



## Review Article

# Supporting of gifted children's psychosocial developments in preschool period

Nisa Gökden Kaya<sup>1</sup>\*

*Hitit University, Faculty of Health Sciences, Department of Child Development, Turkey*

### Article Info

Received: 18 March 2020  
Revised: 27 April 2020  
Accepted: 12 May 2020  
Available online: 15 June 2020

#### Keywords:

Gifted preschoolers  
Identification  
Learning environments

2717-7602 / © 2020 The Authors.  
Published by Young Wise Pub. Ltd.  
This is an open access article under  
the CC BY-NC-ND license



### Abstract

Preschool period involves critical development tasks within psychomotor, cognitive, language and psychosocial areas; therefore, supporting of gifted children's developments in preschool period is crucial. Gifted children have some differences from their peers in some traits, such as intelligence, creativity, diligence and commitment and motivation. In case of identification in early period, gifted children's social and emotional development, and particularly their cognitive development will progress better. Due to early identification principle of special education, it is important to evaluate gifted children comprehensively according to multiple criteria. Comprehensive evaluation means evaluating children using not only standardized intelligence tests, but also children's products, observations, rating scales, checklists, questionnaires, interviews, aptitude tests, achievement tests, awards, honors, grades, or other valid and reliable measures. Since parents and teachers of gifted young children play important roles in identification process, they should be aware of early signs of giftedness. There are some distinctive characteristics particularly in the cognitive, social and emotional domains which gifted children demonstrate in early childhood. Although there are some characteristics attributed to gifted young children such as curious, persistent, divergent thinkers, highly focused on their interests, and able to make abstract connections in learning exist in the literature of giftedness, it should be kept in mind that not every gifted child will exhibit all of these traits. In addition, parents and teachers should be aware of asynchronous development of gifted children in order to support their psychosocial developments especially in the preschool period. The psychological well-being of the children which depends on their self-esteem and confidence to create new things are interrelated with relationships with parents and teachers. In that sense, the unique needs of gifted preschoolers should be taken into account by parents and teachers in order to create appropriate learning environments. Teachers are under great responsibility for recognizing and identifying gifted children and then creating an efficient curriculum for them. The education given to gifted children should be boosted and enriched.

Kaya, N.G. (2020) Supporting of gifted children's psychosocial developments in preschool period. *Psychology Research on Education and Social Sciences*, 1(1), 25-30.

## Introduction

Preschool period is a process of rapid development within psychomotor, cognitive, language, psychosocial aspects; which lay the foundation of child's personality traits. In other words, the early years of life is critical for shaping an individual's characteristics in the rest of the life. Several research findings have revealed that quality early childhood care is positively effects children's development in cognitive, language and social domains (Clarke-Stewart, Vandell, Burchinal, O'Brien, & McCartney, 2002; Dunn, 1993; McCartney, 1984; Peisner-Feinberg & Burchinal, 1997). Thus, supporting children's psychomotor, cognitive, language and psychosocial development in childhood period is crucial. This is also prevailing in case the child is gifted. It is crucial to encourage and support the talents, motivation and creativity of gifted children by appropriate education.

### Identification of Giftedness in Preschool Period

There is no commonly accepted definition of the term "gifted" in literature. Although there are some common traits that researchers use to define giftedness, such as intelligence, (Sternberg, 1995), creativity (Marland, 1972; Renzulli,

1978), diligence and commitment (Renzulli, 1978), motivation (Renzulli, 1986), measurement of these traits and so measurement of giftedness is a problem (Peyser, 2005). There are some principles of identification of giftedness. First of all, identification should be made with scientific methods and proven techniques.

Traditionally, individuals with intelligence quotients (IQ) 130 and over were defined to be gifted (Rinju & Baby, 2012). In order to identify high intelligence, standardized, and so reliable, valid, and objective IQ test are widely used. Nevertheless, Sankar-DeLeeuw (2004) argues that standardized tests can be less reliable and less valid for young children because of standard errors of measurement, inadequate ceiling levels and inappropriate content with higher functioning levels.

Early identification is one of the basic principles of special education. The earlier gifted children are identified, the more successful they become in their education (Moore, 1992). Porter (1999) stated that it is important to identify preschool age gifted and talented children in order to give opportunity for their talents development.

If a child is diagnosed correctly as gifted in the early period, it is easy to create a plan for the future (Schofield & Hotulainen, 2004). However, it is not so easy to identify a gifted child, because many different data are needed in order to detect a gifted child in the early period.

