

FIELD THEORY AND ANALYSIS OF CHILD BEHAVIOR IN METZGER'S SCHOOL

Development of Self Consciousness and Motivation for Achievement

Anna Arfelli-Galli

The Gestalt movement has contributed to developmental psychology since its beginnings, but its contribution to developmental problems has taken on a decisive progress with the epistemological considerations by LEWIN (1926, 1927, 1931a, 1931b) and the shift from the study of perception and thought to the study of behavior. In 1926 the series *Untersuchungen zur Handlungs- und Affektpsychologie* began to appear in the *Psychologische Forschung*. In this series, behavior is analyzed considering the global situation in which the subject is acting. Within the series, LEWIN and collaborators developed a number of fundamental constructs to describe and interpret the subject's behavior. Most studies were focused on adults, but in 1933 the series published two works by Sara FAJANS on the variations of the valence in relation to the distance of objects in children aged between 0 and 6 years. In the following years, the field-approach developed by LEWIN has provided significant contributions to developmental psychology with the works of the GOTTSCHALDT school in Berlin, of the MEILI school in Bern and of the METZGER school in Münster.

Under Wolfgang METZGERs guidance, developmental psychology has found a rather peculiar space in the Münster school; the analysis of child behavior was developed, increasing the understanding of the development of personality, with remarkable educational and didactic repercussions. In this last context the wide range of contributions is documented in a synthesis by METZGER (1971).

Here, I will focus on works by KEMMLER (1957), KLAMMA (1957) and HECKHAUSEN (*et al.* 1962, 1963a, 1963b, 1964, *et al.* 1965) – all METZGER pupils - which have particular relevance as examples of research on the development of the personality based on the field-approach. Their focus is on the articulation of the psychological field in the interval between 1;6 and 6 years, from the appearance of the first negativism conducts and the will of “doing-it-alone”, to the achievement motivation, and the appearance of a true level of aspiration.

Reintroducing these studies acknowledges the contribution given by their authors to the Gestalt school of developmental psychology; however, the value of this research is not merely historical, because their contribution to the understanding of the early phases of self-knowledge and of achievement-motivated-behavior is still relevant today. These studies show that the LEWINian approach is an ideal tool to identify the dynamic underlying a behavior, even when an effective inter-subjective exchange is impossible.

1. KEMMLERs research on the negativistic age

Negativistic conducts (*Trotz* in German), which appear in the second half of the second year of life imply educational problems, but also problems of interpretative nature, since their occurrence is unforeseeable and dissonant both from the situation in itself, and also

from the sociable nature of the child. In the 1950's, before KEMMLER's studies, these conducts had already been mentioned in the international psycho-pedagogic literature, and interpreted in an Aristotelian essentialist way. At the time rare single-case observations had been performed on these conducts, which were the subject of heterogeneous considerations in terms of educational psychology, and of a complete failure in terms of experimental investigations. LEWIN (1935, 15; 37) refers to these conducts to criticize what was at the time the current interpretation:

The fact that three-year-old children are quite often negative is considered evidence that negativism is inherent in the nature of three-year-olds, and the concept of a negativistic age or stage is then regarded as an explanation (though perhaps not a complete one) for the appearance of negativism in a given particular case! [...]

[...]; just as the explanation of negativism by the *nature* of the three-year-old child entails for Galilean concepts the consequence that all three-year-old children must be negative the whole day long, twenty-four hours out of the twenty-four.

In her study KEMMLER endorses LEWIN's criticism and adopts his proposal for a Galilean research model that should observe the child in natural settings:

The actual behavior of the child depends in every case both upon his individual characteristics and upon the momentary structure of the existing situation¹.

During 6 months KEMMLER has shared family life with a child in negativistic phase to elaborate an operative definition of this conduct, distinct from other similar behaviors like simple disobedience, aggressiveness, self-esteem, particular expressions of shame and playful exercise of rivalry:

Negativism is always a reaction of a child to an action – broadly speaking – that the environment directs against him. A child who is not colliding against anything, who does not feel obstacles or demands, has no negativistic reactions. This reaction of the child feeling the environment as being hostile rouses his personality and takes on an affective and dramatic character, with an expressive attitude of diffused denial. Gestures are typical. Contact with the surroundings is lost; even just for a few minutes, the child is not easily influenced, it is not possible to get in touch with him. This reaction is inappropriate and has no adequate relation to desires the child could or would have realized. (KEMMLER 1957, 285²)

The sample

KEMMLER has studied a sample of 121 subjects in age from 1½ to 2½ years. Children have been observed in heterogeneous natural environments: 8 families of various social-economic status, 2 institutions, one nursery school and one children's clinic unit. Negativistic behaviors were recorded for 71 children, including all the 17 children observed in families. Typical events have occurred only with 54 of the 90 children observed in institutions. All of the 488 observed events were recorded by the Author immediately following their occurrence³.

