

**CHARLES UNIVERSITY IN PRAGUE**  
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DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

Learning English: Exceptional ways and needs of exceptional  
children

Master Thesis

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**Declaration of autorship**

I hereby declare that I have written this diploma thesis without any help from others and without the use of documents and aids other than those stated below and that I have cited them correctly according to established academic citation rules.

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signature

## **Acknowledgements**

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## Contents

|  |    |
|--|----|
| 1 Theory of the exceptional.....                             | 3  |
| 1.1 The Gift.....  | 3  |
| 1.1.1 Different types of the gift.....                       | 6  |
| 1.2 History of the interest in and research of the Gift..... | 9  |
| 1.2.1 Pathological line.....                                 | 9  |
| 1.2.2 Biological line.....                                   | 10 |
| 1.2.3 Psychoanalytic line.....                               | 11 |
| 1.2.4 Environmental line.....                                | 12 |
| 1.2.5 Modern research of the giftedness .....                | 14 |
| 1.2.5.1 Marland Report.....                                  | 16 |
| 1.3 Models of giftedness.....                                | 18 |
| 1.3.1 Three-Ring Model.....                                  | 18 |
| 1.3.2 Model of giftedness by F.J. Mönks.....                 | 19 |
| 1.3.3 “4+4+1” Model of giftedness .....                      | 20 |
| 1.4 Three gifts for a gifted child.....                      | 21 |
| 1.4.1 Family.....  | 21 |
| 1.4.2 School.....  | 24 |
| 1.4.2.1 Four groups of gifted students.....                  | 26 |
| 1.4.3 Friends.....   | 27 |
| 1.5 The case study of Jane.....                              | 31 |
| 1.5.1 Conclusion.....  | 32 |
| 1.6 Enrichment and acceleration.....                         | 33 |
| 1.6.1 Enrichment.....  | 34 |
| 1.6.1 Acceleration.....                                      | 36 |
| 1.6.2 Conclusion on Acceleration and Enrichment.....         | 39 |
| 1.7 The importance of good teacher.....                      | 40 |
| 1.7.1 Demands on the teacher.....                            | 40 |
| 1.7.2 Teacher of the gifted.....                             | 42 |
| 1.7.3 Working with gifted students.....                      | 44 |
| 1.7.4 Difficulties of teachers of the gifted students.....   | 45 |
| 1.7.5 Education of the gifted in the Czech Republic.....     | 46 |
| 1.7.5.1 Mensa gymnázium.....                                 | 46 |
| 1.7.5.2 My visit on Mensa gymnázium.....                     | 47 |
| 1.7.5.3 Conclusion on the visit of Mensa gymnázium.....      | 49 |
| 1.8 Perceptions of a teacher.....                            | 50 |
| 1.8.1.1 Interview with Jane.....                             | 51 |
| 1.8.1.2 Interview with Josef.....                            | 55 |
| 1.8.2 Conclusion on the perception of a teacher’s role.....  | 59 |
| 2 Alternative ways of teaching English.....                  | 60 |
| 2.1 Summer Camps of Mensa and their purpose.....             | 61 |
| 2.1.1 English section in the program of summer camps.....    | 63 |
| 2.2 English section on summer camps today.....               | 64 |
| 2.2.1 Conclusion.....  | 68 |
| 2.3 Three alternative ways of teaching English.....          | 69 |
| 2.3.1 Board Games.....                                       | 69 |
| 2.3.1.1 Board games suitable for teaching English.....       | 70 |
| 2.3.1.2 Summary on the Use of the Board games:.....          | 75 |
| 2.3.2 LARP .....   | 76 |
| 2.3.2.1 Possible use of LARP in teaching English:.....       | 77 |
| 2.3.2.2 Midsummer Night’s Dream – description of a LARP..... | 78 |

|  |    |
|--|----|
| 2.3.2.3 Conclusion.....  | 79 |
| 2.3.3 Drama Education.....   | 79 |
| 2.3.3.1 Possible use of drama education in teaching English.....                   | 80 |
| 2.3.3.2 The Children of Lir – Example of the possibilities of drama education..... | 81 |
| 2.3.3.3 Conclusion on Drama Education.....   | 82 |
| 2.4 Conclusion on alternative ways of teaching English.....                        | 84 |
| 3 Final conclusion.....  | 85 |



## **Introduction**

In my diploma thesis, I deal with themes of giftedness, gifted children and gifted education. I am also concerned with the perception of these themes by the rest of the society, the support of which is essential for a successful and healthy development of a gifted child. Also, in the second part of my thesis, I deal with unusual methods of teaching English, the use of which- in my opinion- can be a great benefit for the ever curious gifted children.

I believe that it is a right of every person to be educated in a way that is best for him or her. Gifted children represent no exception. Despite this fact, their themes and their issues often lack understanding of the surrounding society or they are perceived as something exotic, unnatural. This fact is represented by several myths surrounding the gifted population which lead to the ongoing misinterpretation of many of their needs and habits.

My diploma thesis is divided into two main parts.

In the first part, I present the description of the main topics connected to the themes of giftedness and gifted population, such as methods of enrichment and acceleration, which can be used for a better education of the gifted. The main problems surrounding the gifted are presented in another chapter, as well as important institutions which can help, such as the institution of family or school. The historical development of the perception of the theme of giftedness is also described.

Another important chapter of the first part is about teachers of the gifted and their important roles in the development of gifted students. Also, through series of interviews one can learn about the perception of the teachers as seen by both gifted and non-gifted students. One can see the differences between the views of these two groups as well as points of view on which both groups agreed.

In the second part, I present alternative ways of teaching English, as unusual approaches often works extremely well when combined with the curiosity of the gifted. The activities of Mensa of the Czech Republic, as one of the leading institutions concerned with the themes of giftedness, are described with special focus on the summer Mensa camps for the gifted.

In writing the first part of this diploma thesis, I gladly accepted the help of books and articles written by such authors as Jolana Laznibátová, Václav and Jitka Fořtík, Lenka Hříbková, Erika Landau and others, each of them representing a leading authority in the field of giftedness and education of the gifted. For the description of the role of the teacher as viewed by gifted and non-gifted students, I used the method of half-structured interview and parts of my research from previous years, concerning this theme. I also visited Mensa gymnázium and conducted a survey there in order to understand issues of the gifted better and in more detail.

In the second part of this diploma thesis dealing with alternative methods in teaching English, I base many of my remarks mainly on my research and on my personal experience of several years spent on summer camps and other activities of Mensa of the Czech Republic as one of the lecturers and later as the head of the drama section.

The main questions I wanted to ask were: “Is the amount of support for the gifted students and gifted population in general sufficient in our country?”, “Are teachers prepared for and aware of the special educational and social needs of the gifted?”, “How do the gifted perceive their surroundings?” and “Can alternative ways of teaching English bring more motivation and enthusiasm into the teaching process?”

These are the main questions of my diploma thesis. On the following pages, I will try to answer them.



# 1 THEORY OF THE EXCEPTIONAL

## 1.1 THE GIFT

At the beginning of the thesis dealing with specific learning techniques and special learning habits of the gifted children, it is necessary to define the essential term of this thesis – to define the term of the gift. But this definition can be rather difficult. One of the leading authorities in Slovakia, focusing on the theme of the gift and gifted children, Jolana Laznibátová, stresses that although around the world the issue of the gift and the gifted children is well elaborated (it is studied for about a hundred years), in our country it is even nowadays only an area of interest of a few specialists. In their book *Nadané dítě a rozvoj jeho schopností* (Praha, 2007) Václav Fořtík and Jitka Fořtíková state, that amongst the theoreticians there is no concord, when dealing with two similar terms, namely the gift and the talent<sup>2</sup>. These two terms are often interchanged, especially by the laic population. Fořtík and Fořtíková in their book state the fact that the understanding of the gift depends on the point of view and therefore it can be understood as:

1. Qualitatively-distinctive summary of abilities, which enable successful administration of an activity.
2. General abilities or general elements of abilities, which enable the capabilities of a human being, the level and characteristics of its actions.
3. Intellectual potential or intelligence; a complete individualistic characteristics of cognitive possibilities and learning capabilities.
4. Summary of talents, of congenital givenness, a manifestation of the level and abilities of congenital prerequisites.
5. A talent, existence of inner prerequisites for achieving exceptional results in an activity.<sup>3</sup>

