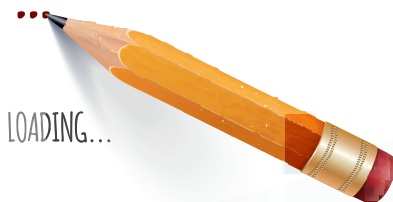Andrea Puskás

Gifted and Talented Learners
in the Foreign Language Classroom

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Gifted and Talented Learners in the Foreign Language Classroom

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To Zsombor and Mátyás

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Andrea Puskás

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Introduction

"Gifted and talented youth are major national resources."
(Feldhusen and Jarwan, 2000: 271)

Contemporary practices of inclusive classes have generally resulted in shifted priorities towards students with learning difficulties, which has diverted attention from the gifted and talented. Teachers have no or minimal professional training (both during their teacher training and during their teaching practice) in gifted education yet it is up to them to identify gifted learners and, if they do, it is their responsibility to decide what is to be done with these learners. Schools in Central and Eastern Europe have limited or no funding for programmes serving gifted learners.

Within class, differentiation rather than acceleration continues to be the most commonly applied approach when a variety of learners with a range of needs have to be handled and satisfied. Teachers are often left alone without a teacher's assistant or appropriate support to differentiate and satisfy these learner needs. Even in the case of committed and enthusiastic teachers, it seems to be impossible sometimes to satisfy the needs of learners with learning difficulties or special needs such as ADHD, ADD, dyslexia, dyscalculia, to name but a few, simultaneously within one classroom during the same lesson. On many occasions, it is the needs of the gifted and talented that are neglected with teachers claiming they will learn anyway.

The main aim of this book is to draw attention to the characteristics and special needs of gifted and talented learners. Far too often, they are undeservingly neglected in classroom practices even though their unique needs require methods and approaches designed specifically for them. Based on the synthesis of theoretical assumptions and research results on the education of gifted and talented learners, the aim of the book is to suggest practical

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solutions and ideas on how these learners can be provided with challenges and satisfying tasks in the English as a foreign language classroom. The aim is to outline several practical solutions that help to incorporate ideas, activities and strategies to create a more appropriate learning environment for gifted and talented learners.

Although the scale of gifts and talents - just like the types of intelligences - is colourful, several solutions and ideas that concentrate on providing intellectual challenges for learners are outlined. These activities and related tasks can lead to the improvement of creativity, critical thinking, flexibility and better problem-solving skills; skills and abilities very much needed in the twenty-first century.

1. Learners in the centre

Learner-centered teaching is about creating the most optimal environment for learners to learn in the best and most effective way. Learners must be actively engaged in the learning process and learning must be authentic, meaningful and useful (Doyle, 2011). The teacher has a significant role in creating such a stimulating environment.

The quality of the teacher has a major impact on effective learning (Murdoch and Wilson, 2008) therefore, the teacher's role seems to be crucial Their knowledge of second language learning, classroom management, effective teaching methods and techniques, learning strategies, group dynamics, lesson planning, time management, organisation, empathy, assessment, communication skills and many other related skills need to be at a high level. Put simply, a teacher needs to be a superman or superwoman to cope with the challenges that turn up in the classroom and to be able to create a learner-centred, motivation-sensitive, supportive environment to make the learning process both effective and enjoyable. The old model of education, wherein a teacher who knows everything and can do anything mechanically transfers knowledge into the heads of learners and directs the classroom teaching and learning processes, needs to be forgotten. Evidently, the teacher has a central role in managing the education process, however, learners are surrounded by so much information and educational tools and so many sources of information and learning opportunities both inside and outside the classroom that teachers are neither the primary sources of knowledge nor the all-powerful directors of the educational process anymore. Their role has shifted from that of controller to facilitator and supporter of learning and more emphasis has been placed on the learner's own active role in the learning process. Therefore, there are two major areas of concern within a learner-centred approach. One is mapping,

identifying and then satisfying the individual needs of learners to make learning more efficient and the other is to equip learners with competences, skills and abilities that help them become more autonomous learners, to exploit and develop their potentials so they become responsible for their own learning process and an active participant in their own development We cannot, however, expect them to be responsible for their own learning and be autonomous without first teaching them how to do these things.

In addition to appropriate content knowledge, there are certain skills and competences learners need to acquire in order to be successful in a learner-centred environment. Weigel emphasises that teaching should no longer focus only on the content of learning, but should as well notice creativity, critical thinking and skilful performance as being crucial elements of knowledge construction (Weigel, 2002). Learners must be taught how to learn and take on new learning responsibilities, how to become critical thinkers and become competent problem-solvers. Being surrounded by, and having access to masses of information, they also need to be able to judge the validity and reliability of different sources as well as the relevance of certain content and knowledge. Additionally, they need to be aware of the significance of verified information, how to set learning goals and how to evaluate certain processes. Students need to be taught how they learn best and how they can increase their own learning efficiency.

A learner-centred approach also involves increased flexibility in curriculum design as it takes into consideration learners' interests to a larger extent. Research findings support the idea that motivation and engagement in learning can be increased if learners are given tasks they are interested in, a choice in what they are learning about and more independence in completing certain tasks (Emerick, 1992). Of course, it is first necessary to identify these learner interests and crucial to examine how individuals learn best and what their needs and

characteristics are which can pose a significant challenge for a teacher keeping in mind the likely diversity of their class or classes.

Conrad and Donaldson define engaged learning as, "a collaborative learning process in which the instructor and learner are partners in building the knowledge base" (Conrad and Donaldson, 2004: ix). Engaging learners and encouraging them to become more involved in their learning process is not a new phenomenon. It has been the integral part and main goal of learner-centred approaches to teaching and learning. Learner engagement is based on the idea that the more involved learners are in their own learning process, the more successful and efficient the learning process will become, and the longer lasting their learning outcomes will be. Constructivist approaches to learning emphasize the importance of practical experiences and collaboration in the process of learning and suggest that knowledge is constructed by individual learners as well as through social experience and interaction (Weller, 2005). Each learner's actions contribute both to the construction of individual knowledge and to overall community knowledge development (Conrad and Donaldson, 2004).

A learner-centred approach to teaching and learning is a crucial phenomenon in the twenty-first century where learners need to be well-equipped with quality and relevant content knowledge but also be flexible, creative and critical thinkers.

1.1. Learner differences

Success in language learning depends on many factors. Learner characteristics can contribute to successful learning, however, there are still plenty of misconceptions circulating regarding the features that support or prevent language improvement. For example, the belief that extroverts can learn foreign languages quicker and more efficiently is still widely held as a given even though it lacks convincing research evidence and is not supported by research findings. On the other hand, it is true that certain learner characteristics can be relevant to the issue of foreign language learning and should be taken into consideration when designing lessons and courses. Such factors influencing language learning can be intelligence, language learning aptitude, learning styles, preferred learning strategies, motivation, the age of learners, social background or previous learning experience, though these are not determinants or strict codes stigmatizing the output of language learning. Rather, they are guiding signals that enable teachers to make their teaching processes more effective and allow them to adjust their methods and approaches to fit the needs of learners to a greater extent.

General differences between learners can be of various kinds:
- attention span
- physical needs or difficulties
- psychological needs or difficulties
- social and cultural background
- different upbringing
- medical background
- self-confidence and self-esteem
- any identified special educational needs and disorders
- level of maturity

- levels of interest in the given school subject
- prior experience with the given subject
- speed of working
- different learning styles, preferred ways of learning and thinking
- levels of social skills levels of cognitive skills

Learners – especially in primary and secondary schools – spend a lot of time with their digital devices. Research findings have confirmed that spending so much time with smartphones or other gadgets contributes to the rewiring of the brain due to brain plasticity. This rewiring then has an impact on attention span and memory systems, the development of thinking skills as well as social skills (Sousa and Tomlinson, 2018). The extent of these effects may vary depending on the amount of time spent with digital devices, but these definitely lead to the creation of further differences among learners in the classroom. Sleep deprivation also influences a learner's achievement and their active participation in classes.

The pace of learning can also be different among students, especially at early ages. The fact that learners are of the same age in a classroom does not indicate that all of them will learn at the same speed or in the same way. Especially in case of younger children, the pace of brain development varies (Sousa and Tomlinson, 2018): while one child might be able to read and write when entering school, another child at the same age could still be struggling with the simple act of holding a pen but this does not mean that the latter will not catch up and possible be even more skilful than the first child two years later.

Learning styles, brain dominance and types of intelligences are important aspects of learner differences. However, these are also factors that can be improved and influenced by appropriate learning environments and strategies.

Identifying learner characteristics is one of the central principles and tasks of the teacher in a learner-centred classroom. The greatest benefit of a learner-centred approach is that it focuses on learners as individuals rather than as a class unit As such, it is a mindset which has the potential to make learning more efficient.

2. Defining intelligence

Where the concept of intelligence is concerned, the most frequent definitions or terms people think about is high-level cognitive skills, exceptional abilities, and higher-level mental capacity or problem-solving skills. Intelligence is a complex phenomenon, not only referring to mental processes, but also other areas and elements, such as abstract reasoning, decision-making, the ability to learn and to express oneself and the ability to adapt to new environments (to follow a Darwinian evolutionary idea). The last two decades of the twentieth century have provided multiple theories and models of human intelligence which have since shaped the ongoing discourses regarding talents, abilities or giftedness. These theories have paved the way for the contemporary understanding of the above terms and have initiated much debate.

2.1. Sternberg's triarchic theory of intelligence

Robert J. Sternberg's triarchic model of intelligence has been a milestone in the definition of intelligence both in psychology and in education. Sternberg (1985) proposed a theory of intelligence model which is fundamentally an information-processing approach to human intellectual functioning (Feldhusen and Jarwan, 2000); a cognitive approach as opposed to the previous psychometric approach to intelligence.
Sternberg describes information processing and the working of the mind as the interplay of several components. A common set of processes underlies all aspects of intelligence (Sternberg, 2002). He determines three basic components: metacomponents, performance components and knowledge-acquisition components.

Metacomponents are executive processes that plan what things to do, monitor them as they are being done, and evaluate after they have been completed. Metacomponents include recognizing and clarifying problems, planning, creating strategies to solve problems, mental representation of problems, pulling together the cognitive resources needed to solve problems, surveillance of problem solving and judging the adequacy or quality of solutions.

Performance components execute the instructions of the metacomponents. They are the special abilities an individual needs to perform a particular activity in a given area or domain. These are often specific pieces of knowledge or skills related to a problem being addressed; for example, the comparison of stimuli, justification of a given response or making a response. These are the types of unique mental skills needed to write poetry, play chess, solve complex algebraic problems or any other number of specific tasks or processes.

