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Analysis of the emotion of fear in gifted children and its use in teaching practice

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Abstract

This article presents an analysis of fear in gifted children of younger school age in comparison with the control group of children. The tool used for the research was a questionnaire with statements about fear, with the intensity of selected types of fear evaluated. The questionnaire was subject to a factor analysis, which resulted in 5 areas of fear. At the level of the individual factors we determined that fear in gifted children is less intense than fear in children from the normal population, although no difference was found in the hierarchy of fear. We also found that gifted children are most afraid of global problems. Within the group of gifted children we observed differences between the sexes, while boys declared lower levels of fear than girls, in the factors My family and Phobias. The conclusion contains recommendations as to how to work with fear amongst gifted children in teaching practice.

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1. Introduction and theoretical bases

Fear is our natural companion throughout our lives. It is one of the basic human emotions and acts as a natural corrector which warns us against dangerous situations that could harm or, in extreme cases, kill us. Fear arises in

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situations that are important for the individual. The individual responds to such situations with certain changes in conduct and behaviour. These reactions to life's problems may give the individual advantages, such as the mobilisation of mental and physical powers, but may also cause unreasonable reactions such as depression, apathy or, on the other hand, agitation, panic or hyperactivity. As a result of targeted guidance, education, upbringing and social experience one learns to understand, accept and cope with fear situations and continue through the phases of one's emotional development. (Herbert, 2004)

During a person's life fear goes through a complex process of development, while certain forms of fear are specifically associated with particular periods of development. We will be focusing on younger school age, which is the subject of our further research. Fear stemming from imaginary creatures may be observed in the early stages of this period. Other common fears include fear of injury, medical intervention and disease. In children aged 9 and upwards we can see the start of fear of death, which reaches a peak during this period and then accompanies the individual throughout his or her life. Another significant group of fears is linked to the school environment. Due to its complexity (the influence of the social, cognitive and emotional areas of the child's development), this may be the source of fears underpinned by a variety of motives. Social relations also start to become important with the gradual approach of adolescence, accompanied by the need to compare oneself and one's performance and expression with those of one's peers. (Muris, 2007)

The emotion of fear in childhood involves a wide range of factors that underpin it. These are internal factors such as the child's personality and particularly temperament and cognitive processes, while external factors include the family environment and quality of parental relations, school and the peer environment, and the broader socio-cultural context (Michalčáková, 2007).

In our research survey we focus on younger school-age children and particularly on so-called gifted children. In connection with the specific characteristics of gifted children, the question may arise as to the quality and quantity of the concept of fear in this context. Due to the above factors that underpin fear, aptitude may also be considered such a factor.

Aptitude most often tends to be described as an individual's ability in selected areas held in esteem by the socio-cultural environment, which is quantitatively and qualitatively more developed in comparison with a child's peers (Heward, 2013). For the purposes of our research aptitude based on one-dimensional definitions and demonstrated performance (Porter, 1999) and is perceived in the sense of a high level of intellectual ability.

If we focus on factors that can influence the specificity of fear in these individuals, gifted children are characterised by typical cognitive and also socio-emotional development. As regards cognitive characteristics (Hertzog, 2008), it is worth mentioning factors such as intense curiosity, abstract thinking, the ability to transfer knowledge, creativity, generating original ideas, excellent memory, interest in philosophical topics. Of the socio-emotional characteristics described by T. L. Gross (2011), these include asynchronous development of the personality (the rift between the level of intelligence and aspects such as motoric, verbal and socio-emotional development), perfectionism, emotional sensitivity, multi-potentiality, intensity and depth of experience.

On the one hand, publications on this topic describe gifted children as individuals with increased levels of selected fears associated particularly with school, such as fear of failure, of manifesting their own real-world skills, fear of taking risks and making decisions, and fear of non-acceptance by their peers (Senior, 2014). A study by J. Derevensky and E. B. Coleman (1989) claimed that gifted children between the ages of 8 and 13 experienced dominant levels of fear in comparison with the control group. Overall they found a higher level of all fears in gifted children, with a significant difference in fear of nuclear war and other global problems. The authors explain this result as being due to expert knowledge possessed by the children, as well as their imagination and the ability to see the consequences of these phenomena.

The EBSCO database contains research carried out by J. G. Tippey and J. J. Burnham (2009) into fear in gifted children between the ages of 7 - 10. They explored fear of death and life-threatening situations, fear of the unknown, social and school-related fears, fear of animals and fear of medical procedures. The most common partial fears in girls included fear of using weapons, combat in war and meeting dangerous strangers. Boys were most afraid of fighting in war and using weapons, although these fears were far less frequent than in girls. Research into fear in gifted children has also been carried out by a team of authors, Portešová, Konečná, Budíková and Koutková (2008), who found that accelerated cognitive development and greater access to information causes global fears (space or natural disasters) to come to the fore earlier and with greater intensity. The authors even imply a link between the

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