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Giftedness as a Source of Communication Difficulties in a Group of Peers

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Abstract

In modern educational conditions, the organization of work with gifted children is of particular importance. We have been studying the peculiarities of social-pedagogical work with gifted children in educational organizations of various types since 2018. The empirical study was conducted via interviewing of teachers of educational organizations in Kostroma, Yaroslavl, Galich, Kursk, and the Sirius educational center (n=225).

The results demonstrate that the work with gifted children is focused on the development of special abilities, while the sphere of their social development and communication remains neglected. Therefore, we see visually successful children who may suffer from the inability to present themselves, while being burdened with a lack of meaning in life, and complex relationships with the micro-society.

In this regard, the aim of the article is to identify and characterize communicative difficulties of gifted children in a group of peers.

The empirical data compiling is carried out by means of the polling method, testing, and interviewing gifted children (Kostroma, the Sirius center, Sochi) (n=223), which enables to identify the most striking problems of social development of gifted children where communication problems occupy the leading place.

The article reveals the communicative peculiarities and difficulties of gifted children with peers and adults based on the diagnostic data.

The results presented in the article enable to formulate some specific features of socio-pedagogical work with gifted children to overcome their communication problems. These features are taken into account when developing and implementing the program called "Self -development is the key to success".

Keywords: giftedness, gifted child, socialization, communication.

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Introduction

In modern educational conditions, educators face the necessity to organize the study process with children who have different educational opportunities. We are talking about both disabled children who require special attention, the specifics in the educational process, the creation of special organizational and spatial conditions, and gifted children who exceed the existing standards while perceiving educational material and demonstrate supreme skills in certain areas of activity in comparison with their peers. Work with special categories of children, including gifted children, requires additional attention of the educationalist and the development of individual educational routes, which is additional complexity for teachers according to the requirements of the Federal State Educational System. Despite this many educational organizations are trying to solve the problems and improve their effectiveness in working with gifted children.

During 2018 and 2019, the current practice of social and pedagogical work with gifted children was analyzed. The study of educationalists' and future teachers' attitudes to the problems of social development among gifted children was conducted in educational organizations. The empirical study was carried out by a survey of teachers of general education and professional institutions in Kostroma, Yaroslavl, and Galich (n=132), specialists of supplementary education organizations in Kostroma, Yaroslavl, and Kursk (n=66), and teachers and specialists of the Sirius educational center in Sochi (n=27).

The research results revealed the specifics in the organization and content of social-pedagogical work with gifted children in educational organizations. Modern educational organizations in Russia are largely subordinate to the implementation of Federal Educational Standards and, in this regard, they value good academic performance, compliance with norms and rules of the conduct. Children who "break out" from the "framework of the average student" cause difficulties in work and need additional psychological and pedagogical support. Due to their peculiarities and complexity, gifted children commence to experience pressure both from teachers and from their peers in the study process. In this regard, the data obtained showed that modern educational organizations are mainly focused on quantitative results in working with gifted children: academic achievements, victories in contests. However, the problems of social development and socialization of this category of children sometimes remain outside the range of pedagogical tasks.

The research necessitates special attention in solving age-related problems of development and socialization of gifted schoolchildren. At the same time, we should not only talk about the development of the abilities of this category of children and their formal success, which is one side of the coin. It is

important for an educationalist not to lose a sight of existing obstacles which a gifted child faces in relationships with a micro-society, in the formation of self-awareness and adequate self-esteem, in the development of communication skills. It is important to understand that the implementation of the creative and intellectual potential is fully possible if they successfully solve natural, socio-cultural and socio-psychological problems of socialization in the course of their life (Zaharova, Grushechkaya, & Shcherbinina, 2019).

For years, we have been studying the success of solving age-related socialization problems of gifted children on the basis of educational organizations in Kostroma. The research has revealed a number of difficulties in socializing of gifted students:

- inadequate self-perception of gifted students, low level of self-acceptance;
- difficulties in relationships with peers (inability to establish interaction; problems in resolving conflict situations; a low socio-metric status in the group);
- difficulties of self-realization in a group of peers (gifted people are already initially tense, feel discomfort being among their classmates, but there is a desire to be accepted and respected);
- a low level of flexibility in behavior, etc.

