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**PROJECTIVE METHODS IN ASSESING FAMILY-SCHOOL
RELATIONSHIP AND CHILDREN ADAPTING ABILITIES**

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Abstract

In Romania, the psychology domain has gained lots of interest over the years, therefore education can't be well understood or effectively applied without involving at least the fundamental psychological principles. Education attires the attention versus the concept of „parenting” (the parent's role in forming a child's behavior) but also towards school education (the school's role in developing various learning abilities, at a child). Between family and school there must be a positive, solid, relationship, for assuring the psychological balance of a child. When, for various reasons the link between these two fundamental social contexts, the family and the school, is broken, the negative outcomes will be seen at the child level, by non-specific, dysfunctional, maladaptive behaviors. The objectives of this study were to assess the role of projective psychological methods when dealing with a child's dysfunctional behavior at school. Qualitative research was based on a 9-year-old boy experience of psychotherapy, having real difficulties adapting to school's specific educational patterns, also having poor relations with his family members. For working with the subject's emotional issues, specific psychological projective methods have been used. The results of the psychological work process showed that projective techniques are a valuable resource when dealing with one's internal world, especially when their communication skills are low (attributable to lower age) or when the person's emotional blockages are so deep that he itself has difficulties observing or verbalize them.

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1. Introduction

In the Romanian school context, education and evaluation of a child are made based on grades, tests, information given by the teachers, an educational approach based on a punishment-reward model,



most often a child being evaluated by his grades, obedience, capacity of memorizing and reproduce information.

Following the Piaget theory on cognitive development, the premises were that, depending on his developmental stage, a child is more or less capable of understanding the world like an adult does, therefore, his capacity of assimilation and accommodation to external stimuli must be a major point of interest when it comes to education. At the same time, being dependent from his caregivers, a child develops various ways to meet the adults' expectances and positive evaluation from the significant ones, meaning that often he can behave contrary to his will, causing an inner break of his balance, that will reflect in all of the aspects of his life. (Cramer, 2000)

This paper sustains the need for attention to the psychological defense mechanisms (Freud, 1926, Fenichel, 1945, DSM – IV, 1994) of a child when evaluating him and, therefore, when it comes to education. A reliable way to investigate the inner aspects of a child is by working with projective methods, this article being based on a significant study case on this topic.

This study case claims the pressing need for psychological intervention in balancing the relation between the child, his family and their relation with the school, projective methods being one of the most relevant ways of investing one's psychological world, and one of the most appropriate approaches when working with children.

2. Research Methods

2.1. Objectives

The objectives of this qualitative research were to bring to the fore the importance of psychological evaluation and guiding of a child, focusing on optimizing the way a child school performance is understood.

Thus, the aim of this study was to assess the role of projective methods for evaluating and investigating the psycho-emotional specific of a person, for establishing the balance between two major life context of a child: the family and the school.

2.2. Case Pesentation

The study involved a 9-year-old boy, named in this article B. I., that was brought for psychological evaluation, by his mother, on recommendation given by the school teacher of his son, claiming „abnormal behavior, aggressive attitude towards teachers and colleagues, unexplained violence, low school performance, low attention at the class”.

Based on the anamnesis (life history of the child) made with his mother, the life context had „no major disturbing experiences” as she said. But for „the eye” of the specialist, things were seen different. B. was coming from a regular family, with married parents, having a younger brother aged 5 years. He was on the 3rd class in secondary school, spending most of the time at his maternal widowed grandmother, that brought him from school, and kept him at her house each day until evening around 7 p.m. On weekends, often B. spent his time at his grandmother, parents being at work. His younger brother

