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PRIMARY SCHOOL EDUCATION- A PREMISE FOR A HARMONIOUS EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract: *The aim of the present study is to be a brief insight into the world of primary school children, (grades I-IV) through the stories created and invented by them. The research is based on the assumption that the development process of any child can be facilitated through creative methods and the first step to achieve this goal is to gain access to the child's world. In order to obtain the necessary data for our study, we proposed art-therapeutic group meetings, which had the purpose to activate the children's resources and inner potential, to improve the student-school relation, the parents-children relation, as well as the parents-children-teacher (primary school teacher) relation. By applying the principle of social-constructivism, according to which "reality is built through conversation", we initiated a process of building and rebuilding the children's reality, so as to turn it into an individual space of knowledge, self-knowledge and personal development.*

Keywords: *story, child, personal resources, school, self-knowledge*

1. INTRODUCTION

The present study has as its starting point the numerous transformations undergone by the primary school student throughout the school adjustment process and during his/her change from an ordinary child to a responsible and involved student.

There are numerous experimental proofs which demonstrate the crucial role of inhibition in any activity subjected to interference. The inhibition is a general label applied to a group of mechanisms which have the purpose to deactivate or partially eliminate the answer or the mental content and to reduce or eliminate the interference of the current load which contains irrelevant information (Miclea, 1999).

A deliberate implementation or removal triggers the processes of cognitive inhibition. Any deliberate mental control is inherently associated with a process that determines the diminishing of one's attention and the elimination from a person's conscience of any informational flow which might interfere and endanger the achievement of our intention. The starting point for the two complementary processes is our intention to get engaged in a mental control: one process aims to implement attention, while the other aims to inhibit any collateral informational flow (from external stimuli to thoughts) (Miclea, 1999).

The counter-intentional effect is the opposite effect initiated by an intention to control a state or a behavior;

“The situation in which, the more we strive to obtain something, the more determined we are to succeed, not only do we fail, but the higher the chances are to obtain the exact opposite effect.” [1]

According to Miclea, the implementation of an intentional state involves three different types of processes:

- a) An activation or executive mechanism, which has the purpose to activate the mental contents which are congruent with the desired mental states.
- b) An inhibitive mechanism aimed towards the deactivation of irrelevant information and of additional processing flows.
- c) A metacognitive mechanism which assesses the functioning of the other two mechanisms as well as the subject's own efficiency.

This model “predicts” that the counter-intentional effect is more powerful in those characterized by low levels of self-efficacy and by deficient inhibitory mechanisms.

The primary school period is marked by numerous changes like, the adjustment to another working rhythm, a sequence of the work and relaxation periods totally different from the one in nursery schools, a different relationship with the classmates and with the class teacher and a higher workload than in nursery schools. Thus, the children need to internalize the related rules, to have their behavior more strictly controlled and to understand in a different way the human relations.

We use to say that in most cases our thinking is oriented towards achieving a goal like: problem solving, behavioral control or the updating of some information. There are also moments (when we do not have a precise purpose) of relation, boredom when a certain mental content is scanned semantically. When there is no precise purpose, a random trait of the content (an image, a thought, a desire, an emotion) is exemplified and a rapid search of the relevant information connected to the trait is performed. Thus, one can extract from his/her memory a thought connected to this and the process is repeated until one realizes that the thought has a specific purpose; this is the moment in which the subroutine of the

purpose achievement is activated. When the intended mental control, competes with processes that need less resources, the probability to succeed is considerably higher when compared with tensed, stressed, time-pressed situations. The additional mental tasks will increase the possibility of having counter-intentional errors. Thus, in order to go through this age period (primary school) in an appropriate manner, it is more than welcomed any support which facilitates the child's understanding of all changes which he/she has to face and handle.

The available cognitive resources are always limited and insufficient. Any mental process, intentional control included, has to compete with other processes which need resources. Thus, it is advisable for the primary school student to have the best possible contact with his/her own resources. The metacognitive process refers to the cognitive representations and to the propositional attitudes which humans have about their capacity to implement an intention to control and about the efficiency of the respective control. It also includes the conscious and the unconscious feedbacks, which humans receive while or after the implementation of an intentional mental control. All the received information is included in a general scheme about the ability to succeed in general or when in a similar situation (Miclea, 1999).

A series of theories emphasize the inhibitory inefficiency of children in the context of an incomplete cognitive development, characterized by susceptibility towards inefficiency. Thus, Dempster claims that the resistance to interference represents a basic cognitive function which affects performance in various types of tasks. Among the experimental tasks which demonstrate sensitivity to interference one can include the ones that imply the switching of attention or of the type of given answer, the competition between stimuli or answers, respectively the changing of conditions necessary to administer reinforcement.

