

Educational strategies leading to labeling the gifted pupil

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Abstract

Labeling of gifted pupils can negatively affect the life path of gifted individuals. The study explores whether and how a teacher can label gifted pupils when applying educational strategies based on internal differentiation. We focused on formally identified intellectually gifted pupils (age 7–12) educated in (mainstream) elementary schools in the Czech Republic (Central Europe). Qualitative data were collected through classroom observations and teacher interviews. We observed 24 gifted pupils and 15 teachers from 12 schools. We identified five main types of educational strategies leading to inappropriate labeling, such as Tasks for Quick-witted, Challenges, Boffins Goes to Competition, Teacher's Assistant, and Individual Projects. The “inappropriateness” of these strategies consisted of the significant preference and presentation of gifted pupils, in the useless and overused selection of gifted pupils, and the rigidity of the applied strategies. The paper seeks to highlight the existence of a paradoxical phenomenon whereby, when teachers are maximally interested in promoting giftedness, the stagnation of gifted pupils and other pupils in the class occurs. The study concludes with recommendations for eliminating inappropriate labeling of gifted pupils.

KEYWORDS

educational strategies, gifted pupils, internal differentiation, labeling, qualitative research

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DEFINITION OF GIFTEDNESS RELATED TO LABELING

According to Sternberg and Zhang (2004), there are more than 100 definitions of giftedness. Although they significantly differ from one another, they fundamentally affect the lives of gifted individuals (Dai, 2009). At the same time, the existence of definitions of giftedness has led to the emergence of labels of “gifted,” that is connotations of being labelled as gifted, many of which may not match the characteristics of individuals (Robinson, 1990).

Some definitions of giftedness deepen the labeling and also its riskiness. Individuals whose giftedness is described by the following characteristics may be among those most at risk (Gates, 2010; Miller, 2009): the content or degree of giftedness is clearly defined; giftedness is very rare (i.e. less than 2% of cases in the general population); giftedness is manifested (demonstrated), formally identified (under the auspices of an institution) and formally developed. If we apply these features of giftedness to the typology of definitions according to Dai (2009), we find that these are the traditional definitions of giftedness, which are associated with the perception of gifted pupils as exceptional, highly motivated and productive individuals. Preference for traditional definitions of giftedness prevails among teachers, even in different cultures (Altintas & Ilgun, 2016; Miller, 2009; Olthouse, 2014).

Our research focuses on gifted pupils in the Czech Republic. In the Czech education policy (Framework Educational Program for Elementary Schools, see EDU.cz, 2021) the gifted pupil defined as “an individual who, with adequate support, shows a high level of mental abilities, physical, manual, artistic or social skills in one or more areas, compared to peers”. This definition could belong to traditional definitions (see Dai, 2009).

Diagnostics of gifted pupil in the Czech Republic could be informal or formal. Formal diagnosis is entrusted exclusively to Education Counselling Facilities, which carry out a comprehensive diagnoses of giftedness (see NUV [National Pedagogical Institute of the Czech Republic], 2018). Based on the results, the pupil formally belongs among “gifted and extraordinarily gifted pupils”. They are integrated at school into one of four degrees of the “supportive measures”, which legislatively define depth and form of differentiation in education (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports [MSMT], 2016). These pupils could study according to the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or the Plan of Education Support, a simplified version of the IEP. School will then receive increased financial support for a pupil diagnosed and educated in this way. Care for these gifted pupils is registered and evaluated by the Czech School Inspectorate (CSI). According to the Czech School Inspectorate (CSI) (2022), there are 0.1% of so gifted pupils in the Czech Republic, with almost three-quarters of them being boys. Informal diagnostics is done by another subjects (i.e. psychologists, teachers’ or parents’ nomination). Care for these pupils is carried out on the basis of an individual agreement between the parent and the teacher. The numbers of these pupils are not registered.

For our research, we decided to observe the pupils whose giftedness corresponds to the definition from the education policy and who passed the formal diagnostics of giftedness. The definitions of these gifted pupils could deepen labeling and its riskiness: giftedness is clearly defined and identified, manifested, formally developed and is extremely rare (0.1%).

LABELING THEORY AND GIFTED PUPILS

Classical Labeling Theory deals with the process of constructing an individual's personality in relation to the existence of so-called labels (Becker, 1973; Goffman, 1963). It posits that a person's behaviour can be influenced by the terms used by society to describe their characteristics (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1997; Matsueda, 2014). Labeling is defined as a socio-cultural process (Damico et al., 2021) that assumes the existence of a negative connotation to an individual's attribute (Goffman, 1963). This label is attributed by those around

the individual and reinforced by those under the auspices of institutions (Becker, 1973; Frieh, 2019). Once the label is assigned, the individual is segregated from the original group and directed towards an individual or collective segregation within a group with the same attributes (Rist, 2017). Segregation further reinforces the label, leading to internalizing the attribute in the individual's character. The outcome is the demonstration of these attributes (Kolb & Jussim, 1994), thereby displacing the natural characteristics of the individual (Shang-Yu et al., 2020).

