

Preschool Children's Perceptions of the Value of Affection As Seen in Their Drawings

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the perceptions of children in preschool education with regard to the value of affection in the pictures they draw. The study involved 199 children aged 60 months old or above. The descriptive research method was used and data were collected with the draw-and-explain technique. During the collection of the data, the children were requested to draw a picture related to the value of affection and explain the picture they drew. The children's explanations were recorded by the researcher. The study is one of the first to be conducted in Turkey with preschoolers in this research area. The results showed that the children generally depicted human figures like family members, other children and friends, animals like butterflies and dogs, trees, flowers and grass, happy images such as hearts, balloons and balls, and abiotic images like clouds and sunshine, as well as other images like houses in their drawings. The children tended especially to feature people and objects in their immediate vicinity.

Keywords: Preschool, drawing of value of affection, value education, perception of value of affection in children.

Introduction

From birth, humans find themselves within a social existence and try to adapt themselves to their socio-cultural environment. This effort of adaptation continues throughout the child's development. The basis of children's social and emotional development is substantially built in the first years of life, as with all areas of development (Günindi, 2011). Therefore, early childhood constitutes the most critical part of life in terms of adopting values that children will need socially. Because children in this period are going through the fastest stage of their development, where their personality is built, they are strongly affected by their immediate environment and open to any kind of learning. Their development can therefore be supported with timely and efficient interventions.

Between the ages of zero and six a child begins to adopt the value judgments of the immediate society and the behaviors and habits that comply with its cultural texture. The

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child's interaction with his/her peers and other individuals within the environment during the preschool period helps them gain many positive and negative behaviors, skills, manners and opinions. These build the basis of their value judgments. While information about values is learnt during a person's whole life, the first knowledge is gained in early childhood (Bilir & Bal, 1989; Bronson, 2000; Davies, 2004; Uyanık-Balat & Balaban-Dağal, 2009; Dereli-İman, 2014).

Many definitions have been proposed for the notion of 'value'. Although it is generally defined as an important criterion within cultures and societies, values tend to be understood to consist of objectives generated against the backdrop of the ideas, standards and targets adopted by a group, or behavioral patterns organized such that the individual can maintain his/her existence within the group in accordance with the standards that are considered right by all the individuals within the society. Values can also correspond to behaviors and implementations which grow over a long period and to which society expects individuals to conform, or generalized ethical principles or beliefs which are considered right and useful by most of the members of a social group or society in order to maintain the existence, unity and continuity of that group or society; they can also reflect common feelings, opinions, targets and benefits, or more or less certain and systematic ideas enabling the individual's interaction with the environment (Türk, 2009; Fichter, 2006; Bolay, 2004; Veugelers & Vedder, 2003; Kızılcelik & Erjem, 1996; Titus, 1994).

Studies conducted on values education in Turkey and the world generally focus on topics like the provision of values, implementing values education programs, and the effect of the family on values education. Children's own opinions of values and the way they perceive and make sense of them seem not to have been studied adequately. Existing studies involving interviews and surveys among teachers or families have tended not to favor drawing as a means to determine children's perceptions (Revell, 2002; Veugelers & Kat, 2003; Berkowitz & Bier, 2005; Skaggs & Bodenhorn, 2006; Gökçek, 2007; Husu & Tirri, 2007; İnci, 2009; Richardson, Tolson, Huang & Lee, 2009; Üner, 2011; Öztürk Samur, 2011; Uyanık Balat, Özdemir Beceren & Adak Özdemir, 2011). However, pictures provide the potential for children to present their world-views in their reactions against telling a story, relaying metaphors and both the description itself and their own descriptions. A child synthesizes his/her opinions and feelings about the subject with his/her observations and expresses them by means of colors, shapes and lines while drawing (Malchiodi, 2013). Children synthesize their observations from life with their opinions in their pictures, and reflect on what happens in their environment in the way they perceive it. Drawing a picture is both an enjoyable activity and an explanation technique for children (Hayes, Symington & Martin, 1994; Johnson, 1993). While children are often uncomfortable answering questions asked in interviews, they express the same information willingly when asked to draw a picture (Lewis & Greene, 1983). Drawing is also seen as an alternative means of expression for children who cannot express themselves verbally (Chambers, 1983; Rennie & Jarvis, 1995). If pictures drawn by children are analyzed well, they can provide researchers with detailed information about their knowledge and development (Yavuzer, 1997), perhaps more so than written or verbal texts.

