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PROBLEMS OF SELF-CONCEPT OF CHILDREN IN THE
CONTEXT OF COMPULSORY SCHOOL EDUCATION



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Abstract

Monitoring the development of self-concept of primary school pupils in relation to school success (and school performance motivation). Based on the research problem was determined the research question: What is the meaning of a child's self-concept in relation to school success in context of compulsory school education? Self-concept is created throughout life, especially in social interactions. Its important components are the social comparison and the feedback that the child gains especially in the family background. Issue of self-concept is proving to be currently a highly distinguished paradigm in relation to school, then academic and life success. Study of literature, research of domestic and foreign literary sources, including questionnaire methods and research surveys. An important component of self-concept is social comparisons (with significant others), there is no comparison with everyone, but only with whom one sees personalization of their goals. It is a mirror "I". At younger school age, it is essential that child is surrounded by the right models that reflect their self in a constructive way. The results of the theoretical background point to the importance of strengthening especially the parental and pedagogical competences in the sense of strengthening the positive self-concept of the pupil. Self-concept is a cube with many walls. It is important for parents and educators to develop self-concept to enhance school, academic, and work success.

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Keywords: Younger school age, self-concept, school success.

1. Introduction

Self-concept is created throughout life, especially in social interactions. Its important components are social comparisons and feedback that the child receives especially in the family background. The issue of self-concept is proving (in addition to other important psychological determinants) to be currently a highly recognized paradigm in relation to school, and later academic and life success. Every child who enters compulsory school attendance is a specific personality. Children come from a certain social environment, with certain preconditions and dispositions. Since childhood, individuals are affected by various influences and a healthy self-concept is the result of various processes, often due to the social environment (parents, teachers, peers, etc.). This influence can help the child to form a healthy self-concept, which is important for the further growth and development of social, work, emotional, intellectual and moral abilities. The lack of this support is associated with the formation of an unhealthy self-concept, which often has undesirable lifelong consequences (Schunk, 1989; Schwarzer, 1992). Besides family, the school is an environment in which children spend a lot of time. Therefore, it can be assumed that this environment has a significant impact on children. The school should develop not only the child's knowledge, but also abilities and skills. The teacher should know the child's mental development, he/she should know how the individual mental functions develop, and in which developmental stages there are significant changes affecting the learning and behavior of the child at school (Satirová, 1994).

2. Problem Statement

The child's entry into school is a very significant turning point in every child's life. School is the first important institution a child enters. At school the child gets into a new angle of the process of socialization, he/she develops such qualities and competencies that allow him to move satisfactorily in this environment (Vágnerová, 2012). By entering the school, the child acquires the role of schoolboy/schoolgirl and classmate, which gives him/her a certain status and membership in one social group, class and school. Equally important is the interaction between school and family, for which school means the institution to which the child is subject and setting norms. Of course, the school also evaluates the child, while the evaluation of school activities is given to the child not only by teachers, but also by parents, classmates and himself (Sedláčková, 2009). The same author also points out that a child recognizes his/hers value if he/she is evaluated by his surroundings not only with understanding for his needs, but also with sobriety and kindness. The need to achieve a good performance and be successful is important for almost every child who enters school. However, children who are not able to achieve the required results also enter the school, because they do not have the prerequisites to do so (either the necessary skills or personality attributes, good health or the necessary social background). An unsuccessful child acquires the role of a bad pupil. However, the personal significance of failure can be different for a schoolchild (Vágnerová, 2005). The younger schoolchild considers a positive feedback as proof of emotional acceptance, for him the mark is an expression of the relationship that the teacher has with him/her. At this age children accept the opinions and attitudes of important other people uncritically as unquestionable and given (Vágnerová, 2002). These views affect not only how he views his/hers past or present performances, but also what he/she expects from himself/herself in the future, what would be desirable. Awareness of self-worth, a sense of inner satisfaction and, as a result, affection and physical and mental health, can flourish only in an atmosphere

where individual differences are respected, rules are flexible and communication is open, where love is expressed, responsibility is accepted and sincerity reigns (Satirová, 1994).

