INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION IN CHILDREN OF PRIMARY SCHOOL AGE*

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Abstract

In contemporary society, communication is a subject of certain topicality and of particular importance in the process of development and formation of every human being. Communication helps young pupils to engage in dialogue, ask questions and receive responses, communicate assertively with adults, communicate positively with peers, accept the opinions of peers and adults, identify the right time to initiate a dialogue with adults or peers, to conclude a dialogue in a fair and polite manner.

Communication efficiency, however, depends on the level of development of the communication skills of the communicators. The development of interpersonal communication skills begins early, having its specificity at each age. The development of communication skills is a process of great complexity and especially the primary school age it coincides with the social integration of the child in an organized group where communication has a very important role for establishing the relationship with others.

Interpersonal relationships are established and evolve based on the background of interpersonal communication between people, treating them as conscious and direct psychological alliances between people. Interpersonal relationships of primary school children are formed and developed based on individual particularities, as well as based on the types of relationships internalized and learned from the family and the school environment. In the present study we have to analyze the ability of young school pupils to communicate effectively.

Key words: Communication; Interpersonal communication; Interpersonal relationships; Primary school-age.

1. Introduction

Interpersonal communication is an inherent need for the full and valuable realization of human potential. Scientists explain the concept of communication as a

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"specific category of human activity, which has the main role in establishing, developing and perpetuating relationships between people in various environments" (Gippenreuter, 2019, p. 10). This reality requires contemporary psychology to trace and secure the realization of a new goal: to make interpersonal communication more efficient. Communication efficiency, however, depends on the level of development of the communication skills of the communicators. In this sense, interpersonal communication can be enhanced by identifying and implementing theoretical and applied benchmarks.The development of interpersonal communication skills begins early, having its specificity at each age. The development of communication skills is a process of great complexity and especially the primary school age it coincides with the social integration of the child in an organized group where communication has a very important role for establishing the relationship with others.

Interpersonal communication also mediates *interpersonal relationships*. Researchers in the field state that interpersonal relationships are established and evolve based on the background of interpersonal communication between people, treating them as conscious and direct psychological alliances between people (Floyd, 2013). Interpersonal relationships of primary school children are formed and developed based on individual particularities, as well as based on the types of relationships internalized and learned from the family and the school environment.

2. The theoretical framework

When we intend to define the concept of communication we observe that scientific studies provide us a multitude of possibilities to define the notion of communication from the perspective of different fields: psychology, pedagogy, sociology, physics, mathematics. The simplicity of defining the concept of communication is only apparent, the same as possibility to include communication and its components into a generally valid definition.

The Larousse Psychology Dictionary defines communication as follows: Communication, relationship between individuals. Communication is primarily a perception. It involves the deliberate or undeliberate transmission of information intended to clarify or influence an individual or a group of receptors. But it does not reduce itself to this, at the same time as information is transmitted, there is an action on the receiver subject and a retro-active effect (feedback) on the emitting person who, in turn, is influenced (Sillamy, 1998, p. 73).

Following the theoretical analysis, it was found that the communicative dimension reflects a phenomenon naturally included in the dynamics of social processes. Interpersonal communication includes:

a) communication factors (actors, characters, agencies); the distance between them and their location, both being important for specifying the particularities of the message transmission channel;

b) the framework and the institutional context of the communication that automatically prints a certain type of code: official, media, colloquial, didactic, secret, etc.;

c) enunciative situation (interview, debate, lesson, scientific session, etc.);

d) active or latent repertoires of transceivers;

e) feedback practiced;

f) jamming factors (noise) (Bălan *et al.*, 2008, p. 234).

Therefore, we define interpersonal communication as an activity of socializing people in a given situation or social context which establishes connections and interactions between at least two people, each coming with thoughts, ideas, feelings, behaviors, values, attitudes, needs, goals, visions that they communicate to each other, capitalize on them, develop them or shape them in the situation of communication and interpersonal relationships.

The social aspect of communication and interpersonal communication, according to Neculau (2004, p. 97), ensures a vital connection with other people, so "communication plays a fundamental role in the exchanges and interactions that are conducive to the training of a consensual universe".

