



# *Chapter 2*

The Role of Play in Child's  
Development



## 2.1 The Relationship Play-Development

*General conceptual aspects* There is a strong connection between the child's development under all its aspects and play. Since birth, the child's knowledge of the world is achieved through play. In the beginning the play's role is pretty inaccurate, therefore psychologists have called it non-play because children handle toys instinctively. Gradually, it becomes better shaped. Play, as childhood specific activity is a form of child behaviour based on imagination and its specific features: vivacity, superficiality, illusions.

V. Stern mentions in his studies, the determinant factor for the emergence of play – *the bluntness of the child's universe*, determined by his poor knowledge experience. To fill that blank, the child appeals to play, as a compensatory remedy. The expansion towards the unknown is carried out by means of playing because playing gives the child the possibility to turn to a unknown world in a gradual manner without feeling frustrated by the disadvantages of ignorance. In order to understand properly the way play functions in childhood, we need to understand the evolution of physical and mental development of a child. If we consider human development in general, a child development in particular, we refer to some compulsory steps one has to take on the way to adulthood. These steps or stages contain periods, of development, progress and evolution, as well as mental, physical, moral and social changes. Human development involves passing from one stage to the other based on several self-determining factors of serious complexity.

Therefore, development can be analysed from the perspective of various sciences: anthropology, sociology, education, ecology, biology, psychology and pedagogy. The research area is cover by psychology. Specialists have investigated child development by various methods, from types of influences

exerted on children starting with the first interactions between parents and their children, to ways of raising and educating children from various cultures. Psychology turned this rigorous analysis into theories. One of these theories is the theory of social learning which brings forth the principle based on which child development is determined by the connection he has to other people and these connections would have major influence upon his evolution. Another theory is implemented by the psychoanalytic approach. In child development studies we also find elements of structuralism which emphasizes the biological maturing of children and the sequential development of their cognition. Each theory had its adherents who made significant contribution to the development of such theories, facilitating the access to knowledge of human psychology from various perspectives but with a mutual role in practical educational activity.

*The Role of social interaction in child development.* The child's personality and behaviour are developed based on social interaction. Social interaction is a form of constraint with the following characteristics: reward and punishment, imitation, identification with certain models, assuming social roles and compliance with expectancy. Throughout his development, the child takes part in various social processes: social perception and understanding of human behaviours, assuming of social roles and behaviours associated to them, verbal and non-verbal social communication. The first social relations established by a child are with the parents, especially the bond between a child and the mother, which is stabilized around the age of seven months. The mother uses play when she interacts with her child, using all sorts of noisy toys, by means of which she tries to catch the baby's attention, either using word games to comfort the baby, or just to play with it through various comforting gestures: continuous touch of chin, caressing the cheeks, tickling, gymnastics, The child and the parents get used to one another as this interaction develops, and it gradually it turns into attachment.

*Ways of social interaction.* The child's first contact to the outside world occurs through the interaction with the parents, conducted in various ways: in the feeding, care and communication process, through gestures, mimicry and words of the person who takes care of him, usually the mother. Simple games such as: gestures, handling of objects can offer the baby a varied but also incentive experience: the smile, the lifting and holding in the arms, tickling, simple games, and communication of any type. The child starts to acquire his first knowledge of the surrounding world based on the parent's various behaviours in relationship to the child. Human interaction brings about reactions that lead to behaviour stimulation and learning. One has noticed the child's tendency to react stronger to people than to other stimuli from his background such as daylight or sounds (Schaffer, 2005). Humans are very sociable compared to other species, they don't lead their life in complete isolation and need social stimulation to develop their innate abilities. Since birth, the child shows a strong desire to socialize, according to researchers. Studies have proven the existence of children's innate tendencies (Hayes Nicky, Sue Orell, 2003), such as smiling when looking at something that resembles a human face. When the baby is very little, this tendency is a response to very simple stimuli (such as an oval piece of cardboard with two points, which resembles a human face), but as the baby grows up and its experience amplifies, it doesn't react to such a picture anymore, the increases have to be more detailed. After the age of 5 months, the baby will react to a more realistic image, such as a photograph. Besides the basic tendency, which the baby learns to amplify as it grows up, the attachment occurs in its life that appears to be a form of biological "programming" (IRM)<sup>5</sup> which develops and becomes more complex as the child acquires new experiences by interacting with the social environment.