On the contrary, in an environment where children are constantly criticized and punished for mistakes, children feel inferior and guilty and as a result grow up based on internalization of labels that people "hang" on them. By constantly repeating to children that they are "bad", they do not become "good" children. Sometimes the labels given to children by teachers reinforce those they have previously received at home. Children who are called "good" at home usually hear the same thing at school. However, both the above-mentioned reinforcement and the conflict are potentially dangerous. Children who are victims of unsatisfactory self-images at home suffer even more when these self-images are confirmed at school. On the other hand, children who are given one picture of themselves at home and a completely different picture at school will not be sure what they really are. Both groups of children are denied the opportunities necessary to develop a positive and coherent self-concept (Fontana, 2014).

Self-concept refers to an individual's ability to influence his or her life. The quality of self-concept development can contribute to the creation of optimistic life, school, and therefore work attitudes, and contribute to the interpretation of difficult tasks as challenges (Schunk, 1989; Schwarzer, 1992). If individuals believe that they are able to control the course of events, they are better able to manage their own emotional state and are able to more effectively manage stressful situations (Luszczynska et al., 2005). However, the quality of self-concept development may also contribute to the emergence of a greater degree of mental vulnerability and tendency to depression and stress. These individuals then suffer from self-blame for their own mistakes and errors, lose faith in themselves, and easily give up life tasks. They live with a sense of hopelessness, become victims, focus on doubts and gradually lose social support. The feeling of an individual being able to control the course of events is associated with the idea of better coping with life's difficulties. An adult is a former child. Therefore, it is important and life-determining to monitor the development of self-concept in primary school pupils, because here are the foundations of future school, later academic, and therefore life success born. The basis of the concept of one's own identity is a certain "theory about oneself", which the child creates himself/herself by internally processing and explaining the information he/she receives from the environment. In the case of a child, especially by the family, from a certain age also by the school, i.e. especially by the personality of the teacher and group of peers (Satirová, 1994).

3. Research Questions

In a preview that provides the wide spectrum of the research problem, we have asked ourselves the following questions that interest us in an academic discussion on a theoretical basis:

3.1. What is the significance of a child's self-concept in relation to school success in the context of compulsory school attendance?

3.2. What does it mean for a schoolchild to be successful in school?

4. Purpose of the Study

The term self-concept refers to the attitudes and expectations that the human individual has towards himself. Social comparison and feedback play an essential role in the process of self-concept creation and development (Kohoutek, 1998). A more detailed definition is given, for example, by Shavelson et al. (1976), who understand self-concept as self-perception formed by experience in interaction with its environment, whereas “these perceptions are influenced primarily by the evaluation of the individual's behavior by significant others and their feedback” (Konečná, 2014, p. 49). Shavelson et al. (1976) add that it is a hypothetical construct potentially used to explain and predict how a human individual acts. These attitudes and expectations are formed in social interactions throughout life, from the prenatal period (Kohoutek, 1998). Authors dealing with this issue relate self-concept to attitudes, feelings, knowledge of own skills, experience or appearance or social adjustment, which suggests that self-concept includes a cognitive, perceptual, affective and evaluative component, including self-evaluation. This relationship with oneself is realized through the emotional experiences of the Self within the dimension of positive versus negative evaluation. Specifically, these are the dimensions of self-respect, self-esteem, self-confidence, self-evaluation, etc. (Konečná, 2014). In this context, it should be mentioned that individual psychological schools have their own opinion on the functioning of the human psyche and its organization, each school focuses on individual aspects from a certain angle and focuses on some phenomena, which also appears in the approach to self-concept. An individual is not born with a sense of self-concept, but creates it during his/hers life by interacting with the external environment. The process of self-concept development is long and complex and takes place differently for each human individual. The basis of the concept of one's own identity is a certain "theory about oneself", which the child creates himself/herself by internally processing and explaining the information he/she receives from the environment. The opinions and attitudes of other people important to him/her - loved ones or authorities (parents, peers, teachers) are essential for the formation of self-concept. For the first six years, a child's self-esteem is shaped especially by the family. When a child starts going to school, other influences come into consideration; however, the family remains important (Satirová, 1994). Sedláčková (2009) states that the child's self-concept is created by combining three aspects, namely the physical aspects, sensory ideas and personal memories. Important role play also sensory, social and emotional experiences arising from personal memories of feelings of satisfaction, well-being, success and happiness. It should be emphasized that a healthy self-concept in childhood establishes a person's mental health in adulthood. Although the development of self-concept is different for each individual, the phases are the same: in neonatal and infant age, there is an essential symbiotic relationship with the mother establishing a future sense of security. At this time we are talking about the emerging Self, with the basic self-awareness being placed until the age of three to six months. There are many developmental changes in infancy, especially in independence and in gaining confidence in the world and in oneself. The key skill is separation from the mother and awareness of one's own personality and possibilities (Orel et al., 2016). In preschool age, egocentrism, magicism and emphasis on subjectively significant features predominate. Self-concept is connected with the body scheme and the child is not yet compared to others. Self-concept depends on other people's feedbacks and the opinions of the authorities are uncritically accepted. In early school age, there is a great life-change (the start of compulsory schooling), which is also written in self-concept. At this age, a child's self-assessment is significantly dependent on the