Rules governing communication (human) set behavioral patterns to which members of a community have to comply and have three remarkable properties: (a) they can be followed, (b) are prescriptive, and (c) they have a contextual validity (Fârte, 2004, p. 12).

Researchers Bocoş, Gavra, Marcu (2008, p. 44) describe the functions of communication:

1) The first function refers to understanding and knowledge. Thus, communication supports both a better oneself knowledge and the knowledge of others.

2) A second function of communication is to develop consistent relationships with others.

3) The third function concerns the dimension of influence and persuasion of communication. In the communication, we can influence the pro and contra arguments of the interlocutor, but also we can influence his/ her behavior to achieve certain goals.

The period of primary school age is a qualitatively new stage in human psychological development. In early childhood, children enter the stage of concrete operations, they have already reached the use of reason, they can think logically. ,,At the age of 7-8, they have many skills necessary for collaboration, but we also know that the expression and verbal behavior during this period are spontaneous and sincere. Thusat this age children need the help, the intervention of the elders to be educated" (Racu, Racu, 2013).

Different subsystems of the environment contribute to the formation of the child's relationship: the family, school, and social environment where the child's personality is born and continually develops. The family environment is the first model of interpersonal relationships for the child and becomes a guideline for their further interactions. Thus, the communication of children with adults is complementary, but children also need the partnership of adults, concidering the "need to collaborate in acquiring everyday practical actions and in the process of theoretical and practical knowledge of various fields" (Bolboceanu, 2007, p. 40).

After Vygotsky (1991), young child, initially learns how to properly perform activities with the adult. As the child develops, the circle of activities they carry out on their own widens, based on the activities initially carried out with the adults, that become for the child resources for the subsequent successful activities in the near future.

Relationships with siblings also contribute to the development of interpersonal communication skills of younger school children. The way of communication and relationship with the brothers and sisters is taken over later in the social interaction with peers. The interpersonal relationships of young school children are rich in the cognitive discoveries and emotional feelings. Thus, being in the first interpersonal relationships, children relate and find friends with a similar communication style like their or they are affiliated with a complementary style. These social connections can serve as a strong foundation for future interpersonal relationships (Lisina, 2009).

Therefore, specially a friendly family environment, the tenderness of the parents contributes to the positive positioning of the child in school and in the formation of an adequate self-appreciation (self-esteem) appropiate to the self and in the formation of a proper conscience (Abric, 2002).

The specificity of interpersonal communication in children is highlighted in the instructive-educational activities. Platon (2001, p. 28) highlights: "The pupil's adaptation to school depends on a multitude of factors and their permanent interaction. Some factors are intrinsic, others are inherent in the different environments where the pupil is present or some others they will have to face: family, as the main basis for "building" reality; the school, as the place of updating and developing its intellectual, emotional, social and knowledge acquisition capacities; the society in which he will have to integrate".

At the school, in the training process, the self-esteem of young children is formed based on the evaluations provided by the teacher. Here the children know their first teacher who differs from the educator. They learn to identify these personality qualities within the studied disciplines, they learn norms and rules of behavior. In the relations with the teacher, with the peers, in school and outside the school, they are guided by them (Lisina, 2009, p. 215).

During this period, the teacher's intervention is very useful in terms of encouraging children to initiate, establish and maintain social relationships, developing the ability to work in a team, to cooperate with others, to communicate effectively, to collaborate, with regards to developing students' social skills. The children establish relationships and form groups by making friends with the children they like and appreciate, with those they learn together, and with whom they carry out joint activities. "But, relationships with the peers are built on a partnership basis and are governed by the norms of equality, and relationships with parents and teachers remain with unequal (complementary) rights" (Ștefaneț, 2012, p. 37).

In this way, children learn a series of skills, habits, and social interactions. In the opinion of Ananiev (2004), in interpersonal communication can be highlighted the attitude of the child's personality towards himself, people, work, community.

