

## **Gifted child in the family: early detection of giftedness** **Alta capacidad en la familia: detección temprana de la superdotación**

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#### **Abstract**

The identification of students with high abilities is of vital importance to give the precise educational response for these students. However, a prior step is the nomination of these students, which can be done by parents, teachers or other relevant people in their environment. However, one of the most frequent nominations is that made by parents. In the present investigation, carried out with qualitative methodology, the answers given by the parents of 10 highly qualified students about the nomination of their children are shown, who made it and which indicators were those that indicated the existence of high intellectual capacities. The results show that practically in all cases the nomination was made in the family, and then the diagnosis was corroborated either by a psychologist or by the school. The signs that led parents to suspect high abilities, both behavioural and emotional, are also pointed out.

**Key words:** *Giftedness; Early detection; Family; Detection Indicators.*

### **Alta capacidad en la familia: detección temprana de la superdotación**

La identificación de estudiantes con Alta Capacidad Intelectual es de vital importancia para ofrecer la respuesta educativa necesaria para estos estudiantes. Sin embargo, el primer paso es la detección de los mismos, que puede realizarse en la familia, en la escuela por parte de los docentes o por otras personas relevantes en el contexto de los niños y niñas. Sin embargo, uno de los colectivos que primero realiza esta detección son los padres y madres. En la presente investigación, desarrollada con metodología cualitativa, se presentan las respuestas que han dado los padres y madres sobre la detección que han hecho de 10 niños y niñas identificados de altas capacidades intelectuales, mediante indicadores que señalaban la existencia de superdotación. Los resultados muestran que prácticamente en todos los casos la detección fue realizada por la familia, y más tarde el diagnóstico fue corroborado por un psicólogo o por los docentes. Queda patente que los padres y madres identifican la alta

capacidad intelectual de sus hijos tanto en los aspectos comportamentales como emocionales.

**Palabras clave:** *Superdotación; Detección temprana, Familia, Indicadores de detección.*

Giftedness is not a simple concept but it endorses some models to explain it, and involves more than just intellectual issues. For example, parents of children with high ability usually identify this characteristic in terms not only academic features, but also, personal ones and creativity (Altintas & Ilgün, 2015). A study of Manzano, Arranz & Sánchez de Miguel (2010) points out the importance of having multiple criteria to qualify children as gifted, such as cognitive maturity, creativity and motivation criteria. In fact, evaluation scales have been constructed for teachers, which include different aspects besides academic skills, such as leadership, self-motivation and divergent think skills (Barraca & Artola, 2004).

There are different models to define giftedness. Some of them put focus in cognitive characteristics as classic models by Marland (1972) o by Renzulli (1978). Another contemporary ones include social context in definition of giftedness, as Tannenbaum (1986) or consider family, school and Friends in this definition as Mönks & Van Boxtel (1988). In this line, at present there are several systemic models to define giftedness, as Gagné (2009) who explain that giftedness is a natural capacity but talent is training result or Ziegler, Vialle & Wimmer (2013) that explain an interaction between person and his or her environment to definition of giftedness.

This study is based on this type of models, which assumes that giftedness encompassed the child in his or her environment, including the family, which has been recognized as a primary and critical component in the

development of talent (Mönks, Katzko, & Van Boxtel, 1992; Mönks, 1994; Colangelo, 2002). In fact, some variables, such income o academic level can be modulating indicators of giftedness (Belur & Oğuz-Duran, 2017).

Identification of giftedness at a very early age is necessary issue to deal with personal and academic adjustment and to incorporate them in special programs and provide them with adequate social and emotional support (Colman, 1993; Hodge & Kemp, 2006). Final school grades and scholastics competence have been studied, showing that gifted children included in the program had better final grades than those who were not (Hotulainen & Schofield, 2003).

For those reasons scientific literature pays special attention to the Identification Issue and there are large numbers of researches about different measurement instruments in order to identify giftedness (Glascoe, 1996; Ackerman & Paules, 1997; Touron, Reparaz & Peralta, 1999; Clarke, 2001; Pfeiffer & Petscher, 2008; Pfeiffer, 2011, McClain & Pfeiffer, 2012). But, early identification is not easy because the measurement instruments are not very reliable (Clarke, 2001).

It is no clear who identify first gifted children. Some authors indicate that parents are the first people to detect giftedness. In the family, parents discover early that their child is different from others (Panov, 2002). Although there are researches that also indicate that are the teachers who decide the high intellectual capacity (Sommer; Fink & Neubauer, 2008) and who have the most guidance to identify students as gifted and

talented children (Belur & Oğuz-Duran, 2017). On the other hand, teachers seem to be quite accurate in identifying the high capacity of their students in early school (Hodge & Kemp, 2006).

The literature points out that not all characteristics of high-skill students are identified equally. For example, both parents and teachers better identify highly intellectual skills than creative or highly social skills in children (Sommer, Fink & Neubauer, 2008).

The objective of our work is to present parents' experiences in early behavior, cognitions and emotions common in gifted children, as well as knowing who is the first to detect high capacities. The final purpose is

to find ways in counseling parents of parent training.

**METHOD**

The methodology used was qualitative research.

**Participants**

Ten parents were chosen which consisted of one father, seven mothers and two couples, of gifted children between 10 to 14 years old. Children characteristics are shown in table 1 (age, gender, school level and year, and Intelligence Quotient).

