

PSYRGGU 2020

Psychology of Personality: Real and Virtual Context

PARENTS AND GIFTED PRESCHOOLER: THE SPECIFICS OF RELATIONSHIP

Elena Belova (a)*

*Corresponding author

(a) Psychological Institute of Russian Academy of Education, Mokhovaya, 9 (4), Moscow, Russia,
elenasbelova@mail.ru

Abstract

The article is devoted to the problem of the relationship between parents and gifted children at the preschool stage. The role of parents in revealing children's giftedness, which is considered as a precondition for the development of a creative personality, is discussed. Significant parenting aspects that contribute to the development of high abilities of preschoolers are highlighted. A study is aimed at identifying the specifics of the relationship between modern parents and gifted preschool children. To identify the differences, we also studied the relationship between parents and children whose creativity was less pronounced. The results showed that although parents strive to show respect and trust in the children, only some of them manage to build a harmonious interaction with the child. There are twice as many parents of this type among the parents of gifted preschoolers as among parents of peers. Gifted preschoolers, as well as their peers, perceive relationships with parents as very significant, which is typical for children of this age. But less than half of the gifted and less than a third of their peers feel comfortable and confident in relationships with their parents. In the majority of preschoolers, when analyzing the perception of the relationship with parents, both signs of comfort and signs (of varying severity) of a certain discomfort (signs of uncertainty, anxiety, etc.) are distinguished. The need for psychological support of parents in raising preschoolers and disclosure of potential is emphasized.

2357-1330 © 2020 Published by European Publisher.

Keywords: Gifted child, parents, preschool age, relationship.



This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 4.0 Unported License, permitting all non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

1. Introduction

Disclosure of giftedness in preschool age largely depends on the characteristics of the microenvironment, and primarily, the family microenvironment. Its main structural component is the relationship between the child and the parents. It is difficult to overestimate the importance of this relationship for the development of the personality of the child and the disclosure of the child's abilities and talents. In this regard, the study of child-parent relationships in the context of the giftedness problem is of particular interest.

1.1. The relationship between parents and children: opportunities for children high-level abilities

Parents are the first to notice early signs of a child's talent. They are the main people in his life. Therefore, parents create the conditions for unleashing the potential of a preschooler. The parent-child relationship is a complex two-way process. Researchers agree that it is impossible to single out one single type of interaction between parents and children which is crucial for the development of high-level abilities in children (Freeman, 2000; Morawska & Sanders 2009).

Each child and parent enters this interaction, having a unique character and potential. However, this does not deny the possibility of building harmonious and effective relations for the development of children's giftedness. Such a relationship is characterized by positive attitude, emotional support and security. Parents create conditions (materials, space, activities, etc.) to realize the potential of the preschooler and stimulate the development of his abilities and talents. At the same time, it is important that parents have sensitivity to the potential talents of their children from an early age. This will help to avoid forming them into an image that adults may wish. Wojcicki (2019) believes that success in raising happy and successful child is the result of TRICK: Trust, Respect, Independence, Collaboration, and Kindness. It is the key for the realization of the best human qualities and disclosure of potential.

Siegel and Hartzell (2013), based on new discoveries in the field of neurobiology and attachment research, explain which way interpersonal relationships directly influence on brain development. They offer parents a step-by-step approach to building a deeper understanding of their own childhood experience that will help them raise compassionate and cheerful children. Parents will contribute to the development of children's giftedness if in their relationship with a child, from their very birth, shows: attentiveness, responsiveness, conscious perception, and cheerfulness. The upbringing of an extraordinary child implies the willingness of parents to learn throughout life and the realization of the possibility of personal growth.

1.2. Young gifted child in family

Currently, it is possible to single out the prevailing trends in the understanding of giftedness that manifests itself early: most often it is regarded as a complex phenomenon, the characterization of which involves a certain degree of conditionality; the disclosure process is ambiguous, due to the influence of a number of factors (psychological, genetic / biological, social, etc.). In the early stages of development of children, in particular in preschool childhood, researchers turn to the concept of "potential" when identifying a key indicator of giftedness (Clark, 2013; Melik-Pashaev, 2019; Monks & Ipenburg, 2014).

A study by Denisenkova (2008) of the family conditions for the development of mentally gifted preschoolers showed that most of them grew up in an atmosphere of kindness and support from their parents. 80% of parents rated the child's giftedness adequately and accepted with joy. Such parents took an active position in development and education of the child. Very rarely there have been cases of parents ignoring or repulsing children's giftedness.

