SPECIAL ISSUE

EDUCATION AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Obituary: Claude Bourcet

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While they were completing the final preparations for this special edition, the editors were shocked to learn of the death of Claude Bourcet. His article in this edition reflects not only his research interests but the skill and commitment with which he applied himself to his academic activities. In providing a picture of Claude’s academic qualities it stands for itself as a tribute to him. We wish to go further and pay tribute to his qualities as a man. Claude was a well-liked and valued colleague and he will be sorely missed by us and by all who, like us, grieve his loss.
Parental education and the socialization of the child: Internality, valorization and self-positioning

Christine Bouissou
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Contemporary western society is characterised by an individualistic model of the person. Conceptions of socialization insist more on self-expression and development than on the individual's submission to social requirements. Values concerned with individual responsibility and self-realization guide educative actions. The article analyses the influence of parental education on internality and self-esteem in the child with particular attention to how parents lead the child to become responsible (commitment). Two hundred parents (from contrasting social backgrounds) answered a questionnaire on internality and a question on self-esteem. According to their social background, the parents adopt educative practices which induce more or less responsibility in the child. Leading the child to accept responsibility in daily life encourages the learning of internality, but family education has little influence on self-esteem. How subjects "positioned" themselves, i.e., how they placed themselves a variety of measures was examined. Some preferred to position themselves in the centre of the scales while others placed themselves on the extremes. There was a correlation between the positioning of the parents and that of the children.

Posing the problem

During the individual's first years of life, parental education constitutes an essential determining factor in development and self-construction. What the parents communicate in the process of primary socialization appears to the child to be the components of an "only world possible" (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). The social world's reality is perceived by the child as the reality of the natural world, as an objectively valid truth. Although the child does not remain passive in socialization, it does not choose its educational partners and, indeed, it is those partners who define the content which is passed on to the child. Primary socialization leads to relatively irreversible forms of interiorization, the more so because the child will be linked affectively to its partners and will build up its identity by identifying with them.

Socialising influences depend of course, on the cultural context in which individuals evolve. This explains why it seemed to us to be important to analyse the "sensitivities" which
characterise society as it approaches the socialization process. The consumer economy has changed over the centuries, leading to the emergence of new values and to different conceptions of socialization. Thus, in western societies, the individualist model of the person considerably influences practices and expectations in terms of socialization (Vanandruel, 1991). This model values the individual’s personal development to a greater extent than social conformity and submission to collective rules. Becoming a person, in western societies, means taking account of one’s own interests and needs within an overall aim of fulfilment and happiness and it also means showing oneself to be available to others, capable of listening. Socialising means personalising oneself – “On the social stage, the individual only truly seeks to adapt to his social milieu. To integrate insofar as he has the feeling that he can achieve something by doing so – not only through the satisfaction of his desires, but also thanks to the possibility of making an impact, transforming such and such an aspect of physical or social external reality, in line with his own projects” (Tap, 1991, p. 53). Qualities such as autonomy, independence, creativeness and authenticity are currently highly valued and constitute essential educative objectives.

Even if normative pressures and socialising influences remain strong, they appear less clearly and are more difficult to uncover. To use Vanandruel’s expression, self-esteem and internality would appear, to provide a rating for successful socialization. The theoretical interest given to these two concepts is the mark of an individualistic (and thus quite relative) orientation. At the same time, to study them is of interest because what the child interiorises or becomes will depend on the cultural values that are effective in its living environment (Bouissou, 1996). From a historical point of view, the authors have observed a change in the socialization process. The Renaissance period marked a turning point in that it brought with it an increasing interest in the human person, his sensitivity and behaviour. This change in sensitivity has led to a different consumer economy: during socialization, socially undesirable, impulsive tendencies are repressed and the social nature of feelings (of shame, malaise, well-being, pleasure and displeasure) is forgotten, thus making these natural feelings seem to be the result of the “ego” expressing itself. We can draw a parallel here with the notion of social utility (Beauvois, 1982): social adaptation appears to be a personal choice by very reason the value currently attached to individual autonomy.

