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Relationship of a Gifted Child with Their Peer Environment

ABSTRACT: The main aim of the article is to determine the relationship between the abilities of a child at pre-school age and the emerging difficulties in their peer group. It is important to determine the support the child receives from parents and teachers in the kindergarten, to know the forms of talent development, to determine relationships with peers and to know the principles and forms of cooperation between parents and the child's teacher. Another significant issue is the relationship between the difficulties in the peer group and being a gifted child. The inspiration for undertaking this topic were personal experiences gained during work, taking care of gifted children at preschool age.

KEYWORDS: exceptionally gifted child, gifted child, abilities.

Introduction

Significant and specific differences in children's development become noticeable already at an early age, which can also be observed on the example of abilities. Little ones can stand out for their quick and correct thinking, uniqueness and richness of ideas as well as the speed and ease of performing a given task. The development of a gifted child determines whether they will manage to maintain and expand their interests and talents. Such a child can achieve or is already achieving very high school results in comparison to their peers. Due to the highly developed creative imagination and properly used abstract thinking, they can be successful in a specific field of science or be comprehensively talented (Limont, Dreszer, Cieślukowska, 2010, p. 5). Parents

and teachers play very important role here, and they should change the way they perceive such a child and accept them (Pufal-Struzik, 2016).

A gifted child needs understanding and acceptance instead of being labeled as an eccentric and naughty young person. Adults should support them in their contacts with peers and relations with their close ones, as this largely affects the overall mental, emotional and social development. It is not possible to determine all possible and necessary forms and ways of working with such a child. This is assessed on an individual basis and taking into account the possible consequences. The upbringing and teaching of children is not an easy job, and what helps are the qualities of a teacher, which include, above all, creativity and a willingness to interact with other people. The reflective attitude of the teacher favors their personal and professional development and the development of their students' personalities.

General approach to the development of a gifted child

Abilities are properties of an individual's psyche that allow for effective performance in a given field regardless of the level of difficulty and tasks to be solved. The division of abilities distinguishing between general and special abilities is worth noting. The former, as "general intelligence", affect all kinds of activity of a gifted person. This concerns mainly the ability to learn, the ability to adapt to new challenges and conditions and the ease of solving new tasks and problems (Giza, 2011, pp. 135–137). Special abilities, on the other hand, are associated with certain skills. A child has a talent that results from the interaction of general and special abilities, random and environmental factors, non-intellectual internal conditions (Podolak, 2011, pp. 199–200). This ability is directed in a given direction, so that a person can be gifted mathematically, technically, artistically or in natural sciences (Szewczuk 1997, p. 996). Not every gifted child, however, will be able to perform better than an average child (Wysocka, 2010, p. 631).

A gifted child demonstrates an above-average level of intelligence, physical abilities, fast and efficient abstract reasoning and ease of learning. They remember, reason and associate more quickly, which is reflected in better grades at school. They can have various interests and creative imagination from a very young age (Dyrda, 2007, p. 16). They ask abstract questions, are eager to expand their knowledge and notice certain important things faster than their peers. Their interests are often directed towards something that is rather unusual and unconventional, especially from the perspective of the environment (Wieczorek, 2011, pp. 224–227). The gifted child, despite their

predisposition, is often not satisfied with their own achievements due to too high ambition and perfectionism. When dealing with many problems at once, neither their concentration nor the effectiveness of the results decreases. During school lessons they may be inattentive and wriggle on the chair because they are bored, but can answer the teacher's questions. As an individualist, they constantly ask questions and expect an immediate answer. They are more likely to choose reading a book rather than going out with their peers, which makes intellectual entertainment more important to them than sports.

The child's abilities may be genetic, environmental and anatomical-physiological. Irrespective of this, the child should be motivated to learn and develop their talent. Such a child is more sensitive to inappropriate criticism and unfair assessment, and therefore they tend to prefer the company of adults rather than children (Giza, 2011, pp. 135–137). A major role is played by parents, who satisfy the child's cognitive needs, strengthen the child's confidence in their own abilities and stimulate creative activity. The child should learn to use cultural goods and have the opportunity to participate in additional educational activities (Wieczorek, 2011, pp. 224–227).

