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Contemporary problems in bringing up children

Introduction

The society often treats the process of bringing up a child as a simple task. Parents, basing on their own childhood experiences, attempt to reproduce the educational methods they were subject to. However, generations differ due to the variety of stimuli provided by the developing civilisation. By means of television programs the mass media try to assist parents providing them with the knowledge they can take advantage of while rearing their child. Unfortunately, facing difficulties, parents fail to observe their own deficiencies or mistakes made in the upbringing process. The fact that parents brought up in other circumstances and for different future have to prepare young generation for their life in conditions they could not expect (Brzezińska, 1999). The academic community should concentrate on proposing wide-ranging emergency and long-term assistance in solving a variety of upbringing problems. Only then, parents and teachers prepared for the process beforehand will raise the new generation in accordance with the human development cycle. As characteristic features of the process are its duration and continuity, the long-term goal should be consistently and persistently followed. Parents, however, often miss to discern problems rising from family itself and tend to seek help in treatment of results, not in identification of the actual cause of child's misbehaviour.

Sources of problems in child rearing

Every child is observed to misbehave from time to time, and that is a natural characteristic of childhood and adolescence periods. Children learn to function in their families, in the society or group by gathering good and bad experiences, testing to find limits to which they can act without restraints towards their parents, teachers or other children. When the first symptoms of mis-

behaviour occur is difficult to establish (Kořakowski, 2007, p. 110). The present article will discuss a few approaches analysing causes of problem behaviour. Irrespectively of the year of the publication its discussion of child's misconduct causes remains relevant. Moreover, new questions are continued to appear as a result of the civilisation development.

Manifold origins for upbringing problems occurrence and entrenchment have been described in literature, but the most widely accepted division includes exogenic and endogenic causes discovered in changed development factors and their complex interdependencies. As follows from the above, the explicit influence of particular factors is difficult to be precisely identified since it depends on e.g. external conditions, the child itself, his/her age, experiences, sensitivity, the way his/her nervous system works, on living conditions of the family, on the system of demands, applied parenting methods, behaviour patterns, on single-occurrence situations and events all contributing to creation of the unique network of individual causes and factors facilitating appearance of misbehaviour. It is essential to determine the child's sensitivity, his/her way of reacting to stimuli, resistance to failure and frustration, tolerance to command, bans or restrictions. Children's emotions towards safety, care and independence are different from those of adults (Kaja, 1972). That trend of research has appeared in numerous publications since it reflects on such sources as the child itself or the society and includes psychologization, as well as socialization and pedagogization distinguished by Otto Speck (2007).

Considering upbringing problems one may find that they originate from:

- 1) incompatibility between parenting methods and education at nursery school or kindergarten;
- 2) mistakes parents make;
- 3) upbringing styles preferred by parents;
- 4) disturbances of the development process (temperament and personality);
- 5) inability to identify stages in child development.

A child starts shaping his/her social behaviour influenced by upbringing methods used by their parents and the environment. Thus, the child's conduct depends on

how parents establish and implement rules, support and encourage the child and exert their authority, how they structuralize their child's life and make it predictable (Vasta, Haith, Miller, 1995, p. 472, own translation).

Parents approach the undertaking in a variety of ways. Unfortunately, the educational institution often performs its task in a manner unlike that used by the family environment and as a result the child faces a situation of a cognitive dissonance – incompatibility of two concepts. Thus, the child has to substantiate his/her choice of one idea as a rule of conduct or may develop and integrate a conviction that behaviour depends on the current environment. The latter situ-

ation often results in problems arising in both upbringing environments and may lead to the child developing neurosis.

Irena Obuchowska (1976) distinguishes the following interfering features of the environment:

- a) considerable inconsistency in demands (e.g. a child is always assisted at home, while at kindergarten is expected to act unaided),
- b) mutually contradictory demands leading to a situation where a child is praised or punished for the same conduct (e.g. praised for being curious at kindergarten but punished for persistence in asking questions at home),
- c) the fact that demands are not adjusted to the child's abilities.

High demands have a traumatic influence on children and the too low ones may result in neurosis by lowering the psychic immunity (a child accustomed to success at home is not capable of accepting failure). Marta Bogdanowicz writes about the difficulty in identification of one neurosis source because the disorder is caused by a chain of numerous phenomena.

