

# Image Detalization as an Indicator of Figurative and Plastic Creativity of Preschoolers

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Based on a brief description of creativity and imagination, their indicators and age characteristics, the insufficiency of research on the creativity of preschoolers is shown. A diagnostic study (1993—2000) is described, aimed at identifying the age characteristics of children 3—7 years old in detailing the motor-plastic image. 193 children participated in the diagnosis according to the author's method "Hare and Wolf"; they were asked to embody the plot of the "fairy tale" by means of the movement language. It was revealed: in the younger group, schematic movements predominate, signifying the image; in the middle group, the proportion of "complex" figurative movements is growing; in the senior and preparatory groups, "complexes" (partial and integral) prevail and the number of sequences of figurative movements that convey the phases of the character's actions is growing. Statistical analysis (according to the criteria H Kruskal-Wallis and U Mann-Whitney) revealed significant differences in image detail between different age samples and the absence of such differences between boys and girls (in different years).

**Keywords:** creativity; figurative-plastic creativity; compositional creativity; image; detailing of the character's image; movements language; preschoolers.

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# Детализация образа как показатель образно-пластического творчества дошкольников

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На основе проведенного автором анализа и краткой характеристики творчества и воображения, имеющихся данных об их свойствах и возрастных особенностях делается вывод о недостаточности исследований особенностей творчества дошкольников. Приводятся результаты диагностического обследования (1993—2000 гг.) возрастных особенностей детей 3—7 лет в детализации двигательно-пластического образа. В диагностике по авторской методике «Заяц и волк» участвовали 193 ребенка; им предлагалось воплотить сюжет «сказки» средствами языка движений. Выявлено: в младшей группе преобладают схематичные движения, обозначающие образ; в средней группе растет доля «комплексных» образных движений; в старшей и подготовительной группах преобладают «комплексы» (частичные и целостные) и растет число последовательностей образных движений, передающих фазы действий персонажа. Статистический анализ (по критериям Н Краскела-Уоллиса и U Манна-Уитни) выявил значимые различия в детализации образа между разными возрастными выборками и отсутствие таковых между мальчиками и девочками (в разные годы).

**Ключевые слова:** творчество; образно-пластическое творчество; сочинительское творчество; образ; детализация образа персонажа; язык движений; дошкольники.

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## Introduction

One of the primary aspects of the study of preschoolers' features of figurative-plastic creativity [9] is the consideration of various views on the nature and features of creativity, its origin and development. At the same time, different interpretations of the content of creativity and related concepts are revealed. Thus, "creativity" is understood as a process [19], a type of activity or the highest level of development of any activity [15], the product of this activity [19], as the realization of the mission of humanity in cognition of the world [2; 3; 15];

"productive imagination" as a psychological process underlying creativeness [4; 5; 13] as one of the universal creative abilities [13; 14]; "creativity" — as the ability to creative activity and thinking [1; 12].

Until now, the definition of creativity "is given according to its result, which is characterized through the novelty of the product" [3, p. 64]. In contrast to this, it is proposed to consider as an indicator of creativity its mechanism, the essence of which is "the development of activities on one's own initiative", with going beyond the set task, guided by the motive "to know and

understand everything”, and not for the sake of achievement of success [3; 14]. However, in relation to preschoolers, it is also relevant to consider the step-by-step development of creativity indicators, which is both age-related and individual in nature. Such research positions are aimed at an internal process and result that is significant for the creator himself and motivates him for further development. In children, the significance of the result is subjective as a reflection of novelty in their individual “story” of development.

The opposite position is presented in some modern foreign studies aimed at developing the creative potential of gifted children for the sake of their creative productivity, which requires external support provided “only to those who are ready to fully immerse themselves in this process” [18, pp. 24–25]. Obviously, only such immersion guarantees not a waste of funds on the cultivation of a future talented human who will be able to provide “returns” and multiply the efforts invested. The shift in the focus of research from the identification of general abilities to “the search for potential abilities that are important for specific areas of activity” [18, p. 24], which can be developed from school, is becoming one of the reasons for a small number of research on preschool age, despite the emphasis on the importance of early detection in children’s abilities, including creative ones. Studies of creativity potential are conducted with children up to 6 years of age to “understand the initial emergence and development of creativity” and to develop “creative thinking” through “interactive creative tasks based on movement” [20]. “Motor creativeness” is more often understood as “new ways of harmoniously acting or appropriate behavior in new situations” [21].