Another principle of identification is comprehensiveness. The best way of identifying gifted children is evaluating them comprehensively according to multiple criteria (Moore, 1992; Smutny, 2000; Virginia Department of Education, 2005). Comprehensive evaluation means evaluating children using many assessment tools together (Hallahan & Kauffman, 1994). Virginia Department of Education (2005) listed eight multiple criteria on identifying gifted children. These are: assessment through portfolios or student products; record of observations; rating scales, checklist, and questionnaires; individual interviews; aptitude tests; achievement tests; awards, honors, grades; or other valid and reliable measures. Although researchers emphasize that giftedness and talent should be assessed multi-dimensionally, IQ tests are widely used as predominant identification measures for admission to government provisions, by many countries, including Turkey. But giftedness is more than high intelligence.

Another problem in identification of giftedness is similar characteristics of bright and gifted children. Especially parents whose children develop rapidly than their peers can confuse. Bright children may show similar characteristics with gifted children to some degree. Also there are individual differences within gifted children group which is not homogeneous. In other words, although some characteristics of gifted young children such as curious, persistent, divergent thinkers, highly focused on their interests, and able to make abstract connections in learning (Louis & Lewis, 1992; Roedell, 1989; Tuttle, Becker & Sousa, 1988; Webb, Meckstroth & Tolan, 1982) exist in the literature of giftedness, it should be kept in mind that not every gifted child will exhibit all of these traits. For example, although many of gifted children begin to talk early compared to their peers, it is not a rule that all gifted kids are early talkers.

### **Early Signs of Giftedness**

Gifted children show remarkable development features that are superior compared to their peer groups. Renzulli (1986), who is a pioneer in gifted education, defined three-ring conception of giftedness as, above-average talent, superior creativity and task commitment; and ability to combine their features and apply them to one or more areas.

There are some distinctive characteristics particularly in the cognitive, social and emotional domains which gifted children demonstrate in early childhood (Harrison, 2004). The featured characteristics of gifted children are in intelligence, creativity, leadership and art domains (Koshy, 2001). The general characteristics of these individuals are metacognitive, social and emotional features that depend on the development of their high mental capacities (Cutts & Mooseley, 2001; Renzulli, 1978; Tuttle, Becker & Sousa, 1988).

Intense curiosity comes first among these domains. Gross (1993) also stated high level of questioning, desire to learn, and unusually advanced sense of humor as characteristics of gifted children. Another apparent sign of giftedness is extraordinary verbal skills. According to Smutny (2000) it is possible that gifted pre-school children ask thoughtful questions, and make discussions about issues and ideas. In this context, another apparent sign of giftedness is extraordinary verbal skills. Because of extensive vocabularies, they are able to use the language in a creative way such as metaphors or figurative meanings (Castillo, 1998). In addition, they are able to understand abstract ideas at early ages. Consequently, most gifted children have advanced sense of humor compared to their peers (Porter, 1999).

Abilities of gifted young children are listed by Sankar-DeLeeuw (2004) according to a research conducted with families and teachers of gifted children. Gifted young children have superior abilities not only in academic areas, but also in social interactions, emotional intensity and sensitivity. The various traits described by parents are, curiosity, divergent thinking, gross and fine motor skills, early reading skills, having high math skills, perfectionism, focused

attention, highly developed sense of humor, creativity, high-verbal ability, early literacy skills, determination and making abstract connections in the learning process.

In order to support psychosocial developments in preschool period, it is crucial creating opportunities foster the gifted children's unique skills, creativity and talents. Since gifted children enjoy talking with older people and adults, sharing their thoughts, dreams and accompanying them through learning process, increases their self-esteem. According to their interests, interactive reading activities, observations, science experiments and brainteasers are some examples for supportive extra-curricular activities for gifted preschool children. In addition, peer relationships are important for psychosocial wellbeing of children. Thus, activities fostering the peer relationship help them to accept and respect personal differences.

### **The Role of Parents and Teachers**

Many researchers agree that parents and teachers of gifted young children play important roles in identification process (Chan, 2000; Kaya, 2015; Sankar-DeLeeuw, 1999; Yazıcı, Akman, Mercan-Uzun, & Kardeş, 2017). The identification process begins when the early signs of giftedness are noticed by parents and teachers. Thus, parents and preschool teachers should be aware of early signs of giftedness.