Aspects of psychology have been lighting the way in the field of psychiatry and picture therapy (Malchiodi, 2013). The objects drawn by children, colors and the painting materials they use can all provide important clues for diagnostic and therapeutic purposes. Diagnosis and treatment are not included in this study, so these elements have not been evaluated in the children's drawings. This research was conducted with the draw-and-explain technique to determine the perception of children in relation to the

value of 'affection'. The literature review revealed no studies analyzing the drawings of children in relation to the value of 'affection'. This study therefore fills a research gap.

Method

The descriptive research method was used and data were collected with the draw-and-explain technique. The study group consisted of 199 children in total, who went to independent kindergartens in Aksaray and were aged 60 months or above.

Measurement Tool

The draw-and-explain technique was used to determine the children's perception of the value of 'affection' (Brackett-Milburn, 1999; Shepardson, 2005). This technique observes children's drawings and their explanations of these drawings. The draw-and-explain technique is a diagnostic method used to evaluate how children structure opinions and concepts (McWhirter, Collins, Bryant, Wetton & Bishop, 2000). The children were asked to draw whatever came to their minds when 'affection' was mentioned, and to explain these drawings. The researcher recorded the children's explanations according to pre-prepared codes applied to each drawing

Application Process and Environment

The study was conducted within the academic year 2014–2015. After permission had been obtained, the researcher went to the participating institutions and informed the administrators about the study. After this information had been obtained, an implementation plan was drawn up together with the school managers to determine when and how the assessment instrument would be applied. While the children narrated their drawings, the narration was recorded.

Researcher's role: Before the research, the researcher visited the participating schools for three weeks to teach two-hour lessons about issues independent of the research (children were asked to draw responses to such questions as 'What comes to your mind when you hear "environment"?', 'What does "hero" mean for you?', 'What does 'being healthy' mean for you?', and so on). This was to enable the children to get used to the researcher so they could express themselves comfortably.

Finally, the researcher asked the children "What comes to your mind when you hear 'affection'?" and they were asked to draw their responses. The children's responses were not guided or interrupted by the researcher. After the children had completed their drawings, the researcher asked about them and what they wanted to express. Each drawing was filed separately after the researcher had recorded each child's narration of his or her drawing on a blank sheet and attached it to the reverse of each picture.

Data analysis

The data obtained were analyzed using interpretative content analysis, a qualitative method (Ball & Smith, 1992; Banks, 2001). The interpretative content analysis included determination and definition of themes, subjects and cases in the visual and written material obtained from the study (Giarelli & Tulman, 2003).

The codes and themes acquired were reviewed by the researcher for validity and reliability and analyzed using the same procedures as different specialist researchers. The reliability formula suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994) was used to calculate the reliability of the research: $\text{Reliability} = \frac{\text{Agreement}}{\text{Agreement} + \text{Disagreement}}$

The research reliability was calculated as 92%. Values above 70% are considered reliable (Miles & Huberman, 1994), so this research can be considered reliable. In addition, to evaluate the consensus between the experts and the researcher a Kappa

(conformity) analysis was carried out. At the end of this assessment the Kappa value was found to be 86%. The results can therefore be considered reliable.

The use of verification strategies in qualitative research is important to increase reliability (Morse et al., 2002). Thus, all steps followed in the research are reported. The researcher made relevant notes about the application environment and implementation process in the form of short notes. Notes not used as data enabled the researcher to review the implementation. The data obtained from the study were also reported in the context of a descriptive analysis and a percentage and frequency analysis.

Findings

In total, 10 categories and 104 codes were obtained from the analysis of the data. Children generally drew human figures like family members, other children and friends, animals such as butterflies and dogs, trees, flowers and grass, happy images such as hearts, balloon and balls, abiotic images like clouds and sunshine, and structures like houses.

