

**Prof. Loredana-Ileana Vișcu,<sup>1</sup> PhD**

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"Tibiscus" University of Timișoara, Faculty of Psychology,

Centre of Qualitative Research in Counselling and Psychotherapy, Romania

**Lecturer Ramona Răducan,<sup>2</sup> PhD**

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"Tibiscus" University of Timișoara, Faculty of Psychology,

Centre of Qualitative Research in Counselling and Psychotherapy, Romania

**Cornelia-Ecaterina Cornean<sup>3</sup>**

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Centre of Qualitative Research in Counselling and Psychotherapy, Romania

## **DIDACTIC STRATEGIES AND METHODS OF CREATIVITY DEVELOPMENT FOR GIFTED CHILDREN**

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**Abstract:** Giftedness has represented the study subject of numerous researches, with the purpose of empowering educators and carers in their work with gifted children. The development of the gifted innate potential represents a challenge for carers, because giftedness generates difficulties on personal, relational and social plan for the gifted child. In most case, a child's developed ability seems to be accompanied by language disorders (e.g. Winner *et al.* 1993), auto-immune disorders (e.g. Benbow, 1986) and even emotional and social problems (e. g. Reis *et al.*, 1995). The purpose of this paper is to present a framework intervention plan in developing interpersonal relations and a creative potential in gifted children and students, starting from landmarks offered by psychodrama and the Integrative Strategic Model of the Self. Parents, teachers, professors and psychologists have the obligation of helping and caring for gifted children and students so that they can fulfil their potential.

**Keywords:** gifted children, gifted students, psychodrama, the integrative strategic model of the self.

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### **1. Introduction**

Giftedness is mainly defined as a superior ability or as an unusual superior intelligence (Winner, 2000). An IQ or a SD 2 (Standard Deviation) over the population general average (usually of 130), in many occasions denotes a superior intelligence. Gifted students (also considered extremely gifted) are defined as having an IQ higher than 145 or at least 3 time over the medium SD (Feldman, 2003). Among the gifted children' intellectual capacities one could mention: intellectual curiosity, fascination for ideas and words, the ability to perceive different sides of the same question, metaphoric thinking and the ability to visualise models and systems (Silverman, 1995), a faster processing speed when talking about a cognitive task of problem solving (Gaultney, Bjorklund, & Goldstein, 1996), and particular

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<sup>1</sup> loredana.viscu@gmail.com

<sup>2</sup> ramona.lungu@yahoo.com

<sup>3</sup> cornean.corneliae@gmail.com

learning abilities and an exceptional transfer ability of solutions to new situations (Vaivre-Douret, 2011).

On the other side, for most gifted children, the development of such an ability can be accompanied by language difficulties (e.g. Winner *et al.* 1993; etc.), by auto-immune disorders (e.g. Benbow, 1986) and even by emotional and social problems (e.g. Reis *et al.*, 1995), being subjected to different risks: situation of scholar under-fulfilment, of isolation and difficult socialisation, intellectual inhibitions, depressive states, difficulties resulting from a gap between cognitive and affective development” (<https://didactika.files.wordpress.com/2008/06/supradotarea.doc>).

The authors’ purpose is to present an intervention framework, in the establishment of interpersonal relations and a creative potential in gifted children and students starting from a base offered by ideas from psychodrama and from the Integrative Strategic Model of the Self, which can be used by parents, carers, teachers, professors, psychologists in choosing proper didactic activities for gifted children and students with the task of motivating them in fulfilling their potential.

“Psychodrama methodology puts in motion mechanisms of personal development during a training activity. During their training, participants may be placed in unusual situations, by introducing the principle of subjectivity, of equality between group members and of the rule of auto-expression circularity, and by a constant interaction and the activation of telic relations between the group members... Role play may be considered a learning method and a sustainment for roles of maximum adaptation, which is highlighted through a learning space, where the role played contrasts the crystallized one. The action and analysis of experiences favour important insights for each participant. Parallel to this individual insight, a group insight is also produced successively to confrontation between parts, which leads to a reformulation of the problem introduced to role play.” (Răducan, 2017: 138). Thus, psychodrama becomes an important instrument in potentiating of social relations of gifted students, if used correctly.