Knowledge-acquisition components are forms of intelligence in which new information is processed and committed to long-term memory (Feldhusen and Jarwan, 2000). These components include selective encoding (i.e. objectively sorting through the information we meet and deciding which pieces are relevant and useful) and selective combination (i.e. uniting pieces of related information into integrated wholes).
(based on Sternberg, 1997, Feldhusen and Jarwan, 2000, Sternberg and Grigorenko, 2002).

The three components of intelligence are interactive, metacomponents activate performance components and knowledge-acquisition components, which then provide feedback to metacomponents. When the components are applied to relatively familiar kinds of problems - e.g. when the individual knows what kinds of problems to expect - the components reflect analytical

abilities. When the components are applied to newer problems or situations, creative abilities are involved. Practical abilities are involved when the individual applies experience to adapt to, shape and select environments (Sternberg and Grigorenko, 2002).

The triarchic model is further divided into three subtheories: componential subtheory, experiential subtheory and contextual subtheory.

The componential subtheory refers to academic proficiency and relates to analytical giftedness, the type of giftedness which is the easiest to measure with standard IQ tests.

Experiential subtheory refers to the individual's ability to be flexible, innovative and creative. This stage of the triarchic theory deals with how well a task is performed based on how familiar it is. Concepts such as novelty and automation are discussed here. Experiential subtheory links with Sternberg's second type of intelligence: synthetic giftedness or being creatively gifted, which manifests itself in creativity, intuition and several forms of arts. A person who is creatively gifted is particularly suited to tasks which require them to create, invent, discover, explore, imagine and suppose.

Contextual subtheory claims that the environmental context has an impact on intelligence. In an article from 1997, Sternberg provides the following definition of intelligence: "the mental abilities necessary for adaptation to, as well as shaping and selection of, any environmental context" (Sternberg, 1997: 1036). Sternberg explains that individuals do not simply adapt to the environment, they shape and sometimes even change it and, at other times, select a new one. According to this assumption, intelligence helps the individual to actively form their environment. Sternberg argues that it is crucial to differentiate between intelligence, intelligent behaviour and tested intelligence. Intelligent behaviour, he claims, may differ from one environmental context to another. People may not appear intelligent based on the way they behave in all settings. Even different ethnic groups and cultures have different

conceptions of what constitutes intelligent behaviour. It is the mental processes that underlines intelligence and which can give rise to different behaviours in different kinds of environmental contexts, tasks or specific situations (Sternberg, 1997). The contextual subtheory is closely connected with practical intelligence.

Sternberg claims that people do not necessarily excel only in one of these types of intelligences but that they can master all of them, or a combination of any two. The analytical – creative – practical intelligence classification went on to determine the development of gifted and talented education (see Sternberg and Grigorenko, 2002).

2.2. The theory of multiple intelligences

Howard Gardner, professor at Harvard University, the father of the theory of multiple intelligences (MI theory) and a significant figure within the field of intelligence theory, pointed out that learners bring several types of intelligences with themselves into the classroom and these types of intelligences can be further developed (1983). The core of Gardner's theory is the argument that the mind or brain consists of several modules, organs and intelligences, wherein each module operates according to its own rules in relative autonomy from the other (Gardner, 2011). It is important to highlight that these intelligences are not equivalent with learning styles.

Originally, Gardner (1983) elaborated a model of seven types of intelligences: linguistic, musical, logical/mathematical, visual/spatial, bodily/kinesthetic, intrapersonal and interpersonal, which was later extended with two (or more appropriately, one and a half) more types.

1. *Linguistic* – a form of intelligence where the individual is sensitive to semantics, phonology, the sounds of words and

their musical interactions upon one another. They value syntax, the rules of constructing phrases, the pragmatic functions of language, the uses of language as well as the flexibility of language. It is the ability to use language effectively and creatively demonstrated by, amongst others, poets and writers.

2. *Musical* – an intelligence that involves sensitivity to pitch, melody and rhythm and the rhythmic organization of music and musical patterns. It is the ability to achieve a high degree of musical competence shown by composers and musicians.

3. *Logical/mathematical* – the form that relates to the ability to use numbers and number patterns effectively, the ability of logical reasoning, ordering, re-ordering and assessing. The individual with this intelligence loves dealing with abstraction, can recognize significant problems and then has ways to solve them.

4. *Visual/spatial* – this type of intelligence involves good orientation skills and the ability to depict, rotate and operate within three-dimensional forms or objects. The ability to perceive the visual world accurately is a key feature here and allows the individual to perform transformations and modifications of original perceptions and to be able to recreate aspects of an individual's visual experience even in the absence of relevant physical stimuli. Gardner claims that spatial thinking is not only used in arts by the likes of sculptors but can be present in scientific processes such as the building of DNA models.

5. *Bodily/kinesthetic* – the ability of using one's body to express ideas, objects or certain kinds of activities.It is the skill of, "translating intention into action", to carry out delicate movements involving precise control. Mature forms of this intelligence are present in dancers, actors,

athletes or inventors who have the ability to manufacture or transform objects.

6. *Intrapersonal* – the sixth and the seventh types of intelligence were identified by Gardner as the personal intelligences. Intrapersonal intelligence is the ability to distinguish between and understand one's own feelings and is linked to the development of the internal aspects of a person. Intrapersonal intelligence is embodied in the figure, for example, of a novelist who can write about their feelings at ease and who draws upon their inner experiences to transfer ideas to the world in the form of narratives.

7. *Interpersonal* – this second form of personal intelligence turns outward, towards other individuals. It is the ability to notice and make distinctions amongst other individuals relating to their moods, motivations, intentions and temperaments. Interpersonal knowledge allows an individual to interpret other people's desires and intentions, even if they are well hidden and to act according to this knowledge. The most developed forms of interpersonal intelligence can be observed in religious leaders, therapists, counsellors, skilled teachers and parents.

In 1999, Gardner extended the theory and added the eighth type, the *Naturalist*. This – refers to someone who feels comfortable in the natural world and who can make distinctions among organisms and entities in a natural environment. The ninth type, or, more exactly, the possibility of a ninth type that Gardner added in 1999 was *Existential* intelligence, "the intelligence of big questions" (Gardner, 1999).

Gardner explains that these types of intelligences are present in everyone. All of us possess these intelligences but they do not develop equally and they can be further improved by individuals throughout the years. Gardner also assumes that intelligence in general is a dimension on which human beings differ and that

there are not two people, not even identical twins, who would possess the exact same profile of intelligences (Gardner, 2011).

The theory of multiple intelligences quickly became widespread in education and several teachers and educators reacted to it by altering teaching approaches and educational programmes. Based on educational practices, Gardner later explained that the application of MI theory should involve two basic concepts: individualization and pluralization. An educator who finds MI theory relevant, should both individualize and pluralize. By individualizing, Gardner intends that an educator should know as much as possible about the intelligences profile of each student in the classroom for whom they have responsibility and should, subsequently, teach and assess in ways that bring out that student's capacities. By pluralizing, Gardner understands that the educator should decide on which topics, concepts or ideas are of greatest importance and then they should present them using a variety of approaches. When a topic is taught in multiple ways, more students can be reached.

The greatest benefit of MI theory is it recognises that the human mind is highly diverse, differentiated and multi-layered. There is no such thing as one right solution or one single right way of doing things. Therefore, it is misleading to judge learners according to a single set of criteria. Instead, a more diverse approach is needed.

Sternberg's and Gardner's contribution to understanding learners and learner differences is tremendous. Although individual traits and characteristics must initially be mapped these can be improved and further developed. The environment in which learners operate has a crucial role in developing individual gifts and types of intelligences, a fact which places a huge responsibility onto individual teachers and educators.

3. Inclusion and differentiation

The terms of inclusion and differentiation are frequently used when talking about either trying to eliminate or exploit learner differences. This might appear to be a contradictory state as it involves trying to include different learners into one unified whole before we then do our best to create differences between them within that group.

3.1. Inclusion

Inclusion has dominated the atmosphere and basic philosophy of education in Central Europe over the past few decades. The idea of inclusion emerged from the need to include marginalised groups and individuals, such as those disadvantaged socially and disabled learners or learners with learning difficulties. The main aim has been to integrate these marginalised groups in order to eliminate exclusive practices. It means that the primary goal of inclusion was to identify differences between several groups of learners and to work to reduce or even eliminate them completely. Integrating marginalised groups into the mainstream was gradually replaced by inclusion. The shift to an inclusive school system also involved the movement from special educational institutions and related settings to that of general primary schools where all learner types can be educated under one roof. Children who were moved into mainstream classes were expected to fit in and children who were already part of the mainstream classroom were supposed to continue as before. All this despite teachers being given hardly any concrete help or advice on how they should adjust their classroom methodology to accommodate this altered dynamic of learners.

Inclusion is defined by Takala and Aunio (two Finnish experts in the field of inclusive education from Helsinki

University) as, "a flexible educational approach in which all kinds of children have the opportunity to participate in general educational programmes" (Takala and Aunio, 2005: 39). They point out that inclusion is a political rather than educational matter, since its aim is to get rid of social, economical, environmental and cultural barriers in modern society.

In the introduction to his collection of essays and papers written by authors and experts of gifted education titled *Including the Gifted and Talented*, Chris M. M. Smith (2006) argues that inclusion does not have a universally agreed and accepted definition but is rather based on a set of principles. When examining the place of talented and gifted learners, Smith points towards a very important assumption: namely, that the education of able learners and an inclusive education system is not necessarily contradictory, but that much depends on the interpretation of two key issues. The first connects with the definition of inclusion and the second relates to the degree of flexibility that might exist when grouping learners for appropriate challenges within an inclusive educational system. He explains that if inclusion is understood in the narrow sense of the word as, "all children being educated with their age-appropriate peers in a mainstream classroom, then appropriate provision for able children is very difficult, if not impossible" (Smith, 2006: xiv). If, on the other hand, inclusion is understood widely, "as a means of achieving social inclusion beyond school" (Smith, 2006: xiv), then inclusion for talented and gifted learners will work.

No matter how benevolent the intentions of creating an inclusive educational system are, the elimination of differences also includes the possibility of not only eliminating unwanted behaviour and getting rid of segregation or exclusion on the basis of social background, but also eliminating appropriate intellectual and academic challenges for different learners. When the major goal is to provide the same provisions, the same circumstances and the same input for all learners, this is a constant risk. Without the

ideas of differentiation and a learner-centred approach to teaching and learning, inclusion can end up as an unfair school practice whereby groups of learners can become disadvantaged.

3.2. Differentiation

By promoting the idea of inclusion, it has become increasingly clear that including several different learners in one classroom makes it more difficult to satisfy all learners' needs and that it is, therefore, necessary for teachers to differentiate the curriculum, their teaching methods, activities and strategies intensively. The idea of differentiation is based on accepting the fact that the learners sitting in the classroom are individuals and might need different teaching approaches so they can benefit from classroom activities and make the most out of them. It is necessary to identify where each learner stands and try to move them on from that point. However, it seems many times almost impossible to satisfy the needs of so many different learners by one teacher at the same time. To do so would seemingly require the teacher to make copies of themselves or, more likely, work an unsustainable amount of extra hours. It can be even more difficult when a teacher does not meet the learners daily and instead sees them for only two or three lessons per week. On the other hand, it is necessary to underline that satisfying individual learner needs and enabling more and more learners to improve and grow during classes should be one of the most important priorities of teaching.