The optimal functioning at the level of the prefrontal cortex is done during early adolescence, the child's difficulty to resist interference being caused by the immature development of the prefrontal cortex. Thus, the



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resistance to interference represents a basal cognitive process, which is extremely important for the understanding of individual differences and development. The time span between six and ten years old or the end of the childhood age is in fact the period of early/primary schooling. The first four schooling years, even if they follow immediately after the nursery school years, bring major changes in a child's daily routine and in the events that govern his/her life (Bonchis, Secui, 2004). In spite of these changes, the child does not have the necessary robustness. The child is sensible, instable and gets tired quickly (Schiopu, 1997).

A reason is the main cause of a certain behavior. However, not any cause is a reason. The child's development towards the formation of his/her personality is mirrored by a series of reactions and manifestations occurring in the behavior he/she displays. The child might have the proper attitude, he/she might display diligence or he/she might express a greater or a lesser desire to learn. In other circumstances, the child might display nervousness or laziness (Oance Ursu, 1998). It is of utmost importance to understand the factors which influence the changes in a child's behavior (Cretu, 2003). At the basis of the child's attitude are various reasons, through which we understand the representations or the ideas which determine the action necessary to fulfill a certain need or an interest. "The individuals of a society are trained to enter an organization, an activity branch and eventually the labor market"[2]. Some psychologists claim that the pre-school student will manage to assimilate a content of knowledge or to assimilate a certain way of behaving, on condition that he/she unfolds a pleasant, attractive and accessible activity (Bonchiș, Secui, 2004).

The reasons behind an activity are not always evident to the child. "Family life is in fact the first school of emotions and feelings for any child" [3].

Towards the end of the pre-schooling period, the child learns under the influence of the impulses given by the adults around him, due to his desire to comply with his/her status of future student, which attracts him/her and also because of the desire not to upset his/her parents (Simon, 2004). Gradually, the child's motivation is increased by the nursery school teacher and then by the primary school teacher. Their psychological place and role is well defined for the children. The requirement to learn in order to satisfy a sort of family or personal identity feeling and to keep the parents' affection and the other's respects, remains a basic motivational structure for children and it is in general more tensional than motivational learning triggered by other types of motives (Schiopu, 1997). During the nursery school period the child finds himself/herself at the intersection of three types of environment: family, nursery school and the social one, this last one being observationally crossed (the street, the shops, the means of transport, etc.). When the child reaches the primary school age, the dynamics of these environments changes and so does the child's reaction to them. Although, integrated in the same social life, the three components of the environment ask the child not only to adjust his/her behavior to systems which have different requirements under different tutelage, protection and affection conditions, but they also create a more profound apprehension of the diversity of the world and life in general, a more dense and complex decision making process, deep emotions, curiosity and a profound desire to learn in unusual circumstances (Cosma, 2001). During the

schooling period, the child will switch from being a simple observer of the social life, to being actively involved in it. If in the beginning he/she is a mere spectator of the surrounding world, through the diversification of his/her house chores and not only, he/she is involved in various processes which take place every day. By going through these processes, the child learns the skills that are necessary for various tasks, becoming more and more prepared for a complete, independent adult life.

Starting from these theoretical aspects, the following general objective of the study was established: the picturing of primary school education through its essential dimensions- school adjustment, the conversational and relational space.

Work Objectives:

1. Identifying the differences in perceiving reality according to the subjects' age.
2. The enrichment of the relational and conversational space with the help of stories and exercises leading to the child's understanding of his/her position within the class, his/her relation with the end product-the story, the conscious reporting to others, a better relations with himself/herself and a more efficient group dynamics.

Work Hypothesis:

1. Enrichment of the experience of reality is different according to the subjects' age.
2. Enrichment of the conversational and relational space by means of group intervention.

Sample Description

The study was done on students from four primary school classes in Arad, as follows: one first grade with a students' average age of 6,89, one second grade with a students' average age of 7,65, one third grade with a students' average age of 8,04 and one fourth grade with a students' average age of 9,34. The number of students in each class was as follows: first grade (12 girls and 13 boys, 25 students in total), second grade (11 girls and 12 boys, 23 students in total) third grade (13

girls and 10 boys, 23 students in total) and the fourth grade (11 girls and 10 boys, 22 students in total).

Study Tools

The tools used during the study were: Early Schemes Inventory (scale for insufficient self-control), taken after Bouvard (2002), "The story with a given beginning" and "The six-step story". The story with a given beginning is a tool that aims to help the child discover and be aware of the relationships extant in his/her family of origin and of his/her role in that family. The six-step story is a tool that aims to help a child deepen his/her self-knowledge, starting from building up a character and following his/her adventures, the way he/she relates to dangerous situations, supportive characters, the way he/she fulfills the given tasks and the way in which he/she finds positive solutions to various situations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Hypothesis number 1. Starting the study from applying to each class the Early Schemes Inventory, the results point out the significant differences extant between classes, concerning the insufficient control, as it was expected ($F=13,215$ to $p=001$). By identifying the differences extant between classes, we proceeded towards establishing the objective for optimizing the control for both task achievement and the relational space.