Probably the most common definition of the gift, as can be found in Jolana Laznibatová's *Nadané dieťa* (Bratislava, 2001), is that the gift should be perceived as an exceptional general level of intellectual development and this level is for a longer period of time (for several years) to a great degree constant<sup>4</sup>. This understanding of the term is accepted in most of the countries around the world<sup>5</sup>. The second term, which is very closely tied to the term of the gift is *the talent*. According to J. Laznibatová, a talented person will show his or her exceptional and highly specific skills mostly in areas like music, arts, dance or sport<sup>6</sup>. Laznibatová also states, that one can see talented individuals in all those people, the gift of whose is not academic and in those cases their talent often does not correlate with high IQ, therefore it does not correlate with high level of intellectual development.<sup>7</sup> She also presents the opinion of E. Winner (1996), who states, that both the gift and the talent share the same triadic model, which is as follows:

1. Gifted individuals reach early maturity (be it either physical/mental)
2. They require minimal help or support from the adults for succeeding in an area, in which their gift lies.
3. They want to excel in the area, in which they are gifted and they devote almost all of their time to it, without any external influence.<sup>8</sup>

Václav and Jitka Fořtík state that the talent can be defined as a high degree of the evolution of skills, mostly special ones. They continue by saying that one can speak about the talent on the basis of outcomes of activities of an individual, which show a certain degree of novelty, or originality of approach. Similarly to J. Laznibatová, they stress the importance of the talent in such areas of art such as music, dancing or acting.<sup>9</sup>

On the other hand there are many authorities (F.J. Mönks, I.H. Ypenburg, A.J. Tannenbaum, V. Dočkal, L. Hříbková etc.) who use these two terms as synonyms, as the differences between these terms are still vague.<sup>10</sup>

As we continue to search for the definition of the gift, one can use the help of *Psychologický slovník* by Pavel and Helena Hartl (Praha, 2009), where the definition of the gift is as follows: "*the gift (is) a set of talents functioning as*

*an assumption for a successful development of skills; it is mostly used in connection with individuals performing physical or mental performances the level of which is above average.*”<sup>11</sup>

In her book dealing with the gifted children and the term of the gift itself, *Nadáni a Nadaní* (Praha, 2009), Lenka Hříbková comes with a following definition of the gift:

*“The gift is often seen as a potential of a personality for certain activity which is essential for exceptional achievement (the outcome, the product of the activity).”*<sup>12</sup> Hříbková continues by saying that: *“Even if for the potential one substitutes any kind of skill or personal attribute, if we speak about the gift, only a superior performance is to follow, an extraordinary one, not any performance.”*<sup>13</sup> Hříbková later stresses the importance of many other factors, which can influence the final outcome of the activity, such as personal attributes or environmental conditions. Therefore, she sees the gift as an evolving “product” of congruent relation between the capabilities of an individual and the possibilities, which are offered through the environment.<sup>14</sup>

To complete the basic vocabulary, which is often used in the connection with the gift and gifted individuals in general, there is probably one more term that needs mentioning – the term of ingenuity (can be also found as genius or ingeniousness).

In *Psychologický slovník* of Pavel and Helena Hartl, the term of ingenuity is defined as *“designation for the highest level of either intellectual or creative skills and abilities (occurs in cases of IQ 140 or more); but it is always influenced by other factors such as motivation, temperament, emotionality and environment, therefore without a lucky combination of most of the factors, the genial ability may never occur in a creative way.”*<sup>15</sup>

Another explanation of ingenuity can be found in a title *Odvaha k nadání* by Erika Landau. She says that: *“Ingenuity is a rare phenomenon, which has even greater possibilities of expression, which are by talent, understanding and/or by using the gift even in international comparison elevated on a rare phenomenon.”*<sup>16</sup> She also states that without supporting individual talents, the gift and the ingenuity cannot evolve, which is – according to Landau- common

for the whole phenomenon of intelligence itself.<sup>17</sup> Also, it is important to realize, that the gift is by no means identical with ingenuity.<sup>18</sup>

J. Lazníbatová also stresses that the issue of giftedness is not restricted only to humans and mentions some of the possibilities of the occurrence of a kind of the gift in the animal kingdom, such as the specific behavior of the dolphins under certain conditions. When an autistic individual comes into a pool with dolphins, these animals carefully approach the him or her and they begin to rub him or her gently with their bodies which is very similar to offering the autistic individual a hug, which is one of the techniques of how to give such an individual a sense of safety.<sup>19</sup>

### 1.1.1 Different types of the gift

Although there are some cases of individuals that can be characterized as multi-gifted (or multi-talented), the phenomenon of the gift can usually be seen only in a specific area(s) of activities of a given individual. Therefore there are many possible divisions of the types of the gift and of their classification.

First type of the classification is *horizontal*<sup>1</sup>. This classification focuses on dividing the gifts according to the types of activity in which the gift is manifested. Therefore, one can find an area of musical gift, artistic gift, language gift (which is, of course, very important when dealing with learning of foreign languages), mathematical gift etc. Each of those areas can be further divided or incorporated into more general units. Language gift, for example, can be found, along with mathematical, leadership, scientific and technical gifts in a general unit of intellectual gifts, which is often perceived as a gift for science. This division can be also used in an artistic area – for example, the musical gift can be divided into a gift for interpretation and a gift for composition.<sup>2</sup>

Second type of classification is a *vertical*<sup>3</sup>. This classification focuses on differentiation of the gift according to the level of its actualization. It can be divided on a *latent* (potential) and *manifested* (actual) types of gift. Latent type

is used in a connection with those children (and individuals in general), in which (often via psychological examination) personal potential was found, although they do not yet manifest any extraordinary outcomes in concrete areas. This type is often seen in younger children, in whom it is usually not possible to find a dominant interest. It is presumed that the latent type becomes manifested by an external stimulation of the child's development, namely in a supporting social and social-cultural environment. F. Gagné identifies those environmental factors as catalysts<sup>4</sup>. It has been found, that during the process of latent type of gift becoming manifested type areas like influence of social conditions (such as a rich, supporting environment etc.), are very important, along with the personal activity of a given individual or with the process of learning, through which the area of gift can be trained or enhanced.

Václav and Jitka Fořtík present a different division of the individual gifts and their types, according to the research of American experts DeHaan and Havighurst.<sup>5</sup> This division is used for distinction of academic talents even nowadays and it divides the types of gifts into following categories:

**Intellectual abilities** are those which are related to the school successes. Here one can find verbal, numerical or spatial skills and factors of thinking in terms of basic intellectual functions.

**Creative abilities** cover areas like understanding a problem, the ability of forming thoughts or products and to come with new possibilities of uses of objects or materials.

**Scientific abilities** can be described as abilities for using numbers and algebraic symbols. Here one can find arithmetic thinking, interest in nature and also the skill of using scientific methods.

**Leadership or managerial abilities** represent the competence for helping a group to achieve defined goals and to enhance interpersonal relations. Needless to say, it is an essential skill for people in lead positions.

**Dexterity abilities** (also called "craftsmanship") are closely related to a talent in arts, science or engineering. The success here lies in the ability of manipulation, spatial imagination and a sense for visual details, similarities etc. This kind of talent is important for artists, writers etc.

Yet another division can be found in the work of A. Tannenbaum, who tried to think about the types of the gifts from their usefulness in terms of the society. The criterion which he uses for the division is the way, in which the society accepts and values different types of superiority.<sup>6</sup>

Tannenbaum therefore characterizes *scarcity gift*, which is very rare. The individuals with this gift can lead the whole population forwards and this gift can also lead to an easier, better way of life.

Another type is the *surplus gift*, the bearers of which help the society via products of their work. They cultivate thinking, sensitivity etc. via research or pieces of art.

Tannenbaum then describes *quota gift*, which focuses on high achievements of people working in professions like teachers, lawyers, social workers etc. Tannenbaum points out that for these people it is the talent that matter, rather than their highest achieved level of education.

The last category is the *anomalous gift*. Individuals of this gift achieve extraordinary successes on the very borders of human possibilities, although in a very specific and restricted areas.

As L. Hřibková summarizes, in the process of categorizing of the types of the gifts, mostly social-cultural and social criteria are used, and it is the manifested type of gift which forms the basis of the research.<sup>7</sup>

## 1.2 HISTORY OF THE INTEREST IN AND RESEARCH OF THE GIFT

In this part of the thesis, the individual lines of research will be described and explained, following mostly the division of L. Hříbková. Each of the lines is given an individual chapter.