All the results indicate the need for special attention in solving the communication difficulties of gifted children with a micro-society.

Purpose and objectives of the study

The aim of the study is to identify and characterize the communicative difficulties of gifted children in a group of peers.

Literature review

Much of the work experience and research results are focused on the development of the abilities among gifted children and organization of work with them at different age stages and levels of education.

At the same time, the researches of Russian scientists (Leutina, 2014; Panov, 2014; Yurkevich, 2018) indicate the need to create conditions in the educational school environment for the socialization of an individual and development of social and communicative competency (Leutina, 2014; Yurkevich, 2018).

At present, particular attention is paid to active work not only on the development of the abilities of gifted children but also the creation of conditions for their social development and their existential sphere (Panov, 2014; Smirnov & Khazova, 2017).

This is confirmed by foreign researches. Thus, the social component of the life of gifted children and adolescents has been the focus of close attention of foreign psychologists for several decades (Meshkova, 2015). The results of the research by Davis and Robinson (2018) confirm the susceptibility of gifted children to bullying and indicate the need for special work with their psycho-emotional sphere, which requires highly qualified specialists in this field. Guez, Peyre, Le Cam, Gauvrit, and Ramus (2018) depict that gifted children are at risk of failing at school in comparison with their peers.

The results of the work by Bachkov and Starovoitenko (2017) are of special significance. The study is dedicated to the problem of psycho-pedagogical support in developing social competency among gifted adolescents. Litvak and Bondarchuk (2012) dedicate their study to an innovation strategy of psychological and pedagogical assistance in socializing gifted students (Lekomceva, 2016).

All these studies indicate the necessity to organize special social-pedagogical work with gifted children in educational institutions and create conditions for successful socialization tasks (Grushetskaya & Shcherbinina, 2018).

One of the leading socio-psychological tasks in gifted adolescents' socialization is the development of communication abilities and interaction skills. However, as the results of the research have shown, this problem is not always successfully solved by gifted teenagers and remains relevant and acute, thus requiring more progress in the work towards its solution (Shcherbinina, 2019).

Methodology

The empirical study includes an interview of specialists of educational organizations in Kostroma, Yaroslavl, Galich, Kursk, and the Sirius center in Sochi (n=225). In addition to the study, we conduct a survey, testing and interviewing gifted children (Kostroma, "Sirius" in Sochi) (n=223).

Diagnostic tools applied in the study:

- monitoring of gifted children;
- polling of gifted children and educationalists;

- sociometry
- “Method of self-attitude research” by S.R. Pantileev (1992);
- -“Communicative and organizational skills” (Batarshev, 2001);
- “Methodology for assessing the relationship of a teenager with a class” (Rogov, 2003);
- -the questionnaire “The School situation” (Zaretsky, V.K., Smirnova, Zaretsky, Yu.V., Evlashkina, & Kholmogorova, 2011);
- -the questionnaire “Subject position” (Zaretsky, V.K., Zaretsky, Yu.V., & Kulagina, 2014).

Experiment stages:

- 1) Study of the peculiarities of social-pedagogical work with gifted children in educational organizations of various types;
- 2) Formulation of the specifics of socio-pedagogical activities with gifted children in educational organizations of various types;
- 3) Identification of features and problems of social development;
- 4) Identification and actualization of problems of gifted children in the communicative sphere;
- 5) Development and conduct of the work program with gifted students “Self-development is the key to success” in order to solve the communicative problems of this category of children.

The research methodology is built on an age-based approach to social education as a purposeful creation of conditions for human development. We take into account the specific traits and capabilities of children in each age group and utilize them while working. The age-based approach allows arranging social and pedagogical work in an educational organization in a way to create conditions for an effective solution of age-related socialization problems among gifted children.