In one of the foreign studies with children aged 5–6 years, creativity (the creative beginning) is seen in the use of symbolic means in the play with social roles [6]. It is noted that children’s understanding of the meaning of their role-playing actions gradually shifts the support of the meaning of game from actions with real objects and their substitutes to relations with other children, to creative comprehension of “the relationship of one’s character with other per-

sonages, taking into account the rules” [6, p. 43]. After the developmental influence, there was a “deep emotional immersion of children in their roles” [6, p. 44], a conscious correlation of the role actions of their own and other characters, which allowed children to perform “role-playing actions in the best possible way, fully representing depicted personage” [6, p. 45]. Based on the generalized description in the article, it is not clear in what exactly the “emotional immersion” in the role and “performing role actions in the best way” were manifested; However, in part, these results “overlap” with our findings below.

Measuring the productivity of creativity is one of the main areas of research both abroad [1; 6; 12; 19] and in Russian psychology [8; 12; 13]. The creation of tests of divergent (creative) thinking is associated with the concept of J. Guilford [13; 19] and the first psychometric tools that continue to be widely used in modern research and educational practice [19, p. 10]. Indicators of creative thinking are traditionally recognized as: flexibility, fluency, plasticity, accuracy, mobility (movingness), originality, elaboration, as well as an overall assessment of the nature of the response by experts [1; 7; 12; 13; 19].

Let’s briefly consider the features of productive imagination, including in relation to preschoolers. The identification of patterns of the formation of imagination in preschool childhood is important because it is during this period that the main prerequisites for its development are laid [13, p. 5]; it, according to words of L.S. Vygotsky, D.B. Elkonin, V.V. Davydov, is recognized as the “basic “psychological conquest” of preschool childhood” [14, p. 59].

The needs arising from the inability to adapt to environmental conditions are an impulse, the driving force of imagination, which becomes a source of creativity [1; 4; 5]: elements of life impressions, experiences are combined into new combinations, uniting according to the principle of a common affective tone [16] or the law of a common emotional sign [4; 5], and also — according with an idea or conception, which makes new combinations bearers of meaning [17]. Imagination, “crystallized” in the products of creative activity [16], “begins to really exist in the world” and becomes “a new active force that

changes reality. This is the full circle of creative activity of the imagination” [4, pp. 15—16], in which intellectual and emotional factors are mutually necessary [4].

L.S. Vygotsky considered it substantial for the imagination to distance from reality into a relatively “autonomous activity of consciousness, which differs from the direct cognition of reality” [5, p. 130], which is creating opportunities for free action [5].

He pointed to a turning point in the development of imagination, which coincides with the emergence of speech, by means of which the child is freed “from the power of immediate impressions, having gone beyond them” [5, p. 123]. At the same time, he emphasized that children’s imagination has a motor character, which in preschoolers is found in dramatization, which has more similar with play, where children actively depict images (characters) “through of their own body” [4, p. 89].

The author’s works on the development of figurative-plastic creativity in preschoolers [8—11, etc.] are related to the study of the features of productive imagination, which is manifested and can be actively developed in this activity. Figurative-plastic creativity is an artistic and game activity of preschoolers, in which the main means of embodiment of the images of characters in the context of the plot is the language of movements — voluntary expressive movements and bodily plastic of a child. The development of figurative-plastic creativity is assessed by five indicators [8], one

of which — the detailing of the personage’s image — characterizes the compositional creativeness of preschoolers, that is, reflects the ability of children to “connect” movements (of arms, legs, torso, head, facial expressions) into complex combinations and sequences that form the basis of the composition (or its fragments) and embody a imaginative meaning in accordance with an imaginary situation. This indicator is close to such criteria of creative thinking as “accuracy” and “elaboration” of details, but does not coincide with them, since it characterizes not only the product of creativity, but also the stages of formation of the ability to “compose” in the language of movements.

The results of the study of the features of the detailing of movement-plastic images embodied by preschoolers are described below.

## Methods

**The purpose of the study** is to identify the age characteristics of preschoolers in the detailing of the personage’s images, considering it as an indicator of figurative-plastic creativity.

