Preschool Children’s Self-Concepts and Academic Achievement: Preliminary Findings

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BACKGROUND

During early childhood, children begin to develop an understanding of their attributes, abilities, and values. This sense of who they are characterizes their developing self-concepts. Children’s self-concepts become increasingly differentiated and multidimensional over time. More specifically, children’s self-concepts can be subdivided into three domains: cognitive, social, and physical (Burnett, 1994; Harter, 1992; Marsh, et al., 2002). Children’s self-concepts have important developmental and educational implications. First, it is likely that children’s self-concepts are related to their overall feelings of self-worth. Second, children’s self-concepts may also be related to academic achievement and motivation. Given the potential impact of self-concept on children’s development and educational outcomes, it is important to examine this construct.

Although extensive research has examined the self-concepts of children in elementary, middle, and high school, little is known about the self-concepts of younger children. The current study examines preschool children’s self-concepts, and explores the relationship between self-concept and academic achievement.

METHOD

Participants
• The current sample included 48 children (30 males) between the ages of 3.0 and 5.7 (M = 4.5). Eight additional children participated in the study but did not complete all of the tasks because of fatigue and/or misunderstanding of questions or scale usage.

Materials
• Children’s self-concepts were measured using two separate self-concept measures:
  - Marsh Self-Description Questionnaire for Preschoolers (SDQP; Marsh, 2002)

Procedure
• Children were recruited from two local childcare centers.
• For each child, all of the measures were administered individually in a quiet room within the childcare center.
• Each testing session began by explaining the nature of the tasks and then assuring each child of the confidentiality of his/her responses. Upon receiving each child’s verbal assent, the child was asked to draw a picture of himself/herself. This established rapport and increased the child’s comfort level.
• The order of tasks was counterbalanced, with half of the children completing the Joseph Scale first and the other half completing the SDQP first. The K-SEALS was completed in between the two self-concept measures. A fourth task, an interest concept measure, was added at the end of the testing session.
• The majority of children completed the 4 tasks within 25 minutes.
• Children were given stickers as a token of appreciation.

SELECTED REFERENCES


RESULTS

Bivariate Correlations Between the Joseph Scale and the SDQP

|                | Girls’ SDQ-P | Boys’ SDQ-P | p
|----------------|--------------|-------------|---
| Joseph Scale  | - .30        | .48*        | .01

Bivariate Correlations Between Academic Self-Concept and Academic Achievement

|                | Girls’ K-SEALS | Boys’ K-SEALS | p
|----------------|----------------|---------------|---
| Academic Self-Concept | .68*           | -.07          | .00

CONCLUSIONS

• There were no sex differences in children’s self-concepts scores. Both girls and boys displayed similar levels of self-concept on both the Joseph Scale and SDQP. The vast majority of children displayed positive self-concepts.
• There were no sex differences on the subscales (academic, social, and physical) of the SDQP. This study warrants further research into children’s self-concepts as well as the relationships between their self-concepts and achievement. More specifically, the measurements/methodology used to assess young children’s self-concepts need to be examined.