

KNOWING THE CHILD'S NEEDS FOR THE EXPLOITATION OF SOCIAL GOOD

ALEXANDRU GABRIEL NEGOIȚĂ*

alexgabrielnegoita@yahoo.com

Abstract: *This article aims to contribute to the knowledge of the child's needs, knowledge that leads to his or her good. Contemporary society pays increased attention to the well-being of children because the future of human civilization depends on their good bio-psycho-social development. Thus, knowledge of the factors underlying child development as well as the characteristics of the psychological profile constitutes the basis for understanding the needs that children have. The degree to which their needs are met determines the degree of development of children in all their specific aspects as human beings. Understanding the way in which the child sees the world due to the needs he or she has represents an important resource in shaping any educational approach.*

Keywords: *The Rights of the Child, The child's mental development, The child's needs*

Introduction

The conceptual determinations on which the scientific approach is built are very important. The Dex defines the child as "the boy or girl in the first years of life (until adolescence)"¹. Law 1 of Romania, 272/2004, on the protection of the rights of the child, finally, in article 4, the child as a "person who has not reached the age of 18 and has not acquired the full capacity to exercise, under the terms of the law".

The Convention on the Rights of the Child adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations and which was also assumed by our country through the adoption of the law, Law no. 18/1990, defines the child as "any human being under the age of 18, except in cases where the law applicable to the child establishes the limit of majority below this age"². In addition to these conceptual definitions, the child can be defined by each human being according to the sensitivity or tangent with and towards children. For Henry Ward Beecher, a supporter of the abolition of

* **PhD. in Political Sciences, University of Bucharest.**

¹ Jean Piaget, *The Psychology of the Child*, Basic Books, 1969, p. 27.

² John W. Santrock, *Child Development*, McGraw-Hill Education, 2011, p. 5.

slavery and a well-known evangelist of the 19th century, "children are the hands with which we grasp heaven", for the pedagogue Maria Montessori "the child is the spiritual builder of humanity, and the obstacles to its free development are the stones in the wall in which the human soul has been imprisoned"³.

From a spiritual perspective, children are seen as gifts received from God, as signs of blessing, for which they must be cherished and cared for. References in this sense can be found in the Bible, in the Old Testament, where children are considered an inheritance from the Lord, a source of joy (Psalm 127: 3-5), in the New Testament where the attention to the needs of children is visible both on the part of the Savior Jesus who took them in his arms and blessed them (Matthew 19: 13-15), but also in the writings of the apostles who urge parents to care for children and raise them wisely (Colossians 3: 21, Ephesians 6:4). The child is therefore a human being framed in a temporal period of his existence and who has rights and needs specific to his bio-psycho-social characteristics. The rights and needs of the child derive from the study and knowledge of him, of his age and psychological particularities⁴.

The above-mentioned laws clearly outline, at a universal as well as specific level, the rights that any civilized and responsible state must ensure to children. Thus, the state must recognize the fundamental right of the child, namely the right to life, and make every effort to ensure its supervision and harmonious development. The child's entry, by birth, into human society brings with it the recognition of the right to a name, to a citizenship and to be in the care of his parents, respectively the family into which he was born. Any society should ensure the respect of these rights because its future as a human civilization with specific, national determinations depends on the well-being of the children within it. Legal acts and regulations will take care of the necessary actions in the event of a violation of the child's rights. All these steps are carried out on the basis of research aimed at discovering the specific characteristics of the child. Studies in the field of child psychology, within the socio-human, biological and medical sciences are a real and useful support for knowing the particularities of the child⁵.

³ Maria Montessori, *The Absorbent Mind*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967, p. 18.

⁴ Lev Vygotsky, *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*, Harvard University Press, 1978, p. 56.

⁵ Laura E. Berk, *Child Development*, Pearson Education, 2013, p. 9.

