

## EDUCATION, SOCIETY AND GIFTEDNESS

**Abstract:** Gifted children are the most precious wealth of a nation and it is up to society to capitalize this value at its maximum. In other words, society, school and family are the educational partners responsible for identifying and educating these children, so that their innate potential can develop at its uppermost. The real challenge is to identify the gifted children, to see beyond appearances, to overcome prejudices, to give true values real opportunities. Giftedness is actually a lengthy process that first involves recognizing the children with potential and then investing the energy needed for their development. Prejudices, sometimes without a malicious purpose, lead to ignoring real genius where it is obvious, but hidden from social opacity, which is only focused on certain safe and comfortable aspects. Superficial criteria are more accessible for identifying gifted children than a lucid look beyond appearances. Oftentimes, highly gifted children are lost because of the obtuse vision of individuals, sometimes highly rated teachers. Gifted children have remarkable and obvious skills, but their idiosyncratic development is an obvious disadvantage, because school is bothered by such events and has no patience to look beyond them and see the true nature of the holder.

We believe that it is a debt of honour, as well as a moral duty for ours, the servants of school, to focus all our energy towards the identification and education of gifted children because they are the future treasure of a nation, they are the engine that triggers social progress.

**Key words:** *giftedness, identification, education, responsibility, approach styles*

### **Endowment, giftedness and genius**

Giftedness is attributed to a combination of factors coming from two directions: the natural factors, a hereditary factor which is doubled by the educational one, the two factors mutually determining each other. It is also necessary to point out the role of the social environment on the development of a gifted child (Worrell, F.C., Olszewski-Kubilius, P., & Subotnik, R.F., 2012). The fact that people are born with specific traits is highlighted by studies on identical twins raised in separate families, with surprisingly similar psycho-behavioural characteristics although they were raised in different social environments (Sternberg, R.J., & Davidson, J.E. (eds.), 2005). The educational factor has a decisive role in the development of skills to their maximum level, but it is done only in certain conditions determined by educational and social factors, as well as self-motivation from a very early age. The motivational factor along with creativity can often substitute the absent factor, but when all three factors (intelligence, creativity and self-motivation) work together in an educational and social environment favourable to children, they can achieve absolutely outstanding performances in developing the child's potential (Jolly, J.L., & Kettler, T., 2008). Although statistically, gifted children form a proportion of 4-6% of the population, stimulating educational and social conditions may increase this percentage to 20% according to researchers. In this case one can observe an increase in the cognitive capabilities in both categories, but with different growth speeds - about ten times higher in the case of gifted children than in other children.

A talent which evolves in an appropriate social environment, along with self-motivation, leads to remarkable achievements. However not all men endowed with great intelligence and talent are socially accomplished. Within MENSA - the organization of people with an IQ over 130 on the Stanford - Binet adult intelligence scale, are Nobel winners as well as taxi drivers. Although they had the same level of intelligence, some have achieved an acclaimed social status, while others did not. The level of success is determined not only by intelligence but also by self-motivation, dedication, perseverance, hard work and other random aspects such as luck, chance or opportunities.

The concept of endowment can be identified at the intersection of three qualities: intelligence, creativity and motivation, each of which can be found in the absence of the other two. There is no correlation between social success and giftedness, because many gifted people can be the victims of social exclusion due to their outstanding competitiveness. Thus, the smartest man of the twentieth century, with a measured IQ of 180, Billy Sidis, who had graduated from college at the age when others did not yet complete high school, who knew many languages in which he translated spontaneously and had discovered black holes decades before

physicists and astronomers did through logical thinking, died young after holding the "high" social position of a public librarian.

Although the great potential of gifted children and people and give them the opportunity to solve problems and crises of humanity, they are a high-risk population with special social needs, which involve emotional and social protection from society in order to help them attain their native potential.