¹ LEWIN cit. in KEMMLER, op. cit., 286.

² All translations from German are by the Author.

³ Observations went on for 2 years and 8 months for a total of 71 days, of which 46 in families and 25 in institutions. The 8 families have been visited from 9 am to 7 pm, with 274 observed events in 17 children (10 boys, 7 girls). Children in non-typical ages present in the families did not present negativistic behaviors.

After a global phenomenological analysis based on the operative definition mentioned above, the analysis of the parts is applied to the persons involved, to the frustrated needs, to the child's expressive behavior, to environmental and gender differences, and finally to the evolution of the phenomenon.

The persons involved

Four hundred and thirty-two (88,5%) of the 488 observed negativistic events concerned conflicts between the child and adults or older children. Events observed in family can be divided into responses to obstacles set by: the mother (22,0%); father (2,6%); Author (41,9%); nanny (17,8%); brothers (8,8%); adult strangers (1,8%); grandmother (1,4%). No negativistic reaction to physical obstacles has been observed.

No observation contradicts the operative definition of conduct appearing when the child encounters an obstacle; furthermore, it is clear that the obstacle is originated by people familiar to the child, while he reacts differently when encountering obstacles coming from the physical world.

Environmental and gender differences

There have been no noteworthy difference in relation to the families' socio-economic status. In institutions events have been occurring at later ages. In nursery school events have been less frequent than in families and happening only for the youngest ones; in the children's clinic unit they have been almost absent. No gender differences have been recorded.

Frustrated needs

In 393 events (80,4%) the conflict aroused when the adult demands had interfered with desires that the child had already manifested, or when the adult had tried to stop actions the child was already busy with. In 59 events (12,1%) the conflict occurred when the adult tried to hinder the child's physical autonomy.

Example 1. The father has promised Max a drive. The nanny – the person he loves above all others – quickly tries to change his wet trousers. The child lives this as an hesitation or an obstacle to his outing. He throws himself on the ground, puts up resistance, screams continuously and quickly rolls about, paying no attention not to get hurt or to hit the furniture. The whole is so violent that it is to lift him from the ground. Anxiety takes over the whole family. At the end, with great difficulty he's dressed with clean trousers. From the moment he sits in the car next to his father every trouble is forgotten and he is completely happy.

Example 2. Two years later, Max (4;7), his younger brother Rolf (2;8) and the Author are out for a stroll. They stop by a monument on which pedestal the children start climbing up and down. After a while they are invited to stop. Max obeys even if he is enjoying himself very much. Rolf refuses to stop. He screams terribly, throws himself down all stiff, and has to be literally dragged away. He is all red in the face and bites when he is taken by the hand. There's nothing left to do but to embrace him, and he suddenly calms down.

Only in 35 events (7,2%) the conflict has arisen as a rejection to the adults' orders, without the child having shown any special intentions beforehand.

Example 3. The father asks Max (2;6) to tell his name, Max. The child cannot pronounce it right yet, and his father treats him like a stupid. Max understands the negative assessment. He abandons his father ('goes-out- of- the-field'), sulks, and for some minutes he is unapproachable.

The expressive behavior

The reaction can appear in active form, and more rarely in passive form, but the expression taken by every single child is extraordinarily typical. Common characteristics of these two different forms are the child's isolation and communicative closure: for a short period he is not easily influenced, the hindered action's goal doesn't matter anymore, while he appears giving in to an emotion that he seems incapable to rule. His behavior appears primitive and completely inadequate to reach the initial goal that now seems to have lost any relevance.

Example 4. Berni (3;11) is being washed. Doris (2;0) comes closer and screams "Doris too, Doris too". As the nanny doesn't pay attention right away, she shouts in anger. When it's her turn, she refuses bathing for a while.

The negativistic behavior is fundamentally primitive, a-finalistic and closed in itself.

Extension in time

For some children the single event lasts only a few minutes and stops as rapidly as it has appeared. The critical event ends by going back to a normal and peaceful relationship with the adult; only in some children a latent aura of negativism remains for a variable amount of time. In rare cases the event can take on very dramatic critical forms.

The progress in the course of months is typical: the behavior appears around 18 months of age, its intensity reaches the maximum at 22 months and at 34 months it disappears in most subjects. When faced by a crisis, some parents systematically abandon their requests. In such cases the dynamic changes, negativistic crisis become a way to remove the obstacles set by the adult, and crisis can show up until and beyond the 3 year of age⁴.