The other important instrument is the Integrative Strategic Model of the Self (Drobot, 2015; Popescu & Drobot, 2015). The model is based on research in neurosciences, transactional analysis, psychosynthesis, Jung psychology, developmental psychology, the theory of attachment, cognitive psychology and social constructivism. The Self is considered to be an emergence of the basic self, the central self, the plastic self and the external self. The functional unit of the self model proposed is the internal working model, a concept suggested by Bowlby and Main (Drobot, 2013). For a better conceptualisation and understanding of the Self model, the content of the self: Basic, Central, Plastic and External is approached through six psychological axes: A (Emotional); B (Biological); C (Cognitive); E (Existential); F (Family); P (Psychodynamic).

## 2. Didactic strategies and methods of creativity development used with gifted children and students

Teaching gifted children represents, for most educators, a challenge, due to a multitude of factors, from the teaching environment, to the national curriculum and their experience in working in demanding situations. First of all, teachers should be able to understand the way in which gifted children perceive the world, their needs and the manner in which they solve problems or think; mainly because, their gift may be accompanied by different inconveniences, such as emotional or social problems (Piske *et al.*, 2017). Special strategies and the development of their creativity should help educators and others; motivate gifted children in fulfilling their full potential. Strategies and methods chosen influence the learner's academic, emotional and cognitive development.

Guérios sustains that “imagination and creativity surpass and transcend the limits imposed by the classroom walls, the teachers' room, and pedagogical coordination” (2005: 141). Using creativity inside the teaching environment may provide new possibilities to understand complex thinking, and the development of creative thinking skills helps the learner in obtaining autonomy and self-knowledge (important skills in the inclusion process of gifted children). Specialty literature offers a series of examples that stipulate the importance of specialized techniques and services for gifted students, especially in working with creative teaching, the most recent belonging to Stoltz (2016). Creativity received different definitions, in different domains and from different authors. For example, Alencar (2001) defined creativity as being a natural and inherent resource for every human being, which should be used more in the classroom, in order to encourage expression.

Two characteristics of creativity seem to be underlined by most definitions: achievement of a final product and the potential of producing something new (Jauk *et al.*, 2013). Some examples of this type of activities, which can be applied in teaching gifted children are offered by Alencar & Fleith (2001: 37): activities that stimulate imagination, which allow them to explore different knowledge, that lead to producing new ideas, situations and object, which involve critical analysis and especially which are in the area of students' interest.

At an international level the following strategies seem to be used with gifted individuals: **acceleration, enrichment and grouping**. Acceleration refers to enabling the child or student in a program that is based on his proficiency, instead of being based on his age, thus he could skip classes, enlist in different programs at the same time, compact curriculum etc. Enrichment refers to developing the individual's cognitive and creative thinking by involving him in different projects, researches, experiences through different programs: offered by different institutions or organizations. Acceleration and enrichment represent differentiation didactic strategies. Grouping refers to bringing together learners with similar skills, learning style, cognitive thinking, interests (Şahin & Levent, 2015). Gifted learners are differentiated from their peers, especially when talking about their speed of learning, their cognitive capacity. Educators have an important role in developing these innate capacities, by applying strategies which use as methods: the use of supplementary

materials, individualizing education, increasing task difficulty, offering more responsibilities inside the group, using creative techniques, offering upper classes credits, etc.

Another important factor in the learner-educator relation is communication. Educational communication could also become a creative method of teaching, because the educator is an actor who can play his role well. A communicative skill, together with a social skill will lead to the establishment of rich relations and of appropriate teaching and evaluation methods (Răducan *et al.*, 2008, 542–544). Psychodrama techniques combine communication skills and mechanisms of personal development in the instruction activity. The education may alternate between the teacher's leadership style from a direct influencing to facilitating a relation, provoking spontaneity and developing telic relations between the group members (Răducan, 2017: 138).

Through role play, Jacob Levi Moreno (2009) proposes the acquisition of spontaneity as an instrument for social skills development and for a proper affective feature, according to the environment where the individual lives. Thus Moreno proposed "the theory of learning spontaneity" which adds spontaneity to the cognitive, affective and behavioural component of human personality. He believed that learning is a process of knowledge generated by the experience lived inside the community; it is the product of intersections of all forces that interact with the individual. Psychodrama role play may help provoke auto-observation, reflection and becoming aware of past experiences. This method first uses a Self actor (the place of perceptions, emotions, contract, affective and body memory) and the observing Self (headquarter of reflection, defining, memory and communication).

Thus, one could say that creativity is associated by many authors with the motivation to learn, this is why educators must be creative in teaching others how to learn creatively. It is important that every educator offer possibilities for innovative action and insists on creative teaching in order to motivate learners (Kane, 2016).

