

Structure of affective concepts in preschool and early school age children

The main purpose of the research is a description and an analysis of the content and the structure of the affective concepts of five basic emotions like: *joy, sadness, fear, anger, surprise* in preschool and early school age children.

Research question was formulated as follows: " What is the structure and content of the emotional concepts of the five basic emotions (like: *joy, sadness, fear, anger, surprise*) of children in preschool and early school age? ". Furthermore, two additional research questions were formulated. The first is: " Whether and what kind of changes would occur in recognizing emotions *joy, sadness, anger, fear* and naming basic emotions *joy, sadness, anger, fear and surprise* based on the facial expressions of children depicted in photographs during the preschool and early school period? ". Then, the second question is: " Are there any changes in regulation of *anger, fear* and *sadness* during the preschool and early school period? ".

The research was carried out in a transverse (transversal) system among children selected from six age groups: 4;0–4;11, 5;0–5;11, 6;0–6;11, 7;0–7;11, 8;0–8;11, 9;0–9;11. The data collected from a sample of 240 children were used to analyze the test results. There were 20 girls and 20 boys in each of the six designated age group.

The initial criteria for selecting children was a permission of their parents (or caregivers) for testing.. The next criterion was the correct intellectual and linguistic development. It was assessed by the standardized tools at the first stage of the study, as well as the lack of manifested symptoms of disorders or developmental delays assessed by the child's parents or caregivers. Therefore, the selection of children was not random, but conditioned by the above factors.

In order to describe the content and structure of emotional concepts the experimental technique created by S. Grabias (2012) was used. It allowed to obtain an information on six basic components of a given concept, i.e. category e: carrier, features, activities, causes, circumstances / effect and in addition his assessment. According to S. Grabias (2012) analyzing the verbal utterances of individuals, one can extract from them the cognitive definition of the phenomenon underlying it. The author of the study somehow reversed mentioned above procedure and formulated interview questions based on elements of the cognitive structure of emotional concepts, such as *joy, sadness, fear, anger* and *surprise*.

The presentation of research results on the content and structure of the concepts of emotions *joy, sadness, fear, anger, surprise* in children from two periods - preschool and early school –enabled to show the line of development of knowledge about emotions. In the

minds of preschool children, the definitions of individual emotions are permeated with an anthropocentric attitude to reality and anthropomorphism in the perception of surrounding phenomena and objects. Describing of emotions, the youngest children used mainly tautological definitions, containing synonyms. It should be emphasized that verbs which were describing emotional states were dominated. Examined children had difficulty in categorization process, and therefore with cognitive activity leading to the assignment of names (in this case, the names of individual emotional states) to the category of *emotions / feelings*, whereas early school-age children began use names from a higher (abstract) level. It should be mentioned that abstract representation occurs among the oldest nine-years children. Moreover, respondents defining emotion, referred to specific situations that could be its source, i.e. they used descriptive definitions. This category most often appeared in the group of children of primary school.

Pre-school and early-school children indicated as the carriers of emotions mainly persons from their immediate surroundings and their family members. In addition, younger children pointed out spiritual and fictional characters or phenomena of nature or objects which is associated with the feature of child thinking, i.e. anthropomorphism. Among older children this category concerned each person which proves to the growing awareness that the feeling of emotions is a typical human being feature and concerns the entire human species. In the group of nine-year-olds, the indicated carrier category prevailed.

In the knowledge about the manifestations of emotions among children in early school age there are primarily expressive, perceptually available indicators of their survival. In recognition, the face and mimic changes occurring in it, as well as changes in the behavior of a person experiencing a given affective state, are particularly significant for them. Preschool children also took into account the indicated perceptual traits, describing the symptoms of joy and surprise while characterizing other emotions, they mainly called the face of a person feeling a certain emotion.

A similar situation occurred in the description of circumstances related to the experience of someone's emotions and evaluation in moral categories made by the subjects from two developmental periods. In children's opinion, joy is a good emotion, while describing their own reactions in response to the joy of another person, they point out to behaviors consistent with the emotional state of the joyful person. On the other hand, sadness, fear and anger were assessed by preschool and early school age children as negative affective states, except that the latter additionally made relative and ambivalent assessments regarding the indicated emotions. In addition, children aged 4–9 years old, describe their own responses

to the sadness, fear or anger of others, mainly reported behaviors aimed at helping that person reduce them by self-regulation or finding another way to cope with experiences.

In the case of emotion which is *surprise* regarding its assessment or description of the reaction in response to astonishment of another human being, it was dominated by preschoolers lack of knowledge in this area described by the statement "I don't know" or "nothing". Analyzes regarding the characteristics of the causes of emotions show that both preschool and early school age children most often indicated behaviors in the same categories.

The presented analysis of the content of the utterance revealed an extremely rich and complex picture of emotions and its various aspects (elements of the structure, i.e. definition / definition category, carrier, manifestations, causes, circumstances, behavioral characteristics or evaluation in moral categories) constituting the content of the concepts of *joy, sadness, fear, anger* and *surprise*.

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