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<sup>5</sup>IRM, innate releasing mechanisms (genetic programming, teleonomical mechanisms).

Another important manner of interaction between children and adults is the imitation of gestures and mimicry by repeated observation, exercise and practice. It has been noticed that very little children imitate their mothers' facial expressions. In daily childcare, mother usually uses exaggerated facial expressions when she talks to the baby. Therefore, a few weeks old babies engage in interactions with their mothers and imitate their facial expressions, which is particularly important in their evolution. The phenomenon of transition from contagion to communication occurs at this point. The main types of imitation seen at babies (12-21 days) are opening the mouth and thrusting out the tongue but as they grow up, their ability to imitate and respond to stimuli become more and more complex. Crying, for instance, can be regarded as means of communication, an adaptation to environment, a way of asking for help. Mothers develop an ability of understanding the baby's cry, distinguishing between cases of hunger, pain or just need for affections (to be held in the mother's arms) etc. One of the most important manners of communication between a mother and her child is the visual contact. Scientists dealing with this issue have observed that eyeball dilatation, a way of unconsciously signalling affection, is also a signal transmitted by children to their parents after the age of four months. Before this age, their eyeballs dilate at the sight of anyone. This aspect reveals two things: firstly, that people interacting with the baby will receive other messages besides the smile, showing that the child takes pleasure in the interaction and secondly, that after the age of four months children start having preferences in terms of people around them. Thus, non-verbal communication is the basis of attachments between children and parents, representing a primary experience which will be useful for future social interactions. We can notice that at birth, the child is provided with a set of behaviours that will guide the development of social interactions. An innate reflex is the Moro reflex: when hearing a loud noise in the proximity (hitting the table, for example), the child reacts automatically, stretches the arms than

cuddles, starts crying with eyes wide open. These types of reflexes are found in new-borns, though they completely disappear after 5 days. The Moro reflex is used to test the normal functioning of the new-born's brain and body, a useful answer to a stimulus that frightens, resulting in bond with the mother. It is also a stimulus for the mother, who will be more protective with her child. Basically, there are three ways of encouraging the child's socializing activity: imitation, identification and direct education. Imitation involves copying an action or a set of actions and it allows the child to acquire physical skills very quickly and efficiently. The baby plays by adopting social roles and imitating the adults whom he has seen in these roles. All these are part of the process by which children learn behaviours that they can use later on. The child can learn more by imitation than by direct learning.

*Observation based learning.* The child often learns based on the observations he unconsciously acquires. Though this process begins with imitation, learning is rapidly internalized and the child comes to identify himself with the person or the role. Identification takes longer time than imitation and it is believed that the learning of social roles, such as learning the role of gender takes place by identification. Therefore, theoreticians of social learning believe that models are very important in the development; role models offer guidance to children and teach them proper behaviours throughout their lives. Researchers have conducted a series of experiments to investigate imitation at children. They have found out that not all models are equally imitated; children have imitated models they considered similar to them, choosing their models according to their own gender. Researchers have also investigated the extent to which positive stimulation (such as praise or encouragement) can influence learning by imitation. If an aggressive behaviour is ignored or punished, it is less probable that it would repeat but aggressive actions with satisfactory consequences upon the aggressor have a higher probability of recurrence. On the other hand,

warmth and closeness in a relationship can have positive effects on the identification process. It has been noticed that boys with affectionate relations with their fathers, gain higher scores at masculinity tests than boys whose relationship is more reserved. The same situation is valid for girls too: the tighter the relationship with the mother is, the stronger the identification with womanhood is. Children learn a lot by imitation and identification but also by direct reactions of adults. They are a good manner of preparing children to behave according to social demands. Self-reinforcements and punishments are often seen as emotional reinforcements (pride and satisfaction in the first case, shame and blame in the second). Depression is also a part of self-administered set of punishments. Appraisal standards are learnt by modelling, especially from parents or other people with influence on the child. They are learnt in childhood and later on changed due to the interaction between standards and performance. Each society shapes the child's behaviour by rewards (praise and adult attention, considered a reward by children), but also by socially adequate punishments. It is preferable that the types of punishment used by parents would develop a strong feeling of consciousness in children<sup>6</sup>. Psychological punishment seems efficient by generating a strong consciousness in children, apologizing is interiorized, so the child comes to regret his deeds and feels guilty and responsible, but only provided that the adults give them some explanation on their expectancies and rules to be followed. If we consider physical punishment, its only effect is the fear of being discovered and not the development of a strong consciousness<sup>7</sup>. Explanation and communication seem to encourage the child's social behaviour.