At the same time, it has been shown that the relational dimension reflects the relationships between two or more people and develops based on the background of interpersonal communication. Interpersonal relationships are established and developed based on the background of interpersonal communication between individuals. Interpersonal relationships are presented as support that serves as a base for personality formation and self-discovery processes. At primary school-age children, the styles of attachment, education, relationships established in the family determine the formation of identity, school adaptation, and relationships with peers. The period of early schooling "develops new types of relationships based on the fact that the school as a social institution includes in its classes, groups of equal age, tutored, which go through the training program with a pronounced competitive spirit, and group relations are subject of the same rules and regulations" (Verza, 1993, p. 69).

Bozovich (2008) mentions that during the early schooling take place the most significant changes related to the attitude and the mutual relations. Once enrolled in school, the child joins to a new team. The inclusion of the child with his/her peers in the learning activity forms a common attitude of solidarity.

Interpersonal relationships and social connection are important for the well-being of children, as social interactions help to shape their sense of self. A child who grows up and develops in a favorable relationship environment (family, school and social) has the opportunity to develop as a whole and balanced person. Interpersonal relationships of primary school-age children are formed and developed based on individual characteristics, as well as depending on the types of relationships internalized and learned in the family and the school environment (Tolstaia, 2018).

Summarizing the theoretical study, we can conclude that especially at primary school age communication with peers and adults is one of the decisive factors for personality development. This is since a child attending primary school moves into a new system of interpersonal relationships. Interpersonal communication skills are directly related to personality and refer to all activities in which children participate. Difficulties in communicating with peers often lead to delays in personal development.

3. Methods and experimental group

The following *methods* were used in this stage of the research: Method "The ability to build a dialogue", after Shchetinina, René Gilles projective method.

Method developed by Shchetinina (2013) for measuring and evaluating the skills and level of verbal communication. The sheet of the proposed method contains two variables: the competence to initiate a dialogue and the competence to maintain and complete the dialogue, with five scales for the first variable and four scales for the second variable.

The René Gilles method is not related to purely projective methods. It constitutes an intermediate questionnaire between the survey and the projective tests and is an optical-verbal method. The purpose of the method is to study the particularities of the child's behavior in various situations, social adaptation and the child's interpersonal relationship with others. In order to achieve the purpose of the

research, from 12 scales we selected 5 that include items that characterize the child himself and that identify particularities of the interpersonal relationships of children with peers, namely: relationships with friends; the tendency to dominate; communicability; tendency towards isolation, isolation; appropriate social behavior (Burlachuk, Morozov, 2000).

Students from three public pre-university institutions participated in the finding experiment: the gymnasium "A. Mateevici" from Răuțel village; the "D. Cantemir" gymnasium from Pîrlița village; the gymnasium from Mărăndeni village, Fălești district. The total number of subjects − 376, of which 96 students were in the first grade, 68 − in the second grade, 80 − in the third grade, and 132 − in the fourth grade. The participation of children was possible due to the obtained consent of the parents, the management of the institution, and the school psychologists.

4. Discussion of results

To determine the initial *level of verbal communication* in children in grades I-IV, was applied the method "Ability to build a dialogue", developed by Shchetinina. The data obtained are presented in Figure 1.
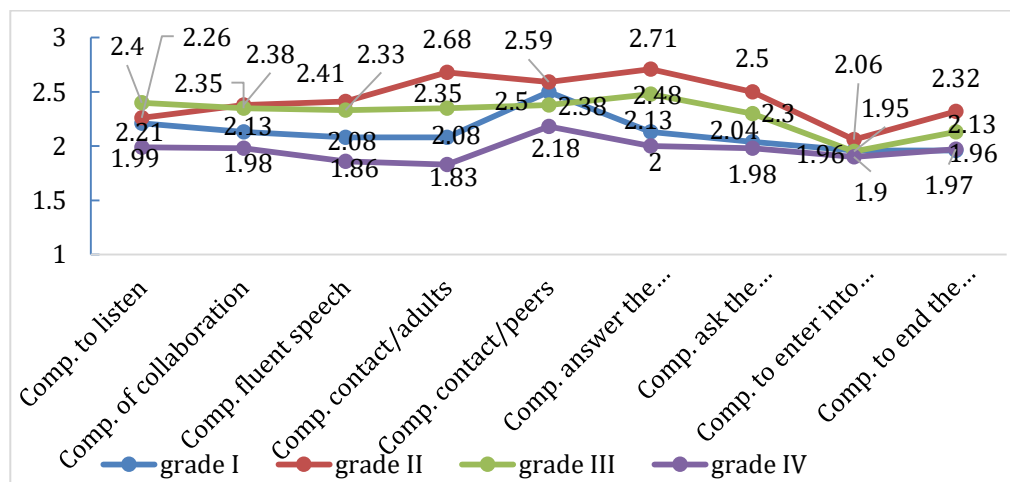