Table 1. *Figures included in the drawings of the children participating in the study*

Categories	Codes	60 months old or above	
		<i>f</i>	%
Family/Relatives	Mother	56	28.1
	Father	46	23.1
	Siblings	57	28.6
	Themselves	35	17.6
	Grandmother	2	1
	Paternal grandmother	3	1.5
	Grandfather	16	8
	Uncle	4	2
	Maternal aunt	2	1
Brother's wife	3	1.5	
Other People	Friends	15	7.5
	Baby	4	2
	Child	34	17.1
	Visitor	10	5
	Teacher	9	4.5
	Greengrocer	3	1.5
Plants	Tree	22	11.1
	Flower	68	34.2
	Grass	24	12.1
	Fruit	13	6.5
Animals	Bird	2	1
	Butterfly	38	19.1
	Dog	11	5.5
	Cat	8	4
	Bear	2	1
	Rabbit	5	2.5
	Sheep	2	1
	Turtle	3	1.5
	Shark	1	.5
	Fish	4	2
Chick	10	5	

Table 1 (Cont.). Figures included in the drawings of the children participating in the study

Categories	Codes	60 months old or above	
		<i>f</i>	%
Animals	Ant	4	2
	Mountain	4	2
Abiotic Elements	Cloud	42	21.1
	Sun	84	42.2
	River	5	2.5
	Sea	5	2.5
	Planet	2	1
	Sky	7	3.8
	Beach	2	1
	Star	4	2
Buildings/Vehicles	Home	65	32.7
	School	6	3
	Car	13	6.5
	Plane	1	.5
	Road	6	3
	Farmstead	5	2.5
	Elevator	2	1
	Bicycle	1	.5
	Wall	3	1.5
	Pool	1	.5
	Statue	3	1.5
	Bulldozer	2	1
	Traffic lamp	4	2
	Ladder	5	2.5
	Motorcycle	2	1
	Semi	2	1
Rocket	2	1	
Slide	3	1.5	
Rail	3	1.5	
Happy image	Balloon	6	3
	Entertainment	1	.5
	Smile	3	1.5
	Gift	2	1
	Heart	40	20.1
	Kiss	1	.5
	Cotton candy	2	1
	Money	2	1
	Affection	2	1
	Ball	7	3.5
	Kite	2	1
	Ankara	2	1
	Istanbul	2	1
Play	3	1.5	
Toy	3	1.5	
Foods	Pastry	2	1
	Potato	3	1.5
	Nuts	3	1.5
	Egg	3	1.5

Table 1 (Cont.). *Figures included in the drawings of the children participating in the study*

Categories	Codes	60 months old or above	
		<i>f</i>	%
Natural Events/ Seasons	Rainbow	15	7.5
	Rain	2	1
	Snow	2	1
	Winter	8	4
	Summer	3	1.5
Others	Computer	3	1.5
	Paint	2	1
	Dress	2	1
	Bag	2	1
	Nail	1	.5
	Closet	4	2
	Ghost	1	.5
	Rope	1	.5
	Cage	1	.5
	Door	2	1
	Book	2	1
	Window	4	2
	Straw	2	1
	Chair	2	1
	Number	2	1
	Wheel	1	.5
	Television	2	1
	Vase	2	1
	Leaf	1	.5
	Snowman	6	3

The images included in the drawings and the frequencies of these images are given in Table 1. 42.2% of the children who participated in the study depicted sunshine, 34.2% flower(s), 32.7% house(s), 28.6% sibling(s), 28.1% their mother, 23.1% their father, 21.1 cloud(s), 17.6% themselves and 17.1% other children in their drawings. The most-encountered animal in the pictures was the butterfly (19.1%), followed by the dog (5.5%) and the rabbit (2.5%). Images that expressed happiness such as hearts (20.1%), balls (3.5%) and balloons (3%) were also observed.

Examples of children’s drawings are given in Picture 1, Picture 2, Picture 3 and Picture 4.

Picture 1 drawing, the child shows an unknown girl, herself, a flower, grass and a cloud. The child narrates her drawing as follows: “I am gifting a flower to a girl whom I don’t know. The girl to whom I gift the flower gets very happy and walks on air. Then, she starts running, saying that she has to go. She falls down, because she stumbles while running. I help her with getting up. She thanks me. The fact that I give a flower to someone whom I don’t know, and help her, shows my affection for her, and it points at her affection for me when she thanks me.”

Smiling children and flowers, grass and blue clouds are also observed in the pictures of many other children.