Reconsidering these assertions on the concepts presented one can conclude that a high aptitude equipment, excellent or exceptional intelligence do not always lead to genius. One of the experts concerned with this issue, L.Terman, in his study on a sample of 1500 subjects in the early '20s, did not find any genius among his sample (Guerra, N., & Van Acker, R., 2010). Concerned about the IQ and the socioeconomic variations in the population tested, his research has shown a stability and independence of the IQ in relation with sociocultural factors throughout life. One can draw the conclusion that in order for genius to manifest itself, one needs a number of circumstances, in addition to a high level of general intelligence, some emotional intelligence, high creativity, socio-cultural circumstances and some individual characteristics such as motivation (Siegle, D., & McCoach, D.B., 2005), temperament and personality. Recent research has shown that intelligence is particularly important in the emergence of genius. For this reason it is important to establish the children's IQ, because it provides important clues about their learning ability, their pace and effectiveness of learning. Once one has detected the level of intelligence, educational intervention within the family and school, together with intrinsic motivation and creativity are crucial elements in the development of gifted children. But in order to achieve brilliance, researchers say that children also need some opportunities related to the socio-cultural environment, and other items related to hazard (Ziegler, A., Stoeger, H., & Vialle, W., 2012).

### **Giftedness in Romania**

The socio-economic development of a country will influence the approach to educational policies. Until recently the gifted children in Romania were considered an elite class which caused great harm to a society based on equality (whoever was different from the rest of the mass needed to be silenced). After the Revolution of 1989, our country has tried to shake the dark traits of the communist period, to open its political, social and cultural horizons. Thus, Romania was accepted in the largest international organization generically called IRSCA with the help of the lobby made by the President of Gifted Education, Professor Florian Colceag, a teacher of high vocation and a devoted servant of genuine school. IRSCA Gifted Education has achieved integration into global policy network on giftedness, by the international recognition of the personal work in this field and the degree of high personal expertise of Professor Florian Colceag. The most important achievements are forming an international support committee of the National Program *Gifted Education* in Romania, consisting of leading personalities in the field of gifted education, as well as the inclusion and initiation of projects and programmes in the gifted education global network, with the initiative or involvement of Romania. New directions have been initiated, such as the policy on the education of gifted children, while the urge to develop programmes that can be promoted by *Gifted Education* in the future has been declared. Thus, the education of gifted and talented children has expanded from the scientific and technological field to leadership and management of the social system, becoming a priority around the world, as well as in our country. One also knows perfectly well the relationship between *Gifted Education* and the development of training programs devoted to developing capable and motivated leaders, with the necessary intelligence and training to solve complex problems and current crises.

### **The interest for gifted children**

An interest in giftedness has only been noticed, according to documents in our country, after 1900 with the concerns of people with modern views on the phenomenon.

One of them was Stefanescu Goangă, who, on referring to the education of gifted children, has noted that school does not do enough for these children, moreover that "*school is a waste of time and place of boredom, not an institution able to awaken, to form their superior powers of creation*".

Liviu Rusu (1929), concerned with the "selection of gifted children", emphasizes the aspect that intelligence is nothing more than "*the ability to adapt to new circumstances with the help of thinking*" and the means by which gifted children can be helped is to have them grouped according to their skills in homogeneous classes. Stephen Odobleja (1938), preoccupied with these children, in his work entitled "The Consonantistic Psychology" made the following observation: "*it is the fault of society and family, pedagogy and school, that*

*precocious children do not develop to their natural destiny and that they so often become wrecks of society, instead of its stars."*

Părvu (1967) speaks of the special abilities of children and how these could be cultivated by family and school.

Zisulescu (1971) is concerned with studies that show the undeniable value of motivational and affective valences in the education of gifted children.

Alexandru Rosca (1981), in his work, is also concerned about gifted children and makes outstanding contributions to the field by emphasizing the important role of a differentiated education of gifted children in their accession to excellence.

Maria Roth-Szamoskosi (1986) defines giftedness "*as a multidimensional system of individual cognitive, motivational and sociocultural factors, which ensure the achievement of superior performance*" in which boosting their optimal choice of methods is the key to success.