### 1.2.1 Pathological line

Traces of the interest in finding more about individuals, which performed extraordinary feats, can be found even in the Antique. At the very beginning, creativity and talent was perceived as a “gift from the gods” (or later, with the growing influence of Christianity, it was a “gift of God”).<sup>1</sup> One of the famous antique philosophers who was concerned with the theme of the gift was Plato. In his famous dialogues (e.g. *Ion*) he thinks of the gift as of a kind of illness – actually, when Plato (through his use of the character of Socrates) speaks to Ion, a famous rhapsode, he asks him about his extraordinary knowledge and superior performance (talent/gift) of Homer’s work. In the discussion, Plato/Socrates comes with his famous genetic fallacy and claims that the source of the knowledge of Ion is divine (and that it comes from the Muses, who inspire a poet. Then Ion is inspired by this poet, finishing the process by pleasing his audience). Plato/Socrates also says that Ion is out of his mind when interpreting the work of Homer, that he is affected by his inspiration. In the very end of the dialogue, Socrates says that after the discussion, he finds Ion god-inspired as an interpreter of Homer, but he does not find him an expert.<sup>2</sup>

L. Hříbková mentions Plato as one of the philosophers, who links ingenuity with mental illness.<sup>3</sup> She also mentions similar point of view of C. Lombroso, who thinks of the creativity as a possible form of degenerative psychosis. Lombroso completely rejects the possibility of “healthy” ingenuity.

Theories which link mental illnesses and exceptional achievement can be found even nowadays as in the work of R. Eisenman.<sup>4</sup>

### 1.2.2 Biological line

J. Huarte, a renaissance philosopher, connects the ingenuity with the existence of an inborn skill of some individuals – so-called *ingenium*, which enables them to create extraordinary pieces of work. Huarte connects this skill with an extraordinary brain structure, where the biological line of research can be seen.<sup>1</sup>

Because of the enormous boom of biology and science in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (such as the publication of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, published in 1859), the existence of gifted individuals (or *miraculous* individuals as they were called in this time) was often linked and connected to biological factors. Unfortunately, the main interest concerning this miracle lied mostly in studying bright adults, who were often adored or glorified. Also, in this period, the term *genius* was preferred.<sup>2</sup>

F. Galton is perceived as a founder of the modern biological conception. In his article published in 1869 he was probably the first to form the question of “nature versus nurture” thus pointing out the important connection between the biological predispositions of an individual and the decisive strength of the environment the individual is raised in. He also tried to prove that mental abilities are inherited in the same way as physical ones. Eventually, the term *genius* was replaced by two terms- *gift* and *talent*.<sup>3</sup>

After the Second World War another research began, focusing on the intelligence as a basis of the gift. One of the most prominent researchers in this period were A.R. Jensen and H. J. Eysenck. It was Eysenck who stated that the intelligence is mostly genetically given (about 80%) and that the remaining 20% can be affected by the environment.<sup>4</sup>



The way of viewing a human both as a biological and social being opened new ways of perceiving the very essence of mankind. Throughout years, biology discovers more and more factors that influence the giftedness. But biology alone cannot solve the problem – there have been tendencies to found *psychobiology*, a new science, which would lead to synthesis of biology and psychology.<sup>5</sup>

In modern times, it is important to stress the tendency to take into account such fields of science as sociology etc., to create a complex research of the phenomenon of the giftedness with all possible factors (social, personal, biological, economical etc.) that can influence the evolution of the gift or the talent.

### 1.2.3 Psychoanalytic line

Another line of research concerned with the phenomenon of the giftedness is the psychoanalytic line. Here, the authors were not concerned with the inborn dispositions, they were rather interested in answering questions of why and how do some individuals create extraordinary pieces of work. To clarify this process, representatives of the psychoanalytic line used the phenomena of human defence mechanisms, sublimation and compensation.<sup>1</sup>

According to S. Freud, sublimation is a defence mechanism, which serves an individual, to protect the Ego from torment and distress, which is caused by conflicting demands of Id and Superego.<sup>2</sup> An individual needs a protection from distress, because it causes unpleasant psychic state, which signalizes a danger to Ego. Eventually, Ego – unintentionally- tries to seize the control by activating defence mechanisms. Sublimation serves an individual as a protection against his or her distress, but in the same time this defence mechanism is beneficial to the social group and society, in which the individual is raised. Because of the important role of sexuality in Freud's work, one can say, that during the process of sublimation, the sexual object of an individual is

replaced by other object, cultural or social. Sublimated object, according to Freud, can be clearly seen in creative, exceptional pieces of work. Freud himself sees the typical sublimation in works of Michelangelo Buonarroti or Leonardo da Vinci. According to Freud, most people are able to sublimate some of their libido into cultural and social areas, thus creating social values and keeping sufficient amount of libido and sexual instinct for individual wishes.<sup>3</sup>

A. Adler, another representative of the psychoanalytic line, distinguishes himself from Freud's theory, stressing, that creativity and exceptional production are motivated by a conscious thought. He sees it as an outcome of personal deficit, which can relate to physical or mental area.<sup>4</sup>

Psychoanalytical line was also criticized, for example by A. Anastazi or by the Czech psychologist J. Hlavsa, who criticized the omission of the role of life experience in the psychoanalytical line, which can influence the creative process a great deal.<sup>5</sup>

#### 1.2.4 Environmental line

In terms of the issue of development of the gift, environmental line focuses on the role of external factors and the socio-cultural environment. Such ideas can be traced even to the great philosophers of Antiquity.

Aristotle stressed out the importance of the individualistic approach towards students. This idea influenced many great pedagogues concerned with the phenomenon of the gifted children in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, such as L.S. Hollingworth or A. J. Tannenbaum.<sup>1</sup>

Plato in his famous work *Politeia* (The Republic) speaks about the importance of training the middle group of society – so called wardens.<sup>2</sup> He also presents a list of useful areas of skills they should be able to use and know, such as philosophy, gymnastic skills etc. By doing this, Plato in fact foretold typical areas, in which the basic types of gift are seen – the gift for science, art and

sport.<sup>3</sup> He also speaks about the importance of not pushing the students in their study, as only those who really want to learn will proceed further on – here one can see the modern idea of the strong inner motivation of the gifted individuals (as presented in the works of V. and J. Fořtík or J. Laznibátová ).

Ideas of the antique philosophers formed foundations for the generations to come. In the renaissance and humanism era, one can see again the growing interest for the phenomenon of the gift. One of the outstanding philosopher was Jan Amos Comenius, who perceived the gift as being present in each human being (although in various quantity). He also believed that this human potential can be nourished and cultivated. Comenius also stressed the importance of using a correct method towards individual students.<sup>4</sup>

Ideas concerning the decisive influence of the social environment, namely education, influenced opinions of many psychologists. This influence can be seen in early behaviourism of J.B. Watson, namely in his famous statement:

*“Give me a dozen healthy infants, well-formed, and my own specified world to bring them up in and I'll guarantee to take any one at random and train him to become any type of specialist I might select – doctor, lawyer, artist, merchant-chief and, yes, even beggar-man and thief, regardless of his talents, penchants, tendencies, abilities, vocations, and race of his ancestors. I am going beyond my facts and I admit it, but so have the advocates of the contrary and they have been doing it for many thousands of years.”<sup>5</sup>*

Even the theory of Marxism was concerned with the idea of development of the giftedness. The starting point here was the analysis of the division of work and the specialization of activities, which lead to the specialization of human skills. Possibilities of developing and applying skills of an individual depend on the conditions of living, job and education, which are provided by the social system in which the individual lives.<sup>6</sup>

### 1.2.5 Modern research of the giftedness

It is hard to tell why in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as contrasted with the preceding centuries, the attention of the authorities interested in the phenomenon of the giftedness moved from a gifted adult to a gifted (talented) child. Some point to Darwin's Evolution Theory. J. C. Gowan sees the turning point of the focus from an adult to a child in the dominating role of behaviourism in the psychology of this era.<sup>1</sup>

Probably the most prominent and important person of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in terms of the study of giftedness and gifted individuals was L. M. Terman. He is considered the founder of the "supporting the gifted children" movement<sup>2</sup>, and he is also known for the most exhausting research in this area<sup>3</sup>.

