

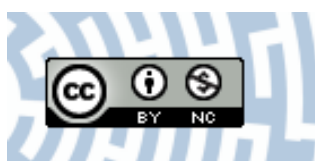


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Title: Threats to the process of children's and teenagers' adaptation to society (sociological, psychological and educational contexts)

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Threats to the process of children's and teenagers' adaptation to society (sociological, psychological and educational contexts)

Abstract

In the article the threats to the process of children and teenagers' adaptation to society are described. The attention has been focused on moral and social development of children and teenagers.

Key words: mechanisms of adaptation and misadaptation to society, resocialization and reeducation processes, social life standards and distorted socialization

If we assume that adaptation is defined as **"effectiveness or degree to which an individual meets the requirements of personal independence together with social responsibility as expected from his/her age, life and environment"** (Kostrzewski, 1977), the components of such definition will be an interesting subject of investigation.

This can be divided into questions connected with evaluation of personal aspects (independence, responsibility, level of functioning, individual development) and social aspects of functioning, which involve so-called social life standards, moral development and social expectations. Any disturbances in these aspects can consequently lead, whether directly or indirectly, to wrong adaptation, which is the same as misadaptation.

Far from arguing about the extent or meaning of the words "wrong adaptation" and "misadaptation", I would like to concentrate upon a specific adaptation mechanism connected with moral or social development of children and teenagers:

- Throughout the process of moral development we can observe the consequences of increased educational obligations resulting from axiological assumptions of ideal upbringing and consciousness-raising, i.e. understanding of rules and values, which is most often expressed by the sequence anomy-heteronomy-autonomy.

- Throughout the process of social development an important stress is put on social competences, social activity level, growing into culture of the nation, other indicators of social development which are often considered as unstable or comparative.
- Most often, however: as social development which can mean a humanization process through developing specific human psychic qualities which are subject to social laws.
- As a process of becoming a member of society in result of adopting human cultural output; this is often considered the same as learning behaviors, which enable to adapt to social environment or to know the rules of behavior required in the society. This process involves furthermore developing various forms of contact with other people and accepting other forms of behavior towards the society or relationship between an individual and the society (Kościelska, 1984, p. 22).
- As acquiring social competences expressed by social skills. Social competence is shown by a degree to which an individual is able and willing to adapt to customs and habits, to behavioral standards accepted in the society as correct, furthermore by a degree to which an individual can do it independently, finally by a degree to which an individual can participate in the events or undertakings of his/her society (Witkowski, 1985). (The meaning of "social competence" is a resultant of investigations on the degree or level of socialization, which is of essential importance in special education. Therefore, probably, the definition of social competence is an extended definition issued by World Expert Committee referring to the problem of general social adaptation).

Both the first and the second process can be carried out through imitation (copying), identification (desire to become similar or the same) or internalization (desire to have inner Tightness; introverted attitude).

If the quality of educational or social processes is satisfactory, the guardians do not show any discontent whereas the environment or educational circles are glad to see that things are correct unless there is a conflict of roles, values or interests. Therefore, a proper adaptation is reflected by a realistic look upon oneself and upon the environment, trying to understand one's own deficiencies, looking for adequate ways to relieve emotional stresses and improving the ability to control conflicts. On the other hand, wrong adaptation is manifested by: being dissatisfied with oneself, considering oneself as unhappy, showing weak or no intellectual or social activity and presenting defensive attitude instead, showing inadequate reaction, no cooperation with a group when expected to do so. It is quite different when the processes do not have satisfactory effect on the child's development or are not in accordance with expectations of e.g. parents. Then we ask such basic questions as why, for what reasons, where did

we go wrong, what was the primary cause etc. Before the questioners start being impatient, I want to point out that each adaptation process is affected by mechanisms which have **psychological character** (being most often indicative of the condition or form of basic psychic control processes and also defensive mechanisms among which aggression may be a basic one), whereas the effects of wrong functioning have **social character**. Let's investigate this mechanism basing on the following examples:

- Development is disturbed by factors connected with what is called **distorted socialization**. The family is generally good but there are conflicts from time to time and disturbances in fulfilling some functions. Effects: wrong adaptation and disturbed development of the child.
- Development is normal but at some point (under the influence of various factors like a change of school or environment, "sick friendship") a process called **demoralization** begins. Effects: the child makes changes, often very deep, in existing opinions, hierarchy of values, attitudes. (Demoralization is always connected with reevaluation of somebody's attitude towards reality. Demoralization comes into existence when the values, which are desirable from the educational point of view, become replaced by competitive values, which are undesirable from the social, educational etc. points of view. Most often under the influence of morals or culture other than those the child has known so far).
- Development in the conditions, which can be, described as antagonistic-destructive or sub-cultural socialization (due to connection of an individual with values and rules of subculture which is opposed to culture of a larger community) (Pytka, 1993).