Children are particularly exposed to the risk of developing neurotic disorders as their nervous system is immature, and their acquired mechanism of coping with difficult situations is not sufficiently strong (Bogdanowicz, 1991, p. 181, own translation).

Preferred parenting styles determine the method of task realisation. Before characterising the styles of upbringing in detail, let me quote Halina Spionek (1963) who pointed to upbringing problems while describing infants. Though published years ago Spionek's statements perfectly exemplify contemporary parents. The symptoms of upbringing problems include so called 'whims' and negative emotional states most often resulting from mistakes made in the upbringing process in family or at nursery. The author blames such disruption of the daily schedule of the family as changed the sleep or meal time, rocking, too much amusement just before bedtime, telling stories or scaring, which may cause sleep disorders and, consequently, to chronic fatigue of the nervous system manifesting with overexcitement or crying for trivial reasons. The overall irritation may also follow from overheating, uncomfortable or too tight clothes or actions of parents wishing to do something too quickly what results in their child developing e.g. a fear of bath, getting dressed or meals. Failure to observe one's own mistakes in the upbringing process as surrendering to whims or acting 'in defiance' leads to children developing multiple-symptom neurosis. Rearing a child is not a simple task; it means incessant work of the child and parents due to which the child's behaviour will comply with the social and moral norms.

One may further consider the distinguished by H. Spionek degrees of deficient upbringing resulting from the parent-child relationship. There is no parent who could avoid some failure or oversight in the process of upbringing a child i.e. a parental mistake. As a result of the child rearing process parents can be found to bring up their children well, badly or disastrously. The first level of deficient

upbringing is characteristic for children in the first years of life when only minor mistakes are observed. Parents lavish affection, attention and care on their child, however, with time they fail to attend to some spheres of child's psychological development. The second stage is observed later in the child's life, when the scope and intensity of parental mistakes prevent socially-accepted behaviour in majority of everyday situations. The mono- or bidirectional parent-child relationship becomes deteriorated. The third level means that parents lose contact with the child entirely, resigning from their influence, or act ineffectively (Spionek, 1981, pp. 56–57). The discussed stages may be compared to the process of creating a unique upbringing environment determined by mistakes made by parents.

There is no coherence in descriptions of parenting styles found in literature but those most often proposed are described as: 1) autocratic, 2) liberal, 3) democratic, and 4) inconsistent. H. Spionek (1963) lists the following deficient parenting styles: over-strict and rigorous (coercive), over-indulging and inconsistent. However, one may accept as the best the division into four following types: autocratic (authoritarian), uninvolved, permissive and authoritative (Vasta, Haith, Miller, 1995).

Parents preferring the autocratic upbringing style are extremely demanding, supervise and control their children incessantly enforcing their demands with threats and punishment. Children react badly to the style showing discontent in relationships, moodiness, aggression and disobedience. Another style, the uninvolved one, imposes few limits but offers children little care, attention or emotional support. As a consequence, indifferent parents contribute to their children developing excessive demands and disobedience. Disturbed social relations and no effective participation in play are observed. The permissive style means permission for a child 'to do anything'. Parents adopting this upbringing style tend to be very affectionate and emotionally sensitive, imposing few restrictions on the child. On one hand, the parents motivate their children to behave properly by means of their acceptance and encouragement, on the other, they offer little assistance to their child trying to structuralize the predictability of the environment. As a result, children of permissive parents act similarly to children reared in the autocratic style, showing frequent impulsiveness, immaturity and being uncontrollable. The fourth discussed parenting style, the authoritative one, is perceived as the most advantageous and is employed by parents characterised as protective and sensitive to children's needs. Children are to observe clear and understandable limits and rules; consistency and responsibility are other features of the style. Children brought up by authoritative parents are curious, confident and independent (Vasta, Haith, Miller, 1995; Obuchowska, 2004).