For learners with special needs or disabilities, differentiation is vital so they are able to access the curriculum. For those learners who are gifted and talented, differentiation is needed to keep them interested, avoid boredom and to make learning challenging and engaging for them. Differentiation is undoubtedly a time-consuming process for the teacher but

it is the only way to satisfy the various needs of a group of learners. Taking learner differences into account should start at the stage of lesson planning and preparing for courses. It surely involves a shift in perspective, since differentiation focuses on what, when and how learners learn and not on what the teacher teaches. Differentiation is a perspective and reflects on what the teacher thinks about teaching, rather than a set of prescribed instructions or practices. Through differentiation, the teacher responds to various learner needs to maximize learning outcomes.

Sousa and Tomlinson point out that there is research evidence that learners will engage more with learning and learn more robustly when their differences and similarities are kept in mind and taken into consideration by teachers when planning lessons (Sousa and Tomlinson, 2018: 8).

Sue Cowley explains there are two basic ways schools try to solve differentiation. The first is by setting their learners into different classes based on their abilities or, secondly, within a single class, they create smaller groups working to a similar principle. This reduces the differences between learners working together (Cowley, 2018).

Most scholars openly agree on the fact that differentiation is of most importance for learners with special educational needs. Due to the lack of teacher's assistants, teachers are often left alone in the classroom to handle the very challenging demands of learners with special educational needs and disabilities or those with learning difficulties. There is a wide range of special educational needs, usually grouped according to four main categories:

- Cognition and learning – dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia, dyspraxia
- Communication and interaction – speech difficulties, autism or autistic spectrum conditions (these are on a spectrum that includes a range of levels, e.g. Asperger's syndrome)

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- Sensory and/or physical needs – visual impairment, hearing impairment, multisensory impairment, physical disabilities
- Social, emotional and mental health – anxiety, obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), selective mutism, attention deficit disorder (ADD), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), oppositional defiant disorder (ODD)

The list of learners with special needs rarely include the very specific target group of gifted and talented learners, although it has been confirmed by research findings that this group does require methods and approaches which are not appropriate for other groups of learners. Differentiating the curriculum and instruction to cater for gifted learners is unavoidable yet far too many schools still seem to ignore the special learning needs of these learners by claiming that, since they are 'smart', they will learn anyway. There are other schools who have identified the unique needs of gifted learners but are not yet using the right practices that would respond to the distinctive learning characteristics and profiles of these students. Even though in many Central European countries there are opportunities for introducing special programmes and even for getting a teacher's assistant for supporting gifted learners, this does not seem to be a frequently applied solution.

David D. Sousa and Carol Ann Tomlinson examine differentiation in terms of brain research, neuroscience and cognitive psychology and conclude that, "differentiation is brain friendly and brain compatible" (Sousa and Tomlinson, 2018: 2). However, there is less consent among researchers and practitioners about how to do differentiation well.

One of the most frequently used and most typical approaches to differentiation is content, process and product differentiation. Content differentiation refers to differentiating the content knowledge and skills we want learners to acquire

and differentiating the ways and modes in which learners access this knowledge and these skills. Process differentiation occurs at a stage when learners are beginning to operate with the newly acquired content and skills and is a kind of practice stage, where learners receive various activities within which they need to operate with the received information. It can mean they can be asked to work in pairs, groups or individually, task complexity can be varied and learners can be given a problem to be solved without guidance or provided with diagrams, rubrics or additional models. Product usually refers to the ways learners show what they have learnt or understood. Product differentiation refers to several types of assessment as well as providing learners with several different opportunities and ways of showing what they have learnt.

Another approach to differentiation is the so-called topping and tailing approach (Cowley, 2018), wherein the teacher plans materials and activities for a lesson based on what he or she expects to be the learners' average level. They will then prepare support for those learners who are under that level (tail tasks) and additional tasks and activities for those above (top tasks). A very similar method is the three-column method, which is based on the same principle. Here, the teacher will prepare differentiated worksheets, including three different columns. The middle column will contain tasks for the expected level, the left column will have differentiated tasks and activities for those below the expected level and the right column for those working above the expected level. When differentiating within one classroom, teachers use different timings for different learners, vary the complexity of tasks, use differentiated groupings within the class for different activities and use a variety of methods, approaches and techniques to satisfy a wide range of learner needs.

Inclusion seems to currently be the status quo in schools in Central Europe since there is no other option. The engine of creating an inclusive school environment has been driven by

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affective and social goals, not concentrating on – and sometimes disregarding entirely - intellectual or academic issues and goals. Moltzen claims that many scholars stand for the idea that, while the inclusive classroom may be the, "least restrictive environment for students with special needs, it is the most restrictive environment for students with special abilities" (Moltzen, 2006: 42). While the intentions of inclusion are strongly political – trying to create a fair educational system in which nobody, not even socially disadvantaged groups of learners, is excluded - the problems and questions it has led to in schools are mainly pedagogical (how to handle a diversity of students with so many differences and satisfy everyone's special needs within one classroom at one time by one single teacher) and sometimes even ethical (not satisfying certain students' needs or neglecting them because of lack of staff, time, professional training, experience, expertise). These are the problems that teachers need to solve by differentiating and making teaching personalized to the special needs of individual learners. They need to make use of the diversity of learners and learner needs so that nobody is disadvantaged or left out.

4. Gifted and talented learners

There have been several terms and names attributed to learners who demonstrate high abilities at school and are usually quick at learning and have good grades. They are called gifted, talented, able learners, high-achievers or even prodigies. To sufficiently satisfy the needs of this group of learners, it is crucial to clarify who exactly is being talked about and what the specific characteristics of these learners are.

J. F. Feldhusen (2001) offers the following definition of gifted learners:

> "The term gifted is used to identify children who are superior in mental ability or very high academic achievers. Generally, they are children who learn easily and rapidly, reason or use logic fluently, think well theoretically and abstractly, are advanced in verbal and/or mathematical skills, and retain or remember information exceptionally well. Their cognitive precocity is exhibited in their ability to function mentally at levels far beyond what is typical or normative for their chronological age." (Feldhusen, 2001: 4208)

Gifted learners are individuals who demonstrate outstanding levels of aptitude or exceptional abilities to reason and learn or competence in one or more domains – i.e. a specific area or areas of activities such as mathematics, music or languages (McGowan et. al., 2016). This specific domain may involve intellectual abilities, however, there is a wide range of domains within which giftedness can be embodied such as mathematics, foreign languages, arts, music or sport where creative intelligence or other types of intelligence are requested.

Francoys Gagné is one of the key figures in the field of gifted and talented learners, and his theory of giftedness and talent development has been a major point of reference. His differentiated model of giftedness and talent has been influential since the 1980s and it is his definition and distinction from here

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that we will use as a reference point when using the terms 'gifted' and 'talented'. Gagné clearly differentiates between gifts and talents. Giftedness is associated with, "domains of abilities," which foster exceptional performance in various fields – this is talent (Gagné, 1985: 108). This means that giftedness means opportunity and potential, whereas talent is concrete performance and the practical manifestation of giftedness. Giftedness, Gadné explains, "corresponds to competence which is distinctly above average in one or more domains of ability," and talent refers to performance which is distinctly above average in one or more fields of human performance" (Gagné, 1985: 108). Based on the above definitions, giftedness is more connected with inherited or innate abilities and talent to a more concrete practical manifestation of these abilities in the form of unique behaviours. According to Gagné's model, every field of talent connects with a set of abilities necessary for exceptional individual performance. In addition, Gagné points out that every talented individual is gifted, but that not every gifted person is talented. It could be that a gifted person lacks motivation or does not put enough time and effort into a certain activity and, in these circumstances, giftedness will not develop into a special talent. A person can be gifted intellectually but it can happen that he or she will not be talented academically. This is the case of gifted underachievers -who will be discussed later - although the lack of motivation is of course not necessarily the only reason for an individual underachieving at school.

Gagné identifies four major domains of human ability: intellectual, creative, socioaffective and sensorimotor, which means that giftedness is no longer tied exclusively to IQ scores and other, traditional intellectual activities. There is a fifth domain that Gagné adds to the list, that of 'Others', which makes these domains open for still further expansion. Gagné explains that these five domains of abilities are natural abilities with a clear genetic origin. Intellectual activities are needed to learn, to read or do maths or speak foreign languages;

creative abilities are needed for solving problems or to come up with an original solution or product in science, literature or art; physical abilities are involved in, for example, sport, music or woodwork and social abilities are used in everyday interactions with others (Gagné, 1995).

One of the most important innovations and advantages of Gagné's model is that it clearly points at the responsibility of the environment and circumstances of an individual while, at the same time, it demystifies the superior role or dominance of inherited abilities, though it does not discount them entirely. Gagné's theory proposes that, on one hand, it is the environment, both of the family and the school where learning, training and practice takes place, that have an influence on talent development. The role of the surroundings, the home, school, the wider community, the type of activities, courses, programmes undertaken by the individual, the events they participate in and the encounters they have with significant personalities who have an impact, serve as catalysts for an individual (Gagné, 1995). On the other hand, it is the personality of the individual that contributes to the development of certain talents. Here, growth is shaped by the characteristics and features of a person (their personal interests, needs, perseverance, adaptability, attitudes, independence, self-esteem, values, and competitiveness for example) and their motivation. Motivation has a crucial role in this model, since it is the driving engine and pre-requisite which helps giftedness transform into talent.

Following the hugely influential model of Gagné, further lists of characteristic features of gifted and talented individuals were compiled.

Shore and Kanevsky (1997) list seven ways in which gifted learners differ from others in their thinking processes:

- They have more extensive knowledge and use it more effectively.
- They utilize metacognition more efficiently and more often.

- They spend more time on the cognitively complex parts of problem solving and then quickly solve and report solutions.
- They understand problems better, especially in terms of commonalties and transfer.
- They employ assumptions that they systematically evaluate.
- They are flexible in choosing strategies and points of view.
- They enjoy and create complexity and challenge around their tasks.