Internality, as an overestimation of one’s personal role in explaining psychological events (standing in opposition to externality), seems to us to illustrate strikingly the concept of autonomy. Internality’s normative aspect can be explained by change in the socialization process. As a social norm, internality answers to four criteria. On the one hand it is a socially shared belief: we can see that individuals belonging to dominant social groups are those who show strongest attachment to that norm (Dubois, 1987). On the other hand, the norm of internality is subject to a social learning process: the training arrangements take part quite significantly in its interiorization and cognitive development cannot alone provide an explanation for that learning process (Dubois, 1988). Further, the norm of internality intervenes in evaluation and judgement practices: when individuals attempt to show themselves in a favourable light, they describe themselves as responsible for the events that arise in their lives and by doing so, they effectively receive positive evaluations (Dubois & Le Poultrie, 1991). Finally, the norm of internality is more open to interpretation in terms of social utility than in terms of truth: its integration corresponds to acceptance by the individual of certain socially dominant representations (Tostain, 1991). In our view, internality and self-valorization, both of which are strong values in western society, are learned within the contemporary affective dynamic of socialization. Moreover it is essential to analyse how they function, as the institution of the school is strongly attached to them: the child who succeeds in schooling will be fulfilled, conscious of his personal worth and responsible for his acts. “Without wishing to state that the mode of attribution constitutes a criterion for evaluation which is on a par with using and mastering the French language, we believe that the internal – external dynamic cannot be dissociated from the production or the evaluation of the individual’s behaviour at school” (Deschamps, Lorenzi-Cioldi, & Meyer, 1982, p. 150). We also wish to take account of another dimension of the child’s personality, namely self-positioning. This corresponds to the way the subject “situates himself in relation to others and
the degree of community he feels in relation to them” (Meyer, 1989, p. 443). Positioning refers back to self-other differentiation – to the distance the person establishes between himself and others. This is a dimension of personal and social identity. Identity implies both searching for and recognising one’s worth and the need to assert oneself (Tap, 1980). It is built up through the comparison of oneself with others. The person needs to resemble others but at the same time to differentiate himself and this allow him to try out the feeling of his uniqueness, his originality (Tap, 1988). Using a psycho-social approach, we can consider that the establishment of identity “is subject to the particular conditions of the group to which one belongs, situated in a larger inter-group context” (Durand-Delvigne, 1992, p. 64). According to their social position, individuals define themselves specifically in relation to others, particularly in relation to the groups to which they belong. Socially dominant individuals exercising power (social, economic or symbolic) present a “personal identity” rooted in their specific characteristics, thus expressing their singularity, their uniqueness.

The socially privileged, adhere more than others to the dominant norms – individualist norms, in particular – they define themselves as singular individuals. Individuals who occupy less privileged positions present instead a “positional identity” (Lorenzi-Cioldi, 1988), anchored more in the social group, founded on the general characteristics which define the group. While it is a cultural value in our western societies, the individualist model of the person has also a social differentiation function. It translates “the identity of dominant individuals and places the members of groups who are dominated, into a relationship of otherness. In group interdependence relationships, the dominated make what the dominant are not into a reality in a complementary fashion” (Durand-Delvigne, 1992, p. 64).