Contemporary research has shown that a system of upbringing practices understood as a responsible procedure determines the development and autonomy of a child. O. Speck provides the following definitions of the concepts:

- 1) neither the authoritarian nor the permissive upbringing style is conducive to the process of a child becoming an autonomic individual;
- 2) dependency, apathy, aggressiveness may follow from prevalence of instructional practices;
- 3) overindulgence of caregivers may encourage children's aggression, tyranny and wilfulness;
- 4) good conditions for the development of child's autonomy are observed when the parenting style bases on the stable emotional bonds and sympathetic interest, when, thanks to reciprocal communication, the child is influenced by clearly expressed norms and supportive control, when the caregivers' actions are adapted to the developmental stage of the child, i.e. the more independent the child grows the more restraint in using upbringing practices is observed on the part of the parent; in other words, the caregiver's trust constitutes encouragement and support for the child in his/her passing from one independence level to another (Speck, 2007, p. 244, own translation).

Temperament may be another source of problems in the upbringing process. The interpretation has not been substantiated, though so called 'difficult children' are recognised to be in the risk group because of the greater probability of behaviour disorders. Unfortunately, the influence mechanism remains unexplained. For example, shy children show an early temperamental feature, namely inhibition observed in their behaviour in early childhood and remaining stable for a number of years. Some research has pointed out that the feature may change with time. Moreover, shyness, bashfulness and so called difficult temperament may be interrelated with experience and socialisation (Vasta, Haith, Miller, 1995).

Subject literature describes child's personality development as at least parallel to the general physical and psychic progress. However, one should stress the fact that the process is not unambiguous as

there is no definite answer to the question if the maturation process of all organism functions and psyche is of the same importance for individual development or if the process strictly depends on the type of those functions (Chłopkiewicz, 1987, p. 157).

Though all functional capabilities of an individual are reflected in the child's personality some of them are particularly stressed. M. Chłopkiewicz (*ibidem*, p. 302) writes that

Developmental process disorders leading to permanent deformations, inhibitions and retardations in formation of the personal structure are a specifically childhood problem. Those are the source of the considerable number of upbringing difficulties and the cause of limited effectiveness of parenting influence. They initiate the process of wide-ranging deformations of an adult personality, and contribute to emergence of neurotic or sociopathological disorders.

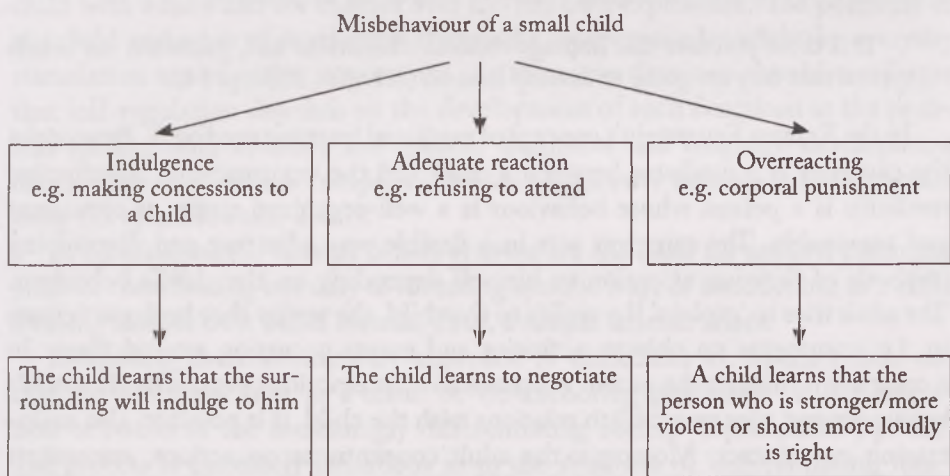
Child's behaviour follows some patterns and is highly in a predictable, i.e. the biological and psychic development of a child progresses according to a specific outline. Thus, human behaviour is subject to a number of set rules and norms (Ilig, Ames, Baker, 2006). Innate predisposition of a child and characteristics of the developmental stage she/he has reached influence the behaviour to not lesser extent than the way the child is treated by parents and the environment. Child's behaviour depends not only on his/her developmental stage but also on his/her former experiences of relations within the family and the environment. Parents should learn to recognise the natural behaviour of their children since the child's development is compatible with the distribution of balance and imbalance periods over the developmental scheme. Therefore, if the child's behaviour suddenly changes one should not seek reasons for the transformation in the child's background or his/her difficult character. Periods of balance, both internal and in relations with people and the external world, are intertwined with periods when the child does not feel comfortable even with him/herself and seems to be in conflict with other people. What is essential is the sequence of those periods as every child imposes her/his own pace on the series but every stage of comparative balance is followed by a period of unrest and unadjustedness. Adults should realise that every stage in the child's development has both positive and negative.

