

SCHOOL CONTRIBUTIONS IN THE RECOGNITION OF STUDENTS WITH HIGH CAPACITIES

CONTRIBUIÇÕES DA ESCOLA NO RECONHECIMENTO DE ESTUDANTES COM ALTAS CAPACIDADES

CONTRIBUCIONES ESCOLARES EN EL RECONOCIMIENTO DE ESTUDIANTES CON ALTAS CAPACIDADES

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ABSTRACT: It is believed that the best means to contribute to the development of the potential of students with high capacity are found in school. Its responsibility is to provide a project that effectively leads to the development of children with potential above average. This paper presents a research whose theme addresses the school's contribution to the recognition of the most capable students. It aims to identify, in the teachers' view, when it is easier to see the signs of high capacity of students in the school environment. As a methodological procedure for collecting information, questioning was applied to 36 teachers from the Municipal Education Network. The responses were analyzed according to the Content Analysis constructs proposed by Bardin (2011). The results revealed that the difficulties encountered by teachers reiterate the importance and the improvement of teacher training meetings for the task of recognizing students with high capacities.

KEYWORDS: Teacher training. Giftedness and talent. High capacities.

RESUMO: *Acredita-se que os melhores meios para contribuir com o desenvolvimento do potencial dos estudantes com capacidade elevada encontram-se na escola. É dela a responsabilidade de prover um projeto que conduza efetivamente ao desenvolvimento das crianças sinalizadas com potencial acima da média. Este trabalho expõe uma pesquisa cujo tema aborda a contribuição da escola no reconhecimento de estudantes mais capazes. Tem como objetivo identificar, na visão dos professores, quando é mais fácil visualizar os sinais de capacidade elevada dos estudantes no ambiente escolar. Como procedimento metodológico para coleta de informações, foi aplicado o questionamento a 36 professores da Rede de Ensino Municipal. As respostas foram analisadas conforme os construtos da Análise de Conteúdo propostos por Bardin (2011). Os resultados revelaram que as dificuldades encontradas pelos professores reiteram a importância e a melhoria das reuniões de formação docente para a tarefa de reconhecimento dos estudantes com altas capacidades.*

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PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Formação de professores. Dotação e talento. Altas capacidades.*

RESUMEN: *Se cree que los mejores medios para contribuir al desarrollo del potencial de los estudiantes con alta capacidad se encuentran en la escuela. Es su responsabilidad proporcionar un proyecto que conduzca efectivamente al desarrollo de niños con un potencial superior al promedio. Este trabajo expone una investigación cuya temática aborda la contribución de la escuela al reconocimiento de estudiantes más capaces. Tiene como objetivo identificar, a juicio de los profesores, cuándo es más fácil ver los signos de alta capacidad de los alumnos en el entorno escolar. Como procedimiento metodológico de recolección de información, se aplicó el interrogatorio a 36 docentes de la Red Municipal de Educación. Las respuestas se analizaron de acuerdo con los constructos de análisis de contenido propuestos por Bardin (2011). Los resultados revelaron que las dificultades encontradas por los docentes reiteran la importancia y la mejora de los encuentros de formación docente para la tarea de reconocer a los estudiantes con altas capacidades.*

PALAVRAS-CLAVE: *Formación de profesores. Asignación y talento. Altas capacidades.*

Introduction

For many of us, thinking about high skills is to remember those most famous characters who marked humanity with their great works: Albert Einstein, Mozart, Isaac Newton and many others considered to be great creative geniuses. Virgolim (2007) warns that these extraordinary minds were not born entirely ready-made. And he compares this development process to what happens to children in school life. Not all of them enter school fully aware of their talents. Many do not have the opportunity to explore their potential during the first few years of life and their abilities can be hidden for many years and even a lifetime. Thus, the author reinforces the importance of recognizing and validating the talents of students in the early years of the school year.

Alencar (2009) considers that rapid advances have been observed in the most diverse areas, generating new challenges for teaching. And he assures that it is no longer enough to teach what is known, but to prepare the student to question, reflect, change and create. It shows that in many countries there is a concern to expand and make better use of the talent and potential present in individuals so that they are able to face and solve problems with effort, talent and creativity. Thus, preparing the student to deal with problems can provide better conditions for the development and expression of creative thinking in the classroom.