They are also able to speak whole sentences earlier than their peers, even using quite sophisticated vocabulary, and will faster learn to write and read with comprehension (Majewska-Pyrkosz, 2011, pp. 277–285). Toddlers often have mathematical and artistic skills, with time they develop motor or literary, or even intellectual skills (Wieczorek 2011, pp. 224–227). Such children often have difficulties in social contacts, resulting from a lack of satisfaction of social needs and a desire to isolate oneself from others (Misiuk 2010, pp. 70–71). Teachers try to verify the student's knowledge by means of grading, but it is not uncommon for them not to have good results because they do not want to comply with the rules and principles (Misiuk 2010, p. 70). Gifted children demonstrate a significant level of intellectual or directional development early on. They are active in a given field, learn faster and want to constantly broaden their knowledge in their area of interest (Limont 2010, pp. 90–91).

Contacts with peers are important for every child. Gifted students more often experience problems with fitting into such a group, therefore they should be helped (Pufal-Struzik, 2016, p. 69). It is not easy for parents and teachers to get to know and understand a child who stands out among their peers (Karwowski, 2006, p. 9). The development of creative abilities and talents is also affected by pedagogical and family-related problems. These include the material and living conditions of the family, interpersonal relations among relatives, traumatic events in the past and the atmosphere and style of upbringing (Szmidt, 2009, p. 22).

The role of parents and kindergarten teachers in the development of a gifted child

Parents and other close family members play an important role in the development of a gifted child. Parents support the development of the little one and make use of their potential. As time goes by, more and more responsibility for the child's development is taken over by the tutor at the kindergarten, and then at school (Taraszkiewicz, 2011, pp. 16–20). The child's relations with the family are very important, because the child's abilities and achievements may vary depending on the specifics of the child's cognitive functioning, the use of different teaching methods or different upbringing (Sękowski, 2000, p. 34). A child has to be set adequate requirements based on their age and level of emotional and social development, otherwise it will not be easy for adults to understand the little one, their skills and abilities (Orłowska, 2003, p. 52). Parents are obliged to accept the child as he or she is, they must be their support. It will be then easier for the child to make an effort to discover something new, acquire further skills and abilities and to overcome the problems faced (Szumski, 1995, p. 63).

The role of parents is very important because they are the first authority for the child, showing them the world and teaching them life. A gifted child requires even more acceptance and mental support, they must be taught how to react properly to failures, behave in a group and enjoy overcoming their weaknesses. Parents should correct negative attitudes and aggressive behavior, communicate new information, and show opportunities to gain new knowledge and develop interests (Bernacka, 2009, pp. 107–115). Parents may transfer their ambitions onto the child, from whom they expect to fulfill their dreams and desires. Parents are often overprotective towards a gifted child, treat them as if they were the center of the world. Adults, wishing to accelerate the development of the youngster, practice their skills and abilities, which may not be long-lasting and may entail some emotional burden. Excessive pushing of the child towards success and achievements can lead to an increase in the tendency to competition and dominance among peers. The child will be conceited and too self-confident, they will also want to have the exclusive attention of adults and disregard their mates (Szumski 1995, p. 63).

Increasingly popular, especially among families with a gifted child, is home schooling. Parents take on the role of their child's teacher and are responsible for the way and pace of their child's learning. They only need to make sure that the child passes the core curriculum and receives a class

graduation certificate (Wittenberg, Klinger, 2015). The child then has a lower level of anxiety, is independent of their peers, has high self-esteem and greater sense of social responsibility. Home schooling reduces the level of aggression and competition and increases socialization and social maturity (Budajczak, 2004, pp. 61–65). Parents, while teaching their children, can observe, support and help them to learn on a daily basis. It is easier to notice talents or deficiencies (Puślecki, 1999, p. 41).