Categories of parent's influence: "involvement of the adult in the life of the child" (mothers) and "encouraging communication and interaction" (fathers), are significant predictors of the level of intelligence of preschoolers (Tihomirova, 2010).

Young gifted children have their own characteristics and developmental problems, but at the same time, they remain children. Parents of extraordinary children are faced with problems typical for all children of this age and with the problems inherent in gifted preschoolers. Smutny (2016) emphasizes the importance of parents trusting their views, experience and intuition when it comes to their children, and what is important, parents seeing their young abilities as strengths, not weaknesses.

Unfortunately, questions of parenting a precocious preschooler have little coverage in the scientific literature (Fish, 2016). The problem of the features and styles of parents in connection with the development of gifted young children remains poorly understood (Pilarinos & Solomon, 2017).

2. Problem Statement

According to studies of the social connections of children, from the mid-1990s, there has been an increase in the number of contacts with close adults and an increase in their importance. Moreover, the new situation of transitivity, which is a characteristic of all generations, is associated with the emergence of problems and risks in the development and relations of people (Martsinkovskaya, 2015). In this regard, the relevance of psychological research aimed at studying the ongoing changes, including in the parent-child relationship, is increasing.

The relationship between parents and preschool children is most often studied by means of analysis of opinions and attitudes of adults. Moreover, the opinion and the "internal position" of child remain out of focus of the study. However, as researchers notice, the process of relationships between modern children and adults is characterized by complexity, multifaceted conditioning and bilateral activity (Feldstein, 2011). Studying the specifics of this process, both on the part of adults and the child, in a changing sociocultural space opens up a new problem field for research.

At the stage of preschool childhood, the development of the child is most affected by the family microenvironment. Difficulties and disruptions in the relationship of parents with a preschooler can negatively affect their development and disclosure of child's abilities and talents (Clark, 2013; Monks & Ipenburg, 2014). The problem of the relationship between modern parents and preschoolers in the context of supporting their giftedness needs careful study.

3. Research Questions

The following questions were raised in the study:

3.1. Question 1

What are the features of the attitude of modern parents to their gifted children?

3.2. Question 2

How do gifted preschoolers perceive relationships with parents?

4. Purpose of the Study

The study was aimed at identifying the specifics of the relationship of parents with gifted preschoolers: features of attitudes of parents and preschoolers perception of parents and relations with them.

To achieve this goal, the following tasks were solved:

- Highlighting a group of preschool children with high creative potential, the main component of giftedness, and a group of peers whose creative potential was less pronounced;
- Analysis of the relationship of parents to children (taking into account the level of potential);
- Highlighting the perceptual characteristics of relationships with parents of preschoolers from two distinguished groups.

Children's giftedness was considered in accordance with the concept of Matyushkin (1990) "Creative giftedness": as a prerequisite for the development of a creative personality; high creativity is the foundation of giftedness.

5. Research Methods

5.1. Participants

175 children of 5-6 years old (mean age - 5.6 years) and 54 parents (mainly mothers) took part in the study. The children attended kindergartens in Moscow.

5.2. Methods

The following methods / techniques were used:

- Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking (TTCT);
- observing children during games and activities;
- conversations with children, teachers, parents;
- expert assessment of children's creative work (drawings, crafts, etc.);
- projective technique "Family Drawing";
- Questionnaire "Analysis of family relationships" (DIA) (Eidemiller & Justitskis, 2008).

Qualitative and quantitative data analysis was carried out (SPSS Statistics 22).

5.3. Procedure

The study was conducted in two stages.

At the first, diagnostics of the creative potential of all preschoolers was carried out; separation of two groups of preschoolers, differing in the level of creative thinking, brought up in similar (structure, economic status) family conditions.

At the second stage, an analysis of the relationship of parents to children from two selected groups was carried out, highlighting the peculiarities of perception by preschool children of parents and relations with them.

6. Findings

At the first stage of the study, two groups of preschoolers were identified, equal in number (No. = 27, the number of boys and girls was approximately equal), but differing in their creative potential. Group I consisted of children with a high level of creative thinking, which could be attributed to the gifted. They had high results on the Torrance Tests ($M = 64.33$; $SD = 4.46$). Group II included their peers, whose creative potential was less pronounced ($M = 46.07$; $SD = 4.59$). A comparative analysis showed that differences between groups in creative thinking are highly reliable ($p = 0,000$, t-test).

At the second stage the parent-child relationship was examined from two sides: parental attitudes and child perception of parents were studied.

