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Psycho-Pedagogical Support of Gifted Preschoolers

Psychologiczno-pedagogiczne wsparcie utalentowanych dzieci
w wieku przedszkolnym

SUMMARY

The article describes the main approaches to defining the essence of concept “childish giftedness”, identifies its features, proves the necessity of a complex study and identification of giftedness in preschool age children in order to create a program of its support and development, analyses organising features of educational work with gifted children in preschool educational institutions, explains the importance of psycho-pedagogical support of parents in bringing up gifted preschoolers.

Keywords: giftedness; characteristics of giftedness; children of preschool age; psycho-pedagogical support; preschool educational institution

INTRODUCTION

Current trends of the society development require (of the psychological and pedagogical science and practice of educational activities) the elaboration of new technologies for the early development of personality who is capable of living a further, full of value and harmonious life, of realizing talents and abilities, of achieving success in life, which becomes a significant component in a successful development of the state. One of the most difficult and important elements in this regard is the question of developing abilities and talents of preschool age children.

Scientists study various aspects of the problem. First of all, it is the nature of abilities, an intellectual and creative giftedness (Chudnovskyi and others 1980;

Leytes 1988; Molyako 1991; Teplov 1985; and others); the teaching of gifted children, the impact of individualisation and differentiation on the children in the conditions of an educational process (Gilbuh 1992; Kuzmenko 2005; Kuzmenko 2014; and others); the diagnostics of giftedness and the development of individualised educational programs and methodological support of the processes of developing abilities and talents of preschoolers (Karabaeva and others 2011; Kuzmenko and others 2009; and others).

However, despite constant scientific research of this problem, at the present stage of science development, the most significant and controversial issues are the ones of peculiarity of:

- diagnostics for the early detection of general and special giftedness,
- the development of methods of complex study of giftedness,
- the establishment of criteria and indicators which characterise the existence of abilities in different spheres of life of a preschool age child, as well as of working out technologies for the development of giftedness,
- close cooperation of teachers with the parents of pupils to ensure an appropriate environment for the development of gifted children in the family.

THE CONCEPT ESSENCE OF “GIFTEDNESS” AND CHARACTERISTICS OF GIFTED PRESCHOOLERS

Analysis of scientific literature gives reason to believe that there are different approaches to the definition of “giftedness”. Teplov (1985) treated the talent as a qualitative unique combination of abilities (individual psychological characteristics of personality), on which depends the possibility of achieving greater or lesser success in one or another activity. The scientist believed giftedness to be the problem of quality, but not quantity, and claimed that there was no limit in the development of abilities, and their level was determined by the duration of a person’s life and by the methods of their development correlated with the characteristics of giftedness. The researcher differentiated between general and special abilities, and accordingly, general and special giftedness (Teplov 1985).

Rubinshteyn (1960) tended to similar statements claiming that giftedness is a set of all human data on which depends the productivity of their activity. He understands special abilities as “the reference of general giftedness to certain special branches of activity” (Rubinshteyn 1960, p. 6). One can see general giftedness in human special abilities, and at the same time, they interpenetrate into and complement each other, being in unity. The psychologist believed the importance of a creative product and speed of its creation to be a measurement of talents.

Therefore, direct indicators of the level of abilities development are considered to be the shifts in thinking abilities that have emerged as a result of mastering certain knowledge (Rubinshteyn 1960).

Chudnovskyi and others (1980), in turn, emphasize that giftedness is an integral manifestation of abilities in activities, that is, a general quality which is integrated into activities. Manifestation measurement of giftedness is different and is determined by two indicators: manifestation of individual abilities in the activity system of personality and integration of individual abilities in a particular activity field. Scientists distinguish two types of giftedness: intellectual (general giftedness which is shown in the learning ability and is accompanied by the speed and quickness of mental activity) and creative (with a high level of development of creative abilities, aptitudes and strivings of the individual for creative activity) (Chudnovskyi and others 1980).

The authors of *Working Concept of Giftedness* (Bogoyavlenska and others 1998) consider giftedness as a systemic quality of psyche which is determined by the possibility of achieving high (unusual, remarkable) results in one or more activities in comparison with other people. A gifted child is “a child who is notable for his bright, obvious, sometimes outstanding achievements (or has internal preconditions for such achievements) in one or another activity” (Bogoyavlenska and others 1998, p. 5).

This definition is largely different from an usual notion of giftedness as a high level of development of specific (primarily mental) abilities of the child, because giftedness is treated as a systemic quality which characterises the child’s psyche as a whole. In this case it is individuality, his direction and values system which lead to the development of abilities and determine the way an individual giftedness is realised.

