

Families of Gifted Children and Counseling Program: A Descriptive Study in Morelos, Mexico

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Abstract

For some decades we can find studies where perceptions and family attitudes toward children with giftedness are discussed, leading to the conclusion that children with these characteristics should be perceived and studied as part of an ecosystem that should include both family, and the college and the inner world of the child. Unfortunately in Mexico, studies about families of gifted children are scarce. Hence, the study has two aims: first, to identify the characteristics of 30 Mexican families, with at least one gifted child; second, to propose educational orientation for their families. Two questionnaires were designed. One of them gathers information about: age of parents, parents' education, number of family members and general characteristics of their gifted children. The other questionnaire collects the opinion about what does it mean for parents to have a talented or gifted child. A program is proposed to work with parents around the more relevant issues regarding their child and the family.

Keywords: *family; gifted children; counseling program*

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Undoubtedly, the family and school are the main education actors involved in the development of the skills and talents of gifted children. But it may happen that both education agents have difficulties to meet the special demands of these children. It is also true that many times the particular characteristics of the children will reconfigure the relationships that exist within families and become a challenge for the school organization.

Despite the importance of the subject, most of the research about giftedness has focused on skills and learning and intellectual needs of this type of student population. Since the end of the eighties studies about the personal and emotional balance of gifted children in their relationship with family have started to become important (Colangelo & Dettman, 1980, 1983, Pérez, Domínguez, López & Alfaro, 2001). Besides, in Mexico there's few research on family characteristics of gifted and people with high abilities (Gómez & Valadez, 2010; López-Aymes, Acuña & Mercado, 2013; Sánchez, 2007; Valdés, Carlos Vera - Noriega & Montoya, 2012). Hence the importance to look into the subject.

1.2 The Families of Gifted Children

It is not an easy task to characterize families with a gifted child because different studies may come from both the clinical experience of specialists (López-Escribano, 2003; Martínez & Castiglione, 1996) as from specific studies in school settings (Manzano & Arranz, 2008), or the characterization of certain types of people in different countries or at different times (Chan, 2005; Terman, 1926; Zubiría, 1997). Each of these research circumstances generates different information according to the context from where it emerges. It is not the same to characterize a family looking for specialized help because their child has shown some problems at school (poor adjustment, isolation,

school failure, depression, among others), or does not really know how to direct their great learning potential, to families who are informed, after a process of school identification, that their child has outstanding abilities or skills. Nor it is the same to characterize the needs of families in urban, rural or indigenous contexts. However, studies on families with gifted are useful to give a specific response to their needs and demands, adapting them to their particular circumstances.

The investigation of Manzano & Arranz (2008) notes that if you analyze the influence of the family context in the development of gifted children, you should adopt a contextual approach to investigate how family context variables are associated with the development of such children. According to the model of Arranz (2005), family context variables can be classified as *ecological* or *interactive*. The ecological refer to the settings in which development occurs, such as socioeconomic status or parental age (from the model of Bronfenbrenner, 1986, equivalent to the Exo- system variables). These influence the quality of the interaction, but do not show a direct interaction between family members. Meanwhile, the interactive includes specific interaction modes, of day to day among family members, such as, for example, educational styles of parents, lifestyle and family type, the presence of conflicts between parents or among siblings, the type of relationship established by the children with their peers, the support, stimulation and family cohesion (Variables related to the meso and micro system).

But in the studies reviewed by Manzano & Arranz (2008), there is data that may seem contradictory to each of these organic or interactive variables. For example, with respect to the age of the parents, some studies show that young mothers and fathers easily get motivated and invest energy in the education of their gifted children and who are interested in their own professions (Cho & Yoon, 2005). While other studies found that gifted children had parents older than the rest of their fellow students (Rogers & Silverman, 2001). Furthermore, with respect to socioeconomic status, it has been proven that there are gifted children in all socioeconomic strata. Apparently having high socioeconomic status may be an enhancer of the appearance of gifted children, but it may be possible that it is associated with the ability of parents to use their economic resources in stimulation and education opportunities (Bornstein & Bradley, 2003). In this sense, several authors agree that socioeconomic status may not be as important, but rather the cultural and educational level of parents (Redding, 2000; Zubiría, 1997), particularly of the mother (Manzano & Arranz, 2008) in the development of talent and high abilities.

