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Development and Validation of Self-Regulation Questionnaire in Children and Minors

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Abstract

Although a variety of instruments have been used in research on teenagers, the existing questionnaires tend to be developmentally and contextually limited. There has not been an self-regulation measuring tool validated in the Czech settings yet, especially one aimed at children and minors in institutional care. The aim is to measure the degree of validity of the constructed questionnaire designed to measure the level of self-regulation (behaviour, cognition, emotions and attention) in children and minors. The primary purpose of this study was to develop a context-specific self-report measure of self-regulation and gather initial psychometric information about the Self-Regulation Questionnaire (SRQ) in children and minors. Information regarding the scale factor structure, validity, and internal consistency was gathered using a sample of 102 children and minors in institutional care (children's homes and correctional facilities in the Czech Republic). When designing the questionnaire, the team took the following measuring tools into consideration (Questionnaire on Self-Regulation, Adolescent Self-Regulatory Inventory), the theory of self-regulation of behaviour and emotions, along with results of a qualitative analysis that preceded the development of the instrument. The analysis revealed a hierarchical model of self-regulated behaviour. To examine the initial construct validity of the SRQ, all 16 items were submitted to principal component analysis with varimax rotation. The confirmatory factor analysis provided evidence for a solid factor structure in different samples. The internal consistency as indicated by Cronbach's α s, was moderate to good for majority of the extracted scales. The SRQ in Children and Minors has the potential to move the research on self-regulation in a new, viable direction. The SRQ will be further used to validate a predictive estimate of risk behaviour among children and minors living in different social environments on the basis of the difference (deficit) in the process of self-regulation.

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1. Theoretical background

Change is ubiquitous in today's world. Increasing knowledge leads to an exponential growth of technology, which gradually transforms the way we live and work. On the other hand, this enormous scientific and technological progress brings unsettling social, political and economic consequences. The individual in today's society must be prepared and able to respond to changing conditions, make informed decisions and take actions to address the current and future challenges. The great task of the current educational institutions (UNESCO, 1996) is therefore not only to teach young people how to learn, but also how to live in society (learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be). Brater (in Bechler, 2005) sees self-education as the key, the center of conduct and orientation. Every young person today must learn to stand on their own feet, lead own life, work on themselves, on their own development. We need to acquire a new culture of learning, manifesting itself, among other things, by greater individualisation, cooperation, independence and responsibility of the learner (Maňák, 2005).

The National Research Council in line with the new concept of education (2011) formulated three broad clusters of 21st Century Skills: cognitive skills (non-routine problem solving, critical thinking, systems of thinking), interpersonal skills (complex communication, social skills, teamwork, cultural sensitivity, dealing with diversity) and intrapersonal skills (self-management, time management, self-development, self-regulation, adaptability, executive functioning).

Self-regulation (as one of intrapersonal skills) is the ability to flexibly activate, monitor, inhibit, persevere and/or adapt one's behaviour, attention, emotions and cognitive strategies in response to direction from internal cues, environmental stimuli and feedback from others in an attempt to attain personally-relevant goals (Moilanen, 2007, Demetriou, 2005, Novak and Clayton, 2001). The theory of self-regulation is based on a hierarchical model of 6S, i.e. self-reflection, self-esteem, self-confidence, self-control, self-management and self-creation. Self-creation in this model represents the highest value when the individual reshapes himself/herself by one's own forces. Turning inward or self-knowledge is a mere prerequisite of self-regulation, however not the only one. One thing is to know oneself, evaluate oneself, be able to control one's behaviour and emotions and regulate these further, but change oneself on one's own account is another thing.

The development of one's own autonomy and responsibility and therefore self-regulation of behaviour is indispensable for life in contemporary society. Very often, however, we rely on the fact that these life skills will gradually be mastered by the individuals themselves. A systematic development and support of self-regulation of behaviour and emotions is quite interesting (Zelinda, In Ruise, 2006), especially by the school, which is to cultivate the child's personality even though it is very often associated with school success, social competencies and healthy eating habits (Richards, Gross, 2000). In contrast, research finds that children and adolescents who exhibit poor self-regulation skills are more at risk of peer rejection, social problems, delinquency, and obesity (Trentacosta, Shaw, 2009). For this reason it is important to build and improve the self-regulation capacity of children and youth, especially in an environment where children are vulnerable to risk behaviour (e.g. they do not live in the natural family environment) the process of self-regulated behaviour may not be automatic, although they may be aware of their problem behaviour (display self-knowledge).

According to the social cognitive perspective (Zimmerman, 2005), there is a gradual development of self-regulation, which is divided into four developmental levels: observation, emulation, self-control and self-regulation. The self-regulated skill level is achieved when one systematically adapts his/her behaviour to the changing personal and contextual conditions. Self-regulation is associated with the so-called tacit knowledge, which is described (Gardner, 2001) as a characteristic of successfully intelligent people. It represents human behaviour that is directed towards achieving personal goals and is acquired with a little help from others. Due to this tacit knowledge the individual is able to identify what is necessary in order to achieve their goals (success) and to aim their actions at achieving these goals. One's attitude toward the environment (conditions) is essential as tacit knowledge enables the individual to adapt to the environment and at the same time to make the most of it in order to work for him/her. A successfully intelligent person realises that there are other options regarding the environment and is able to regulate the environment in order to suit their own needs more (i.e. shaping).

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