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<sup>6</sup>In 1938, Mackinnon showed that students who proved to have a strong consciousness (haven't cheated in any test when they had the opportunity) had suffered from psychological punishment from their parents and those who cheated, had suffered from physical punishment.

<sup>7</sup>V., Preda, (1998), *Delincvența juvenilă. O abordare multidisciplinară*, Presa Universitară Clujeană, Cluj-Napoca.



Piaget<sup>8</sup>, in his studies, developed an original theory on the genesis and mechanisms of thinking, called the operational theory. He delimited periods and series of intelligence operations:

- The sensorimotor period, extends from birth to two years of birth. During this period the child is concerned with coordinating actions and learning physical objects. In the first sensorimotor period, from birth, one can notice repetitive gestures that are the baby's manner of playing with its own body parts. The baby gradually discovers the body through an accidental and mechanic game which turns into skill. Thus, the baby will satisfy some of its needs, such as thumb sucking. Skills and assimilation are developed in this period by conditioning. Gradually, by the development of sensorimotor actions, the child achieves an ocular-motor coordination, which will cause the handling game of objects such as: touching objects, taking them to the mouth, abandoning them. By this game of handling objects and by adult interference, the child makes contact to reality, with the object oriented world, which he will eventually assimilate. Parents communicate with children through gestures; the parent uses words in association to the object and the child responds through gestures. For instance, the parent placed the bunny on the shelf. When the child is asked "Where is the bunny?", he points with the finger to the shelf. The child acquires knowledge and learns by interaction with his parents and adults and the leading activity is play under various forms. By playing, the child becomes able to find new means not only by exterior or material exploration but also by interiorized combinations, which lead to understanding or intuition. For instance, a child placed in front of a half-

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<sup>8</sup> Piaget is known worldwide and is an inspiration in fields like psychology, sociology, education, epistemology, economy and law. He published *Biology and knowledge*, *Child's conception of the world*, *Child's speech and thought*, *Genetic epistemology*.

opened match box with a dice in it, would try to open it, first by material exploration (specific reaction to the 5<sup>th</sup> sensorimotor period), and after the failure, the child shows a totally new reaction. He suspends the actions and examines thoroughly the situation by opening and closing the mouth, or tightens and loosens the fist to imitate the result he wants to achieve, namely a complete opening of the matchbox. Then, suddenly, the child sticks the finger through the opening and manages to open the box. These are the first signs of intelligence,

- The preoperational period, between 2 and 7 years of age, shows a child concerned with verbal qualification. If a general decentring occurs during the first eighteen months, which makes the baby consider itself an object among other objects in a universe consisting of permanent objects, spatial-temporary structured with a certain degree of objectivity, the second year of a baby's life consists of permanent objects. The sensorimotor structures are the source of future thinking operations. It means that intelligence arises from action, in general, and it changes objects and real situations. Knowledge, which at children involves active and operational assimilation, is achieved by playing. Symbolic playing or fictional game, which was unknown in the sensorimotor period, occurs now. Due to the development of perceptions and representations, children use imitation accompanied by objects, which become symbolic. This fact is possible because of development, which allows *verbal evocation* of events that don't actually happen in the present. Along with symbolic playing and drawing, the child moves from concrete representation to postponed representation, and then to thinking. J. Piaget stated that: *symbolic playing is, undoubtedly, the peak of infantile playing. It suits to the essential function played by games in a child's life more than the other two or three types of playing, that we would also take into consideration. The child is forced to adjust constantly*