With regard to family cohesion, it appears to be a factor in the development of talent and high capacities (Caplan, 2002, Chan, 2005; Sánchez, 2007; Zubiría, 1997). Understanding family cohesion as an organized family context, with little conflict, with good communication, high expectations of achievement, where the autonomy and independence of children is promoted and they have a good self-concept (Manzano & Arranz, 2008). However, there are other studies that indicate that various problems or family tensions (parental loss, tense or traumatic family relationships) can trigger the talent despite adversity (Van Tassel-Olszewski-Kubilius & Baske, 1989).

As noted by López-Escribano (2003), family studied from an "ecological" aspect is seen as another social system that influences the development of the person. In the family members interact with each other, setting objectives and goals, behavioral models, and offering guidance, motivation and mutual support. So each member of the family system will develop different levels of self-discipline, persistence on tasks, constructive use of leisure time and other skills necessary for learning. So there is no doubt that these aspects are decisive in the more or less rapid development of top talent development.

It is undeniable that the presence of a child with different characteristics can cause a range of feelings and reactions within the family. For example, authors such as Moon, Kelly & Feldhusen (1997), mention giftedness as a tension source, they argue that families are in great need of guidance, especially in regards to roles and family dynamics as usually "abnormal" situations happen more often. On their part, Colangelo & Dettman (1980) claim that the gifted may cause in parents feelings of inadequacy. Parents often feel they are not ready to support them emotionally and may also experience feelings of difficulty regarding the provision of educational resources or intellectual stimulation needed to help in the development of their outstanding qualities.

These feelings or ways of thinking tend to be predominant, especially in parents whose intelligence is in "normal" parameters, as the need for them to keep up with their children generates considerable levels of anxiety. However, if parents have a high intellectual endowment this dissonance and the potential problem are reduced.

1.3 Orientation

Colangelo & Dettman (1983) argue that despite the importance given to the family in the education of gifted children, they are given very little information about how to educate their children to such features. Sometimes they are offered lists of things to do or not to do, or general manuals for parents that sometimes do not take into account the

particular characteristics of the families and their complexity (Jolly, Treffinger, Ford & Smutny, 2011; SEP, 2011; Warren, 1999).

If parents are not well informed, as it usually happens thanks to the media - that promote and create myths and stereotypes – misconceptions may arise that will surely interfere with the proper understanding of their gifted children and the making decisions about their education. And it has been well studied that society in general does not promote this type of features (Pérez, 2000).

In Mexico, for example, among the demands for guidance that parents of gifted children reveal are concerns about what are high capacities, how can they personally and socially develop their child; interest in the actions they can implement to adapt the education of their child, how to achieve rapprochement with the school and learn about school programs for gifted children (Duran, 2006; Mercado, 2011).

Projects in schooling for parents in México are scarce. Even when reviewing the educational policies of our country, you will find that parent education is being ignored, so when speaking of schooling for parents is to speak of a new subject in this area of giftedness. However, parents have gained more space in the school context. As new dynamics have been structured in school and in society, it has been possible to design new settings for parent and family training. Educational institutions are increasingly faced with more requirements, so they must increasingly make proposals aimed specifically at parental training.

Between 2010 and 2011, in some states of Mexico diverse networks of parents of gifted children were developed. The aim of which is to generate support links on different topics of interest for families while offering peer support in benefit of these children and youth. Some of the most enthusiastic states are Aguascalientes, Morelos, Nuevo León, Sinaloa, Sonora, Veracruz and Yucatán, among others (Ocampo, 2011). There are also some annual meetings with parents of gifted children, where conferences with experts are offered and topics that worry parents are discussed (SEP, 2013).

Given the scarcity of studies on families with high capacities in México, and of a specific response to their guidance requests, this research has two main objectives. First, it seeks to identify the characteristics of 30 Mexican families who have at least one gifted child; second, resulting from this characterization, a proposal for educational guidance to families is submitted.

2. Method

A descriptive exploratory study was conducted to know the characteristics of families who have gifted children, and to hear parent's views regarding their own and their children's characteristics and needs.

2.1 Participants

The group of participants involved 30 parents who have children with high abilities or gifted of the Federal Elementary School Prof. "Estanislao Rojas Zúñiga" in the city of Cuernavaca, Morelos (Mexico). These students have been detected and cared for by la Unidad de Servicios y Apoyo a la Educación Regular (USAER) [Regular Education Support Services Unit]. Parents voluntarily attended at the invitation of support teachers of the USAER.