**Hypothesis.** During preschool childhood the detalization of images (personages) by children become more complicated step-by-step in the process of its creatively embodied by means of expressive movements.

**Characteristics of the subjects:** 193 children aged 3—7 from kindergartens in Moscow (Table 1). On average, the composition of boys and girls is approximately same: 51% and 49%.

Table 1

Number of groups of children

Groups Years of diagnostics	Junior	Average	Senior	Preparatory
1993	—	13	14	—
1994	32	18	15	19
1997	—	16	11	21
2000	34	—	—	—
Standard deviation	0,504	0,791	0,797	0,506
Number of children by age	66	47	40	40
% Boys	43,6	53,2	52,5	55
% Girls	56,4	46,8	47,5	45

**The study scheme** is an individual diagnosis and comparison of the data obtained both at four ages and within each age.

**The “Hare and Wolf” technique** (author: E.V. Gorshkova) was created in 1993 to identify the features of figurative-plastic creativity of preschoolers. The child was asked to embody a plot of 12 episodes using expressive movements (the procedure and evaluation system were described in detail earlier [8]).

Each episode of the “fairy tale”, embodied by a child, was evaluated in points depending on the method of detail. Based on the sum of the points, the individual level of development of the detailization of images (personages) was determined: “zero level” — skipping episodes, lack of detail; low: 0.5—2.0 points; average: 2.5—7.5 points; high: 8—12 points (qualitative characteristics of the levels are given below).

When processing the results, methods of qualitative analysis and mathematical statistics were used with the applying the SPSS program to compare the obtained data according to the H Kruskal-Wallis criterion (for three or more samples) and with their pairwise comparison according to the U Mann-Whitney criterion.

## Results

The following ways of “solving” separate episodes have been discovered: skipping episode (a child does not move, stay to stand at place); movements not reflecting the image (personage); “schemes”; “complexes”; sequences of movements, which occur at all ages, but in different ratios (Table 2). Detailing the image begins with the use of “complexes” according to the image of personage.

According to quantitative analysis, the junior groups were characterized by a predominance of schematic, non-detailed, imaginative movements, as well as movements not embodying personage’s image; a high proportion of missed episodes; detailing was noted only in 25% of cases.

In the middle groups, the proportion of absences decreases by a third and the percentage of “complexes” doubles. The most typical is using of schematic movements and incomplete “complexes”. The first sequences of movements (fragments of the composition) appear, but their number is not significant (the total share of detailed solutions is 40.1%).

In the older groups, the number of missed episodes is reduced by another 2.5 times. The percentage of “complexes” is growing, and the

TTable 2

Ratio of detailization methods at different ages, %

		Groups			
		Junior (3—4 years old)	Middle (4—5 years old)	Senior (5—6 years old)	Preparatory (6—7 years old)
<b>“Solutions”</b>					
Refusal, skipping an episode		29,4	22,3	9,3	6,6
Not an imaginative movement		18	5,4	6,7	0,4
Single <b>Schematic</b> Movement (“Schematic”)		27,6	26,2	27,2	11,7
“Complexes”	<b>Incomplete</b> (partial image)	17,7	34,2	31,7	51,9
	<b>Holistic</b> (the image of the “whole body”)	2	4,1	10,3	10,7
	In general (“complexes”):	<b>19,7</b>	<b>38,3</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>62,6</b>
Sequences	(A) — <b>variants</b> of equivalent movements	2,4	2,7	4,4	7,7
	(B) — <b>concretization of the action</b> (from “schemes” and “complexes”)	2,9	5,1	9,6	10
	(B) — <b>concretization of action</b> (only from “complexes”)	0	0	0,4	0,2
	(D) — <b>“cohesive tissue”</b> (fragments of the composition)	0	0	0,4	0,8
	In general (sequences):	<b>5,3</b>	<b>7,8</b>	<b>14,8</b>	<b>18,7</b>

share of sequences is doubling (56.8% in total).

And finally, in the preparatory groups, “complexes” and sequences of figurative movements prevail (summary 81.3%).