**Table 1.** *Children characteristics*

Subject	Age	Gender	School level	Year	IQ
1	11	M	Primary education	6° Primary	130
2	13	M	Secondary education	3° Secondary	146
3	11	M	Primary education	6° Primary	142
4	10	F	Primary education	6° Primary	155
5	13	M	Secondary education	3° Secondary	157
6	13	F	Secondary education	3° Secondary	137
7	11	M	Primary education	6° Primary	170
8	15	M	Secondary education	4° Secondary	143
9	11	M	Primary education	6° Primary	136
10	13	M	Secondary education	1° Secondary	158

**Instrument and Procedure**

Qualitative methodology was used, with semi-structured interviews to understand the gifted child’s world. In the semi-structured interview, we asked parents about the way they had discovered these differences. The interview had several topics about children: school; learning habits, motivation, academic scores, creativity, personality, family and friends. The questions on which this study

was based was: When did you notice that your child was different in its development to other children? And What do you notice it?

**RESULTS**

We want to know who and when was the first identification of giftedness. Except for one case, it was the family who identified giftedness at an early age (table 2).

**Table 2.** *Identification.*

Subjects	Identification age	Identification	Confirmation/Corroboration
1	6	Family	Psychologist
2	2	Family	Psychiatrist
3	3	Family	Teacher and Psychologist
4	6	Family	Psychologist
5	3	Family	Administration and Psychologist
6	5	Family	Psychologist
7	2	Family	Teacher and Psychologist
8	4	Family	Teacher and Psychologist
9	8	Psychologist	Psychologist
10	9	Family	Psychologist

We differentiate between indicators of early detection: behavior indicators, cognitive indicators and emotional indicators.

The most important indicators are the cognitive ones (n=19), table 3. Parents identified cognitive indicators easier than behavioral or emotional indicators. They

refer to learning different languages easily (n=1), learning to read early (n=5); having spatial ability (n=2); learning positive attitude (n=4); learning and using their own language (n=2); associating ideas (n=2); memory (n=1) and using mathematics (n=2).

**Table 3.** *Cognitive indicators.*

Subjects	Languages learning	Reading learning early	Spatial ability	Association ideas	Positive attitude of learning	Language learning and use	Memory	Maths
1				X	X			
2		X						
3	X		X					
4		X			X	X		
5		X	X	X				
6								X
7		X					X	X
8		X			X			
9						X		
10					X			
Total	1	5	2	2	4	2	1	2

Parents identified in their children behavior that is related to giftedness in the specialized literature (hyperactivity, behavior related with school, etc.) (table 4).

Finally, parents were concerned with emotional factors, such as their relationship (difficulties in social skills) and fears (Table 5).

**Table 4.** *Behavioral indicators.*

Subjects	Literal responses	Translation
2	“Vomitaba al ir al colegio porque le aburría”	He threw up when he got to school because it was boring.
3	“Manipula a las hermanas más pequeñas”	He manipulated his younger sisters
4	“Era hiperactiva, no dormía para no desaprovechar el tiempo”	She was hyperactive. She didn't sleep because she didn't want to waste time
6	“Se aburría en el colegio”	She was bored at school
7	“Al gatear ya intentaba correr”	When he crawled, he wanted to run
9	“Era hiperactivo”	He was hyperactive
10	“Es un niño normal”	He was a normal child
	“Era el primero en terminar las tareas escolares”	He was the first to finish his task at school

**Table 5.** *Emotional indicators.*

Subjects	Literal responses	Translation
1	“Tenía miedo a la muerte”	He was afraid of death
2	“Se siente a gusto con los adultos”	He was comfortable among adults
3 and 8	“Tenía dificultades en sus relaciones sociales”	He had difficulties in social relationships
6	“Tenía dificultades en sus relaciones sociales”	She had difficulties in social relationships
	“Tenía miedo a morir”	She was afraid of dying
9	“Tenía miedo a subir al avión, por si le pasara algo”	He was afraid of flying

## DISCUSSION

This work is aimed at to identifying parents' experiences in early behavior, cognitions and emotions common in gifted children.

In our study, parents were the first to identify giftedness in their children which occurred in nine cases out of ten. In five families, they observed gifted behaviour before the children initiated primary school (Panov, 2002).

The most frequent indicators are cognitive because they are easier to detect by parents. Sommer, Fink & Neubauer (2008) obtain similar results. Among the behaviour indicators, we found two cases where hyperactivity was diagnosed instead of giftedness. Sometimes, active behaviour is confused with hyperactivity (Genovard, 1988; Chan & Chan, 1999).

Heterogeneity is one characteristic of giftedness (Passow, 1993). In this study we found different cognitive, behavioural and emotional indicators in each family.

A limitation of our study is the small sample. It would be necessary to expand the sample to see if there are more different answers and to reach the saturation that the grounded theory points to.

Identifying giftedness is a very important issue so parents can be conscious of their children's high abilities and influence in the development of the child's talent (Feldman & Goldsmith, 1986).

In order to training parents not only to identify their gifted child, but also relate adequately with their children. So, it would be interesting to strengthen parent meetings to deepen the relationship between parents and children and analyse their educational work

Programs to deal with giftedness must include parent counselling, so “Parent’s concepts about giftedness may affect their interpretation of their gifted children’s characteristics and behaviours and influence their reaction to them” (Solow, 2001, pp. 14).

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