Factors of the child's mental development

To determine the child's needs, it is necessary to look at the factors of his mental development, more precisely, knowledge of hereditary, environmental and educational factors. From a hereditary point of view, the biological uniqueness of the human being is marked in the genes in the chromosomes of the cell nuclei⁶. The hereditary endowment of the child, which involves general traits of the species as well as individual characteristics, is under the influence of the environment in which he lives. Research shows that environmental and educational influences can shape different mental profiles and characteristics in children⁷.

Environmental factors, both physical - bioclimatic conditions and social - economic, political and cultural conditions influence the development child. Thus, some influences can shape similar individual traits within a community while others can favor the differentiated manifestation of hereditary potential. On the other hand, educational factors in society direct through a systematic action the action of the hereditary factor and the modification of environmental influences. Education thus has a leading role in the formation of human personality due to the changes it produces in an organized manner and focused on a clear purpose that aims to form the educational ideal established at the level of society⁸.

In terms of the environment, an intense concern has consisted in following the way in which the family influences the development of children's personality because the family is a major factor of influence due to the fact that the child is born and interacts for the first time with its family environment. Family affiliation determines the child's name as well as his educational biography. Its socio-economic and moral structure, the social class from which it comes, the values it accepts are aspects that are reflected in the child's personality. All influences exerted in the family, over generations, have an effect on the child's psychological development. Also, family dysfunctions - disorganization, death of a parent, divorce, remarriage - are aspects that raise problems for the child's development⁹.

⁶ Jean Piaget, *The Psychology of the Child*, Basic Books, 1969, p. 33.

⁷ Lev Vygotsky, *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*, Harvard University Press, 1978, p. 57.

⁸ Jerome Bruner, *The Culture of Education*, Harvard University Press, 1996, p. 44.

⁹ Urie Bronfenbrenner, *The Ecology of Human Development*, Harvard University Press, 1979, p. 21.

Knowing the psychological profile is also important in order to understand the child's needs. Defined as "a quantitative and qualitative expression of all the components, processes and psychic properties, as well as the interfunctional relationships between them, characteristic of a certain stage in the ontogenetic development of children and which differ from one individual to another", the psychological profile reveals the degree of mental and behavioral development for a certain age and for each individual, thus there is a psychological profile of the age and one of the individual. The psychological profile of the age involves the set of typical manifestations specific to children of the same age, but they also involve some aspects that differ from one child to another. The individual psychological profile includes all the characteristics of each child, by which he or she is differentiated from other children of the same age.

Child development takes place in stages, being an objectively necessary and universal process. The human individual experiences organic, neuropsychic and psychosocial development, all of which produce certain visible changes in the human body. The child's growth determines certain anatomical and morphological changes. His or her maturation produces visible qualitative changes in his or her behavior, in his or her relationships with peers. The emergence of psychic mechanisms, of the verbal communication system, requires the fulfillment of certain needs. Staged psychic development must produce progress in the child's behavior, which is in a system of social relations. The specific needs of each stage of development must be treated with great care¹⁰.

Child needs

The desire to ensure good child care is specific to civilized societies¹¹. If physiological needs are easier to fulfill, psychological needs require deeper knowledge that must be accompanied by understanding and love¹². Knowing the child's needs responsibilities those who work with them - parents, teachers, people with whom children are in contact - to create a climate in which the child feels safe, understood and comforted when they suffer, whether physical or mental. Physical and emotional care are closely linked to the needs signaled by the child. At birth, the child is

¹⁰ Erik Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, W. W. Norton & Company, 1950, p. 247.

¹¹ Jean Piaget, *The Psychology of the Child*, Basic Books, 1969, p. 45.

¹² Lev Vygotsky, *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*, Harvard University Press, 1978, p. 89.

"a bundle of needs, of needs imposed by survival, on the one hand, and development, on the other"¹³. These can only be fulfilled with the assistance of an adult. His need for food, which is different from his sucking reflex, is fulfilled only by the mother.

The conditions in the child's living environment can facilitate or hinder the optimal satisfaction of his needs. Neurobiology indicates that the failure to satisfy the child's needs during his childhood produces negative consequences on the development of the child's brain. Thus, an optimal development of the child is closely related to the fulfillment of his needs and the mother's capacity to read them correctly.