**Qualitative features by levels of detalization of personage image at different ages.**

Due to the omission of episodes and the use of schematic (non-detailed) movements, the results on this indicator are reduced. Signs of detailing of the personage image are associated with the use of “complexes” and sequences of imaginative movements, which have qualitative differences at three levels of detailing, while a significant direct correlation is found with the development of the performance (emotional-figurative) expressiveness indicator (in all ages  $K_{\text{кор}} \approx 0.8$ ) [8].

Children with a **low** level of detalization of the personage image (at any age: from 3 to 7 years old) use incomplete “complexes”, combining 2—3 figurative movements, both reflecting the image and not quite appropriate (stereotypes of figurative movements not corresponding the given image; contradiction of facial expressions and plastics). Movement sequences are almost not used. As a rule, emotional accompaniment (joyful or indifferent) rather reflects the child’s attitude towards the task being performed. and not the features of the embodied image.

**Average** level. Along with “complexes” of disconnected details, there appear integral, non-contradictory “complexes” in which all the components of movement correspond to the given image of personage. Sequences of movements (in 1—2 episodes of the plot for junior and middle preschoolers, and in 3—5 episodes for older ones) include not only schematic, but also incomplete “complexes” of figurative movements. The emotional experience [perezzhivanie] of the images manifests fragmentary, as a rule, “on separate episodes” however it can be quite striking when using integral “complexes” (figurative movement “with the whole body”).

**High** level (in a small percentage of older preschoolers). About half of the fragments of the “fairy tale” are embodied by children with the help of coherent sequences of figurative movements (in exceptional cases — even in in almost all episodes), and in the rest of the fragments they use “complexes” of movements. As a rule,

it is accompanied by an emotionally expressive performance of the personage image.

At different levels of detail, two basic principles (A and B) are found in the construction of sequences of movements.

A) Variability of movements of equivalent meaning, conveying one action with the invariable mood of the character and his movement in (unrecognizable imaginary) space; it was more often seen in the episodes “The Bunny is having fun”, “The Bunny walks”: alternating types of jumps with turns at a place and forward movement remains the same at all ages.

B) Semantic concretization, enrichment with details of character behavior are found in situations of interaction, in reactions of one character to another (the hare is scared or drives away the wolf; the wolf is scared of the hare); as a rule, the older the preschooler, the more phases of emotion development are embodied in a imaginative movement (within one episode), and the more emotionally expressive it is performed an image, with an emphasis on the emotions of the personage rather than on his characteristic plasticity; space is lived and played out in relation to an imaginary opponent.

Then complex sequences appear, consisting only of “complexive” movements; there is even a combination of several episodes into coherent fragments of the composition (options B and D — see Table 2).

The increasing detalization of the personages’ images reflects the enrichment, the growth of concretization of its content features thanks to the deepening of children’s understanding of its meaning, imaginative content.

**Statistical analysis of results by ages.**

For each age sample, the average values of individual totals obtained in different years were determined and compared with each other according to the Kruskal-Wallis H test and in pairwise comparison according to the Mann-Whitney U test. As a result, statistically significant differences were revealed: on the Fig. 1 it are marked with “asterisks”.

With this in mind, the data for 1993 (in the junior and senior groups) and for 1994 (in the preparatory group) were excluded from the comparison of the mean values. After subtracting them, the data were compared with similar results for all

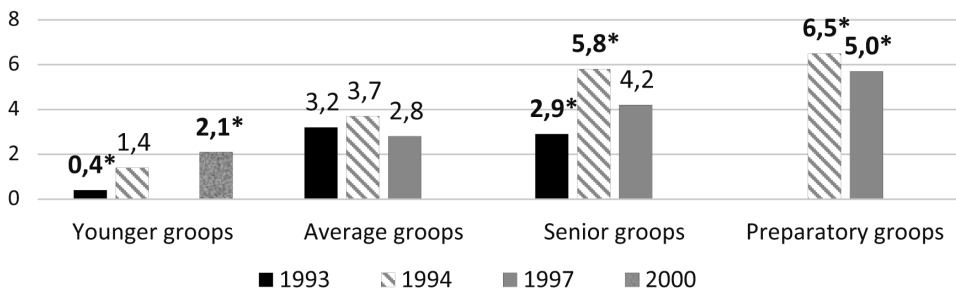


Fig. 1. Comparison of average scores for the methodology as a whole in four age group samples (in different years)

years (Fig. 2), and that did not reveal a fundamental difference in the developmental trend of the personage image detailization: during preschool childhood, there is increasing children’s ability to detail a movemental-plastic personage image.

