

THE PRESCHOOL PERIOD AND ITS CHALLENGING BEHAVIOURS

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Abstract: It is well known that in the development and evolution of the human being, in shaping of its personality, each age period has its significance, but many researchers believe that preschool and early school education is essential in the shaping the person. The preschool period, which overlaps the preoperative period identified by J. Piaget, is a period of intense development of the child, marked by outstanding acquisitions. The age of 4-7 years is known as the period of the most explosive, numerous and surprising aspects of mental development, representing a stage of child development where the main mental features specific for the psychological profile of each child are consolidated and gradually defined. The provision of favourable conditions for new acquisitions and progress in the cognitive, affective and psychomotor area is made once the child enters the kindergarten, being the first organized environment for maximum exploitation of multiple resources of children, for skill stimulation and their proper education. For the good conduct of educational activity it is necessary to know the children's mental and individual peculiarities. During preschool period the mental structures feed through / with challenging behaviours and situations that lead to the development of new mental features, but with differences in their development even in siblings living in the same family. To know the child means to have information on his/her physical, mental and social development level, compared to the standards of psychological age, knowledge that is obtained through a long-term, well-organized and systematized activity.

Keywords: preschool period, mental development, challenge

Introduction

As intelligence was one of the most disputed and discussed issues both in philosophy and psychology, finding a precise definition on which the psychologists agree was very difficult. "The idea of "intelligence" or "skill" is a mature and dominant concept in everyday life" (Ann Birch, 2000), being used to explain and describe the differences between people and their behaviour. In a broad sense, intelligence is defined as the ability to adapt to the environment, the ability to find solutions to new situations, thus an instrument of success.

The inventory of numerous theories and definitions, more or less verbal, proposed in recent decades to explain the psychological nature of intelligence leaves the impression of confusion. The multiplicity of meanings results also from the diversity of the definitions on intelligence. Thus intelligence is defined as the ability to adapt to problematic situations, an instrument of success, of knowledge, ability to acquire new capacities, instrument of abstraction, of combination, of synthesis etc. Two great periods can be observed in understanding intelligence: one from the perspective of cognitive psychology and one from the experimental perspective. If we compare various conceptions of intelligence, we find that those who have studied this field (Piaget's genetic psychology, classic psychometrics and cognitive psychology) started from its sense as a general skill, as a complex structure of operations or invariable heuristics, independent of the context in which they are activated or the contents on which are exercised. But psychologists agree on two aspects, namely: that intelligence is a capacity to be learned from experience and that it involves the individual's ability to adapt to the environment.

Psychologists have long studied intelligence by issuing a number of theories on its development, theories that can be classified into two categories: classical psychological theories and alternative theories of intelligence.

Development of intelligence in children aged 4-7 years

It is recognized that psychological development is achieved in stages, each being characterized by a prefiguration of mental processes and characteristics. The transition from one stage to another marks a leap, both within various mental components, and in the relationships between them, of the personality as a whole.

Following numerous studies and researches on genetic psychology, Jean Piaget formulated several stages or successive phases in the development of intelligence in children.

Piaget presents thus the development in terms of genetic development stages, perspective that implies:

- the order of the different acquisitions to be unchanged;
- the existence of an intrinsic structure of the stage and not just a juxtaposition of properties;
- this structure to reconvert previous acquisitions that don't disappear, but develop under another form (in regressive situation they may reappear);
- each stage to contain a point of preparation and one of stability;
- genetic development stages and dynamic development stages to be subdivided into sub-stages (approach by age).

The preoperative period is very interesting for our study, focusing on the age of 4-7 years that we normally find in preschool children and in children at the beginning of primary school.

No period of human mental development has so numerous and explosive, unpredictable features as the preschool period. Preschool brings important changes in the child's life, both in terms of somatic development, as well as in mental development, but also in terms of relationships, as it is a period of discovering physical reality, human reality, and especially a period of self-consciousness.

Preschool age is a crucial period for the further development of the child, as it is characterized by a complex and interesting development in terms of physical, cognitive, social and emotional levels.

We refer hereinafter to the cognitive development and in particular to the development of intelligence.

Preschool period may be divided into three sub-periods:

- Small preschool sub-period at the age of 3-4 years;

- Medium preschool sub-period at the age of 4-5 years;
- High preschool sub-period at the age of 5-6/7 years.