For the author, many Brazilians are unaware that the potential present in human beings is immense and, even so, it has been used in a limited way. She points out that many

capacities remain inhibited and blocked for lack of stimulation, encouragement and a favorable environment for their development.

The idea of developing potential results from a feeling of hope for better days for man's future. For Guenther (2006), human capacity can be considered the most stable natural resource that exists, as it is renewed with each generation. People with high capacity, according to the author, are more able to face adverse situations, learning, acting and finding solutions that help build promising paths for the future.

Guenther (2013) asserts that the best means to contribute to the development of the potential of students with high ability are found in school. When the community recognizes the presence of talented young people in the school environment and understands the need for a project that also meets the interests of these students, it can and should contribute through several actions: recognizing and identifying the most capable students; providing material and providing learning situations compatible with the potential and interest of the identified students; and looking for concrete help from the local community to promote good projects and specialized support to ensure the success of the educational project.

Thus, in this work, we seek to demonstrate not only the relevance of the teacher's role in the process of identifying the most capable, but also to highlight the importance of the involvement of the school community in developing the potential of the identified students.

It is important to remember that the school is not always prepared to meet the needs of all students. And also, that it is its responsibility to provide a project that effectively leads to the development of children with above-average potential. Unfortunately, in school practice, we realize that the most capable children receive nothing more than what is offered to all average students, as observed by Guenther (2013, p. 16, our translation):

Most gifted children are invisible at school, treated at an average class level, subjected to a diet of activities and occupations below their capacity, interests, and educational needs, with no chance of developing their potential other than by chance.

The author states that it would be necessary to strive to raise the level of those who already demonstrate superior mastery, a work that can start through the involvement of all educators in the process of recognizing gifted students within the school environment and especially in the educational interventions that will be carried out later. Another aspect pointed out by her is the fact that this student must become visible to the eyes of all professionals who work at the school. It is essential that the Management Team promote the involvement of the entire school community (faculty, technical, administrative and auxiliary

staff) in this task, as everyone is responsible for the development and formation of each student as a citizen and as a human being. This is an important attitude for all students in the school, not just the highly capable, as everyone needs to feel motivated, interested and encouraged to move forward with their ideas and interests. In the case of more capable students, this is a measure that can make a big difference in their academic performance and in the development of their potential.

The objective of this work is to identify, in the view of teachers, when it is easier to visualize the signs of high capacity of students in the school environment. Therefore, as a methodological procedure, the following question was carried out to 36 teachers from the Municipal Education Network of a city in the interior of São Paulo: When is it easier for you to visualize the signs of high abilities/skills in your students?

This research is based on the contributions of Alencar (2009), Gagné (2004), Guenther (2006; 2011; 2013), Virgolim (2007) and Sabatella (2008) among other authors.

The expectation around the results of this research is to highlight the situations of everyday school life that favor the observation of signs of high potential, thus facilitating the teacher's view of signaling and the development of capacities identified in the school environment.

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Intervention strategies for observation, signaling and identification of students with high abilities

To identify a child with above-average potential in the school environment, it is necessary to see the signs that he or she manifests. According to Guenther (2013), the gifted or more capable child presents superior production in some identifiable area; shows signs that their production could be better than it is. In addition, they may have low production, showing boredom and little effort due to lack of motivation for the proposed activity. Presents good production in non-curricular areas, demonstrating curiosity in various subjects and willingness to deepen knowledge; their performance is marked by originality and individuality in situations of school life; likes to express their opinions; makes pertinent comments regarding the subject worked in the class and makes their own decisions; demonstrates interest and preference for some types of activities, expressing their predilection for certain subjects or practices suggested at school. They can also demonstrate rejection for certain situations; as

well as signaling good quality in ideas, actions and responses, evidencing a broad view of the world and good argumentation.