Scientists propose to consider a child’s giftedness and aspects of its manifestations in the child in a particular period. Bright and expressive giftedness of the child in the activities is called obvious. But the one which is not shown is called hidden. Its causes are various: lack of knowledge, increased anxiety, conflict nature, reluctance to show his success because of their rejection in the past. Obvious and manifested giftedness which is seen by psychologists, teachers and parents, is current, and children who demonstrate it are not gifted but talented. Giftedness with certain psychic abilities (potentials) for high achievements, not yet implemented in the activity because of functional failure, is potential (Bogoyavlenska and others 1998).

To early manifestations of giftedness Gilbuh (1992) refers a high cognitive activity and intellectual curiosity, speed and accuracy of performing mental operations due to sustained attention and memory efficiency, richness of vocabulary, originality of verbal associations, an expressed establishment of creative tasks accomplishment, development of creative thinking and imagination (Gilbuh 1992).

Molyako, in turn, identifies the following characteristics of gifted children: focus of interest, frequency and regularity of their appearance; curiosity, a striving to create something new, predisposition to solution and search of problems; a qualitative formation of an unique individual style of activity; highly structured knowledge, the ability to see the subject studied in the system; increased selective sensitivity which is accompanied, as a rule, with feelings of satisfaction; high criticism of the results of child's work, the tendency to put a heavy target and strive for perfection (Molyako 1991).

Gifted preschool children willingly get engaged in different kinds of activities and games, however, they give preference to those in which they are able to express themselves creatively – to discover, create something new. They are gladly and enthusiastically engaged in creativity, they show their activity, initiative, quite independence in creative search. According to Leytes (1988), an inclination to creativity in its individual originality is a distinct characteristic of childhood. Peculiarities of children with early signs of giftedness indicate that the difference between intelligence and creativity is relative, they do not need to excessively be opposed – they have common roots. The most general characteristic and structural component of the creative potential of the child are notional needs which constitute a psychological basis of the dominance of cognitive motivation (Leytes 1988).

Dominant cognitive motivation of a gifted child is expressed in the form of experimental, research activity and is characterised by high sensitivity to the novelty of the stimulus, the novelty of the situation, manifestation of something new in normal things. Cognitive motivation and research activity are expressed in a high selectivity of the child in reference to researching something new, in preferring different colours, sounds, shapes, etc. Firm selectivity is the basis for the development of special abilities (art-visual, musical, literary, technical, sports, etc.).

As noted by Karabaeva, a childish giftedness, unlike an adult one, has its own specific features: it is often a manifestation of age development characteristics (for example, preschool children are particularly inclined to mastering languages, they possess a high level of curiosity); under the influence of age and education change one can see “extinction” of the signs of giftedness; the peculiarity of the dynamics of forming children's giftedness is often manifested through the uneven mental development; the signs of children's giftedness are often difficult to distinguish from the trained knowledge (or wider – from the degree of socialisation), which is the result of favourable conditions of a child's life (Karabaeva and others 2011). In addition, gifted children do not always strive to demonstrate their achievements in front of others. So, a child who has a talent for poetry or making up stories may hide his passion from the teacher.

It should be noted that all studies of the identified problem refer to the fact that a child's giftedness is very ambiguous both in its manifestations and peculiar-

ities of development. So there is no use talking about intellectually or creatively gifted preschoolers in a broad sense because in preschool years these talents have common roots and primarily appear in cognitive activity which begins to develop in preschool years. In connection with the change and extension of activities at school age it is already possible to speak about the manifestations of different types of giftedness in children. Therefore, analysing various approaches to the study of preschool age children with early development, we will use the terms “intellectually gifted children”, “children with a higher level of cognitive activity”.

PSYCHO-PEDAGOGICAL SUPPORT OF GIFTED CHILDREN IN PRESCHOOL EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION

An essential condition of developing interest in learning is the relationship between child and teacher, the main tasks of the latter are to identify and support gifted children, to disclose their identity, to develop an integral worldview, creative and system thinking, to create favourable conditions for the development of gifted children in the interests of personality, society and state.

Psycho-pedagogical support of gifted children in preschool institutions is considered as a complex technology of psycho-pedagogical support and assistance to the child and parents in solving tasks of development, diagnosis, counseling by specialists in different fields whose actions are coordinated and aimed at creating individualised educational programs on the basis of the most favourable interaction with the child.