2.2 Measuring Instruments

Two instruments were designed: a) A questionnaire that collects information on general characteristics of the family and the identification process, based on the questionnaire of López-Escribano (2003); b) The other instrument, reflects the views of parents on what it means for them to have a gifted child (Duran, 2006). It is designed for parents to express about the process of discovering their child's giftedness, what were the difficulties they had to face, their fears, feelings and concerns, their expectations and main experiences that they have lived with their child, the consequences and transformations that it has caused within their family. From the analysis of the data collected, a program aimed to work with parents who focuses on issues that concern them regarding their child and his/her family, especially topics on how to develop their child personally and socially, on the actions that parents can carry out to promote an education appropriate to the needs of their gifted children, and on the relationship between siblings and the rest of the family, on how to achieve a rapprochement between parents and school.

2.3 Procedure

The research process consisted of the following phases. 1. Exploratory phase, where the instruments were designed and participants were selected; 2. Data analysis phase, and 3. Drafting of proposal for counseling parents.

3. Results

3.1 Characteristics of Families with Gifted Children

From the application of the questionnaire "Analysis of family characteristics" we obtained the following results. A total of thirty parents were surveyed. Most of them were mothers (56%), 23% of respondents were fathers, only 10% of the instruments were filled out by both parents, 6.6% by grandmothers and 3.3% of the population surveyed did not indicate the required data (see Figure 1).

Fathers and mothers said their children's age fluctuates between seven and twelve years, most of which correspond to twelve and eleven years (see Figure 2).

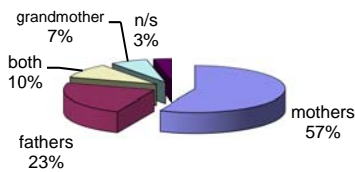


Figure 1. Population Surveyed

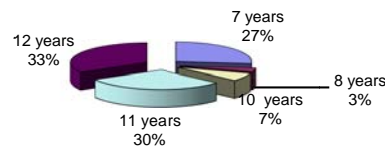


Figure 2. Ages of Children with High Capabilities

The number of girls was equal to the number of boys (15 per group).

In most cases, gifted children come from small families as 77% of them are comprised of two or three children. 17% belong to families with more than 4 children (see Table 1).

Table 1. Number of Children per Family

Children per family	Frequency	Percentage
1	2	6.6%
2	13	43.3%
3	10	33.3%
4	3	10.0%
7	1	3.3%
8	1	3.3%

Some of the interesting facts that resulted from the application of the instrument indicate that parents consider having another gifted child (besides the identified child) especially the same percentage of families with two children (43%). From the data it can be inferred that when a family has two children, parents insist on considering that the other child has the same high capability condition, probably in an effort to provide equal treatment and education to their children.

Most parents report that their children learned to write between ages five and six. However the parents mentioned in several cases that their gifted children were outstanding since preschool.

Some expressions of fathers and mothers regarding the precocity of their abilities and that are drawn from the observation recording instrument are:

"... Since kindergarten (nursery) she/he knows how to read"

"... Since preschool she has been a very dutiful and... that is why teachers invited her to take part in poetry, dance and different activities"

"... From preschool she has been known for helping others and excels in Crafts"...

21% of parents report that their children were not diagnosed in a precise form or by specialists in the field.

Parents, in relation to what level of knowledge on the subject of outstanding skills or high capabilities, 90% of respondents assured not to belong to associations for gifted children or to have attended conferences, congresses, seminars or courses related to the subject except for school meetings with CAS teachers (Note 1) to which their children belong nor read about or documented on that regard (only 15% has).

The educational level of parents who have been subject of this research is medium as only 26% completed their secondary education and only 10% of parents have college degrees; while 33% of mothers have studied and completed middle school and similarly only 10% of mothers have a college education.

With regard to the occupation of the parents, 16% perform trades (as driver, gardener, farmer), 20% work as technicians (contractor, industrial maintenance, computer technicians) 30% of the mothers are devoted to home chores, only one mother works as a university lecturer and 20% of them are engaged in technical careers (secretary, designer, sales, lab technician, nursing, computer).

3.2 Analysis of Results on Family Experiences

The instrument called "Record Sheet of Family Experiences" allowed extracting critical data to take into account when making a diagnosis of family needs as this space allows parents to express their emotions, major concerns and values about their children and even more, about themselves.