Since the end of the last century, Labeling Theory was expanded to include other groups of people at risk, such as homosexuals, individuals with mental illness, or obesity (Frieh, 2019; Hencken, 1984; Myers & Rosen, 1999). Currently, the attributes associated with individuals are viewed in a negative and also positive view (Barrick, 2017). Whether they are viewed positively or negatively depends on other circumstances (environment, the individual's personality, the current stage of the labeling process, etc.) (Gates, 2010).

Modified Labeling Theory has also been widely applied to the topic of giftedness (e.g. Coleman et al., 2015, 2021; Gates, 2010; Meadows & Neumann, 2017; Plangger et al., 2013; Ronksley-Pavia et al., 2019; Striley, 2014; Wiley, 2020). Freeman (2013) argues that the "gifted" attribute is associated with a set of connotations and that these truths, half-truths and misconceptions exist in society as "gifted myths" (Leavitt, 2017; Treffinger, 2009). These generally accepted projections are then associated with all gifted individuals and can create diverse attitudes on a scale from supporting elitism to denying care for the gifted (Delisle, 2001; Gagné, 2018), which influences education of gifted (David, 2011).

LABELING GIFTED PUPILS, ITS POSITIVITY AND RISKINESS

Labeling a pupil as gifted can have drawbacks and advantages (Gates, 2010). Among the positives is the key fact that someone notices the giftedness and is subsequently interested in developing the child (Freeman, 2005). According to most authors (Coleman et al., 2015; Gates, 2010; Heward, 2013), labeling is a necessary part in caring for the gifted, as it creates conceptuality in gifted identification and education.

Labeling can offer positive benefits, such as better the offer of academic growth and the possibility of having better academic results (Berlin, 2009; Coleman & Cross, 1988). Gifted pupils could perceive higher self-esteem, coherence in life goals and inner harmony (Meadows & Neumann, 2017; Thomson, 2012). Another advantage of labeling is sharing ideas with other gifted people, seeing owns future positively and having a possibility to reach a dream profession at an expert level (Klimecká, 2022).

Key negatives of labeling include the association of "giftedness" with a negative connotation (Delisle, 2001; Gagné, 2018) and, according to Borland (2005), selection of gifted in an "ill-served curriculum". Between the concrete negative implications belongs fear of academic failure, perfectionism (Berlin, 2009; Gross, 2011; Sastre-Riba et al., 2019), stereotypical description of gifted characteristics and using gifted pupils for competitions and helping with teaching (non-gifted) peers (Klimecká, 2022). Another problem relates to the social area and includes, for example, bullying, segregating the gifted and social isolation (Coleman & Cross, 1988; Cross et al., 2014; Geake & Gross, 2008; Meadows & Neumann, 2017; Striley, 2014). Gifted label may be a significant risk factor (Brown, 2016; Freeman, 2013; Kurt & Chenault, 2017; Seeley, 2004), which can result in a poor quality of life for the gifted individuals. Some authors (Rinn & Majority, 2018; Wiley, 2020) claim that characteristics associated with gifted individuals as their typical qualities (perfectionism, multipotentiality, overchoice, underachievement, impulsivity, overexcitability, rebellion, low social competence, individualism) are, in fact, just consequences of labeling. Other authors

talk of predictable crises of labeled gifted pupils (Colangelo & Wood, 2015). Borland (2005) and Gallagher (1996) point out the negatives of labeling gifted pupils and offer the idea of no conception of giftedness as a positive dealing with labeling, and also development in the field of gifted education.

To summarize the above, labeling gifted pupils is necessary and must not be avoided in general. Our concern should be to promote the positive consequences and eliminate the negative consequences of labeling. Because labeling is a socio-cultural process (Damico et al., 2021) varying according to specific factors surrounding gifted pupils, the “guidelines” on how to define and identify (in-)appropriate labeling depend on the specific context.

LABELING THE GIFTED PUPILS WITHIN THE EDUCATIONAL STRATEGIES

Each gifted pupil in our study has already entered the labeling process, because he/she is formally diagnosed as gifted and got a formal label. How gifted pupil treats the label mostly depends on the environment (in our case, the teacher). In our study, we focus on educational strategies (and of course the teacher as a manager of these strategies) as a possible architect of the labeling. Educational strategies include all material and nonmaterial tools that lead to the achievement of the educational goal of the lesson (Richmond, 2018).

If the teacher is interested in developing the pupil's giftedness in the (intellectually) heterogeneous school class (without removing the gifted pupil from the school class), he/she must do so through internal differentiation (Endepohls-Ulpe, 2017). Therefore educational strategies based on internal differentiation form an integral part of the labeling process in ordinary elementary schools. The aim of internal differentiation is described by Tomlinson (2013) as an approach in which teachers proactively modify curricula to address the diverse needs of individual pupils to maximize the learning opportunity for each of them. Rogalla (2012) adds that these pupils usually work in the same topic area and classroom as other learners but on a broader scale. The condition for internal differentiation is then working with higher educational goals and a direction toward constructivism (Graffam, 2003; VanTassel-Baska et al., 2020). Internal differentiation is, therefore, not only about gifted pupils but about everyone, just as labeling gifted pupils can have an impact on others.