(Shore and Kanevsky, 1997: 137-139)

Heacox and Cash (2014) provide the following list of characteristics of gifted students:

- Accelerated pace of learning, retain information with less repetition
- High verbal ability
- Strong observation skills
- Strong critical thinking, problem-solving and decision-making skills
- Innovative, creative in generating ideas, thoughts and actions
- Take risks
- May mature at different rates than peers of the same age
- Independent
- Sensitive
- May have problems with friendships and may be isolated due to lack of intellectual peers or students with similar interests
- Exhibit leadership facilities
- Wide range of interests
- Passion for particular topics

(Heacox and Cash, 2014)

A shift in paradigm appeared and started to rule discussions on giftedness at the beginning of the twenty-first

century and later in the 2010s. During the first two decades of the new century, there has been a change in the definition of giftedness as well as in the ways giftedness is identified. The shift from understanding giftedness as a given category towards the emphasis of individual differences and a more developmental interpretation of giftedness has resulted in a more flexible and fluid approach to gifted learners. Matthews and Folsom describe this shift as, "from a mystery to a mastery model," where mystery model refers to the categorization of children as gifted on the basis of innate, inherited abilities and mastery to the understanding of giftedness as exceptionally advanced subject-specific ability at a certain point of time (Matthews and Folsom, 2008). Based on this mastery model, giftedness is understood as a process, rather than as a category and is question to several developmental stages and needs as well as several changing circumstances. This means that, at certain developmental periods, an individual can demonstrate more signs of giftedness than at other periods due to the variables in individual developmental trajectories. This understanding of giftedness also attributes huge significance to environmental factors affecting giftedness and talent development. One of the most crucial findings of researchers supporting the 'mastery model' of giftedness is the contradiction of the claim that gifted people learn quickly. The followers of the mastery model assume that all learning and achievement require time and that gifted students can often be slow to learn (Matthews and Folsom, 2008).

Some scholars (Carol Dweck, 2006; Matthew and Folsom, 2008, Nagy 2011; Nagy and Szarka 2017) point to the fact that it is not simply enough to be gifted and that it is hard work, perseverance, persistence and intensive effort that leads to success in learning. This means that instead of praising children for their abilities, more attention should be paid to the appreciation of their effort and choices. Dweck explains that giftedness is not the ability itself and that it is fed by constant curiosity and challenge seeking

(Dweck, 2006, cited in Matthews and Folsom, 2008: 21).

Hilary Lowe claims that "able pupils" (a very typical change of terminology in the first two decades of the twenty-first century; more researchers now prefer to use 'able learners' instead of gifted or talented) can achieve and succeed if the following factors and conditions are in place: ability + opportunity + support + motivation + success + encouragement + recognition.(Lowe, 2002).

4.1. Using brain research to describe the gifted

Several scholars and scientists have attempted to explain giftedness from a neuroscientific perspective and justify the difference between gifted individuals and their typical peers based on brain research findings (Geake 2008; Heacox and Cash 2014).

In his neuroscientific approach to gifted intelligence, John G. Geake claims that gifted people have a high ability at fluid analogizing and a better working memory, the most critical consequence of high-level prefrontal cortical functioning. A basic difference between exact and fluid analogizing is that, for example, while in exact analogizing we have one correct answer (e.g. White is to black as day is to…), in fluid analogizing there may be a range of responses (e.g. What is the London of the United States? The answer here could be anything from Washington, DC as the capital of the USA, New York as the USA's largest city or Los Angeles, the centre of its film industry) (Geake, 2008). Based on Geake's findings, there is correlation between verbal IQ and neural activation in left lateral prefrontal cortex during fluid analogizing. Geake also proposes that the gifted have a greater working memory capacity and capability.

Based on brain research, it is also claimed that the gifted are more emotionally sensitive than many other children

(Daniels and Piechowski 2009; Heacox and Cash 2014).

Most studies referring to the more sophisticated workings of gifted learners' thinking skills and studies which suggest that gifted learners have higher brain proficiency, also underline the importance of hard work, constant practice and the appropriate provision of motivation for the learner or, more precisely, the importance of an environment that builds a learners' intrinsic motivation (Heacox and Cash 2014).

Heacox and Cash claim that the efficiency of a gifted learners' prefrontal cortex allows them to handle abstract ideas and supports their need for deeper content. It means that it is not only the brain efficiency of learners that demand deeper content, but it is true vice versa and that more intellectually challenging content and complex tasks stimulate brain processes and leads to more efficient thinking skills. This is justified by Heacox and Cash, when they write, "the closer the cognitive demand matches the brain processing efficiency, the more the learner will develop greater neural efficiency and capacity" (Heacox and Cash 2014: 17).

Based on brain research, Heacox and Cash claim that differentiation for gifted learners can be improved, since it provides evidence that it is not enough to simply give gifted learners more activities to do of the same type Instead, it is necessary to go into more depth and to provide them with activities and tasks that require they use more of their brain to sort, categorize, generalize and process abstract and more complex information.

Though brain research has developed a lot recently, we still do not know enough about the workings of the brain. However, studies on how the brain works can inform gifted education on how to improve the skills and abilities that gifted learners possess and provide them with challenges and opportunities for using different types of thinking. It is also interesting that there is an increasing number of articles that are

publishing research findings about gifted learners with learning difficulties such as those with ADHD or dyslexia, learners who are exceptionally gifted and talented in one domain but struggle in another. Further work has been published on the potential of the brain to compensate if certain parts are not developed or work properly (Nagy 2006; Nagy 2015) and how, in addition, many skills and abilities can be improved by practice and again, persistence and hard work - a very important message indeed.

4.2. Identifying gifted learners in the regular classroom

The process of identifying talented and gifted learners in the classroom is, on many occasions neglected entirely. Teachers usually justify this by arguing that as talented and gifted learners are intelligent and skilful enough to develop their abilities and learn new materials on their own, they will naturally take care of themselves in the classroom. However, research findings have shown that talented and gifted learners often hide their knowledge or minimize their abilities in order to avoid standing out from others so they are not bullied or excluded from the group. There is also research evidence indicating that many gifted and talented learners even drop out of secondary school (Carlson, 1981).

Unfortunately, even today, there is no reliable and valid measuring tool for the identification of talented and gifted learners. A common practice for identifying these learners is to choose those with high academic grades. However, obtaining a grade is the result of so many factors (many of them other than ability) that it cannot be the only tool for identifying talented and gifted learners. Carlson (1981) claims that, basically, there are two ways of measuring ability: objective and subjective measures. Objective measures can include

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standardized tests measuring achievement or IQ. These, Carlson explains, have plenty of drawbacks, since they do not take into consideration factors such as curriculum differences, group testing pressures or reading problems. Subjective measures, according to Carlson, include teacher nomination, learner's products, parent nomination, peer nomination and the learner's expression of values and ideas (Carlson, 1981: 386).

Subjective measures are able to provide a wider identification potential, since they do not concentrate only on the results of a written test, but instead consider the wider social context of the learner, the feedback of teachers, parents, classmates or schoolmates and the learners themselves. This can lead to a more complex picture about a learner's abilities. On the other hand, the feedback provided by these people can be unreliable, especially if they do not know what factors to consider when giving descriptions and providing data. Carlson explains that even teacher observations can be more accurate when teachers are provided with training and structured observation sheets and checklists. Most importantly, it is crucial to identify the talented and gifted learners and be clear about what the special characteristics of these learners are, because, often, even experienced teachers can become confused and are not able to spot the relevant signs.

One of the earliest assessment tools for identifying gifted learners – used with children from the ages of 6 to16 – was the *Wechsler Intelligence Scales* which included tasks and activities on information comprehension, arithmetic, finding similarities and differences, vocabulary, picture completion, picture arrangement, block design, puzzles, coding or mazes. Other measurement tools were the *Differential Aptitude Tests*, which gave scores for verbal and numerical reasoning, abstract reasoning, space relations, spelling and language usage (Feldhusen, 2001).

The Ravens Progressive Matrices – designed in 1936 by

John C. Raven – is a visuospatial intelligence test and a further example of a frequently applied intelligence test. This is a nonverbal test which can be used with children from the age of five.

Of course, as has already been mentioned, it might be dangerous or misleading to measure or identify giftedness on the basis of general tests. Giftedness and talent cannot be simply made equivalent with test scores or scores on rating scales. Instead, it must be kept in mind that being gifted and talented is a set of specific characteristic features, complex abilities and interactions and specific types and forms of behaviour.

Belle Wallace (2006) proposes a model of interrelating qualities and attributes which underpin high achievement. The model consists of four components, each embracing further qualities, skills and abilities that all schools should develop to enable gifted and talented learners to reach their full potentials. These components and sub-items are necessary for successful performance and this model can serve as a guideline for schools, not only as a goal, but also as a tool to identify gifted and talented learners.

Abilities	Knowledge
social	knowing that…
emotional	knowing how to…
spiritual	knowing when to…
movement	thinking skills
visual/spatial	problem-solving strategies
auditory	
mechanical/technical	
mathematical	
linguistic	
scientific	
Zeal	**Creativity**
interest	imagination
ego-strength	lateral thinking
motivation	independence
self-esteem	divergence
sensitivity	originality
maturity	flexibility

Table 1 High performance constellation elaborated by Belle Wallace (2006); including the interrelating qualities and attributes which underpin high achievement.

Wallace (2006) also provides a checklist for identifying gifted and talented learners at primary and secondary school. Based on this checklist, teachers can identify high achievement, although learners do not need to demonstrate or portray all the qualities included in the checklist to qualify.

"More able and talented children may:
- be confident and competent
- express own feelings

- attribute ideas to others
- be self-effacing
- reflect on own performance
- possess extensive general knowledge, often know more than the teacher, and find the usual reference books superficial
- show good insight into cause-effect relationships
- easily grasp underlying principles, and need the minimum of explanation
- quickly make generalisations, and are able to extract the relevant points from complexity
- have exceptional curiosity and constantly want to know why and inventive and original when interested
- ask searching questions which tend to be unlike other children's questions
- often see the unusual rather than the conventional relationships and are able to pose problems and solve them ingeniously
- display intellectual playfulness, fantasise and imagine and are quick to see connections and to manipulate ideas
- give inventive responses to open-ended questions
- have a keen sense of humour in the unusual, and are quick to appreciate nuances and hidden meanings
- appreciate verbal puns, cartoons, jokes, and often enjoy bizarre humour, satire and irony
- criticise constructively even if sometimes argumentatively
- be unwilling to accept authoritarian pronouncements without critical examination, and want to debate and find reasons to justify the why and wherefore
- have mental speeds faster than physical capabilities so are often reluctant to write at length
- prefer to talk rather than write, and often talk at speed with fluency and expression

- be reluctant to practise skills already mastered, finding such practice futile
- read rapidly and are able to retain what is read, and to recall detail
- listen only to part of the explanation and appear to lack concentration or even interest, but always know what is going on
- jump stages in learning and are often frustrated by having to fill in the stages missed
- leap from concrete examples to abstract rules and general principles
- have quick absorption and recall of information, seem to need no revision and are impatient with repetition
- be keen and alert observers, note detail and are quick to see similarities and differences
- see greater significance in a story or film and continue the story
- see problems quickly and take the initiative
- have advanced understanding and use of language, but are sometimes hesitant as the correct word is searched for and then used
- become absorbed for long periods when interested and be impatient with interference or abrupt change
- be persistent in seeking task completion when motivated and often set very high personal standards – are perfectionists
- be more than usually interested in 'adult' problems such as important issues in current affairs (local and world), evolution, justice, the universe, etc.
- be concerned to adapt and improve institutions, objects, systems and can be particularly critical of school, for example
- be philosophical about everyday problems and common-

sense issues
- be perceptive in discussions about people's motives, needs and frailties
- daydream and seem lost in another world
- show sensitivity and react strongly to things causing distress or injustice
- empathise with others, and often take a leadership role; are very understanding and sympathetic"

(Wallace. 2006: 195-196)

Building on the work of Lowe (2002), Wallace (2006), Smith (2006), Heacox and Cash (2014) and Robinson et. al. (2007), the following principles can be concluded in connection with gifted and talented learners:

- Giftedness is not a one-off and fixed state or condition. Abilities will emerge, develop and reveal themselves within different environments and settings and at different times (Smith, 2006).
- Identification of giftedness and talent should not be simple based on the results of an IQ test but should be the process of multiple, flexible criteria. Identification should be the basis of intervention.
- Learners who are identified as gifted and talented require special programmes and methodologies that fit their needs.
- There are special methods and techniques that only work with gifted and talented learners and are not suitable for others (Smith, 2006).
- Instead of focusing on the equity versus excellence debate, teachers and educators should focus on providing high quality learning opportunities.
- Gifts and talents should be seen as phenomena in themselves.iftedness should be understood as multifaceted.

