

The Role of The Cultural Environment and Normative Situations in The Development of Gifted Children

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Abstract: This article analyzes the theoretical and practical significance of the cultural environment and normative situations in the development of gifted children. The author substantiates the concept of a normative situation as a basic unit of the educational space and highlights its role in the child's personal development, socialization, and manifestation of giftedness. The study describes the external, internal, objective, subjective, emotional, reflective, and transformational components of a normative situation and reveals their role in the development of cognitive, regulatory, and communicative abilities. Based on the cultural-historical approach of L. S. Vygotsky, A. N. Leontiev, D. B. Elkonin, and other scholars, it is demonstrated that the interaction between the child's natural potential and the cultural environment is a key factor in development.

Keywords: Gifted child, cultural environment, normative situation, preschool education, personal development, cognitive ability, communicative ability, reflection, transformational thinking, socialization.

Introduction: Work with gifted children includes two main areas. The first area is associated with creating the conditions necessary for the development of children's giftedness. In order to understand the strategy for creating these conditions, it is necessary to analyze the characteristics of personality development in the social environment. For this purpose, we introduced the concept of a "normative situation."

By a normative situation, we mean a standard situation of sociocultural interaction in which the rules of social behavior are defined with sufficient clarity. It should be emphasized that a normative situation refers to a set of factors, conditions, and circumstances in which society prescribes certain actions to the subject. There are two important aspects here. First, such a definition of a normative situation relates normatively prescribed actions not directly to the subject, but to the objective conditions that the subject may encounter. In other words, a normative situation is relatively independent of the subject. Therefore, the system of normative prescriptions exists separately from the subject and is

manifested as a system of knowledge or as culture. Second, while linking rules to specific features of the situation, the normative situation nevertheless directs them toward the subject and encourages the subject to act in accordance with the established norms. It should be noted that it is impossible to remain passive in a normative situation. For this very reason, the normative situation is the space of the subject's activity. Thus, the child's space of personal activity appears as a set of typical situations containing normatively defined modes of activity, that is, as culture.

Thus, the normative situation appears as the basic unit of the child's life space. According to the analysis conducted, any normative situation includes the following components: the material characteristics or features of the situation and the rules or normatively prescribed modes of action, that is, ideal characteristics, according to E. V. Ilyenkov's terminology. Material and ideal characteristics constitute, respectively, the external and internal characteristics of the normative situation. These

characteristics may be referred to as the objective characteristics of the situation.

The connection of rules with the attributes of a situation, that is, with its objective aspects, for example, with an object included in the situation, reveals an extremely important feature of the normative situation. If the normative situation is considered not from the standpoint of rules but, conversely, from the standpoint of the object, then, in order to be a cultured person, it is necessary not only to be able to see the object itself but also to know the rules associated with this particular object in the given culture.

Thus, when culture is viewed as a system of normative situations, any object loses its immediate content: it is no longer merely an object, or even primarily an object, but appears as an object of human culture. Therefore, any object in culture possesses two types of characteristics: natural and cultural characteristics.

The cultural, or object-specific, characteristics of an object are the modes of action prescribed in relation to it, which actually express its functional characteristics. Naturally, these characteristics do not directly follow from the natural properties of the object. However, this does not mean that natural characteristics cannot be interpreted in connection with specific cultural characteristics or rules. Thus, any situation or any object in human culture possesses two groups of characteristics: external, natural, visible characteristics and internal, cultural, object-specific, invisible characteristics.

When a child encounters any object, the child interprets its cultural characteristics in some way, correctly or incorrectly, and interacts with the object in accordance with that interpretation. Therefore, the main structural feature of any normative, or more precisely, cultural situation is that each time the child encounters certain visually perceived natural conditions, the child must interpret them from the standpoint of the rules associated with these conditions in the given culture. In other words, in accordance with the existing rules, the child, as a human being and a subject of culture, must be able to distinguish and interpret these conditions correctly.

Naturally, it is reasonable to assume that the same external conditions, for example, a particular object,

may be interpreted by different subjects as an object representing different rules or functions. This circumstance is one of the important structural features of the normative situation. Thus, although rules are linked to the material, object-related characteristics of an object, this connection is not unambiguous. This multiplicity of meanings arises from the fact that, in addition to objective, external and internal characteristics, another group of characteristics can be distinguished within the structure of the normative situation: subjective, or meaning-related, characteristics. These characteristics are associated with the individual or group of individuals who introduce the given normative situation into the existing system of norms. They express the goals and meanings underlying the introduction of the normative situation into culture. However, these rules do not always coincide with the child's own rules, which may lead to various difficulties in the development of children's giftedness.

In any normative situation, we distinguish the following aspects: external, internal, objective, subjective or meaning-related, emotional or experiential, reflective, and transformative aspects. Thus, all the above-mentioned groups of abilities—cognitive, regulatory, and communicative abilities—are manifested in a normative situation.