Practical guides for teachers point out inappropriate educational differentiated strategies leading to ethical problems with gifted pupils. Freeman (2005) describes dysfunctional forms of gifted pupils' selection, which excessively support their individualism.

VanTassel-Baska (1992), Coenen (2002), and the National Association for Gifted Children [NAGC], (2016) refer to a pedagogical strategy in which the gifted are over-assigned to the role of tutor. Robinson (1990) talks about inappropriate competitive activities in inclusive settings. However, the mentioned strategies lack thorough anchoring in basic or applied research and conceptual linking to the Labeling Theory.

For the purposes of our research, we tried to define possible features of educational strategies (originating from internal differentiation), which lead to “inappropriate” labeling. When we looked for these strategies, we asked the following questions, which arose on the basis of theoretical starting points: is the gifted pupil privileged or undervalued?; is the giftedness highlighted (at the expense of other pupils)?; is the gifted pupil over-segregated in the group (more than other pupils)?; is this segregation appropriate?; is this an ethically correct situation (is somebody discriminated at the expense of other pupils)?; do some pupils show some of the undesirable consequences of labeling gifted (e.g. bullying, rebellion, social isolation)?

We conducted qualitative research in elementary schools, where “gifted pupil” is educated. We defined the following research questions:

- Which educational strategies lead to inappropriate labeling of gifted pupils?
- Why do the identified educational strategies lead to inappropriate labeling and what is their “inappropriateness”?
- What are the means of inappropriate labeling of gifted pupils within educational strategies?

METHOD

Participants

Study participants were intellectually gifted pupils (see definition of giftedness) at the age of 7–12, their classmates, and teachers, that is all classroom participants. We visited 12 schools in district towns in the Czech Republic, where we observed 24 gifted pupils (18 boys and 6 girls) and 15 teachers (all female).

Materials

Primary data source was direct observation of teaching. We focused on academic subjects (not non-academic subjects such as physical education, music, or art), where the support for giftedness was based on internal differentiation (the gifted pupil was not moved to another class). We observed teaching from 2 to 4 h per day (with the same gifted pupil or group of gifted pupils) and returned to the research field whenever possible. Secondary data sources were interviews with 11 teachers, each lasting about 10 min, to specify the context of the identified situation. All data were recorded in the paper-and-pencil form (due to the preservation of the natural teaching environment). Data collection took place from 2020 to 2022.

Four researchers spent a total of 80 h in the research field. Team consists of three academics and one consultant from the practice of the elementary school. They view the topic exclusively from the point of view of pedagogy and their professional and personal experiences (women; more than 10 years practice in education; professionally profiled in gifted education). Implementation of the research was approved by the Ethics Committee of Tomas Bata University in Zlin.

Procedure

Specific educational strategies were identified by the researchers directly in the field. When identifying the strategies, we asked ourselves the following questions related to labeling according to the theoretical background: Is the gifted privileged or undervalued? Is their giftedness being developed at the expense of others? Is it “all things to all pupils”? Is the gifted over-selected, and is this selection effective? Is there an overuse of a particular phenomenon, emphasizing inappropriate labeling? Do gifted pupils or their classmates exhibit specific traits that may imply labeling? We identified all observable phenomena in teaching, such as the pupils' verbal expressions or the teacher's application of educational strategies. There was no protocol with predefined categories for the observation. The researcher thus reacted to the unpredictable “life” in the school classroom.

After observing school lessons, we asked the teachers with a request for comments on our notes. Here, interviews were conducted in order to specify the broader context of situations from the teacher's point of view. The questions for the interviews with the teachers were highly individualized in relation to the type of strategy we identified in their teaching. In general, we were interested in the motive for using the strategy, what preceded it, how it

will develop in the future, and how often the strategy is used. Presentations of the situations and discussions on whether to classify them as labeling occurred at team meetings due to minimizing subjectivity in the observations.

In the next phase, the situations were analyzed by the study's author. Elements of grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) were used. Open coding was applied to gain initial familiarity with the content of the situations. This involved repeated 'dissecting' of the situations, thematic unpacking, naming themes, and assigning codes to themes. The basic categories, properties, and contexts were indicated by grouping concepts into higher orders. A follow-up technique was the partial use of axial coding. Due to the nature of the data, we did not apply an established paradigmatic model (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) to uncover connections. Instead, we applied the actual phenomena that more closely specified the context of the pedagogical situation. In the following steps, the whole team reunited and discussed the categories that emerged from the coding. At this stage, the need for repeated returns to the research field arose to collect the necessary data and saturate some categories. As the codes and categories were reorganized, the themes were saturated, and a final version of the theory was produced.