The latter type of socialization arouses a lot of controversy because quite undoubtedly there are no good conditions in such a situation to develop socially as far as social expectations are concerned. However, if we take into account that the former two types illustrated a model, which considered a mechanism of negative psychological reinforcements, such mechanism is not so clearly visible in case of sub-cultural socialization. Adaptation process is normal. Psychological mechanisms producing adaptation show normal functioning, but the base on which both social and moral developments are supported is "sick" due to the hierarchy of values just being constructed. The individual constructs his/her world of values identifying himself/herself with a pathological family, group of crime or band of thieves, and only observing the rules, which are observed by his/her environment.

Psychological interpretation emphasizes some kind of continuum contained in the phases (stages) of "becoming" a misadapted individual.

Phase one (initial) is typical for a feeling of being repudiated or lack of emotional dependence. Natural needs of the child, connected with what is called

emotional adherence, are not satisfied. The reasons are: lack of parental love, no manifestation of feelings, lack of interest in the child's affairs. Typical reactions are: insubordination, perverseness, monkey-tricks, gradual hostility towards selected persons, manifesting discontent, most often as a defensive reaction, through aggressive reactions towards things, animals, weaker friends, younger siblings.

Phase two (fixing) is typical for: masking sufferings, hiding painful psychic experiences, aversion to positive interactions for fear of being repudiated, gradually assuming the attitude of a "hard one", rejecting any forms of expression which might reveal a longing for kindness, love, approval, acceptance. Hence, a strong activity to look for friendships or satisfy other needs outside the home. This phase is also typical for susceptibility to addictions (usually psychoactive drugs), problems at school, flights or truancy, finally, as Maria Grzegorzewska writes, admiration for wrong-doings together with heroics.

Phase three (autonomized): typical attitude is definite self-determination on the side of antagonistic-destructive (anti-social) positions. Typical is: attempting to make gangs, non-formal groups, in which the members are joined together through their destructive activities and infringing moral or legal rules (wars of gangs, sub-cultural groups, organized groups of crime or groups with other "philosophy of life") (Pytko, 1993).

In cases of both demoralization and distorted socialization we observe stages of rejection, isolation, sense of wrong, rigid emotional expression, masking the feelings, problems with interpersonal communication. On the other hand, we do not observe such processes in individuals "shaped" in the conditions of sub-cultural socialization. Moreover, it should be stressed that typology of the social irregularity process is determined not only by symptom syndromes but also by groups of etiological factors and diagnostic features (called sometimes a clinical picture of misadaptation) (examples of such typologies are as suggested by Cz. Capów or Sullivan & Grants).

Therefore, a matter of great importance is lack of both emotional and social maturity, in other words not only incorrect perception of somebody's own person but also inability (often due to lack of knowledge) to act in a group.

Another classification is based on symptoms indicating some type of attitude. This can be presented by describing certain characteristics which refer closely to behavior.

- Asocial: These are always trying to dominate or make other people subordinate. If they ever show kindness or interest in other people's affairs, their main purpose is to profit. They treat others in an instrumental way. They have no moral restraints and they do not feel restricted by social rules. Control mechanisms of their own behavior are impaired. Their reactions are impulsive and inconsistent.

- Conformists: These are obeying only when controlled by people on whom they depend. Emotionally unstable to excess, they can manipulate their obedience and show resignation from independence attempting to commit a wicked deed in order to get a profit. Full of inner antagonisms and hidden conflicts. When not controlled, they have a feeling of comfort, power and overestimated importance.
- Neurotic: These are generally decent. However, never-ending anxieties, doubts and fears can lead to behaviors undesired from the social point of view. Sometimes they excessively manifest their approval of rules and principles of social coexistence, hence they give the impression of being mentors, or they pose as moralists. This is said to be a defensive mechanism to reduce the pains arising from a fear that they will not cope with the requirements of a proper, decent life.

Even if the misadapted have a very similar behavioral picture, they may be quite different from the point of view of "remedies" used for their resocialization, reeducation, orthodidactics, therapy etc. I think that these differences are a constituent of low effectiveness of the above process. In practice, individual character of a "socializing path" is hardly ever taken into consideration, whereas resocializing practice shows that a misadapted person who has been shaping his/her social development through distorted socialization will need different reeducational measures or methodical procedures than the one who has been shaping his/her attitude towards other people, world or rules through demoralization, or those who have been shaped through some kind of subculture.

1. It seems that resocialization process is the most complicated in case of those who have gone astray through subculture because they are very reluctant to accept social requirements or to try changing their "philosophy of life".
2. It seems that a useful attitude towards recognition of adaptation mechanisms is to consider them as closely related with defensive mechanisms, which can provide information about the condition and possibilities of adaptation.
3. It seems that an unfavorable tendency is appearing to spread in educational circles (family, school, groups of friends) a comparative perception of rules, values or behavioral patterns, changing cognitive disposition of the children.
4. Finally, it seems that the presence of defensive mechanisms, even those with negative connotations like hostility or aggression, is from the point of view of resocialization diagnostics an important indicator showing a method of settling differences with the environment by persons who have problems with adapting to the conditions, people, situations etc.

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