Self-positioning, like internality or self valorization, refers to the question of the subject’s identity, an identity which is socially constructed. All of these “concepts explicitly invoke a theory of the subject or better, the problematic of a subject sketching out a theory of the subject” (Deschamps et al., 1982, p. 141). In the psychosocial approach, identity is constructed in the articulation between the individual and the collective group. It is the product of the interaction between the personal and the social. Taking educative actions into account is of prime importance in this approach. Parallel with change in the socialization process, we can also note a transformation in expectations in terms of socialization and educative practices. However, parents’ educative behaviour patterns are considerably influenced by their position in the social field. We have noted, in particular, that the value given to autonomy, self-control and initiative are all stronger in family practice insofar as the parents are socially and culturally privileged and thus adhere to dominant values (Kellerhals & Montandon, 1991). Depending on the social groups to which one belongs, adhesion to these different values is also linked with educative behaviour patterns which more or less encourage the autonomy of the child. All studies dealing with family education, recognise that democratic educative practices (imposing limits on the child while leaving him a share of initiative) are particularly characteristic of privileged social classes. In the light of these ideas, our research tests the following general assumption: the orientation of parental educative practices, will be linked to whether the child will show a more or less significant valorization of itself, a more or less pronounced interiorization of internality and a personal or positional identity.

Method

In order to try to understand the influence of educative practices on internality, self valorization and positioning, we decided to concentrate on the child’s assumption of responsibility in carrying out familiar tasks and on how the parents encourage the child in these activities (Kiesler, 1971). Guinguain (1986) has already shown that commitment favours the child’s internalization of the norm of internality. We can also assume that educative practices aiming at making the child responsible encourage the development of autonomy and, through this, valorization of self and construction of a personal identity. We
used a questionnaire consisting of twenty questions, each with three possible responses: educational practices involving low level commitment, medium level commitment and high level commitment. They are defined as follows: high-level commitment educative practices involve the parents granting responsibilities to the child while controlling and guiding him in those tasks. They are characterised by a balance between parental control and the child’s freedom. In contrast, low level commitment educative practices involve strong parental control and less investment from the child. Finally, where the child assumes a significant part of responsibilities without being guided by the parent, it is experiencing medium level commitment educative practices. The questionnaire was inspired by instruments used by Lautrey (1980) and Guinguouain (1986). It takes account of everyday and diverse family situations (household activities, trips out, personal hygiene and relations with the parents).

Multiple correspondence factor analysis (MCFA) on the twenty items reveals a factor opposing high level commitment educative practices to medium level commitment educative practices. This involves a commitment factor with regard to the child, from which we defined a factorial score (corresponding to the subjects’ position on the axis) and which we used to analyse relations between parental education and the child’s psychological dimensions. To measure the child’s internality, we chose the causal style of questionnaire used by Pierrehumbert, Neuwly-Chuard, & Plancherel (1987b). There are twenty-four items each of which asks seeks a response (one internal, the other external) to which the subject can adhere more or less strongly. This allows four modalities to be defined: strongly external, moderately external, moderately internal and strongly internal responses. These questions evoke pleasant or unpleasant events in various areas of the child’s life (school situations, relations with peers and with the parents). When this questionnaire was subjected to descriptive analyses, however, the internal consistency proved to be low and this led us to retain only a sub-group of eight items. These items all evoke unpleasant events for the child and can be used to calculate a negative internality score. Measures of self-esteem were obtained from the French language version (Pierrehumbert, Jankech-Caretta, Neuwly-Chuard, Plancherel, & Zanone, 1987a) of Harter’s scale (1982). Six areas were taken into account: school work, social and physical skills, physical appearance, behaviour and self-worth (understood as a general self-assessment). Thirty items, in total, were presented to the child. Each allowed four possible modes of response: very low, low, strong and very strong self-esteem. Multiple correspondence factor analysis on each of the six dimensions of self-esteem led to a factorial score for self-evaluation (one score per dimension). We defined self-positioning indirectly by using children’s responses to questionnaires on internality and self-esteem. Each item in these two instruments refers to two groups of children who differed in self-esteem (strong or weak) or in causal explanations (internal or external). Having chosen the group he/she resembles, the subject has to specify whether identification is strong (i.e., a polarised position, with modalities 1 and 4) or moderate (i.e., a more central, intermediate positioning, with modalities 2 and 3). Descriptive analyses carried out on internality and self-esteem items showed an opposition between polarised and intermediate responses enabling us to define factorial scores for self-positioning. We found a strong correlation between the different scores for self-positioning – each child tends to position itself in the same way on both scales – and this led us to consider that self-positioning is truly a psychological variable which refers back to a dimension of personal identity. The analysis of our results was based therefore on the factorial scores from the descriptive analyses (scores for commitment, self-vallorization and self-positioning), together with a negative internality score. The population covered by our research comprised 200 parents and their children aged between 10 and 12. Information relating to the parents’ professions and level of education allowed us to define a synthetic variable, presenting five modalities (highly underprivileged, underprivileged, intermediate, privileged and highly privileged socio-cultural identity). Our working hypothesis was as follows: children who benefit from parental commitment to educative practices which provide more internal explanations for events arising in their lives, will value themselves more highly and show a lower identification with their social group than children who experience low-level commitment in parental educative practices. We also decided to check whether parents’ socio-cultural origin is an explanatory variable for their educative choice.
Results