In summary, KEMMLER has shown that children express negativistic conducts only when, having started an autonomous action, they are hindered by orders or constrictions coming from significant adults. It is a dynamic made possible by the progress in development: the autonomy of ambulation, the object's constancy and the widening of memory. Such episodes occur when a significant adult tries to hinder an action *already* independently undertaken by the child, who is no longer easily distracted from his intentions as at earlier ages; this explains why the phenomenon could not be studied in experimental settings. The a-finalistic nature of the negativistic behavior indicates that the frustrated need is the child's autonomy, rather than the goal the child wanted to achieve. The child linguistic incompetence and the little developed future-time perspective further justify this quite abnormal reaction when related to the real entity of the frustration. These behaviors document a developmental progress of great interest, because:

In order to experience the other as an opponent, as something hindering one's desires, one necessarily has to have reached a certain degree of self consciousness (*Ichbewusstsein*) (KEMMLER 1957, 319-320).

⁴ To answer the question on the future of child behavior, KEMMLER has examined a considerable number of records (1800) of a psycho-pedagogic centre. In her opinion negativistic conducts are not associated to psychic symptom, but rather to the educational behavior of the parents: where the educative approach was judged as repressive, negativistic conducts had quickly disappeared and this correlated with an insecure psychological development; where instead the educative approach had been evaluated as incoherent, negativistic conducts persisted, and psychological development had been lacking of self control and respect of social rules.

2. KLAMMA's research on wanting-to-do-it-alone

In the same age interval in which negativistic conducts appear, the child experiments heterogeneous situations he organizes in various ways. An empirical evidence is given by the wanting-to-do-it-alone (*Selbermachenwollen und Ablehnung von Hilfe* in German) that can be observed around 2 years of age. Often signalled in specialist literature (FALES cit. in LEWIN et al. 1944, 354; MÜLLER 1958), this conduct has been studied by KLAMMA (1957), who presents it as a lively request of doing by oneself associated with refusal of help from the adult. This behavior does not aim at reaching a performance level, but rather at doing autonomously; the first difficulties encountered in the execution are enough for the child to desist from his intentions, and ask for the help he had vigorously declined previously; this is observed until 4 years of age. Even when these behaviors are not clearly aimed at the achievement of a result (one speaks of aspiration's precursors) they do require the consciousness of anchoring the ongoing activity to oneself: a sense of being and being the cause of one's actions. On this issue KLAMMA's results are similar to what observed by KAGAN (1981) in children of 24 months, on the intensification of statements with which they anticipate or describe their activities.

By wanting-to-do-it-alone a child articulates his personal experience according to three polarities: 1) the subject source of the action - himself; 2) the physical object towards which the action is directed for an expected change; 3) the adult with whom he negotiates roles. In these situations, the child appears able to control a complex dynamic; in front of the adult proposing to help him in the action, he neither loses sight of his final aim of the human partner with whom - differently from the negativistic conduct - he continues to communicate in a congruous way.

For HECKHAUSEN *et al.* (1962, 317), as for the other mentioned authors, wanting-to-do-it-alone is a rudimentary aspiration and this leads us to the following theme.

3. HECKHAUSEN's research on the development of motivation

Among HECKHAUSEN's⁵ several studies on motivation, particularly interesting for their continuity with the previously studied phases are those related to the development of achievement-motivated-behaviors (HECKHAUSEN, ROELOFSEN 1962, HECKHAUSEN, WASNA 1965) and to the appearance of the level of aspiration (HECKHAUSEN, WAGNER 1965). We will here examine the developmental of the behaviors that LEWIN's collaborators, starting from HOPPE (1931) and DEMBO (1931) have analysed in adults.

3.1. Achievement motivation

The experiments were carried out with children from a nursery school which had been open since two months. The experimenter and her assistant were already famil-

⁵ For a detailed bibliography see HECKHAUSEN H., HECKHAUSEN J. (2006³).

iar with the children, who treated them like personnel of the same school. Fifty-three children (32 boys and 21 girls) aged between 2;7 and 6;3 years, took part in the research. Each subject is invited to build a tower faster than the experimenter.

The procedure chosen to identify the earliest expression of achievement motive (*Leistungsmotivation* in German) is simpler than those used by previous researchers (MÜLLER 1958). The experimenter and the child are seated one in front of the other, each with his set of materials; an assistant, seated at a different table placed at 1,5 meter on the side, takes notes of the game. Each set of materials includes a white wooden base with a central white pin with a coloured tip, red for one player, blue for the other. In a dish by his side, either player has 12 wooden rings of the same colour of the pin's tip, which are used to build the tower; a metal bar allows one to insert only one ring at a time. Once all the rings are in place, the white part of the pin is hidden and the tower appears of a single colour. In this way, the evaluation of the game is possible through perceptive indexes and its cognitive elaboration is very simple.