The ideas of the existential approach are focused on the organization of work with gifted children, aimed at finding oneself, meaning of life and a way of existence in a complex world, traits of their unique personality. The solution of the tasks is found through the application of social choice situations in the practice of working with gifted children.

The identification of socio-pedagogical conditions for overcoming the communicative difficulties of a gifted child refers to a reflexive-compensatory approach when a gifted child evaluating himself identifies his problems and with the help of an educator builds a program of self-development.

Results

The study of the phenomenon of “social development” enables us to formulate a set of criteria and indicators for successful social development of gifted children (highlighted criteria are interaction with peers; interaction with adults; mastering the rules and norms of the micro-society; organization of independent activities).

Based on the formulated set of criteria and indicators we have conducted a study to identify characteristics and challenges of social development of gifted children attending educational institutions in the city of Kostroma, a multi-disciplinary school for gifted students of Kostroma State University, House of children's creativity “Zhemchuzhina”, the Sirius educational center (n=223).

According to research results, the most common problems gifted teenagers face are:

- *Inadequate self-esteem.* Diagnostic results often allow to record low self-esteem of gifted students which sometimes prevents successful self-realization and prevents the establishment of positive relationships with peers and adults.
- *The difference in the game interests of gifted children and their peers* often causes the destruction in relationships and communication.
- *Difficulties in relationships with teachers and parents.* It is common among gifted children to complain about unfair situations involving school teachers and their parents. Gifted children “experience” these resentments which become a “stumbling block” for establishing communication between a gifted child and close adults.
- *Difficulties of self-realization* of their potentials and opportunities in a group of peers, *inability to present* their point of view, their achievements, their views and opinions on a problematic issue.
- Specific *rigidity* in the behavior. In this case, we mean the sphere of interaction with micro-society where gifted people have difficulties in reacting to a changed social situation fast and adequately, which prevents successful communication.

The enlisted problems are interdependent and often connected with cause-and-effect relations.

To study peculiarities of socio-pedagogical work with gifted children, we have conducted the research in educational organizations of different kinds. The empirical study includes surveying specialists of educational organizations in Kostroma, Yaroslavl, Galich, Kursk, educational center “Sirius” in Sochi (n=225).

We would like to highlight certain results. The school teachers, educationalists of supplementary education and the Sirius educational center pay diverse attention to academic performances inactivity and erudition, however, these characteristics have certain relevance for each answer. The specialists of educational center “Sirius” stress such traits as leadership ambitions and creative self-fulfillment in comparison with the school teachers and educationalists of supplementary education.

In the question connected with priority areas of work with gifted children, we observe a big difference in the given answers. Thus, the specialists of educational center “Sirius” find no need in paying much attention to regular diagnostics in comparison with the school teachers and educators of supplementary education, whereas the latter suppose that there is little necessity to help a gifted child in their social development (17%) to compare with the answers given by the tutors of educational center “Sirius” (71%). However, in the questions of development of abilities, talent advancement, the importance of assistance with self-identification and positive interactions, the pedagogues of all the educational organizations share similar points of view.

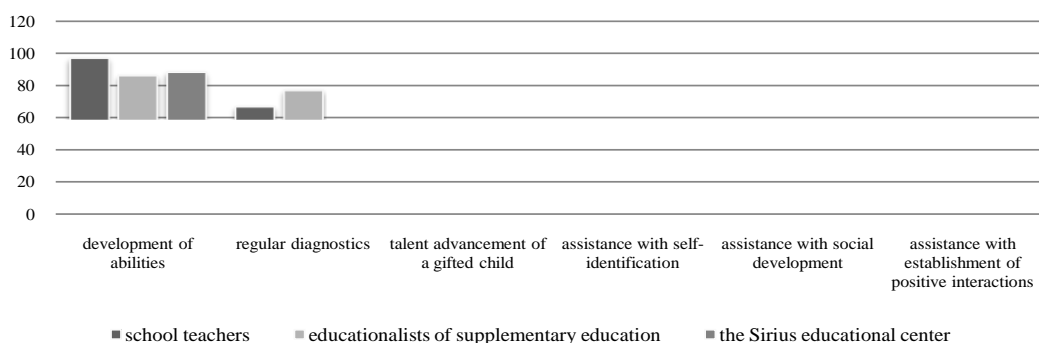


Figure 1. Priority areas of work with gifted children (data comparison)