assessment of other people, especially on the assessment of the group of peers (Vágnerová, 2012). In middle school age, self-concept is more stable, does not change over time, individuals gradually begin to be critically evaluated and gains lost uniqueness. The child is thus able to create an overall appreciation for his/her Self as a personality and to formulate representations for the awareness of his/hers own value (Konečná, 2006). In adolescence, it is a period of developing and searching for the identity of each human individual, when a young person searches for a new sense of self-concept and its continuity. Self-concept becomes more differentiated and a clear and stable sense of self-identity is achieved (Orel et al., 2016). Průcha et al. (2003, p. 242) state that the concept of school success is not yet sufficiently clarified and may mean:

1. "Managing the demands placed by the school on individuals that are positive evaluation of student achievement,
2. the product of cooperation between teachers and pupils leading to the achievement of certain educational goals (it does not only matter on the pupil, his/her abilities, diligence, etc., but also on the teacher, and especially their joint synergies),
3. modern pedagogy also places great influence on the factors of the family environment and socio-cultural environment".

Helus (1979) defines pupil's school success as "consistency created during educational cooperation and resolving discrepancies between requirements on the one hand and performance, activities and development of the pupil's personality on the other" (p. 39) and further divides school success into subjective, expressive self-evaluation, and objective, placing the child in a position of success in front of others.

5. Research Methods

In the presented paper, we used literature studies to compare and determine the range of self-concept research in relation to the success of the child in some contexts during compulsory school attendance (in the first stage of primary school). It turns out that the issue of pupils' self-concept is generally a very popular topic, which is in the focus of many researchers in various forms and with different aims. These are both domestic and foreign sources, which provide a number of interesting results. Among the researches in the Czech Republic, we can mention Syrovátková (2015) research survey, which dealt with the relationship between motor intelligence and school success from the subjective and objective point of view of a primary school pupil. The author found that there is a relationship between movement intelligence and subjective perception of school success. Pupils who passed the movement intelligence test were mostly assessed in terms of self-concept on average to above average, while they were pupils who were more often evaluated by the teacher with marks with excellent value. The research thus basically confirmed the relationship of direct ratios between the subjective and objective evaluation of school success, where a higher rate of overestimation corresponds to a better average. This is certainly an interesting and good information, which, however, cannot always be generalized, but this is in agreement with Fontana (2014), who confirms the subjective-positive self-concept under the conditions of objectively-positive self-concept (see above). No less interesting results are brought by Šrůmová (2012), who used the Self-Concept of School Success

Questionnaire (SPAS) (Matějček & Vágnerová, 2006) to examine the self-concept of children of younger school age with a diagnosis of specific learning disabilities. Surprisingly, the results of the SPAS questionnaire show that children with specific learning disabilities are usually adequately assessed for their abilities and performance. These are pleasantly surprising results, especially since this group of children usually has no insight and their self-concept tends to be negative. Kelymanová (2014) dealt with pupils' self-concept, and was interested in how success and failure at school (in the sense of evaluation by marks by the teacher) will affect pupils' self-concept. The research was realized on third- and fifth-year primary school pupils. Research showed that self-assessment shows a degree of self-criticism when pupils know that they are more or less successful in certain areas. Most pupils in both grades considered themselves successful in learning or stated that they could improve in something. The success or failure of third- and fifth-year pupils was measured primarily by the grades they achieved. Fifth graders had success connected more with grades they achieved: research showed that when they had good grades, they were successful, when they had bad grades, they were unsuccessful. This result may be related to the fact that pupils in the fifth grade of primary schools in the Czech Republic may take entrance exams for multi-year grammar schools. For these pupils, good grades are essential. For third-year pupils is success associated with praise from the teacher, because for them the personality of the teacher is still an important authority. These are findings in accordance with the above findings of Vágnerová (2002), who came to similar findings.