Gifted children demonstrate distinctive characteristics as early as in the first months and years. In this context, parents are the first witnesses of children's early signs of giftedness. Observations of parents on their child's development are important cues for identification. Extraordinary development in cognitive aspects are expressed by exceptional memory, curiosity, divergent thinking, gross and fine motor skills, early language and creativity. Another distinctive feature of gifted children is preferring company of older children and adults, mature sense of friendship and advanced play interests. They enjoy playing challenging games such as chess. Since they enjoy activities that are appropriate for older children and have a mature sense of friendship, they usually prefer company of older children and adults (Galbraith, 2000).

Although there are some researches that argue the misidentification of potentially gifted children due to teachers' prejudices against cultural differences (Davis & Rimm, 2003; Kaufman & Harrison, 1986), in recent years, teacher opinions are widely used as a way of identifying gifted students. Teachers, who are professionals trained about the development process of children, serve important data. In that sense, observations of teachers are matchless data sources. Especially by development of teacher assessment scales, more objective identification process can be carried out.

Parents and teachers of gifted young children play important roles not only in identification process, but also in meeting their unique needs about education. Sankar-DeLeeuw (2004) pointed out parents and educators as keys in helping gifted young children grow intellectually, socially, and psychologically. In other words, parents and educators should provide appropriate learning environments in order to support their positive development of young gifted children.

Many researchers mention the asynchronous development of gifted children (Davidson, 2018; Radue, 2009; Rinn & Majority, 2018; Smith, 2013). Normally developing children's physical, cognitive, language and psychosocial developments occur synchronously. However, gifted children's cognitive development is faster than the other development areas. Since gifted children are in the foreground in cognitive aspects, it is common that parents and teachers misunderstand or ignore the social and emotional needs of gifted children. Some of the gifted children may need adult help to interrelate with their peers in order to develop social skills, because they have more sophisticated interests than their peers. Since gifted children have more sophisticated interests than their peers, some of them may need adult help to interrelate with their peers in order to develop social skills. If gifted children do not interact with children having similar interests, talents and abilities, they may face some social problems (Galbraith, 2000). In this context, parents and teachers should be sensitive to gifted children's psychosocial needs.

Psychological well-being of gifted children is interdependent with personal interactions. There is no doubt that parents play a critical role for a realistic self-esteem, which is necessary in order to use superior talents such as creativity. In that sense, accepting and respecting approaches from parents and teachers are needed for developing self-esteem. Davidson (2018) mentions that gifted children whose parents give appropriate independence, discipline, opportunities and guidance reach their full potentials. Conversely, unrealistic expectations of parents may instigate low self-esteem and dysfunctional perfectionism. Parents and teachers should keep in mind that gifted children also have childish desires such as play. Offering opportunities for gifted children to play with their peers will be helpful for both their social and psychological developments.

Parents and teachers have responsibility to give information about social skills, to guide them in order to foster positive relationship with others and create environments that gifted children can utilize their talents in a friendly way. This kind of approach leads to develop not only the empathy skills that mean understanding of others' feelings, but also self-esteem of gifted children.

### **Appropriate Learning Environments for Young Gifted Children**

In literature, there are some educational approaches used in gifted education that can be used in preschool period such as acceleration, grouping and enrichment. Acceleration means moving the student through curriculum at rates faster than typical. Grouping is a strategy that divides children according to their abilities. Enrichment is simply defined as making academic modifications on speed and depth of learning content through horizontal programs (Dümenci, Gürsoy & Aral, 2016). Although enrichment is preferred mostly because it gives opportunity to gifted children to interact with their peers, in order to choose the appropriate strategy, the individual characteristics of the gifted child should be taken into account.

Appropriate learning environments for young gifted children mean educational environments that base on the learning characteristics of gifted children that are described as different and requiring special educational provision (Silverman, 1995). All preschool children including gifted children should be guided to attain relevant academic skills, and also to create ideas, question, make predictions and assess the outcomes (Dağlıoğlu & Çakir, 2007). In order to improve creative thinking, the curriculum should involve the thinking abilities and planning in preschool period. VanTassel-Baska and Stambaugh (2007) recommend teachers of gifted children are to be flexible in curriculum delivery through practices that incorporate student choice about the learning process, content and product.