The levels of detailization of personages’ images in children of different age groups were compared in two ways.

Their percentages (Fig. 3) revealed a predominance of “complexes” of figurative move-

ments in children from 5 to 7 years old (middle — preparatory groups); in the junior groups, due to a large share of schematic movements, a low level of detail prevails.

Statistical analysis of the results of four age group samples in two cycles according to the H criteria of Kruskal-Wallis and U Mann-Whitney revealed statistically significant differences between the age groups, except for the pair: senior and preparatory ( $0.059 > 0.05$ ), however a trend

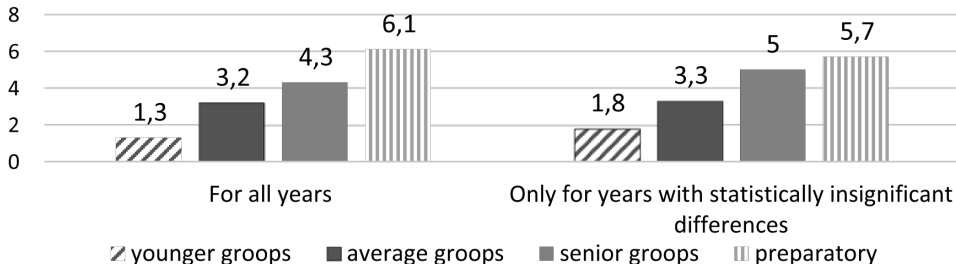


Fig. 2. Comparison of the average final results on detailization of the image differently by age

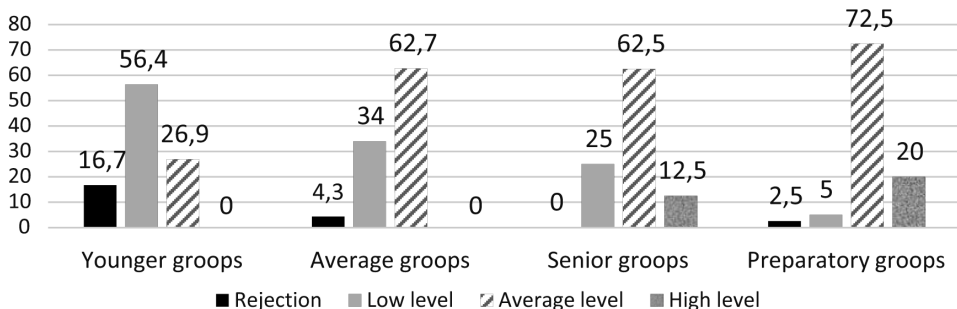


Fig. 3. Levels of detail in different age samples

towards the significance of the differences is outlined here as well.

A comparison of the levels of detail in boys and girls of the same age (separately by year) revealed (according to the Mann-Whitney U test) no statistically significant differences between them. The exceptions were the two older groups in 1994 and 1997, where girls performed significantly better than boys. Thus, it can be argued that the ability to detail an image of personage in the course of its creative embodiment through expressive movements, as a rule, does not depend on the child's gender.

### Discussion

The main methods of constructing an image by means of expressive movements — “schemes”, “complexes”, sequences — are similar to the levels of the qualitative indicator of productive imagination (according to the method of O.M. Dyachenko “Dorisovyvanie figur”<sup>1</sup>) [13]. For example, schematic (non-detailed) imaginative movements are similar to schematic object images in a drawing and prevail in junior preschoolers; “complexes” of imaginative movements are analogous to filling an object image with details (in the picture) and become characteristic of the middle preschool age; and the sequences of imaginative movements, which form the basis of the movement-plastic composition, are analogous to the levels of actions and plot in the drawing. This allows us to assume that the detailing of the image as an indicator of the composing movement-plastic creativity of preschoolers reflects the general trends in the development of the quality of children's imagination. At the same time the originality of the motor and plastic image reflects the development of the quantitative indicator of imagination [10].