For Guenther (2011), developing talent means seeking high levels of performance through teaching, instructions, exercises and practice. In order to reach high performance standards, she points out some necessary conditions inherent to the individual, such as: will, effort, desire to develop and inner availability to seek and receive education; in addition to time, discipline, dedication and effort to ensure progress in improving the activity.

Along this path, the author states that factors that develop the natural capacity or endowment are not taught, as they act in unplanned ways such as: maturation, informal and unsystematic spontaneous learning, daily living and life experience that are acquired through living together and varied opportunities. Guenther (2011) considers these aspects as chance circumstances. Therefore, to circumvent the unexpected and accelerate the development of human capacity, it is necessary to intensify the action, offering the students marked experiences lived, ensuring that they actually take interest in what is being offered through a concrete experience.

The author clarifies that learning takes root insofar as it takes place concretely. Therefore, their choices are related to the subjects studied, information received and skills acquired. As Guenther (2011) states, concrete learning and good results are directly related to the density of planned and carried out experiences, the degree of diversity of the experiences obtained and the degree of complexity and depth of the situations and content developed in each activity performed.

To ensure validity in solid learning, educational intervention must be calibrated by what the student experiences, and not by the content to be learned (GUENTHER, 2011, p. 98). The author also states that learning can result from a deliberate process through a pedagogical intervention. In this case, attention should not be focused on what the child has already learned, but on what potential they still have to achieve.

For the endowment to develop, the child must be inserted in environments of everyday, natural and varied experience, with a wide network of informal education and in periods of time that allow sedimentation of the lived experience, as pointed out by Guenther (2013). She also highlights that informal education encompasses world expansion, socializing with peers, influence of “admirable” people, clarification of values and internal learning of being and of random events.

Cupertino and Arantes (2008) list actions that may be viable to develop the potential of students identified as having high abilities within the school environment, such as:

deepening the study; development of interdisciplinary projects; establishment of partnerships; formation of groups of common interests; creation of individual work plans; with the record of production and processes experienced at school; partnership with city halls, universities, private companies and volunteers. In addition, mentions teacher formation for observation and signaling of students with high abilities.

The author justifies that these strategies can make it possible to serve the most capable population only by using existing spaces, such as schools, for example. She also claims that class councils can help identify students with above-average potential, especially after grade 6, when the vision of all teachers is very important. The continuous evaluation of the processes, according to Cupertino and Arantes (2008), is relevant both in identifying and meeting the needs of the identified students.

What every teacher needs to know

Guenther (2013) emphasizes that capacity is not a fixed trait and can be developed as part of the influence exerted by the environment. As stated by Gagné (2004), it exists since birth as a potential, which can be stimulated, or inhibited, by the quality and diversity of the interaction between genetic plan predispositions and environmental conditions. The gifted child can be considered equal to the others, with attributes specific to the age group, subject to the same influences of the physical and sociocultural environment. However, they differ from most of their peers in that they perform remarkably better than the others. It is also very important to note that high ability in one or more areas does not ensure superior performance in all areas. And, finally, good performance and good grades can indicate ability in intelligence, but this is not the only sign, nor should it be seen in isolation from the others. There are other situations of a non-intellectual nature to learn in school, in life and in the peer group.

The best way to capture high natural capacity, according to Guenther (2013), is to consider the child's natural production, expressed in their own way of perceiving, learning, responding and acting. This is a process developed over time, based on the sequence of real events, guided by continuous, direct and systematic observation, in the various situations of action, production and performance in which the child is involved, in the classroom, in and out of school.

Guenther (2013) mentions that teachers are the most indicated to detect signs of high ability in children, based on what normally happens in the classroom. She considers it

necessary for the teacher to be prepared to understand what he is looking for through guidance on what to observe in the classroom context.

For the author, it is necessary to notice something that the child does well: good ideas, good production, interesting and timely comments, careful and detailed observation, safe conclusions, with performance in concrete tasks. She cites as examples: essays, drawings, constructions, musical pieces, repairs to mechanisms that do not work, suggestions on classroom arrangements and help to colleagues. In this sense, teacher education can be an effective strategy for clarifying doubts and promoting more reliable criteria for identifying domains without considering only signs of cognitive ability.

