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### **SELF-IMAGE AND SELF-CONFIDENCE, AS FACTORS FACILITATORS OF COMMUNICATION TO SMALL SCHOOLCHILDREN**

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#### **Abstract**

If self-esteem is the emotional reaction of the individual perception of their own image, self-image is the way in which a person perceives its own characteristics physical, cognitive, emotional social and spiritual, it is the result of self-assessment and evaluation from those around and how it is reflected in the eyes of others. Self-esteem can be positive and negative, having an important role in the involvement of the pupil in difficult tasks, in making responsible decisions, the ability to resist in the face of pressure group, in creating the psychological state of well, in maintaining a good health and mental strength to the factors of stress. *The adequate language development* provides a more shaded verbal communication, increasing the chances of higher quality social interactions. Children can initiate discussions about emotions, which facilitates the understanding and recognition of their own emotions and those of others, may require explanations and clarifications from adults, can establish the relationship between cause and effect of events - emotional reactions - behavior.

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#### **1. Introduction**

Self-image or Ego, represents the way how a person perceives their own physical, cognitive, emotional, social and spiritual characteristics. In plain language, self-image is the view we have about ourselves, about "who we are" and "what can we do", it is the foundation on which self-esteem is formed. A positive self-image becomes an inner strength that allows the individual to enjoy his personal chance, despite all the obstacles, bringing him the satisfaction and complacency.



As the child gets older and experiences different and increasingly complex life situations, he begins to develop the so-called *self-knowledge*, a process that lasts throughout life, which consists in shaping, structuring and then enriching the self-image.

## 2. Self-Image – The Mental Representation of Oneself

### 2.1. Self-image - Concept

**Self-image** is a mental representation of oneself, including knowledge about himself (emotions, knowledge, values, skills, behavior etc.), which helps the individual to adjust their behavior in society. However, self-image does not always reflect reality. Self-image is a structure, in which, we can differentiate several components:

1. *Current ego*, referring to what the individual believes he is in a certain moment of his development;
2. *Ideal ego*, that reflects what the individual would like to be;
3. *Future ego*, expressing what the individual can become in the future.

The main *negative ways of self-image manifesting* are:

1. *avoidance* - a student with a negative self image can adopt attitudes like shyness, avoidance of confrontation with people or problematic situations;
2. *defensive aggression* - a student with a negative self image compensates by attacking the source of frustration, mocking his colleagues who perform better than him;
3. *compensation* - a student who is unsuccessful in some subjects tries to minimize their importance and to succeed in others, to which he gives more importance;
4. *resistance* - some students try keeping their self-image as created and manifest resistance to change, even if it is for their benefit;
5. *low motivation* - a student with a negative self image, will show a lack of self-confidence, will be less motivated to initiate or engage in various activities, because he will not feel able to complete them successfully.

If self-esteem is the result of the auto evaluation and the evaluation of those around and how he is reflected in the eyes of others, self-esteem represents the individual's emotional reaction to the perception of their image.

## 3. The Self-Esteem – The Evaluative Dimension of Self-Image

### 3.1. The Self-Esteem - Concept

**Self-esteem** represents *the evaluative dimension of self-image* and relates to how we evaluate ourselves in relation to our own expectations and of others (eg, better or less good). The value of a human being does not derive from the performance achieved in a certain area, but from the set of all behaviors, actions and potentialities from the past, present and future, on all levels of life.

Self-esteem is an affective component of the cognitive scheme, referring to the own person (Stănculescu, 2008, p.308), it can be positive or negative, fulfilling an important role in the engaging of the person in demanding tasks, in responsible decision making, in building the capacity to resist to the

pressure of a group, in creating a psychological condition of well being, in maintaining good mental health and resistance to stress.

High self-esteem reflects the recognition of the value of the human being, autoapreciation and self-confidence.

The main role in self-esteem development of the child is represented by the evaluative feedbacks of the parents (in the preschool period) and teachers, colleagues or friends, the appreciations or criticisms being taken and internalized by the child, leading ultimately to the development of a high or low self-esteem. Young children begin to evaluate their self-image, based on the opinions and reactions of their parents and their teachers. In this respect, boosting self-esteem is based on highlighting the qualities of the child, clearly outlining the level of expectations for him, encouragement, praise, anticipating the needs and avoiding the perfectionism. Some investigations had revealed that students with high levels of self-esteem have favorable attitudes toward school, a high popularity, high school performance, social skills and are optimistic (Stănculescu, 2008, p.309).

Establishing quality interpersonal relationships, based on effective communication, requires a special "opening" of the individual to the people in his entourage, assuming thereby, both developing the capacity to disclose their feelings, motives and opinions to those around, and a certain responsiveness to their feedback.