*to the social world of the grown-ups, whose rules and interests are exterior to him and to a physical world that he poorly understands. Therefore, he doesn't manage to satisfy the ego's affective and intellectual needs, unlike adults, for whom these needs are more or less complete. They remain unaccomplished, the smaller the child is. It is therefore necessary for the child affective and intellectual balance to benefit from an type of activity, which is not focused on adjusting to reality but the assimilation of reality to the child's ego without constraints or punishment. This is the game, which converts reality by a more or less pure assimilation to the ego's needs while imitation (when it is an aim in itself) is an more or less pure adaptation to exterior models and intelligence a balance between assimilation and adaptation. (J. Piaget, 2005).* It is interesting to notice that symbolic games can be identified mainly with affective conflicts. An event from the child life will be reproduced in a play with the dolls. The child will solve the conflict more efficiently in the play than the parents have with him and the solution to the problem will be a happier one *either because the child uses with the dolls a more intelligent pedagogy than the parents', or because he integrates in play what the self/esteem prevents him from accepting at the table (to eat everything from a plate of soup, which he doesn't like, especially if the doll is the one which symbolically does it)* (J. Piaget, 2005). Any event with negative influence or consequences on the child will be reflected by the symbolic game and the outcome will be a happy one. We can notice that symbolic games are used by children for conflict solving but also to counterbalance unsatisfied needs, to discharge obedience and authority and to let off and extend the ego etc.,

- The concrete-operational period takes place between the ages of 7 and 12, when the child begins to deal with abstract concepts such as numbers,

relations and affinities. Educational activity conducted through play, will determine the child's mental development, which is a succession of three schemes. Each scheme continues the preceding one, firstly by reconstructing it at a new level and then overcoming it at a higher level. The building of sensorimotor schemes continues with the building of semiotic, thinking and inter-individual connection schemes. The internalization of such action schemes is reconstructed at a new level, the level of representations which continues with concrete operations and cooperation structures,

- The formal operational period takes place between the ages of 12 and 15. It is the period when the child begins to rationalize logically and systematically. Formal thinking is developed on restructured concrete operations by subordinating them new structures, whose development will go on throughout adolescence and the entire life (along with many other changes),
- Another perspective calls these periods: the animist infantile period, the period of magical thinking, the period of referential egocentric-syncretic thinking and the period of developing concrete thinking and later on formal-logical thinking.

The thinking operations also develop and are expressed as operations of: classification, counting, measurement, movement in time and space etc. Operations are the result of internalization and mental projection of the subject's actions. They are reversible and are coordinated with other operations. Altogether, they create overall structures. Reversibility, the ability to invert and reconstruct operations is a characteristic of operational thinking, according to Piaget. Piaget regarded intelligence as the human being's ability to adjust to the environment and to its changes. Intelligence is not acquired at once but

gradually by children, in very well defined stages. These stages, which Piaget called periods, are identical for each individual. The child learns in each stage, based on games, new forms of behaviour and develops logical thinking. Each stage is characterized by different cognitive abilities. Although certain children can move from one stage to the other in a faster pace, Piaget believes that all children have to undergo all stages in the same succession. Each stage enriches the child with new abilities different from those acquired in the previous stage. Piaget considered intelligence as a manner of development by interaction with the environment. The children act continuously upon the environment through the games they play or by observing the effect their actions have. When they think, they perform mental operations. An operation is considered any set of actions that have effects upon the environment. As the child starts possessing new abilities, they occur as cognitive structures in the child's thinking process. They are called schemes. A scheme contains all ideas, memories, abilities and associations linked to a certain set of operations. Piaget believes that cognitive thinking has arisen as a result of new schemes and extension of existing ones but with a wider applicability. As the child grows up and relates to the environment, he constantly develops and changes the schemes. The scheme is a guideline in our behaviour. Piaget believes that thinking is the result of unexpected results. He suggests that when we are capable of appealing to pre-existing schemes, we don't think at current event too much. The new usage would be outside of what Piaget called the opportunity domain of our pre-existing schemes, Piaget believes that such an event that implies the inability of applying existing schemes as usually, causes mental instability and imbalance. The attempt to correct the lack of balance is achieved by psychical equilibrium, adaptation of schemes by assimilation and adaptation until the individual is able to deal with the new situation. Assimilation is the process of amplifying the opportunity of schemes, just by their extension so that they would be useful in processing new information. In other words, *assimilation* takes place when new

