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Study on the structuring of self-image in early childhood

Stan Maria Magdalena^{a*}

^aUniversity of Pitești, Faculty of Educational Sciences, Targu din Vale street, no.1, Pitești 110040, România

Abstract

Self-concept - the capacity of a person to realize his/her physical and psychic readiness and to act in the direction of discovering new inherent particulars represents a rather late acquisition in human development, nevertheless having multiple implications on the level of personality structure. Self-image, a product of self-concept represents the essential reference point of behavioural and emotional self-regulation. The present study proposes to demonstrate the dynamics of the structuring of self-image (the real self) in early childhood, as well as the identification of the sources which facilitate the process of self-knowledge.

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1. Introduction

The self-concept appealed to the interest of men of science and usual people along time. The famous question "Who Am I?" and its associated answers accompany us during our entire lifetime: how the others perceive me, what is my real own nature, what is my individual belief about myself. Knowing our self, knowing our own ego and the manner of its organization is very important for our social life, but at the same time an indispensable quality for the development and formation process of any individual, subject to social negative or beneficial influences (Allport, 1991). The self-concept, being at the core of personality refers to the set of perceptions that the person has about himself, the set of characteristics, attributes, qualities and deficiencies, capacities and limits, values and relationships that the subject knows to be descriptive of him. The considerable interest related to the definition of the self-construct, to the understanding of its modality of formation, to its inner organization but also to its evolution

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +0-000-000-0000 ; fax: +0-000-000-0000 .

E-mail address: [magdalena.stan@upit.ro](mailto:magdalenastan@upit.ro), smariamagdalen@yahoo.com

through ontogeny is explained by the fact that it represents a powerful predictor of the mental health condition during adulthood but also of school achievements and academic success (Byrne, 1996; Wigfield et al., 1997).

The level of self-image affects performance powerfully, in all activities, the mechanisms of causal circularity functioning here significantly: those having a high self-esteem are more confident, can rally more and are more successful which strengthen their self-image. Those with a low self-esteem, increase the risk of failures, determining a more gloomy vision of themselves. Thus, the vicious circle becomes very hard to deter. In time, it has been observed that those having a high self-esteem interpret successes in a different manner, appealing to a large series of attributions and behave much more variously as compared to those having a low self-esteem who have restrained and predictable self-attributions (Rogers et al., 1978). One of the most important fields of research in social cognition is that interested in the development of the child's understanding capacity with reference to himself. Each young individual asks sometimes questions such as: Who Am I? Through what am I distinct from the others? What are my strengths and weaknesses? What are my possibilities? How could I develop my qualities and overcome my failures? The answers to such kind of questions refer to the familiarity with the defining personality traits, the aptitudes, the motivational and value system, the rise in self-esteem, in self-assertion, the development of creativity, of the self-regulation capacity, of interpersonal relations and communication abilities, of the possibilities of managing one's emotions, etc.

Through the present study, we propose to identify the modalities of structuring the self (self-image) at children in early childhood and to identify modalities of association with their school performances.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Conceptual delimitations: self-concept/self-image

Self-concept represents the collection of perceptions and knowledge people have about their qualities and characteristics (Iluș, 2000). Self-concept is a multidimensional concept and represents a behavioural pattern dependant on the context in which it is learnt; this one reflects the evaluation of the past behaviours and experiences, influence current behaviours and becomes a predictor of future behaviours (Schierer & Kraut, 1979; Braken, 1992).

Self-image is defined by the humanist psychology as being part of our personality structure, having structural and functional autonomy and independence. It constitutes an integrator and organizer of each individual's inner life, playing a main role in the choice of values and goals and representing the central core of our personality. (Zlate, 1999) Self-image includes all representations about one's own ideas, beliefs, abilities, attitudes and behaviours of the individual related to his own personality (Zlate, 1999).

The real – global self (the experiences we live within the socio-cultural environment) includes: *physical self* (the development and acceptance of one's own corporality, the manner in which the person perceives himself/herself or believes he/she is perceived by others); *emotional self*: (integrates one's attitude towards own experiences, towards others and future); *academic self* (the manner in which the self intercepts and integrates the informational matter about him and the world, the manner in which he operates with it; the more positive self-esteem the higher performances); *competence self* (refer to the clear awareness of one's individuality in relation to one's communication, assertive, learning, career planning abilities); *familial self* (the emotional comfort the child experiences related to his parents); *social self* (includes the dimension of personality we expose to others, our reactions in the interactions with others).

The structure of self-image is extremely complex. One should distinguish among proper self-image, the representation of how the individual sees himself; ideal self-image, the representation of what the individual would like to be, self-image attributed to the external world, the representation of what the individual believes that others think about him and possibly, in the long run, the image of the others about him, the representation of what others really think about him. The structure of self-image includes corporal-dynamic representations, representations of own abilities and possibilities of action, representations about the current role and status as well as about the projected one.

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