- Gifted learners have a desire to learn and receive intellectual stimulus. If this stimulus fails to arrive, a reductionist climate can lead to the suppression of this desire.
- Gifted learners learn best from experience related to topics and areas they are passionately interested and involved in. Emotional engagement, motivation and commitment to a task are therefore essential components in their learning process.

5. Practical solutions for gifted and talented learners

Very often, teachers will disregard the gifted and talented learners in their classrooms and leave them on their own, claiming they will progress and learn curriculum areas without any additional support. It is not only because of neglect that this situation occurs, but also because of the vast number of unique challenges a teacher will face in a diverse classroom on a daily basis. It is necessary to understand that it is not only inappropriate or unethical to ignore the needs and the potentials of gifted and talented learners but that it can also lead to irreversible consequences such as boredom, underachievement and a loss of motivation, to name just a few. Working with gifted and talented learners requires appropriate and carefully planned approaches and solutions, not ad hoc classroom decisions.

Lowe explains that schools supporting gifted and talented learners should develop the following areas (Lowe, 2002: 90):

- informed understanding of the nature of high ability learners and their characteristics
- creating an effective identification system of giftedness and high ability learners
- appropriate pedagogy and methodology for able and talented learners
- organisational structures to support teaching and learning programmes
- support structures for learners
- staff expertise
- promoting and rewarding success
- effective management of gifted and talented provision

A schools' readiness to implement changes and practices to support gifted and talented learners is crucial. Only schools that support the

climate of ongoing innovation, reflection and evaluation can cater well for gifted learners (Smiths 2006). School management should not be afraid to intervene so that all learners' needs are satisfied and that a supportive environment is provided for everyone.

Jonathan Wai and Camilla P. Benbow claim there are three basic types of educational intervention that have developed during the past few years in the field of gifted education: acceleration, grouping and enrichment (Wai and Benbow, 2021). Acceleration is also referred to as **quantitative differentiation** and enrichment as **qualitative differentiation** (Moltzen, 2006).

Acceleration is a type of educational intervention in which a student is moved to a higher class or study programme at a faster rate or at a younger age. The two most radical forms of educational acceleration are grade skipping and early entrance to college (Wai and Benbow, 2021). Acceleration is still very rare – and I would say practically non-existent – in Central Europe. However, accelerated learning content can, through the use of special curriculum and lesson plans, provide an innovative solution within the regular classroom for gifted and talented learners.

Grouping by ability is based on the idea that learners can benefit from homogeneous learning environments in which they can interact with peers who are more or less at the same academic and intellectual level. The types of grouping ranges from within-class groupings, cross-grade subject groupings to special groupings for the gifted (Wai and Benbow, 2021). Grouping learners with their intellectual and developmental peers within the classroom is intended to be a useful strategy for gifted and talented learners and has been recommended by several scholars (VanTassel-Baska and Stambaugh, 2005). However, it sometimes meets opposition from parents who

object to the singling out of students in terms of their abilities.

It is necessary to distinguish between ability groupings and grouping within a regular classroom based on learners' abilities.

Grouping learners in the same classroom at each grade level based on learners' abilities for specific content is beneficial not only for learners but also for the teacher as it makes it easier to manage differentiated teaching and learning (Van-Tassel-Baska and Stambaugh, 2005). With grouping, the teacher needs to prepare specific materials and even separate lesson plans for different groups. For example, this could take the form of one lesson plan for the main body of students and a second specifically designed for gifted and talented learners. On this, featuring investigations, higher-level reading tasks, problem-solving tasks, interdisciplinary projects or activities that scaffold reasoning, analysing, evaluating and critical thinking that would not be suitable for the main class body will be available for gifted and talented students. Research shows that when gifted and talented learners finish a task earlier or more quickly than their peers and when the pace of a lesson is adjusted to the attention span or abilities of their less able peers, they feel frustrated (Moltzen, 2006). Therefore, it is crucial that the teacher uses the time of gifted and talented learners productively to pursue special interests and topics that these learners can be engaged with until other learners finish an activity.

In some schools there are **withdrawal or 'pullout' programmes** for gifted and talented learners, replacing within-the-class grouping. These are programmes where students are taken out of the regular classroom environment and spend some time with their intellectual peers, those either of similar abilities and/or interests. Sometimes these programmes are criticized with the very common argument that gifted and talented learners are gifted and talented all day long and during the whole week, not only on Tuesday afternoons (Moltzen, 2006). However, when withdrawal

is combined with the practices of an inclusive classroom where there is already grouping within the same class, the combination of solutions such as this can be highly beneficial.

Ability grouping

Miraca U. M. Gross (2006) deals with academically gifted learners and supports the idea of ability grouping.

The most common forms of ability grouping used for academically gifted learners are as follows:

- *Special schools* – there are both state and private schools for gifted learners. Interestingly, while schools for learners talented in performing arts have existed for a long time and arouse almost no controversy, special schools for academically gifted learners initiate plenty of debate.
- *Full-time classes* – in some primary schools, there are separate classes for gifted learners, where students are educated full-time with their ability peers.
- *Pull-out or withdrawal programmes* – gifted learners attend a mixed-ability class but are withdrawn from the class for a couple of hours and lessons per week to work with ability peers from other classes on enrichment and extension material. These pull-out groups can be subject specific, for example, maths or English.
- *Cluster grouping* – this refers to the practice of identifying the top six to ten learners at a grade level and placing them in the same, otherwise mixed ability classroom with a teacher who will develop a curriculum differentiated specially for the level and space of this group. The cluster may be selected on the basis of a single subject talent or by their general academic ability.
- *Regrouping for specific subject instruction* – learners work with ability peers from other classes at the same grade

level. This regrouping generally occurs for one or more academic subjects with the learners remaining in their mixed ability classes for the rest of the time.

- *Cross-grade grouping* – learners move to a group or classroom which contains learners of the same ability from various grades. Classes are set by achievement level and not by age. For example, primary 3, 4 and 5 will take maths at the same time and learners are grouped into classes according to their abilities. Assessment is ongoing and learners can change groups at regular intervals.

(Gross, 2006)

Gross lists a number of arguments in favour of ability grouping:

- "The academic achievement of gifted pupils in ability grouped settings is consistently and significantly higher than that of ability peers educated in the inclusion classroom." (Gross, 2006: 132)
- "The quality of gifted pupils' academic achievement is related not only to their access to ability grouping, but to its intensity and duration." (Gross, 2006: 132)
- "Gifted students in ability-grouping settings have more positive attitudes towards learning, and more realistic attitudes towards their own abilities, than do ability peers in inclusion settings. Pupils are much more motivated to learn when the level and pace at which the curriculum is pitched is slightly beyond, but not too far beyond, their current level of achievement." (Gross, 2006: 132)

When they are with their ability-peers, learners can be better provided with more intellectual stimulus and inspiration which can lead to higher-level academic results. The pace of learning, content type, processing and product

are adjusted to the needs of a more homogenous group.

One of the most popular forms group work is the cooperative method, which is based on several different learners working together, with each assigned a role and task to complete within the group. The cooperative method is based on establishing mixed-ability groups. Research on the application of cooperative learning in practice has confirmed the benefits and positive effects of its usage. Hanna Shachar (2003) underlines that research findings support that cooperative learning has contributed to the improvement of learners' skills in the following disciplines: reading, arithmetic, learning a second language, social and natural sciences. However, in summarizing the findings of eight studies - seven of them carried out in Israel, one in Singapore, - she concludes there is research evidence that different levels of academic achievement (low, middle and high achievers) are affected differently by cooperative learning and that they respond to it in various ways. Shachar explains it was high achievers who demonstrated very small or even no change in academic achievement and no change in attitude towards learning after the application of the cooperative method and that it was the middle achievers who benefited from it the most. Low achievers were not hugely influenced either, at least not as much as middle achievers.

Enrichment is the process of providing talented and gifted learners with educational opportunities that go deeper than the regular curriculum (Wai and Benbow, 2021). While acceleration relates to the pace of learning, enrichment is about depth and breadth. Here, gifted and talented learners are given additional or more demanding activities than their peers. Feldhusen and Jarwan have doubts concerning enrichment in the sense that implementing enrichment without having any other opportunities for gifted learners is unlikely to work efficiently. They explain that educational programmes and curricula that are

general in nature and offer enrichment experiences to everyone are less effective than programmes specifically designed for talented and gifted learners (Feldhusen and Jarwan, 2000: 271). Even if one agrees with this argument, we must accept the fact that most primary and secondary schools in Central Europe currently lack programmes specially designed for the gifted and talented and that these learners sitting in a regular or inclusive classroom alongside their less able peers is the status quo. In such environments, where an officially approved educational programme is absent and no additional professional support is provided for teachers, enrichment, content acceleration and grouping can all provide solutions. Some scholars (Townsend 2004 & Moltzen 2006) argue that acceleration and enrichment should not be an either/ or option, but a union, and that one should not be implemented at the expense of the other. On the other hand, it is true that talented and gifted learners need an inspiring, challenging and stimulating environment which cannot be provided merely by the teacher. Teachers' competences and skills in differentiation and satisfying the needs of gifted and talented learners also vary and while some teachers can teach gifted and talented learners at ease, others find it far too challenging. Even the professional readiness of teachers to cater for these learners can vary significantly with some being provided with skills and training while others are not. In the second volume of their *International Handbook of Teachers and Teaching*, and based on empirical evidence, Biddle, Good and Goodson claim that there are large differences in the quality of instruction among teachers and classrooms and that these differences have a great impact on learners' academic performance (Biddle et al., 1997: 673). Keeping this in mind, creating programmes specifically designed for talented and gifted learners could highlight the need for teachers who have experience with, or appropriate knowledge of, working with talented and gifted learners.