Human needs were classified into five levels by the psychologist Abraham Maslow¹⁴. According to his theory, only when the needs at one level are satisfied do those at the next level begin to manifest. Grouped, starting from the base of the pyramid, human needs are: physiological, security, social, esteem, self-actualization. Based on these notions, psychologists have developed new paradigms and have made classifications of human needs. Since the child's development is closely related to his family, it is responsible for satisfying needs.

Even when the child enters the educational environment, preschool or school, he receives the approval of the family depending on how he integrates into these environments, on how he respects the respective rules. The moments of crisis in the child's development are also carried out by the family. The challenge of communicating effectively with the child and understanding him is a real one for the family. Everything depends on the loving relationship between parent and child, and only the child who feels truly loved will develop to his maximum potential.

The authors Chapman and Campbell talk about filling the child's "emotional reservoir" with love. In this sense, they bring to attention the five ways in which children express or understand their love: physical caresses, words of encouragement, time given, gifts and services. The food for the child's emotional need is therefore love. A child who feels loved is easier to discipline and form. Children's needs are the same regardless of their environment of origin. Parents must have the ability to understand the child's signals and react promptly and appropriately to meet their needs. They must have the ability to perceive the child as he is, which will help develop a good self-image in the child's case.

¹³ Maria Montessori, *The Absorbent Mind*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967, p. 102.

¹⁴ Abraham Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*, Harper & Row, 1954, p. 150.

Their ability to engage positively emotionally in the child's life will produce joy in the child that the parents feel involved in his life. The parent's ability to empathize in the relationship with the child, to familiarize himself with his feelings, makes it easier for him to self-control his own feelings. The ability to have realistic expectations in raising and supervising the child is a function of great importance. If the parent's expectations are unrealistic, too high or too low, they can cause frustration in the child's behavior. The parent who has real expectations for his child is the one who will understand the level of development, real capabilities and potential of his child.

Ana Muntean makes a classification of the child's needs from an emotional point of view into four categories, as follows: a) the need for love and security - is the most important at a young age, being a basic condition for the development of a healthy personality¹⁵. The ability to respond to love ensures the child's humanization as well as the ability to love and form, later, his own family. b) the need for new experiences - ensures the child's intellectual development. Through life experiences, manifested at first in a playful form, the child learns to explore the world, to cooperate with it, develops sensory and cognitively. c) the need for recognition of abilities and the need to be appreciated - is another real need that the child faces. In any learning situation, whether in the family or at school, the child needs encouragement and reward. d) the need for responsibilities - the child's independence increases. Gradually, responsibilities increase. They must be given within and under the guidance of the family so that the child learns the rules of what is permitted or not.

The well-being and smooth running of human society depend on the proper satisfaction of these needs. Their fulfillment will produce optimal development of the child and the development of a responsible adult. Wanting to provide support to parents who want to raise their children well, Irina Petrea, following her observations on children, identifies the following needs of the child: the need to be liked, loved, understood and accepted, the need for trust and freedom, the need for identity, the need for stimulation and learning, the need for play and exercise outdoors, healthy eating, daily routine, discipline, the need to be respected and the need for harmony in the family.

¹⁵ Ana Muntean, *Child Development Psychology*, Iași, Polirom Publishing House, 2016, p. 74

Since man is a spiritual being, the child also has this need. Religious values, along with the faith of the parents, are elements that are transmitted to children in the process of primary socialization. Active participation and involvement in religious communities as well as attending religious schools sediment in the child the moral-religious values acquired in the family. The family can familiarize him with the religious beliefs he has embraced. Education that only produces satisfaction for the values of knowledge is incomplete without religious values, of faith, under the Cucus line. Religious faith is significant for the child's mind and soul because it transposes the ego into the world of deep values that urge towards continuous improvement. Education is not endangered by religious faith, but through education faith can be formed and strengthened.

