

**GIFTED CHILDREN, SPECIALNEEDS AND SPECIAL EDUCATION**

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*Abstract: In my article I want to underline that the gifted are exceptional children with special qualities and needs. For the professionals in education is important to know how they can identify them among others in order to help them develop their inborn aptitudes up an optimal point. Real intelligence and also real ability can be developed to their maximum potential if the system of education provides an education programme which is appropriate for gifted children abilities. Intrinsic motivation, coherent programme and dedicated teachers all together could help gifted child to access excellence. In order to realize that objective we propose an alternative program to gifted child education. The method provides activities and counselling to the gifted children adapted to their individual profile. The gifted child chooses a mentor who is prepared to guide him/her to develop his/her native aptitudes and vocation.*

*Keywords: gifted child, mentoring, guide, excellence*

**The teacher`s role in educating the gifted**

The theory and practice of education help identifying those opportunities that would help gifted preschool children and primary school pupils in their progress. Their progress is the sum of these opportunities and their exceptional inborn giftedness. Outstanding intelligence or an extraordinary ability can be developed and shaped only by designing such a pedagogical “system”. It would try to work on the achievement of instructional-educational objectives, by improving the educational process and adapting it to the educational needs of gifted children/teenagers. The development of their extraordinary intelligence and abilities is based on their intrinsic motivation and attitude towards learning. The problem lies only in the identification of that path which would really improve the competence of the gifted in school activities. The teachers skills and dedication are essential in channelling the gifted towards school work, curiosity and natural inquiry. The infantile curiosity, sometimes general and not channelled on a topic, in its attempt to reach performance, develops the intrinsic motivation of the learning activity. Dedicated teachers prepare didactic situations suitable for their objectives, giving the instructional-educational process the desired content and structure, the proper rhythm and direction maintaining a gifted child`s level of interest at a proper level. The teacher collaborates with the gifted child, challenging him/her to bring arguments and counterarguments, to “discover” new information, to integrate it, transfer it and use it when the didactic situation requires it. The teachers do not have to change the gifted child`s personality but their duty is to make a contribution to the achievement of their full potential, to help them find pleasure in learning, to develop positive attitudes towards school, to their academic success.

The school success of the gifted children is the result of the interaction of psycho-physiological, pedagogical and social factors, which are adapted to the requirements of school activity. There are adapted by the teachers and their proper intervention. We noticed from our research that high intelligence is not linked to school success. Therefore, for the teacher that

manages activities with gifted children, school success is a “barometer” for the level of their school adjustment without being a goal in itself, as it becomes in other cases. Along with revealing the school adjustment of the gifted, school success gives us information on the quality of the pedagogic act performed by the attending teacher. Thus, the teacher’s ability to lead and bring the gifted child closer to his/her intellectual potential is an important condition of school success, especially for children with exceptional school abilities but obvious school disadjustment. The teacher has the moral duty to support gifted children to improve their school results, to interfere with the family when s/he notices that values promoted by the family don’t fully overleap those promoted by the school. Real joint activities between school and family are in favour of overcoming school difficulties for exceptional pre-schoolers and pupils.

Whenever the gifted children’s school success remains below the level of his/her potential, immediate psychological interventions are demanded. They try to identify and combat the cause of poor school results and to identify the most proper manners to improve them. Valuable contributions in the field of biology, psychology, medicine, etc helped the strengthening of “educational sciences” and created conceptual and methodological premises required to increase instructional-educational efficiency of the gifted. It also highlighted to most effective ways to prevent school failure and disadjustment and designed didactic strategies to trigger and develop the exceptional potential if gifted children.

### **Mentoring, an alternative in the education of gifted children**

Mentoring as a manner of developing inborn abilities of the gifted, involves guidance from a mentor. The aim is to develop an inter-psychological relationship of learning, the mentor being regarded as an expert in the field and an external amplifier for mental activities; the mentored gifted child is a gifted “novice”, interested and motivated (M.L. Stănescu, 2004). Newby and Corner (1997)<sup>1</sup> define mentoring as a „dynamic relationship between a person that wishes to learn and another one willing to help and guide”. Specialists underline the role played by teachers, their contribution to “teaching children how to learn”, a technique adjusted to the needs, interests, personal qualities, aspirations, learning style, by interiorizing certain techniques of intellectual work, increasing independence and personal responsibility in knowledge.