Ioan Berar (1998, 2001), devotes numerous studies to the issue of giftedness, from both theoretical and practical perspectives. He comes up with concrete solutions to achieve an educational environment conducive to the maximization of the potential of gifted children.

Mihai Jigău (1994) is devoted to the study of the phenomenon of giftedness starting from pre-schoolers and brings significant critical arguments on the lacking education in relation to gifted children and proposes alternatives worthy of consideration for the improvement of the education of children gifted in mathematics.

Carmen Cretu (1996, 1997, 1998) gives great interest to the issues of giftedness, becoming a prestigious specialist in the field with numerous reference works on **the pedagogy of success**.

Liliana Maria Stanescu (2002), is known by her concerns for the education of gifted children, the ways that we propose to support gifted children in order to develop their high skills.

One should appreciate the fact that in 2001, The Center of Excellence for Performance Students is established, as a unit directly under the Ministry of Education and Research.

In 2007 the **Law on the education of gifted children who are capable of high performance** is established, along with the National Differentiated Training Centre.

The Romanian educational policies in recent years are increasingly considering exceptionally gifted children so that more and more associations are in charge of them: The Education 2000+ Center, CODECS Foundation for Leadership, RO-TALENT, Junior Achievement, The Union of Romanian Students, CUFR, the Cygnus Foundation, LEADERS Romania and others.

In 2006 EDUGATE was founded – The Romanian Consortium for the Education of Gifted and Talented Children and Youth with over 30 founders of the most prestigious Romanian organizations and institutions which aims to promote original Romanian education and research, to attract talented young people in this work with inclination to research, leadership, entrepreneurship, arts, and to contribute nationally and internationally to the prestige of these activities. "*By gifted education one respects the divine nature of man and not the man-commodity, the consumption man. We promote the creative man, a man able to develop his potential.*" In 2008 the Excellence magazine was put on the market, a magazine that addresses important and taboo issues regarding national education. One noticed in the first issue a discussion on "*the learning paradigm inherited from parents and grandparents: dictated, copied, memorized, reproduced, forgotten*".

### **The early identification of giftedness**

Generally, gifted child have high capacity distributed in all directions and show skills in many areas; this feature should make them easily identifiable (Borland, 2008). However, in reality, things are much more complex, the personality of these children sometimes makes them difficult to be identified. Some children are endowed with a high general intelligence distributed in all directions and if these children receive support and assistance they will develop an upward direction. Other children have a high intelligence in one direction and problems in other directions; they need support to overcome shortcomings and to elevate the endowment line. Regarding talented children, one can observe skills in a specific area and problems in others. There may not be, however, a total and immutable correlation between the intellectual level and giftedness, research revealing the personal complexity of the gifted children. There are abandoned areas concerning gifted children as well, due to their asynchronous development thanks to psycho-emotional and random factors. In general, after identifying gifted children and knowing their characteristics, each school makes its own support system to help the gifted child on specific skills, but also with the collaboration of dedicated teachers and family. Such schools are interested in identifying gifted children and providing them with opportunities to

develop their skills and talents with the tools at hand ( Heller, K.A., & Schofield, N.J., 2008). What is important is to achieve identification using the specific identification tools.

The types of intelligence are unevenly represented in gifted children, on various areas of development. In general, sensory intelligence is positively correlated with emotional intelligence which can be tested. Based on emotional intelligence on the floors of analytical, critical and spiritual intelligence, the sensory intelligence is developed. This is relevant in the development of the teaching methods where the capacity of absorbing processed information is driven in parallel with the capacity of logical processing of this information and with the development of abilities. The decisions taken by a school on the development of strategies for identifying gifted and talented are related to one's interest in the field, which is not limited to that, but which will be geared towards the development of specific programs to educate children through a flexible school policy and through a curriculum typical to the school.

