

"The bear family" method as a tool for cognitive testing in a pre-school children sample

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The theoretical framework of this study is the north-American research (Botvin, Sutton-Smith, 1977; Bornstein, 1994, Fivush et al, 2001) based on children narration during developmental age. A number of cognitive variables were selected – structure, consistency, logic complexity, and sequence of narration – in order to obtain useful diagnostic information on children's cognitive development.

The aim of this research was twofold: on one hand, to analyse the cognitive narrative level of a group of 48-month-old children and, on the other hand, to test the applicability of "The bear family" method (Bornstein, 1994; Venuti, Cesari 1996) in an Italian pre-school sample.

The "The bear family" method was administered to an Italian sample made of 66 pre-school children (coming from Padova and Caserta provinces) for cognitive investigation. This method – based on the integration between play and narration – was coded from a purely cognitive point of view. This version of the method analyzes (1) length, (2) consistency, and (3) structure of children's narration.

The length of narration was assessed based on a number of variables that measure the number of sentences (high consistency versus low consistency sentences) used during narration.

The logic complexity of narration was assessed based on a 12-points scale.

The structure of narration was assessed with a different measure, which was mainly focused on the richness of narration details

This method turned out to be particularly suitable for pre-school children. Indeed, data show that 48-month-old children fully understood the instructions and produced narrations that – albeit their poor consistency and structure – followed a certain chronology of events. Moreover, the study confirmed that story telling facilitates psychological diagnosis of children.

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