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## PRESCHOOL PEDAGOGY CONFRONTED WITH THE CORONAVIRUS CHALLENGE

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### ABSTRACT

The current theoretical paper is a brief reflection with an analytical bias and a descriptive nature, aimed at registering the likely difficulties and presumed risk consequences for preschool children as a result of physical and social isolation in emergencies such as the Covid-19 pandemic. It applies to parents, students of pedagogical specialties, professionals in the field of education, and is a modest attempt to summarize the hypothetical adverse effects of the social recession in these days of a worldwide hardship. The view of these problems signals to the pedagogical specialists the negatives of the pandemic, unfolding the horizons of their timely preparation and readiness to deal with the influence of isolation on the socialization of children. At this stage, such a theoretical organization is devoid of pretensions to present the complexity of the problem, as well as to be comprehensive in reasoning, despite of a clear sense of the possibility for them to proliferate in a variety of directions, each of which deserves special attention and in-depth analysis.

**Key words:** preschool pedagogy, children, preschool age, socialization, social isolation, a kindergarten teacher

### INTRODUCTION

The last serious ordeal facing modern humanity is the coronavirus pandemic, which has reshaped the everyday culture of people around the world and is taking them with rapid force to health, economic and social suffering. In its intense pursuit of dynamic progress, humanity seems to have begun to do more harm than good to its own "portrait" and to self-situate itself in its saddest days. Fortunately, not all people will be physically infected with the virus, but it is certain that everyone will "suffer" from it psychologically.

Within the social dimension, knowledge, erudition and wisdom present the spiritual "immune system" that protects humanity from the destructive forces of the virus, and in this sense it can be assumed that preschool children are the most vulnerable members of society, given their fragility due to lack of a healthy

basics of knowledge and understanding of life. Preschool age is the important but delicate stage of development of the sequence of biological elements of the human life path when the child makes its first social "steps", when its personality is expected to develop constructively, when preparing for life in society and for orientation in the functional structure of social logic, when it is modeled on a spiritual-value plane, when it develops its moral ideological focus and when it enters that process which a guarantee for the preservation of humanity – socialization.

### SOCIALIZATION IN ISOLATION (?)

The existence and protection of humanity is realized by the organization of people in society and in institutions, where social experience is passed down from generation to generation. This is most effectively done through education and systematic continuity of accumulated social experience and civilizational capital. Socialization prolongs through a person's entire life, but its beginning is the early "pre-school" (1) or "pre-work" stage (2) to 6 years of age (preschool age).

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In the kindergarten, the educational work is carried out with the purpose of the realization of the fundamental preparation for life in the society. Education in kindergartens differs from spontaneous socialization through purposeful and meaningful social action, which is directed, guided, premeditated, specifically oriented and purposeful to the result – preparedness, readiness and propensity for self-change, self-conscious activity and a self-initiating constructive behavior. With all the right justification (3) calls education "preparation for self-education." Education is the basis that generates socially meaningful essences in the individual, it initiates the exceeding the limits of individual transformation, taking into account the dynamism of social circumstances and the reflection on its limits, with a bias towards its creative modeling for successful social integration.

Today, the coronavirus creates a new social situation of prolonged isolation, which can be divided into a physical and a social one. The first concerns the physical health and the social one -- the mental health, but both have a sharp effect on the socialization of children. Without neglecting the importance of the children's physical and mental well-being, the good of healthy eating and physical activity, the focus of the current theoretical construction is the process of socialization, which is strikingly essential for the development of preschool children, because "if between the socialization that appears in childhood and the one on adulthood there is a long break, the latter affects the whole further life of the person"(4).

In the conditions of social detachment, socialization is strongly obstructed and hampered by the "microenvironment" (5), the generally accepted, established and described in the literature socializing factors, in particular "microfactors" (6) and "social institutions" (7) of socialization not only have a recessive effect, but are temporarily absent. Early pre-school socialization, upbringing and development of preschool children is subordinated to the family because its "institutional mechanism" is violated (1). Isolation corrodes the socialization process and its duration can hinder social development. In the etymology of the two words, a significant difference stands out – isolation (from the Latin *insulatos*) means "island" and semantically refers to solitude and separation,

as opposed to social (from the Latin "socialis") – public. Both concepts are self-rejected, but the uncertainty remains as to how to have socialization in isolation or how to prepare the child for life in society without life in society?

