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On the issue of uncovering giftedness in early childhood

Diana B. Bogoyavlenskaya^{a*}, Maria E. Bogoyavlenskaya^b, Elena S. Zhukova^a

^aPsychological Institute of the Russian Academy of Education, Mokhovaya st 9-4, Moscow, 125009, Russia

^bInstitute of Study of Childhood, Family and Education, the Russian Academy of Education, Makarenko st 5/16, Moscow, 105062, Russia

Abstract

The research aim was to identify the capabilities and limitations of tests for uncovering giftedness. The sample consisted of 103 preschoolers and students of elementary school. A comparative analysis using methods “The Creative field” and Raven’s Colored Matrices was carried out. The research allowed establishing a system of correlations between different methods, reflecting such factors as educability of a child, mastering a new activity and its successful performance according to various indicators. Thus, the correlations identified point to the presence of an intellectual component in the process of mastering a new activity, but Raven's test does not reflect the factor of activity development, which is supposed to be a significant characteristic of giftedness. So the research results dispute the validity of intellectual testing methods for uncovering child’s giftedness and estimating prospects of its development.

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1. Introduction

The past few decades have seen a dramatic increase in the relevance of finding and supporting gifted children. The fact is evidenced in the document signed by the President of Russia Dmitry Medvedev in 2012 as well as the “Decree on young talent scouting” dated the same year. This prioritized the task of estimating efficiency criteria for scouting for children and youth with general giftedness.

The research aim was to identify the capabilities and limitations of tests for uncovering giftedness as psychological research is considered to be one of the dominating methods in this sphere nowadays.

* Bogoyavlenskaya D.B. Tel.: + 7-916-354-47-88.

E-mail address: mpo-120@mail.ru

2. Theoretical background: evolution of the term “giftedness”

The efficiency analysis of a test as a tool for giftedness diagnostics poses anew the issue of understanding the nature of giftedness. The choice of a test depends on certain interpretations. However, we have to admit the absence of the common concept of giftedness. The whole variety of existing approaches can be put into Hegel's triad: thesis, antithesis, synthesis, and that can explain different (alternative and reduced) definitions of giftedness, not as alternatives but rather as phases of clarification of the term.

The thesis was formulated by Francis Galton the forefather of this subject matter. [1]. His wisdom became apparent in the fact that having marked out the ability to create as the characteristic feature of Homo sapiens, he began to study its highest form – genius. That allowed him to discover its main components: high intellect, personal and motivational characteristics and perseverance.

However, having made a first step, Galton was unable to make a second one at that time: he could not find out a unit of geniality analysis. That is why he had to reduce the concept to one of the components – intellect. V.M. Ekzemplarskiy points at the Gordian knot of the problem: “...only the lack of available experimental methods for evaluating the maturity of the emotional-voluntary sphere and, vice-versa, significant development of quantitative methods of studying intellect put the solution of the problem mainly into the intellectual sphere...” [2, p. 264]. Stern follows up: “The need for measurement leads to narrowing the concept of giftedness” [3, p. 58]. Thus, for decades the concept of giftedness, reduced to IQ measurements, dominated in psychology. Then there came the antithesis. Thus, the development of the concept is related to the method of measurement. This leads to the replacement of the whole concept by one measurable element. This fact underlies the tendency which Vygotsky named “element-wise analysis”, i.e. reducing the whole to one component. But “on the way of identification of the whole with an element, the problem does not get solved, it is just passed over” [4, p. 13].

In his studies Galton admitted that a gifted person's distinctive, characteristic feature is his/her “devotion to a cause” [1]. The issues, which were empirically discovered by Galton, but could not be elaborated in the middle of the 19th century, were theoretically grounded and experimentally proved a century later in a procedural-activity paradigm. Indeed, a true “devotion to a cause” presupposes a high degree of enthusiasm, preoccupation with the activity. In this case the activity does not stop even if the initial task has been fulfilled. What an individual does with passion, he/she constantly improves, realizing new ideas that have surfaced in the process of work. As a result of it, the new product of the activity sufficiently exceeds the initial idea. In this case it is possible to say that the activity develops on the individual's initiative. The phenomenon of “self-motion” of activity can be observed and that leads to going beyond the given limits [5].

It is in what exceeds the specified result (the ancient Greeks introduced a special term “*porism*” for this phenomenon), in the ability for continuing perception much beyond the requirements of a given situation, in doing what *loses the form of the answer* that the secret of the highest forms of creativity and giftedness lies concealed. Along with that, the ability for activity development on one's initiative cannot be explained by intellectual qualities alone. Our initial hypothesis was the surmise that it is the quality of an integrated personality, reflecting the interaction of cognitive and emotional spheres in their unity, where abstraction of one of the sides is impossible, as they are inseparable. That “alloy” of capabilities and personality possesses a quality of universality, i.e. it belongs to the given whole as a unity and corresponds to the methodological requirements to an analysis unit of creativity.

Our approach which allows identification of an analysis unit integrating the cognitive and emotional spheres of a personality and making them a whole, eliminates the difficulties which prevented from diagnosing the whole set of factors discovered by Galton [6]. Thus, it corresponds to the phase of synthesis in the study into the issue of creativity and giftedness.

3. Research methods

3.1. Description

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