information is absorbed by the scheme without significant changes in the scheme's structure. A new scheme should change its "form" to fit with the new information. Piaget called this process *adaptation*. When new information is completely different, the adaptation process could result in a new scheme, formed by dividing the existing scheme into two. Assimilation and adaptation are simultaneous and occur together, as part of the balancing process. They are the fundament of cognitive development. The first scheme of those developed by a child is the corporal scheme. It occurs when a child starts to understand the idea that certain things can be called "I" and are always present while others "Non-I" are present just sometimes. Once this scheme formed by the child's increasingly richer experience, it will gradually extend and divide by assimilation and adaptation.

The reduction of egocentrism is another central concept in Piaget's theory. It is a pretty controversial concept, because certain psychologists believe that it doesn't fit with the experimental proofs of child's sociability. The idea is that in the first four years cognition is developed by a gradual reduction of egocentrism. The main reason why the children's thinking is different from adults' thinking is their egocentrism. Egocentrism can be also reduced through playing, especially through games with rules, where children have to restrain some impulses and obey the rules of the game and the group he belongs to. According to Piaget, the baby is totally egocentric at birth, seeing the universe as a mere extension of itself. This vision gradually adjusts through playing as part of educational influence. In the first period of life, babies come to realize that objects have a continuous existence even if they aren't constantly under its attention. In other words, the baby perceives the objects' constancy and then, in the preoperational period, children have the ability to imagine things from someone else's point of view. Although Piaget accepts the idea that cognitive development is amplified by interaction with the environment, he believes that

it is a rather hereditary process because a certain type of thinking could not develop if the child is not genetically suited for it. Bias can occur earlier if the environment is extremely incentive or later if the child doesn't have many chances to explore various issues.

## 2.2 Premises of Personality Development Through Play at Children

The concerns to define accurately the concept of personality have been subject of interest to many psychologists and pedagogues and their interest is still vivid. Psychologists<sup>9</sup> define personality as “(...) *stabile element of a person's conduct; what characterizes and distinguishes one person from another one*”.

Al. Roșca believes that a child's personality is unique as long as it is a non-repetitive combination of psychological traits with a high degree of stability.

Allport states that personality is the dynamic organization within an individual of psychophysical systems that determine his unique adjustment to the environment.

Consequently, personality is the sum of stable elements in a person's behaviour, which distinguishes and characterizes his character, makes it a unique individual.

Since the first years of life, human beings evolve, develop and grow up under the influence of biological, psychological and social conditions which will have a unique impact on their personality. The main directions of personality development at children are distributed on physical and mental coordinates:

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<sup>9</sup>Sillamy, Norbert, *Dicționar de psihologie*, Editura Univers Enciclopedic, București, 1998.

thorough knowledge activity, changes in their affective life, in relations and attitudes towards the environment and continuous improvement of voluntary conduct. The conditions can be favourable for the development of a child's personality and in this case the entire development is stimulated. If the conditions are unfavourable, the development can be limited. The analysis of these conditions has to be based on real situations and on the reception and assimilation potential of the above mentioned influences. The fact is that playing is essential in the development of a child's personality, thus contributing to his development as a social being. By playing, the children imitated everything that had a powerful impact on them. We should also mention that playing is represented by the child's desire to be an adult and act like an adult. Children's games grasp antagonist relations, which are development by children in a positive manner and always in their favour.

Playing develops critical thinking. If we follow the actions of a pre-schooler, we see that he operates with the significance of objects, though he relies on material substitutes (toys). Reliance on substitutes diminishes in time, playing is performed through words-denominations which symbolize objects and actions are accompanied by speaking. Thus the child goes to the wall, acts like washing the hands, comes back and says "I have washed mu hands", goes to a table, sits down, acts like eating, stands up and says "thanks for the meal". The functional development of playing and the ontogenetic development experience a self-determining development. More general mechanisms of intellectual activity are developed through playing.

### **2.2.1 Factors which Influence the Development of Human Personality**

The evolution of human personality is the result of a relationship between hereditary and acquired factors, between interior and exterior conditions,



between an individual and a group, as well as between the individual's and the group's history. The child is hereditary gifted with certain skills which improve and develop by education and the background history.