For the names of the categories (strategies), we tried to base them on the language of the participants, such as boffins, quick witted or handy helpers. These "in-vivo codes" provide additional evidence of the investigated teachers' attitudes and prejudices towards gifted education.

RESULTS

We identified five main educational strategies leading to inappropriate labeling of gifted pupils, some of which are further subdivided into sub-strategies (see Table 1). We use the abbreviations T = teacher, GP = gifted pupil, C = classmate and R = researcher to directly cite pedagogical situations. Through the pedagogical situations, we describe the individual strategies and reveal the existence of labeling. At this point, we do not primarily evaluate whether a particular example is good or bad with respect to labeling. The evaluative aspect is the focus of the following section; it offers an assessment once the broader context of all situations has been considered.

Tasks for quick-witted

The essence of the strategy is that the teacher first works with the whole class (frontal instruction) and assigns follow-up tasks to gifted pupils or those who have previously

TABLE 1 Primary and partial educational strategies.

Primary educational strategies	Partial educational strategies
Tasks for quick-witted	I have to hire you Gifted worksheets
Challenges	—
Boffins goes to competition	—
Teacher's assistant	My handy helper Help each other
Individual projects	

completed the task. There are two partial categories: *I Have to Hire You* and *Gifted Worksheets*.

From the teacher's point of view, the purpose of utilizing the strategy *I Have to Hire You* is the need to activate gifted pupils who are finished with the task earlier than others. However, we suspect this to be any kind of pupils' activation, regardless of the development of giftedness. T: "Because they write and think faster. I have to take that into account and give them more things to do." T: "A gifted pupil has more tasks ready. He wants to work all the time. He gets an assessment for the completed worksheets."

Interviews show that the strategies are assigned to a stable group of more skilled and fast-working pupils. T: "I notice when those pupils are done, and then I challenge them to work on extra tasks." T: "I don't limit the extra tasks only to the gifted. If the others are faster, they can work on that too ... but then it's rather the same people doing it."

Educational strategies are derived from lower cognitive goals. They have the character of repetition and repeated application of knowledge in a familiar context. A distinction should be made between tasks with and without direct links to the objective or topic of the lesson. Tasks with the link are related to the lesson topic or objective. Tasks without such link appear to fulfil the teacher's actual need to activate the pupil in some way; such tasks were most likely not planned within the previous pedagogical preparation for the lesson in progress. Examples of the tasks with direct links might include the following:

In a Czech language lesson, the teacher assigns a task from a workbook: T: "Do the whole page 16. Matěj wants another task? Yes, there is one! And I would be happy if you could do it all the way to page 18."

The tasks without a direct link to the lesson objective might include the following:

The Czech Language class is in progress. Pupils are given a text about birds in which they are to locate answers to the questions. The GP gets everything done quickly. T: "Zuzi (GP), a special task for you: take your crayons and color the birds." The teacher then waits for most of the children to complete the task, but these children do not color the pictures. A joint check follows, with Zuzi constantly ready to report; the teacher prefers to call her out

Gifted Worksheets strategy is again designed for pupils who have previously mastered the assigned activity. These are different types of tasks based on higher-order thinking operations. During the observed lessons, these were predominantly activities with special worksheets (printed or online) for the gifted. The assignment of these tasks has a deeper purpose: the teacher is concerned with the targeted development of giftedness.

T: "You can't give the tasks of the same difficulty to the gifted; they have to have something they would enjoy and that would motivate them. If I give them to do more and more tasks in the textbook that are based on the same principle, it will just discourage them."

T: "I offer worksheets designed for the faster and more gifted pupils."

Strategy is designed for the gifted and bright pupils who work quickly. Even though the tasks are theoretically directed to all pupils in the class, in reality, only cognitively gifted and fast-working pupils can master them. T: "I use it for the gifted ones, but if I see that a child in that class is already done, has already calculated the assignment, then I will give the support

worksheet to the other bright ones.” T: “Anyone can work on the tasks for the fast learners; there is just a condition that they have to have completed the standard activity correctly.”

If a strategy privileges the gifted pupils, it can put them in a challenging situation face to face with their peers:

A gifted pupil finishes a task early and is asked by the teacher to work on a computer with an educational program aimed at the gifted. C1: “And has Šíma got it again? Or why isn't he doing it, once again? I might as well do it ahead of time and then play with the computer here. Oh yeah.” ... C2: “And Ms. Teacher, how come Šíma can work again on the computer? He hasn't done it yet.” T: “He has done it, three times faster than you, and you better focus on yourself and not check on Šíma.”

Strategies may or may not be directly linked to the lesson objective or topic. The first example presents the targeted incorporation of activity into the lesson, while the second example presents an activity with no connection to the lesson.

T: “Last year, we had this project at school, and I could buy these worksheets here (teacher shows a binder of assignments). I sorted the worksheets thematically. I put them exactly under a specific curriculum, so that's why the worksheets deepen the curriculum.”; T: “This year, I took part in two workshops like that. They were about developing creativity. We were given tips on websites with puzzles, brainteasers, ciphers. I'm well pre-stocked for this.”