The moral values of religion outline a human profile with positive values, beneficial to the entire society. Thus, along with the family, other institutions such as the church and the school, achieve a socialization regarding the religious side of man. The content of religious education within the school aims, according to Jude states, the formation of religious consciousness, beliefs and feelings in accordance with religious consciousness, as well as practical skills and habits specific to religion. Good upbringing, spiritual balance, education and well-being of the child are not possible in a hostile, violent, dysfunctional environment. Where there is love, there is also understanding and harmony.

For children separated from their biological family, the challenges regarding the fulfillment of needs are strong. The social protection system must be well organized and focus its resources and efforts to replace what the family should have offered. Other stressful factors in the environment, whether physical or social, produce imbalances in the child's development. Malnutrition, infectious diseases, drugs, medications, radiation cause suffering and disorders in children. Their abnormal development can also be influenced by the age of the parents, whether they are too old or teenage parents, by the mother's emotional state or by their premature birth. All these factors are real challenges for the society that pursues, within its framework, the well-being of the child or his protection. Also, knowledge of the specific characteristics of childhood, of the stages of development, with the challenges and transformations that they imply, will support the effort of each one, at the individual level – parent, family and at the general level – human society, to ensure that the needs of children are met.

The child's world

To understand the child's world, an effort of introspection is necessary to remind ourselves of how we were children. On the other hand, relating to them, contact with them or the simple act of observing children provides precious information about how the world is shaped for a child¹⁶. Robert Coles said about children that they "give us a chance to see a good part of who we are: human beings struggling to understand what this world means"¹⁷. The child looks at the world through his own logic, which often springs from his imagination. Having just entered the world, the child tries to understand it by relating to it through the prism of his own thinking. The world opens up to the child full of possibilities. Based on this trust, the child is motivated to learn by performing different tasks and, on the other hand, because of this trust, he can get into trouble. The mixture of fantasy and reality is specific to the child's world. This characteristic is evident in the child's reactions in different circumstances, reactions based on his own imagination and not on the reality of himself.

The child's world is less inhibited than that of an adult, the child does not worry about what others will say about him. His world revolves around him, egocentrism being specific to the first years of life¹⁸. As he interacts with others and the relational spectrum opens up, the child becomes aware of the presence and needs of others. On the other hand, the child shows a curiosity that urges him to learn new things. The child's world is often overwhelming, so a child may have fears that an adult cannot understand. Knowing the child's perspective on the world provides information about the needs that each child has.

Knowing children's needs is essential in order to ensure their full development in all aspects of human nature: physical, psychological, social, spiritual and professional¹⁹. The child enters this world within a family that has the responsibility to love, care for, educate, guide and discipline him. The role of the family is particularly important in the development and formation of the child as a human being²⁰. Shaping the self-image, social identity, belonging to the family, spiritual and cultural group, learning social and relational skills and abilities, the ability to

¹⁶ Jean Piaget, *The Psychology of the Child*, Basic Books, 1969, p. 37.

¹⁷ Robert Coles, *The Moral Intelligence of Children*, Random House, 1997, p. 61.

¹⁸ David Elkind, *The Hurried Child*, Addison-Wesley, 1981, p. 42.

¹⁹ Jean Piaget, *The Psychology of the Child*, Basic Books, 1969, p. 45.

²⁰ Urie Bronfenbrenner, *The Ecology of Human Development*, Harvard University Press, 1979, p. 27.

communicate, all these characteristics that ensure good social integration of the child are shaped within the family.

Continuing and supporting these efforts comes the school, which, through didactic and educational actions planned with a precise purpose, completes the child's development as a social being. Good collaboration between the two pillars, family and school, brings benefits to the child. This partnership facilitates the child's educational success, his/her learning progress as well as good integration into the school environment²¹. Any action that pursues the child's well-being must be guided by knowledge of his/her needs, both general and individual.

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²¹ Constantin Cucuș, *Pedagogy*, Iași, Polirom Publishing House, 2014, p. 213.