In the case of a child at preschool age, it is important to shape proper social relations. Their cognitive development, tolerance, sense of bond with their peers are formed, and various forms of play are developed. Therefore, the focus should be on children's cultural activity, introduction to diligence and accuracy (Kałuba-Korczak, 2011, pp. 4–7). A child should not be forced to learn too quickly and at a high pace, as it may result in fatigue or even boredom and lack of interest in the content of the lesson (Paszkiwicz, 2011, pp. 20–26). Most children behave differently at kindergarten and at home, so good communication between parents and teachers is important (Szumski, 1995, p. 63). The organization of work with a child is based on the analysis of the problem in the didactic and educational process (Urbanek, 2016, pp. 32–42). The task of the teacher is to discover and define the problem, strengthen the child's efforts, support them in observing and searching (Żuk, 2013, pp. 54–57).

The teacher can, adequately to the child's interests, use certain methods to develop their abilities: the Irena Majchrzak's method, the Bronisław Roślowski's method, the Glenn Doman's method, the Marta Bogdanowicz's method – from song to letter, the project method, method of designing educational opportunities and the "Klanza" method (Skoczylas, 2017).

Several methods have been used in this study, because when working with a gifted child it is important to remember that they get bored faster, especially when repeating the same materials or activities. This means that one has to find various ways of expanding and enriching the tasks that are presented to the preschooler. The task of the teacher is to motivate to action, organize exhibitions and performances, as well as contests where gifted children can prove themselves. It is also necessary to cooperate with the parents of the little ones in order to share all comments and observations.

Methodology of own research

The subject of the presented research are difficulties of a social nature appearing in the peer group with a gifted child. The aim of the research was to determine these difficulties. The research problem is the correlation

between the child's abilities and the emerging difficulties in functioning in the peer group.

The research method used in this paper is case study. On the one hand, this method is accused of lack of scientific reliability and some basis for generalization of conclusions, but on the other hand it allows to solve scientific and practical problems. The foundation will be to systematize the knowledge of this method (Wójcik, 2013). The research procedure is based on two techniques, i.e. interview and observation. The interview is a specific form of a relaxed conversation conducted in the form of a prepared questionnaire, interview scenario or disposition (Kvale, 2010, p. 19). The observation, on the other hand, is a method of collecting primary data allowing to find answers to the research problems (Mazurek-Łopacińska, 1999, p. 138). The most important, however, seems to be the fact that observation gives the researcher an opportunity to grasp what has not been expressed verbally. The paper employs two research tools: interview questionnaires (for pre-school teachers, for parents of a gifted child and for the child) and an observation sheet.

The research was carried out in the kindergarten „Akademia Sztuk Dziecięcych” – Niepubliczne Przedszkole Artystyczne nr 113 w Warszawie (Eng. *“Academy of Children's Arts” – Private Art Kindergarten No. 113 in Warsaw*) which prepares children to start school education and achieve success in further life.

Analysis of own research results based on case study

Three children were selected for this study: 2-year-old Józefina, 6-year-old Kacper and 3.5-year-old Henio. Even though it would be possible to identify yet another three gifted children in the kindergarten, Józefina, Kacper and Henio are a kind of example of little ones attracting the attention of adults and their peers. Considering also some sentiment to these pupils, they became a source of interesting observations and thus research. Direct interviews and observations of the children were focused on the educational difficulties in working with an exceptionally gifted child, as well as their relations with their peers. At the beginning it can be noted that it is not easy to bring up and teach a gifted young person.

In order to describe the relations of gifted children with their peers it seems the most important to observe them. By means of a case study, i.e. a comprehensive description of an individual taking into account certain variables, one can thoroughly examine even a complex phenomenon in its real context. This is how the characteristics of the selected gifted children will be described.

Józefina is a calm and sensitive child. She quickly learns and assimilates new information, is fully independent and very curious about the world, has no health problems. Her parents are interested in her progress in the kindergarten, stay in touch with the teacher and observe their daughter. Kacper is also a neat child and his parents follow the tutor's advice on raising the boy and his development on an ongoing basis. Due to his health problems, everyone tries to do something to make him happy, and Kacper often and willingly takes advantage of it. Nevertheless, he is an independent and calm child, efficient and thinking logically, learning very quickly and remembering new knowledge. Henio is a neat child, but quite often dressed up inadequately for the weather, because on cold days he always has tights, pants and a ski suit, even when the temperature outside is above zero, which makes him constantly sweaty and overheated. The boy has a very good relationship with his dad, but slightly disrespects his mom and behaves very aggressively towards her. It is difficult to say what the reason for such a relationship between the child and the mother may be. The observation shows that the boy could react in this way to her overprotectiveness and certain insistence. The boy's parents contact the kindergarten teacher on an ongoing basis and discuss all the matters concerning the child within the family circle at home.