Mentorship – the needs of some gifted and talented learners' can best be satisfied with a mentor, a more experienced individual, either a teacher or a professional from outside the school who possesses a deep and thorough knowledge and expertise. This model is similar to sportspeople having coaches or musicians and their private teachers.

Rogers (2007) outlines the following considerations or lessons suggested by research on gifted education that need to be taken into account when working with gifted and talented learners:

- Gifted and talented learners need daily challenges in their specific areas of talent that go beyond the regular curriculum.
- Gifted and talented learners should be provided with opportunities to work independently.
- Gifted and talented learners should be provided with subject-based and grade-based acceleration.
- Gifted and talented learners should work together and socialize with peers at the same or similar academic and intellectual level and abilities.
- As far as curriculum areas are concerned, there should be differentiation in terms of pace, amount of practice and the organization of content for gifted and talented learners.

The above lessons are drawn on the basis of the synthesis of research from the period from 1861 to 2007 (research studies, essays and programme descriptions).

Choosing the right form of education and solutions for gifted and talented learners – should it be enrichment or ability grouping – is the key to successful learning. VanTassel-Baska (2021) point out that contemporary views of genetics let us know that it is both genes and the environment that shape ability,

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which means that a stimulating and inspiring environment can strengthen and increase genetic power. This leads to the fact that the development of talent can occur only in a supporting environment. Rogers (2007) points out that a much greater development occurs when there is mutual effort at both school and in the home of the talented individual to provide the child with complex knowledge and skills. A talented child, therefore, should not be isolated from peers and talent development should certainly not be limited only to after-school activities. If a school fails to provide adequate opportunities for gifted and talented learners, it can lead to boredom and even a rise in stress, a loss of motivation or discipline problems. Rogers suggests that if the school cannot organize groups, there should be a structured programme of independent learning for talented and gifted learners supervised by a gifted resource teacher, media specialist or talent-area mentor (Rogers, 2007: 383).

Dona J. Matthews and Christy Folsom (2008) have elaborated a model which can be applied in gifted education and talent development: the model of Teaching for Intellectual and Emotional Learning (TIEL). This model is graphically represented by a colour-coded wheel, which is divided into two halves. One half includes five thinking operations (five subparts) based on the theoretical work of Guilford, and the other comprises of five qualities of character based on the work of John Dewey. The five thinking operations are cognition, memory, evaluation, convergent production and divergent production with the five qualities of character being reflection, empathy, ethical reasoning, master and appreciation. Each component from the thinking operations half pairs with one from the qualities of character half to emphasise the systematic interconnected dimensions of thinking, feeling and learning. This points to the importance of connecting intellectual development with emotions.

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The pairs Matthews and Folsom suggest are:

- *Cognition and reflection* – cognition includes observing, discovering, knowing, being attentive and recognizing relevant information. Reflection is significant for organizing facts and identifying connections. Matthews and Folsom state that a teacher who effectively uses the cognition/reflection axis can better differentiate learning activities and assignments in a gifted classroom.
- *Memory and empathy* – this pairing is based on the assumption that in order to motivate interest in new knowledge, teachers need to first activate learners' prior relevant experience; in other words, their memories.
- *Evaluation and ethical reasoning* – evaluation includes analysing, setting criteria, decision-making and self-monitoring. These are types of self-organisation skills that learners need to gain in order to become more responsible and to be able to evaluate their own achievements. Ethical reasoning relates to evaluation in such a way that learners are given guidance in ethical issues which might provoke intense feelings.
- *Convergent production and mastery* – convergent thinking and production refer to the search for one right answer including logical and sequential thinking. Both convergent production and mastery are connected to a domain-specific, foundational knowledge. Underachievement occurs among gifted learners when they wish to master content knowledge but they are not challenged intellectually or logically.
- *Divergent production and appreciation* – divergent production refers to creative thinking, producing alternative ideas and solutions, inventing, designing and composing. It cannot occur without appreciating the beauty, diversity

and possibilities surrounding the individual, a lesson all gifted learners need to be taught.

The above model has several implications for teachers and educators interested in gifted education and, first and foremost, emphasizes the importance of connecting intellectual development with emotions. Teachers of gifted learners need to integrate cognitive and emotional processes in their teaching in such a way that learners can develop within a safe and challenging environment.

5.1. Further ideas for classrooms with gifted learners

When working with gifted learners, teachers must face and overcome certain barriers that makes serving gifted learners difficult and must make extra effort to ensure learning is more efficient.

The teacher must possess appropriate, **high-level content knowledge** of the subject area they teach. They should feel confident about providing more challenging content to curious and critical learners and be able to answer the specific questions they pose. Lack of content knowledge will affect classroom management and methodology and may even lead to a loss of respect and trust in the teacher amongst gifted learners.

Appropriate and even high-level **classroom management skills** are crucial for teachers when working with gifted learners. Careful groupings, working in different forms, mobility within the classroom, various types of seating arrangements, keeping a track of individual and group progress, recording which tasks have been distributed to selected learners, providing a wide range of assignments, different levels of content and different deadlines and keeping a record about them, all require superior classroom management skills.

Modification of the curriculum is unavoidable when working with gifted learners. For many teachers this means stepping out of their comfort zone and a greater workload. Adjusting the curriculum is necessary to satisfy individual learner's needs in general but, in the case of gifted learners, it can mean accelerated content, different assignments and additional and/or more complex tasks which require the creation of different lesson plans for use within a single classroom. Teachers should include projects that require critical thinking, analysis, evaluating, reasoning, interdisciplinary topics and creative tasks to provide suitable challenges to gifted and talented learners. VanTassel-Baska and Stambaugh explain that pre-assessing a learners' level of the content knowledge at a given grade can help teachers know in advance how to adjust the curriculum to the needs of these learners. They explain that teachers should prepare selected problems from textbooks, chapters, reading comprehension assessments, and that, in each of the content areas, learners who score 85% or higher will need compressed instruction that is substituted with more advanced tasks and work in the given area (VanTassel-Baska and Stambaugh, 2005). Even if this pre-assessment is not carried out, teachers must observe the pace student learning throughout the school year and adjust the curriculum and the level of content knowledge and task complexity accordingly.

Higher-level or enriched content can be provided by replacing texts in coursebooks, bringing in content from a higher-level curriculum and from related, authentic materials or by asking a professional from the given area to join classes or provide help in some other way.

Opportunities for developing persistence and perseverance should regularly be provided for gifted and talented learners.

Using interdisciplinary content or integrating standards or content from multiple disciplines can create a positive challenge for gifted learners. For example, using graphs, statistics, and

diagrams when investigating natural sciences in the English as a foreign language class or analysing and describing natural habitats or wildlife populations in different areas or countries.

Adding depth and complexity is necessary when we talk about within-the-classroom differentiation for gifted learners. It is crucial to acknowledge that it is not enough to simply provide gifted and talented learners with more activities of the same type when they finish early or have digested the content or memorized facts quickly. Instead, it is necessary to create opportunities for gifted learners to go deeper into the content of the curriculum and to develop skills such as making generalizations, analysis and synthesis, understanding connections or developing analogies. While other learners are working on a task, say, a reading one, gifted learners could be asked to act as journalists or scientists asking questions about the content, look for further data connected with the topic, write a report on a related issue or topic or create charts based on the information provided by the text. Adding complexity to a task can be carried out in several ways; gifted learners can be asked to examine reasons and results, evaluate multiple perspectives on the same event, creating connections or establish interrelationships, make predictions, examine changes over time or connect ideas to other fields or disciplines

Using worksheets – teachers can prepare special worksheets for different levels and different learners. Worksheets can be marked with special symbols or codes and can provide several levels of task complexity.

5.2. What happens when the needs of gifted learners are not satisfied?

When the needs of gifted and talented learners are not met, several forms of negative behaviour can arise (Zahatňanská and Nagy 2020; Heacox and Cash 2014). First, it can lead to boredom, which is one of the most common reasons for disruptive behaviour or indiscipline in the classroom. Further serious problems can include a loss of learner confidence, personal insecurity in their own abilities, lower test scores and even lasting, academic underachievement. Such facts highlight the enormous ethical problem of neglecting the specific needs of these learners and not nurturing their potentials.

More and more studies have dealt with gifted underachievers (Liang See Tan et. al. 2015; Heacox and Cash 2014). These are learners who have high-level cognitive skills and usually obtain high scores on general ability tests, but who exhibit poor academic achievement in the form of low grades and expected progress. Underachievement usually occurs when there is a great difference between the potentials of a learner -their abilities and gifts - and their actual academic performance. The reasons for this underachievement are multifaceted.

There are gifted learners who are gifted in one area and less successful in other fields. Other times it is a question of interest in that they will do the things they are interested in and ignore other disciplines and tasks. They are called 'selective producers' by Heacox and Cash, learners who are smart and capable of high performance, but who will engage in work only if it is of direct interest to them. Heacox and Cash claim these learners view school as a buffet table, choosing what they like and are willing to engage in while leaving the rest untouched. The underachievement of gifted learners can be the result of several factors and circumstances. The most commonly held reason is the lack of intellectual stimulus and/or the presence of a stimulating environment.

Very often, teachers do not have the appropriate knowledge and skills to satisfy the special learning needs of gifted learners and, many times, they ignore their demands for more complex tasks and intellectual stimulus. The second most discussed reason for gifted underachievement relates to a learners' attitude or in them possessing a fixed mindset or certain beliefs that are difficult to change. This mindset can result in a learner believing that their intelligence is unchanging and that it is enough to be 'smart' to avoid hard work or perseverance. Another harmful belief arises from the perfectionism that many scholars associate with giftedness. In concentrating too much on being perfect and achieving the best results, gifted learners can be known to avoid tackling tasks where they fear they cannot be the best or perform perfectly.

Another reason for underachievement can come from social relationships in the classroom. Sometimes, gifted learners will, when in a non-supportive environment, hide their abilities because they do not want to be teased or bullied by their peers.

There is research evidence that academic underachievement and poor school performance in the case of gifted learners can be reversed with the incorporation of educational interventions that focus on learners' individual strengths and interests (Emerick, 1992). Learners need to be provided with challenging tasks and must be engaged in work that motivates them. Challenges need to be continuously provided otherwise reversing underachievement will not be as efficient. It is equally important to provide meaningful tasks to these learners as it is to establish a relationship between the learner and the teacher which is based on mutual trust and respect.

