Children's Wishes

Valerie Sollars

Summary

Through the use of a projective technique, the three greatest wishes of 7-year-old and 10-year-old children were analysed. The sample under study included 227 girls and 256 boys attending five primary state schools in Malta. Each child had to think of three wishes which in his/her opinion would be suggested by the child of the same sex in the story. Significance was obtained when considering age as a variable. When considering sex differences, it was found that boys and girls conform to wishes and needs related to their sex whereas certain wishes are associated with one sex group only.

Introduction

It is almost imperative for a student of child psychology to study children's wishes as they are a reflection of various aspects of a life. Wishes reflect fears, needs, emotions, ambitions and expectations.

By expressing one's wishes an individual may give vent to his anxieties. Wishes shed light on what scares an individual, what interests him, whether his needs are to be satisfied in the immediate future as well as the aspirations and plans as a grown up. Wishes can be pleas for simple, tangible articles buty they may also transport an individual into the realm of fantasy and imagination.

Getting to know one's wishes serves as an indication of how the individual would like to grow and develop unfettered by undue pressures and impositions; how an individual rates himself and how he sees himself in relation to his peers and adults.

Wishes also indicate the type of shortcomings which preoccupy an individual and how he hopes to overcome them.

There are two methods of finding out one's wishes — by a direct method or by using a projective technique. Studying wishes by the direct method involves a straightforward question to be answered by the individual concerned. Winkley (1982) presented the situation in a similar way. In the sample:

> "the children were asked to 'imagine that magic could really happen and that wishes could come true' and then to write down their three wishes"
> *(p. 477).*

The advantage of this method is that an individual definitely knows that he has to think up his own wishes. However, one might be inhibited or feel shy to do so.

The problem is thus overcome by the projective method whereby an individual's wishes would become known in an indirect way.

Rationale of the Projective Technique

With all types of projective techniques, ambiguous stimuli are presented. These stimuli are introduced to the subject as ambiguous situations, pictures or tasks. For example, in the Thematic Apperception Test, developed by H.A. Murray (1938), a subject is required to interpret a picture by telling a story. In the Children's Apperception Test (Bellak, 1954), use is made of a series of pictures showing animals in anthropomorphic situations. Other such techniques are Raven's Controlled Projection Test where the subject does a free drawing and is simultaneously told an incomplete story, and Rosenzweig's Picture Frustration Test where individuals are shown in ambiguous and frustrating situations.

It is assumed that since the task is ambiguous and there are no wrong answers, the individual will project his feelings, attitudes, pressures and needs into the situation. Of course, one cannot be too careful with the interpretation of the data. However, considering the complexity of personality testing and the objections which exist against different assessment techniques, it would be more fruitful to concentrate on improving test interpretation rather than argue about the validity or otherwise of the projective techniques.

Plan of the Investigation
Subjects

Five primary state schools were chosen for the study. Seven- and ten-year-old boys and girls from Year 3 and Year 6 classes were eligible for the study. The total sample was made up of 483 children — 240 were from the younger age group whereas the remaining 243 students were from the older group. According to sex groups, there were 256 boys and 227 girls.

The sample also included various ability

levels. The pupils were streamed according to their academic qualifications; the number of streams depends on the school population. For the study all streams were considered.

Experimental Procedure
To find out the children's wishes, the test was administerd in two ways:
(a) in the form of an interview with Year 3 and the Year 6 lower streams
(b) in written form for the upper and middle streams of Year 6.

In all classes instructions were given in Maltese. All responses, whether written directly by the pupils or by the interviewer, were noted on a specially prepared form.

The oral form – With the younger pupils, a story was made up and related as follows:

'Once upon a time there were two seven-year-old children. They were brother and sister. One night they had a dream about a fairy. The fairy asked them to make any three wishes as she could give them anything they asked for.'

Pupils were then asked to come outside class individually and state the wishes of the boy or girl. To prevent pupils from talking amongst themselves, the teachers were asked to go on with the lessons when the interviewer stepped out of class.