All this require confidence. The more a person increases their self-confidence, the more that person is willing to assume the risks associated with exposing to the opinions and reactions of others.

Developing skills in communication and establishing quality interpersonal relationships, increasing the autonomy of pupils achieving individual and group higher performances, overcoming communication barriers, need self-confidence.

Moderate confidence, based on self-knowledge, on recognition of both their qualities and limits is necessary, to accept the risks involved in open and sincere human relations (Rime, 2008, pp.135-139). It is well known that the overvaluation and undervaluation of the personal potential will lead to failure.

#### **4. The Emotional and Physical Abuse – the Biggest Obstacles in The Formation of Self-Esteem At Children**

The biggest obstacles in the formation of self-esteem at children, are emotional and physical abuse, preventing them becoming a core objective in psychological counseling of children and their families. Emotional abuse prevention focuses on the following aspects:

- *active listening of the child;*
- *perception of the child as a valuable and special person;*
- *providing support in accountability and personal decisions;*
- *avoiding labeling, criticism and judgement of the child behaviors;*
- *developing the student self-esteem and the sense of competence;*
- *learn ways to cope with stress.*

##### **4.1. Increasing Confidence**

*Increasing confidence* in children is a cyclical process, which involves:

- *recognition of anxiety* – it is a negative emotion that occurs when a person is uncertain in terms of their ability to avoid physical or psychological pain felt after a failure, anxiety manifests by permanent concern, irritability, headaches, lack energy, strength and concentration, reduced ability to respond during tense situations, the individual perceiving themselves as being incapable of coping with a situation. A first step in reducing anxiety is identifying the *defense mechanisms* (avoiding or reducing anxiety methods, without coping with the situation that determines it). Defensive behaviors such as avoidance, repression, projection of the source of discontent on other people, regression (approaching significantly easier tasks), rationalization, finding excuses, explanations, reduce anxiety and become through repetition strong habits, resistant to change.
- *the changing process and compensatory behaviors* – through which the use of anxiogenic behaviors is limited. In this situation, the child resorts to some compensatory behaviors that are used temporarily until the tension is reduced.

Some of the most common compensatory behaviors are: oral behaviors (excessive eating, eating sweets), excessive sleep, withdrawal into fantasy, discussing problems with an empathetic person, and at older ages, the use of exercise, the last two behaviors being linked to the self-confidence increasing. The teacher is the one who must accept that students will make mistakes, but only by facing and overcoming difficulties, they will increase their self-confidence.

The knowledge of the educator about the psychophysical and personality characteristics of the child, the social, family and cultural environment in which he lives, needs and requirements of his education, is very important as it allows correct understanding of the meaning of the message communicated by the child, anticipation of the impact it could have on him, as well as the behavioral reactions determined by it.

The lack of effective communication in the classroom is often a source of conflict and in such situations, the only way to resolve the conflict is cooperation, which allows each party to find out the position and arguments of the other parties, negotiating in order to find the most acceptable solution.

Deciphering the reactions of children in time, allows the educator to regulate the conduct of the communication in time, the entire educational activity becoming a success.

In order to *improve* the school type of interaction, the teacher can take a number of *concrete actions*, such as (Ezechil, 2002, p. 54):

- know how to relate to and produce an active interlocutor;
- ensure continuously over the use of the same code by partners in the communication process;
- take into account the children's psycho-physiological and affective-emotional state at the time of communication (rested-tired, relaxed-rushed, preoccupied-disinterested etc.), searching for possible harmonization of them; identifying of the emotional level and the affective states through which the child finds himself at the moment of the communication and reception of the message is important, as they can become a distraction from the communication process;
- giving freedom to the party to issue a response in his pace;
- launch and read messages through multiple channels;
- minimize the effect of internal and external noise sources, whenever possible.

#### 4.2. Message Transmitting

Referring to message transmitting during educational activities, Elena Stănculescu gives some *recommendations* (stressing the importance of the nonverbal and paraverbal during the lesson), designed to improve the communication during educational activities (Stănculescu, 2008, p. 213), of which we can mention:

- transmitted information must be clear, accurate, precise (providing further explanation to students is recommended, to remove the ambiguities); the message sent must be issued correctly from the beginning, because once submitted and perceived, it is irreversible; accuracy involves using a rich vocabulary to express the desired directions and to be able to fully exploit the communicated subject;
- the communication must have expressiveness - adequacy of the used expressions with an affective and emotional tone on the message;
- avoiding the exposure of a frozen physiognomy by the teacher and adopting a positive, open communication that takes on extra expressiveness;
- avoiding the excessive use of neologisms in oral expression, because they hinder the understanding of the significance of the messages;
- adequacy of the verbal messages to the nonverbal ways of communication; correct receiving and decoding of nonverbal messages issued simultaneously and interchangeably with what is spoken;
- avoiding the use of an excessive gesticulation, not to draw students' attention on it, to the detriment of the verbally sent message;
- use of paraverbal elements to emphasize certain meanings and avoid monotony;
- active language enrichment by developing a positive attitude towards reading;
- taking into account that during the first part of schooling (and in preschool), the internal language is not very well developed, which can affect the child's ability to coordinate, condensate and predict oral and written language;
- the oral expression of the students requires an adequate stimulation, using persuasive ways, argumentation techniques etc.