In this sense, as Virgolim (2007) asserts, schools should be concerned with stimulating creative productivity and intensifying the quality of learning experiences for all students, offering the opportunities, resources and encouragement necessary for them to reach their maximum potential.

To obtain an environment that favors the manifestation of signs of ability and talent, Guenther (2013) suggests that the classroom be rethought in order to provide students with an atmosphere of freedom and respect for their productions. Thus, the teacher can: a) promote an environment of natural respect and discipline, praising the commitment and effort to do well and carry out what is started, paying attention and listening carefully to what students have to say; b) provide time and space for classroom initiative, in order to locate potential and capacity in students, planning must have some space to detail actions and introduce changes discussed between the teacher and the class; c) create diversified opportunities with a minimum of instructions and promote opportunities for action and interaction between students and professors, even during periods of curricular content teaching; d) recognizing varied expressions of thought, as well as recognizing not only the logic of linear thinking, but also that of non-linear thinking, favoring creative and innovative manifestations.

In addition to the classroom, Guenther (2013) emphasizes that it is possible to perceive signs of student talent in other places and in different situations beyond the school environment. At recess, when the children are free, living naturally with their peers; on educational tours, when they can freely express what they feel and know about the context; at festive ceremonies, fairs, theater, dance or music performances; in relationships with adults; and in other situations where their manifestations are spontaneous.

In order to motivate students to demonstrate their talents, Guenther (2013) recommends that teachers broaden their view of different perspectives in relation to the development of skills, elaborating questions, expanding limits to knowledge, proposing

challenges, encouraging the emergence of new associations and analogies and, finally, stimulating the student's research spirit.

Alencar (2009) highlights the importance of creating a favorable climate for the development of creativity in the classroom. For that, one of the fundamental measures is the receptivity to new ideas. As an example, the author suggests that opportunities be given for the student to raise questions, elaborate and test hypotheses, disagree, propose alternative interpretations, critically assess facts, concepts, principles and ideas.

In this sense, it is necessary for the teacher to have an attitude of respect for the issues raised, regardless of their degree of relevance. She also states that not all creative ideas occur quickly and immediately, so it is necessary to allow time for the student to manifest spontaneously. Encouraging students to reflect on what knowledge they would like to deepen can also be an excellent opportunity to help develop students' potential.

The author also ponders about the climate of threat and fear, which is often present in our schools, which should give way to the desire to take risks, to experiment and freedom to innovate and explore new ideas, without fear of judgment or evaluation. For the author, the students must be valued in their productions, contributions and ideas, eliminating barriers to the development of creativity in schools.

Materials and methods

This research was carried out with teachers from 3rd to 5th grade of elementary school, from the Municipal Education Network of a city in the interior of São Paulo, who annually participate in the process of signaling and identifying students with above-average potential from their comparable group. Signaling occurs through the completion of an observation guide that makes up the Pathways to Develop Potential and Talent – CEDET methodology, which was designed to lead the development of students' potential in one or more domains of capacity.

The items presented on the form represent the signs that can be expressed by students: general intelligence, mathematical ability, verbal ability, creative and socio-affective talent. The teacher's main task is to observe which students excel in one or more of the signs present in the guide without being tied to tests or assessment activities. Students with consistent signs are enrolled from the 6th year onwards in a Potential and Talent Development Program in order to develop their skills through after-school activities.

The Program is maintained by the City Hall and provides registered students with experiences with professionals with a high degree of competence and admirable qualities that meet the most diverse interests expressed by students up to the 9th grade of elementary school.

In order to identify, in the view of teachers, when it is easier to visualize the signs of high capacity of students in the school environment, the following question was applied to 36 teachers of the Municipal Education Network as a methodological procedure for collecting information: When is it easier for you to visualize the signs of high ability in your students?