Figure 1. Demonstration of verbal communication skills in children in grades I-IV (average values)

We used the t-Student statistical method to calculate statistical differences. Indices of the statistical difference of the first-grade students compared to the second grade; III and IV are presented in Table 1, Table 2 and Table 3.

Table 1. Significance of the difference between the means in the characteristics of verbal communication in children in class I - II

Scales	t-Student	Significance level
Competence of maintaining fluent speech while establishing contact	2.003	0.05
Competence to contact adults	5.945	0.00
Competence to answer the questions	4.1	0.00
Competence to ask the questions during a dialogue	2.974	0.00
Competence of collaboration with others	2.192	0.05

Table 2. Significance of the difference between the means in the characteristics of verbal communication in children in class I - III

Scales	t-Student	Significance level
Competence to contact adults	3.045	0.00
Competence to answer the questions	3.449	0.00
Competence to ask the questions during a dialogue	2.244	0.01

Table 3. Significance of the difference between the means in the characteristics of verbal communication in children in class I - IV

Scales	t-Student	Significance level
Competence to listen	2.669	0.01
Competence to contact adults	3.974	0.01
Competence to answer the questions	2.989	0.05
Competence of maintaining fluent speech while establishing contact	2.251	0.01

The data analysis allowed us to find that by the end of the first grade - the beginning of the second grade, the students have already adapted to the school environment and the school regime. They learned to maintain discipline and to be attentive during the lesson. Children come to first grade with a more modest vocabulary. In the second grade, students have more developed communication skills since they are one year older than those in the first grade. They have enriched their vocabulary (read more fluently, recite poems more clearly and expressively, create and write essays).

When they communicate and expose their knowledge, their speech is more expressive. In the third grade children their ability to reflect, think is much more developed than in the first-grade students. They have a richer vocabulary that allows them to communicate, solve problems, compose beautiful phrases and sentences, and operate with various notions from Romanian and foreign languages. Third-grade

students, compared to first-grade ones, communicate and cooperate much easier with the teacher and colleagues. During classes, their verbal communication also comes with more ease, and they establish connections with adults and peers, create dialogues, and have conversations on different topics. These findings confirm the need for more effective interpersonal communication in primary school-age children.

The differences obtained between the first and fourth grades can be explained as follows: the young students of the first grade communicate and link interpersonal relationships during learning and play activities. The main environment for socialization at this age is school and family. A high level of verbal communication of IV grade students can be observed when they communicate verbally without using any benchmark (recommendations from parents, colleagues, in some cases the teacher's instructions). They manage to have an easy dialogue with both colleagues and adults (and also they can answer questions).

Following the identification of the incipient level of verbal communication in the students of grades I-V and separately by grades: I; II; III; IV we find that the differences between the level of communication skills development among students in grades I and grades II, III and IV are not so significant, in some skills, there is no difference at all. Hence we make the somewhat paradoxical conclusion that the set of knowledge, information, the fact that is indisputably necessary for a developing personality, which is traditional for a modern education system, does not contribute enough to the formation of communication skills so important for children's development: the ability to speak fluently while establishing contact, the ability to ask questions during the dialogue, the ability to enter into dialogue on time, the ability to end the conversation.

However, the obtained results confirm the need to streamline interpersonal communication through a program of psychological intervention. During the young school period, based on the interpersonal communication of the learning activities and the socialization process, the children develop the ability to communicate, the ability to collaborate, to work with both adults and colleagues. As a result of social interactions, pupils obtain a high level of verbal communication, there are outlined certain styles of communication models, used as a mark for future interpersonal relationships.