For the analysis of the data in this section they were encompassed in the following categories that literally collect their expressions:

3.2.1 Fears and concerns of parents: Among the major concerns of parents is the need to match and meet the demands of their children, especially those related to such an advanced knowledge their children could achieve reach; it appears that parents may have feelings of inadequacy about or low self-confidence

"(Our son) has had problems... with Mom and Dad, (because) we did know how to guide him as we should..."

"(We're afraid of)... not to live as to ensure him his life"

"... I like for him to ask me about so many things that sometimes he confuses me, but I try to give the correct answers..."

"Not being able to help my son as he deserves"

"Our fear is his self-sufficiency and that one day he will not need of grandmother or of parents..."

"At first, the truth honestly, it was a little hard to cope, but over time I have learned a lot and I do not deny that I also had to go to the psychologist for me and for him..."

"... (In kindergarten her teacher told me :) " Iselita will not have study problems, but other aspects of her personality and character must be taken care of. "

"My concern is that he pays some attention because he gets distracted easily"

"He asks and wants to know more current things that sometimes his dad and I do not know how to explain..."

3.2.2 Expectations and opinions about their gifted children: In this section, the parents make comments that refer to their son and daughter in a positive manner, recognizing the abilities of their children, they are proud of them and show great interest in improving or stimulating them

"He is the joy of the family, always cooperates and will outdo himself"

"We are very proud, his dad and me"

"We have no problems with my son; he is very intelligent and obedient..."

"I was surprised by his ability to learn since kindergarten"

"... I'm surprised about his ability to read and write and that at home his sister has taught him some computer, he knows how to access, send e-mail, messenger..."

"... Since (Preschool) she has been a very dedicated girl and especially has had an ability to retain and understand things and that is why her teachers invited her to participate in poetry, dance..."

"To find out about this quality in my daughter has made me proud... it has given her self-assurance in everything, which has made her stronger inside and outside and all that she wants she achieves and she knows she has to earn it..."

"In the family, she is one of the pillars due to her joy and willingness to help others... when she is older she wants to be a teacher..."

"As an experience it has been very nice and has united the family in all aspects"

"There is a no higher score than 10 if not she would get it"

"I was proud of her and happy; knowing that there is a gifted family member is great for the family."

3.2.3 Characteristics of gifted children: In most cases, fathers and mothers report the typical characteristics of gifted children, but it's worth noting that it is necessary to establish a specialized diagnosis because in some cases, children may additionally have some undetected dissynchrony (Note 2), and that would be essential to contribute to their optimal development

"He stands out in sports and school"

"What he learns, he learns by himself"

"She has distinguished herself by helping others and she stands out in Crafts"

"His fear is not being able to understand the negative behavior of other individuals, even knowing the rule of discipline"

"I think she is a special girl, for at age 7 she studies almost by herself, she is very hyperactive, learns easily and fast, she likes to talk adult themes such as politics, she likes societal issues"

"Everything she saw and heard she would tell me in detail..."

"She likes and gets excited about something, show a lot of interest and after a while she doesn't like it or loses interest..."

3.2.4 Detection and diagnosis: In addition to the preceding paragraph, the parents show uncertainty on a specialized diagnosis and show conflicts and even deny knowledge of this diagnosis, probably due to the possible social isolation to which their child may be subjected

"It took a while to understand what was happening, because I was brought to my child's school"

"My child is unaware that he has been classified that way ... I am glad he does not know because I don't want him to live it as a pressure"

"... Initially (was detected) as hyperactive"

3.2.5 Demands and needs for guidance: Mothers and fathers are demanding guidance of specialists and finding new ways to achieve the optimum development of the capabilities of their children

"We don't know his IQ"

"There has not been any special follow-up to increase, explore or analyze his skills and knowledge"

"It is urgent that a program be established in primary schools to detect and track these values because Mexico needs them"

4. Discussion

In a general way, in the results of the application of the instruments to parents you can appreciate that for them to have a gifted child does not imply a difficulty in itself for family living or an element that generates ruptures in the context of their family relationships, nevertheless, parents recognize the need to be guided on certain aspects in which they say they feel unprepared, they especially ask to be trained to ensure that their children come together as better human beings and make use of their capabilities to the fullest. In this sense they recognize that to achieve these goals it is considered important to maintain direct communication with the school to which their children belong.

Mothers and fathers showed in their comments that there are no models around the characteristics of gifted children, that although they share some of them, they are also individuals with their own personality, with specific family situations and shared needs with other families who have gifted children, that is, giftedness does not necessarily mean having an extraordinary family. In fact, contrary to what one might think the characteristics of the families of these children have a low or medium socioeconomic status, the level of schooling is just the basic, in some cases families are single parent or with a history of a divorce, and parents have little knowledge about giftedness.