The results of the survey show the differences in perceiving the outcome of social-pedagogic work. These characteristics, in our opinion, orient educators in defining the work contents. Thus the school teachers

prioritize children's educational results, not paying much attention to the problems of communication and interaction. The tutors of the educational center "Sirius", vice versa, give a priority to these spheres as results of socio-pedagogic work and evaluate them more than children's victories in contests and their success in some activity. The specialists of supplementary education consider participation and victories in contests and Olympiads valuable. With this, however, they take account of success in communication, interaction, conflict resolution. The demonstrated results reflect similarities in approaches to form contents of social-pedagogic work of the educationalists of supplementary education and pedagogues of educational center "Sirius" and depict diverse opinions of the school teachers on this survey (Zaharova et al., 2019).

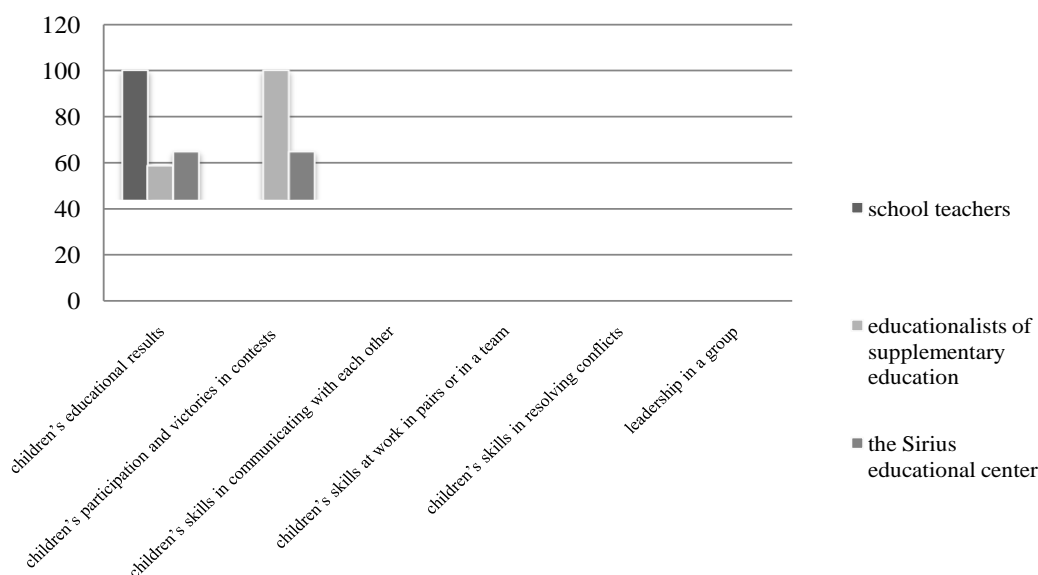


Figure 2. Results of socio-pedagogical work with gifted children (data comparison)

The conducted survey demonstrates the specific features of socio-pedagogic work with gifted children in modern educational organizations:

- All educational organizations perform socio-pedagogical work but with a diverse degree of intensity, consistency and with distinct contents and priorities;
- Unfortunately, none of the research facilities have a specific program of social-pedagogic work with talented children;

- In most organizations the subjects of social-pedagogic activity are represented by pedagogues, educators, educational psychologists and social workers;
- The diverse types of educational organizations have priorities to work with different kinds of giftedness, which influences work contents and its precedence;
- According to the results of the survey, the comprehensive school is aimed at the development of abilities of gifted children and their success rate, whereas the problems with their social development and communication draw less attention in comparison with the organizations of supplementary education and educational center “Sirius”;
- The obtained data demonstrate pedagogues’ different perceptions of “innovativeness” in work with gifted children. Educational center “Sirius” is considered to be a leader in originality and variety of contents, forms, and methods of work with gifted children, while the comprehensive schools and organizations of supplementary education observe traditional approaches in work with children including gifted ones.