Indeed, a normative situation presupposes the mastery of a particular standard mode of action, which is repeatedly carried out each time a child or an adult enters this situation. It is precisely this standard that ensures a certain degree of stability in social or cultural interaction within the normative situation, which directly influences the development of normative-stabilizing abilities. In addition, goals are also set for the subject within the normative situation, and the subject must constantly compare his or her behavior with the established norms, which leads to the development of regulatory or management abilities. The mastery of a cultural rule in a normative situation is impossible for the child without communication and interaction with adults. Therefore, the normative situation also presupposes the development of communicative abilities in the child. In addition, experiencing or living through a normative situation activates the development of abilities related to symbolization and transformation.

The introduction of the concept of a normative situation as a unit of the educational space makes it possible to identify new directions of developmental work with intellectually gifted preschool children and to develop approaches to their development.

It is necessary to account for the internal tension of the normative situation. In other words, it is important to understand that a normative situation is introduced into culture under such external conditions in which it becomes necessary to regulate the activity of the individual. Such a necessity arises only when a person, each time he or she encounters these conditions, acts in a socially unacceptable manner. It is precisely this unacceptable tendency that the normative situation restricts, transforms, and normalizes. Naturally, this tendency originates from the subject, which means that it is regarded as egocentric and natural in its nature. Thus, in the normative situation, there are two opposing and, in this sense, tension-filled levels of activity: natural and cultural. The level of natural activity is manifested in the given normative situation as the child's initiative behavior.

The need to create a more effective normative space arises from the fact that, within the set of situations in the kindergarten system, that is, as one aspect of educational culture, we distinguish three groups of rules. The first group includes prohibitive rules and the corresponding situations. A child who enters such a situation is confronted with a restriction imposed on his or her activity. For example, a child who comes to kindergarten encounters a situation in which leaving the area designated by the teacher is prohibited. The second type of rules is referred to as prescriptive or directive rules. Prescriptive rules and situations include all cases in which the child is given clear instructions on how to act. Prescriptive or directive situations determine how various objects should be handled, for example, the use of tableware during meals. The third group of rules and corresponding situations includes all cases in which children's initiative is supported. Such situations may include those that arise in play activities. It should be noted that most normative situations in kindergarten culture are prohibitive and prescriptive. In such cases, the specific feature of normative situations is that the child's individuality is not taken into account. In these situations, the child is required to act in a standard manner without implementing his or her own

plans.

As A. Bandura noted, one of the main motives of children's behavior is the motive of achieving self-efficacy. In other words, the child must achieve a result that, on the one hand, demonstrates his or her social competence and, on the other hand, constitutes a personal achievement regarded as a product positively evaluated by the people around him or her. Achieving such a result is difficult in a system dominated by prohibitive and prescriptive situations. The situation becomes even more complex because the development of children's giftedness is also influenced by the clash between two opposing approaches to children's capabilities.

One widespread approach to the child is based on the idea that the child is a subject with limited experience who cannot participate in the productive activities of adult society; therefore, a separate period preparing the child for adult life, namely childhood, is considered necessary. This approach is also supported by many local authors. For example, D. B. Elkonin (1978) wrote: "A situation arises in which the child cannot be taught to use the tools of labor because their complexity prevents this, while the division of labor creates the possibility of choosing future activity, and this choice is not unambiguously determined by the activity of the parents. As a result, a distinct period emerges in which children are left to themselves."

A. N. Leontiev (2009) also emphasized the child's limitations: "A human being is not born equipped with the historical achievements of humanity. The achievements of previous generations are embodied neither in the individual nor in his or her natural abilities, but in the world of products of sociohistorical practice surrounding the individual—in language, science, moral norms, and works of art. Only through mastering these achievements does a person acquire genuinely human characteristics and abilities. The fact that a child lives within culture without fully knowing it indicates the necessity of mastering that culture." Continuing this idea, A. N. Leontiev (2009) wrote: "...the most important factor in development is the child's interaction with adults and the appropriation of the world of material and spiritual phenomena created in the course of the historical development of human society."

In this context, culture appears as a source of cultural or ideal forms. D. B. Elkonin (1989) wrote: "The child enters into interaction with a certain ideal form, that is, with the level of development of human culture achieved by the society into which the child is born." The important point is that cultural forms already exist and appear as established models that the child is expected to imitate. The process of mastering these models or ideal forms determines the child's development.

L. S. Vygotsky (1983) paid considerable attention to the analysis of this issue. He contrasted the two aspects of the developmental process—the natural and the cultural: "The normal child's entry into civilization usually forms a single whole with the processes of organic maturation. Both planes of development—the natural and the cultural—coincide and merge with one another. Both lines of change interpenetrate and, in essence, form a single process of the child's sociobiological formation as a personality." Although he considered such a contrast to be conditional, he nevertheless regarded it as necessary: "...the opposition between 'nature' and 'culture' in human psychology is valid only in a very conditional sense... However, in our view, distinguishing between them is an absolutely necessary condition for any adequate study of human psychology."