Sigmund Freud determined the fact that the child is subjected to trauma (the birth trauma, the trauma of giving up breast feeding, the trauma of father's or mother's infidelity, trauma of another child's birth, trauma of reduced cuddling, trauma of severity and punishment) to conflict and constraints since birth. Therefore, the more the child plays, the more conflicts sprang from these traumas and contradictions will be solved, which will avoid the danger of neurotic illness. Generally, the social background is the space where the child lives and which provides certain development premises, learning and behaviour models. Family is the closest to a child and it influences the development of natural premises. It is important to know the background a child comes from, because it can explain certain behaviours. A child raised in a favourable affective environment develops as an autonomous, confident person, feeling that the parents support him in any situation. In family, the child also learns to get and to give love and to have a socially desirable behaviour. Affective indifference in a family leads to lack of orientation, insecurity in behaviour and lack of confidence in humans. Thus, family is for children an affective environment very necessary for their harmonious physical and mental development. The children's emancipation is the result of the influence parents have on their children. Emancipation is actually the children's desire of being like their parents. Games undoubtedly reveal this aspect. They show us the relationship between parents and children.

Psychologist Albert Adler develops in his observations the idea that conflicts between parents and children are projected in their games. Children find compensations and satisfactory solutions in games. Limitations and obstacles from real life can be found in children's games. Parents can follow the

children's playing and can correct the attitudes towards their children by adapting other educational methods. But no matter how optimal the relations in a family are, it cannot provide all children's development needs. Consequently, kindergarten fills up and broadens the education received in families through activities organized and conducted by trained teaching staff.

Kindergarten attendance supports socializing activities and this new background brings about changes in the child's social relationships: increases the number of reports with adults and other children, more varied quality of relations, emergence of the need to adapt behaviour to the needs of other peers. From a psychosocial point of view, education plays a key role in the development of the mental traits and the integrative-adaptive behaviours.

Kindergarten has all educative means to intensify the relationship between the child and other people (adults and children). For instance, visits can be organized, where the child plays the role of host and guest, like celebrating a birthday (with activities such as inviting guests, organizing entertainment games), participation in community actions, activities and games where children talk to each other, cooperate, compete, accept and help each other. A pre-schooler who attends kindergarten benefits from an organized, conscious and guided education in order to exploit his full potential and to stimulate new acquisitions. Moreover, the entire kindergarten activity is focused on a peculiarity of childhood – playing. Based on each child's individual traits and on the conditions leading to development, capable of changing the original structure of a child so as to become compatible with social demands. The child lives in two worlds: one belonging to the principle of satisfaction, and on the principle of reality. Playing is part of autistic illusions; it represents unsatisfied wishes in the real life and a world of endless possibilities. This is a real world for children, as real as the other one, where there are constraints and interdictions – the adult world. Playing makes this subjective and autistic

childhood world to be as real as the objective reality itself. The child steps into the real world by means of education guided by adults. The child can accede to the knowledge of reality only through the relationship system child-adult, firstly parents then teachers.

Therefore, it is important that kindergarten teachers know the level of children's mental development when they enter the group as well as the social background they come from, their medical history, social and family conditions etc.

Factors that play the most important role in shaping of personality are:

- Neuro-functional maturation,
- Rich and varied stimulations offered by kindergarten,
- The role of playing as fundamental activity,
- Interrelating to peers of the same age,
- More complex relationships with the family and the others.

The following personality components emerge and act under the influence of these factors:

a) Initial manifestation of abilities in those with native premises such as:

- Special receptiveness to certain types of stimuli,
- Low sensory thresholds,
- Attraction for activities related to skills that will emerge later on. The manifestation areas are: drawing, music, choreography, gymnastics and foreign languages.

b) Gifted children can already achieve significant results.

c) The development of character is made under the influence of family (*the seven years of education in the family*) and kindergarten.

Kindergarten offers the premises for the formation of character through:

- Building voluntary adjustment,
- Crystallization of fundamental feelings especially towards the parents but also towards the others,
- The ability of being responsive to their demands and to the models they offer,
- The development of primary moral consciousness.