6.1. Parenting

According to conversations with parents, relationships with children are very significant for them. Parents are interested in successful development of preschoolers, tend to pay attention and time to their education. They seek to build communication with children on respect and trust. This was a characteristic of parents of children from both groups. There were no parents who were indifferent to the children and their upbringing.

The more detailed analysis of parental attitudes was carried out by means of the Questionnaire "Analysis of family relationships". Some of the parents of preschoolers from both groups revealed peculiarities of their attitude to the child, which may indicate certain violations of the educational process in a family (Figure 01).

Hyperprotection is typical for parents who give the baby a lot of energy, time and attention; education is central to their lives. This feature was highlighted in 11.1% of parents of preschool children of group I and 25.9% of parents of preschool children of group II (difference at the level of trend: $p = 0.07$). An additional analysis showed that among parents of gifted preschoolers, such a feature was observed when: a) conception and birth of a baby was associated with problems, and parents were very sensitive to the health of the child, sought to protect them from any difficulties in every possible way, and over-cared for them; b) the attitudes and positions of the parents corresponded to the model of intensive / active parenting (Faircloth, 2014; Sivak, 2019), and nurturing of a child was the main area of their implementation.

Hyperprotection manifests itself in a situation in which the child is on the periphery of attention of the parents. It was rarely detected: only 3.7% of parents of preschool children of group I and 7.4% of parents of preschool children of group II.

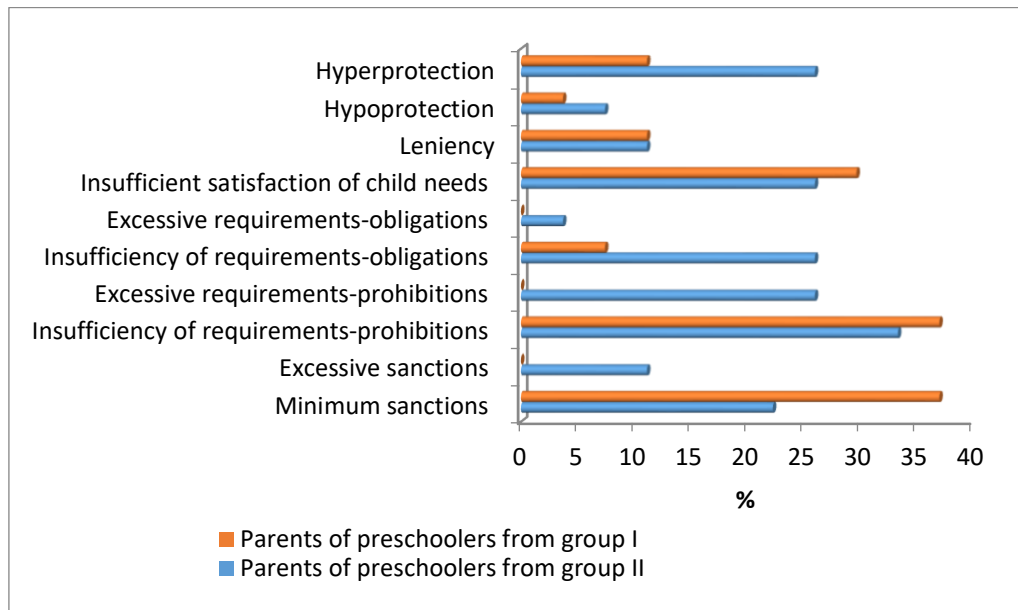


Figure 01. Features of relations of parents to preschoolers

Lenience reflects the desire of parents to maximize and non-critical satisfaction of any needs of the child. A small part (11.1%) of parents of children of both group I and group II was prone to this style of upbringing.

Insufficient satisfaction of the needs of the child was found in 29.6% of parents of children of group I and 25.9% of parents of preschool children of group II. This can partly be explained by the excessive criticality of some parents to themselves. This is especially evident in situations where parents are very busy at work, or another family member requires great care, and feel guilty due to the lack of time to communicate with the child.

In case of Insufficiency of requirements-obligations, the child has a minimum number of responsibilities in the family, and this applies primarily to self-care skills. For parents of gifted children this is less typical than for parents of peers (7.4% and 25.9%, the difference is significant $p = 0.029$).

Excessive requirements-prohibitions, when the child is presented with a huge number of requirements that limit their independence, was not observed in the education of gifted, but was observed in 25.9% of peer families. Excessive sanctions were also revealed only in 11.1% of parents of preschool children of group II.