Commitment and social background

The parents’ socio-cultural background explains significantly the commitment to the child: parents adopt more committed educative practices insofar as they come from privileged socio-cultural backgrounds (see Table 1).

Table 1

| Socio-cultural background and the child’s commitment (univariate variance analysis) |
|---------------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Commitment (dependent variable) | Very Privileged | Underprivileged | Intermediate | Privileged | Degree of Freedom | F    | p     |
|                                  | -0.80          | -0.14          | 0.27          | 0.33          | 0.34           | 4 - 390 | 20.30 | <0.01 |

More detailed analysis of our results shows that parents from underprivileged social backgrounds seem to adopt educative practices which are more subject to fluctuation and more extreme than those of with privileged parents. In certain cases, they leave their child considerable freedom and do not impose limits and, conversely, at other times, they show themselves to be highly coercive. In more privileged groups, on the other hand, parents are characterised by strong consistency in their educative action: they seem to seek a balance between their wish to make the child assume responsibility and the need to maintain control.

Commitment and internality

Covariance analysis shows that the child’s internality is largely explained by a strong level of commitment in parental educative practices. A child who is committed in his behaviour, tends to internalise the norm of internality and to explain events in his/her life in terms of personal characteristics to a greater extent than is the case with other children. Liberal practices are more conducive to interiorising social norms than are more coercive practices (Benois, 1994). Hoffman (1983) noted similar results: inductive disciplinary techniques (which we can consider to be democratic) allow for a true appropriation of moral standards (these being apprehended by the child as personal requirements). More “punitive” techniques, on the other hand, lead to an external morality in which the child respects norms because they have been imposed on him through external constraints.

Democratic educative practices can be distinguished from authoritarian practices from an ideological point of view. They contribute in a different fashion to ideological transmission. In an authoritarian educative system, parental power can be asserted as such, without need for justification from the parent. Thus, the child who bends to constraints does not necessarily adhere to that power’s ideological foundations: does not necessarily interiorise the norms of its educative partners. Conversely, a more flexible system is often accompanied by a liberal justification of power. It relies on making the child assume responsibility with direct reference to freedom of action. It leads the child to commit itself in its acts, to accept the pressure to which it is subjected and to internalise the justifications involved. In this orientation, commitment is an intermediate process between educative action (considered as an exercise of power) and internalization by the child of social norms. Liberal education thus appears to play an effective role in transmitting social norms (its power would be even more impressive if it also induced internalization of adult standards, rather than leading the child to construct its own standards and values). We must be prudent, however, in interpreting our results. It would
be rash to generalise the relation observed between learning internality and the child being brought to assume responsibility. Our questionnaire’s internal consistency is weak, and this encourages us to question the concept of internality. This is indeed a complex matter. While its particularly normative appearance in certain social spheres (school and social practices of evaluation) no longer needs to be demonstrated, it is no doubt less meaningful in other fields (for example, in the child’s relations with its peers). How the notion of internality should be understood is dependent on the particular field in which it is operative.