This period is considered a crucial step in the development of cognitive skills, acquired through specific preschool activity, namely through the game which is considered as fundamental activity for the preschool child.

Thinking is much more intuitive, the children form their point of view and cannot understand that others feel differently or think differently, leading to the conclusion that their thinking is dominated by egocentrism. Egocentric thinking is a pre-logical, intuitive and pre-conceptual thinking, being situated halfway between schemes and concepts. Egocentric thinking downfall through decentring occurs by the age of 5-6 years, when the child's reasoning changes, observing a decrease in egocentric responses with stronger accommodation to the objective external reality.

Objectives and working hypothesis

The main objectives of this study are:

- collecting data on cognitive, emotional, motor behaviours and on the children's aged 4-7 years ways to react in some contexts;
- capturing opinions and attitudes of parents regarding the education and development of their children;
- highlighting and analysing the differences occurring in preschool children's intelligence development based on the premise that:
 - the development of intelligence in preschool children is different depending on their age?
 - environmental factors influence the development of intelligence in preschool children?
 - children's gender influence the development of their intelligence?
- exploitation of research results by implementing an Intervention Plan relating to the psycho-intellectual development of preschool children.

Starting from the objectives set out above we have formulated the following research hypothesis:

- there are major differences in the development of intelligence in preschool children depending on their age;
- there are major differences in the development of intelligence in preschool children depending on their background;
- there are major differences in the development of intelligence in preschool children depending on their gender.

Depending on the specificity of preschool age, the following data collection methods have been used to assess children's intelligence:

- observation;
- questionnaire for parents to collect additional information about the children;
- Raven Colour Progressive Matrices test.

The observations recorded on the sheet allow us to make a continuous analysis of the progress of children, to obtain a real picture on their capacities. Children should not be compared between themselves, but with themselves in different periods, which can be performed after recording the observations. It was found that there are intellectually gifted children, but also children in the evolution of which various external factors with negative influence have intervened that led to a number of adverse aspects: poor verbal expression, incomplete acquisition, some show psychomotor instability, others are hardly mobilized, low volume of attention, thinking deficiency, decreased ability to focus and different behaviours of their personality develop in various rhythms and ways. The observations and information provided by this method can be used to better understand and plan activities to facilitate the development of the child.

Data interpretation

Knowing the child implies a systematic activity of the psychologist and educator to decipher the child's personal formula, i.e. to identify the child's bases for his/her becoming as personality and

to project educational strategies, favouring in every stage of development, the value and amplification of native potential. Knowing the child is not an end in itself but a means, a step - the first one - in the complex and continuous process of forming an authentic and harmoniously developed personality. In this context, I emphasise Piaget's thought: "From an intellectual and from a moral point of view, the child is born neither good nor bad, but as the master of his fate."

In the activity of psychological knowledge it is our task to use, knowingly, the data from psychology to be "inspired" in the educational approach, the psychological information being a tool for exploration and knowledge, a means to adapt and act on the child.

In the educational process, as a complex process of fixing the values of some skills, competencies and performances by comparing them to a set of criteria, standards or benchmarks, psychological knowledge is a necessary and mandatory condition.

For the smooth conduct of educational activity it is necessary to know the mental peculiarities of the age and the individual peculiarities of children.

Child development undergoes most progress both at physical and at mental and social levels between the ages of 4 and 7 years. Muscle development, coordination of movement and major progress in motor coordination is observed at physical level. At cognitive level attention, memory, intelligence, language are developed and at social level the social and emotional behaviours are developed. Knowing these changes is an aspect that should be handled by teachers to better organize and plan the activities they conduct with children.

Depending on the specifics of preschool age, for the evaluation of children intelligence the following data collection methods were used: observation, questionnaire for parents to collect additional information on children, Raven Colour Progressive Matrices test. Knowing the level of development of intelligence is important in evaluating the mental development of the child. The correlation between the development of intelligence by age, gender and environmental factors was highlighted in the study by analysing the results.

The statistical analysis reveals that gender does not influence the development of children's intelligence, but that there are significant differences in the development of intelligence in children aged between 5 and 6 years and those aged between the 6 and 7 years. It

was found that the environment from which children originate is another factor that can influence the development of their intelligence.

The child's mental development is therefore an extremely complex process, at the end of which we must find a mature person "armed" with everything that allows him/her to adapt to the society he/she belongs to. As noted, this process is active, dynamic, which is achieved as a result of the influence of external factors on the child's individual peculiarities.