The study of skills and talents of the child is carried out in two directions by teachers together with a psychologist of a preschool institution: the study of the peculiarities of their manifestation and of a social situation of a child's development. Diagnostic work includes the following phases of research:

- identification of the development state of general abilities and establishment of special interests and aptitudes of a preschooler,
- identification of individual specific dynamics of development of a certain kind of ability, manifestations of stable and spontaneous interests of a child; the analysis of individual peculiarities in behaviour and development of a gifted child,
- learning precisely the development of individual differences of a child which can affect (positively or negatively) the success of manifestation and development of abilities (health, physical development, temperament, cognitive processes),
- deep study of personal qualities (initiative, perseverance, determination, endurance, etc.) which are necessary for realisation of abilities and manifestations of giftedness.

The results of the study and individually oriented planning of educational work with a gifted child are reflected in an individual educational program where one can find additional contents, the most effective methods and techniques of work, additional resources and activities that should be implemented.

As the success of a child's development in the period of early childhood is to the greatest extent determined by the impact nature of the family adults, diagnostic work should foresee a social situation of a child's development (values system of the family, the family way of life and their style, children's living conditions, etc.).

Kuzmenko believes that for the detection and study of gifted preschoolers one should rely on the following academic regulations:

1. Integral (complex) study of a preschool child which investigates individual characteristics and takes into account all the data about a child obtained by different specialists (teachers, psychologists, physicians) and further joint work on the analysis of the obtained data and making the only strategy of educational work.
2. Dynamic study of a child which implies taking into account not only existing but also potential opportunities that define the "zone of proximal development", the establishment of individual specific dynamics of development (monitoring).
3. Socially meaningful environment. Taking into consideration the development of giftedness, the purpose of early childhood is a gradual transformation of genetic preconditions of giftedness (inclinations) into personal potential which should provide further (and usually later) actualisation of the natural with the acquired, appropriated and regulated by a personality. The success of this transformation depends not only on the power of the natural potential of a child, but on the socio-psychological factors which to a greater or lesser extent affect him. Social environment, upbringing, training, communication style with parents and teachers, meaningful organisation of life, the atmosphere of emotional comfort, a child's life full of activities of a certain kind, support of a positive self-esteem, motivation, presence or absence of educational equipment are the factors which determine the rate of actualisation of abilities at the stage of early childhood.
4. Variability of development. The success of a child's development depends on the adequacy and complexity of the task content, on the individual effectiveness of methods of organising a psycho-pedagogical interaction. This implies the need to create individual development options which will meet the needs, opportunities and abilities of each child (Kuzmenko 2014, p. 185–187).

It is obvious that a teacher should want his work to be of a research nature, should overcome the habit of acting according to the pattern, and find new, most optimal ways of developing creative potential of his students. Only professional competence of a teacher, knowledge of the phenomenon of children's giftedness and of the development prospects of children can become the basis for creating the programs of psychological and pedagogical support of gifted children.

In relation to teaching gifted preschoolers, of course, the leading methods in the work are those of creative nature – problem, research, project methods in combination with the methods of independent, individual and group work. These methods have high cognitive and motivational potential and match the level of cognitive activity and interests of gifted children.

Since children with a higher level of cognitive interests start to learn letters very early, I suggest conducting classes in game form with a group of 3–5 children by learning a sign system in the form of a journey. One day – one letter. Each lesson is a storyline and is associated with adventures or journeys of the letter which is being learnt.

The lesson consists of the following stages:

- acquaintance with a poem about the letter,
- learning the poem by the scheme,
- colouring the picture to the poem,
- music (uttering the letter, making up songs about the letter),
- acquaintance with the letter, making the letter come alive and making the plot,
- reading words with a new letter, making words with bricks,
- speech and literary creative work (making up names, poems, stories, tales about the letter),
- artistic creative task (painting, creating a plot picture).

One of the factors of educational work with gifted children is a multisensory approach which involves activation of different senses and ways of information perception, combines visual, auditory and tactile elements in a learning process. A number of tasks which are focused on different channels of perception allow activating educational interests of children and hold their attention; engaging all organs of sense contributes to a better mastering of the material if compared with traditional methods, provides an integrated approach to different types of children's activities.

PSYCHO-PEDAGOGICAL SUPPORT OF PARENTS IN BRINGING UP GIFTED PRESCHOOLERS

An important approach of psychological and pedagogical support of gifted preschoolers is a collaboration of preschool educational institutions with the fami-

lies of their pupils. Practice shows that the forms of parents' reaction to the existence of a child's giftedness are very different:

- parents tend not to see early giftedness of their child because they do not know what to do with it,
- parents do not take the peculiarities of a gifted child, his symptoms seem strange to them (non-adaptive behaviour),
- parents are exploiters of a child's giftedness; such parents see giftedness as a possibility of the manifestation of their own status or prestige, self-affirmation through certain abilities of their children or realising their unfulfilled potential opportunities,
- parents accept and love the child, but not his talents; abilities of children are perceived as a benefit, as potential (Młodyk 2006).