While analyzing the process of child development, L. S. Vygotsky emphasizes one of its contradictory features: "In child development, what is supposed to emerge at the end of development, as its result, is already given in the environment from the very beginning." To explain this situation, he introduces the concepts of the initial (primary) and final forms. By the primary form, he apparently means the genetically determined initial psychological structures that form the basis of the interaction between the child and culture and develop in this process: "We have seen that at the beginning of development the child possesses only the primary form, that is, for example, in the sphere of speech, the child pronounces only individual words. This is because individual words are part of the child's dialogue with the mother, while the mother already possesses the ideal form—the form that should emerge at the end of the child's development. Can a one-and-a-half-year-old child fully master this ideal form, that is, simply adopt and imitate it? No. However, as the child at this age

moves from the first stage of development toward the final stage, can the child increasingly adapt his or her initial form to this final form? Yes, research confirms this."

By the "ideal form," L. S. Vygotsky understood, on the one hand, the psychological structure that should emerge at the end of development and, on the other hand, the form that already exists in culture and serves as a cultural model: "We shall agree to call this developed form, which should emerge at the end of development, the final or ideal form. It is called 'ideal' because it represents a model of the result that should arise at the end of development."

L. S. Vygotsky views the developmental process as an interaction between primary and ideal forms: "The greatest distinctive feature of child development is that this development takes place under conditions of interaction with an environment in which the ideal form, that is, the final form that should emerge at the end of development, not only exists in the environment and is in contact with the child from the very beginning, but actually interacts with the primary form and exerts a real influence on the child's first steps in development; that is, what should be formed at the end of development in some way also influences the earliest stages of this development."

He understood the discrepancy between the primary and ideal forms as the driving force of development: "...the driving forces of development in this discrepancy are the main contradictions in child development, which arise between the ideal and genetic (developing) forms." According to this logic, in the process of mastering the system of means formed in culture, such as language or the system of scientific concepts, natural psychological functions are transformed into higher psychological functions. These functions are characterized by awareness, voluntariness, and mediation.

In conclusion, the effectiveness of developing children's giftedness depends primarily on the content and quality of the educational and sociocultural environment created for them. The concept of a normative situation substantiated in the article is interpreted as an important theoretical basis for the child's personal development, socialization, and manifestation of giftedness. A normative situation

serves not only for the child's mastery of certain rules, but also for understanding, interpreting, and creatively applying them. In this process, the child's cognitive, regulatory, communicative, reflective, and transformational abilities develop consistently.

The study also shows that an educational environment based only on prohibitive and prescriptive rules does not allow children to fully demonstrate their initiative and creative potential. On the contrary, the creation of a normative space in which children's initiative is supported and independent thinking and creativity are encouraged is an important condition for the development of giftedness.

Based on the scientific views of L. S. Vygotsky, A. N. Leontiev, D. B. Elkonin, and other scholars, it can be emphasized that a child's development occurs as a result of the interaction between natural potential and the cultural environment. Therefore, in the educational process, the child should be regarded not as an object who acquires ready-made knowledge, but as a subject who actively masters culture and is capable of creating something new.

Thus, one of the most important tasks of modern education in working with gifted children is to create developmental normative situations that support their individual capabilities, interests, and initiatives. It is precisely such a pedagogical approach that contributes to the full realization of children's intellectual, creative, and personal potential.

It is necessary to develop children's skills in independent decision-making, reflection, and transformational thinking by increasing the proportion of activities based on problem situations, creative tasks, role-playing games, and research activities.

It is advisable to establish effective cooperation between parents and teachers and to widely promote practical recommendations for creating a developmental environment in the family that supports the child's interests and giftedness.

In assessing children's giftedness, attention should be paid not only to academic results, but also, on the basis of a comprehensive approach, to their creativity, initiative, problem-solving ability, communication culture, and social activity.

In future scientific research, it is recommended to evaluate the effectiveness of developmental

pedagogical technologies developed on the basis of normative situations in preschool education practice through experimental work and to develop mechanisms for their implementation in practice.

Based on the results of this study, the following recommendations can be proposed for the development of children's giftedness:

Special attention should be paid to creating a developmental normative environment in preschool educational organizations that contributes to the development of children's giftedness. Along with prohibitive and prescriptive rules, it is advisable to increase the proportion of situations that support children's initiative, independent thinking, and creative activity.

In organizing the educational process, it is necessary to widely introduce a personality-oriented pedagogical approach that takes into account each child's individual abilities, interests, needs, and pace of development.

It is recommended to improve professional development programs aimed at preparing teachers to design normative situations effectively and to use them as a means of developing children's cognitive, communicative, regulatory, and creative abilities.

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