In the conditions of "chronic" social isolation, children's socialization presents a test for the development of children, but also for their families, because in reality only parents should be engaged in the implementation and regulation of daily routines, various games, as well as their moral, aesthetic, mental, work and physical education. The temporary cessation of the work of the kindergartens does not allow the general organization of the children's life in them, the feeling of cultural identification with the kindergarten and the qualified pedagogical interaction, separating in this way the children from their teacher and not least from the other children as a social group and the micro relations within it. All this calls upon an ongoing reading of the fundamental prerequisites of the educational work for the formation and development of the personality for their maximum inclusion in the family spaces due to the conditions of isolation. This is important for creating adequate preparation for the possible negative effects of the temporarily interrupted hitherto known to us children's socialization.

In the conditions of an acute deficit of various behavioral models and the abandonment of active social systems, the social world is strictly limited within the family. At this time it is the only socializing factor and should be the source for the formation of habits, sentiments, qualities, ideology, culture, knowledge, experience, joy, happiness, virtues, values of children – the future adults who in turn will form the moral appearance of the subsequent societies.

## SOCIALIZATION IN THE FAMILY

The first social unit with which a person comes into contact with is the family. It is a group of biologically related individuals living together and sharing a common physical and social environment. Many researchers focus their efforts on studying this socializing factor, as they believe that it is indispensable and crucial for the children's development. *"The contribution of the family in the socialization of the individual, in the formation and development of the cognitive and affective"*

*sphere of the personality, in the general orientation of man in the world ...*" (8).

Depending on the structure of the family, (9) characterizes four main types of families: nuclear (elementary) family – it is universal in all human societies and contains the married couple and their children who are still independent; the mixed (extended) family – which contains several married couples and their children living together in the same household; a family with three generations – it contains representatives of three generations; the "broken" family – one in which the parents are separated, one parent has died or both parents have died. According to the structure of family relations, (10) distinguishes between three types of families: an adult-oriented family – the children are taught a kind of behavior close to that of the adults, including their interests and needs are subordinated to those of the adults; a child-oriented one – parents do everything possible for the well-being of children, and the latter adopt a strong consumer attitude to life; oriented to the guidance of adults – the emphasis is on the individual development of the child. In 2014 (11) was wise enough to outline the radical changes in the demographics of family life, taking into account the growth of gay couples, extramarital cohabitation and single-parent families, the increasing frequency of divorces and separations, remarriages, poverty and changes in parenting patterns for raising children. The author accepts that the family is the main institution for socialization, but emphasizes the fact that different family models are not common to the majority of people. The interpretations of (12) are also indicative of the relationships in modern diverse families as an example of support and a reference point for the growth of children.

Given the diversity of family models, a variety of influences on different children can be expected, depending on what families they belong to. Central is understanding of parents' attitudes and values, which are passed on to their children, and their full-fledged relationships lead to a sense of security in the latter, which in turn has a proportional effect on their social and communication skills (13). In support of this, (14) identifies family interactions as one of the factors influencing child development and supports the idea that parents who spend a lot of time playing and studying with their children have a positive

impact on their development (and vice versa). Undoubtedly, (15) has similar beliefs, who clearly notes the influence of parents in laying the foundations of social knowledge and ways to solve life's ordeals. There is a unanimous opinion of these and other researchers about the leading role of the family in unleashing the potential of the child's personality, and in an even narrower sense, it is modeled by the concentrated influence of parenting styles that (16) interprets today. Within the spatial boundaries of the family, children perceive parenting styles much more fully, because at the moment this is the only source of incentives for learning and a resource for learning. The lack of society in kindergartens and the physical situation of children mainly in the home lead to a weakening of the desire to adhere to social norms, and strengthen the manifestations of the child's character and its immanent features. At such a time, parental behavior is crucial and (17) alarms parental behaviors that adversely affect children's development: uncharacteristic attitudes, inappropriate control, and corporal punishment. Parental behavior with such elements would cause stress in the child's personality as a result of which the child closes in on itself, feels guilt, fear, confusion, and anxiety, and hence includes various psychological storage mechanisms that can be destructive and invisible in the short and long term. Contrary to the considered interpretation and in view of its prevention, (18) formulates favorable parents as loving, encouraging the verbal expression of children's emotions, resilient in difficulties, respecting children's independence and promoting virtues (honesty, empathy, self-control, etc.).