Among the foreign researches we can mention, for example, the research of the Spanish authors Peralta and Sánchez (2003) from the University of Almería. The authors examined the relationship between the self-concept and their school success of primary school pupils in the province of Almería. Peralta and Sánchez found a close relationship between self-concept and the degree of academic success, which according to their research also refers to the prediction of general performance, i.e. there is a direct relationship between self-concept and academic success. Mentioned authors believe that more attention needs to be paid to pupils' self-concept and self-confidence, and that teachers should be offered methodological guidance so that they can work on those issues throughout the educational process.

In a study involving 113 German children, Wolter and Hannover (2016) examined children's school self-concept in mathematics and reading during the first grade. The results showed that first graders have a very positive self-concept in relation to school. Self-concept in mathematics and reading was divided into two scales - cognitive and affective components. Girls scored significantly higher on the scale of the affective component of reading, so they enjoy reading more than boys. No significant differences were found in the other scales. In terms of performance, the girls scored significantly higher in the reading test, and no statistically significant difference was confirmed in mathematics. In their longitudinal research involving 160 Swiss children, Dapp and Roebbers (2018) focused on children's self-concept and its transformation related to entry of compulsory school attendance. They also examined how children's self-concept is related to school success. Their aim was to verify the generally accepted idea that children's self-concept is less differentiated and less realistic because children tend to overestimate their abilities. The research was done on six-year-old children in kindergarten and subsequently on the same children during the first grade. The authors found that self-concept differentiated much earlier than originally thought. Even for children in kindergartens, self-concept includes aspects related to literacy, mathematics, peers and teachers. In addition, gender stereotypes (i.e. boys with a higher mathematical self-concept and girls with

social ones) seem to form at such a young age. After entering the first year, children's self-concept increases and is positively related to school success, which suggests at least some realism in children's self-concept.

6. Findings

Positive self-concept is very important for the mental performance and overall health of the child. It is one of the most serious factors influencing the development of mental illness or mental health. If we want to be able to answer research questions, it is necessary to realize that the foundations of a positive self-concept are already being formed in preschool and especially at a younger school age. Unfortunately, already among children in the first stage of primary schools we can find children who systematically underestimate their abilities and the value they have in the eyes of other people and who show feelings of inadequacy and hopelessness that do not correspond to their real study (learning) potential. In terms of Erikson's theory, such children have failed in their developmental task of "learning of diligence", doing things well and developing skills to cope with immediate problems, and therefore show feelings of inferiority and lowered self-confidence (Fontana, 2014; Satirová, 1994). According to Fontana (2014), girls in younger school age have a lower level of self-confidence than boys. They set lower life goals and, rather than boys, underestimate their abilities, even though in the first grade of primary school they often beat boys in reading and language skills. Even though girls can work as diligently and conscientiously as boys, they are often satisfied with second place. The level of self-confidence is also influenced by the socio-economic status of the family from which the child comes. Children from wealthy families tend to have high self-esteem and vice versa. The older the child is, the more important his peer reactions are to him/her. Children underestimated by their peers very often also underestimate themselves and are not able to gain an acceptable position in the classroom. Thus, they are more often victims of bullying (Vágnerová, 2005). The teacher's reaction is also crucial, because an important component of self-concept is social comparison with significant others, there is no comparison with everyone, but only with whom the individual sees the personification of his/her aims. According to Cooley (as cited in Stephenson & Wicklund, 1984), this is a mirror "Self". At a younger school age, it is essential that the child is surrounded by the right role models (parents, teachers) that reflect his/her "Self" in a constructive way (Průcha et al., 2003). Teachers must be sensitive to the individual personalities of each child in the classroom and take into account the interaction between the personality and other variables involved. Teacher can help gain confidence in children's own abilities by giving them opportunities to succeed, by encouraging them instead of reprimanding them when they have to cope with failure, and by showing them that they believe in their abilities (Fontana, 2014). Mistakes should be seen as an essential part of the learning process and educational lagging behind as a sign that a child needs help. It is dangerous if the teacher, by his/her behavior in the pupil evokes the belief that he/she cannot improve and does everything to get his/her words. The pupil then resigns and begins to behave as the teacher expected. In this case, we talk about the Golem effect (Průcha et al., 2009). Failure at school is thus an attitude of the mind rather than an objective fact. Children who develop this attitude, sometimes perhaps with the "help" of teachers who consistently give them bad grades and criticize them in front of the class, will tend to give up and show little motivation, even when mastering the task is theoretically in their possibilities. For such children, failure becomes normal (Fontana, 2014). At the beginning of school age, a child's self-concept results from the experience of oneself, it is still quite

