

THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT THEORY FOR THE EDUCATION AND MENTAL HEALTH OF THE CHILD

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Abstract: *According to the ecosystemic model of Bronfenbrenner (1979), the development of an individual is part of an environmental system that is complex and in interaction, built around a microsystem and being dynamic in relation to a macrosystem. This article presents and questions the ecological theory of human development and wants to illustrate the applications of the Bronfenbrenner model in the field of today's education and in the field of mental health of the child and adult. The social ecology theory takes as a postulate that the development and behavior of the individual are the result of continuous influences between the individual and his environment. If we are not careful, a child who has potential, can develop behavioral problems or problems of adaptation in an environment with high-level risk factors. After having quickly presented the ecological approaches in sociology and psychology from 1920 to 1950, two cases of schools and pedagogical projects based on self-esteem and creativity will be illustrated: one in Luxembourg, Europe, and the other in the USA, in Washington. They show how the mental health of young children may affect the learning process. In the field of public mental health, the declination of the Bronfenbrenner theory is relevant: the Ottawa Charter, WHO, 1986, has been supporting, for 30 years, the creation of favorable environments that determine good physical and mental health of the population.*

Keywords: *ecosystemic model, human development, mental health of the child, education, self-esteem, creativity, Ottawa Charter.*

According to the ecosystemic model of Bronfenbrenner (1979), the development of an individual is part of an environmental system that is complex and in interaction. Each system is dynamic and constructs the individual's development process. This brief article has two objectives:

1. It registers the "theory of the ecology of human development" in approach to other models,
2. To present that theory and to illustrate the applications of the Bronfenbrenner model in the field of today's education and in the field of child's mental health.

Theoretical inscription

Bronfenbrenner's theory is based on diverse approaches, especially biological approaches of living that postulate as an explanatory model of social relationships between living organisms and their natural environment. The psychiatric/ psychological approaches are focused on the individual determinants (personal history, personality, mental health, parenting knowledge, stages of development.). (Freud, Piaget, Erikson ...). Sociological approaches take into consideration the social determinants (education level, poverty rates, unemployment rates, social isolation), (Léonard, Straus). The ecological approaches, centered on the notion of complexity and on interrelationships of individual and environmental factors, have also enriched the thought of Bronfenbrenner: they take into consideration political, social and economical contexts.

1. Two major influence schools

- **The human ecology in sociology(USA)1920**

This is certainly also all the reflection on human ecology in sociology (USA), of the School of Chicago, who founded the reflection with the work on the effects of urbanization (Simmel, 1905). In this current, the focus is on the social data, economic and demographic areas of human activity (Parket Burgess, 1926). More recently, the spatial distribution of urban population and the social phenomenon (Mayer, 1998) are studied.

- **The social ecology in psychology(USA)1950**

This current of development of community psychology founds the work of Barker et al. (1955, 1963) on the behaviors in connection with the life contexts. It is through the development of these approaches that the human development model of Bronfenbrenner (1979) was able to find an extension and a legitimate contribution.

2. The theory of human development of Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979)

This approach is based on reflections of theories, that were briefly discussed above, it brings a more macroscopic vision that includes all the interaction

systems that determine individual behaviors. Bronfenbrenner presents it like a form of cumulative theory of «interlocked systems ».For him, five systems interact on personal life existence conditions. These systems or contexts produce individual and collective attitudes and behaviors:

1. The microsystem: is the immediate environment of the individual;
2. The mesosystem represents the places in which the individual lives: teachers, neighborhood, religion, parental education;
3. The exosystem constitutes the external factors affecting more or less directly the individual. It is a broad set of structures that are social and / or organizational and that govern other systems: the economic level of the parents, the pedagogical project of the school ...;
4. The macrosystem comprises the mesosystem and the exosystem : it regroups the social, cultural and politic values of the society. They exert an influence over the behaviors and attitudes, both collective and individual;
5. The chronosystem concerns the dynamic and temporal dimension of every human environment in relation to social and cultural variables. Therefore, the chronosystem includes the normative transition links (passage of a period of existence to another, partly influenced by the other systems).

This model constitutes a conceptual analyzing tool with a schematic presentation in Figure 1.