For the analysis of the answers to the question, Bardin's (2011) content analysis constructs were used, which aims to analyze the content of the answers beyond their immediate meanings. As stated by Bardin (2011), content analysis is established from the correlation between semantic or linguistic structures and the psychological or sociological structures of statements, thus reaching other meanings of a psychological, sociological, political and historical nature. Bardin (2011) emphasizes the role of inference in content analysis, which is portrayed by the author as a set of communication analysis techniques, in order to obtain, through systematic procedures for describing the content of statements, indicators (quantitative or not), which allow the inference of knowledge related to the conditions of production of the messages.

In this research, we chose the theme as the unit of record. The themes that emerged in the survey participants' responses were grouped into categories under a generic heading. Thus, it is possible to enter the meaning of the words arising from the participants' responses, reaching meanings that go beyond what is literally expressed by the respondent.

After reading the responses of all research participants, data interpretation and inferences were made according to the procedures of Content Analysis by Bardin (2011). For this, explicit and implicit meanings in the responses were observed, examining differences in meaning between the contents of the statements and the common points presented by the participants.

In this way, it was possible to establish categories that represented the most favorable situations, in the view of teachers, for the observation of signs of high abilities among students in the school environment. Frequency (F) and percentage (P) refer to the number of times the category is mentioned in the answers given by them, and not the number of survey participants. Therefore, the same survey participant can be included in several categories.

The table below addresses the question: When is it easier for you to see signs of high ability in your students?

Table 1 – Moments pointed out by teachers

Analysis Categories	F	P	Examples
During classes and activities carried out with demonstration of high student performance	18	50,0%	Teacher 1: "During classes there is always someone who goes above and beyond who shows more interest." Teacher 3: "When they are great students, in works where colleagues ask questions all the time, they remember details of old content and are very quick to carry out the work. The activities that entertain the class are over in a few minutes." Teacher 11: "I find it easy when I perceive above-average talents in relation to mathematics, interest in complex subjects for the age group and ease with manual work." Teacher 17: "During the teaching-learning process in the classroom with their arguments, posture, communication, problem-solving interventions and the student himself has the autonomy to go in search of problem solving in the conceptual, attitudinal and procedural aspects." Teacher 20: "When he excels at a certain skill." Teacher 31: "At the moment they are carrying out the proposed activities." Teacher 36: "When we work on specific assessment activities in the classroom, where, in one way or another, we measure the progress of students, it is possible to identify students who are above average."
During playful, natural, spontaneous and diverse activities	11	30,6%	Teacher 2: "In collective and playful activities [...]." Teacher 4: "In differentiated activities [...]." Teacher 5: "In situations that favor spontaneity [...]." Teacher 10: "In moments of relaxation [...]." Teacher 16: "[...] we develop different and extra-class activities, as students feel safer and act more naturally, showing signs of high capacity." Teacher 33: "[...] common situations [...]."
During collective or group activities	10	27,7%	Teacher 2: "In collective and playful activities such as games [...]." Teacher 5: "[...] In group work situations [...]." Teacher 12: "[...] at the time of the game, of a gymkhana [...]." Teacher 13: "[...] in group activities, conversation circles and class socialization, content, in group." Teacher 35: "In group activities [...]."
During interaction with students	8	22,2%	Teacher 4: "[...] observing the relationship between them [...]." Teacher 22: "When the environment of study and coexistence allows students to put everything they know on the table, without prejudice or shame, without fear, so that they feel more at ease." Teacher 27: "In conversations where they show their interests [...]." Teacher 30: "When I establish moments of conversation with students, paying attention to their questions. Observing their curiosity, their desire to know the issues, their desire to help and participate and their empathy and socialization."
Other Answers	6	16,6%	Teacher 6: "I believe in the second semester of the school year, when we already had a whole semester to get to know the kids." Profess 25: "When they bring concepts or content that do not relate to their age of study. Also when it is evident that the subjects discussed in the

Analysis Categories	F	P	Examples
			classroom are uninteresting or boring." Teacher 32: "In everyday activities in specific situations." Teacher 34: "When I allow them to be protagonists."