Terman's project of longitudinal study (after a series of many lesser projects) began in 1921. His first research group consisted of 1528 children from California, each one of them of IQ score of 140 and more.<sup>4</sup>

For identifying those individuals, Terman used the Stanford-Binet's test from 1904, which he translated into English in 1916. Originally, this test was composed by Alfred Binet, a French psychologist, the test of began a new age in modern intelligence testing (in fact, it was the first IQ test). Originally it aimed to find those children, who could benefit from extra help in school, Binet assumed that the lower IQ signalizes need for more studying, not an inability to learn. After Binet's death in 1911, his formula was elaborated by William Stern in 1914. Another version, already mentioned, was that of L. M. Terman in 1916. Nowadays, the type of test is known as Stanford- Binet scale and this type of test is sometimes referred to simply as an IQ test.<sup>5</sup>

L. M. Terman focused on a complex study of gifted children. As techniques for understanding and identifying the capabilities of the gifted children, he used various didactic tests and general knowledge tests, along with homework, which the children were to complete. Also, he was interested in the family background of those children in general. Therefore, he arranged many interviews with individual families of the gifted children, where questions of

house rules, education of the parents and grandparents, successfulness in school or the amount of books in home library were debated.<sup>6</sup>

In his research, Terman saw the main difference between gifted and normal children was in terms of general knowledge, interest in reading and in the knowledge of languages. Also, he perceived that it is characteristic for the gifted children to have one dominant area of interest. Terman's research showed the intellectual, volitional, and moral superiority. Lesser superiority was found in terms of emotionality and the least was the in terms of social skills and abilities. Also, it was during this research, when the hypothesis of faster cognitive maturation of girls (in comparison to boys) was expressed for the first time.<sup>7</sup>

The outcomes of this longitudinal research meant an opening of a new area of systematic research. The most important ideas of this research, which influenced the future research of giftedness are the following:

1. The Gifted do not form a homogenous group in terms of personal characteristics, there exist many differences between individual members.
2. Images of perceiving a gifted child as of a weak constitution and non-communicative and images of high intelligence as a phenomenon similar to a mental illness are incompetent.
3. Superiority in terms of intelligence stays constant even in adulthood.
4. Mental age of the gifted has an increasing trend until the mean age.<sup>8</sup>

But it is also important not to forget, that even this great work had its flaws and was criticized by some. The most criticized points of his research were his conception of the gift as only an issue of high intelligence, his unambiguous interpretation of the gift as being congenitally determined and his perception of the stability of intelligence through the development of an individual.<sup>9</sup>

Despite this criticism, the conception of gift of L.M. Terman was and is still very influential.

### 1.2.5.1 Marland Report

Another wave of interest in the giftedness began with the Marland Report, when S. Marland presented the outcomes of his long observation to the American Congress. In his report, Marland referred about the unsatisfying position of the education of gifted children and also about the unsatisfying support for those individuals. Marland's report presented a general definition of the giftedness for the first time<sup>1</sup>. In his report, S. Marland defined gifted children as follows: "children capable of high performance include those with demonstrated achievement and/or potential ability in any of the following areas, singly or in combination:

1. General intellectual ability,
2. Specific academic aptitude,
3. [Creative](#) or productive thinking,
4. [Leadership](#) ability,
5. [Visual](#) and [performing arts](#), or
6. Psychomotor ability."<sup>2</sup>

The report's definition continues to be the basis of the definition of giftedness in the whole world even nowadays.<sup>3</sup>

S. Marland also brought up another phenomenon, by saying that: "*As USA spend about 1000 dollars a year on a child with learning disabilities, at the same time it spend 2.45 dollars a year on a gifted child.*"<sup>4</sup> He also declared the importance of supporting gifted children (in education etc.) is crucial as without sufficient support, these children may experience mental problems or it can lead to total limitation of their skills.

After this report, in 1978, the American Congress passed a directive, which admitted, that a large number of exceptionally gifted children (in that time there were about 1, 5- 2, 5 million of them in the USA) requires a distinctive educational care, which is unavailable under regular school conditions. The

Congress also agreed on assigning funds in total value of 25 mil. dollars for the year of 1979. This number is increasing every year. These funds are to be used for supporting the education of the gifted children, for development of new programs of various types of gifts etc.<sup>5</sup>

In Great Britain, there has been a study *Teaching Able and Gifted Children* (1982) which presented various possibilities and approaches towards education of gifted children in England, Scotland and Wales.<sup>6</sup>

In the rest of Europe, specialized research stations concerned with the phenomena of the gift and the gifted began to be established approximately twenty years ago.<sup>7</sup> Well-known centres for study and support of the gifted are: Centre for study of the gifted in Nijmegen in Netherlands, centres by the universities in München, Hamburg, Tübingen, Bonn or Hannover in Germany. Newer centres can be also find in Budapest in Hungaria or in Warsawa, Poland.<sup>8</sup>

When the Czech Republic is concerned, important activities can be seen in the studying programs of the Faculty of Pedagogy of Charles University<sup>9</sup>, where one of the leading authorities focusing on the various issues of the gifted students is L. Hříbková. Another important centre in Prague is certainly Mensa of the Czech Republic, which is a part of Mensa International (it was established on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1946 in Oxford by Lionell Ware and Roland Berill)<sup>10</sup>, and offers testing of IQ and various support for gifted individuals and those who are interested in such issues. Mensa of the Czech Republic was established by Dr. Hana Drábková in 1989.<sup>11</sup> Since its establishment its main aims are to support and offer advice to gifted people, in which they are highly successful.

## 1.3 MODELS OF GIFTEDNESS

In this part of the thesis, I would like to present some of the famous models of the giftedness, which influenced the whole perception of the study of this field. These are namely the models of J.S. Renzulli, F.J. Mönks and E. Czeisel. Each of these models is described in a separate article.

### 1.3.1 Three-Ring Model

Despite the fact that L. Terman himself agreed, that the giftedness can fully extend only in combination of such factors as courage or persistence of a given individual and that the gift affects the whole personality of a person<sup>1</sup>, in the 60'es and 70ies the main and often the only criterion in the process of identifying gifted individuals was IQ.<sup>2</sup>

Due to this phenomenon, after a series of analysis of empirical studies dealing with the phenomenon of giftedness, J.S. Renzulli, an American educational psychologist, developed the *three-ring model of giftedness* (see pic.1 of the Appendix), which broadened the conception and understanding of giftedness. In this model, J. S. Renzulli presents three main areas of characteristics of an individual, which, if they are of certain degrees, form a basis for carrying out an exceptional and creative outcome.<sup>3</sup>

Renzulli defines giftedness as an interaction between three groups of attributes:

1. Above Average Ability
2. Creativity
3. Task Commitment



Within the above average abilities Renzulli sees a difference between general abilities (like processing information, integrating experiences, and abstract thinking) and specific abilities (like the capacity to acquire knowledge, performance of an activity).<sup>4</sup>

By creativity Renzulli understands the fluency, flexibility, and originality of thoughts, openness to new experiences, sensitivity to stimulations, and a willingness to take risks – which form the basis of divergent thinking - and also creative abilities like openness to new ideas, tolerance towards ambiguities etc. Renzulli also stresses the importance of further research of alternative methods for evaluating the creative abilities<sup>5</sup>.

Under task commitment Renzulli understands motivation turned into action (such as perseverance, endurance, hard work, but also self-confidence, perceptiveness etc.). Concerning gifted children, J. S. Renzulli stresses the importance of intrinsic motivation, which prevails in these individuals in comparison to the extrinsic, which is created due to extrinsic stimuli (such as reward)<sup>6</sup>. Renzulli argues that without task commitment high achievement is simply not possible.

Renzulli also states that it is no longer possible to perceive the results of an IQ test as the main criterion for the identification of gifted individuals.

To return to the three-ring model of Renzulli, *only if characteristics from all three rings are combined and work together*, high achievement or gifted behavior can be witnessed.<sup>7</sup>

### 1.3.2 Model of giftedness by F.J. Mönks

Another famous model concerning the phenomenon of giftedness was created by F.J. Mönks, a Dutch developmental psychologist (see pic.2 in Appendix). This model features the basic three-ring model of J. Renzulli, but has its differences. As a developmental psychologist, Mönks perceives the personal

abilities of an individual as a dynamic disposition of the individual for his or her behaviour and activity<sup>1</sup>. According to Mönks, the basic components of giftedness do not develop in a “social vacuum”. He sees the gift as affected by mutual influence of both internal and external factors<sup>2</sup>. Mönks connects the basic three-ring model of J.S. Renzulli to the main socializing factors, which influence the development of a child.

In his model, F. J. Mönks sees the giftedness as an result of interaction of six areas, three of which belong to inner equipment of a child (here belong those areas of J.S. Renzulli’s model – Above Average Ability, Creativity and Task Commitment) and these are influenced by three *socializing factors* – family, school and contemporaries. Each of the late three is perceived by Mönks to be of equal importance for the realization of the potential of gifted individuals<sup>3</sup>.

After the publication of the three-ring model of J.S. Renzulli, there has been a lot of criticism, which focused mainly on the fact that it is almost impossible to find an individual who would fit all the criteria. In comparison to Renzulli, the model of F.J. Mönks is used even nowadays and it often forms a basis for many modern studies concerned with the phenomenon of giftedness. In her book, J. Laznibátová stresses the importance of the model of F.J. Mönks, which forms also a theoretical basis for her conception of care and support of the gifted children.<sup>4</sup>

### 1.3.3 “4+4+1” Model of giftedness

Another, more complex model of giftedness was presented by E. Czeisel, which is normally known as *4+4+1* model, in which both the internal and external factors which influence the giftedness (as presented by F.J. Mönks) are broadened. Probably the most interesting factor, which is presented in this model, is the factor of *Luck*, which Czeisel sees as an essential component for successful identification and development of the gift. This model is accepted for example in Slovakia, in local school for gifted students, “Škola pre mimoriadne nadané deti”. **L67**

## 1.4 THREE GIFTS FOR A GIFTED CHILD

Under this rather non-concrete title are hidden the individual external factors which F.J. Mönks stresses in his famous model of giftedness. Each of his three primary socializing factors (family, school and classmates/age-peers) is discussed and described in a separate article.