The research starts with the exploration of materials. The invitation is: *Now everybody builds a tower, me here and you there*. Obviously, the child is allowed to be the winner. The true competition starts after having undone the first construction. The assignment is: *Now we'll build a tower, quickly. Want to see who ends first? You or me?*. As soon as either one ends, the child is asked: *Who ended first?* The child's answer is awaited without solicitations, and all his behaviors are accepted, silence included, after which he's invited to undo his tower: *So, now we undo the tower and we rebuild it!* From the fourth time on, a prediction is asked: *Who will end first this time? You or me?* Until the seventh trial the experimenter says: *Let's do one more!* After the seventh trial, closing a cycle, the child is asked: *Should we do more?* If the child is willing to continue, the cycle can be repeated until the 16th tower, right before which it is announced: *This is the last one and then we stop*. Nevertheless, the child is free to stop the competition in any moment.

Manipulating speed the experimenter alternates the child's success and failure. In the exploration phase success goes to the child, which is in the 1°, 2°, and 4° trial. In the 3°, 5° and 6° trial success goes to the experimenter.

The child's behaviors to be analysed are the competitive behavior, the competition duration, the different reactions to the questions *Who has won* and *Who will win*, the going-out-of-the-field modalities, and the reactions to success and failure.

Competitive behavior

The competitive behavior is characterized by a quick start in building the tower as soon the assignment is given, by tension and concentration during construction, by fleeting looks to control the opponent's advancement state. Reactions to success and failure are differentiated. There is a clear contrast with respect to playing conducts denoted by freedom in relation to the goal, by the cyclic activation of tension and distension states, and by undifferentiating the goal (HECKHAUSEN 1964).

From 3;6 years on all children show competitive behaviors, even if of short duration. Of the 21 youngest children aged between 2 and 3;6 years, 5 simply play with the materials; the assignment for them is to *build*. Other 6 children are totally concen-

trated on the tower building; for them the assignment is to *build a tower*. Only 10 understand the assignment in its totality and the contest's social structure in the meaning of *building a tower before the opponent*.

Contest duration

An evaluation is made on the number of competitions the child undertakes before leaving the field. The number of attempts consistently increases at about 3;6 years, an age at which all understand the assignment. A slow growth follows, stabilizing at 5;6 years. Inter-individual differences are big. Early going-out-of-the-field before having completed a cycle, decreases with age. Before 3;7 years exiting after failure prevails; from 3;7 to 4;6 years exits after success or after failure are equal; from 4;7 years there is a clear prevalence of exits after failure.

Behaviors in reaction to the question: Who won?

Answers are varied and complex. Special attention is given to expressivity in a global sense, analysed in attention focusing, mimic expression, eyes direction, bodily attitude as contact or as avoidance of the field's natural parts: own tower, the experimenter's tower, the experimenter herself, sometimes the assistant⁶.

In the 10 children aged between 2;3 to 3;6 years that have shown a competitive behavior, attention is generally focused on the tower. The emotional component is not particularly strong in case of success nor in failure. After failure children are silent, with eyes low or ashamed. Only 3 children have had basically positive strong mimic expressions independently of the result.

In the behavior of the 16 children aged between 3;7 to 4;6 years focusing shifts between their own tower and the opponent. Mimic expression is strong and distinct: positive in case of success, spontaneously announced in visual contact with the experimenter; in case of failure the expression is tense and visual contact is avoided. Ambiguous mimic expressions, such as a twisted smile, are frequent. Only 5 children declare their failure.

In the 25 children aged between 4;7 to 6;10 years there is a tendency to control affections with expression softening and motility control, which are more marked after failure. Contrast between success and failure is evident in the bodily attitude, which is focused and closed on the tower in case of failure, and characterized by open communicative contact with the experimenter in case of success. Spontaneous reactions to success decrease and spontaneous declarations of failure increase.

Behaviors after failure

Behaviors after failure present a phenomenology that can be organized in four modalities: 1) not taking note of failure (being silent, remembering previous success, lying, etc.), which decreases from 2 to 6 years; 2) intensifying efforts (in the

⁶ Expressive behavior analysis occupies some 35 pages!

following trial or in substitute actions like undoing the tower), which increases from 2 to 6 years; 3) abandoning the contest situation (literally, or by playing with the materials kit or by doing substitute actions, etc.), which decreases from 2 to 6 years; 4) attempts to avoid failure, which is independent of age and includes either conducts aimed at ensuring success (such as undoing the tower only partially, setting rules for the experimenter, etc.), or conducts for failure prevention (such as declaring one's intention to give up winning, stopping construction during progress). These are differently oriented attempts of controlling the conflict: seeking success or avoiding failure, reaching the goal or decreasing pressure, aimed at the past or at what might happen in the future.

In the Author's opinion their phenomenology does not differ from the adults'.

Answers to the question: Who will finish first this time? You or me?

Of the 10 children from 2;3 to 3;6 years almost all answer *me*; 4 children after having abandoned the competition start playing with tower and answer *you*.

Of the 16 children from 3;7 to 4;6 years, 10 always answer *me*; two never speak; the others are silent sometimes and sometimes answer, but only one child designates the opponent as winner.