In preschool, children develop at a cognitive, mental, social, and physical level through playing. It is the fundamental source of pleasure and emotional well-being „Le jeu, c'est le travail de l'enfant, c'est son métier, c'est sa vie.“ (The game is the work of the child, it is its work and its life) says more than a century and a half ago the French pedagogue Pauline Kergomard and her statement is relevant to this day (19). The game is an exteriorization of the immanent, strictly individual, unique and authentic children's world. Analyzing children in the new conditions of a pandemic, the Bulgarian psychotherapist (20) recommends that they be encouraged in the emotional expression of anxiety and melancholy (if any) through

creative games and drawing, which take place in a balanced and calm atmosphere. If adults are worried about the current catastrophe, but are aware of the state of emergency, then it is only possible for children to feel their anxiety without being able to understand the reasons for it. The author's observations signal that in their cognitive aspirations, preschool children who have narrow spatial horizons initiate destructive behavior due to the accelerated feeling of boredom from television, tablets, toys and familiar games. Here, too, parents have a significant role and a difficult task to be able to present everyday life in limited physical spaces and activities in it as a game, to invent new ones even if this requires a retrospective of the mobile games they and their parents in turn played as children. Extracting the usefulness of the games of previous generations and applying them at this time would create a space of thought and imagination to compensate for the momentary deficit of the physical one.

Referring to the views of (21) that cooperation between parents and children in educational activities is a kind of springboard for an easier transition from kindergarten to school, it can be assumed that now is the right time for parents to think in this direction. It is naive to expect pedagogical miracles from mothers, fathers and grandparents who are representatives of all spheres of work (and therefore do not have sufficient knowledge of the cognitive needs of the child at a particular age), but they must be very proactive and demonstrate a positive attitude towards education, to be in close (albeit remote) connection with the pedagogical specialists for formation of an exact sequence in the upbringing, to increase their reading activity and to expand, and build rich linguistic stimulation in the home. All this can be consciously or unconsciously underestimated by the parents, as they have to continue to solve the current household issues of domestic origin, which distracts the attention from the children. Awareness of this refers to the need for non-formal education at any age, because nowadays it "is becoming increasingly important as the most appropriate tool for kindergarten/school to enrich and expand the potential of every child, every student" (22).

Another significant aspect is the social and economic characteristics of individual families, which can significantly increase the unpleasant

feeling of social inequality. According to a study by (23), 31.3% of Bulgarian families cannot afford a school trip; approximately the same share is of those who do not have educational games at home, as well as those who do not have the opportunity to buy books for children. These data from 2019 outline an unenviable picture of the situation, which calls upon significantly effective support through remote pedagogical counseling and activation of all possible mechanisms for social and educational support of these families, because "the child's home environment has significant effects on the educational outcomes" (24). Does the economic crisis increase the likelihood of weak families becoming even weaker?

## CONCLUSION

Looking back at the past days of intense social life, it seems to be temptingly pleasant, but its pragmatism must be limited to the ability to see more clearly the present and future times and even more so to love and experience them consciously and fully. Our new personalities, whose consciousness is permanently crossed by thoughts of self-growth, care for others and striving for self-actualization, will make socialization possible in conditions of isolation. In this growth, people will construct the healthiest society that will withstand even the greatest disasters. Life changes, but it must be a progressive process because it is LIFE. There must be a vaccine against any sudden disaster, and it is precisely the human will – that inner force which, according to (25), can elevate it above its external destiny.

For the pedagogical science, the coronavirus is a serious test that has led to a change of high social significance, and its solution is still unclear, so specialists must focus their efforts and turn it into another challenge that has been overcome. In isolation, the teacher has the freedom to expand and enrich their professional and personal qualities and competencies, understood as "a construct analyzed as a personal quality, as a system of competencies structured in a certain way and integrating knowledge and skills in a specific context, providing an opportunity for the individual for adequate independent practical expression, as well as the individual's relations to himself, the others, the activity and the results from it" (26). The mission and vocation of the teacher and his professional portrait is to deal with the darkness, to be a light and a

landmark, because he is the "child's leader". The teacher of the children must find the strength to be even more inspired and even more dedicated to the children than ever and to unwaveringly encourage and guide the parents. His current temporary physical absence should not leave an unfavorable mark on the development of future generations, because this is his legacy as ascribed by the founder of kindergartens, Friedrich Fröbel.

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