The written form – Year 6 pupils in the upper streams were asked to think and write down the wishes of a 10- to 11-year-old child. They were told that these wishes would be granted by a special person which could make any wish come true. They were allowed to write the wishes in Maltese or English. With Year 6 pupils from the lower streams, an interview was carried out in the same way as with the younger students.

All pupils were informed that this was neither a test nor an examination.

Results

The wishes given by the sample were classified into various broad categories, each being in turn sub-divided into further classifications. This classification was based on that suggested by Winkley (1982) with some minor modifications. Table 1 shows the relevant classes and related categories.

To test the results for statistical significance the test for differences between proportions/percentages (Cronbach, 1970) was used.

The wishes recorded were analysed in the following ways:
(a) according to age (comparing Year 3 to Year 6 wishes)

(b) according to sex groups (comparing boys' wishes to girls' wishes).

Class	Category	Sub-categories
P	Possessions	P1 - Money P2 - Animals P3 - Houses P4 - Vehicles P5 - Toys P6 - Books P7 - Others
F	Future Achievements	F1 - Career (Reality) F2 - Career (Fantasy) F3 - Power F4 - Fame F5 - Scholastic Achievement F6 - Marriage/Children
N	Personal Needs	N1 - General Need N2 - Real Problem N3 - Change in Self N4 - Magical Change
T	Travel	T1 - Holidays T2 - Adventure T3 - Emigration
SC	Social Conscience	
RF	Removal of Fear of death or illness of oneself or others	
UN	Unclassifiable	

Table 1: Class, Category and Subcategories of Wishes

Age Differences
The results shown in Table 2 were obtained when age was considered as a variable. The rank order for both age groups follows the same pattern but there are significant differences in the frequency of wishes made for each broad category.

Category	% Year 3		% Year 6		z	p
Possessions	66.8%	(956)	39.6%	(576)	14.60	< 0.01
Future Achievements	22.1%	(316)	30.6%	(446)	5.17	< 0.01
Personal Needs	6.0%	(86)	12.1%	(176)	5.69	< 0.01
Travel	3.5%	(50)	10.3%	(150)	7.18	< 0.01
Social Conscience	0.8%	(11)	1.7%	(25)	2.17	< 0.05
Removal of Fear	0.0%	(0)	1.2%	(17)	4.20	< 0.01
Unclassifiable	0.8%	(12)	4.5%	(66)	—	—
Total	100.0%	(1431)	100.0%	(1456)	—	—

Table 2: Distribution of Wishes by Age and Significance of Age-differences.

When considering the subcategories for each section, significance at the one percent level was found with the subgroups 'Money' (P1), 'Toys' (P5), 'Others' (P7) and 'Travelling' for holidays (T1).

There were a great number of Year 6 pupils who made wishes for money and travelling for holidays whereas toys were widely selected by the younger age group.

Sex Differences

When wishes made by boys were compared to those suggested by girls, not many statistically significant distinctions resulted (Table 3).

Category	Boys' Wishes	Girls' Wishes	z	p
Possessions	56.7% (434)	48.8% (332)	3.00	< 0.01
Future Achievements	24.7% (189)	28.8% (196)	1.76	> 0.05
Personal Needs	7.2% (55)	10.3% (70)	2.09	< 0.05
Travel	8.2% (63)	6.6% (45)	1.15	> 0.05
Social Conscience	0.9% (7)	1.5% (10)	1.06	> 0.05
Removal of Fear	0.4% (3)	0.7% (5)	0.77	> 0.05
Unclassifiable	2.0% (15)	3.4% (23)	—	—
Total	100.0% (766)	100.0% (681)	—	—

Table 3: Distribution of Wishes by Sex and Significance of Sex-differences.

As can be seen from the results, significance at the one percent level was achieved with the category 'Possessions' whereas significance at the five percent level was obtained with the category 'Personal Needs'.

With the various subcategories, significance at the one percent level was achieved with 'Vehicles' (P4) where boys made more wishes of this type than girls; and the subcategory 'Others' (P7). In this last sub-category, girls made a number of wishes for clothes and jewellery.