In other cases, the teacher does not have these activities prepared in advance and challenges the gifted pupil to work on their hobby. Gifted pupils are usually accustomed to this activity and approach it automatically without the teacher's permission.

Teacher delivers the class instruction and then assigns the tasks to pupils. After a short while, both GPs finish the tasks, and without asking the teacher, they take books (a novel for girls, a dinosaur encyclopedia) from their bags and start reading. Four other pupils have also completed the task but are waiting for the end of the lesson.

Challenges

Challenges is similar to the previous strategy, except that pupils work on tasks segregated from others from the beginning and not after finishing the main task. The tasks are more challenging and aim at higher cognitive goals. The purpose of including the strategy is to develop the pupil's talents realistically. T: “The tasks are more challenging. They need to be thought about. They can have more solutions.” T: “I can't force the gifted pupils to do what they already know; that would discourage them from learning ... For example, when I have to take longer to give instructions to others, I will give the gifted ones a more interesting task that they would enjoy.”

Activities are targeted at diagnosed gifted pupils and other very gifted pupils. Although the teachers claim the tasks are directed towards all pupils, they target cognitively advanced pupils in reality. T: “When we have simpler schoolwork, I know those guys (GP) would need to do something else already, so I give them the super challenge.”; T: “But the super challenge is not only taken by these two gifted ones; they all have the opportunity to choose it and get

good marks for it.” R: “How many pupils are actually working on that super-challenge?” T: “Regularly these two, but occasionally someone joins them.”

The teacher's intention in these strategies is to develop pupils' talents. It is noteworthy that they lean towards the strategy even if the standard activity is also developmental and often more interesting. It may also be conducted within a pedagogical constructivist framework, which gives it a significant potential for the individual development of the pupil's giftedness. It would therefore seem that separating pupils is instead a goal of teaching than an effective teaching means.

One of the aims of teaching the Czech Language in the first grade is to practice the vowels a, e, i, o, u, and y and to repeat the syllabication of selected words. The teacher starts the lesson by dividing the pupils into groups. The gifted children, unlike the others, can already read and write. T: “Now all the children except [...] (lists GP) sit backward on the carpet.” Next, she turns to the group of GPs seated at their desks. They are given a worksheet with the task of matching nouns with their characteristics (e.g., fish: swims, flies, sings). The others work on the carpet, refining vowel sounds, clapping their hands, and stamping their feet to the rhythm of syllables. They laugh, and they enjoy the activity. Most GPs are not working and look back at their classmates. T (to GP1): “Are you done yet? No? Then why are you sitting and watching.” GP2 does not know how to do the task because he finds that some items have multiple solutions. GP3 keeps raising his hand [a sign requesting permission to say something] and simultaneously shouting that he is done with everything and requires another task. He is given the task of “drawing something.” Group work is completed, and classmates return to their seats. A presentation of the work of the GPs comes up; they deftly think of answers on the spot (most of them have not worked on their assignments). The other pupils have no idea what the context of the presentation is. During the presentation, the GPs argue amongst themselves, “A fish can fly too, out of water.” The teacher shouts at the pupils not to call each other names.

Boffins goes to competition

A gifted pupil is excluded from the team to a significant degree; they individually focus on a topic or area unrelated to the lesson objective. If they prepare for school competitions organized by the Ministry of Education, the materials they work with are not even related to the course they attend.

These practices are a functional tool for the development of giftedness. Teachers assign them parallel to the regular tasks they consider non-developmental for the gifted. T: “Every teacher can give their best to the gifted. For example, she can enter a pupil in a competition. There are so many possibilities. You just have to be interested and not say, yeah, he behaves bad ...” T: “When we do something with the class that the gifted already know, and I know they wouldn't enjoy it, I ask the gifted to prepare for competitions.”

Strategies are designed exclusively for diagnosed gifted pupils or other significantly gifted and motivated pupils. T: “I have three pupils in Math that I am preparing for competitions. The two are diagnosed as gifted, the older one isn't diagnosed, but he is also highly gifted.”

The teacher's instructions to implement the strategy are overt. She directly defines a group of gifted pupils to whom she assigns different tasks than she does to the rest of the class. Sometimes, she cannot resist directly addressing the

gifted pupils by specific names. T: “Boffins go to the table; they take their worksheets. The Logic Olympiad [a competition in logic] is here in a month.”

Gifted pupils become a preferred group here. Although other pupils are told that they can also participate in the activities, it is evident that this cannot be the case. A certain social tension in the classroom is a straightforward consequence of this action. C: “We’re the dunces here, Ms. Teacher. You’d better ask some of your prodigy who wins your Olympiads all the time.”

Teacher's assistant

Essence of the strategy is that gifted pupils participate in the teaching process together with the teacher. We identified three types of strategies: My Handy Helper, Help Each Other and Individual Projects.