In Picture 1, the value of ‘affection’ was described with the figures of an unknown girl, herself, flower, grass and cloud. Picture 2 shows happy-looking people including the child’s mother, father and sibling, at home in sunny weather. A heart has also been drawn to intensify the impression of ‘affection’.



Picture 1.



Picture 2.



Picture 3.

In this drawing, a flower, a house, sunshine, a butterfly, a rabbit, a child, and some grass and clouds are shown. The child narrated the picture by saying: 'Affection means loving nature, flowers and animals.'

In the picture, the sun, flowers and smiling rabbit and butterfly stand out.



Picture 4.

In Picture 3, the value of 'affection' was described with flower, house, sun, butterfly, rabbit, child, grass and cloud figures. Picture 4 depicts a friend, sunshine, a butterfly, some flowers, some stairs and a heart. The child narrated his/her picture by saying: 'Affection means loving your friend, mother, father, everyone and nature.' We can see that the heart image was used to intensify the impression of 'affection'.

When the records of the interviews held with children are reviewed, we can see that being with family members, other people and plants and animals has particular significance within children's perceptions of the value of 'affection'.

Discussion and Suggestions

'Affection' is described as "the feeling that directs a person to show close interest and attachment to a thing or a person" by the Antalya Governorship Provincial Directorate of National Education, in the booklet entitled 'Values Education in Preschool'. In line with the Ministry of National Education, the booklet mentions the necessity of helping preschoolers adopt affection for nature, animals and plants (M.N.E., 2011). The participating children spoke about their drawings by making stories out of them. Some of their narrations were as follows:

Child A: Affection means hugging my mum and dad.

Child B: Affection means things in nature loving each other.

Child C: Affection means my mum, my dad and my siblings. It means flying birds in the sky.

Child D: Affection means loving nature. Affection means growing flowers and loving animals.

Child E: Affection means sun's chatting with sun's friend, rabbit's having a chat with rabbit's friend, people loving both nature and animals.

The interviews held with children show affection for family members, relatives, friends and even people they do not know, besides affection for nature, animals and plants.

As stated, the literature review revealed no studies using the draw-explain technique with regard to the value of 'affection' for preschoolers. Moreover, few studies were encountered involving preschoolers within the scope of values education; such studies that existed mostly involved children in primary and secondary schools, families or teachers. These studies examined the relationship between behavior and success and between the values education program and family participation, ethical maturity, and academic success, differences in value preferences between male and female students, the effect of values education on the exhibition of positive behaviors and level of social-emotional development, the values expected of children by families, and the effect of teachers relaying values as a result of the program applied for values education, using assessment instruments such as surveys and interviews (Dilmaç, 1999; Veugelers & Kat, 2003; Sarı, 2005; Berkowitz & Bier, 2005; Skaggs & Bodenhorn, 2006; Gökçek, 2007; Husu & Tirri, 2007; Katılmış, 2010; Öztürk Samur, 2011; Uyanık Balat, Özdemir Beceren & Adak Özdemir, 2011).

Pictures drawn by children can be used to determine their knowledge about a topic, their misconceptions and interests. The first researchers to study children's pictures did so to determine their intelligence level (Burt, 1921; Goodenough, 1926; Harris, 1963). Some early theorists and researchers also examined children's pictures in relation to developmental and personality traits within the process (Koppitz, 1968; Hammer, 1958;

Machover, 1949). Studies conducted on children's pictures and on how children perceive what happens in their environment have started to be used by educators in recent years. Although the examination of children's drawings is an effective method, the number of studies conducted on this topic is quite low. On this basis, drawings should be used also for different values in future studies within the scope of values education. Pictures drawn by children can also be used to assess children's opinions and perceptions, the causes of values-related problems they encounter in the school and family environment, and the solutions they think of to solve these problems. Although a limited number of children were studied in relation to 'affection' in this study, the data obtained are valuable because to the researcher's knowledge there are no existing studies on children's perception of the value of 'affection' using their drawings. In the future similar studies should be carried out with different samples and the results compared. Even though the self-expression of children by drawing is an effective subject for analysis, it has some limitations. Interviews should be carried out with children and recorded, besides having them draw pictures in order to reduce limitations.



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