The achieved results prove the necessity to draw the attention of the pedagogic community to the problems in the social sphere and communication of gifted children.

A possible solution to the problem of communication and difficulties in the sphere of social development may be the program of socio-pedagogic assistance for gifted school children “self-development – the key to success” which was worked out by the authors. In the study process, children learn to distinguish priorities while planning their life perspectives on the basis of positive self-attitude and self-perception, self-awareness in the society.

The purpose is the creation of a program of integration into the system of social relations based on self-development by gifted children.

Objectives:

- 1) Knowledge of peculiarities of verbal and nonverbal communication.
- 2) Development of interaction skills.
- 3) Development of communicative flexibility.

- 4) Improvement of skills at demonstrating emotions.
- 5) Correction of diffidence.
- 6) Acquaintance with behavioral strategies in conflicts.
- 7) Increased readiness of participants to define priorities while planning their life perspectives.
- 8) Formulation of more objective self-esteem.
- 9) Development of skills of self-presentation.

Hence in the process of the program realization significant module of work is dedicated to resolution of communicative problems among gifted children.

One of the diagnostic methods for evaluation of effective realization of the program is the method “Communicative and organizational skills” (Batarshhev, 2001).

The program for gifted children “Self-development – the key to success” was pursued in the comprehensive organization of Kostroma city, in the multi-subject school for gifted children of Kostroma State University and in a municipal state institution of supplementary education “institution of children’s creativity “Zhemchuzhina” in the current year.

We demonstrate the results of primary and secondary diagnostics of communicative abilities of participants of the group from a municipal state-funded institution of supplementary education “institution of children’s creativity “Zhemchuzhina” (n=18)

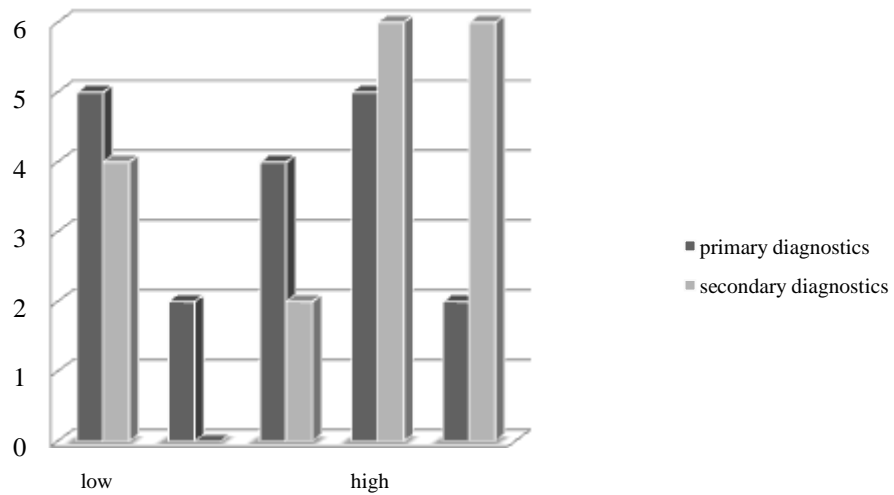


Figure.3. The results of diagnostics of the communicative abilities of gifted adolescents

Besides communicative and organizational skills, we evaluate the participants' inclinations towards success in some area of activity (giftedness), their self-attitude during the whole year of work (the method MIS by Pantileev (1992)).

The initial test demonstrates that the majority of the participants of the group from municipal state-funded institution of supplementary education in Kostroma city "institution of children's creativity "Zhemchuzhina" have inclinations (giftedness) to the spheres they have never thought about (the group structure is peculiar: they are senior school students and first-year college students). Another intriguing question is connected with the adolescents' motivation to further development in the areas of revealed preferences. Frequently the teenager does not demonstrate any intention to continue their development in the sphere, the choice of the profession made by the college students accentuates the revealed problem which should be analyzed and worked out.