The identification of gifted children is necessary to be achieved from the early childhood (Gail Junion-Matz, 2001). Arguments are both psychological and pedagogical. It is known that the shaping of a child's personality is done during childhood, when one lays the foundations of intellectual and practical skills through educational influences. Gifted children identified early will benefit from the opportunities provided by society to evolve on the line of giftedness and to develop to their full native potential (Sankar-DeLeeuw, N., 2004). The development capacity during childhood was found to be the sharpest of the whole life of the human being; in this period the character models, the foundations of future social being are settled, now the baby is very adaptable and easily influenced under a formative educational aspect. Not coincidentally do they say about a person that he has or does not have one's seven years at home! Gradually, under the influence of educational programmes tailored to the needs of these children, one can form a conduct and behaviour directed towards harnessing innate skills. Identified from an early age, and subjected to appropriate educational strategies, the gifted children will develop at full their native endowment; they have the opportunity to access excellence. Researchers emphasize the beneficial idea to start school as soon as possible. We believe that an early identification of skills and the stimulation of the child within the family, then in kindergarten and school, will enable them to develop at maximum levels. Among the subjective methods used for identifying gifted children, we list the following:

- Denomination;
- Observation;
- Questionnaires;
- Lists;
- Case studies;
- Analysis and interpretation of the students' work based on assignments given or free choice;
- Analysis and comparison of the grades obtained at different school subjects;
- Monitoring.

*Denomination* is achieved by the identification of gifted children by peers, parents, teachers, counsellors or by themselves. This implies the existence of lists of features in current language, which can reach people who are interested.

*Observation* involves the use of combinations of potential and performance measurements. It is more objective than denomination.

*Questionnaires* are effective if their components determine the empirical identification and if they can be applied easily.

*Lists*, or *check-lists* as they are called in literature, are relevant in the identification of gifted children.

*The case study* is a relevant method for identifying gifted children and because of the belief that this method offers the possibility of comparison and use of patterns.

Ability tests are used to test the potential, while performance tests are useful in assessing student performance and their classification into categories. Gifted students with learning disabilities can get low scores on performance tests. Diagnostic essays are designed to identify specific areas of disability, not identify giftedness.

*Monitoring*. Teachers have the opportunity to develop monitoring methodologies to help in observing students. These observations may give an idea about performance, interests, strengths, weaknesses, abilities. Specific data can be collected to give the measure of efficiency to the observation. Identification was the first

step in selecting those children who exhibited early performance, especially in the arts (drawing, painting, music, sports) by expert assessments in these areas:

- selection based on only one criterion or on several criteria;
- location in a group for a period of time (*pull-out group*);
- special programmes based on enrichment;
- different teachers with little contact between them;
- return to the classroom after the classes of “enrichment”.

Certain pupils may be easily identified due to characteristic features and can be integrated in special groups such as:

- the underperforming;
- the gifted with learning difficulties;
- the gifted with non-intellectual disabilities;
- the gifted as creators of disorder;
- the gifted with other mother tongue;
- the gifted from different cultural backgrounds;
- the gifted with socio-economic difficulties;
- the gifted disadvantaged by gender discrimination;
- geographically isolated gifted children.

The methods of identification are based on age, development stage, and abilities. They include:

- assessment of pupils' answers in classroom activities;
- denomination by parents, supervisors, mates, teachers and pupils themselves;
- assessments of answers given in competitions;
- observations, list of behavioural characteristics, interviews;
- analysis of school results.

The identification performed by the teacher should have the following characteristics:

- to be a part of a coherent programme used by the entire school community;
- has to use multiple criteria;
- should use both objective and subjective strategies;
- pupils of the following categories should not be over assessed: the underperforming, pupils with

exceptional intelligence, with disabilities, with learning difficulties and those coming from different cultural backgrounds.

The identification should:

- be performed throughout the entire schooling period;
- use multiple criteria;
- be inclusive;
- be dynamic and continuous;
- be culturally correct;
- ensure identification of all giftedness and talent areas;
- be organized and linked to differentiation of educational pathways;
- open for early identification and should also identify all stages of giftedness;
- to collect information from all factors involved in the process.