My Handy Helper strategy is similar to I Have to Hire You strategy. Pupil is activated by simple activities related to teaching organization, such as handing out teaching aids, writing on the board based on dictation, organizing didactic games, advising a classmate, etc. Although teachers theoretically assign these activities to all the pupils, the essence of the task—to activate the gifted pupil—is that the target group is again an active, fast-working gifted pupil. T: “So, of course, all the pupils help me, but especially those whom I see that they need, that they need some kind of extra activity.” R: “Are those two the gifted ones?” T: “Well, of course, I use these two for the activities more often since these are the ones that are done earlier.”

Educational strategy is usually not planned by the teacher. It is applied spontaneously to respond to the actual situation, such as here:

Pupils revise. The teacher provides instructions. A gifted girl significantly interrupts the lesson with her movements and comments during the instructions. GP: “I can’t understand that you don’t get it yet.” The teacher admonishes the pupil for shouting. The girl keeps interrupting the teacher’s instructions by commenting on the lesson. After a while, the teacher requests the GP to come to the board: “You are going to be a scribe, come to the board.” The pupil writes on the board what the teacher dictates to her.

In the Czech language lesson, pupils practice synonyms and antonyms. The teacher asks a GP to go to the board and write the words uttered by his classmates in two columns (synonyms and antonyms). Then the pupils work in pairs. T: “Now, my handy helper will hand out the paper with the synonyms and antonyms, and it is up to you to divide them into columns.”

Repetition of the strategy may lead to the exclusion of the pupil from the collective or to the emergence of an inadequate self-image of the pupil:

GP is given the task of handing out corrected written work in Math. He does so by announcing the name of a classmate, demanding quiet and a raised hand of the respective classmate. Some pupils do not respect his conditions. GP: “Let’s calm down, pupils. Who are you? Say your name loud and clear.” He gives the corrected work to a classmate with the comment, “You’re such a nerd.” C1: “Well, first of all, you’re a nerd.” C2: “Teacher, they are calling each other nerds here.” C3: “Don’t play a teacher here, boy.”

At the end of a Physics lesson, the teacher seeks a volunteer to read the temperature on the thermometer and write it in the charts. No one volunteers despite repeated calls from the teacher. C: "Let Ferda (GP) get the measure. He always does it."

We named the next strategy *Help Each Other*. It is based on the idea of the gifted pupil being directed to help other classmates in solving tasks:

Pupils work independently. The ones who have finished are instructed to go to the teacher to check their solution. Those who worked out correct solutions provide the so-called "support." T: "Domčo (GP1), you have already shown us that you can do it well, so you go to Monča and support her." And "Metod (GP2), when he is done, I'll find someone for him to support ... So, who else needs support?" The teacher finds a weak pair of pupils. T: "Metod, when you finish, support the neighbors here, in front of you."

According to the teachers, the strategy helps to develop the pro-social and metacognitive skills of gifted pupils. However, the ulterior motive is the need to engage the gifted learner.

T: "Gifted have problems with emotional and social intelligence. They should develop pro-social skills in the first place so that they know how things work in normal life. The stronger ones are just supposed to take care of the weaker ones. Plus, the pupil enjoys it, and you could see that he happily accepts these tasks and doesn't get angry in that class."

All pupils theoretically perform the role of the teacher's assistant in the class. In reality, however, the "support" is done by the class's more skillful and active pupils, which logically follows from the type of activity suitable for these pupils. T: "So, of course, all the children help me in the teaching. I try to involve them equally." T: "The other gifted one, he is an introvert, that's why I don't involve him in the support. The first gifted is very active, and he needs that involvement in the support."

Preferred position of the gifted pupil performing "support" is potentially problematic. The problems can intensify in case the teacher chooses to reward the activity:

Pupils check their calculations. T: "Swap notebooks with a neighbor, and whoever finds the neighbor's mistake gets a candy for each of their mistakes." GP: "Ms. Teacher, Michal has a lot of mistakes, but we will share the candy. Or I'll make some mistakes on purpose, so Michal will get some candy on me too." T: "No, Kryštof (GP), don't make mistakes on purpose, be cooperative." After the correction, the teacher allocates candies to the children according to the number of mistakes found in the neighbor's work. T: "Well, Kryštof (GP), Michal is no good deal for you (laughs)."

Individual projects

In the Individual Projects strategy, the pupil must prepare a "project" in or out of class and then present the results of their work to classmates. Aim is the actual development of the gifted pupil in their area of interest. T: "I have a pupil who enjoys history. And he says to me, Teacher, when are we going to have these projects so I can prepare a presentation? They (GPs) are implementing it. They're learning how to present; they can respond to their classmates' questions."

Activities are directed to diagnosed gifted pupils. They can also be directed to other significantly gifted pupils without a diagnosis of giftedness; however, this seems to be a constant group of pupils. T: “Gifted who have an IEP (Individualized Education Plan), I require those presentations. I have a very bright girl there, she’s not diagnosed as gifted, but I give those presentations to her sometimes too.”