### **3. The integrative strategic model of the self – an instrument of creativity development for gifted students**

In addition to the methods presented above, the methodology presented in this paper, resulted from a complete experience as a educator and as psychologist, has at its basis the Integrative strategic model of the self and psychodrama resources, which form a general framework for a didactic intervention which can be used to stimulate creativity in gifted students. The objective is to offer individualized educational landmarks for creativity stimulation on the six axes of the model described: A (Emotional); B (Biological); C (Cognitive); E (Existential); F (Family); P (Psychodynamic). The starting point of this method is the student's individuality, the educator's task being the one of selecting the most appropriate strategies, according to the axes presented.

Because educators desire to obtain important results from gifted students, organizations, schools, universities insist on the development of a creative potential, by neglecting psychological needs or by accelerating neurotic conflicts. In other

words, the product of creativity in gifted students offers an illusory socio-emotional well-being, so that subsequently the conflict will be reactivated and the subject reengaged in a creative effort. For example, if self-esteem is low in a gifted student, educational strategies could accentuate the student's psychological stress: "Why become embarrassed by doing that?" the student is engaged in exhausting behaviours, and the final creative product may or not obey "standards" demanded. What is considered important is the obtaining of a creative product, without being concerned about the socio-emotional well-being of the gifted student.

Still, the situation may change; for example, higher education institutions offer specialized help to gifted students, engaged in obtaining creative products. Even if such centres exist inside universities, there are other inconvenient such as: the absence of specialized personnel, a reduced promotion of these services, the shame of demanding help etc. So what do we propose? The solution proposes an intervention framework for gifted students in order to develop their creativity and their relation skills, which involves:

- the identification of gifted students through counselling and vocational centres;
- the organization of group sessions in order to sustain, support gifted students (teams formed of psychologists, psychotherapists, educators);
- the organization of individual sessions and group psychotherapy using psychodrama;
- the elaboration of an individualized psychotherapeutic plan with psychotherapeutic objectives on the six axes of the Integrative strategic model of the self;
- the selection of participants for group psychotherapy according to common psychotherapeutic objectives:
- the reducing of neurotic conflicts;
- the analysis of results (by respecting deontology ethics) together with educators:
- the implication of educators in the selection of appropriate educational strategies;
- counselling for gifted students and for their educators.

Educational methods used may be individualised, after a psychoanalysis for each gifted child, in order to offer personalized interventions may, with the help of team, multidisciplinary work (educator, teacher, educational psychologist, psychological counsellor, psychotherapist) based on the six axes of the model proposed. The specialist will thus pay attention to problems identified on the following psychological axes:

a. *Biological Axis (B)*. Creativity development may be blocked or slowed down by: mechanisms of maintaining a body image that sustains dysfunctional behaviours connected to body integration. Sometimes, gifted students consider they have a disgraceful body; they are too thin or too fat, too tall or too short etc. Thus they avoid entering group activities, preferring solitary actions – they may overcompensate with creative actions, but with negative consequences on their self-esteem; and mechanisms of psychosomatic maintenance with the repression of emotions and the

manifest of psycho-somatic illnesses (ulcer, migraines, constipations etc.), especially before competitions.

b. *Cognitive Axis (C)* – gifted students may manifest automatic thoughts, dysfunctional cognitions “I am no good”, “I am not like the others”, and “I am different” thus affecting the here and now behaviour; complex psychodynamic mechanisms maintain anxious behaviours, perfection type behaviours with the diminishing of creativity, the manifest of panic attacks, a blockage of creative behaviours; and self-esteem is often low, thus appropriate educational methods may help increase it.

c. *Emotional Axis (A)* – The connection with the “accepted” educator may replace the parent-gifted student relation, who in the past didn’t allow a secure attachment. The creation of a secure attachment with an educator, educational counsellor or psychotherapist may represent the basis for developing a creative potential. Emotional regulation is based on this secure attachment, and adaptable mechanisms for the maintaining of personal values are turned on – an internal locus of evaluation of realized.

- The development of creativity, overcompensation by realizing hard work in obtaining products is often a method of problem discharge or a symbolic method of solving neurotic guilt. Educational strategies should not maintain this neurotic conflict in creative activities. Positive results may be obtained this way adapted to the student’s needs.

d. *Psychodynamic Axis*. Different creativity products are the expression of a fragmented/dissociated self. Thus the purpose of education strategies used is to develop the student’s creative potential, helping him to develop an integrated personality and in maintaining an adaptative balance between anxiety and aggressiveness.