Source: Devised by the authors

The first category of the question was mentioned by 18 teachers, that is, 50% of the participants, who answered that it is easier to visualize the signs of high abilities during classes and activities carried out with demonstration of high student performance. Teachers point out in their answers that there are always students who, through relevant questions and observations, demonstrate interests beyond what was expected. Quick thinking and agility in carrying out the work are also considered signs of high ability by teachers. Another aspect mentioned as a sign of potential is the expanded worldview, characterized by interest in complex issues, arguments presented and autonomy in solving problems. Professor 11 points out the facility in relation to mathematics and manual work as visible signs of high potential. Furthermore, Professor 36 believes it is possible to identify students with above-average potential through specific classroom assessment activities.

These responses emphasize classroom performance for student identification. However, as observed by Sabatella (2008), it is not possible to use only academic and traditional analysis tools, since not all students learn in the same way or have the same type of intelligence, justifying careful observation and the use of diversified identification processes as a complement to the signaling process of the ability domains.

The second category has 30.6% of participants, who understand that the best way to identify signs of ability would be during playful, natural and diversified activities. In their responses, the teachers point out that moments of relaxation are favorable to the natural manifestation of students, showing spontaneous signs of high abilities. Professor 33 cites everyday situations as valuable evidence of high ability. This idea is seen by Guenther (2011), when she reiterates that, through everyday activities and varied situations, it is possible to recognize the areas in which students are most interested or present their best productions.

The third category of the question presents 27.7% of teachers stating that it is easier to show signs of potentiality during collective or group activities. They point out in their answers that games, gymkhanas and conversation circles are appropriate opportunities for the expression of natural signs of high potential among students. This confirms what is explained by Guenther (2011) when showing that diversified activities with little instruction can favor

interaction between students, creating situations in which those who know more about a particular subject demonstrate and share their knowledge with colleagues.

The question also presents the fourth and last category with 22.2% of teachers mentioning interaction with students as one of the main ways to stimulate signs of high ability. These teachers consider in their answers good relationships, dialogue and active listening as important principles to obtain from students the expression of interests, questions and general knowledge. Teacher 22 states that such behavior is relevant for the student to show himself at ease in his manifestations. And Professor 30 justifies that, through dialogue, it is possible to observe the students' curiosity, interest and desire to learn about other subjects. Thus, we infer that the teachers mentioned are concerned with the natural respect that Guenther (2011) associates with the act of listening carefully to what children have to say about their desires, interests and questions. Such an attitude can provide the student with freedom to manifest talents and potential to be developed.

Final considerations

Of the 36 teachers who answered the questionnaire, 18 stated that it is easier to see signs of high ability in their students during classes and activities performed with demonstration of high student performance. Another 11 teachers highlighted playful, natural, spontaneous and diversified activities as the most favorable to the manifestation of potential. Only 10 teachers mentioned the moments of collective or group activities as being the best for the expression of high capacity. And 8 teachers mentioned the situations of interaction with students as being conducive to the observation of signs of potential.

The statements made in the first category seem to demonstrate that academic activities and assessment results, in the teachers' opinion, are the most favorable to the manifestation of signs of high capacity. However, for the CEDET methodology, the real signals are captured through playful, natural, spontaneous, diversified activities and also in collective activities in which there is interaction between students or teachers. In this type of activity, it is possible to perceive the students' natural ability, what they bring with them and what demonstrates the potential to be developed. Therefore, it is possible to see that there are still misconceptions regarding the activities that truly stimulate the manifestation of signs of high abilities. This aspect can be considered relevant for the elaboration of a formative proposal for teachers.

Recognizing the presence of gifted and talented children at school requires a philosophical, attitudinal and pedagogical position from all educators. In addition to the

commitment of schools, there must be courage to face the challenge of guiding students towards the development of personality traits and attitudes that contribute to the development of potential and talent.

As educators, we have a duty to ensure that all children whose educational project is under the responsibility of the school receive what they need so that they can develop as much as they can. Assisting the most capable means offering them instruments that enable their development, that expand their potential and that provide a level of personal satisfaction that favors their participation in the community in which they are inserted. In this way, we will be contributing to the formation of citizens who are more confident in their potential and in their effective role in social development.

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