Literature specifies other causes for upbringing problems originating from the following domains:

1. Misbehaviour as a consequence of a variety of symptoms – the 'difficult' conduct is a result of symptoms of disorders or diseases (e.g. delirium caused by high temperature), or emotional problems. Often the child is unable to control appearance or disappearance of the specific behaviour.
2. Unfamiliarity with the rules – the misbehaviour is accepted by its environment irrespectively of the child's compliance to the rules or expectations.
3. Misbehaviour – connected with conscious activity of a child who is aware of rules and norms but violates them to achieve something or to test parental determination.
4. Impulsive aggression occurring most often when a child cannot cope with the situation he/she faces or in a state of strong emotional tension and shows as a sudden outburst.
5. Socialised aggression where a child of low internal excitability tries to hide the fact and escape consequence. The aggression is connected with gains and many a time is combined with occurrence of major behavioural disorders.
6. Oppositional and noncompliant behaviour – negativist, hostile, rebellious, provocative and destructive behaviour transgressing norms accepted for the age and socio-cultural context.
7. Major (serious) behaviour disorders – consciously violating other people's rights and socially accepted norms (Kołakowski, Wolańczyk, Pisula, Skotnicka, Bryńska, 207, pp. 109–110).

The analysed behaviour is a result of the child's relations with parents and surroundings. Diagram 1 presents a model according to which the child's behaviour forms. It points out to the fact that parents devoid of knowledge, imagination and, primarily, consistency by their upbringing practises contributes to the occurrence of misbehaviour. Parents should react to such behaviour calmly, determining reasons for child's emotions, but at the same time also outwardly expressing their disapproval. The child should have a chance to think over the misbehaviour as only in this way he/she is given an opportunity to learn to solve problems in the future relying on communication and feeling responsibility for his/her own conduct. Thus, the child has to learn the rules and norms of functioning within the society. If parents are indulgent to undesirable behaviour or if they fail to react to it at all, the child will fail to discover and integrate the rules and norms. Similarly, if parents overreact shouting or being aggressive, the child will learn to solve the problems in the same way, namely, with aggression. Parents have to react to every occurrence of misbehaviour as only in this way they prevent the child from entrenching the behaviour. If the reaction fails to occur, it may be interpreted as a reward. The upbringing process and all activities within must be continuous, not sporadic. The parents' behaviour described above presents a model of shaping child's behaviour presented in an article on ADHD and shows the scheme of child' behaviour in a simple way.

Diagram 1. Model of child's behaviour shaping

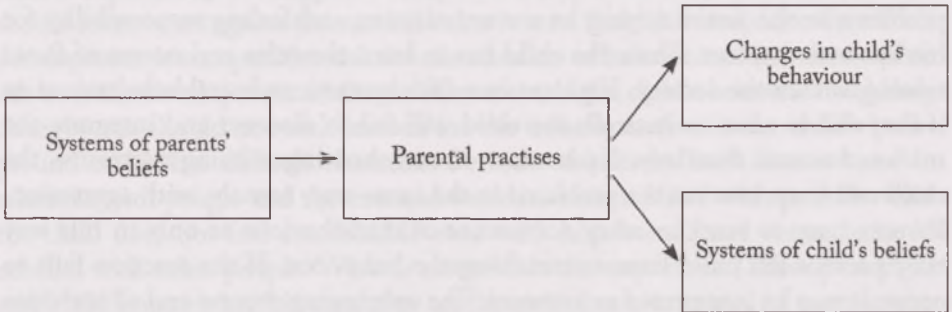


Source: Kołakowski, Wolańczyk, Pisula, Skotnicka, Bryńska, 2007, p. 111.