Gifted children differ from the rest of preschool/school children in their leaning style, because they acquire knowledge through cognitive learning strategies, but especially through their extraordinary sensitiveness. Sensitiveness is a result of the heterochrony in the development of their personality. Therefore they need constant guidance to understand their position of gifted children, to gain more confidence in their possibilities to revalue these exceptional abilities. In this context, effective strategies of guidance are important. They have to guide gifted children in their activity. They also have to be adapted to the personality of each gifted child. Unusual behaviour of gifted children can affect their school results. research prove that both children with poor results and those with good ones can improve school results, their attitude towards school when they are guided by someone they trust.

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<sup>1</sup>Newby, T. J. & Corner, J. (1997). *Mentoring for increased performance: Foundations and methods. Performance Improvement*, 36(2), 11-15. [commons.ucalgary.ca/documents/Mentoring\\_p1.pdf](https://commons.ucalgary.ca/documents/Mentoring_p1.pdf)

The mentor, a teacher trained to work with the gifted can help them know each other better, to appreciate their condition properly, to understand why they are positively different from other children, to assess objectively their qualities and faults and how to have better school results. Recent pedagogical research has proven that proper learning style leads to higher school results (Dunn, R., & Dunn, K.,1992).

Each gifted has extraordinary learning abilities, yet sometimes they cannot approach them effectively. To determine a pupil's learning style, teachers have to observe how they like to learn something new. Some like to acquire new information through pictures, others through contact with different people, through practical applications, active, direct involvement, others are more effective when they study individually in a familiar atmosphere.

Modern pedagogy emphasizes the special role of teachers, their contribution to the pupils' guidance, especially the gifted ones, who have a different psychological formula, more sensitive and different from regular preschool children/primary school pupils. The teacher tries hard to find ways to facilitate learning adjusted to the gifted children's needs, interests, personal qualities, aspirations, learning styles to help them achieve self-fulfilment.

*What does mentoring involve?*

Mentoring involves a special type of activities engaged between the gifted and the mentor-teacher and aims to adjust learning activities to abilities, personal style and children's interests so as to bring about significant quality changes in the behaviour of the gifted. The mentor through coherent didactic procedures would determine their self-motivation towards learning. Emphasis is placed on the gifted child's personal cognitive strategies. On this basis, they would progressively build acquisitions focused on task solving, practical applications, skill, and ability development.

Mentoring (by a dedicated mentor-teacher trained for work with the gifted) can make a contribution to the support of the gifted in solving situations that they would not be able to solve without support. Thus, between the mentor and the gifted a relationship is developed which encourages knowledge acquisition, development of skills and abilities according to personal giftedness, learning style and personal rhythm of acquisition. The mentor's task is to encourage and guide the gifted in the process of developing extraordinary skills. To achieve this aim, the mentor has to possess certain psycho-pedagogical and management abilities: good professional training in the field, a deontological profile focused on the values of humanistic ethics, passionate about the profession and child loving, capable of conducting mentoring activities with the gifted. (Table no VII.8).

Table- *Matrix of mentor's competences*

No	Perspective of educational ac	Competences		
		Knowledge	Application	Integration
1	Pedagogical	- knows and identifies psychological particularities of the gifted - knows and identifies opportunities of school psychology used along with pedagogy in the development of gifted	- establishes interrelations between psychological peculiarities of the gifted and the influence of educational factors;	- elaborates and fills out the psycho-pedagogical file of the gifted; - applies properly educational strategies and