The children participating in the study receive a lot of support from their parents. Józefina's parents satisfy all her emotional needs, correcting displays of egoism and aggressive behavior. The girl has the mental support of her parents, who teach her how to behave in difficult social situations and how to cope with failure. The parents constantly encourage the child to work by conversations, playing, walking with her and sharing interests.

The situation is very similar for Kacper. The boy's parents take great care of him and his development, go on trips together, go to the cinema and talk a lot, as well as follow the teacher's recommendations concerning work at home. The most important for the parents is to stimulate the development of the child, which is essential because the boy often exhibits inappropriate behavior and isolates himself from the group. He does not like to clean up after playing, gets angry quickly and tosses his things around. He often reacts with screaming and gets upset, which may be partly due to the fact because he is an only child, his loved ones try to help him in everything and compensate him for the additional stress caused by subsequent nose surgeries.

Henio is one of the children who can count on considerable support from his parents. Adults often talk to him, explain more difficult matters and are patient. The educational problem is Henio's domination of his mom, who is completely subordinated and does what the child wants. If she has a

different opinion or does not allow her son to do something, she becomes a victim of physical and verbal violence of the child. It is not unusual for a boy to shout at her and beat her in the face when his mother picks him up. In such a situation, the woman does not react, sits patiently and waits for Henio to stop. Often it takes even an hour, or less, if the boy gets what he wanted from his mom, for example a chocolate bar or juice, then the child gets dressed and leaves the kindergarten. In the home environment the mother experiences similar situations. The child can request muffins immediately after waking up, to which the mother reacts immediately. She obediently satisfies the boy's expectations by baking the muffins he wants and giving them to him. Otherwise, Henio will not eat anything for breakfast, he will scream and beat her. The child's relationship with his father is much better. Henio respects his dad, they are able to play together and he does not use any demanding tone towards him. The father can wait patiently in a situation when the child has a crisis, which then also lasts much shorter. The dad is adamant, he will not let the son force him to do what he wants. Henio's emotional outbursts therefore become meaningless against the calm and firm dad, who does not react to such childish behavior. However, the most important thing is that parents are aware of this problem and try to deal with it.

All teachers have excellent attitudes towards children. They identify the talents of the little ones to make it easier and more effective for them to work with them later. The children can count on the teacher's commitment to their work and development, they do not feel judged by adults, and they can even be fully independent and learn freely. All three of them have teachers who respect them, are open to children's needs, ideas and interests, which makes children more willing to share their knowledge and attention. In practice, little ones are more willing to take part in games with their peers, it is easier for them to get along and cooperate with others.

A characteristic feature of the examined three children is the fact that each of them is an only child that is in the center of parents' attention, which also seems to be important for the accelerated development of the child. Józefina, according to her parents, is very gifted, she is interested in books, likes to look at them, shows pictures when asked to do so. Kacper has mainly mathematical and computer talents. At the same time he is also very good at Polish and English language, as well as has great motor and manual skills. Henio, on the other hand, has mathematical abilities, which stems from his perception of the world through the prism of patterns and repetitiveness. He is interested in science, likes to read, paint and play with bricks.

Gifted children are usually shy and lost, they often have difficulties in communicating their feelings and knowledge, their interests are different than those of their peers, which also contributes to their isolation (Misiuk, 2010, pp. 70–71). Józefina sometimes has difficulties in engaging in conversations and friendships with her mates. Her peers often do not want to play with her, so she prefers to play with two mates whose company she enjoys or she chooses an adult as her interlocutor. Kacper likes to talk to his peers, they spend a lot of time together. However, the boy often starts to impose his will on them, which is not always welcome among children. This results in arguments and quarrels, and often requires the support of adults. Henio, however, has difficulties in establishing contacts with others, and before joining in, he observes his peers and their behavior for a long time. He also wants to show off and always be an expert by imposing his own rules of playing.