Of the 25 children from 4;7 to 6;10 years 9 declare the experimenter as the winner, while the others show clear signs of conflict in body behavior, mimic or voice tone.

In short, one competes as soon as the situation structure is dominated on the cognitive level and this is what regularly occurs at the age of 3;6 years⁷. Feelings of joy or anger of the previous phase transform into pride and shame for one's own competence or incompetence: the positive result is anchored to the self. The conflict established on failure is overcome in various ways, some dependent and others independent of age. At the age of 3;6 the capability of keeping up the competition also augments; global expressive behavior, in particular an ever livelier mimic, shows a progressive intensification of the conflict between hope of success and fear of failure in a past perspective; in a future perspective the plane of unreality still prevails. An important change occurs at the age of 4;6, with a sharp increase of the duration of the competition. Mimic is controlled. In the past perspective the level of reality stands out and failures are admitted; the opponent's success can also be predicted. The temporal perspective widens and the levels of past and future interact with one another, but only at 5;6 the reality plane dominates also in the future perspective.

This research highlights the progressive differentiation of the cognitive structure of the child life-space between 2;6 and 5;6 years. There are three stages of change. The

⁷ To give more evidence to the fact that it is necessary to have a cognitive control of the situation in order to be able to compete, the experimenter used the same procedure to examine 62 seriously retarded subjects, ranging between 3;1 to 6;10 years of mental age. Their behaviors confirmed the relationship between mental development and personal experience of the game (HECKHAUSEN, WASNA 1965).

first at 3;6 years when the child starts competing and a real motivation is organized. At 4;6 years the conflict centred on future trials appears, and the insecurity of the realistic prediction takes the place of desire-based security. Finally, at 5;6 years the conflict is over, one gets to controlling one's own emotions and conducts characterised by effort intensification become more frequent.

The results confirm what already has been stated by LEWIN on the genetic superiority of unreality on reality. The relationship between these two planes depends on the differentiation of the child's life space in the given moment, on the wideness, direction and structure of the time perspective, on the content, structure and tension of that particular relationship subject-environment. The construction of the reality plane in a future time perspective takes place with the inclusion of the reality plane already organized in the past time perspective. This is a basic precondition for giving oneself real goals and planning them. Conflicts arise when the difference in value among the two planes is limited, which is to say when neither the unreality plane nor the reality one prevail. Being these conditions even, conflict evolves from a state of prevailing unreality to one of prevailing reality.

3.2 *The development of the level of aspiration*

In a subsequent research HECKHAUSEN and WAGNER (1965) explored the level of aspiration (*Anspruchsniveau* in German), that is the difference between the result one has achieved and the result one aims at obtaining in the next trial. Fifty-three children are asked to chose among different levels of difficulty in four different contexts: jumping distant, jumping high to touch a ball, build a tower with wooden blocks, lift weights. Each subject is invited in a nursery school room where the objects necessary for the tasks are lying around. Each object has a colour corresponding to the level of difficulty of the corresponding task so that also in indexes can again be used, to facilitate the consignment's comprehension. The experimenter, with whom children are already acquainted, explains the functioning of each instrument, informing that in each task the first level, the easiest, is passed by almost all children, while almost nobody manages to pass the last level, the most difficult one. Children are free in their decisions and the experimenter uses a friendly tone, one that is not directive, and does not make comments on choices, success or failure.

Before 3;6 years children start exploring when the experimenter has not yet finished his explanation, and give little attention to the assignment. Their behavior is scarcely organized; it is more of a playful approach and a positive result is experienced with joy but not attributed to one's skills. Failure is experienced as an obstacle, a discrepancy between expectations and reality, which does not disturb the child's mood. The choice among different degrees of difficulty is rather an exploration of materials and of their relative novelty. The experimenter is a benevolent presence to whom one can speak spontaneously to tell or to share the joy of the result.

After 3;6 years children are attentive and get seriously involved in the task. Almost all children live the situation in relation to their own self and worry for failure, which is lived as an expression of their own incompetence, which provokes strong conflicts together with different attempts of overcoming it. Starting from this age, as

already seen in the tower building competition of the previous research, children are enlivened by the true aspiration to measure themselves with the task; the direction of increasing difficulty becomes more attractive than the decreasing direction, while what is too difficult is carefully delimited. Differently from the competition context of the previous research, here it is possible to study the precursors of the aspiration level through the first strategies used in choosing the goal. Actually, the choice of the degree of difficulty in which getting involved is a source of conflict for fear of failure, especially at the upper boundary of the already overcome difficulty. The social situation clearly affects behavior.

At the age of 4;6 another change takes place. Once the decision is taken to face a higher degree of difficulty than those already passed, all children appear free from conflict, even if they remain well concentrated. In case of success, their expression is measured and serious. Failure on the other hand hurts in a lasting way; all means are tried to mitigate the conflict provoked by failure, not intensifying the effort but minimizing it, looking for excuses, or doing substitute actions or even avoiding new attempts. Adults are treated as critical observers in front of whom one fears to make a bad impression.

