Self-development

A trajectory from family over school to friends?

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Self-development: A trajectory from family over school to friends?

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Introduction

- From a cultural-historical point of view, school is a fundamental setting for appropriation of cultural tools and these transform the way the subject perceives the world (Vygotsky, 1986)
- A considerable volume of research has shown the relationship between formal education and processes of memory, categorization, reasoning and problem solving (e.g., Luria, 1976)
- Formal education may similarly change the notion of self, e.g., away from defining oneself contextually in terms of one’s group of origin (ibid.) and towards the ideas of the independent citizen that is promoted by Modernity (Olson, 1994), but more research is needed in this area
- To investigate that issue, the Sevilla Laboratory of Human Activity integrates research on self from cross-cultural psychology (e.g., Markus & Kitayama, 1991), autobiographical memory (e.g., Wang & Conway, 2004) and narrative (e.g., Smorti, 2004)
- For example, de la Mata et al. (in press) compared Mexican groups with different levels of formal education and found more indicators of relatedness in the self-memories of participants with little education, whereas participants with more education were more prone to recall themselves in ways associated with an independent notion of self

- The present study adds a within-subject analysis (Antalíková, Gulbrandsen, de la Mata Benítez, & Santamaría, in press) to support the assumption that it is indeed education that enhances independent notions of self and not vice versa. For context, models of self from cross-cultural psychology and autobiographical memory are summarized before the results.

Hypotheses and suggested model

Based on the mutual interrelatedness of autobiographical memory and self-construal, and the assumption of school promoting an independent self, we asked adolescents to recall meaningful memories about their family, school and friendship, expecting the following:

1. Looking at independence and relatedness of self, school memories will display the highest autonomy, while family and friendship memories will point to higher independence;
2. Looking at the time perspective of adolescent self-development, family memories will be recalled from the earliest age followed by school and friendship memories, mirroring our participants’ developmental trajectory.

Results

- Participants: 22 Norwegian (M = 17.95), 40 Slovak (M = 18.2) and 52 Danish adolescents (M = 19.1) – together a sample of 114 adolescents (M = 18.56), balanced for gender
- Method: questionnaire in participants’ mother tongue asking them to recall memories about their family, school and friends, which should be at least 1 year old and of a special meaning to them
- Variables: participant’s age at the time of recalled events (self-reported); other-self ratio (number of references to other people divided by number of references to oneself) (Wang & Conway, 2004)

Discussion

- Both of our hypotheses were supported:
  1. Participants did recall family memories from the earliest age, followed by school and friendship memories, following a developmental trajectory where the three settings shift in importance; and
  2. In school memories, participants did refer more to themselves than to other people, as opposed to family and friendship memories, indicating that when thinking and talking about school, they were thinking more independently of themselves than in the other social settings.
- This suggests that formal education can change the notion of one’s self towards higher independence, but also that the setting of school itself (and the remembering thereof) activates this independence within one’s self accordingly, which is displayed in one’s autobiographical memories.

References