The lack of prohibition requirements for the child and the minimum sanctions are characteristic of 37% of gifted parents and a slightly smaller part (22.2% and 33.3%) of parents of preschool children of group II, but the differences do not reach significance level.

A comprehensive analysis of the data made it possible to single out the parents who were distinguished by a sensitive and friendly attitude towards children and a harmonious parenting style. There were more of them among parents of gifted preschool children (44.4%) than among parents of children with less pronounced creative abilities (22.2%), the differences are statistically significant ($p = 0.039$).

6.2. Relationships: views of the child

Each child from the two selected groups made a drawing of his family. The following aspects were analyzed: 1. Representations of the parents by the child (presence in the picture, image features); 2. The child's self-image in the family microenvironment (presence of the I-figure in the figure, features of the image of the I-figure, structure of the figure); 3. Emotional comfort in relations with parents (as a result of a comprehensive assessment of all aspects in the analysis of children's drawings of the family).

The results presented in Table 01 indicate that for gifted preschoolers and for most of their peers, relationships with parents are very significant and generally perceived positively.

Table 01. Features of relations of preschool children to parents (in family pictures)

Aspects of family drawing analysis	group I % of children	group II % of children
Parents presence	100,0	92,6
I-figure presence	100,0	89,9
Adequate distribution of figures in the figure	74,1	70,4
Emotional comfort in relationships with parents	44,4	22,2

At the same time, as shown by a comprehensive analysis, only 44.4% of preschool children from group I feel comfortable and confident in relations with their parents, and a significantly smaller number (22.2%) of children from group II (significant differences, $p = 0.039$). In the majority of preschool children (55.6% of group I and 59.3% of group II), when analyzing the perception of the relationship with parents, both signs of comfort and signs (of varying severity) of some discomfort (signs of uncertainty, anxiety, etc.) are distinguished. And only 18.5% of group II children showed signs of pronounced discomfort in relations with their parents: there are no figures of parents or an I-figure in the drawings of these preschool children, an inadequate distribution of figures in the drawing is noted.

The aspect of the correspondence of the parental attitudes and the child's perception of the parents and relations with them was analyzed. No complete match was found. Qualitative analysis revealed a more complex picture: in a small part of gifted children (7.4%), signs of discomfort were present in the perception of relationships with parents, although their interaction style was highlighted as harmonious. And many gifted preschoolers felt confident and comfortable in relations with their parents, although problematic aspects were highlighted in the style of parenting. At the same time, even taking into account these cases, the interconnection between the style of upbringing and the perception of the gifted child by relations with parents is highlighted: the more harmonious the parenting style is, the more chances of the gifted preschooler feeling confident and comfortable in relations with parents.

7. Conclusion

The problem of the relationship between parents and children is of particular relevance in a rapidly changing reality. Its decision is associated with the successful development of the personality of the child and the disclosure of his potential.

The study allowed us to expand our scientific understanding of the specifics of the interaction of gifted children with their parents.

The results obtained are consistent with the findings of other researchers (Eidemiller & Justitskis, 2008; Feldstein, 2011) that the process of parent-child interactions is characterized by complexity and bilateral activity.

The results showed that although parents strive to show respect and trust in the children, only some of them manage to build a harmonious interaction with the child. There are twice as many parents of this type among the parents of gifted preschoolers as among parents of peers. In disharmonious relationships, the following signs of violations of the educational process in the family were found: hyperprotection, lack of desire to meet the needs of the child / uncertainty that they did everything necessary for the child, insufficiency of requirements, prohibitions, etc.

Gifted preschoolers, as well as their peers, perceive relationships with parents as very significant, which is typical for children of this age. But less than half of the gifted and less than a third of their peers feel comfortable and confident in relationships with their parents. In the majority of preschoolers, when analyzing the perception of the relationship with parents, both signs of comfort and signs (of varying severity) of a certain discomfort (signs of uncertainty, anxiety, etc.) are distinguished.

The study confirms the opinion of other researchers (Siegel & Hartzell, 2013; Silverman & Golon, 2008) that psychological support to parents of preschool children in the process of harmonizing interactions with the child and disclosing giftedness is needed.

Promising areas for further research may be the study of the relationship between parents and gifted children, depending on their gender and emotional characteristics.

Acknowledgments

The study was funded by Russian Foundation for Basic Research according to the research project № 18-013-00976.