The cooperation between parents and a teacher of a gifted child is based primarily on daily communication, conversations about the child and their development. Each child participating in the study has parents who are in contact with the teacher on a regular basis, analyze the information provided and perform the proposed tasks and exercises. The teacher regularly provides the diagnosis of the preschooler, points out the relevant literature and the right path to eliminate possible problems and difficulties. According to parents, their children have teachers who put the pupil first, who are wise and experienced, which has a positive impact on the child and their relationship with their peers, as well as on parents who can trust the people taking care of their little ones.

Summarizing the characteristics of the children selected for the study, it can be seen that relations between gifted children at preschool age and their peers are not easy. On the one hand, the little ones have no problems with establishing contacts, but on the other hand, they prefer to spend more time staying aside and observing. They tend to pick one or two friends with whom they are closer to each other and avoid or try to minimize contacts when playing and learning. At the same time, however, they are liked by their peers, so that despite some negative features or behaviors, they are welcome to join in games or activities at the kindergarten. The cooperation between parents and the teacher of a gifted child is based on constant contact and conversation about the little one. Both parents and teachers are interested in the child's progress and their further work. The teachers guide the parents in continuing their work at home, and the parents give any comments they may have. This cooperation is unanimously assessed by adults as very good, appropriate, fruitful and intense.

The kindergarten teacher's work with a gifted child is mainly based on an individual approach to them. It is important to recognize talents and work towards their further development. Children can count on the teacher's support, help with activities or with playing with their peers. The teachers keep an eye on the child, evaluate their activity and look for an appropriate approach to influence the development of the young person in the most effective way. Despite the fact that their work is based on the curriculum, they support and develop the child's talents in various ways individually adapted to the young person.

Analyzing the above conclusions, one can comment on the relationship between the abilities of the child and the emerging difficulties in the peer group. Children usually play with selected peers, even though they do not have any significant communication problems. However, often their friends do not want to play with them because of the rules dictated by the little one. Gifted children are confident, they impose their will on others, but at the same time they can also be nice, friendly and cheerful. They can also tease a colleague without any specific reason and refuse to apologize. It is also characteristic that such a child usually does not accept refusal and their reactions involve screaming and complaining about their peer.

Conclusions

Relationships between gifted children of preschool age and their peers are not simple and easy. These children prefer to observe and analyze first, which can be seen as a desire to avoid contact and cooperation with others. Although they do not have much trouble making friends, they prefer having a few good friends rather than playing in a crowd. When they show their stubborn character, they are often separated from others, which does not bother them either. For children demonstrating certain abilities, it is important to have a good relationship with their parents and the kindergarten teacher. Parents support the child even through their presence, they are always next to the little one, satisfy his or her needs and desires. Children learn from them how to properly perceive the world, to correct their mistakes and how to behave in every situation. Parents do not abandon their child regardless of who they are or what they do. They build the relationships through playing or walking together and sharing interests.

The work of the teacher of a gifted child consists in an individual approach to the little one. The first step is to recognize the abilities and then the right direction of work for the further development of the child. A gifted

child must know that he or she can count on the teacher during activities or playing with their peers. The adult should observe the youngster, assess their activity and development. In this respect, the cooperation between the child's parents and their kindergarten teacher is very important. Adults should be jointly interested in the child's progress and strive for their further development. Teachers should give parents guidance on how to work from home, and parents should report their observations and possible comments. The more developed and unique abilities the child has, the more it is necessary to strive to develop and utilize them more effectively.

The topic of this paper, concerning the educational difficulties in working with an exceptionally gifted child, shows that working with such a child is not easy. However, in case of a very good cooperation with the child's parents, a lot can be achieved. This is important in view of the difficulties in relationships with peers. Gifted children are often separated from their mates, even though they enjoy playing and making friends. However, if they want to belong to the group too much, they also want to supervise everything and decide about the rules. Peers negatively perceive stubbornness and self-confidence, which is why both parents and kindergarten teachers have the difficult task of working with a gifted and an exceptionally gifted child.

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