dependent on current experiences. Although at this age children are convinced that their negative qualities will change to positive over time and those that are good will not change. The child's personality develops and this is associated with an increase in self-criticism, a decrease in egocentrism, greater emotional stability, but on the other hand, greater regulation of thinking and thus a lowering of creativity. The change in self-concept is related to both cognitive development and achieved maturity in connection with the balance of emotional experience. During the lower level of primary education, children increasingly create their self-image by comparing themselves with others, evaluating their results and expressions, and by generalization of their experiences with their own. Children's self-concept is more integrated, complex and accurate. At this age, a global conception of oneself as a unique personality is created (Vágnerová, 2012). How a child copes with an unpleasant situation, such as failure at school is not affected only by gender, family background and relationship with peers. Other factors are also important, such as temperament, the family's attitude to the child's performance, the individual degree of need for success of the child and his parents, attribution causes of failure, etc. (Šimíčková-Čížková, 2008). Child's self-concept includes an idea of who the child feels like, who he or she is considered to be, and what the subjective image of his or her personality is. This concept hides other concepts such as self-regulation, self-knowledge as well as self-esteem (feelings and opinions that a person has about himself in terms of his own competence), self-confidence (the value we attribute) and self-esteem (ability to value oneself and behave towards with dignity, love and truthfulness). In addition to a summary of ideas about oneself, this concept also expresses a relationship to oneself (Blatný & Plháková, 2003). This concept influences the actions and direction of the child and is reflected in the future. It also determines what the child will pursue, what position he/she will probably get and how he/she will react to it retrospectively (Vágnerová, 2012). If we are to answer the research questions asked, then based on the above mentioned, it can be stated that the child's self-concept in relation to school success in the context of compulsory school attendance is of great importance. To be successful at school means for the pupil to positively build self-concept in relation to various determinants in the school environment. It turns out that building a self-concept differs with age, the lower the age of a child, the more dependent it is on authority (Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977). That is why it is important that the social environment does not spare positive feedback.

7. Conclusion

The results of researches of theoretical background and research surveys point to the importance of strengthening especially parenting and pedagogical competencies in terms of strengthening the positive self-concept of the pupils. For an acceptable self-assessment of a child, it is essential that he/she can be accepted and to be important to someone. Carl Rogers states that positive acceptance (acceptance and approval) is the most important social need that children are already born with, and without whose satisfaction children cannot develop a positive acceptance of themselves. Gordon (2012) states why a positive emotional acceptance has such a significant positive effect on a child. The author believes that when parents (and other adults with whom children have a relationship) learn to express their inner sense of acceptance in words, they will get a tool that can bring amazing results. Children can gain influence over the process in which the child learns to accept himself, to be happy and to realize his own value. The accepting adult will let the child develop according to his or her life "program". Gofmann (as cited in Burns,

1992) states that self-concept is a cube with many walls. The one, which is above, is suitable for the episode which individual is experiencing. It is important that parents and teachers help to develop self-concept, which will lead to the strengthening of school, academic and work success (Mareš, 2013). Peralta and Sánchez (2003) add that pupils' self-concept and self-confidence need to be given adequate and sufficient attention, and that teachers should be offered methodological guidance so that they can work on them throughout the educational process. The presented research is a part of a continuous academic discussion concerning the monitored issues. The study was supported by the project IGA_PdF_2020_020.

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