

The Socialization Process and Its Impact on Children and Learning

By Dr. Ralph G. Perrino

Family, school, peers, mass media, public opinion, work, volunteer groups, and religion/spirituality each play a major role in the socialization and, ultimately, the education process. Each of us proceeds through life in a manner we often believe is under our immediate control and influence. It seems logical that the actions we take and the impact of those actions is based upon a series of logical, rational, decisions selected and filtered by choice, not chance. Although this seems a reasonable manner in which to assess one's lot in life, it is far from reality, particularly in the area of education. The sociological perspective tells us otherwise.

One of the most dramatic impacts on a child's education is that of the socialization process. Forces removed from our immediate decision-making process guide us all. Through the process of socialization, the hidden hand of social forces often beyond our control guides our lives. The major agents of socialization – family, school, peers, mass media, public opinion, work, volunteer groups and religion/spirituality – exert external pressure on each of us. As Charles Horton Cooley has pointed out, the evolution of “self” (the “Looking-Glass Self”) emerges from this mix of social forces. George Herbert Mead furthered this idea by developing the “I”/“Me” dichotomy – the acting or unsocialized self and the socialized self, the self based on standards we learn from interaction with others. This is particularly true during the formative years from kindergarten through high school, but can also take place well into the elderly years. The impact of these forces can vary dramatically from person to person, depending on their life circumstances and social class status. The consequences can be life altering and severe.

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