Finally, at 5;6 years, failure does not hurt as intensely as before, and the effort to overcome it is intensified. Constancy is remarkable, choices are binding and success is often pursued till exhaustion. Experience of success is proportional to the level of overcome difficulties. Expressive behavior is more relaxed, indicating a minor degree of conflict both in the decision moment and in case of failure. The choice of the goal is now really an index of the level of aspiration.

In all children, independent of age, the above described dynamic is preceded by a period of exploration where choices of the difficulty level in which to get involved follows irregular paths, now increasing then decreasing, cyclic alternating, and where a goal of a level lower than the previous trial can be chosen both after success and after failure. These are explorative strategies that cannot yet be considered an expression of the level of aspiration. Behavior guided by a real level of aspiration differs from this preliminary phase in several aspects: the sequence of choices is aimed at the performance upper boundary and most attempts concentrate on the borderline with the already overcome difficulty; the actual performance boundaries are then seriously taken into account and not overcome by unfeasible decision; goals not overcome are not abandoned but tried again. Furthermore, decision-making strategies at the upper boundary of one's own performance allow one to individuate two different modalities: one oriented at avoidance, and the other oriented at trying to increase the performance level. These differences have inter-individual consistency (HECKHAUSEN, WAGNER 1965, 232-234).

Concluding remarks

If we consider this research globally, the evolution of the organization of a child's life space emerges in all its complexity and its theoretic and applicative relevance. Between 1;6 and 5;6 years of age a series of crucial changes occurs: from the initial consciousness of being the cause of one's own actions associated to pleasure of building, we move to the pleasure of reaching a precise result, no matter if with or without

help; later, doing-it- alone and the quality of the results become determinant: ending the tower before the opponent, jumping more distant or higher or lifting an heavier weight. Feelings of pleasure and regret evolve first into pride and shame, then into hope and fear. Together with the progressive prevailing of the plane of reality on the one of desires, these feelings contribute to structuring behavior first in terms of result evaluation, then in terms of future prediction. In parallel to this process, the structure of the social field also changes: the adult, who is initially a playing companion, with whom one can actively entertain, becomes an audience in front of whom one can make a smart or bad impression, and later a critical observer in front of whom one tries to control expressions. Individual differences in facing failure and in the dynamic of the level of aspiration have also been explored, showing differences in the ability to resist in the competition, in the prevailing of success seeking, or in the search for protection from a possible failure. Finally, this research evidenced the specific role of the relationship between the person and the environment, as shown at 2 years by the different structuring of the field when the adult is frustrating or offering help. The multi causality of behavior and inter-individual differences are widely documented in a holistic treatment typical of the METZGER school.

The attempt of identifying the child personal experience since the appearance of self-consciousness is still a central topic in developmental psychology. Yet, no single study on this subject can escape relevant objections, no matter how sophisticated its inquiring techniques have been, and this is no surprise considering the impossibility acquiring direct information from the inquired subjects; however, a synergic reading of many different studies allows to arrive at more solid conclusions. The studies by the Gestalt authors we have considered here provide already a first synergic view of longitudinal type, as they show a gradual and coherent development of the phenomenal field from 1;6 to 6 years.

KEMMLERs results which place the precursors of the appearance of self-consciousness in the second semester of the second year of life, are in agreement with the results of other studies focused on the same developmental period, such as for example those on self recognition in the mirror (ZAZZO 1948, 1993), on the appearance of emotions directed at a frustrating subject (MEILI 1957), and on the dialogic structure of non-verbal communication (CAMAIONI 1995, BAUMGARTNER, DEVESCOVI, D'AMICO 2000). Taken together, these data indicate a quality shift in the child's experience concerning self-consciousness, occurring between the end of the second and the beginning of the third year of life (ARFELLI-GALLI 2002, 2005).

Of great value are HECKHAUSENs results on the precocious appearance of motivated conducts, on the importance of cognitive factors for the development of such conducts, on the evolution of the conflict between desire and reality, on the dynamic underlying the level of aspiration and its similarity to that of the adults, and, finally on the intra-individual consistency of the adopted model. The relevance of these results goes well beyond the debate HECKHAUSEN entertained with contemporary researchers.

A final consideration relates to the richness of the data these researchers could gather using the LEWINian working method in dealing with young children. Three main features appear to contribute to the power of this method. Firstly, children are observed in their own environment by observers with whom they are already famil-

iar. Secondly, these studies are performed in situations that are either spontaneous or cognitively accessible to the children. Finally, the collected data address the child behaviour in its entirety: undertaken actions, expressive behavior and possible verbal comments are all considered and equally relevant in order to interpret the child's personal experience.

