

Chapter 6

Projective Techniques Used in Children's Assessment: Theoretical Implications and Case Studies

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ABSTRACT

Educators, researchers, and psychologists often find themselves in situations where they must assess the causes of children's many unwanted or unusual behaviors to take the appropriate intervention measures. Especially at an early age, psychometric tests cannot offer accurate or detailed answers in order to clarify all the questions. This is due to the lack of or reduced possibility of the children to investigate themselves or analyze their reactions. Their responses to various situations are habitually emotional, not rational. Because of these considerations, the investigative approach becomes difficult and also the therapeutic intervention. Projective techniques, although they do not replace standardized tests, are proving their utility, especially in this situation. This chapter aims to describe the importance of using projective techniques in children's assessment. It also explains the particularity of these techniques and presents a few illustrative case studies – the use of the Rorschach test in the psychological assessment of children.

1. INTRODUCTION

Psychologists use projective techniques for assessing and diagnosing various aspects regarding the subjects' personality, reactions, and behaviors, including pathological or unusual reactions/ symptoms. Thus, they can offer detailed information about many psychological characteristics, some less conscientious.

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Projective techniques intentionally use vague or meaningless stimuli (such as colors, symbols, and inkblots) to elicit responses likely to reveal personal psychological characteristics. In the endeavor of giving meaning to these “meaningless” stimuli, the subject is projecting his personality.

In Psychology, the projection was conceptualized by Sigmund Freud (1894 – The Neuro-Psychosis of Defense). The father of Psychoanalysis considered that thoughts, motivations, desires, and feelings that cannot be accepted as one’s own are placed in the outside world and attributed to someone else. Psychological contents unaccepted by the ego are split off and placed in another person.

Freud defines projection as the defense mechanism by which the origin of discomfort is sought externally. Freud assumed that projection did not occur arbitrarily but referred to a characteristic that existed on a small scale in the other person and exaggerated it.

Projective techniques make heavy use of psychoanalytic concepts. Projection, in the psychoanalytical sense, involves the unconscious character of the process, the function of defending the ego, and the reduction of psychic tensions (Minulescu, 2000; Anzieu & Chabert, 2010). “Thus, the projection would be a normal process, which assumes a primitive function of the psychic apparatus: conflict resolution of the Self and reality, producing an identity of perception instead of an identity of thought” (Anzieu & Chabert, 2010, p. 29).

Unlike psychometric tests, the main characteristic of the projective techniques is the degree of ambiguity and the lack of structure of the stimulus situation and the open instructions.

The increase of ambiguity of the stimulus involves a greater projection – the subject would be more prone to add meaning for him, bringing into the light their internal content. Thus, there are no “right” or “wrong” responses to the stimuli, but whether the responses are normative or non-normative is of great importance. However, the specific qualitative characteristics distinguish them from ordinary tests. Thus, any projective method brings into play the main scientific hypothesis, namely the interdependence between the degree of ambiguity of the stimulus material and the activation of the projection as an intrapsychic mechanism: the less structured, more ambiguous the stimuli of the problematic situation the subject faces, the more capable of activating deeper areas of the subject’s psyche.

2. USE OF PROJECTIVE TECHNIQUES IN THE CHILDREN’S ASSESSMENT – BENEFITS AND LIMITS

Children are often brought to the psychologist by parents. Especially small children are not motivated to participate in the psychological evaluation. This endeavor depends

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