Development of intelligence is clearly influenced by the way the child was raised, by the social environment, by the education received, by the child's membership to a socio-cultural environment, as the child is the product of the environment in which he/she was raised. Intelligence itself is not inherited because it is a unique combination specific to each person, and even if there is an optimal genetic predisposition, in absence of appropriate incentives the child will not capitalize on this potential and will not progress.

Regarding the differences in intelligence development by age we can say that the age actually affects its development, due to the child's general development.

It was found that for the group of 5-6 years new forms of mental activity are structured such as memory and imagination representations that give complex dimensions to anticipative and fantastic emotions, while for the group of 6-7 years perception of reality is much more emotionally charged and feeds the imagination and behaviours and mental strategies use more comprehensive symbolism, situational anchored in the surrounding reality. Also at this age there is a spectacular development in terms of sensory-perceptive plan. Perception at the age of 6-7 years becomes perceptive observation and is involved in all forms of learning. Practical logics of relations starts to reinforce in terms of size (large, medium, small), amount (more, less, not at all), sequencing and simultaneity (now, after, first, after, suddenly), comparison (same, equally), etc. In the age group of 5-6 years the child explores the surrounding reality, watching the common characteristics of objects and phenomena, makes descriptions, holds a conversation while at the age of 6-7 years the children are precise in their actions, detect links between objects and phenomena, extract the causes determining them, they describe and sustain a conversation using appropriate words and in various grammar contexts. At the age of 5-6 years the child uses complete sentences with grammatical structures often correct. The development of the

vocabulary understood by the child continues in this period and at the age of 6-7 years the child senses the cognitive meaning of words and sentences, using an increasingly richer vocabulary, show fluency and fluidity of speech and adequate speech rhythm. The required intervention plan relating to the psycho-intellectual development of preschool children, focuses on aspects related to the development of intelligence through activities conducted with children in the cognitive and psycho-motor field. It calls for the involvement of the child in a process of gradual learning to evolve from simple to complex, to enrich the plans of knowledge through all analysers, through object handling and actions, through reasoning in terms of perception, through language and thought, through all knowledge channels, through the most various activities carried out with the children. The work with children will become the structure of the game, the children being constantly asked, challenged to react, encouraged, even though the result will not be as desired. Learning will be achieved through practice, which requires the direct involvement of children in various cognitive experiences, proceeding gradually from simple tasks to demanding tasks, from concrete to abstract, from tasks that require attention for a short time to tasks requiring attention longer, through exercises aimed at various levels of knowledge, thus facilitating the exercise of the child's mental processes. The game, as specific form of activity for the preschool child, becomes a valuable means of education, of intervention in the child's intellectual development, giving thus the child the possibility to learn, to know and to practice mental faculties by unitarily and harmoniously combining learning-practicing tasks with specific learning functions. The essence of the game as a way of intellectual education for preschool children is that it achieves optimal combination between the objectives pursued, the content of activity and the mental peculiarities of preschool age through transposition of learning tasks into a game.

The game will aim at stimulating the children's initiative and inventiveness, determining the children to confront their opinions, to seek solutions on their own, to learn from their mistakes. It is very good not to impose on the children a certain working system, to aim at finding by himself, the most suitable process to act in the game, as stated by Jean-Jacques Rousseau: "the child should not know because you told him, but because he understood himself, science should not be taught but discovered".

Complex stimulation of children covers the following general objectives:

- development and stimulation of intellectual capacity

- development of attention to detail, research, expression and investigation of phenomena, facts, issues
- development and practice of divergent, critical and lateral thinking
- education and development of logical thinking;
- education of thinking qualities: independence, speed, flexibility, originality
- stimulation of the interests for knowledge
- sensory acuity improvement
- stimulation of the capacity to ask questions, to make connections and logical interactions

The stages of intervention are:

- Stimulation and intellectual development through complex training using all channels of knowledge: tactile, kinaesthetic, visual, auditory, language understanding;
- Development and stimulation of child's optimal communication with the environment and acquisition of higher adaptive capacity;
- Supporting the child to acquire the cognitive tools necessary for an optimal intellectual functionality level.

Each intervention stage encompasses therapeutic aspects, targeted learning activities and operational objectives by skill levels: minimum, medium and maximum.

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