In that sense, Smutny (2000) listed general principles in education young gifted children. First of all, teachers are recommended to create a learning environment using a wide range of materials within a thematic instruction to connect content areas, to provide activity centers for self-initiated projects that invites inquiry. It is also important to offer lesson-related activity options for the gifted children in case they finish work early. Another que is providing opportunities for creative movements, such as mime, dance, and singing. Flexible grouping is necessary for children in order to give them chance to interact with peers they like. Teachers should provide variety and offer choices to children choosing topics. It is better for teachers of gifted children to create ground rules and then assist in designing projects and their formats. Another important point is evaluating students individually. Informal interviews, tests, observations, consultations with parents, class assignments, and portfolios can be used by teachers in this process, in order to evaluate children's performance. Finally, teachers should compact the curriculum according to the unique needs of gifted children in order to incorporate creative thinking.

Leadership is an important psychosocial trait of gifted children (Gross, 1993). In that sense, creating learning opportunities that provide effective leadership and moral leadership is also crucial. Giving responsibility to gifted children in team work and including them in some group organizations are some examples for improving effective and moral leadership skills of gifted children.

### **Conclusion**

Preschool period is characterized by remarkable, intense growth in physical, cognitive, language and psychosocial development areas not only for normally developing children but also for gifted children as well. The first important point for the gifted children in preschool period is identification, because an appropriate approach begins with identifying gifted children. Despite the fact that early identification is one of the basic principles of special education, it requires a comprehensive evaluation. Although there are early signs of giftedness in preschool period, it is not an easy process to identify gifted children. Parents and teachers should be aware of the distinctive characteristics of gifted children such as curiosity, divergent thinking, gross and fine motor skills, early reading skills, having high math skills, perfectionism, focused attention, highly developed sense of humor, creativity, high-verbal ability, early literacy skills, determination and making abstract connections in the learning process.

Gifted preschoolers need parents and teachers who are aware of asynchronous development of gifted children. Accepting and respecting approaches from parents and teachers are crucial for psychological well-being of gifted children. A good combination of independence, discipline, opportunities and guidance will lead to a self-confident, creative and satisfied child. Appropriate learning environments that foster social skills, teamwork and leadership are also necessary for young gifted children

### Biodata of the Authors



Assit. Prof. Dr. Nisa Gökden KAYA, completed undergraduate education in Hacettepe University, Faculty of Education, Psychological Counseling and Guidance program in 1999. She graduated from Master of Science program of Psychological Counseling and Guidance in Middle East Technical University in 2007. She received doctorate degree from Gazi University in Special Education in 2016. Her research focuses on education of gifted students. After working as a counselor in several public schools for 19 years, she is now working at Hitit University, Child Development Department. **Affiliation:** Hitit University, Child Development Department, Çorum, **Turkey.** E-mail: nisakay@gmail.com

