions they did not create, and where care can enter the web.

It moves interdependence from observation into responsibility.

It asks:

What conditions are shaping what we see?

Which conditions can be changed?

Where can care enter?

Who is being blamed for conditions they did not create?

Who has the power to alter the conditions?

What small act of stewardship might change the wider pattern?

This is why the Conditions Lens™ cannot remain in abstraction.

It must return to the adult standing in the kitchen.

It must return to the educator in the room.

It must return to the child with the seed.

It must return to the policy that shapes capacity.

It must return to the phone that fractures attention.

It must return to the soil that either holds life or does not.

It must return to the living moment where something can be tended.

The Conditions Lens™ does not replace existing theory. It carries the giants forward through four practical doorways. Its concern is not that theory knows nothing, but that theory is too often separated from the living moment where children, adults, systems and environments meet.

It asks why behaviour is separated from environment.

Why play is separated from work, care, contribution and consequence.

Why policy is separated from the adult nervous system.

Why ecology is separated from childhood.

Why digital culture is separated from attention.

Why adult stress is separated from children's wellbeing.

Why theory is separated from Tuesday afternoon.

Interdependence shows the web.

The Conditions Lens™ asks how the web is being lived.

And once the web is being lived, it asks what can now be tended.

This is why the Conditions Lens™ is not simply another way of saying everything is connected.

It is a way of seeing what connection is doing.

It is a way of noticing where harm is being carried.

It is a way of finding where care can enter.

It is a way of moving from passive connection to conscious stewardship.

The Conditions Lens™ returns the fragments to life.

And once conditions are seen, they can begin to be tended.

Section 12: The Return to the Soil

Return to the child with the seed.

There is no need to overcomplicate the moment.

A child is planting.

An adult is beside him.

The soil is open.

The future is small enough to hold between two fingers.

If he cares for the seed, something may grow.

If he digs it up again and again, it may not.

This is not a metaphor placed on top of childhood.

This is childhood.

Reality, relationship, consequence, agency, care, attention, patience, environment, adult presence, weather, soil and time are all present at once.

No academic tower can fully hold that moment if it insists on separating its parts.

No play box can fully hold that moment if it refuses to see the child's seriousness.

No policy framework can fully protect that moment if it measures outcomes while ignoring the conditions that make such moments possible.

The Conditions Lens™ begins with the simple truth that life becomes within conditions.

But it does not leave us there.

It asks us to enter that truth with care.

Because if everything is connected, then no act of care is wasted.

A calmer adult presence changes the room.

A protected rhythm changes a nervous system.

A child trusted with real contribution changes their relationship with the world.

A patch of restored soil changes the insects, the birds, the water, the food, the child who kneels beside it, and the future they learn to imagine.

A policy written with human conditions in mind changes what families are able to carry.

A tool designed with care can return attention rather than harvest it.

A single adult who pauses before reacting can change the direction of a child's day.

This is not small.

This is the work of continuity.

The Conditions Lens™ takes the ancient truth of interdependence and asks what we are willing to do with it.

It moves us from abstraction to attention.

From blame to conditions.

From helplessness to stewardship.

From passive connection to conscious care.

The law of interdependence shows us that nothing exists in isolation. Everything is connected through relationships of influence.

The Conditions Lens™ asks how we might become responsible for what we now know.

Because once we see the web, we are no longer innocent bystanders.

We are participants.

We are condition-shapers.

And where care enters the web, life has a better chance to grow.

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