References

- Clark, B. (2013). *Growing up Gifted: Developing the Potential of Children at Home and at School* (8th ed.). Pearson Education.
- Denisenkova, N. S. (2008). Sekrety Vospitaniya Odarenykh Detey [Secrets of the Education of Gifted Children]. *Sovremennoe Doshkol'noe Vospitanie [Preschool Education Today]*, 4, 14-24. [In Russian]
- Eidemiller, E. G., & Justitskis, V. V. (2008). *Psihologiya i psihoterapiya sem'i* [Psychology and psychotherapy of the family] (4th ed.). Peter. [In Russian]
- Faircloth, C. (2014). Intensive Parenting and the Expansion of Parenting. In E. Lee, J. Bristow, Ch. Faircloth, & J. Macvarish (Eds.), *Parenting Culture Studies* (pp. 25–50). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Feldstein, D. I. (2011). Glubinnye Izmeneniya Sovremennogo Detstva i Obuslovlennaya imi Aktualizatsiya Psihologo-pedagogicheskikh Problem Razvitiya Obrazovaniya [The Profound Changes in Modern Childhood and the Resulting Actualization of Psychological and Pedagogical Problems of the Development of Education]. *Vestnik Prakticheskoy Psihologii Obrazovaniya [Bulletin of Practical Psychology of Education]*, 4, 3–12 [In Russian].
- Fish, L. A. (2016). Parenting a Precocious Preschooler: Breaking the Silence. *Parenting for High Potential*, 5(3), 2-4.
- Freeman, J. (2000). Families, the Essential Context for Gifts and Talents. In K. A. Heller, F. J. Monks, R. Sternberg, & R. Subotnik (Eds.), *International Handbook of Research and Development of Giftedness and Talent* (pp. 573-585). Pergamon Press.

- Matyushkin, A. (1990). Gifted and Talented Children: the Nature of Giftedness, Screening, Development. *European Journal of High Ability*, 1(0), 72-75.
- Martsinkovskaya, T. D. (2015). Sovremennaja Psihologija – Vyzovy Tranzitivnosti [Modern Psychology – Challenges of Transitivity]. *Psikhologicheskie Issledovaniya [Psychological Research]*, 8(42), 1. <http://psystudy.ru/index.php/eng/2015v8n42e/1169-martsinkovskaya42e.html> [in Russian, abstr. in English]
- Melik-Pashaev, A. (2019). Hudozhestvennaja Odarennost' kak Odnaz iz Granej Obshhej Tvorcheskoy Odarennosti [Artistic Giftedness as One of the Facets of General Creative Giftedness]. In A.I. Savenkov, & L.I. Larionova (Eds.), *Psikhologija Odarennosti i Tvorchestva [Psychology of Giftedness and Creativity]* (pp. 47-52). IPPE News. <http://ippo.selfip.com:85/izvestia/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Psikhologiya-odarennosti-i-tvorchestva.pdf> [In Russian].
- Monks, F., & Ipenburg, I. (2014). *Odarnonnye Deti* [Gifted Children]. Kogito-Center [in Russian].
- Morawska, A., & Sanders, M. (2009). Parenting Gifted and Talented Children: Conceptual and Empirical Foundations. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 53(3), 163–183.
- Pilarinos, V., & Solomon, C. R. (2017). Parenting Styles and Adjustment in Gifted Children. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 61(1), 87–98.
- Siegel, D. J., & Hartzell, M. (2013). *Parenting from the Inside Out: How a Deeper Self-Understanding Can Help You Raise Children Who Thrive: 10th Anniversary Edition*. Tarcher Perigee.
- Silverman, L. K., & Golon, A. S. (2008). Clinical Practice with Gifted Families. In S. I. Pfeiffer (Ed.), *Handbook of giftedness in children* (pp. 199–222). Springer US.
- Sivak, E.V. (2019). Sovremennaja Roditel'skaja Kul'tura i ee Znachenie dlja Vzaimodejstvija Roditelej i Pedagogov [Modern Parental Culture and its Importance for the Interaction of Parents and Teachers]. *Sovremennoe Doshkol'noe Obrazovanie [Preschool Education Today]*, 1(91), 8–17. <https://doi.org/10.24411/1997-9657-2018-10036> [in Russian].
- Smutny, J. F. (2016). A Note from the Editor. *Parenting for High Potential*, 5(3), 1.
- Tihomirova, T. N. (2010). *Intellekt i Kreativnost' v Uslovijah Social'noj Sredy* [Intelligence and Creativity in a Social Environment]. Institute of Psychology of RAS. [In Russian]
- Wojcicki, E. (2019). *How to Raise Successful People: Simple Lessons for Radical Results*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.