		<p>child`s personality; -knows the principles of education and strategies that can be applied in organizing/carrying out the didactic act with the gifted -knows the principles and functions of pedagogical management used in the work with the gifted.</p>	<p>- analysis and applies methods of personality development; -applies knowledge from the field of psycho-pedagogy of the gifted in the mentoring activity; -establishes psycho-pedagogical reference points of management in the educational act</p>	<p>methods of work with the gifted; - communicates empathically with the gifted, the parents and the institution, etc; -projects psycho-pedagogical strategies of helping the gifted; -helps to develop their self-identity (the <i>ego</i>).</p>
2	Psychological	<p>-identifies the gifted children`s peculiarities; -knows strategies of adequate communication with the gifted; -identifies a multitude of causes and mechanisms of triggering interior conflicts in the gifted.</p>	<p>-analysis the process of the gifted children`s development-training; -helps to improve their relationship with the others; -sets the diagnosis, prognosis and solving of interior and interpersonal conflicts, of their consequences on the gifted.</p>	<p>-elaborates educational projects to correct the gifted behaviour and develop a proper self-image; -involves the gifted in creative activities according to their giftedness; -applies forms, methods and procedures suitable for the gifted</p>
3	Axiological	<p>-knows general-human and national values; -knows the teleology of education; -identifies contents/dimension of education</p>	<p>-selects educational strategies according to the gifted children`s learning peculiarities, the objectives and contents of the special syllabus; -studies the effectiveness of educational methods and their revalue with the gifted; -determines the effectiveness of educational technologies and the revalue of exceptional attitudes of the gifted.</p>	<p>-elaborates projects for the mentoring class based on active, stimulating methods - promotes moral-ethical values in the education of the gifted; -practices and promotes general human values; moral-spiritual skills of the gifted.</p>

4	Management	-identifies theoretical aspects of educational management; -applies and explains theoretical-methodological aspects of education; -identifies the tendencies in the development of theory, methodology and practice in the field of gifted education in correlation with contemporary pedagogical research	-analysis the development of the gifted and settles the directions for their development; -identifies difficulties in the gifted children`s educational process and applies necessary remedies.	-elaborates conceptual and methodological guidelines to improve the education of the gifted.

The mentor plays the leading role in organizing educational activities by revaluing his/her competences in the management of the educational process on the following dimensions: planning, organizing, coordinating, decision making, motivating, assessing. They all are implemented based on an interactive strategy that would stimulate the gifted child`s creativity and abilities.

*How can the mentor actually help the gifted?*

The mentor-teacher would be guided by a *special syllabus* in the activity of mentoring the gifted. This syllabus contains contents which have been enriched, developed, individualized, more difficult learning tasks. They are all divided in learning units and time units according to each discipline`s peculiarities. The mentor has to guide the gifted in the activity of knowledge acquisitions, development of inborn abilities and skills that would:

- teach how to learn;
- determine the gifted to be aware of personal learning style;
- teach how to use the most effective learning methods and procedures
- teach to be aware of weak points and strong point;
- teach how to overcome limitations;
- teach objective self-assessment.

For a fully successful mentoring of the gifted, mentors have to enrol to training and special lifelong learning programmes. During this preparation stages, mentors would acquire special skills of working with the gifted, to achieve effective didactic activity with the gifted. They will be taught how to design a syllabus for personal development of the gifted, how to use modern methods in effective learning, what procedures and techniques to use for the development of transferable communication abilities, team work, learning, time management, problem solving, negotiation, listening, creativity, computer usage. etc.

Practice has proven that mentored gifted children achieve better results, become more effective in solving different learning situations that they encounter at school daily, become more autonomous, self-aware, and confident and they take part in school and extra-curricular activities. Their self-esteem also increases. The mentor guides the gifted child towards the most appropriate methods of effective learning. Thus, s/he can acquire information to develop

abilities and competences and also develop abilities required to train skills according to their personal needs of development and inborn giftedness.

The basic condition of a successful mentoring is the trust-based relationship which is established between the gifted and the mentor. The child has to accept unconditionally the mentor. The mentor's main objective will be to help the gifted child to acquire knowledge and to develop skills according to his/her giftedness that would improve his/her abilities. The mentor would constantly guide the gifted during the mentoring activity to achieve planned objectives as they occur in the special syllabus, s/he would stimulate learning through the usage of active-participative methods, effective continuous and formative assessment and self-assessment methods, through the usage of effectively adjusted educational tools that the teachers considers useful.

The possible advantages of mentoring as they are grasped by the teaching practice are:

- it helps the gifted to link theoretical knowledge to everyday life;
- it helps the gifted to conduct disciplinary, interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches;
- it is centred around the gifted children's interests;
- it takes into account the giftedness and the talents it stimulates;
- it answers the learning needs of the gifted, it identifies and stimulates them;
- it monitors didactic actions in the attempt to improve them.