Therefore, the aim of work with parents in bringing up gifted preschoolers is contributing to their psycho-pedagogical training which is necessary for stimulation and development of potential creative abilities of the child. The main approaches to the implementation of this direction are the priority of family education, focus on cooperation (interests, needs and requests of the family), a differentiated approach (taking into account a social status of the family, parental education, family relationship style) and close involvement of parents to participate in a pedagogical process.

Regarding the forms of cooperation between preschool institutions and families, individual, group, collective and visually written forms proved themselves to be useful in practice. At the first stage of interaction one should apply individual forms of work like a questioning of parents to determine the level of formation of cognitive interests of children according to an expert assessment of giftedness; individual interviews; consultations on identifying and bringing up gifted preschoolers. Parents can be offered to keep a diary "Our achievements", to write essays "My child, his personality development", etc.

Among the group forms of interaction one should point out parents meeting "Development of abilities and talents of preschoolers", "Intellectually gifted preschoolers: psychological and pedagogical support", a series of consultations "Educational interests of children", "Children's questions and answers to them", "Source of a child's personality development". Each consultation involves not only a discussion of the problems, but also practical recommendations, tips on their solution. It is advisable to create communication clubs, meetings with interesting people, evenings of answers and questions where parents have the opportunity to become familiar with the best experience of family education of other families, with modern views on the problem of preschoolers' giftedness.

Parents conferences, thematic meetings, open days, fest mornings and entertainment activities, etc., belong to collective forms of cooperation. The main purpose of visually-group forms of work is messaging interesting and useful in-

formation about this problem to parents (parenting corners, information letters), informing about achievements of children (children's art exhibitions, family newspapers), getting acquainted with the psycho-pedagogical and methodical literature ("the library ticket", a box of suggestions).

A particular form of interaction is interactive forms of work with parents. This form of organising cognitive activities has a specific, predictable goal – to create comfortable conditions of companionship and education of parents, in which each participant feels his success, intellectual capacity and is an equal individual (Karabaeva and others 2011). An example might be organising and conducting a lecture-discussion on the topic "Nature of a child's giftedness", a seminar-practicum "Developing imagination of senior pre-schoolers", business games, master-classes, etc.

All defined forms of work between family members and teachers must activate pedagogical learning, encourage parents to know their children better and to change their attitude to the unusual features of their children, to learn to be tolerant to manifestation of their behaviour. So an important thing in cooperation with the family is to help parents understand and accept modern humanistic ideas and guidelines which are based on respect for the personality of the child, taking care of his harmonious development.

CONCLUSIONS

Systematisation and analysis of the source base gives grounds to state that the following criteria have been chosen to determine the content of the concept of "giftedness": a qualitative unique combination of abilities which ensures a successful activity; mental potential or intellect which provides a high level of cognitive abilities; a set of inclinations, natural data characterising the expression and uniqueness of natural preconditions of the individual; the talent, the presence of internal conditions for remarkable achievements and activities. The main characteristics of gifted children of preschool age are a high level of cognitive activity; a desire to be creative in play and other activities; an advanced cognitive development, the joy of learning; emotional sensitiveness.

It has been proved that the work on the study and development of gifted preschoolers should be based on scientific knowledge of an integral (complex) examination of a child, a dynamic study of a child, a socially meaningful environment and variability of development. Psycho-pedagogical support of gifted children in preschool educational institutions is considered as a complex technology of psycho-pedagogical support and assistance to the child and parents in solving development tasks, diagnosis, counselling by specialists in different fields

(teachers, psychologists, physicians) whose actions are coordinated and aimed at creating individualised educational programs on the basis of the most favourable interaction with the child.

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STRESZCZENIE

W artykule zostały scharakteryzowane główne podejścia do definiowania istoty pojęcia „utalentowanie dziecka”, zostały przedstawione jego cechy, udowodniono niezbędność wszechstronnego badania i dostrzegania talentu dziecka-przedszkolaka w celu tworzenia programu jego wsparcia i rozwoju, dokonano analizy osobliwości organizowania pracy dydaktycznej z utalentowanymi dziećmi w placówkach przedszkolnych, uzasadniono ważność psychologiczno-pedagogicznego wsparcia rodziców w wychowaniu uzdolnionych przedszkolaków.

Słowa kluczowe: utalentowanie; objawy utalentowania; dzieci w wieku przedszkolnym; psychologiczno-pedagogiczne wsparcie; placówka przedszkolna