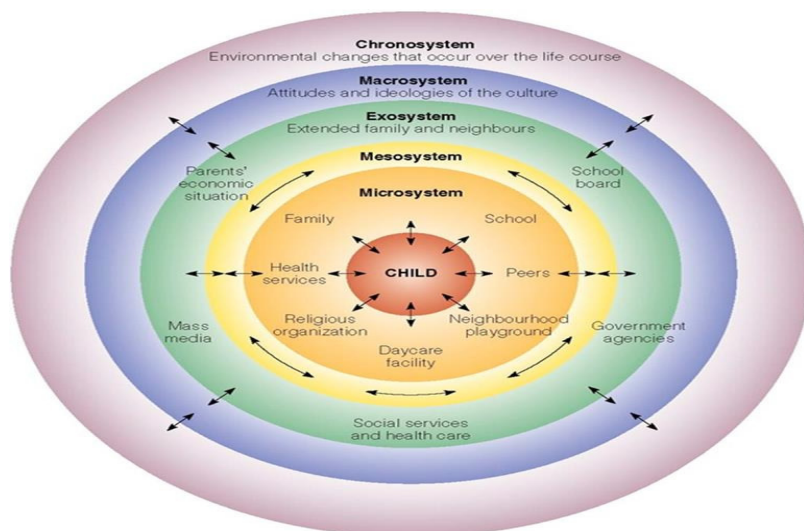


Figure 1 . Schematic presentation of the theory of Urie Bronfenbrenner, 1979

The postulate of Bronfenbrenner's social ecology theory focuses on a vision of development and behavior of the individual who is the product of continuous influences between himself and his life context. This theory should make vigilant parents, educators, professionals, and financial and political deciders. In effect, a child who has potential, can develop behavioral problems or problems in adapting in an environment with high-level risk factors.

This model favors a better understanding of the behaviors and attitudes of individuals, MICRO/MESO systems.

It makes teachers and parents reflect on building favorable environments for well-being and for the harmonious development of an individual, -MESO/EXO systems. The model allows to deconstruct the process which could favor or inhibit the well-being and the physical and mental health. It favors identify the levers of collective action -MACRO system, (political context, cultural context ...)

3. Two cases of schools and pedagogical projects based on a positive and healthy development of the child

First case. Schools of Sanem, Luxembourg

The project "Ensemble on est plus fort"- "Zesumme si mir staark!" ("We are stronger together") aims to « Combat prejudice and inequality by encouraging the creativity and self-esteem of students ».

For 10 years, the teachers from the Sanem Schools in Luxembourg participate in prevention and sensitizing workshops for children of 7 and 8 years. 500 students from 40 classes have benefited from these approaches.

The project includes four thematics: violence, music, body work through dance, and the "fair play". The goal is to give children self-esteem at school, by giving them strength and by learning them to do other things than fighting each other, for example, in case of conflict.

According to Bronfenbrenner's theory, the project is built on the dimensions of the EXO system: teachers and educators. It allows students of the MICRO system, to step back, to integrate the other systems, to be in interaction with others. The project of a school has become a national project, it has questioned the MACRO system and the policy makers who are involved.

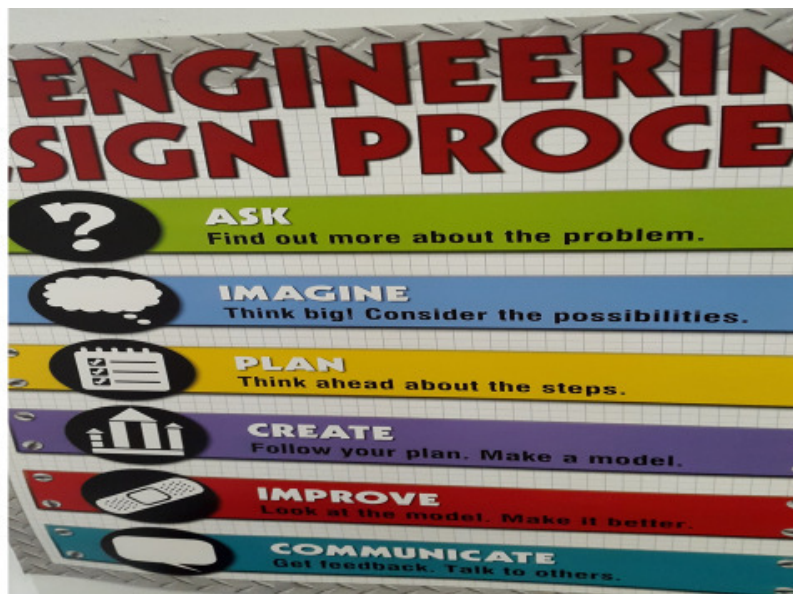
Second case USA. Washington. Blue birds of Alexandria. Virginie

The case involves children of 5 years. It shows how the mental health of young children and their positive development can affect their ability to learn how to read, how to work in teams, and the structuring of their spirit. The actions concern the MESO and the EXO Systems, (the teachers, the pedagogical project of the establishment) to act on the MICRO System, the young students. Figures 2 and 3.