The creator also expresses through connections between the integrated and the disintegrated self and the disapproved states of the self (as functional states). Educational strategies should adapt to the integrated Self and to functional states of the self on the basis of a real psychological support. The psychologist will identify introjected messages or injunctions responsible with the slowing down of the development of a creative potential (don’t be, don’t grow, don’t feel, don’t act, don’t belong etc.) in order to individualize strategies applied. All these introjected messages had in time negative consequences in the development of the student’s personality. With the proper educational and psychological help these messages transform into positive ones (in winners life scenarios). Defence mechanisms of the self, for each gifted student, become “allies” or “breaks” in their education. The identification of a defence mechanism and the positioning of educational means on the diminishing of that mechanism may lead to creativity development.

e. *Family Axis*. The role of family environment was deeply studied by specialty literature. Still, this framework proposes the identification of the gifted student’s role inside the origin family, the identification of transgenerational patterns and of family games from the original family and of intergenerational patterns. In other words, one must identify the manner in which a creative potential is influenced by the family past or present.

*f. Existential Axis.* In individual or in group, the influence of the four major concerns must be identified: death and fear of death; to be or not to be in a relation; freedom and assuming responsibility and finding the sense of life. An educational strategy that desires the development of a creative potential and doesn't take into consideration these concerns will not work. The conflict will be perpetuated. The student's time perception, beliefs regarding spirituality and difficulties in establishing a functional interpersonal contact are forms of expressing creativity.

#### 4. Conclusions

It is thus suggest that strategies used to develop creativity for gifted students to take into consideration the psychological needs of each student, needs that can be identified on the six axes proposed: A (Emotional); B (Biological); C (Cognitive); E (Existential); F (Family); P (Psychodynamic); and an individualized intervention plan for the student's creative development may be elaborated. Strategies of creativity stimulation folded on psychological needs do not aim only at the development of a creative potential, but also at the satisfaction of psychological needs and at the diminishing of a psychological conflict generated by those needs. Specialty literature offers numerous examples when the products of creativity were the consequences of "unsatisfying" psychological needs or in the over use of self defence mechanisms (overcompensation, repression) or in the self dissociation of defragmentation.

In conclusion, an approach for the development of a creative potential is offered, starting from the diminishing of a psychological conflict, from the satisfaction of psychological needs, thus from the student's psychological stabilization and subsequently using educational strategies based on these solved needs and conflicts. The approach proposed leads to the maintaining of an unconditioned wellbeing of the gifted students.

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**Prof. dr. Loredana-Ileana Vișcu**

Universitatea "Tibiscus" din Timișoara, Facultatea de Psihologie,  
Centrul de Cercetări Calitative în Consiliere și Psihoterapie, România

**Lect. univ. dr. Ramona Răducan**

Universitatea "Tibiscus" din Timișoara, Facultatea de Psihologie,  
Centrul de Cercetări Calitative în Consiliere și Psihoterapie, România

**Cornelia-Ecaterina Cornean**

Centrul de Cercetări Calitative în Consiliere și Psihoterapie, România

## STATEGII DIDACTICE ȘI METODE DE DEZVOLTARE A CREATIVITĂȚII LA STUDENȚII SUPRADOTAȚI

**Rezumat:** Supradotarea, genialitatea au constituit subiectul de studiu pentru numeroase cercetări, cu scopul de abilita educatorii, îngrijitorii, în munca lor cu supradotații. Dezvoltarea potențialului înnăscut al supradotatului constituie o provocare pentru îngrijitori, deoarece supradotarea generează dificultăți în plan personal, relațional și social pentru supradotat. În majoritatea cazurilor copiilor supradotați, dezvoltarea sporită a unei abilități, pare a fi însoțită de dificultăți ale limbajului (ex. Winner *et al.* 1993; 1991 etc.), de tulburări auto-imune (ex. Benbow, 1986) și chiar de probleme emoționale și sociale (ex. Hollingworth, 1942; Reis, 1995). Scopul aceste lucrări este de a prezenta un plan cadru de intervenție în potențarea relațiilor interpersonale ale supradotaților, pornind de la reperle oferite de psihodramă și Modelul Integrativ Strategic al Sinelui. Părinții, profesorii și psihologii au obligația de a ajuta și îngriji copiii supradotați pentru ca aceștia să fie capabili în a-și împlini potențialul.

**Cuvinte cheie:** supradotați, psihodramă, Modelul Integrativ Strategic al Sinelui.