was at kindergarten until 4 p.m., having a nanny taking care of him afterwards, until parents arrived home. She also cooked and cleaned for the family. Parents were spending most of their time at work, each of them having their own personal successful business, working good but requesting lots of attention for this. Often, B. spent his nights at his grandmother house, because their parents considered that bringing him home at a late hour would only tired him, knowing that he would have to wake up early in the morning. So they preferred to let him sleep there „for his own sake”. Regarding the spare time of the child, mother said that „I didn’t enroll him in various activities, my mother is pretty old and already tired, it would have been difficult for her to lead him to various places and, moreover, at her place, B. is having a wide yard to play on, it is better for all of us to just stay there, he is receiving all what he needs. He has with whom to make his homework, who to give him food, my mother really cares for him, he is safe there”. Regarding the time spend in family, the mother admits that they don’t spend much time together, but when they do there is „chaos”, the brothers are fighting, the elder one is „always” dissatisfied, the younger one mostly cries of bad behavior of his brother „they just don’t get along, you know, boys are different than girls, it’s difficult having two of them in the same house”. Regarding their business, the mother says that she and her husband worked for years to make things work at the professional level, and nor she or her husband are willing to give up on this, „finally things are getting on a straight line”. Both pregnancies were difficult, mother had to lay down for several months to keep them, taking lots of medicines during this period of time, to deliver healthy babies. She said that both of the pregnancies were really hard to take, she could do nothing but stay, for months, that caused postpartum depression that she surpassed only by involving in some other activities other than spending all her time raising the kids. She found comfort and balance in the professional context of her life, saying that „I am not willing to make any changes in my life”. The father is involved in the family context at a low level, as the mother said he is a loving father when he is home... but mostly he isn’t, you know... work”. About the couple, mother said they love each other, they had been together to various difficult situation, she sees them as a solid couple except they don’t find the time to live their marriage „having two little sons and two business to rule, it’s crazy, but we manage it”.

Regarding the educational model, the mother affirmations are contradictory, claiming his sons „must” study and have really good grades, on the other hand, their businesses are not in the same domain as their studies, taking special training for this, along time. In the family there were discussion regarding their own school experiences, both parents claiming that school rather restricts ambition and one’s personal horizons, not being able to seek the best in a child and help him develop it. In her opinion, the Romanian school system is overrated, and her will is to raise her child to be „independent, not obeying to all the useless rules”.

B. doesn’t have significant friends, spending his time doing homework (under pressure from his grandmother), watching TV, playing with his dog at grandmother’s yard, playing football with some neighbors but mostly ending up being aggressive with them when he loses or when the other kids don’t want to play as he wants. At school, his behavior is rather aggressive towards his colleagues, especially the ones that he considers „weak”, meaning obedient and approval seeking, mocking or, sometimes, hitting them.

The mother asked the psychologist for a clinical evaluation of the child, being really concerned about his son’s behavior, assuming that he is having ADHD or some compulsive-aggressive disorder.

2.3. Work Method

Clinical evaluation of B. was not possible to be done in a classic way, meaning by standardized tests, B. letting us know that he will not collaborate, telling the specialist that he has no trust in the specialist and moreover, being his mother wish for evaluation, he will not answer in a sincere manner. That was a difficult situation at that point, therefore projective techniques were used for the specific objectives of the psychological investigation.

The projective methods are not a statistical validated forms of evaluation, given their specific, utilizing various ambiguous stimuli to which the subjects are responding in their own way, having no sharp directions given by the evaluator. It is assumed that all the answers at projective methods are reflecting the wishes, attitudes and unconscious content of the respondent, the interpretation of the results being in close relation to the person's specific existential history. It would be a mistake to evaluate a person only by one projective output, or without discussing the results with the person itself, correlating all the information from the other sources available (the anamneses, the clinical interview). By studies on this topic, it is held that the content perceived and the manner of organizing the material reveal significant dynamic aspects of personality. As sustained by certain studies, the projective methods are based on the projective principles driven by theories of personality, and can be found under a large variety of tests, from free drawings, sand play techniques or psychodrama therapy methods, to widely known tree drawing, the person's drawing, Rorschach or T.A.T projective method. As the specific literature sustains, they have been used for purposes of diagnosis, prognosis, therapy, and research.

Given his refuse to collaborate, the evaluation process continued with „a free drawing”, B. was invited to do if he feels like. He answered quickly by saying „better than to be bored here” and he started to pick his crayons. „What do you say about a family drawing?” I asked, and he replied „yes, of course”. Then, he begun to draw something else. I've let him do as he wished to, being attentive to see if his reaction was an oppositionist behavior, or a sign for ADHD. B. was really involved in his activity, not rushing at all, but careful at every detail of his drawing. He had something to say by that drawing, and that was nor oppositionist nor ADHD sign. He finished his work by drawing a colorful head of a dinosaurs, with a big opened mouth, with sharp teeth. We talked about his character and told me that „Dyno is really furious, he is starving and has no food to eat”. Seeing that he receives attention and interest for his work, he continued on telling the story of the Dino, had „no friends, he is scaring everyone and like it like that... any other dyno would only be a threat for his food”. Dyno's family was „far away”, he got lost from them and now he must learn how to survive on his own, „he sometimes cries, he misses them, but all his attempts to find them were useless, so he prefers to stay alone, he don't want to suffer again by losing other dynos”. He finished saying that „Dino will be ok, even if he will be alone forever because he is bad, he must survive, so he must be aggressive, it is just... a dyno life”.