These strategies are assigned to gifted pupils regularly and are planned and evaluated. They are being assigned via explicit instruction presented in front of all the pupils, similar to positive feedback.

T: “In my class, the three gifted ones work according to our agreement. They have six projects a year. We pick the topics together here ... They work on them in class when they have finished something early, and if they want it perfect, they finish it at home.”; T: “Thank you for a perfectly prepared project ... Yes, it is definitely worth applauding. And I would assign you another project today after school ... it would be a good match for our class in about 14 days.”

SUMMARY

The first research question investigated *what educational strategies* lead to inappropriate labeling of gifted pupils. We uncovered five main strategies: Tasks for Quick-witted, Challenges, Boffins Goes to Competition, Teacher’s Assistant, Individual Projects and their sub-strategies (I Have to Hire You, Gifted Worksheets, My Handy Helper, Help Each Other). In all cases, these were strategies of internal differentiation, which we can consider one of the means of labeling gifted pupils. Strategies were applied in lessons or parts of lessons in which the teachers tried to provide the gifted pupil with ‘something extra’—to develop their talents, activate them, or otherwise (albeit dysfunctionally) make the teaching more effective for the whole class. However, we do not mean to claim that these strategies (internal differentiation) lead a priori to encouraging inappropriate labeling of gifted pupils. The identified strategies always occurred in an ethically or didactically compromised, teacher-generated context.

Furthermore, we also observed lessons where teachers did not label gifted pupils, and therefore we do not process this data here. Some teachers repeatedly did not apply strategies of internal differentiation and were based on lower educational goals. Gifted pupils were not labelled here but neither were they developed. In other cases, teachers did not repeatedly label gifted pupils but developed them appropriately by using higher educational goals and constructivist educational methods. These strategies naturally lead pupils to differentiation, and the teacher (expert) does not need to create further opportunities for differentiation and, therefore, label pupils. With this, we confirmed that labeling should be a certain part of gifted care (Coleman et al., 2015; Gates, 2010; Heward, 2013), but it is necessary to eliminate its negatives professionally.

The next question was to uncover why do the identified educational strategies lead to inappropriate labeling and what is their “inappropriateness”? Critical issue was directing differentiated strategies exclusively to one group of pupils—gifted pupils. Other pupils in the class did not cooperate on the strategies because they were not in the gifted group or were not up to the task. We further revealed that exhibiting the characteristics of traditional definition of giftedness (exceptional, highly motivated and productive individuals, see Altintas & Ilgun, 2016; Miller, 2009; Olthouse, 2014) is sufficient to label the gifted. Slow-working or conformist gifted pupils (with a gifted diagnosis) were not included in all identified educational strategies. However, formalizing the gifted attribute and preference of traditional definitions emphasizes labeling, as the labeling theory has argued (Becker, 1973; Frieh, 2019).

In this way, a specific and static group of gifted pupils was gradually created in the school classroom. Group members had privileges, for example more interesting educational offers and awards or also disbenefits (work on unstimulating tasks). Pupils rightly perceived this as unfair and voiced their disapproval. Thus, the consequences of labeling gifted pupils affected not only the gifted but also the whole school class, including the teacher. The overuse of these educational strategies then compounded the problem.

Selection was typical for all educational strategies. It could be performed by the teacher, face to face with the gifted, such as in the strategies Boffins Goes to Competition, and Teacher's Assistant. The teacher straightforwardly named the gifted and assigned specific work for them. Teachers directed the gifted to work on different topics unrelated to the lesson objective or subject content, further deepening the selection. However, the teacher usually realized the inappropriateness of this favouritism and tried to compensate for the (dysfunctional) action by constantly emphasizing the fact that anyone could join the special work. Selection was also an indirect consequence of strategies such as Gifted Worksheets, Challenges, Help Each Other or Individual Projects. This selection, implemented through the strategy (not face to face), seemed fairer at first glance but the negative consequences appeared fast. Selection gradually became so popular that the teacher used it even when it was not working (I Have to Hire You, My Handy Helper or Help Each Other). Thus, we found that the inappropriateness of labeling was mostly identified only from the consequences of the application of strategies. Teacher was therefore led to inappropriate labeling by his/her initial good intentions (i.e. to develop or activate the pupil's giftedness). We realized that modified (modern) Labeling Theories should definitely also include positive attributes associated with individuals, as these can also lead to riskiness (Barrick, 2017).