Heacox and Cash offer the following tips for teachers of gifted and talented learners to prevent underachievement:

1. **Focus on the positive**. Teachers should give positive comments to learners rather than negative criticism.

2. **Keep problems private.** Generally, gifted learners tend to have high academic self-confidence but low personal self-confidence. Teachers should have private, one-to-one conversations and discussions with gifted learners rather than discussing any possible problems in public.

3. **Get learners involved and interested.** All learners' motivation increases when they are engaged and interested in what they are doing.

4. **Provide variety and choice.** Teachers should try to avoid predictability and should offer a variety of options for learners to choose from over time. Both instructional variety and a variety of accessing content are important as well as variety in the way learners learn and the way they can show what they know.

5. **Keep your expectations high and the learning rigorous.** Gifted learners should not be left alone to be bored in regular classrooms. Instead, more complex and in-depth tasks and activities should be provided, ones that are appropriate to their advanced level.

6. **Adjust the curriculum to make learning appropriate.** The time, instruction and practice suitable or necessary for average learners to reach their learning goals are often not appropriate for gifted and talented learners. The curriculum and the pace of learning should be adjusted to help keep gifted learners engaged, motivated and interested.

(Heacox and Cash, 2014: 129-130)

Ignoring the special needs of gifted and talented learners can lead to several negative consequences Therefore, the teacher needs to pay attention not to set the same learning goals for all learners and to provide appropriate and challenging learning opportunities.

6. Talented and gifted learners in the foreign language classroom

Gifted and talented learners in a different linguistic setting to their native language have been a keen topic of interest over the last few decades (Blackburn et. al. 2016; Lohman, Korb and Lakin 2008; Kitano and Pedersen 2002). The majority of research findings published in this field concentrates on second language learners and not foreign language learners. These ESL learners are either immigrants or non-native speakers who attend classes with native speakers. Very recently, there has been a growing interest in identifying and satisfying gifted learners in the English as a foreign language classroom as well.

Blackburn, Cornish and Smith (2016) offer the following definition of gifted English language learners: "students who exhibit the characteristics of giftedness and/or exhibit talents as identified through well-recognized theories or models of giftedness (e.g. models proposed by Terman, Renzulli, Gagné, Sternberg, Carroll, Tannenbaum, Torrance, and Gardner) and for whom English is the language of instruction but not their native language" (Blackburn, Cornish and Smith, 2016: 339). They point out that the full abilities of these learners - as well as their true potential - may be hidden because of the language barriers they face. This definition may be very well applied to both ESL and EFL learners. Giftedness is more difficult to identify when this language barrier exists but it is crucial to recognise that gifted learners have the same needs in the foreign language classroom and that being gifted can take many different forms.

Since we are talking about a foreign language classroom, it seems straightforward that teachers should concentrate on the linguistic potential of learners. Linguistic competences and abilities could be the most evident indicators of giftedness and verbal-linguistic intelligence. When describing the linguistic potential

of learners, Wallace lists a set of characteristics and suggests activities that can both help to observe and to exploit this potential.

"Linguistic potential:
- Uses advanced vocabulary and structures accurately and creatively
- Can use complex structures to sequence and explain ideas
- Shows understanding in dual languages
- Empathises with characters and issues
- Identifies differences in purposes and styles

Activities for observation:
- Summarising a story and extracting key points
- Devising word games
- Telling a story with fluency and expression
- Performing drama and role play
- Recalling an event with detail"

(Wallace, 2006: 199)

Depending on their level of linguistic competence in the given foreign language, learners might find it difficult to display the above characteristics of linguistic potentials. However, there are more signs a teacher can look for to identify the giftedness and talents of individual learners. Nancy N. Carlson (1981) suggests examining the following factors: (1) intelligence, (2) verbal ability, (3) ability to memorize, (4) general scholastic ability, (5) study habits, (6) motivation and attitude, (7) personality, (8) auditory ability, (9) previous foreign language training and (10) bilingual background (Carlson, 1981). From this it is clear that identifying giftedness should be based on multiple factors.

Also in the foreign language classroom, teachers should pay attention to the usage of a variety of methods and approaches to satisfy different types of gifts and intelligences. Following Sternberg's classification of intelligence, the

following activities are offered to improve analytical, creative and practical thinking in an EFL classroom.

Activities concentrating on analytical thinking:
- Analysing the plot of a story, the main characters, a problem, a scientific theory.
- Evaluating whether the solution to a given problem is appropriate or not.
- Comparing two characters in a story, writing down similarities and differences between them.
- Interpreting charts, tables and graphs, comparing and contrasting data and finding information within them.
- Reading a job description and the profiles of 4 or more potential candidates before considering the major qualities of each applicant and selecting the one most suitable for the role.

Activities concentrating on creative thinking:
- Writing a poem – either with or without a set of words provided by the teacher.
- Giving students a set of words referring to natural phenomena (e. g. thunder, rainbow, rain, tornado, sunset, sunrise, ocean waves, etc.) and asking them to write an explanation or definition why and how these phenomena occur. The definitions do not need to be true; they could be valid in a fairyland or a parallel universe.
- Writing an alternative ending to a story.
- Placing a story into a different time period. For example transferring a narrative about Sherlock Holmes into the 21st century.
- Interviewing one or more characters from a story for a chat show.

Activities concentrating on practical thinking:

- Designing a school trip with a detailed itinerary and places to visit, tourist information, selecting and (hypothetically) booking accommodation and calculating all costs.
- Creating a practical plan on how to reduce waste at school.
- Setting up a private company and designing theoretical business plans, needs analysis and advertisements for products or services.

7. Improving critical thinking in EFL classes

Developing thinking skills is one of the most important tasks of education in general. The re-evaluation of the goals and practices of education is closely connected with the shift from mechanical knowledge transfer to encouraging and improving independent thinking. The concern is not what the individual thinks and what kind of information an individual can reproduce, it is more interesting to examine what the individual does when he or she does not know something. There should be more emphasis on teaching the individual several ways of thinking and improving cognitive abilities, rather than cramming sets of knowledge or clusters of information into the individual's mind.

There are increasingly more scholars who deal with the improvement of thinking skills in the English as a second or foreign language classroom who claim that by improving thinking, learner autonomy is improved as well and learners will be better able to connect the language learning they do in school with the world outside the classroom (Farrell and Jacobs, 2010).

Teachers of gifted and talented learners choose to plan curricula that provide complexity and deep-thinking opportunities and infuse it with several categories of thinking such as critical, creative, problem finding, metacognition, reasoning, correlational reasoning, reflective inquiry, questioning created for memory, divergence, convergence, aesthetics and ethics, inquiry and investigation, dialectical thinking skills and Socratic discussion (Robinson et. al., 2007).

Several empirical studies confirm that the development of thinking skills and the teaching of critical thinking in second and foreign language classes promotes language skills (Shanini and Riazi 2011; Rao 2007; Lin 2018, Carter 2020, Marosi 2021). While the term thinking skills has several definitions, the most generally accepted view is that it is a set of abilities that develop

out of mental acts and are based on cognitive processes and intellectual activities. Thinking skills may vary from very general skills to specific ones; they may include logical reasoning, making relevant connections, the ability to decompose a whole into parts and the ability to put parts together to create a whole (analysis and synthesis), a proficiency in recognizing uniformities and similarities, noting dissimilarities and uniqueness, the capacity to solve problems, justify opinions, formulate arguments, discover alternative possibilities, the ability to evaluate processes and situations as well as the proficiency in activating one's memory and planning and organizing information (Lipman 2003).

Lipman claims that for educational purposes, the most relevant thinking skills include four basic areas: reasoning skills, inquiry skills, information-organizing skills and translation skills. Here, translation skills are not limited to the transmission of meaning from one language to another, but can occur via different modes of expression; for example when a composer expresses the tone of a poem (Lipman 2003).

Sternberg defines critical thinking as, "the mental processes, strategies and representations people use to solve problems, make decisions and learn new concepts" (Sternberg, 1985: 46). Another definition of critical thinking from Robert H. Ennis is that it is, "reasonable reflective thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe and do" (Ennis, 1987: 10). Lipman argues, "critical thinking is thinking that (1) facilitates judgment because it (2) relies on criteria, (3) is self-correcting, and (4) is sensitive to context" (Lipman, 2003: 211-212). According to Lipman's definition, applying a set of criteria in different contexts can lead to different judgements which the critical thinker needs to be aware of. It is crucial for learners to understand that what applies in one context does not necessarily apply in another and that one claim taken out of context may be misleading. Similarly, taking different sets of criteria may lead to completely contradictory judgements.

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This understanding of the relativity of judgements is helpful as it allows learners to understand that different critical interpretations have different reasons and underlying assumptions. In addition, it helps them to become more open-minded, able to accept different standpoints and perspectives and to recognize situational differences.

Critical thinking has gained a central role in education. Due to the overload of available information learners are surrounded by, they need to know how to distinguish between trustworthy, relevant information and unreliable, fake or misleading information. An important aspect of critical thinking is that the individual can collect and evaluate relevant information necessary for a specific purpose in a specific context and is able to use it efficiently and appropriately.

Critical thinking and language skills go hand in hand in the EFL classroom, since critical thinking skills can help learners become more successful and efficient in a foreign language and increase their confidence (Carter, 2020). A successful incorporation of critical thinking skills in the teaching of English as a foreign or second language should have a central role, since this belief is based on the assumption there is a link between language learning and thinking processes (Iakovos, 2011). Critical thinking skills are believed to be skills that can be taught which means that teachers should not expect these skills to develop spontaneously or naturally. Instead, educators should deliberately guide and support the development of this, "learnable skill" (Bean, 1996: 4). Teachers should create a safe and non-judgemental environment in which learners feel free to share their ideas and practice critical thinking. In addition, teachers should ask open-ended questions, challenge commonly accepted opinions and encourage learners to look for reasons, consider several contexts and perspectives and be open-minded to opinions different from their own.

EFL teachers need to challenge gifted and talented learners and improve their critical thinking skills in several ways. Collaboration in EFL classrooms can promote critical thinking

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however, opportunities for student interaction should always be meaningful and purposeful. Critical-thinking related tasks often involve discussions, asking questions, solving a problem, making decisions or supporting a standpoint. These tasks are not necessarily related to speaking skills only: they can be applied in writing and listening (students need to listen to each other, the teacher or some authentic materials) and also used as post-reading tasks.

Activities that improve critical thinking in the EFL class:

Debates
Debates are an excellent way of teaching students that there are several perspectives and the importance of considering all sides of an argument. In a debate, learners need to take a position either one they chose themselves or one assigned to them by the teacher. They then examine a topic, a case or a claim and collect arguments to support their position. It is very important that the rules and the time limit of the debate are clarified in advance. Topics which are closely connected to the learners' everyday life and environment are the most efficient in creating an engaging debate and can provoke further discussions. A successful debate involves both speaking and listening skills, since they do not only express their opinions, participants also have to listen carefully to the arguments of other members of the class.