Consequently, the premises for character traits are developed under the influence of these factors:

- Respect for the others,
- Self-confidence,
- Courage,
- Perseverance.

We identify the development of structural aspects in the child's personality on the following dimensions: temper, abilities and character.

### **2.2.2 Temperament, Education, Play**

The temperament, as personality side contains a series of innate peculiarities and features that cannot be much altered and are important premises for the process of socio-moral becoming of an individual. Temperament is the energetic-dynamical dimension of personality and it is expressed by the features of intellectual and affective activity but also by the exterior behaviour (motor

activity and especially speaking). There has been extensive research on the classification of temperament on different criteria but an exhaustive classification has not been completed. Consequently, it is difficult to rank a child in a certain pattern. We can distinguish temperamental differences by observing children in various moments and performing different actions. Some are more active and exuberant, other more restrained and lethargic, some are very active and assertive, others are melancholic and meditative, and some overcome psychically any failure while others are very easily discouraged.

Considering these simple observations, we can intervene in the child's education. Energetic, restless, initiative and knowledge-oriented children should be given the opportunity to channel this energy in a positive and creative direction. For instance, their involvement in movement games can stop their impulsive urges and channel their energy to follow the rules of the game. Rule games demand a certain behaviour which would temper aggressive behaviour, guiding temperamental children on a whole new path. When a child has a melancholic temperament with shy, anxious behaviour, the kindergarten teacher should have an encouraging attitude and stimulate him in games that suit his abilities and encourage him. Patience, understanding and delicacy are required in working with these children. Any aggressive action can lead to discouragement and abandonment. The magic of games will bring about the reduction of shyness and spontaneous behaviour. Pedagogic skills are required to get closer to a melancholic child. Any little progress should be appreciated and the teacher should engage these children in proper games and activities in order to develop their courage to socialize. Thus, selecting a shy child for the position of group leader will increase his confidence in own powers and lead to more courageous behaviour. Pedagogic skills, stimulation and encouragement should be used with children who have a powerful but instable temperament, who have initiative and energy but get discouraged very easily.

### **2.2.3 Abilities and Education**

Abilities are part of our personality and are developed on innate features. They are psycho-physiological operational features which ensure speed and efficiency of general mental and motor activities (sensory, psychomotor, and intellectual): intelligence and diligence, as well as specific (plastic, literary, sports). Thus, any feature or mental process becomes attitude if viewed in terms of efficiency. An isolated attitude cannot ensure success in an important activity, but mixed or combined abilities can. For instance, good thinking can hide the lack of information for a period, but in the end high intelligence will not compensate for lack of information, poor skills and lack of abilities. All are self-determining and contribute to the evolution of the child's personality towards his own fulfilment.

Abilities are developed through practice under the influence of educational acts. They are the premises for talent identification and development of exquisite abilities. Besides a trained eye, various manifestation conditions are required to identify abilities. An important manner of identification is represented by games, where children act naturally and spontaneously. An interiorized child can impress us during a game, proving good skills and abilities in a field or another. Playing is a manner of identifying exceptional abilities but also a way to train and practice them, because they increase motivation, enthusiasm and the children's desire of achievement.

### **2.2.4 Shaping Characters**

Unlike temperament, character refers to features deeply rooted in the individual's hereditary characteristics and they aim the socio-moral superstructure of personality, the human being's quality of social entity. When we talk about character, we most certainly involve a moral standard and issue a

valuable judgement.

Etymologically, the term *character* comes from Old Greek, meaning *seal*, *pattern*, and with reference to human beings it means features, lifestyle. This notion refers to the deep structure of personality and it is expressed by behaviours, which are easily predictable by virtue of their frequency. Thus, we know for instance with certain probability how will a child react in case of failure, if he will resist to a temptation (toy) or if in his spare time will prefer reading to playing.

The process of shaping a child's character is a long-term process and involves educational skills, pedagogic interventions, explanations and desirable behavioural models. Character building starts at birth, initiated by family and continued in kindergarten and school.

