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Gifted and talented students in a contemporary Czech school

Definition of exceptionally gifted children

These are children who are identified by professionally qualified persons as having high performance. These children require differentiated educational programs and care beyond the teaching provided by a traditional educational program in order to contribute to their well-being and the benefit of society. High performance capabilities include those that demonstrate benefits or potential in one or more of the following areas:

- general intellectual abilities,
- specific / individual academic competence,
- creative and productive thinking,
- leadership skills,
- art,
- psychomotor abilities. ”(Davis, Rimm, 1998).

Stages of identification of exceptionally gifted students

Ideally, the identification should take place in several stages. Renzulli and Reis suggest four consequent stages of identification (Davis, Rimm, 1998):

1) **Nomination based on a test result:** A student can be nominated after passing a standardized intelligence or performance test.

2) **Nomination by a teacher:** The first step should be followed by a consultation with a teacher who knows the student well, preferably a class teacher.

Stages of identification of exceptionally gifted students

3) **Alternative routes:** This category includes nominations by other people who know the student well. Proposing persons may include parents, peers, but also persons proposed by the pupil who is identified. This does not mean that the student must necessarily perceive himself as gifted, but can, for example, voluntarily enter a competition or school olympic games.

4) **Final proposal (security step):** This category involves other teachers' suggestions. This step was created because the nomination of one teacher could be burdened by the personal preference of a particular student. After the nomination has circulated through all the previous steps, the list of proposed students is presented to other teachers.

Specifics of exceptionally gifted students

In positive way

- They are extremely advanced in any area of learning and performance.
- They show asynchronous development. They may be significantly ahead in some areas and in other areas show an age-adequate or even delayed development (e.g. they can read at the age of three, but they are still unable to tie their shoelaces at five).
- They have an extensive vocabulary and advanced verbal expression for their age.
- They have an excellent memory.
- They learn some things incredibly fast, without the help of others.
- They are capable of more complex cognitive operations than their peers.
- They show the ability to work with abstract ideas with a minimum of concrete experience for understanding.

Specifics of exceptionally gifted students

In positive way

- They clearly understand the relationship between cause and effect.
- They understand patterns, relationships and contexts.
- They always come up with "better ways" to deal with things. They suggest them to classmates, teachers and other adults - not always in the right way.
- They prefer complex and demanding tasks.
- They are able to transfer their knowledge to new situations and problem solving.
- They want to share everything they know.
- They are curious about everything that happens around them, they ask endless questions.
- They are enthusiastic and vigilant observers.
- They have a sense of beauty.

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Specifics of exceptionally gifted students

In positive way

- They are zealous, sometimes extremely sensitive or irritable. They can be completely absorbed in activities or ideas.
- They often have many (unusual) interests and hobbies.
- They are strongly motivated to do things that interest them. They prefer to work independently.
- They have a tremendous amount of energy.
- They tend to have an increased sense of justice, morality and fair play. They are interested in global issues and perceive them personally.
- They have a sophisticated sense of humor.
- They like to be in the lead, they can be a natural authority.

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Specifics of exceptionally gifted students

In negative way

- They refuse to work or they work carelessly.
- They are frustrated by the pace of class work, which they consider insufficiently active or when they do not see clear work progress.
- They protest against routine and predictable work.
- They ask tricky questions, they require a reason why things should be done a certain way.
- They refuse job assignments and orders.
- They daydream.
- They dominate class discussions.

Specifics of exceptionally gifted students

In negative way

- They tend to dominate teachers and classmates.
- They are intolerant of imperfections towards themselves and others.
- They are hypersensitive to criticism, they easily cry.
- They refuse to be subordinate.
- They reject cooperative learning.
- "They do performances" and disturb classmates.
- They can become a "class clown".

Ways of educating exceptionally gifted students

The results of the research point to **two aspects** important for increasing the level of performance of pupils and teachers, which every school can incorporate into its educational policy:

1) **Principal's commitment** – his/her approach to educating the most talented pupils is an incentive for teachers and support for innovation in teaching.
2) **Whole-school approach** - it is important that the whole teaching staff is interested (not only some teachers encourage pupils to do more). Teachers should be aware that the school takes into account the educational needs of all its pupils and that the gifted students require more demanding work at a higher level.

Methods of educating exceptionally gifted students

Acceleration and enrichment (= enrichment of the curriculum) are the basic two methods that are used at different levels and in different variations to educate exceptionally gifted students.

Acceleration means accelerating the school process if it is shown that the pace does not suit the child and that he / she masters the subject matter much faster. This variant also includes early entry into school for a child under the age of six, and then the discussed skipping of grades or the so-called express class, when, for example, a six-year program fits selected pupils into a four-year cycle (Mönks, 2002).

Enrichment is a method that offers many variations and is also known in Czech schools. After all, multi-year grammar schools and specialized language and mathematics schools are essentially nothing more than an enriched program designed to serve gifted children either in specific areas (language, sports, music and mathematics primary schools) or in general cognitive areas (multi-year grammar schools), where It is assumed that students will be more successful in their academic orientation and that they will continue their studies at university.

The category of enrichment also includes elementary art schools, children's and youth homes and other organizations - public and private .

Revolving Door Model

Curriculum enrichment can work on a volunteer basis. The most well-known model is probably Renzulli's "Revolving Door Model" (Renzulli, 1998). Joseph Renzulli built this model on a volunteer basis. It does not respect the tradition that students in the gifted programs should be carefully selected and tested in advance. On the contrary, it provides them with an "open door". It allows students who are interested in the extension program to apply themselves. However, the content of the program is very demanding and will not allow unproductive students to stay - the door will turn again and only the most capable will remain in the program.

Creativity

Another area that is being discussed in contemporary pedagogy gifted students is the shift from problem solving to **problem finding**. Contemporary school introduces hundreds of examples to students every day, teaches them and later tests how to solve the algorithm. However, nowadays there is no need for so many mechanical solvers of the presented tasks. Manual work is largely replaced by various technologies. At the mathematical level, computers solve many problems for us (Tannenbaum, 2000). Our era is looking for such personalities who will successfully look for new problems that need to be solved. It is looking for people with new ideas, concepts and strategies. It is looking for leaders in alternative ways of thinking in science and practical life. Of course, the school should respond to these social needs. It should provide a space for problem-solving and encourage creativity in teaching.

Group work

Various forms of group work are a very popular method in schools. The principle, well known to most teachers, is to transfer the focus of work from frontal teaching to small groups (usually 4 - 8 children), in which students solve a given problem in a limited time through cooperation. After completing the work, each work team presents what results they have achieved. The role of the teacher here is shifted to the "supervisor" of the course of work, he/she can provide guidance to groups individually, but he/she certainly does not manage the work process. In the final phase summarizes what identical results occurred in all groups and formulates conclusions.

Alternative educational programs

The methods of alternative educational programs have begun to penetrate the Czech education system, and teaching is beginning to focus more on the pupil than on the teacher. Our educators understand that in order to achieve effective results, it is not enough to make school children just "walking encyclopedias", but it is necessary to really attract and motivate them for the given field.