It follows from the process that the misbehaviour occurs and becomes entrenched as a result of parents' beliefs systems. The systems are clear-cut and pre-

cise but parents very often fail to apply them to problems appearing in everyday situations. The assumptions may also be invalid altogether and lead to improper upbringing practises as in the case of the uninvolved style. The model below presents parenting practices resulting in changes in child's conduct. The system of interactions is explained by H. R. Schaffer.

Diagram 2. Interactions between the system of parental belief, their parental practices and child's development



Source: Schaffer, 2008, p. 55.

The system suggests that parents' systems of beliefs do not directly influence children but influence adults' behaviour towards children. As follows, the implementation occurs in upbringing practices employed by parents.

It is those practises that impinge children's behaviour and, therefore, the beliefs system that they are going to develop later on (Schaffer, 2008, p. 54).

In the Reuven Feuerstein's concept of mediated learning used by A. Brzezińska the caregiver is a mediator between a child and the environment. An effective mediator is a person whose behaviour is a well-organized entity, is consistent and reasonable. The caregiver acts in a flexible way adjusting and diversifying methods of drawing attention to himself depending on the child's behaviour. The adult tries to 'explain' the reality to the child, the reality they both participate in, i.e. comments on objects, activities and events occurring around them. In a competent manner the parent expresses his/her emotions evoked by the child's behaviour and tries to establish relations with the child, if is possible, also maintaining eye contact. Moreover, the adult concentrates on actions, statements and child's questions. The child should be encouraged, directed towards specific ways of behaviour and should not just act on orders. The caregiver structures expectations of the child towards the situation to follow by means of various statements. The child should receive some reward while acting. It is essential to make all accidental behaviour of the child a reasonable cause and effect sequence (Brzezińska, Janiszewska-Rain, 2005).

Parents, taking advantage of the upbringing guidelines above, may check the child's behaviour against the model described in *Dziecko ryzyka a wychowanie. Elementarz dla rodziców [A risk child and upbringing. The ABC for parents]* by E. M. Minczakiwicz (2005) which provides adults with procedures for their work with their children as well as observation forms. It is an interesting handbook corresponding to the presented child rearing problems.

A child establishing accurate relations with adults is capable of self-regulation i.e. the internalised skill of adjusting his/her emotions, comments and behaviour in response to internal and external stimuli. J. Wojciechowska points out that early childhood achievements are the basis for competencies needed later on, at school, and describes the self-regulation skill as concerning: postponement of gratification, inhibition of impulsive reaction and an organised task-based action. The aspects mentioned above form the basis of social, emotional and cognitive development of the child through subsequent stages. Thus, what seems important is the influence method, adult's control over the child's behaviour, introduction to social life standards into the child's experience, diversification of behaviour and emotions (frequently negative ones). She continues to state that dangers following from the developmental stage for the process of self-control mechanism formation are associated with three basic risk areas according to Kopp (1982, 1989). The risk areas encompass child's temperamental features, the quality of parenting practises and are associated with cognitive and linguistic competencies as the foundation for communication of the child with adults and for control over his/her own experience. The potential of the child and ways of developing the child's competence by adults by everyday stimulation are of major importance. At the same time one should not forget that self-regulation depends on the development of such functions as the problem-solving skill, memory and speech. Cognitive and language development deficiencies very often accompany children's aggressive behaviour and hyperactivity (Wojciechowska, 2005).

In conclusion, the formed beliefs systems are the basis for applied parenting practice contributing not only to initiating specific ways of conduct but to a child forming his/her own belief system. Thus, a simple scheme arises.

Discussing the contemporary approach to difficulties O. Speck points out that the problems arise as a result of 'de-anchoring processes, i.e. disintegration of bonds in the increasingly differentiating society' (Speck, 2007, p. 62). The process is extremely hazardous as in the situation of 'differentiating functional systems disorders of ecological resonance may arise i.e. a limited ability of an individual to react accurately to external interference' (*ibidem*, p. 63). In the contemporary society, the 'society of risk', an individual yields to countless influences and dangers. A survey of the contemporary society of today has allowed researchers to form theories basing on a variety of assumptions associated with the occurrence of upbringing problems.

One of the theories concerns resigning from moral evaluation in an attempt to overcome the binding since the first half of the 20th c, moralist and repressive upbringing model and, consequently, to lift the moralist criterion in evaluation of 'child's mistakes'. At present the tendency of resigning from the moral dimension bases on the pluralism of norms (Speck, 2007).