According to Labeling Theory is labelled individual (or group of individuals) highlighted, segregated from the original group into an alternative group, where the differences of group members are emphasized (Rist, 2017). In our research, segregation was reinforced by the impermeable composition of gifted groups, the rigid repetition of labeling strategies, and the overemphasis on the difference of gifted pupils and their work. According to the Labeling Theory, labeling leads to the internalization of an attribute in an individual's character, displacing the individual's natural characteristics and adopting alternative characteristics (Kolb & Jussim, 1994; Shang-Yu et al., 2020), with consequences affecting the individual's environment (as cited by Meadows & Neumann, 2017). In our research, we have also encountered the consequences of more advanced labeling stages. These included the negative self-image of the gifted, protests by classmates against the favouritism of gifted pupils, defiance of routine work by gifted pupils, abuse of advantages by the gifted, and social isolation of the gifted. Labeling had negative consequences on classmates and the teacher, who frequently got into disputes between pupils, making it difficult for her to teach successfully.

If we summarize the above, we can define in following points what constitutes the "inappropriateness" of labeling from the point of view of the application of the educational strategies we have identified. Between the means of inappropriate labeling belongs:

- Presentation of gifted pupils and their preference: Teacher increasingly presented the differences of gifted pupils, expected (only from them) higher performance and interest. With presented attitudes or applied strategies, teacher preferred (only) gifted pupils.
- Highlighted selection of gifted pupils: Selection was overused (compared to other pupils), over-emphasized, mostly unnecessary and did not lead to developing a giftedness or gifted personality.
- Rigidity and repeatability of educational strategies: If any of the strategies described above were used occasionally, they would probably not increase the labeling. If the teacher were to use the richness of educational strategies, their negativity in relation to inappropriate labeling would weaken each other.

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

Some facts limit our research and restrict the generalization of the results. We observed labeling in a specific context, which is a prerequisite for the theory to be refined. We only used observations (with paper-pencil data collection) and partly teacher interviews to identify labeling. We thus managed to collect a pile of valuable data at the expense of disadvantages (lack of insight from pupils, limited data recording). View of the studied reality was also influenced by the researchers' personalities and profession (see Materials) who became a part of the research, which is typical for qualitative research (Thurairajah, 2019).

For example, we have noticed that it is most advantageous for researchers to present themselves informally. If the researchers entered the school formally (presenting themselves as specialists in giftedness from university), the teachers began to favour and label gifted pupils at the unspoken "wish" of the researchers.

Gender imbalance of the research participants is also worth noting. The teachers (and also researchers) were all females and their views could influence the phenomena. In contrast, the gifted pupil participants were dominated by boys—approximately 70%. The Czech School Inspectorate (ČŠI, 2019) also presents a larger number of formally gifted boys—approximately 70%. This may be due to the fact that gifted boys attract more attention (than girls) and society is much more inclined to identify and develop their talents (Kerr & Huffman, 2019). For the same reason, the results of our study could also have been affected—teachers could favor gifted boys and therefore label them more intensively.

CONCLUSION

In our study, we tried to modify the Labeling Theory (of gifted individuals) and apply it in a specific context (a formally diagnosed gifted pupil studying in a mainstream elementary school). We focused on how strategies of internal differentiation can (in the initially good interest of the teacher) lead to inappropriate labeling. The unsuitability of these strategies mainly consisted in the significant preference and presentation of gifted pupils, in the inappropriate selection of gifted pupils, and the rigidity of the use of strategies.

Recommendation of eliminating inappropriate labeling does not include changing teachers' attitudes towards educating gifted pupils. The primary recommendation, in our view, is the further education of teachers, which should lie in the art of the correct application of internal differentiation. Traditionally, the functional use of Bloom's taxonomy of cognitive goals (Arievitch, 2020) and moving towards a constructivist pedagogy (Naumenko, 2020) are crucial starting points. The teacher should offer all pupils in the class the opportunity to work on all identified educational strategies. A faster learner may be cognitively weaker, as higher cognitive goals are achieved more superficially and, therefore, more quickly. The gifted pupil then gets time to attend to the challenging task (Challenges). Thus, Tasks for Quickwitted can be directed to all pupils, and Challenges are reached naturally by the gifted.

Furthermore, if the gifted pupil is preparing for competitions or solving individual projects, the teacher can differentiate the topic to include other pupils in the class. Suppose the teacher is working with higher cognitive goals and moving towards a constructivist pedagogy. In that case, the Teacher's Assistant can also be a weaker pupil who is theoretically quick-witted here. By functionally alternating between various educational strategies from transmissive to constructivist pedagogies, the teacher compensates for the disadvantages of both approaches and does not tend towards selection, hence no labeling.

A more general recommendation at the end, how to eliminate labeling, could be inspired by Borland (2005) and Gallagher (1996) about the idea of no conception of giftedness. However, the authors do not reject the concept of giftedness in general. Borland (2005)

suggests focusing on developing a differentiated curriculum for all students, while higher levels of curriculum would be open to more students (not only to “gifted”). Borland proposes to deal with students' individual differences in the next step. Both authors suggest the removal of the label “gifted student” or its mitigation (for ex. talent development), which could gradually lead to the reduction of public prejudices against gifted individuals.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The research data are available at the author of the study upon request. The data repository is provided by Tomas Bata University in Zlín.

ETHICS STATEMENT

The project was approved by the Ethics Committee of Tomas Bata University in Zlín.

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