Peculiarities of *interpersonal relationships* in primary school children were determined based on the René Gilles method applied in grades I-IV. To verify the hypothesis, whether or not there are differences between the particularities of interpersonal relationships in primary school children, we present, in table 4, a comparative aspect, the quantitative values regarding interpersonal relationships obtained by students in grades: I, II, II and IV grade.

Table 4. Results of the study of interpersonal relationships in children in grades I-IV (percentage and average values)

Class	Attitude to wards a friend		Desire for leadership		Sociability		Desire for solitude		Social adequacy of the behavior	
	%	$\bar{X}$	%	$\bar{X}$	%	$\bar{X}$	%	$\bar{X}$	%	$\bar{X}$
Grade I	87.4	0.76	20.8	1.22	25	1.63	54.1	0.76	25	2.59
Grade II	91	0.71	14.7	1.66	8.8	2.37	70.4	0.65	8.7	2.94
Grade III	65	1.10	30	0.81	12.5	2.43	85	0.53	5	3.65
Grade IV	72.2	1.00	58.3	1.19	8.3	2.23	66.6	0.76	2.8	3.53

The statistically significant differences obtained when comparing the average indices in the interpersonal relationships of the children in grade I with grades II, III, and IV are reflected in Table 5, Table 6 and Table 7.

Table 5. Significance of the difference between the averages and the characteristics of interpersonal relationships in children in grade I - II

Scales	t-Student	Significance level
Desire for leadership	2.808	0.05
Sociability	5.933	0.00

Table 6. Significance of the difference between the averages and the characteristics of interpersonal relationships in children in grade I – III

Scales	t-Student	Significance level
Attitude to wards a friend	4.626	0.00
Sociability	2.76	0.00
Desire for leadership	3.064	0.00
Social adequacy of the behavior	5.94	0.00

Table 7. Significance of the difference between the averages and the characteristics of interpersonal relationships in children in grade I – IV

Scales	t-Student	Significance level
Attitude to wards a friend	3.772	0.00
Sociability	6.302	0.00
Social adequacy of the behavior	6.227	0.00
Desire for solitude	6.412	0.00

However, in the first grade compared to the second grade, it is necessary to teach children to self-regulate the cognitive, motivational, emotional and behavioral system in the school environment. The learning process facilitates the channeling of the child's energy and the development of their personality. Thus, during the

development the kids become friendlier, the tendency of domination is attenuating and the type of communication implemented becomes more assertive.

First grade children establish interpersonal relationships with peers in the classroom, being guided by the teacher-leader, learning, integrating and experiencing the skills provided in the curriculum: communication skills, self-esteem and interpersonal relationships. In the first grade, they acquire the status of students and comply with the school regime and the social norms. In the third grade, children already have developed more skills of relating to friends, as well as sociability and the ability to behave socially appropriately. During the fourth grade, they practice and reinforce the mentioned skills for using them later in the gymnasium stage.

Relationships with friends, sociability and social adequacy of the behavior in first-grade children are formed based on the type of communication, attachment, parenting, educational style, and predominant mode of interaction, as well as individual, environmental, and interaction patterns of the instructive-educational process. Thus, when being admitted in the first grade and becoming a student, the new relationships appear in the child's life, as well as the new rules, and the child should correspond. In the first grade, the children do their best to complete the learning activities, cooperating, being guided by the teacher. In the first grade, the children are self-centered, independent of each other, they take less into account the perspective of their peers, and they help each other as instructed by the teacher. During the teaching activities and especially the psychological ones, the children have the opportunity to train and develop their communication skills, self-knowledge, and self-appreciation.

However, in the fourth grade, children during the educational process, face their own actions, becoming aware of them and start comparing them with the model of behavior and the norms proposed by the teacher. Thus the child should adapt their rhythm and the rhythm of studies to that of the class group. During the fourth grade, students learn to be empathetic, to communicate assertively, to take into account their own desires and those of their peers. They are more aware of the friendly relationships they establish so that they choose friends from their peers reflecting on common character traits, qualities, values, attitudes, similar occupations, etc. Also in the peer group children find friends and make friends.