The characteristic features appear at an early age, but not all features are exclusive, only those that children possess in the highest degree (Colm O'Reilly, 2012). One must consider some specific features of the gifted, namely the existence of certain negative traits like: stubbornness, tendency to challenge authority, no participation in classroom activities, lack of cooperation, cynicism, negligence and disorganization, emotional frustration, low interest in details, tendency to be absent-minded (Davis and Rimm, 1998). Another way to identify giftedness is the interview technique. The behavioural characteristics allow psychologists with years of practice to identify the traits of giftedness. The level of concerns and the interest horizon of children characterize giftedness as well as psychometric tests. Moreover the interview can provide results in problems where psychometric tests failed. Although the interview can be considered superior in identifying giftedness, problems can occur when it is used on large scale, namely on numerous population such as children enrolled in educational systems. Therefore, psychometric tests are more commonly used.

### **Education styles typical for giftedness**

Any gifted children identified by parents or school must benefit from educational programmes that would develop their native potential, so as to accede to the performance that is ultimately converted into skills with social impact. The complexity of a gifted personality brings forth series considerations regarding the development and implementation of educational programmes (Charlton, JC, Marolf, DM, & Stanley, JC, 2002). Gifted children develop different learning abilities from other children, based on specific thinking patterns (McCollister, K., & Sayler, M. F., 2010):

- critical thinking which assesses ideas and arguments in a creative way;
- Construction of models that give a logical meaning to the world and which can be put into practice;
- Construction of logical arguments that validate or reject concepts;
- Consideration and reconsideration of obvious facts that help in the discovery of laws behind reality which are not visible at first sight;
- Moral thinking that approaches responsibly different actions and finds a proper manner of acting in different situations.

All these features requires special training for teachers working with the gifted. They have to use proper teaching styles, different from those used in mass education.

Gifted children are characterized by attitudes, dispositions and habits which leverage their open minds, objectivity and impartiality. They usually practice metacognition, analysing their own thinking process. Intellectual training that should form the basis of any activities / lessons requires planning, problem solving, strategic decision, and recommendation of methodologies, communication and critical usage of the others' experience. Targeting learning should be based on the analysis of the best educational solutions and their planning for the future. Gifted children are driven by curiosity, they are eager to understand how the universe functions, being able to imagine improvement or reforms, to produce useful social values. Therefore, educational programmes for the gifted must meet educational requirements that would apply to the specific characteristics of their thinking ( Mooij , 2013). Their thinking:

- raises vital questions that are clearly and precisely stated;
- collects and assesses relevant information using abstract notions to interpret them;
- reaches well considered conclusions and solutions, testing them on relevant criteria and standards;
- thinks openly and non-dogmatically within alternative thinking systems, admitting and assessing own suppositions, implications and consequences;
- communicates actively with others, develops solutions for different issues.

For these reasons the gifted possessing critical thinking is self -disciplined, self- directed, self- monitored and self- correctional. He uses rigorous strategies and special skills in handling them (Freeman, J., Raffan , J., & Warwick , I., 2010). He also develops special skills in problem solving and in uttering them. For these reasons teachers working with gifted children, must, in turn, have special abilities and a psycho -intellectual profile which is compatible to the one of his/her students. All around the world, educators have developed an educational system that follows the specific characteristics of gifted children and that could revalue their intellectual and behavioral potential, directing educational influences toward mass educations. Another manner of optimized educational intervention is individualized instruction. This strategy is based on the concept sine qua non that every child is unique, unrepeatable, with specific skills, competences and abilities, which require individualized treatment (Laurance J Coleman, 2003). Each gifted child should have benefit from a personal instruction. The child will develop his/her abilities and skills if s/he is provided with a educational programme structured according to his/her personality and supported by all educational factors involved in the process: family, school and society.

The educational pathway of a gifted child is paved with personalized instructions methods (Friend, M., 2008). The educator, primary school teacher or teacher would project the educational act of the gifted trying to take into account the following issues:

- individual and ages characteristics of the gifted;
- fields of interest for the gifted;
- areas towards they show abilities or talent;
- constant counselling of the gifted;
- keeping a constant relationship with the family.