Commitment and self valorization

Making the child assume responsibility during educative practices seems to play no role in evaluation of its skills. However, it favours general self-appreciation and self-worth (degree of freedom: 2; 208; t = 1.7; p < 0.07). This fits in with the observation made by Kellerhals, Montandon, Ritschard, and Sardi (1992, p. 330): general self evaluation “is clearly related to the educative style adopted by the parents, and more particularly to the degree of autonomy and support enjoyed by the child”. For these authors, the value given to skills or “self-efficacy” depends on the child’s real experiences – on its failures and successes, while self-worth seems mainly to be built up through the regard of others, particularly the parents. Thus, educative practices which make the child responsible – based on the values: autonomy, personalization and self achievement – tend to encourage the child to build up a feeling of self-worth. Another aspect of educative practice, which should doubtless be taken into consideration in studying self-worth, is the support from which the child benefits – the affective dimension in educative action. Many studies (Verquerre, 1989; Schaeffer, 1959; Champney, 1941) have identified two orthogonal dimensions for describing educative behaviour patterns: “control” (i.e., the sharing of responsibilities and parental influence – cf., the “partnership” dimension described by Beauvois in 1994) and “affectiveness” (the parents’ investment in the child’s well-being; their availability to the child). Managing affective relationships between parents and the child is no doubt a determining factor in self-esteem and comprises the affective dimension in identity (Bouissou & Tap, 1997; Tap, 1988).

Commitment and self-positioning

As far as self-positioning is concerned, the influence of educative practices is remarkable. The child identifies more with the group and, insofar as it is the recipient of educative practices which do not involve the assumption of responsibility, positions itself more at the poles of scales. On the other hand, the child who is made responsible during educative tasks, will show a lower level of identification with the group and position itself towards the centre of the scales (see Table 2).

Table 2

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<th>Commitment (independent variable)</th>
<th>Cognitive skill</th>
<th>Social skill</th>
<th>Physical skill</th>
<th>Physical appearance</th>
<th>Behaviour</th>
<th>Self-worth</th>
<th>Internality</th>
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<td>t(1,208)</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p</td>
<td>&lt;0.01</td>
<td>&lt;0.01</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>&lt;0.01</td>
<td>&lt;0.01</td>
<td>&lt;0.01</td>
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</table>
Family education, through the use of responsibility-inducing educative practices, influences the child's identity building. Educative practices which induce autonomy (characteristics of privileged social groups) encourage a personal identity which is oriented towards the individualism of the subject and distanced from belonging to a group and the adoption of group-type characteristics. Conversely, educative practices which are less responsibility-inducing, which fluctuate and which go to extremes (adopted by a majority of under-privileged social groups) lead the child to forge a more undifferentiated, positional identity which is anchored more on a collective definition of self.

The individuals' linguistic practices are also relevant to a psychosocial approach which attempts to explain the influence of social dynamics on identity building. A particular form of social structure (an educative context) will determine the appearance of such and such a linguistic code, and this, in its turn, will express and reinforce that structure. In addition, peoples' linguistic practices, while playing a role in self-definition will also be differentiated according to how people perceive themselves. Socially dominant groups are characterised by elaborate language (Espéret, 1975) which emphasises the singularity of their members. They think of themselves and speak to each other as a collection of individuals each defined as a whole, as a collection of acting wills, subjects of action and history (Bisschet, 1974, pp. 247-248). Conversely, socially dominated individuals are conceived of and see themselves as forming only part of a whole. “While the dominated define themselves by belonging to a collective group, this collective group is not a collective subject (Us in relation to Me), but rather a collective object” (Durand-Deligne, 1992, p. 66). Using of the impersonal French “on” (one) prevails over using the more personal “nous” (we). Parallel with these differentiated linguistic practices, specific family functional patterns can also be observed. In the one case, social interactions within the family group involve persons who are perceived as such, whose intentions and motivations are taken into account. In the other case, they are based rather on the status of the members and on the rules governing relations between these statuses (Moreau, 1989; Espéret, 1975). Various types of parental control can be highlighted. These are associated with the values and qualities that the parents seek to have the child acquire. The “imperative” mode is characterised by using strong power and only allows the child open rebellion, submission or retreat. A control mode “based on positional invocations” stresses the child's belonging to the community and does little to encourage autonomy; it does, however, facilitate the construction of a collective conscience. A control mode “based on personal motivation” underlines the person's qualities and insists on its autonomy. The way the family is run, family social interactions, techniques relating to influence and the type of child's personality profile which is valued by the parents (Kellerhals & Montandon, 1991) are some of the main components which interact to form the child's identity. These dimensions of family education need to be examined in greater depth in order better to understand the construction of the child's identity in terms of self-positioning.

