

Conference on the Fostering and Development of Talent

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Identification of children's abilities with respect to their cultural background

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- **Giftedness** may be perceived as a collection of hereditary dispositions.

However, the giftedness observed by psychologists and pedagogues certainly cannot be defined in this way.

- **In our conception**, giftedness is a complex of *phenotypic* preconditions of various activities and achievements.

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- *Research Institute for Child Psychology and Pathopsychology* deals with the issue of giftedness and gifted children nearly 40 years.

Key findings:

- Giftedness is made up of a complex of instrumental (especially abilities), activating (motivation, interests, will), and self-regulating personality characteristics.
- Giftedness is not a stable attribute. It develops over the life course on the base of hereditary dispositions, under the influence of environment and education, socialization and enculturation.

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- It is useful to look at the giftedness not as an exceptional property of a few gifted people, but rather as *a quality enjoyed by all*.
- So, the question is not: “Does he/she have giftedness?” but “What is his/her giftedness?”
- Such approach allows detecting and developing talents also there, where nobody looked for them in the past – among variously disadvantaged people.

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- We assess gifted individuals (people with outstanding giftedness) according to results of their real activities.
- Often (especially in children), giftedness should be assessed as a potential for an activity that has not been performed yet – in such case we use different tests.

Our experience with testing:

- Culture-free tests trusted by previous generations of psychologists are a chimera.
- No test exists that could be adequately used across cultures.

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- The Research Institute prepares Slovak versions and Slovak norms of several ability tests.
- In fact, human abilities and giftedness can be assessed only in relation to the members of his/her own culture.

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Examples from researches:

- *Preschool age* – Slovak children dominate in abstract thinking, German children dominate in social (practical) thinking.
- *School age* – ability structure is changing adequately to Slovak and German school curricula.
- *Secondary school age* – German students dominate in the reasoning, Slovak students dominate in memory ability.

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- The tests constructed for the majority population are not suitable for testing of disadvantaged groups.
- In our Institute, we have experience with testing of *children with disabilities*.

For such children, it is necessary to modify test tasks, their administration and evaluation.

We also found a few gifted disabled children and we worked with them.

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- *Roma children living in segregated settlements* represent a distinctive disadvantaged group.

As far as this group, we are still unable to identify intellectually gifted individuals. Their life experience and cultural background are quite different from the experience and background of majority children.

- The problem is to find adequate tools that could be used for true assessing their abilities.

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- If they were assessed by Slovak tests, a lot of Roma children would be considered as children with intelligence disorder.
- Therefore, a few years ago, we have developed an instrument which enables to exclude mental retardation in Roma children (*RR Screening Test*).
- Currently, we are constructing *Individual School Readiness Test*.

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Experience gained from our research work:

- Test content must respect experiences that children could actually get.

These are often different in various regions, schools and settlements.

Therefore, evaluation of accuracy of a particular answer may be different in different children.

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Example from RR Screening test:



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Example from RR Screening test:

The standard solution of the majority child:



1. The girl is sleeping;



2. She is getting up and dressing;



3. She is eating her breakfast;



4. She is leaving.

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Example from RR Screening test:

Alternative Answer of Roma Child:



1. The girl is sleeping;



2. She is getting up and dressing;



3. She is going to school;



4. There she will get a dish.

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Example from RR Screening test:

Alternative Answer of Roma Child:



1. The girl is outside;



2. She will eat at home;



3. She will undress;



4. She is going to bed.

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Example from RR Screening test:

Alternative Answer of Roma Child:



1. The girl is eating
at school;



2. She is leaving;



3. She will undress
at home;



4. She is going
to bed.

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Other cultural particularities of Roma children:

- They attention problems distort their test results; the tasks should be short.
- They use the limited language code; the testing should be non-verbal.
- They are not familiar with the language of visual art; drawings are less appropriate than photos and manipulation with concrete materials.

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Other cultural particularities of Roma children:

An example
of a memory task
from Individual
School Readiness Test



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Other cultural particularities of Roma children:

- They have a different value system; the tasks of elimination are not appropriate for them.
- Boys usually achieve better results than girls in Roma communities; it is necessary to look for tasks in which the girls are not disadvantaged.

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- So be it it will be possible to search and to find talents in Roma settlements, we must learn to assess the abilities of *all* Roma children without bias, and to enable *everyone* to obtain quality education.
- Exceptional talents are developed where they have a sufficiently large and quality basis.

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Thank you for your attention.

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