Interpersonal factors group the influences that come from the *family environment* and *educational environment*. The concordance of the messages from these two environments as well as the quality of their educational influences are very important in children education.

Family may exercise a series of attitudes proved to be both un-efficient and harmful to the optimal development of the children.

In our view, as with parents, the teachers' attitude towards discipline and consistency of applying rewards and punishments are extremely important. When the teacher does not explain the rules to children and does not consistently apply the established consequences of breaking the rules, he favors the lack of sense of control, thus preventing the autonomy development at students. The teacher becomes both a model and a coach to developing the emotional and social skills of children. The use of a language that draws children's attention on emotions, highlighting various emotional reactions in the context of ordinary interactions, lowers the risk for the students of having difficulties in understanding emotions, as well as the consequences of their behavior.

The development of socio-emotional skills is the result of environmental influences of where the child was born and lives, as well as from the familial and educational environments, acting on the genetic component with which it is born.

Acquiring social and emotional skills depends on the optimal interaction of all these factors, which may represent a source of protection, which ensures the child's effective adaptation to the environmental requirements.

Intrapersonal social skills are closely related to emotional skills, and acquiring emotional regulation strategies favors the capacity to exercise control over their behavior, being essential for establishing and maintaining relationships with others and the main risk factors in the development of emotional and social skills in children were grouped in intrapersonal and interpersonal factors (Catrinel, Kallay, 2010, p. 38).

Faulty interaction of these factors can contribute to the deficient development of the socio-emotional skills, that can become in turn the source of serious mental and emotional disorders.

Also, in the activity with children, in the preschool group and in classroom, teacher's empathy can be seen both as a quality, a skill and as an act of will, which is sometimes difficult to implement. Empathy involves the teacher's determination, but also the development of self-control capabilities of their own socio-affective reactions, this way expressing their availability to the child, entering their inner worlds, to try to understand them from their position, so he can see the situations with their eyes.

The most important skill in developing the empathic understanding is the reflection of feelings, and emotion is an important part of the relationship, even if it is not always conscious.

Feelings may be expressed both verbally and nonverbally and must be seen, valued, named, and after paraphrasing technique has to be used, to clarify any ambiguities.

Empathy is defined by two components (Abric, 2002, p. 53):

- responsiveness to the feelings experienced by the other;
- verbal ability to communicate this understanding.

Therefore, the teacher's empathy to his student has to be an active one and has to be sent to him. Empathy that is not expressed is an internal attitude, maintained in a latent state with no effect on the communication act.

Acting as a "transmitter" in the communication process, the teacher receives the task to correlate the activity of designing and transmitting the informational message, with possibilities of capitalization on children's personalities and their individual creative potential, thus adding a touch of originality to the educational act.

Achieving a maximum of efficiency in the educational communication act involves unlocking the cognitive and communicational potential of all the involved partners. Besides a good theoretical foundation of the informational message (corresponding to well-defined goals and objectives), to correctly transmit and receive it, it is recommended to use an appropriate paralanguage and sign language, with supportive role on the verbal message.

## 5. Conclusion

Practicing this capacity implies the existence of a positive climate, free of threats or challenges (most often addressing to the child's self-image), dominated by open interpersonal relationships, by cooperation (in which children adopt a dynamic, assertive style of communication), well being, initiative, curiosity, desire to participate in group activities.

Conversations about emotions worn by children at home or at school, allows them to require adult explanations, clarifications and thus easing the identification of the cause-effect relationship between events and emotions, behaviours, and learning strategies for emotional regulation, such as discussing emotional events, anticipating possible situations and emotional reactions, ways of resolving conflicts and problematic situations. Therefore, we believe that the implementation of a psycho-pedagogical intervention program - based on creating an educational environment favorable to total communication, the use of didactic and therapeutic games allowing the expression of feelings and emotional states - is necessary in the educational activities that take place with young schoolchildren, so that their informative side is supported by a relational positive side, thereby enhancing their therapeutic and formative efficiency.

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