### 1.4.1 Family

One of the primary socializing factors which can be seen in the conception of the giftedness of F. J. Mönks is the factor of family. It is a simple fact that the family environment plays a crucial and probably the most significant role in the life and development of the gifted child. It is here, where the first steps of the child happen and it is here where many important decisions are made (and influenced).

L. Hříbková mentions in her book the research of J. Lazníbatová, which took place in 1997 in Slovakia and focused on parents and family environments of a selected group of gifted children.<sup>1</sup> The results indicated that seventy percent of fathers of gifted children in the selected group and sixty-five percent of mothers in this group had university education. Other aspects the research focused on were factors like educational strategies, the age of the parents, number of children in the family, the order of births of children in the family and many others.

The results of the research were as follows:

1. Most frequently, the gifted child is the first-born child.
2. Parents are usually older, with university education

3. Families show great degree of emotional certainty and openness in communication.<sup>2</sup>

Václav and Jitka Fořtík also stress the importance of the family, as it can serve as a kind of prevention against potential social and emotional problems that can happen to the gifted child.<sup>3</sup>

As was already mentioned, it is important for the parents of a gifted child to support and motivate him or her. But, as V. and J. Fořtík point out, this can be rather difficult, as needs of the gifted child can be rather challenging.<sup>4</sup> It is important for the parents to spend time with their gifted child to learn about his or her interests, to read with the child even if the process of reading gives him or her no difficulties.<sup>5</sup> Another important issue (mostly in modern times) is concerned with the need of the parents to listen to their children. To listen and to give both positive and negative feedback, so the child feels their interest, concern and care. Through this process, the child is given a sense of support and love, which is important not only for the gifted ones, but for all children.<sup>6</sup>

But the complex care about a gifted child is often very challenging for the parents, especially for the young ones.<sup>7</sup> The specific features of behaviour of the gifted child can be rather frustrating for the parents and it can even lead to complete resignation on the educative efforts of the parents. Moreover, according to E. Landau, if there are two or more gifted children in the family, this requires an active, conscious support of the father as well.<sup>8</sup> It is therefore good to ask for help in the surrounding family so the parents can relax once in a while.

As Erika Landau points out, a parent who quits his job, and stays at home to look after the child may become frustrated and can be often more problematic than if he or she would have kept the work and spend a lesser amount of time with the child.<sup>9</sup> Also, many problems of the gifted children can be found in past unsuccessful ambitions of their parents – sometimes the parents want to present the success to others only to make the child train for hours some activity they are not interested in – and what is more, the child feels the atmosphere of such behaviour.<sup>10</sup> E. Landau emphasizes the importance of the expectation of the

parents, which can affect the child very strongly and in a positive way – but it should always accept the unique individuality of the child – as V. and J. Fořtík say, it is not possible to perceive the gifted children and gifted population in general as a homogenous group.<sup>11</sup>

In some cases, it can occur that parents are unable to stand the superiority of their own child or children – in this case, the parents should seek advice of some centre dealing with the issues of the giftedness. E. Landau finishes by saying that the care for the gifted child should not mean omitting the needs and desires of one or even both of the parents.<sup>12</sup>

As a help, parents should use the support of both the school and psychological consultancy. With the help of both the pedagogues and psychologists emerges a complex care for the gifted children and their families.

In the Czech Republic, many such activities are provided by Mensa of the Czech Republic, such as board games weekend activities especially designed for families with the gifted children or specialised one-week summer camps. Here, parents can find out that the problems of their child are well known phenomena and also they can share their problems and experiences with other parents. Also, the program of these events works on the principle of team-building activities which shows the gifted children the importance of cooperation which is very important for them and for the whole family as well (see pic.4-6 of the Appendix).<sup>13</sup> *“From the very beginning of these camps,”* says Jan Vodička, one of the propagators of one-week summer camps for gifted children and their parents, *“these programs have been very successful. We prepare special types of activities and outdoor games, in which even a gifted child cannot win without the help of his or her parents. With these activities, gifted children realize the importance of their parents and, in the same time, parents feel the gratitude of their children.”*

Despite their superiority in some areas, it is very important for the gifted children to learn and accept the possibility of failure. To learn this “ability” is important for all children but as the gifted ones are often perceived by their neighbourhood as “exceptional” (and they feel it if it is so), experiencing a failure can be very hard for them. Here again, the family should show its support

and help the child to cope with it, although the occurrence of failure (especially if it is a repeated failure) can lead to anger and tears of the child.<sup>14</sup>

Another very important role of the family lies in the good selection of the school to which their child will attend to. If the child is of an older age, it should also have word in the decision making – it is very hard for a gifted child only to accept decisions which have been made about him or her but without him or her.

15

As V. and J. Fořtík say, it is hard in the Czech Republic to find an appropriate school for the gifted child (there are still only a few of them nowadays).<sup>16</sup> As an alternative, parents can choose a school with extended mathematical or language studies. Although this is often not the perfect choice as to cover all the issues of the gifted child, these types of schools represent a more challenging study and also the students are accepted on the basis of some tests etc., and therefore the atmosphere in the class is normally different and more suitable for the gifted child.<sup>17</sup>

#### 1.4.2 School

School is another primary socializing factor that can influence the development of a child. Although it is the family which still retains the main educative function, it is in school where many issues and problems may arise surrounding a gifted individual.

According to J. Lazníbatová, problems of a gifted pupil may start right from the 1<sup>st</sup> grade of an elementary school.<sup>1</sup> The gifted child enters the school with many expectations, which are normally (especially when positively supported by the parents of the child) very optimistic. The intellectually gifted child, in comparison to his or her future classmates, shows the following signs:

1. They show significant advantages in some areas of development.

2. They have distinct pace of work.
3. They show distinct quality of performance.
4. They show a different range and depth of interests.

In other words, as J. Lazníbatová presents, those children work faster, better than others and also with higher performance.<sup>2</sup>

One can clearly see that these qualities can be both positive and negative. And in the Czech Republic, so far, they are perceived more often in their negative sense.

After the first steps in the school, the great potential of a gifted child is usually soon discovered, as the gifted children often want to show their qualities and skills. This can lead to many things. At the very beginning of the first school year, it is the teacher who plays a very important role. It is the teacher who has to decide how to respond to the gift of the child. David Cooper in his article *Gifted class pushes teachers to the max* which was published in magazine *Teach* presents many difficulties that the teacher in USA experiences when dealing with gifted children – problems such as communication with their demanding parents or with preparing Individual Education Plan for the child.<sup>3</sup>

In the Czech Republic one can see another problem – many teachers simply do not know how to educate and how to communicate with a gifted child. Without a proper education it is hard for teachers to respond correctly and adequately to the special needs and habits of the gifted students. As L. Hříbková points out, it is essential for teachers in our country to focus on issues connected with the education of gifted children.<sup>4</sup>

In many cases in the Czech Republic, after some time of attending the class, teachers usually find out about the potential of the gifted child and they often cease to call him or her up as the (“always”) correct answer of the child would frustrate other pupils. Sometimes, it also happens that a teacher moves the gifted pupil to another seat, beside a below-average pupil to help him or her with the exercises. In any of those two cases, the gift of the exceptional child is not supported, but subdued. (see pic.7 of the Appendix)

This approach of the teacher can lead to many problems. A gifted child the potential of which is not attended to by the teacher becomes bored. The gifted child may begin to disturb lessons by shouting out the correct answers as it *wants* to be heard and wants to show his or her qualities. After some time, they can start to dislike the school despite previous attitude. Also, these gifted children may develop a pseudo feeble-mind only to be accepted by the teacher and by the rest of the class again – they may start to make mistakes only to get the attention of the teacher back.<sup>5</sup>

#### *1.4.2.1 Four groups of gifted students*

None of the situations mentioned above have to occur, it all depends on the individual pupils and their characters (and of course, on the degree of understanding of the teacher). J. Lazníbatová divides the gifted children in school into four following groups<sup>1</sup>:

1. **Non-problematic child** – it is optimally integrated, well adapted, it performs well and it is satisfied with the school.
2. **Active or Hyperactive child** – it understands quickly, remembers well, it has wider knowledge and information than the rest of the class and it wants to show it all. This type of a child takes it as a fact that school is the proper place to present his or her knowledge. But most of the teachers are unable to find the occasion for it or they may be nervous about the reaction of the rest of the class. Children in this group also experience that they cannot ask the questions they are interested in as these questions do not interest the rest of the class. Therefore, these pupils have only a limited space for their education and development. They complete the prescribed curriculum quickly and sometimes they are unable not to disturb the rest of the class once they finish the exercises. This may lead to various recourses from the teacher. This normally happens in the second or third grade, when the problems of gifted children escalate. Parents of these children are advised to seek help of a psychologist.