Following these minimal requirements ensures:

- individual development (children/pupils acquire concepts, notions, utter judgements, develop abilities for a constant learning);
- involvement in knowledge enrichment activities (children/pupils exploit extra-curricular areas, acknowledging the existence of various information sources);
- thorough studies (children/pupils have the opportunity to study a topic of their interest for a longer period of time; they investigate and research in order to finish their assignment) (Kulik, J. A., 2004).

These strategies can be used at all levels of education for students with outstanding performance. For more advanced levels of education (secondary school, high school), pupils are encouraged to spend with extra work or school obligations each week. In exchange they are exempt from some current unimportant school activities.

Counseling provides guidance for the gifted in exploring and understanding their identity. It supports the development of strategies for solving personal problems and decision making. Classical counselling has shaped four directions of approaching the problems an individual faces throughout his/her evolution:

- intervention in situation of crisis, improvement intervention, prevention, formative and development intervention;

- individual counselling is a personal interaction between the counsellor and the counselled person. The counsellor assisted the child in the development of cognitive, emotional and social problems;

- individual counselling is carried on in confidential sessions that allow the exploration of ideas, feelings or problematic attitudes;

- the counsellor and the counselled person are a team founded on mutual trust and openness for collaboration.

A particular form of counseling is group counseling which involves a relationship between the counselor and the group, sharing a common problem. The counseling process leverages the experience and problems of each person assisted. A social relationship is developed within the group. The counsellor develops for each individual, methods and plans to clarify the existing situation, leading to the individualization of the problem. This type of interaction contributes to normal emotional development of the gifted that come to understand that there are others like them who share the same fears, the same problems, the same anxieties. Group counseling helps them to understand more easily and quickly look that there is nothing wrong with them and that there are other people in their position. In group counseling arises a sense of community based on need for affiliation, belonging. During these meetings the members clarify their needs, desires and choices, and each member's self-achievement is related to group dynamics. The objectives of group counseling aim at creating an environment that would develop the participants' ability to obtain information and solutions, to form constructive attitudes (Walsh L. Rosalind, Coral Kemp, 2013).

The purpose of counselling for gifted children/pupils is:

- to support the development of their own individuality;
- assistance in the process of self-discovery and search-development of identity;
- the development of a positive self-image and self-acceptance;
- the development of social abilities and abilities for interaction with others;
- the formation of problem solving abilities and proper decision making;
- support in enunciation of specific and measurable goals that can be observed in behaviour.

Educational counselling is a complex process and it has to take place following certain steps and techniques according to the problem and personality of the counselled gifted child.

Individualized and personalized learning is an educational alternative that gives the child the opportunity to work at his pace and to his extent (Peterson, SJ, & Mann, RL, 2009), it encourages him to take decisions on the choice of subjects / areas of learning, it supports him to work effectively in his personal style, it motivates independent learning, facilitates the possibility to approach personalized work methods but also stimulates him for group activities for new social contact, for extracurricular activities.

As intellectual work technique, mentoring consists of *bringing together a mentor and a certain pupil to develop an inter-psychological learning relationship. The mentor is an expert in the field and an external amplifier of the "protégé's" mental activity and the child is just a gifted and motivated "novice"*. Mentoring consists of individual guidance of the gifted by a mentor who will help the child to develop special abilities and skills. If it is practiced efficiently, this method has remarkable results. The actors of the educational act will develop a inter-psychological learning relationship based on mutual trust. The mentor is an expert in the field and an external provider of information but also a counsellor that helps the gifted and motivated child to

collect information and develop his abilities. Mentoring involves a special type of activity carried out between child and adult who play complementary roles. The mentor lead, guides and encourages the child's initiative and adjust the activities laying emphasis on cognitive strategies. The child collects information and stores what is necessary for his development.

The most powerful argument in choosing this strategy is given by practice. Using these three procedures gave outstanding results in teaching the gifted.

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