The modern society is characterised by moral relativity understood in three ways: as cognitive relativism, ethic relativism and contextual relativism. However, Hanna Świda-Ziemba recognizes permissivism (indulgence), i.e. tolerance towards cases of breaking moral norms, as the most characteristic attitude of the Polish society.

Permissivism is accompanied with abstract recognition of moral norms and social consent to their content being ascribed academic status'. Permissive people are characterised by the so called 'split' between the acceptance of norms and reaction to the acts of their breaking. The acceptance is abstract, and follows from other personality layer than the judgement of oneself and other people. The recognised norms do not constitute a prism through which one judges the reality (Świda-Ziemba, 2002, p. 438).

The contemporary world with its characteristics as deinstitutionalism, detraditionalism, pluralism and individualism favours such values as: autonomy of making decisions, self-realization and faith in progress. Long-term goals are abandoned in favour of specific aims (Mariański, 2006). All those reflections allow a conclusion that the contemporary crisis is being deepened.

Medicalization is another theory of difficulty origin understood as an attempt to penetrate the core of the child's misbehaviour by including the behaviour into the pathology or disease domain. Apparently, recognition of misbehaviour as a disease entails relieving the moral burden from individuals and results in the described above relativity of ethic values. In conclusion one should stress that reducing all solutions of upbringing problems to prescribing medicine is irresponsible since one may not reduce all problems to disease only as it will limit the scope of problem examination. Psychologization aims at explaining child's misbehaviour by means of psychological phenomena while sociologization finds causes for misconduct in specific socialisation processes within the framework of the society. The pathogenic influence of the environment on the child calls for transformation of social relations, improvement of living conditions in lowest community layers, etc. Pedagogization overstresses the rules of responsiveness and support. According to that theory a child poses a difficult object for upbringing and therapy for parents (Speck, 2007). The above theories tend to analyse only one aspect of the problem of misbehaviour what, according to O. Speck, does not allow an overall view of the question.

Conclusion

A child cannot be separated from the family and the environment. The family creates social development conditions and shapes the child's life. The child's progress and the emotional state of the child are interrelated with the conditions and atmosphere within the family. Parents in their relations with children test their parental beliefs. If parents make mistakes following from inadequate reaction to a situation or failing to identify causes for child's misbehaviour, change rules and demands or are inconsistent, they cause occurrence or entrenchment of the child's misconduct. A small child shows little sign of misbehaviour that could be entrenched by parental practises. Children misbehave because parents have problems. Not only were parents brought up in different conditions but also they are unprepared for their role of caregivers. The child's behaviour reflects rules and norms set by parents.

Contemporary parents enumerate the following problems with their children: child's negativism, hyperactivity, aggression, timidity, jealousy, nutrition problems, dependence (or rather lack of independence), early age masturbation, lying, egoism (Obuchowska, 2004). Child's behaviour may be characterised as imitative or defensive, may be a cry for help or an attempt to draw attention.

First discipline problems should signal to parents the need for correction of their own attitude. Unfortunately, even sensible parents surrender to whims or act defiantly thus intensifying the child's misbehaviour. In this way a situation of the vicious circle occurs:

as a consequence of child's misbehaviour resulting from deficient parental approach, mistakes made by parents in the upbringing process multiply, leading to even more serious problems. The situation is the more dangerous that a small child easily forms habits, incorrect stereotypes and practices harmful for his/her further development (Spionek, 1963, pp. 344–345).

It is their parents who have to decide on priorities, have to choose between professional careers, high salary and time spent with their children, between a temporarily incomplete family as a result of immigration for economic purposes (a child in such a family is referred to as a euro-orphan) and life in poorer conditions but together, between separation or divorce and living together for proper development of the child. Disabled parents of disabled children face even more dilemmas. One should not forget pathologic families and those living in poverty.

Knowledge of what one may face does not mean that one is exempt from the duty of opposing misbehaviour. But the knowledge may help parents fight it more effectively than if they faced the problem empty-handed. Thus, there are

situations when misbehaviour ought to be replaced with more proper conduct, in some cases it is enough to counteract, in other one has to face the challenge and struggle.

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