Summary

The contribution by the Gestaltpsychologie to the study of child behavior is here documented by illustrating studies by KEMMLER, KLAMMA, HECKHAUSEN, all members of the METZGER school. Their results on field articulation in children aged between 1,6 and 5,6 years, from the appearance of the first forms of self consciousness to that of the level of aspiration, appear particularly actual. Their analysis is concerned with the changes in the child's personal experience of his/her own achievements, with the conflict between hope of success and fear of failure, with the structure of the temporal perspective, with the reciprocal interaction between the plane of reality and that of unreality, and with the relationship between the child and the adults.

Zusammenfassung

Der Beitrag der Gestaltpsychologie zur Erforschung des Verhaltens von Kindern wird hier anhand von Versuchen aus der METZGER-Schule (KEMMLER, KLAMMA, HECKHAUSEN) dokumentiert. Von höchster Aktualität ist hier vor allem die Analyse der Gliederung des Feldes bei Kindern von 1;6 bis 5;6 Jahren, also in der Zeitspanne zwischen der Herausbildung von ersten Formen des Ichbewusstseins bis zum Auftreten des Anspruchsniveaus. Analysiert werden die Veränderungen im Erleben der eigenen Leistungsfähigkeit, die Formen des Konflikts zwischen Hoffnung auf Erfolg und Furcht vor Misserfolg, die Struktur der Zeitperspektive, die Wechselwirkung zwischen Realitäts- und Irrealitäts-Ebene und schließlich die Veränderungen der Beziehungen zwischen Kind und Erwachsenen.

References

- AMERIO, P. (1985): Alcune dimensioni cognitive del successo come polo di articolazione del comportamento sociale. In: GERBINO, W. (a cura di): *Conoscenza e struttura*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 11-26.
- ARFELLI-GALLI, A. (1984): Importanza e attualità del pensiero di W. Metzger per la ricerca in psicologia dell'età evolutiva. In: GALLI, G. (a cura di): *Il pensiero e l'opera di Wolfgang Metzger. Annali della Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia XVII*, 153-167.
- ARFELLI-GALLI, A. (1995): L'evoluzione del sé. Problemi e metodi. In: AAVV.: *L'evoluzione del sé. Teoria psicologica e prassi educativa*. Assisi: La Cittadella, 37-60.
- ARFELLI-GALLI, A. (2002): L'individualità dell'altro nelle prime relazioni di cura. In: GALLI, G. (a cura di): *Interpretazione e individualità*. Pisa: IEPI, 59-70.
- ARFELLI-GALLI, A. (2004): Comprendere il neonato e conoscere il figlio: due diversi itinerari. In: ARFELLI-GALLI, A., GALLI, G. (a cura di): *Interpretazione e nascita*, Pisa: IEPI, 145-160.
- ARFELLI-GALLI, A. (2005): Prima di dire Io. In: AA. *L'Io allo specchio*. Macerata: Edizioni Simple, 5-18.
- BATTACCHI, M. W. (2004): *Lo sviluppo emotivo*. Bari: Laterza.
- BAUMGARTNER, E., DEVESCOVI, A., D'AMICO, S. (2000): *Il lessico psicologico dei bambini*. Milano: Carocci.
- CAMAIONI, L. (1995): *La teoria della mente. Origini, sviluppo e patologia*. Bari: Laterza.
- DEMBO, T. (1931): Der Ärger als dynamisches Problem. *Psychologische Forschung* 15, 1-144.
- FAJANS, S. (1933a): Die Bedeutung der Entfernung für die Stärke eines Aufforderungscharakters beim Säugling und Kleinkind. *Psychologische Forschung* 17, 215-267.