After finishing his Dino story (that was really significant for his own thoughts of the Self) he proposed to do the family drawing.

He changed his colored crayons with a black one, then started to draw some sketchy figures, first the father, the mother, and two children. The younger one was the last drawn, being apart from the other three figures. In his family drawing there were no hands touching, having sad expressions, the mother being the biggest one standing in the middle, between the father and the elder son. B. said that „I don't know how to draw a family, meaning figures... I am best at dyno's”, then smiled. He described the family as being „a typical one, parents and two kids... the younger one seems to have something else to do, the elder son wants to be near his parents”. Regarding the sad faces of the figures, B. told that they just had a fight on a school situation, the elder son not having good grades. Based on this, the discussion went on his school experience, whether or not he finds that situation familiar. He confirmed that he doesn't like school, nor his colleagues or teachers, „everything is boring there, and also my parents told me that school didn't helped them to raise their business”. He confessed that he doesn't like his teacher because she „ only asks for us to respond to class, he is pretty authoritarian and I just don't like her”. Being questioned about how he would prefer to be, B. said „I don't know... I think she can't stand me so my opinion is useless... anyway, I don't think she cares of it, she thinks of me as the black sheep of the class”. On his colleagues he says that „they are not interesting... they are weak, I mean... I can understand a girl, but a boy... to call his mom whenever we are having a fight, that's hilarious, right? Mommy! Mommy! Come and save me!” (B. started laughing anxiously). When asked if he ever calls his mother, he suddenly became sad and irritated „No. I don't. I don't need her to solve my problems. I'm a man!”, then the discussion on this topic reveal an always busy mother, an authoritarian father that told him „only girls cry, you are a man!”, both not interested in what he is doing, in their son's opinion.

In a second session, B. came smiling, showing interest for the evaluation meeting, „he asked me each day to bring him here, I don't know what's with the sudden change!”, mother said. „What's with the sudden change?” I asked B., and he replied „I don't know... I can draw here...” „But I think you can also draw at your place or at school, right?” „Yes, but I think you care for my drawings”. He chooses to draw a tree, afterwards both of us playing with two cars, racing. The tree had many repressed aggression, anxiety and frustration indices, but also specific signs for his need for love and emotional caring.

Putting all the information together, it seemed that B. was an intelligent boy, suffering from a serious lack of attention and affection by his caregivers and fraternal jealousy, leading to deep frustrations that he expressed through unspecific behavior: denial of his own thoughts and needs, passive-aggressive attitude, laughing when actually want to cry, avoiding direct confrontation with significant ones, looking for power and personal influence over those who he consider being weak, projection of the Self.

For ending the psychological evaluation sessions, together with B. a story on his individual case was made, based on symbols and metaphors that helped him to express himself, and to better understand his own life experiences, his needs and reactions, and to better understand the significant ones. He entitled it „The story of a boy that got lost but eventually, was found”.

3. Results

Along this process, B. and his mother learned to recognize their needs, how to positively express them, understanding the unconscious reasons for B.'s disruptive behavior at home and at school. He first

discussed with his mother about all that he learned about himself during this process, in the secure environment of the psychologist cabinet, for the both of them being a revealing experience.

Furthermore, family and individual psychotherapy, was recommended.

The feedback after a while coming from his mother was that B. changed after this period, significantly improving his behavior at home but also at school, he become interested on, his grades raised, also being able to make friends among his colleagues. All these changes happened thanks to radical changes of his mother, who understood where she was wrong in raising his child and all the implications of her own behavior, at her child level and in the family context.

The results of the psychological work process have showed that projective techniques are a valuable resource when in need of finding what is going on in one's emotional world, especially when their communication skills are low (attributable to lower age) or when the person's emotional blockages are so deep that he himself has difficulties in observing or verbalize them. Moreover, the projective methods can be successfully used for working with the findings towards understanding the inner world of a child, being a practical and significant way for emotional heling, helping to reestablish the personal balance.

4. Conclusions

Educational psychology is an extremely important field in a person's developmental process. As a definition to the concept of education, there is said that it „has a certain value significance meaning that refers to what it offers to peers so that they may raise to the authentic existential status of the individual and the acquirement of the authentic human nature” (Neacsu, 2013, p. 107). When it comes to education, this complex process of development must be understood as an output of various fundamental influences. The educational process can't be understood without the psychological domain, its fundamental theories on human development and applied techniques. Among them, the projective methods are really a valuable work method for investigating and solving psychological human issues, along his developmental stages.