Non-integral “complexes” as the most characteristic way for a preschooler to detail an image (character) take place because the figurative movement is not performed by the whole body, and semantic contradictions may arise between the expressive movements of different parts of the body. This is due to the fact that during the embodi-

ment of the image also are observed child's own expressive movements as a “breaking through” involuntary manifestation of his mood about completing the task [9]. The appearance of holistic, consistent “complexes” (the embodiment of the image “with the whole body”) occurs as a result of the child's arbitrary restraint of his own emotional reactions, so as not to destroy the embodied image. This confirms L.S. Vygotsky's words: in solving an important task for a personality, “the activity of imagination is not subordinated to the subjective whims of emotional logic” [5, p. 127], even when the figurative content embodied by a child can be emotionally saturated. Exactly it becomes significant and motivates the creative activity of the child. But this trend becomes obvious and continues to develop in the older preschool age.

Detailing is especially closely related to “reincarnation”, getting used to an image (an indicator of creativity of performance or expressiveness of performance) [8]. In improvisation, where composition and performance occur simultaneously, the emotionally expressive living of the image is an impulse to enrich the details of the image structure. Image detailing is the construction of an image reflecting its structural expressiveness (content) [9]: the more complex the image detailing, the richer its content, the more the child comprehends the image, the more he is involved in the creative process.

The peculiarities of detailing the motor-plastic image revealed in preschoolers (“complexes” and “sequences” of movements of varying complexity) thanks to the “dryness” of obvious signs allow us to separate the construction of the image (actual detail as an indicator of “composition”) from his emotional living (an indicator of creative actor playing); this helps not only researchers, but also practical teachers to see and analyze the features of children's imaginative-plastic creativity.

According to the diagnostics, the combination of the character's characteristic plasticity and the peculiarities of his experiences (emotions) in the integral figurative movement is practically not found in preschoolers. However,

<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, an adequate translation of the name of the technique could not be found, so it is given in Latin transcription from Russian. The task for the child is to draw a given abstract figure to a complete object image.



this feature has a place only in the spontaneous development of creativity in children aged 3—7 years. As studies show [9; 11], with the purposeful development of imaginative-plastic creativity based on teaching children the language of expressive movements, such a combination is achieved thanks to a certain technique that allows expanding the zone of both nearest and actual development of children.

The revealed absence of statistically significant differences between boys and girls in the detail of the image during its creative embodiment through expressive movements is consistent with the data of other studies: the absence of differences in the creative abilities of women and men [7], the absence of a significant difference in the “motor creativity” of boys and girls of preschool age [21].

A comparison of the results described in this article on detailing the movement-plastic image of a personage with similar data obtained using the same diagnostic method in children who purposefully studied the language of movements as a means of developing figurative-plastic creativity may be a subject of future publications.

### Conclusion

As a result of the study, the age characteristics of preschoolers in terms of the indicator of “detailing” of the movement-plastic image during its creative embodiment were revealed: the ways of “solutions” in the construction of the image; the ratio of the types of detailing at different ages and in the perspective of its complication from junior group to preparatory group. Individual characteristics which ahead of the age-related trend in the development of detailing (or lagging from it) were also revealed; that can be explained by the peculiarities of the child’s personal experience and abilities.

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The hypothesis of the study about the complication of children’s detailing of the images (characters) during its creative embodiment by helping of expressive movements during preschool childhood is confirmed, which can be considered as a stage-by-stage development of the indicator, the main tendency of which is from “complexes” — to alternation “complexes” with simple “sequences”, and then to their compositional combination.

The age peculiarities of preschoolers in the use of various ways of “solutions” of the movement-plastic image and varieties of its detailing are shown: in children of the junior groups there is a predominance of “schematic” movements denoting the personage image, along with a large share of missed episodes of the plot; in the middle groups, along with “schemes”, “complexes” are used; in the senior and preparatory groups, a combination of “complexes” and sequences of movements, the latter become the prologue for the creation of a figurative and plastic composition.

In preschoolers (with spontaneous development, without special learning) the detailing of the movement-plastic image can be observed in the junior group as an emerging tendency (in the form of single “complexes” imaginative movements), but its active spontaneous development occurs in the middle group and especially in the older preschool age.

As a rule, the ability to detail the images of personages in the process of their creative embodiment by the help of expressive movements does not depend on the child’s gender.

The results obtained complement the understanding of the peculiarities of the development of productive imagination and creative abilities of preschoolers both in theoretical and practical plans.

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