- FAJANS, S. (1933b): Erfolg, Ausdauer und Aktivität beim Säugling und Kleinkind. *Psychologische Forschung* 17, 268-305.
- GALLI, G. (1977): *Lewin. Antologia di scritti*. Bologna: Il Mulino.
- GALLI, G. (1980): Die Analyse des phänomenalen Ich und die Tragweite der Gestalttheorie. *Gestalt Theory* 2, 71-77.
- GALLI, G. (1997): Beziehungen zwischen Lewins wissenschaftstheoretischen Begriffen und der Psychoanalyse. *Gestalt Theory* 19, 80-89.
- GOTTSCHALDT K. (1968): Begabung und Vererbung. Phänogenetische Befunde zum Begabungsproblem. In: H. ROTH (Hrsg): *Begabung und Lernen*. Stuttgart: Klett, 129-150.
- GOTTSCHALDT K., FRÜHAUF-ZIEGLER CH. (1958): Über die Entwicklung der Zusammenarbeit im Kleinkindalter. *Zeitschrift für Psychologie*, 162, 254-278.
- HECKHAUSEN, H. (1955): Motivationsanalyse der Anspruchsniveau-Setzung. *Psychologische Forschung* 25, 118-154.
- HECKHAUSEN, H. (1963a): *Hoffnung und Furcht in der Leistungsmotivation*. Meisenheim/Glan: Hain.
- HECKHAUSEN, H. (1963b): Eine Rahmentheorie der Motivation in zehn Thesen. *Z. exp. Angew. Psychol.* 10, 604-626.
- HECKHAUSEN, H. (1964): Entwurf einer Psychologie des Spielens. *Psychologische Forschung* 27, 225-243.
- HECKHAUSEN H. (1968): Achievement Motive Research: Current Problems and Some Contributions towards a General Theory of Motivation. In: *Nebraska Symposium on Motivation XVI*, 103-174.
- HECKHAUSEN, H., HECKHAUSEN, J. (2006³): *Motivation und Handeln*, Heidelberg: Springer.
- HECKHAUSEN, H., ROELOFSEN, I. (1962): Anfänge und Entwicklung der Leistungsmotivation: (I) im Wettstreit des Kleinkindes. *Psychologische Forschung* 26, 313-397.
- HECKHAUSEN, H., WAGNER, I. (1965): Anfänge und Entwicklung der Leistungsmotivation: (II) in der Zielsetzung des Kleinkindes. *Psychologische Forschung* 28, 179-245.
- HECKHAUSEN, H., WASNA, M. (1965): Erfolg und Misserfolg im Leistungswettstreit des imbezillen Kindes. *Psychologische Forschung* 28, 391-421.
- HOPPE, F. (1931): Erfolg und Misserfolg. *Psychologische Forschung* 14, 1-62.
- KAGAN, J. (1981): *The second year: the emergence of self-awareness*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- KEMMLER, L. (1957): Untersuchung über den frühkindlichen Trotz. *Psychologische Forschung* 25, 279-338.
- KLAMMA, M. (1957): Über das Selbermachenwollen und Ablehnen von Hilfe bei Kleinkindern. *Unveröff. Vordiplomarbeit, Psychol. Institut Münster*.
- LEWIN, K. (1926): Vorsatz, Wille und Bedürfnis. *Psychologische Forschung* 7, 330-385.
- LEWIN, K. (1927): Kindlicher Ausdruck. *Z. pädag. Psychol.* 28, 510-526.
- LEWIN, K. (1931a): Der Übergang von der aristotelischen zur galileischen Denkweise in Biologie und Psychologie. *Erkenntnis* 1, 421-466.
- LEWIN K. (1931b): *Die psychologische Situation bei Lohn und Strafe*. Stuttgart: S.Hirzel.
- LEWIN, K. (1935): *A dynamic theory of Personality*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- LEWIN, K. (1946): Behavior and Development as a Function of the Total Situation. In: LEWIN, K. (1951): *Field Theory in Social Science*. New York; Harper, 238-303.
- LEWIN, K., DEMBO, T., FESTINGER, L., SEARS, S. P. (1944): Level of aspiration. In: HUNT, McV. J. (Hg. 1944): *Personality and behavior disorders*. Vol. I, New York: Ronald Press, 333-378.
- METZGER, W. (1961): Studien zur Entwicklung des Leistungsverhaltens in der frühen Kindheit. *Z. Psychol.* 165, 271-281.
- METZGER, W. (1962): *Schöpferische Freiheit*. Frankfurt: Kramer.
- METZGER, W. (1967). Trotz: Einleitung bei einer normalen Entwicklungskrise. In: HÖRL, R. (Hrsg.): *Die Zukunft unserer Kinder*. Freiburg: Walter, 106-113.
- METZGER, W. (1971): *Psychologie in der Erziehung*. Bochum: Kamp.
- MEILI, R. (1957): *Die Anfänge der Charakter-Entwicklung*. Bern: H. Huber.

- MÜLLER, A. (1958): Über die Entwicklung des Leistungs-Anspruchsniveaus. *Z. Psychol.* 162, 238-253.
- PETTER, G. (1965): I motivi conduttori dell'opera di Lewin. In: LEWIN, K. (1965): *Teoria dinamica della personalità*. Firenze: Editrice Universitaria.
- PLAUM, E. (1989): Psychodiagnostik in der Tradition der Lewin-Schule. *Gestalt Theory* 11, 122-155.
- PLAUM, E. (1993): Kurt Gottschaldts Personale Psychologie. *Gestalt Theory* 15, 172-188.
- ZAZZO, R. (1948): Images du corps et conscience de soi. *Enfance* 1, 29-43.
- ZAZZO, R. (1993): *Reflets de miroir et autres doubles*. Paris: PUF.

Address of the Author:

Prof. Dr. Anna Arfelli-Galli
Università degli Studi di Macerata
Dipartimento di scienze dell'educazione e della formazione
Largo Bertelli - Contrada Vallebona
I-62100 Macerata
Italy