Mothers and fathers admit that their children have needs to be guided in some specific aspects; in their personal and family situation or even in their learning and that they also require specialized diagnostics on their giftedness.

In summary, it is essential to know the characteristics of Mexican families with sons or daughters to present outstanding performances in different areas of human knowledge and high abilities. Subsequently, it is important to meet their needs, concerns and feelings and then to propose alternatives to their main difficulties. Also be of great help to have confidence in the potential of parents to generate these solutions.

5. Counseling Guidance Program

The purposes of this program are:

1. Addressing the educational needs of families with gifted children.
2. Build awareness and understanding that the family is a system in which its members are part of everything and that the difficulties must be reflected and solved inside.
3. Develop a sense of identity and separation of family members, that is, that they feel part of a whole as a family is, without losing sight of their individual differences.
4. Develop communication and negotiation skills to resolve family conflicts and improve relationships among its members.
5. It is intended to transversely develop in participants the ability to express feelings, thoughts and affections about family dynamics, of improving their human quality.

5.1 Methodology

The program will address the needs of counseling of families with gifted children. It is intended that this be experiential and focused on family experiences so the results obtained in the previous questionnaires are taken into account. It is important to note that work will be done on different situations and problems which these families face in different scenarios, such as school, family or community to which they belong, because the approach will be systemic.

5.2 Program Structure

The program is structured in three blocks, the first entitled "The meaning of giftedness" will contain activities for the knowledge and understanding of giftedness and their characteristics by developing self-knowledge social skills and knowledge of the other, the second block entitled "Family as a system" activities take place for participants of families to conceive themselves as a whole, as a system, trying to improve the relationship between parents, relations between siblings and the relationship between parents and children. The last block called "Solving family problems" aims to develop communication and conflict resolution skills to address the main problems that gifted children and their families face.

In each block the general purposes are identified and each of the activities purported to be carried out with families are itemized. Each session is divided into the following times: a) Welcome, b) Defining the purpose of the activity, c) Presentation and implementation of the activity and d) Close the session.

The teaching strategies that are handled during the course are: a) Generating prior information activity, b) Guided discussion, c) Evaluation and generalization of learning (Durán, 2006).

The techniques used basically come from systemic family therapy, Cibanal (2006), the Trianes (1996) social skills program and include techniques of own creation. The management and development of these techniques are based on the systems approach to the family and a humanist approach to education, so the development of each of the blocks is not raised as issues that refer to a declarative knowledge but rather to rescue the feelings, emotions and affections that arise in families with gifted children.

5.3 Timing

The program consists of a total of 10 sessions. Each session with 2 hour duration, once a week. A total of 20 activities of which the facilitator should select three activities for each of the suggested blocks, for example: the first block: *The meaning of high ability*, has the following: "I introduce myself to you", "What I can buy," "Guess Who," "Family Radio". The second block: *The family as a system*, has the following: "Family Sculpture", "Narrative of metaphorical stories", "What I do like," "A pleasant surprise". The third block: *Resolving family difficulties*, contains activities such as: "The vision of the other," "accepting differences", "An object in the freezer", "Family Journal ", "Learning to negotiate family conflicts".

5.4 Evaluation

To assess the proposal submitted in this paper, three evaluation moments are proposed:

First time or initial evaluation: In each session, the facilitator will ask questions to the participants in order to analyze the level of prior knowledge on the subject to be reviewed.

Second time or Process Evaluation: After each session, the filling of a "family journal", in which participants reflect on the progress made, the observations noted by the participants for each week will be read. In this family journal,

participants will describe the achievement or otherwise of the referred objectives, obstacles and issues that favored the optimal development of the activities. Suggestions for improving the program will be expressed regarding the work of the facilitator and content development. This time of the evaluation will allow making adjustments in the course of the program.

Third time or final evaluation: In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the startup of the proposed program and suggest improvements thereto, an instrument called “Questionnaire for Final Evaluation of Program: Learning Psychology Guidance for Parents with Gifted Children”

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Notes

Note 1. In Mexico this is how teachers who deal with gifted children are named (Capacidades y Aptitudes Sobresalientes: Outstanding Capacity and Skills).

Note 2. According Terrasier (1985), when the child will be more advanced in one area than in others.