Fact or opinion
The teacher provides a list of statements, some of which are facts and the remainder opinions. Students need to then decide on which category each statement falls into. Statements can be provided to groups or pairs of students to discuss. They can also be displayed on the board or on the wall around the classroom. It is very important that learners understand the difference between a fact as something that can be proved with evidence and an opinion, the expression

of someone's personal feelings or ideas. After the answers are discussed and revealed, learners can discuss the following questions:

How can facts be proven?
Are opinions generally based on facts?
If we all agree on something, does that make it a fact?
How can we verify a statement or a claim?
How can we tell that a statement is based on verified information or someone's opinion?

What does this mean…?
Students work in groups or pairs and given time to consider a problem or issue: for example, ocean pollution, too much time spent on social networking sites, traffic jams in cities, high unemployment rate or deforestation. Students then answer the following questions:

What does this mean:
… to me?
… to my family?
… to my community?
… to my country?
… to the world?

Perspective taking
This type of activity can be carried out in various forms. One possible variation can be based on a reading activity or a text and sees students asked to select a specific character and take on their perspective and consider events from their point of view using their understanding of the text.. This process can foster critical thinking since it requires the consideration of different perspectives on the same event and understanding different motivations as well as the need for students to express sensitivity as to how others can experience events or situations. In a speaking class, students can

take different perspectives in a role-play or a simulation activity.

Four corners (adapted from Fink 2020)
Students are given a statement, a claim or a question and four possible answers to choose from – each in one corner of the room. Based on their answers, they move to a particular corner and discuss their choice with the students standing in that corner. For example, students can be given this statement, 'The best type of holiday is…' and the four corners could be labelled skiing holiday, cruise holiday, beach holiday and camping. More complex sentences or options can include, 'Professional footballers deserve the high salary they receive.' The four options to choose here could be, strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree.

8. Task-based language teaching

A task-based approach to language learning was created in reaction to teacher-dominated, form-oriented second and foreign language classroom practice. It intends to provide learners with a natural learning environment where they can use the language through interacting with one another while working on a concrete task. This interaction facilitates language acquisition. The basic unit of task-based language teaching (TBLT) is the task, not a grammar item or any other linguistic unit. It is much closer to the communicative approach which claims that language should be learned by using it. One of the earliest examples of TBLT was the Bangalore project carried out by N. S. Prabhu. In it, he created a syllabus based on tasks and strongly rejected the idea of pre-teaching grammar units (Thornbury, 2006).

A task is an activity to complete and can be one which is part of an everyday routine, such as answering phone calls, doing the shopping or having a meeting. However, there are more specific tasks for educational purposes or the purpose of language learning. Long talks about *pedagogic tasks* – activities and the materials that teachers and/or students work on in the classroom or other instructional environments (Long, 2015). Van den Branden writes about a *language task*, which he defines as, "an activity in which a person engages in order to attain an objective, and which necessitates the use of language" (Van den Branden, 2006). In an EFL class, a task should definitely involve language, since the goals to achieve it include linguistic targets as well. The process of making a model or building a cardboard house is not an appropriate task unless it involves, for example, the reading of instructions in the target language or verbal instructions given by a partner. The basic difference between the TBLT approach and form-oriented approaches is that TBLT allows learners to use the target language for non-linguistic purposes

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and for purposes in which they can use the language to exchange meaning in a real-life context (Van den Branden, 2006). The aim of a task should always connect with what learners need to use the language for in the future. This is the reason why a TBLT course should start with a needs analysis to map what the learners need the language for and what their specific learning goals are.

Van den Branden explains that classroom tasks should facilitate meaningful interaction with meaningful input and provide opportunities for learners to create meaningful output to reach relevant and obtainable goals. By doing the task, students act as language users rather than language learners.

There are different types of tasks and the task difficulty will depend on learners' previous learning experiences, the complexity of the task and the resources available. Good tasks are the ones that inspire learners and motivate them to work and invest mental energy into their performance (Richards and Rogers, 2014).

The most frequently used task types in TBLT are the following:

Jigsaw task – During this task, learners put pieces of information together to create a larger whole. For example, one learner could have a bus timetable, another a list of hotels and a third, a map of a city with the challenge being to work together to plan a weekend away. Another example could have learners working in groups and being each given a picture about what an old man did at a specific time of the day. Each learner's picture depicts a different activity and, without revealing the images to each other, they need to describe what their picture shows and then, as a group, agree on the correct chronological order of the pictures/activities to reconstruct the old man's day.

Information gap task – This involves the exchange of information to complete a task. Here, one student might have some elements

of information that a second student does not and vice versa. To succeed, they need to interact and negotiate to find out the missing information from each other. Only after sharing the information will they be able to formulate a rounded response.

Opinion exchange task – This type of task requires learners to express their opinions, feelings and attitudes to complete a task. Here, they exchange opinions but do not need to come to a definitive conclusion or solution.

Decision-making task – This type of task requires learners to cooperate and make a decision together in order to answer a question; e.g. to choose one out of a list of holiday offers. They can be given a list of possible solutions or items from which they decide on which option to choose. Here, there is no single right answer, and the focus is on collaboration and discussion. Another example of a decision-making task is a 'stuck in the desert' situation, where learners are given a list of equipment, tools, and items to choose from in order to survive.

Problem-solving task – Students are given a problem and provided with a set of instructions that they must follow to solve it For example, a problem to be solved could relate to there being too much traffic in towns, a lack of entertainment facilities for young people in the city or a high unemployment rate.

There are basically three stages during a TBLT approach: the first is the introduction of the task, where the teacher demonstratesthe task and gives clear instructions about what the learners are expected to do; the second phase is task performance, during which the teacher becomes a facilitator, a motivator and a helper who provides support where it is needed and interacts with the learners when it is necessary; the final stage is the post-task stage,

where task performance and the eventual outcome is evaluated.

The TBLT approach is a great way of providing gifted and talented learners stimulating activities in which they can demonstrate and improve their problem-solving skills, critical thinking and creativity. Task complexity can be discreetly manipulated and adjusted to different needs, even in an inclusive classroom environment.

9. Philosophy-based language teaching

Philosophy-based language teaching (PBLT) is an approach designed to develop both language and thinking skills in foreign and second language education. It is based on the model provided by Matthew Lipman (2003) who proposed that the two essential tools of promoting thinking in the classroom are (1) creating a community of enquiry and (2) engaging learners in a philosophical dialogue. By 'philosophy', the PBLT approach does not mean the discipline or being engaged in specialized philosophical questions or discussions. Instead, philosophy here means the understanding of a concept or a question at a deeper level and an understanding of underlying reasons.

Shanini and Riazi (2010) were inspired by Lipman's framework and decided to apply PBLT in the field of ESL/ EFL learning and teaching with the specific aim of improving speaking and writing skills. The results of this pioneering study opened doors to the application of PBLT in second and foreign language teaching and provides useful tools for improving thinking skills in a foreign language class.

The experiment they conducted involved two groups of university students: one experimental group of 17 students and a control group which also consisted of 17 students. The participants of each group took tests in speaking and writing before and after the experiment which lasted for one semester of 17 sessions. The members of each group met two times a week, on two different days. During each session, the participants received one text - 17 altogether during the experiment - which they read at the beginning of the session. The students were then asked to come up with philosophical questions either individually or in groups. They chose the most interesting questions and discussed them in class. During the discussion, the instructor took notes on the major points mentioned and wrote down key words. Following the discussion,

students were asked to write an essay individually using the key points and the vocabulary collated on the board. The instructor then collected the essays for marking and gave the corrected versions back to the students at the beginning of the following session.

Results of the above experiment revealed there were significant differences between the two groups in terms of a students' performance in speaking and writing skills. In addition, it was observed that students in the experimental group were much more motivated to actively participate in discussions during classes while, in the control group, more students preferred to remain silent. When the attitudes and opinions of the students in the experimental group were questioned, they explained that during discussions - which were many times heated arguments - they forgot they were communicating in English, which helped them to use the language productively. They added that the questions generated were thought-provoking and demanded a reflective and critical stance.

The PBLT approach to foreign and second language teaching is based on the natural curiosity of learners to deal with fundamental questions and understand basic concepts as well as on the socio-cultural understanding of language learning as being a process based on social interaction. The PBLT approach is realized initially with a creative stimulus such as a literary text or a passage to read (can be a newspaper article or a study) and then continued by encouraging learners to ask appropriate questions.

An example of a useful short story which could be used at the beginning of a PBLT lesson is Mark Twain's *The Stolen White Elephant*.
Examples of conventional questions:
1. Who does the elephant belong to?
2. What details does the Inspector want to know about the elephant?
3. How many parts is the short story divided into and in

what ways are these parts different from each other?
4. Find sentences in the short story that describe the police and the attitudes of the police.
5. How did the policemen investigate the case of the stolen white elephant? What were their methods?
6. How long does the investigation take place? Is it successful?
7. Do they find the white elephant? How does the story finish?

Examples of philosophical question:
1. How are newspapers and journalists depicted in the story? How would you describe the relationship between the press and the police? Was the cooperation between them successful?
2. Was the Inspector a dangerous man?
3. Is the Inspector a bad man? What makes you call a person 'good' or 'bad'?
4. What does the white elephant symbolise?
5. The short story is many times referred to as tragicomedy. What do you think and why? Do you agree with this classification?
6. Is the news provided by the media always reliable? How can you tell if information is biased or fake?
7. Is it acceptable for the press to exaggerate news stories or add colouring to them?

In a PBLT approach, the teacher's role is redefined as that of a facilitator and supporter who becomes a guide rather than the controller of the learning process. This kind of freedom and independence raises a learner's sense of responsibility in their own learning and can contribute to an increased level of engagement and motivation.

Concluding thoughts

I would like to encourage all EFL teachers to take steps to identify and serve their gifted learners as, surely, all teachers have such students in their classrooms. Hopefully, the information, tips, activities and ideas gathered in the previous chapters will serve as inspiration for teachers and instructors and will help them to reconsider or expand the practices they are already doing and will contribute to making their classes more challenging. As the first quote at the beginning of the books says, gifted learners are a national resource for which we teachers, educators and parents are all responsible.

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Gifted and Talented Learners in the Foreign Language Classroom

PaedDr. Andrea Puskás, PhD.

The main aim of this book is to
draw attention to the characteristics
and special needs of gifted and
talented learners.
Based on the synthesis of theoretical
assumptions and research results
on the education of gifted and
talented learners, the book offers
ideas on how these learners can be
provided with challenges and
satisfying tasks in the English as
a foreign language classroom.
The goal is to outline several practical
solutions that help to incorporate ideas,
activities and strategies to create
a more appropriate learning
environment for gifted and talented
learners.