3. **Incommunicative child** – it is unable to protest openly against – from their point of view – inadequate approach of the school. This type of a gifted child seeks solution in an escape from the real world to the world of daydreaming, they lock themselves away. They often have some kind of an imaginary friend with whom they speaks (mostly this occurs at home, during a problem). These children often look out of the window, but when they are asked about the ongoing lesson, they are ready and respond correctly and appropriately. These children normally endure most of the lessons, but their feelings of stress, when not attended to, may appear under different conditions (for example, they can be more aggressive at home etc.). As with the previous group, parents are encouraged to seek advice of a psychologist.

4. **The last group** of the gifted is all those silent, *undiscovered* gifted children. Their big misfortune is that they are often not identified by the teacher and therefore they continue the lessons at the same speed and with the same attention as the rest of the class. Their potential is not activated, their skills do not enhance and they are not challenged by appropriate exercises, which form an essential prerequisite for an optimal development of each gifted individual.<sup>2</sup>

M. Gross mentions the fact, that children gifted/talented in sports are usually happier and are more supported than those gifted intellectually, who often experience indifference, lack of understanding or even open demonstrations of enmity from their environment.<sup>3</sup>

Another difficult thing about the school is the fact that the giftedness is hard to identify (aside from mathematical giftedness)<sup>4</sup>. It happens, that many of the gifted pupils end in a help class as problematic children (and the slower pace of the learning process can appear again!).

### 1.4.3 Friends

The last part of the model of giftedness as presented by F.J. Mönks is the influence of friends and age-peers surrounding the gifted individual. It is a

simple fact that relationships of a child with his or her age-peers are essential for the development of the child, as the interaction with them supports the cognitive development, and cultivation of social values of the gifted child. Also, thanks to these relationships, the self-conception of the child develops as well and it helps in the process of forming his or her moral and social values. Also, it can be presumed that children who are not well received by the class or age-peers will experience difficulties in establishing new relationships in the future.<sup>1</sup>

According to L. Hříbková, there has been a wide survey, aiming for the understanding of typical position of a gifted child in a regular classroom. Unfortunately, the outcomes were far from clear. There have been results showing that a gifted child is often not well received by the rest of the class, which leads to his or her isolation.

V. Hrabal in his *Sociální psychologie pro učitele – Vybraná témata* describes an isolated student (the role of which is said gifted students often play) as a member of a class, who is neither much refused nor accepted, without any greater influence. If classmates are asked to talk about such a student, they often say “I do not know him/her,” or even “I do not care about him/her.” – even after several years spent in one classroom. The social contact of an isolated student with other classmates is usually one-sided or limited in other way. The feeling of isolation can be especially painful for new students, who can be classified as socially sensitive introverts.<sup>2</sup>

But also, another series of surveys show results of a well received gifted child, who often maintains an important and dominant position in the hierarchy of the class.<sup>3</sup>

A survey of J.A. Tannenbaum carried out in 1962 shows, that an important question in the decision of the gifted child’s position within the hierarchy of the class depends on whether the gifted child engages in sports or not. Gifted students who were not interested in such activities were found to experience more problems than those, who were somehow interested. Those gifted children (especially younger ones), who were only intellectually oriented, were found as more isolated and their relationships with classmates were found problematic more often.<sup>4</sup>

Another survey from 1983, carried out by N. Colangelo and K. R. Kelly showed different results. According to their study, in the observed group of children of younger school age, the attitude of the class towards gifted students was rather indifferent, these students were at least tolerated and accepted as members of the collective of the class. N. Colangelo and K.R. Kelly pointed out the important role of the attitude of the teacher towards gifted students, as it strongly influences opinions and attitudes of other classmates, especially in first few grades of school.<sup>5</sup>

On the other hand, some authors (Schneider, Byrne, Ledingham etc.) stress the fact, that if a gifted student learns in different learning groups and therefore he or she does not “live” within the class, it is not an unexpected phenomenon that such students are given rather indifferent status from the rest of the class.<sup>6</sup>

D. G. Cornell (1989) pointed out another fact that unpopular gifted students differ from popular gifted students in social status of the family, self-conception and school self-evaluation. Teachers usually described the unpopular gifted students as non-initiative, non-cooperative, over-sensitive to criticism and with inclination to individuality.<sup>7</sup>

Despite all these rather negative facts, popular gifted students do exist. The act of acceptance of a gifted child by the rest of his or her class depends on many aspects and it varies from one case to another. Therefore one can agree with L. Hříbková, who claims in her book *Nadání a Nadání*, that: “*The acceptance by a group of coevals is not a homogenous phenomenon, it is rather a phenomenon much diversified.*”<sup>8</sup>

Unfortunately, it is hard to derive a decisive rule from various social surveys and researches as there can be much inaccurate information and this can lead to “myths” about this population of children with high IQ percentile.<sup>9</sup>

In the Czech Republic, a survey similar to previously mentioned ones was carried out by L. Novotná.<sup>10</sup> Similarly to others, the results of her research carried out on classes on an eight-year high school showed that even here the gifted students are often rejected or isolated, although older students showed more understanding and tolerance towards their gifted classmates.

Another issue connected with the relationships of gifted children with their age-peers is concerned with specialized classes and schools for the gifted, as they are more stimulating their cognitive skills and are believed to create a better atmosphere for establishing new friendships, which would be more than complicated in a regular classroom or school. Although this can be true in individual cases, the survey and study of L. Novotná clearly shows that integration of a student into such class or school does not always guarantee an acceptance of a coeval group. Therefore, special classes and schools cannot be used as a universal solution for educational ways of gifted children. <sup>11</sup>

## 1.5 THE CASE STUDY OF JANE

In my own research, I focused on one gifted child, let us call her Jane. According to her high IQ score (154), and with her consent, I tried to make a brief case study according to the model of giftedness by F.J. Mönks, focusing primarily on the primary socializing factors as presented by F.J. Mönks – school, family and classmates.

Jane is now eighteen years old and she is about to take her school leaving exams. She is a second child and lives in a complete family with one sibling, a brother who is six years older. Both her parents have university education, father is an engineer and works on a high position in a company dealing with electricity in Prague, her mother is a teacher in elementary school in Prague, who has been awarded Jan Amos Comenius honours for her contribution to the profession. Her brother studies on a university, he is also gifted. The whole family lives in two interconnected flats in Prague.

As Jane says, her family grants her full support. She feels safe at home, she feels that she is being loved by the rest of the family. Her parents support her hobbies (she is interested in languages, math, board games and sports like volleyball etc.) but also, they fully support her emotionally. She says sometimes she has her hard days, little depressions and frustrations but she quickly adds, that thanks to her family, she has never felt alone or abandoned. Also, all family members communicate with each other very well, in a friendly way – Jane feels, that she can tell them really anything. Although sometimes there may be different opinions inside the family and little debates about certain issues, Jane says she remembers only few occasions during which there was some kind of tension or some longer negative consequences etc.

Jane is quite self-confident, although in a positive way. She is popular in her class and has many friends. Although there were times when she was nervous and shy about their acceptance, nowadays, as the support and motivation from the family continues, she says she feels more and more confident about herself and she feels gratitude for her parents and family in general.

From the other point of view, her family perceives Jane in a positive way too. Her parents are proud of her and they support her ambitions and motivate her. They say that the main thing for them is for her to be happy, despite the state in which she will reach her happiness (although they would not support such activities as alcoholism, taking drugs etc.) They try to show her also the humorous way of life, through which she does not have problems with the “gifted child” label as can happen in some cases.<sup>1</sup> They believe her and trust her, which was so far never misused (although they remember a few occasions when she came home later than was agreed, but nothing more serious). Her brother also loves her and according to both, they can have good times together, spent in simple chatting, playing board games and so on.

### 1.5.1 Conclusion

In this brief case study, one can see that all of the important factors are present – the family communicates together, respects one another, but also its members can have fun together and enjoy the company of other members. Also, from Jane’s talking it was evident that she acknowledges the role of the family in her life and that she is very happy about their good relationships. She plans to study economy on one of the universities in Prague and seems to be looking forward to it.

## 1.6 ENRICHMENT AND ACCELERATION

It is a simple fact that a modern school is more concerned with students with learning difficulties than with those, who learn faster and perform better than their age-peers<sup>1</sup>.

