

Chapter 8

Representations of Child/Childhood in the Romanian Context: Implications for the Training of Future Educators

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this chapter is to draw attention to the necessity and importance of educators becoming aware of the role that their representations of children and childhood play in the effectiveness and quality of the instructional-educational process. These variables are often unfairly neglected. Progressing gradually through the presentation of elements related to general characteristics, functions, and structure of social representations, all particularized to the type of representations of interest here, the chapter continues with a brief overview of how the child and childhood have been perceived over time, attempting to outline a historical and cultural perspective on how these concepts have evolved. As a natural consequence, the chapter then highlights specific aspects related to representations of the child/ childhood in the Romanian context and the final part present the potential implications of exploring representations of children and childhood in the training of future educators.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The chapter begins with the premise that, within the teaching profession, cultivating a vision of the child and childhood that incorporates positive and relevant ideas and convictions, along with a comprehensive understanding of the child, childhood, and child-adult/educator relationships, can significantly impact student education, comprehension, and emotional support for the primary educational partner, namely, the student.

Considered the foundation of the entire scaffolding that will be the personality of the future adult, childhood has sparked significant interest and represents a distinct area of investigation within the realms of educational sciences, developmental psychology, and the like. The child and childhood thus form an inseparable pair of concepts, intertwined with the process of development. According to the Dictionary of the Romanian Language (DEX, 2016), while any “boy or girl in the first years of life” is considered a child, childhood is defined as the “phase of life,” the “period of human life from birth to adolescence” during which the most spectacular transformations of the human being take place, encompassing physical, psychological, and socio-moral development on the path to becoming fully human.

Developmental psychology is the scientific discipline that focuses on comprehending an individual’s behavior throughout their developmental stages, each of these stages following a well-defined temporal axis. In reference to children and childhood (from birth to 10/11 years), various authors (see Șchiopu and Verza, 1997; Vasile, 2014; Golu, 2015; Crețu, 2016; Verza and Verza, 2017, and others) outline several periods. Based on the aforementioned sources, we proceed to present a succinct characterization of each of these childhood periods, recognizing that the term “child” carries a distinct psychological significance in relation to each age segment.

- a) *The first childhood or pre-preschool period* spans from 1 to 3 years of age for the child. Schiopu and Verza (1997) designated this part of childhood as “the first that involves major differentiations marking the specificity of the era, country, region, and mother tongue” (96), highlighting the assimilation of influences specific to the child’s living environment. By surpassing total dependence on adults (as in the infant stage), the child now becomes an active being, striving to develop adaptation mechanisms, engage in family life, understand family rules and schedules, and gain autonomy. The first childhood remains a stage of human development associated with learning verbal communication and perfecting the movement or manipulation of objects. Verza and Verza (2017) noted that at this stage, “The child begins to feel and experience childhood” (163), referring to the adoption of play and imitation-based actions, significant for socialization and integration into social life. It’s worth mentioning that this

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