Discussion and Conclusions

It seems perfectly logical that significant findings resulted when considering age as a variable. This is a clear indication of the changes which do occur between Year 3 and Year 6 children when it comes to making their wishes. The younger group gave great importance to material goods and tangible articles. With Year 6 pupils there was a sharp decrease in wishes for toys and an increase in the requests for houses, vehicles and money.

Whereas at age 7 children are sill engrossed in their fantasy world expressed through play, ten-year-olds are gradually realizing that they are becoming less dependent on adults and eventually will look for new experiences outside the home. In fact, with all the subcategories of Future Achievements, there were a greater number of wishes expressed by the elder group of the sample.

At ten, children are already making more wishes for Careers, Scholastic Achievements and Marriage than seven-year-olds. They also make more wishes for changes in oneself, solving real problems as well as other general needs. They are hampered by fears which might have never occurred to them at a younger age and are becoming aware of showing social conscience and concern. Even wishes related to travelling for holidays or for the sake of adventure, attract the elder children.

All these findings direct the researcher to conclude that children are aware of what is relevant and appropriate for their particular age. They are not harassed by undue pressures or worries when still young — they are still the centre of attention, finding everything prepared for them. Later on they start becoming aware of difficulties and problems which have to be met with and solved as best as possible.

When considering wishes made by boys and girls, fewer significantly different findings resulted. It seems unlikely that boys and girls at this age opt for different kinds of wishes.

In the research carried out by Winkley (1982), boys made significantly more wishes for 'Power', 'Money', 'Fantasy Career' and 'Large Vehicles'. The girls made significantly more wishes than the boys for 'Change in Home Circumstances', 'Scholastic Achievement', 'Real Need', 'Marriage/ Children' and 'Real Problem' categories which — according to Winkley — reflect an involvement with the real world. Boys' wishes were more fantasy based.

Some of these findings match those of the local sample. Vehicles, for example, are significantly related to the mechanical world which in turn is related to masculinity. On the other hand, girls are more prepared to express the wish of getting married and having their own children.

When considering various subcategories, such as choice of a career or preference of toys, there were clear differences in the choices made. Whereas boys opted for occupations such as those of a policeman, pilot, carpenter, mechanic and doctor, the girls' predominant choices were for the jobs of teachers, nurses and airhostesses. As regards toys, boys go for cars and mechanical devices while girls opt for dolls. In fact, if typical male and femal characteristics are drawn up, it can be said that boys and girls know which features pertain to their sex group. Within each category there were subcategories which were more popular with boys and others which came closer to that which is expected of the female sex. For example boys want work, girls want to get married; the former concentrate on the mechanical world of cars and vehicles; the latter want clothes; males opt for certain types of jobs, females choose other occupations; boys play with certain types of toys, girls have other tastes.

Children are being brought up within a framework of sex roles where boys and girls are expected to act and behave in ways suitable to their sex. What is appropriate for one group is not welcomed within the opposite sex. Such attitudes are being enhanced from the moment of birth, within the family context and reinforced later on at

school and in society.

It can be concluded that children like any other age group of the human race, all have their own wishes and needs. Differences arise because of the motivation one has and the goals for which fulfilment of these wishes is sought. Satisfaction or fulfilment of wishes may be immediate or delayed and age is an important factor in this respect. However, what can be said with certainty is that whatever type of wish is expressed — whether seeking belongingness, security, independence, adventure, new experiences, constructing or knowing something, requesting a material possession or a future achievement, whether the wish arises from processes taking place within the body or stimulated by external objects or even the need for expression of feeling — all children have their wishes and needs and they should be helped as much as possible to facilitate the realization of these wishes.

It ought to be pointed out that tentative explanations have been suggested since on the basis of what is known about differences in atti-tudes one cannot give absolute interpretations of these results. The element of subjectivity could have been minimised by offering the sample a limited number of responses and a forced choice would have had to be made. It would also be interesting to study wishes of other groups as well as factors — such as family background and ability levels — which could contribute to a meaningful understanding of why children make particular wishes.

References

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