In the Czech Republic, the issue of the Gifted students is covered by the education law n. 561/ 2004 Sb., and also by the decree n. 73/2005 Sb. on education of the students with specific educational needs and of exceptionally gifted students. By these documents, it is an obligation for any school to integrate a gifted student (and this means not only placement, but rather an active incorporation of such an individual into the process of education).<sup>2</sup>

Despite all these documents and laws, the reality differs from the theory. Although it is true that gifted students are accepted in schools, the thing which is still lacking is the competent teacher, who knows how to approach a child that learns faster and performs better than his or her classmates. This should not lead to the feeling that it is easy to understand and later to effectively attend to a gifted student – articles named as *Gifted class pushes teachers to the max* presents various reasons why the successful way to a gifted child is difficult.

As was already mentioned, clever and well performing gifted students often experience being no longer called up by the teacher. This can cause many problems as the student usually wants to be called up and to show his or her qualities – when this need is not satisfied, they can stop learning at home or they can begin to answer incorrectly – only to get the attention of the teacher once again.

As the 1<sup>st</sup> volume of *A Nation Deceived: How Schools Hold Back America's Brightest Students* points out, this can be prevented by several ways. There are two main possibilities and approaches of how to help those children to meet a real challenge in the school system and educational process.

Those two forms are known as Enrichment and Acceleration methods. Each of them is being discussed separately.

### 1.6.1 Enrichment

As the name suggests, this method focuses on providing the gifted students with additional material and new, more suitable challenges. The basic curriculum is taught and learned in more detail and with deeper concern. It is a deeper engagement of the curriculum, but not only of the curriculum – also, the teacher presents the class with various interesting information outside of the curriculum. This approach aims mainly for satisfying the basic needs of gifted children, such as their curiosity, their will to learn as much as possible about the topic etc. This enrichment material can be of a general character or it can be more specialized.<sup>1</sup>

This approach is known also in the Czech Republic. As V. and J. Fořtík point out, language schools, mathematical schools and high schools can be seen as such enrichment programs which are to serve children either in specific areas (areas of language, sport, music or mathematics) or in general academic areas (which is provided on high schools).<sup>2</sup>

But Enrichment can also be seen in many free time activities, as one of the main topics of the acceleration is to encourage interests and hobbies of the children that lie outside the scope of regular curriculum. One can see enrichment in educational excursions, field trips, getting students involved in various competitions, in afternoon educational clubs etc. Also, the school can make use of some of the parents who represent an authority in some fields of education.

The enrichment helps students to enhance creative thinking, solving problems, forming questions, with initiation of a project etc. The enrichment can be either more focused on the range of the educational process (presenting more new topics during the lessons) or on the depth of information (deeper elaboration of fewer topics).

When using enrichment, the gifted children (when compared to Acceleration) remain in the same group of age-peers, they do not skip grades etc.

In the process of enrichment, one of the important roles belongs to the availability of suitable extra materials, which can be easily approached by the



gifted children – such as books in a school library, which the child can read after finishing his or her task during the lesson. If the extra material is chosen well (it can be also various toys or games), it can encourage the observation and planning skills.<sup>3</sup>

Possibly one of the greatest facts about the enrichment method is the fact that it can be used in any kind of school, although it often requires a well prepared teacher, ready to answer many questions of the curious children.

In more detail, the enrichment programs can be divided into several types:

a) **Group programs** – the students are in groups according to their interests and premises, normally without any age or class restrictions. This type of programs focus on specific subjects and its aim is to create special didactic plans in a given subject. Such approach can be seen in the work of J. Gallagher.<sup>4</sup>

b) **Individual programs** – ...are the most specific ones and their main concern is to satisfy the individual needs of gifted children. These programs may have form of plans describing suitable approach to work with gifted children in a standard class or outside the class. There exist many authorities, which stress the importance of attending gifted children in an individual way, such as J. Treffinger or J. Feldhusen. Such programs are extremely difficult to prepare and it requires a well prepared and educated pedagogic personnel or adequate lecturers for an effective work with the children.

c) **Adjusting programs** – the main aim of these programs is not to support the strong aspects of the students, it mostly focuses on supporting those aspects, in which they may experience problems or difficulties.

d) **Preventative programs** – this type of programs aim, outside the classroom or in specialized workplaces, for enhancing and supporting social relationships of a gifted child or to prevent problems of this type from happening. As it often occurs, that a gifted child has a very extreme position in a classroom hierarchy, these programs represent a very important support for the

gifted. Otherwise, these programs also support the emotional area of the child, granting him or her support, after situations such as skipping grades, experiencing bullying from other classmates etc.

e) **Harmonizing programs** – the main aim here is to prevent a one-sided development of focus of the gifted children. Also to it tries to develop skills and character of a gifted individual in a balanced way, in other words, to harmonize his or her development.<sup>5</sup>

### 1.6.1 Acceleration

Another gift that a gifted child can get is represented by acceleration, another method for creating a suitable and motivating educational environment for the student. Differing from the approach of enrichment, this method is based on modification of educational methods, teaching plans and curriculum for the gifted students. This method allows a faster advance in one or more subjects (rarely it can occur that a student is accelerated in all the subjects) and it is meant for students with fast pace of learning. This method achieved many successes mainly in the area of mathematics.<sup>1</sup> It can be applied mostly in special classes as its application in traditional classrooms is rather difficult. In the USA, the most successful acceleration programs (focused on mathematics) took part on John Hopkins University in Baltimore. In Europe, similar approaches can be seen in Germany or Slovakia.

In modern society, as can be seen in the above mentioned *A Nation Deceived: How Schools Hold Back America's Brightest Students*, this approach faces a great distrust of the society, as many psychologists point out the importance of not stressing a child because of educational or social issues.<sup>2</sup> Authors of *A Nation Deceived* speak otherwise – they agree with the fact that it is essential to perform a deep and proper study of the child that is about to be accelerated prior to the acceleration itself. The research has many areas of interest, involving the opinion of the child as well, along with his or her family

relationships, school successes etc. Only after such a research can a child be accelerated. In their study, the authors present us with names of many famous and successful American people which were accelerated – names like T.S. Elliot, Joshua Lederberg (the youngest recipient of Nobel Laureate), scientists like James Watson or Charles Townes or one of the members of the Supreme Court, Sandra Day O’Conor, who graduated at the age of sixteen.<sup>3</sup>

The main reasons, why the society usually distrusts this method, as presented in *A Nation Deceived*, include the following:

1. **Teachers lack of familiarity with acceleration.** Educators in most of the schools are unfamiliar with the research evidence on acceleration’s benefits.
2. **Age trumps everything else.** For many educators, age-not readiness – has become the primary determinant for grade placement.
3. **Safe is better than sorry.** Most teachers see non-acceleration as the safer option – they feel that doing nothing is not harmful.
4. **It’s bad to push kids.** Teachers and parents see acceleration as hurrying children through childhood.
5. **New friends are hard to make.** Educators fear that children who are accelerated will not adjust well socially to the new class.<sup>4</sup>

Unfortunately, the above mentioned opinions are usually far from the truth.

For example, although a gifted child is of the same age as his or her age-peers, his or her demands and needs will be often very different and if the teacher does not respond to them appropriately, there is a great danger of the boredom factor, which can occur and which can lead to the child’s frustrations or to his or her disliking of the school and the process of learning in general.<sup>5</sup>

Also, safe is not always better than sorry. If a teacher “does nothing” in terms of needs of a gifted child, he or she in fact performs an intervention in the development of the child. Again, a boredom factor may occur as well.<sup>6</sup>

Dealing with the worry of not hurrying the kids, one should know that if we do not create a supporting atmosphere for the child, we can miss the enthusiastic, bright child who is ready and willing to move forward with the right curriculum and therefore we would ignore the clever child’s interest to learn.

Finally, it is my own personal experience from the summer camps organized by Mensa of the Czech Republic that usually, gifted children do have some problems when communicating with new people – but this varies with each separate case. During the summer camps, which create various possibilities for the participants to take part in one of its daily programs (such as creative writing, drama education, dancing lessons, arts and crafts etc.) I have encountered many gifted children and usually, thanks to the challenging atmosphere created by the nature of tasks of the individual programs (such as to write a short story on a given theme, to perform a simple scene using only limited number of props, to create a piece of art) the children are encouraged to share their experiences and opinions with other participants and usually after a few days, there were many new friendships to be found – and the age was not the issue of importance. Many friendships could be seen between the instructors of the camp and the participants.

According to the authors of *A Nation Deceived*, there are eighteen types of Acceleration<sup>7</sup>.