It is necessary to point out that the work on the topic "Overcoming conflict situations" illustrates that some adolescents continue their education involuntarily because of conflicts in a school; consequently they perceive their position from the negative point of view. Discussing the problem, they have managed to see the past events from the positive side, realize all the advantages of getting a profession and opportunities to continue their education either in the chosen professional area or any other spheres.

The test on communicative activity demonstrates that 11 out of 18 teenagers in the group show an average or above-average level of development of communicative skills. The adolescents take part in communication and share their emotions and thoughts actively. At the program classes, repetitive and poor speech of the teenagers is revealed. The necessities to defend their point of view, substantiate answers, give expanded explanations, describe their emotional state cause difficulties with the majority of the participants.

The analysis of the way the participants perceive the program reveals the fact the majority take it as a game, entertainment but not a systematic work. There are some participants who lack communicative skills, thus their voluntary participation proves the awareness of the existing problems, which represents the first step to the problem resolution.

The data from the primary and secondary diagnostics demonstrate the successful realization of the program. Besides the quantitative results, we may speak about the participants' awareness of the existing problems, understanding of the methods of problem eradication, obtained experience of constructive communication. The participants master skills of goal-setting, get acquainted with the methods of conflict resolution, coalesce.

The program "Self-development is the key to success" has been conducted for 3 years, which enables us to get positive results of its realization as it illustrates a positive effect on the communicative sphere of the gifted children (the participants of the program). The favorable dynamics is proven by the diagnostic data, practical results of the program participants in diagnostic situations and training exercises, teachers' and parents' comments.

Discussions

Revealed difficulties with communication are mostly connected with peculiar traits of gifted children, their specific view on activity and its results, self-attitude and attitude to micro-society. Overcoming the problems is conditioned by successfulness of duly solutions of socialization tasks by gifted children and it leads to a prosperous future based on goal achievement.

Due to the obtained results, we may consider the necessity of organizing specific social-pedagogic work with gifted children in educational organizations of diverse types to be essential.

In order to solve problems in the communicative sphere, we have created and conduct the program for work with gifted children “Self-development is the key to success”. The aim is the creation of a program of integration into a system of social relations based on self-development by a gifted teenager.

The outcome of the work with gifted children in accordance with the program illustrates changes in indicators of communicative skills, however, the analysis of the results of the diagnostics depicts that the feature represents a part of another more difficult trait and it can be ambiguous in judgments of its changes, which proves the necessity of the further study of the problem.

Conclusion

The survey conducted in educational organizations of various types demonstrates that while working with gifted children preferential attention is paid to the development of abilities, educational achievements, and victories in contests and Olympiads. Meanwhile, peculiarities and difficulties in the social and communicative spheres are neglected by social, psycho-pedagogical departments.

We see an externally successful gifted child who has difficulties with solving problems with socialization and social development and who the educational organization is proud of. However, in the future, the person may not become a gifted and successful adult. All the causes mentioned above may evoke the process of victimization of a gifted teenager, preventing his prosperous future which is based on goal achievements and life script of a “Winner” (according to E. Berne). The causes may also lead a promising gifted child to a life script of “Non-winner” or even “Defeated”. The conclusions are proved by the diagnostics of gifted children which was conducted on diverse survey bases and which depicts existing problems in communication, self-evaluation, identification and self-realization.

The necessity to deal with the problems intensified our work on the program of socio-pedagogical assistance to gifted schoolchildren “Self-development is the key to success”, which is aimed at creating particular conditions for self-development and self-identification of a gifted child according to a created life plan. While working, a gifted school child learns more about their peculiarities, formulates their difficulties and works out a script of coping with them.

The effectiveness of work on solving communicative problems of gifted children in the process of realization of the program “Self-development is the key to success” is proved by the diagnostic results, practical achievements of the program participants, and comments of educators and parents.

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