Following the cognitive developmental stages, kids don't get more intelligent but they are changing the way they understand the world, based on their new acquisitions, from stage to stage. For Piaget, the process of interaction implies a two-way response, meaning accommodation and assimilation. “In accommodation, the child's knowledge of the environment is modified to incorporate new experiences which are adaptive to the broad aspect of cognitive demands imposed by the environment. In assimilation, the child incorporates new experiences into an existing structure. Accommodation and assimilation are reciprocal and their interaction generates cognitive growth” (Simatwa, 2010, p. 366). But when a child's psychological defense is on, the two-way process of assimilation and accommodation might be blocked, therefore, the learning and thus, the evolution process is slowed down by external factors, not by the real cognitive and emotional possibilities of the child.

Even if this article is based on a single person's life story, from my work experience, this unwanted life triangle, meaning unhappy child- unsupportive family-school maladjustment, can easily be generalized to most of the youngsters of our times. It can easily be seen the spectacular evolution of children, from one generation to another, the time goes by so fast, having to keep up with it being like a vortex that draws after itself important changes at a personal, family and social level. Not being able to face all this, from various reasons, may attract difficulties on adapting to the new lifestyle demands,

having a hard time finding, keeping and sharing the existential balance that we all strive for. And having kids, may complicate things. Especially when they are having behavioral disorders and no intention of hiding it. And that's the point: they don't want to hide it, they want to be seen. Unfortunately, the family and afterwards, the school, have teach kids lots of things, among which, they get to receive lots of attention when they do bad things. Contrary to appearances, children are very receptive to the messages sent from the environments surrounding them, even if being in the middle of attention in this case, attracting quarrel, punishment, and loss of secure relationships.

Hurt attracts hurt, especially when it comes to children, the poor relations at home will reflect in poor results at school. Teachers must pay attention to these sources of explaining a child behavior, having low grades or a bad temper, doesn't necessary indicates a low IQ or a mental issue. According to Piaget's theory on intellectual development, the human intelligence is formed along four fundamental stages, from birth to adolescence, that span into adulthood. For Piaget, children are as intelligent as adults, the difference being not a quantitative one but in a qualitative sense, children thinking in a different manner than adults do. Therefore, „any member of the teaching staff, irrespective of seniority, must prove trust in its pupils and be animated by pedagogical optimism” (Langa, 2014, p.11) and that means caring, paying attention and willing to avoid putting a label on a child that seems unadapt to the school system. Any teacher should be familiarized with the psychology field, being able to observe any irregularities at a child level, guiding the family to search for solutions not punishment. Psychologist believe that any child is the result of its own family context, the way he approaches school being a direct effect of his family influences.

Starting with Sigmund Freud, the specialists in the field of psychology have confirmed the existence of unconscious psychological processes, a requisite for defenses in times of unwanted life situations that affects the child at an emotional level. Furthermore, based on various relevant studies it is shown that developmental, personality, and social psychologists have all found evidence for sustaining that defense mechanisms can explain psychological functioning. The same defenses will be seen at an adult's behavior, not being able to deal with the guilty feeling of not taking good care of their child, parents will often manifest either avoidance or the tendency of control, in establishing the relation with the school's representatives. From this, a vicious circle can easily be born, affecting directly the child self-esteem and way of acting and approaching life, in general.

When it comes to psychological wellbeing, it's not about whether projective methods are statistical standardized or not, but more about if a certain method is offering a way of expressing itself, of intercommunication, providing a creative way of helping the child to express his unconscious contents. At the same time, empirical studies have shown that projective techniques are being a valuable tool for allowing adults to understand a child, his needs, frustrations, and thus, his behavior.

As philosopher Allan Bloom (2012) said, education is seen as the movement from darkness to light and, on this existential road, as many positive sources of influence we get, the better.

The applied psychology is to be considered as high importance in understanding, improving and applying educational methods.

The educational psychology must be understood as a way of collaboration between teachers, family and psychological specialists, aiming the personal wellbeing of a child, his capacities of personal

development, adaptation and general good functioning in a world that seems to require more and more from a child, offering less and less.

Understood at its best and applied in a caring, mature and responsible manner, educational psychology can make a positive change in this holistic system that can't be seen apart its fundamental elements: the child, the family and the school.

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