### References

- Castillo, L. (1998). The effect of analogy instruction on young children's metaphor comprehension, *Roeper Review*, 21 (1), 27-32.
- Chan, D. W. (2000). Identifying gifted and talented students in Hong Kong. *Roeper Review*, 22, 88- 93.
- Clarke-Stewart, K. A., Vandell, D. L., Burchinal, M., O'Brien, M., & McCartney, K. (2002). Do regulable features of child-care homes affect children's development? *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 17(1), 52-86.
- Cutts N. E., & Moseley, N. (2001). *Üstün Zekâli ve Yetenekli Çocukların Eğitimi [Education of gifted and talented children]*. İstanbul: Özgür.
- Dağlıoğlu, H. E., & Çakır, F. (2007). Development of planning and reflection from thinking skills in early childhood period. *Education and Science*, 32(144), 28.
- Davis, G. A., & Rimm, S. B. (2003). *Education of the gifted and talented* (5th edition). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Dunn, L. (1993). Proximal and distal features of day care quality and children's development. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 8(2), 167-192.
- Dümenci, S. B., Gürsoy, F., & Aral, N. (2016). Türkiye'de okul öncesi dönemdeki üstün potansiyalli ve üstün zekâli olan çocukların eğitimleri. [Education of Highly Gifted and Gifted Children at Preschool Period in Turkey]. *Kastamonu Education Journal*, 24(5), 2469-2480.
- Galbraith, J. (2000). *You Know Your Child Is Gifted When... A Beginner's Guide to Life on the Bright Side*. Free Spirit Publishing Inc., 400 First Avenue North, Suite 616, Minneapolis, MN 55401-1724.
- Gross, M. U. M. (1993). *Exceptionally gifted children*. London: Routledge.
- Hallahan, D. P., & Kauffman, J. M. (1994). Toward a culture of disability in the aftermath of Deno and Dunn. *The Journal of Special Education*, 27(4), 496-508.
- Harrison, C. (2004). Giftedness in early childhood: The search for complexity and connection, *Roeper Review*, 26:2, 78-84, DOI: 10.1080/02783190409554246
- Kaufman, A. S., & Harrison, P. L. (1986). Intelligence tests and gifted assessment: What are the positives? *Roeper Review*, 8, 154-159. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02783198609552961>
- Kaya, F. (2015). Teachers' Conceptions of Giftedness and Special Needs of Gifted Students. *Education and Science*, 40 (177), 59-74.
- Koshy, V. (2001). *Teaching mathematics to able children*. London: David Fulton Publishers.
- Louis, B., & Lewis, M. (1992). Parental beliefs about giftedness in young children and their relation to actual ability level. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 36(1), 27-31.
- Marland, S. P. (1972). *Education of Gifted and Talented*. W D.C.: US Office of Education.
- McCartney, K. (1984). The effect of quality of day care environment upon children's language development. *Developmental Psychology*, 20(2), 244-260.
- Moore, A. D. (1992). Gifted and talented children and youth (Ed. L. M. Bullock). *Exceptionalities in Children and Youth*. (p.420-448). USA: Allynand Bacon Inc.
- Peisner-Feinberg, E. S., & Burchinal, M. R. (1997). Relations between preschool children's child-care experiences and concurrent development: The cost, quality and outcomes study. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly*, 43(3), 451-477.
- Peyser, M. (2005). Identifying and nurturing gifted children in Israel. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling*, 27(2), 229-243.
- Porter, L. (1999). *Gifted Young Children*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Renzulli, J. S. (1978). What makes giftedness? Re-examining a definition. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 60, 180-184.
- Renzulli, J. S. (1986). The three-ring conception of giftedness: A developmental model for creative productivity. In R. J. Sternberg & J. E. Davidson (Eds.), *Conceptions of giftedness* (pp. 53-92). Cambridge. England: Cambridge University press.
- Rinju, G. & Baby, S. (2012). Role of emotional intelligence on stress and coping of gifted adolescents. *International Journal of Physical and Social Sciences*, 2(9), 524-538.
- Roedell, W.C. (1989). Early development of gifted children. In J.L. VanTassel-Baska and P. OlszewskiKubilius (Eds.), *Patterns of influence on gifted learners: The home, the self, and the school*. New York: Teachers College.
- Sankar-DeLeeuw, N. (1999). Gifted preschoolers: Parent and teacher views on identification, early admission and programming, *Roeper Review*, 21:3, 174-179, DOI: 10.1080/02783199909553957
- Sankar-DeLeeuw, N. (2004). Case studies of gifted kindergarten children: Profiles of promise. *Roeper Review*, 26(4), 192-208.
- Schliecker, E., White, D. R., & Jacobs, E. (1991). The role of day care quality in the prediction of children's vocabulary. *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science*, 23(1), 12-24.
- Schofield, N.J. & Hotulainen, R. (2004). Does all cream rise? The plight of unsupported gifted children. *Psychology Science*, 46, 379-386.

- Silverman, L. K. (1995). *Perfectionism*. Paper presented at the 11th World Conference on Gifted and Talented Children, Hong Kong.
- Smutny, J. F. (2000). *Teaching Young Gifted Children in the Regular Classroom*. ERIC Digest E595.
- Sternberg, R. J. (1995). *A Triarchic Approach to Giftedness*. Storrs, CT: National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented, University of Connecticut.
- Tuttle, F.B., Becker, L.A., & Sousa, J.A. (1988). *Characteristics and identification of gifted and talented students* (3rd ed.). Washington, DC: National Educational Association of the United States
- VanTassel-Baska, J., & Johnsen, S. K. (2007). Teacher education standards for the field of gifted education: A vision of coherence for personnel preparation in the 21st century. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 51 (2), 182-205.
- Virginia Department of Education. (2005). 2006-2011 local plan for the education of the gifted. Retrieved March 17, 2020, from <http://www.doe.virginia.gov/VDOE/suptsmemos/2005/adm039a.doc>
- Webb, J. T., Meckstroth, E.A., and Tolan, S.S. (1982). *Guiding the gifted child: A practical source for parents and teachers*. Columbus, OH: Ohio Psychology
- Yazıcı, D., Akman, B., Mercan-Uzun, E., & Kardeş, S. (2017). Preservice preschool teachers' views on the characteristics of gifted children. *Journal for the Education of Gifted Young Scientists*, 5(3), 70-89. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17478/JEGYS.2017.65>.