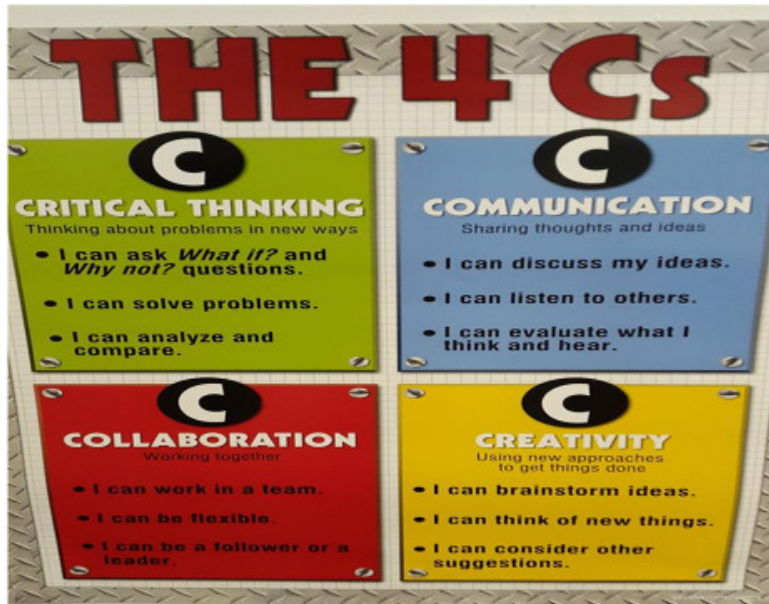
The project is based on the MICRO system, students learn how to work in teams, in a constructive way. The structuration of the thought is the same for students and teachers. They build common values. The pedagogical project's actions on the EXO system, pedagogical directors, the MESO system, teachers, to act on the MICRO System (Students).

These 2 cases, hinged to the explanatory model of Urie Bronfenbrenner, allow us to draw a relevant lesson in the education field. The theory of systems emboîtés verified. In effect, in the two cases there are favored the:

- Understanding the behaviors and attitudes of individuals, MICRO system;
- Contribution to the well-being and physical and mental health, EXO-MACRO systems;
- Reflection of teachers and parents to build favorable environments for well being and harmonious development, EXO-MESO system.



Figures 2. Structuration of the positive spirit and team behavior



Figures 3. Structuration of the positive spirit and team behavior

4. A declination of the theory of human development in the field of physic and mental health

For 30 years, the model is used to define the process of constructing favorable environments, not only for education and human development, but also to promote good physical and mental health, (Ottawa Charter, WHO - 1986). The figure 4 of the Public Health Agency of Canada for a positive mental health illustrates how the theoryzation of Bronfenbrenner is declined. It is based on the concept of "health promotion" which predicts the creation of favorable environments (Macro system) to reinforce the communal action (Exo system) and to acquire individual skills (Micro-Meso systems). The model allows us to list the risk factors and forms the basis of the elaboration work of public policy of mental health and education.



Figure 4. The Ottawa Charter (OMS-1986) to build the conditions for good physical and mental health on the model of theory of systems of Bronfenbrenner

Discussion

The contribution of Bronfenbrenner's theory is important and relevant. It constitutes a support for understanding the behaviors of individuals in the complex society in which we live. It allows us to deconstruct the development process of harmful interactions to conduct a positive change for the individuals and groups in the contextual system. In effect, it serves as a guide and a methodological tool for intervention and action on all registers of life and on all moments of life: it refers to the responsibility of each actor, whatever their level of intervention is.

- At the level of Micro system, it questions the individuals themselves, from childhood to adulthood.
- At the level of Mezo system, it interpellates the responsibility of families.
- At the level of the Exo system, it refers to the responsibilities of the professionals, teachers and educators, it encourages them to examine their practices in order to develop them.
- At the level of Macro system, there are the financiers and politicians who are concerned to develop favorable environments in all living places (schools, companies, cities, neighborhoods) by adequate policies for positive human development.
- At the level of the Chrono system, it recalls the dynamics of life, social dynamics where nothing is fixed, where everything is constantly in motion.

The theory of Bronfenbrenner isn't obsolete and is still relevant: it influences the open approaches to education and the promotion of positive mental health, taking into account the different dimensions of the individual life's records and registering them in temporality.

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