"The story with a given beginning". This exercise allows the children to explore the space of their own families and the role they have within them. If during the first grade, it is more obvious the dependence a child has towards one of his/her parents, the children become more independent as their age increases. The building of the story pointed out the differences extant in the relationship between children and parents from the point of view of both the distance (greater in the case of older children) and closeness towards one of the parents. An element that appeared frequently in all the stories was the one referring to the time that the parents used to spend with their children. The results pointed out the amount of time that the children spent with their "nanny" or even by themselves.



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These results can be related to the number of times the support character occurs in the "six-step story". Thus, in the case of children who display dependence on one of the parental figures, the support characters were either the mother or the father. However, in the case of children who spent most of their time with another person (grandmother, nanny or a family friend) the support characters were usually the embodiment of their friends. The discussions that followed the building up of the story clearly highlighted the differences in family life, ways of spending leisure time and the time spent working, playing or just having a talk. A problem that was observed at the level of all classes was the little amount of time that the children spent with their parents and the numerous hours spent in front of the computer or being "connected to various modern gadgets". When it came to leisure time, the results pointed out that most children were practicing a sport (basketball, football, dancing, etc.) but beside this activity, none of them was involved in any other type of outdoor activity.

"The six-step story". The first step of this technique is to ask the child to describe the main character of the story. The first graders were asked to draw the character because they did not know how to read and write. The results pointed out that the children perceived their body scheme, and in most cases the gender assignment was done correctly. The second, third and fourth grade students made up more elaborated descriptions and it was possible to observe a transition from physical descriptions typical for lower grade students, to a description that included the character's feelings and affective traits. The story continues with the building up of a mission in which the main character needs support and he/she needs to use his/her own

resources so as to end the mission with a happy ending. Most personal resources were grouped around a few characteristics, such as: well-behaved, industrious, good. There were other characters having characteristics, such as: ambitious, strong, kind, clever, etc. At the first grade students, one can observe the existence of a more restricted list of qualities which evolves and ramifies as the children grow older. This is a normal thing due to the child's subsequent development and the guiding lines he/she receives in the school relationships concerning the desirable behavior. During the group sessions, we constantly pointed out the positive characteristics, as well as the possibility to make a change if the children found out that a certain aspect was not functional or did not meet their expectations.

Hypothesis number 2. When it came to the relational and conversational reality, the exercises focused on highlighting the reality of the class and the role and the place each student had within it. It was observed that the description of actions, characters and scenes in the story became more elaborate as children's age increased. That could be partially explained through the acquisition of new words, which enriched the children's vocabulary but also to the fact that most of the children read and some of them were literary gifted and even had an inclination towards presenting the world in a metaphoric way. However, the differences that appeared from one week to another were due to the working methods having been used. Thus, it was observed an evolution of the children's creativity; in the beginning the stories were short and had few details but as the time passed by and the children attended more story workshops, their stories became longer and contained plenty of interesting details. This

evolution can be explained through the formation and development of skills, and acquisitions during the workshops. The children learnt how to present real life objects and notions, and how to render the deepness of human relations (the discussions that followed each story offered additional data about how each student perceived reality). The workshops also favored a continuous work of creation. The exercises proposed during the research, facilitate the children's access towards their feelings, self-knowledge and the exercising of their analysis and auto-analysis abilities. The story analysis makes the difference between how the personal resources are structured as years pass by, and also points out how these resources are used. A very interesting aspect was related to the children becoming conscious of the resources they had. The results of the present study were discussed during parents meetings held at the level of each class. When working with the parents we focused on methods necessary to be applied in order to offer the child the quality time he/she needs and on ways to support the child overcome the difficulties encountered at school. The parents were invited to parents-children workshops, during which we focused on helping the parents discover their children's leisure activities and how the children perceived the parents' presence at the respective activities.

CONCLUSIONS & ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The challenge of a story creates a working space that facilitates the access to the inner-self, to the discovery of a group relation model, to the understanding of the role, which the children perceive and actually have within their peer group and in the relations with the adults around them. The feelings experienced during the exercises proposed by the researchers, were also explored. The working methods were chosen on the basis of the children's age and thus, they were easy to be applied. The discussions which took place throughout the research pointed out the children's possibility to make their own constructions and to be responsible for their

own change. They also pointed out that it is necessary for the parents to be involved in the class and extra-curricular activities alongside the class teacher.

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