The interpersonal relationships of children of young school age are manifested intensely in the groups consisting of their preferences, in the children desire to find a common language with other children, in their desire to have friends, to measure their strengths with other children and to join the class group. The group of friends gains a greater significance and has a significant influence on the formation of the child's personality and social behaviors.

Regarding the appropriate social behavior, we mention that the first-graders express a special interest in the learning activities and show a lot of responsibility in fulfilling the school requirements, but towards the end of the IV grade, the diligence of some schoolchildren may decrease. This is explained by the following: IV grade students are interested in new activities; the educational activities in the first grade

are carried out more in individual form, in the fourth grade the activities are carried out in front, in small groups, or pairs. In the first grade, the children are constantly monitored by the teacher who offers them explanations, the whole learning activity being regulated by the teacher.

While in the fourth grade, children learn to do learning activities more independently or together with their classmates. It should be mentioned that the desire for solitude is more pronounced towards the IV grade.

While growing up, children increase the completeness and adequacy of awareness of their position in the peer group. But at the end of this age, the adequacy of the perception of their social status decreases. This indicates that by the end of primary school age there is a kind of qualitative restructuring of both interpersonal relationships and their awareness. Thus, during the development of the children, they become more friendly, the tendency of domination attenuating, and the type of communication implemented being the assertive one.

Next, we will analyze the peculiarities of *interpersonal relationships* in children with a high level of verbal communication in grade I compared to the specifics of children in grade IV, the results obtained by the René Gilles method.

At the *Attitude towards a friend* scale, the statistical difference obtained between the groups of students in the first and fourth grades is (t=6.244; p=0.00). In the first grade, children with a high level of verbal communication socialize with all their classmates, but they form friendships with their desk mates or with peers they have certain things in common with. So, first-graders focus more on the practical activities they can do together. In the fourth house, children with a high level of verbal communication, already having grown and developed their social skills, can understand a social situation, identify and interpret their own reactions and those of friends communicating with them. They accept the changes in the situation and are willing to find a compromise.

The peculiarities of the manifestation in the first-grade children with the high level of verbal communication of *Sociability* are openness, sincerity, positive communication with peers. In their conversations, they make statements that indicate understanding, curiosity, and synchronization with their peers, their acceptance, etc. Fourth-graders with a high level of verbal communication are aware of the effect of words and carefully match them in sentences taking into account the context (home, school, society). They are diplomats and let their peers be the first to express their opinion, to lead an activity, to propose the topic of conversation. These differences are statistically significant: (t=7.818; p=0.00).

In the first grade, children with a high level of verbal communication tend to respect discipline, listen to the teacher, and are kind to their classmates (t=9.039; p=0.00). They respect the rules and are guided by social norms. First-graders respect safety rules in any context and tend to be careful in dealing with others. In the fourth grade, children with a high level of verbal communication are organized, guided by the rules and criteria for regulating order in the family, at school, in society.

5. Conclusion

The child of primary school age who has the competence to listen; in interpersonal communication, they listen actively, show empathy and unconditional acceptance of the interlocutor. Working with adults and peers, the little student is guided by rules, values, and norms. Working in pairs/groups with adults or peers they ask questions, answer clearly, accept criticism, and appreciation.

The little student who can speak fluently uses correct, appropriate words, in the formulation of statements uses personal pronouns "I", creates affirmative statements, expresses empathy, easily establishes the connection and interpersonal relationships with others. In carrying out the activities, the young student is acquiring new information and argues his own opinions, at the same time listening to parents and accepting their advice.

As a result of effective communication between parent and child, the child learns to collaborate, compromise, or adapt to the communicative situation. Children collaborate, ask questions, clarify or find out details about the subject of communication, provide objective and positive reverse connections to peers. Also, they propose ideas, alternative solutions to problems.

The primary school student who communicates effectively answers clearly, honestly, and precisely to the questions received, being attentive to the questions of the interlocutor (adult/peer); has the competence to ask questions adapting to the topic of dialogue and using the communication channels specific to the interlocutor (adult/peer).

At the same time, communication skills require constant development, especially in children with low levels of verbal communication. The efficiency of interpersonal communication in primary school children can serve as a basis for effective interaction and socialization in the future age stages.

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