The mentor-teachers activity consists of planning the most appropriate subjects to be studied, finding the most useful strategies of achieving the objectives and choosing the most adequate methods of study. The actual manner of undergoing the stages of acquisition will be discussed and established with the gifted. The mentor will guide and monitor the process of achieving the objectives, will assess the results and will constantly counsel the gifted in the learning activity.

Which are the stages that the mentor establishes?

- selecting the learning units for a discipline;
- analysing the objectives/specific competences aimed by the unit and the scientific content to be taught;
- establishing operational objectives for each lesson of the unit;
- selecting operational objectives that can be reached through individual work;
- deciding upon the timing required for each unit;
- deciding upon the types of activity that will be used;
- designing a varied learning strategy that would support the various learning styles of the gifted;
- identifying the difficulties encountered by gifted children and their mentoring in order to overcome them;
- planning continuous assessment.

The mentor-teacher tries to help the gifted develop real abilities, required by a modern society such as:

- work with the others;
- taking well thought decisions;
- having initiative;

- complex problem solving;
- self-directing;
- effective communication.

The mentor will focus on the development of those skills that would allow the gifted to progress in their personal rhythm:

- focuses on achieving operational objectives which are subordinated to specific competence and involve multiple and continuous assessment methods;
- involves learning tasks and work-related activities that take place in a given period of time;
- makes connections to real world;
- gifted pupils prove their knowledge and abilities through a performance and product of their work;
- assessment is formative, continuous and turns into an assessment tool for measuring individual progress, more than just an intelligence test or accumulation of facts.

The mentor will direct gifted children towards the acquisition of skills that develop their critical thinking, sense of responsibility and objective self-assessment. This thing is possible because the following is established from the beginning:

- clear assessment criteria;
- examples and guidelines for high-quality work;
- opportunities to monitor progress;
- methods of using a constructive feed-back;
- reflection and improvement time of processes and their products;
- support in establishing new objectives for future studies.

The mentor-teacher will interfere only if s/he notices confusion, gaps, misunderstandings, jams, and distance from the task. The teacher should involve pupils in decision making on topics such as ways of solving a situation. Modern researches allow teachers to select among a series of intervention strategies. Representatives are the following:

- negotiation – as a form of “meeting” between two parts, in order to establish a settlement;
- brotherhood – the teachers team up with the students creating an interactional universe;
- strategies based on empowering students;
- occupational therapy–uses movement as a supreme form of treatment and intervention<sup>2</sup>;
- strategy of moral support.

It is common knowledge that due to extremely sensitive psychological nature of the gifted, they show signs of emotional instability. Therefore, the teacher has to interfere with pedagogical skills and to choose the intervention strategies very carefully, especially when dealing with educational crisis:

- identifying the nature of the problem (problem statement);
- assessing the seriousness of the problem (the history of the problem, strong point, weak points);
- ways of intervention:

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<sup>2</sup>it demands the teacher's dynamism and availability to organize movement games, outdoor activities, trips.

- creating a balanced learning climate;
- avoiding educational errors;
- nurturing school interests and concerns;
- recognising and awarding success;
- integrating in a group therapy system;
- elaborating an intervention plan;
- applying optimal methods of intervention by consulting specialists;
- assessing the manner of problem solving.

During mentoring, the mentor-teacher will be moderator, coordinator, mediator, facilitator and counsellor (supporting the activity of gifted in difficulty).

### Conclusions

Mentoring is a learning activity and a complex manner of assessment, which is deeply motivating for pupils. The mentor helps children in their learning activity, which becomes meaningful because it orients gifted children towards acquiring knowledge through their own effort.

The mentor just guide the gifted children`s activity towards the achievement of objectives found in the special syllabus. The gifted are guided to acquire the ability of combining older acquisitions with elements of novelty and the practical application of skills and knowledge.

It is important to state clear demands in each stage of training. The mentor guides gifted children/pupils throughout the activities that would target general and specific objectives. They choose subjects of interest for their giftedness. The aim is to develop quality oriented learning, achieved through continuous revision of the topics and permanent reference to set assessment criteria. Parallel with the acquisition pertaining to a certain field, the pupils will start to interiorize the rules of quality related learning.

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