Conclusion

The three elements of the child's personality (self-worth, internality and self-positioning) are related to parental educative practices. Strong personal worth, strong internality and a personal identity are the outcome of practices which aim to make the child assume responsibility and act autonomously. Given the importance which schools attach to notions of responsibility and personal fulfilment, these elements are likely to be assets which assist the satisfactory integration of the child in the school. Further, more detailed research is needed in order better to define the influence of family education on the three dimensions discussed in this article. On the family side, this could involve going more deeply into the affective dimension of educative practices. The notion of internality relies on a complex approach more complex than that which we have employed. Such an approach would aim to take different dimensions into consideration: the areas of life covered by the test items; the
distinction between behaviour patterns and reinforcements; the “stability versus variability” of the proposed causal factor.

Self-positioning features indirectly in the present study. We are now considering how to make it operational in a later study. Using a “who am I?” approach, we could distinguish between responses according to whether they refer to the person in terms of his/her individuality, i.e., idiosyncratic responses, or whether they make use of the subject’s social integration and include references to others, i.e., positional responses (Deschamps et al., 1982). A detailed study of internality, self worth and self-positioning seem to us to be of real relevance since all of these are aspects of identity which are socially constructed, socially valued and which interact. They all refer to a theory of the subject – in line with the individualistic model which is socially valued in western societies – whereby the individual is finally, only what he makes of himself. Feeling responsible for one’s acts surely requires one to define oneself as a responsible, autonomous, singular person who is conscious of his/her personal value. “The individual becomes a subject when we can attribute to him the cause and thus the responsibility for his acts, otherwise he remains dependent on his physical and social environment” (Deschamps et al., 1982, p. 52).

References


Les sociétés occidentales actuelles se caractérisent par un modèle individualiste de la personne. Les conceptions de la socialisation insistent davantage sur l'expression et le développement de soi que sur la soumission de la personne aux exigences sociales. Les valeurs de responsabilité individuelle et de réalisation de soi orientent les actions éducatives. Nous analysons l'influence de l'éducation parentale sur l'identité de l'enfant à l'adolescence, notre intérêt porte sur la responsabilisation (l'engagement) de l'enfant par les parents. Deux cent parents (issues de milieux sociaux contrastés) ont répondu à un questionnaire appréciant leurs pratiques éducatives. Leurs enfants (de 10 à 12 ans) ont complété un questionnaire d'identité et un questionnaire d'estime de soi. Selon leur origine sociale, les parents adoptent des pratiques éducatives plus ou moins responsabilisantes. La responsabilisation de l'enfant dans la vie quotidienne favorise l'apprentissage de l'identité. En revanche, l'éducation familiale influence peu l'estime de soi. Nous analysons également le "positionnement" des sujets, c'est à dire la manière dont ils se situent sur les échelles issues, certains se positionnent préférentiellement au centre des échelles, alors que d'autres se trouvent plutôt sur les pôles. On note une corrélation entre le positionnement des parents et celui des enfants.
Key words: Commitment, Internality, Parental educative practices, Positioning, Self-esteem, Socialisation.

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Current theme of research:

Most relevant publications in the field of Psychology of Education:


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Current theme of research:
Dynamics of personalisation in critical situations. Identity construction and categorisation process. Health and development.

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