Playing contributes to character shaping, by playing children restructure their behaviour. The content of rule games is focused on norms related to relationships between peers; their main content is related to the behavioural rules practiced by adults. The child steps into the evolved universe of superior forms of human activity through playing (Winnicott, D. W., 2004). Games teach children desirable behaviours which they have to follow during playing. By playing, a child identifies the difference between good and bad, beautiful and ugly, pleasant and unpleasant. The kindergarten teacher has to support and stimulate carefully and perseveringly the process of character building, through consistent, convergent, continuous and permanent actions, channelling constructively the children's affection. By playing, the child gets to know his own value, becomes aware of the role he plays in the system of social relationships. Positive punishment and reprehensions will be carefully applied not to hurt their dignity and the child's sensitive ego. Undeserved rewards will be avoided, as well as those which create confusion in understanding equity.

Children will instinctually perceive them as undeserved by what psychologist call *the syndrome of bitter candy*.<sup>10</sup>

The child's mental development does not yet crystalize and define typical personality traits, therefore we cannot talk about character in the true meaning of the word. Character traits are learnt and developed by education, by social experience like games with real life subjects. The character traits will shape and later on become long-lasting and specific. What can be achieved and must be achieved through games, are those models of moral behaviour that a child has to interiorize and follow. The practice of attitudes by various games that require courage, hard-work, discipline, empathy, tolerance leads to the education of moral behaviours, training inner and outer discipline, development of positive character traits.

### **2.2.5 Defining Behaviours**

Every human being has certain defining behavioural characteristics. For instance, certain children control themselves very well when experiencing an unpleasant situation at school, while others get angry and have nervous breakdowns, other are hostile and defend themselves aggressively. Researches in the field of child psychology explain these behavioural structures as personality traits. Each trait relates to a certain personality component, each component is independent from others and characterizes a feature, for instance sociability. The followers of this theory, such as (Schaffer, 2005) claim that on a behavioural level, a trait is indicated by the "*predisposition to answer to a variety of stimuli in the same manner*". Personality traits can be distinguished by a few aspects: persistent and stable behaviour. When we describe the

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<sup>10</sup>Verza, E., *Psihologia vârstelor*, Editura Hyperion XXI, 1993.



personality, we face the risk of alleging the existence of a trait starting from behaviours typical for a state of being with situational character. Personality questionnaires differentiate answers according to their typical, general and present behaviour. One of the main objectives in knowing and assessing a child's personality is predicting his behaviour in a certain situation.

In terms of child behaviour in the kindergarten, the teacher obtains most data by observing him in regular situations or in specially created ones. Playing offers numerous opportunities for observing the children's behaviour but also optimal intervention means. Observation has two stages: selection and definition of behaviour in concrete, noticeable notions (vague definitions are to be avoided) and the usage of systematic, standardized procedures. Teachers can also use technical devices to record behaviours: cassette player, video recording, camera, etc. The used observation grids ensure the systematic character of observations. They have methods of recording, ordering, and narrative or coded processing. The sampling problem occurs when it is difficult to observe all available children. Therefore, if the aim is to observe children playing in a cooperation game, we should select a sample as the study object. When analysing child behaviour, one has to take into consideration the distortive, disruptive factors (for example tiredness, teacher's subjectivity) and the assessed characteristics.

The child overcomes his innate egocentrism when playing. Role play leads to changes in the child's attitude, from the individual, infantile one to a new, adult attitude. The kindergarten teacher will be able to identify the children's personality traits and manner of behaviour as he gets to know the children better. Based on these observations, he will be able to plan the most suitable schedule of educational-formative intervention, which is required by shaping and developing the child's personality in order to be compatible to social demands.

## Seminar Activities



### *Tasks and Applications*

1. —

Starting from the following statement *Childhood games are the buds of a human's entire life because by their development, the man reveals the innermost traits of his being.*" (F.R. Froebel) write a structural essay of 150 words.

Working time 10 minutes.

2. —

What is the study object of Psychopedagogy of play?

3. —

Explain the correlation play-learning-work-creation.

4. —

What is playing?

5. —

In pairs, decide what arguments support the statement: *"Symbolic playing is, undoubtedly, the peak of infantile playing"*.

6. ■

Give your own interpretation of the following statement: *“a system of intended or unintended, explicit or implicit actions or influences, which contribute to the formation, shaping, development and transformation of individuals' personality, irrespective of age, in order to achieve certain goals set according to present and future demands of society”*.