In the Czech Republic, the most often used types of Acceleration include Early Admission to Kindergarten, Early Admission to First Grade or Subject-Matter Acceleration/ Partial Acceleration. Usually, an act of complete omission of a grade (Grade-skipping) is preceded by a commission examination. Needless to say, the process of acceleration is very closely monitored and should an issue arise, there is always the possibility to return a child to his or her previous class.<sup>8</sup>

## 1.6.2 Conclusion on Acceleration and Enrichment

It is an important, although a sad fact, that in the Czech system of law the issues of giftedness are rather undeveloped. In our country, the opinions concerned with fears about stressing the child or hurrying through the childhood of a gifted individual still persist, often supported even by psychologists, who normally advise not to use acceleration methods as there are worries about disproportions between the physical and mental or cognitive and emotional-social development.<sup>1</sup>

Hopefully, with various courses dealing with the issues of giftedness and gifted education, this will change with time.

## 1.7 THE IMPORTANCE OF GOOD TEACHER

Already three components of the model of giftedness by J.F. Mönks, family, school and classmates have been mentioned. J. Laznibátová stresses the important connection and co-operation between two of those components, namely between the school and the family.<sup>1</sup> I have experienced many misunderstandings between parents of a child (gifted or non-gifted) and representatives of the institution of school in modern times. In the past, the institution of school and that of teachers has been far more respected than it is nowadays. As the new system of education starts to take place, teachers are expected to learn new ways of teaching, new ways of perceiving the curriculum and even their students. In modern times, unlike the past, there are cases of unsatisfied parents, arguing with teachers about the marks their child received, trying to correct the decision of a teacher etc.

Still, I believe that the connection between the institution of family and that of school has to cooperate effectively in order to support any pupil or student well.

For a gifted child, this cooperation is important even more, as such an individual needs to be observed with care and understanding. Such a gifted individual needs one more person in his life to be supporting and caring.

Good teacher.

### 1.7.1 Demands on the teacher

Throughout the years, the position and the perception of the role of a teacher by the society changed greatly. If one compares the modern teacher, who uses humanistic principles and methods to the medieval teacher, who defended scholastic ideas “without mercy”, the difference becomes clear.<sup>1</sup>

Nowadays, if one wants to be a good teacher, he or she has to maintain many skills, both of character and of academic values. J. Dvořáček in his *Kompendium pedagogiky* (Praha, 2009) points out, that although there are many types of teachers (autocratic, liberal, integrative etc.)<sup>2</sup>, they all share the common goal – to pass their knowledge to the young generation with clear and humane approach that aims to support and encourage humanism in them even more<sup>3</sup>. According to Dvořáček, it is the personal relationship with the children which makes a good teacher. J. Dvořáček presents us with the following requirements that are necessary to be met for a teacher to be successful: <sup>4</sup>

1. **Academic education in the subject field the teacher teaches.** For example, only a teacher educated in a foreign language can teach it – this cannot be done by an uneducated teacher, it is not enough that he or she “likes children”.<sup>5</sup> It is important to note that only via lifelong education of the teachers can this academic skills be enriched and successfully maintained. But having great academic knowledge does not guarantee a success in a teacher’s profession.

2. **Professional education in psychology and pedagogy sciences.** This type of education allows the teacher to understand the importance of development. It allows him or her to understand the development of a student and the development of the whole class as well. The pedagogic education allows the teacher to make use of his or her personal experience and pass it on the students, so they do not need to learn via the trial-and-error method. Even though there are many “prescribed” methods for the teacher to use, there is still a space for his or her creativity. As in the previous requirement, the need of a lifelong education of the teacher applies.

3. **Personality qualities.** This covers many physical and mental skills that are essential for a successful performance in this career. Research on workload has shown that a teacher’s profession (in terms of energy consumption) is one of the most demanding ones. This is due to the constantly high concentration of alertness, to the permanently ongoing processes of deciding, which support the atmosphere of stress, or because of the noisiness and

dustiness of the area in which the teacher works. Moreover, his or her performance is always under close examination. Demands upon the vocal tract, motor auditory and nervous system are high as well – this varies only a little with the type of school the teacher teaches in.

In terms of essential psychological qualities, a teacher should have sense of justice, intelligence, stability of personality, creativity, patience, self-activity and (of course) positive attitude towards children. Also, a teacher should show some degree of philanthropy and altruism.<sup>6</sup>

From the qualities a successful teacher should have which were mentioned above, one can see that the demands are numerous and their range is wide.

But a successful teacher of gifted students needs to have even more.

### 1.7.2 Teacher of the gifted

Exceptional children need exceptional support from their environment and teachers are no exception – their gifted students need specific ways of learning to be used or special methods of education.

J. Laznibátová mentions in her work N. Maier, who claims that it is essential to support the individual development of gifted children as much as possible, it is important to give them a chance, because they are able to help the world in return. Unfortunately, in our country this point of view (supporting the gifted) is not much taken into account.<sup>1</sup>

For exceptional children, one needs exceptional teachers. Therefore it is only logical, that the main focus of the education of gifted students lies in special education of teachers, which prepares them for such issues<sup>2</sup>. One of the main focuses is concerned with the area of creativity of the gifted children.



During the special education courses taken by teachers the main focus lies in correct and complex study and understanding of the personality of gifted students as well as the basics of communication with them. During the praxis, teachers mostly focus on dealing with problematic situations involving a gifted individual that may occur. Another part of the course is to present the teachers the forms of finding identification of gifted children, as well as the methods for analysis of their outputs and efforts.<sup>3</sup>

During the teaching process, a teacher needs to be able to optimize the teaching methods according to the needs of gifted students he or she also needs to seek balance between supporting strong aspects of the gifted child's personality and supporting the weaker ones as well. Above all, it is important to look after the emotional state of a gifted child.<sup>4</sup>

From the above mentioned requirements of a successful teacher of gifted students may be seen, that such a teacher should be both able to teach, inform and explain possible issues, as well as to be thoughtful and full of understanding.<sup>5</sup>

V. Hrabal in his work mentions the fact, that the process of education is one of the most difficult of human activities in general. He sees the prerequisite of a successful class management in continuous cognition and diagnosis of an individual student as well as that of the whole class. Moreover, a teacher should be aware of his or her part in the state of the class and it is therefore important for him or her to accompany his diagnostic surveys with auto-diagnosis.<sup>6</sup>

To make the already difficult task of the teacher even more complicated, when dealing with gifted students in a regular class, it is important to know that there is no method of teaching that would be optimal for both gifted and non-gifted students at the same time.<sup>7</sup>

### 1.7.3 Working with gifted students

According to V. and J. Fořtík's *Nadané dítě a rozvoj jeho schopností* (Praha 2007), here are some of the basic rules a teacher should keep in mind when dealing with gifted students (especially younger ones):

1. **Non – authoritative communication** – Especially young gifted children have a strong feeling of their own autonomy and its violation can lead to their misunderstanding and they can react violently or by retreating within themselves. This especially applies when a parent uses authoritative style of bringing up with several restrictions and orders given to the child without any further explanation or clarification.
2. **Careful listening** – gifted children, especially when they are talkative, are able to describe their feelings, actions and ideas with all possible details or to come up with new rules of games etc. Sometimes, it can be very hard to listen carefully...
3. **Not forcing a gifted child to an activity he or she does not like** – gifted children often have various rules of their own, but they often have difficulties in following rules of others. If they do not follow the rules of polite behaviour it is – of course – time to act, but if one would organize their free time or even games, one could easily damage or even destroy their own ways of discovering the world around them.
4. **Creating space for the presentation of the child** – both gifted and non-gifted children should experience the feeling of success. Respect and understanding of the closest friends and family are essential for a harmonic development of a gifted child. If children are given space for presenting their successes, they surely will use it, secretly gaining self-confidence.
5. **Evaluation of a work of a gifted child in a group** – gifted children are often very sensitive towards criticism. Therefore, it is good to evaluate the results of their work in groups. Especially if the child is given the

opportunity to start with the evaluating process. By this process a gifted child learns about his or her own mistakes and learns about the importance of critical approach.<sup>1</sup>

These are only the basic rules that a teacher should observe when dealing with the gifted.

In praxis, on some of the specialized schools for gifted students, it is a common that the headmaster specifies the required qualities of a teacher in order to be accepted – for example, teachers of a private school in Braunschweig, which opens classes for gifted student, are required to meet the following qualities:

- To have a teaching style that is suitable for education of gifted students
- To be able to realize a developing educational plans for gifted students, to be able to maintain it and extend it
- To be able to perceive the issues of the gifted and to solve them<sup>2</sup>

#### 1.7.4 Difficulties of teachers of the gifted students

Probably one of the most important issues, when teaching gifted students, lies in the preparation of an Individual Education Plan (IEP) and its continuous update. “This procedure allows the gifted child to develop according to their skills and abilities. But for many teachers this exhausting work is the reason to quit their jobs after only a few years.<sup>1</sup> Another reason for the teachers to be tired is the fact, that, although gifted students are perceived as students with special educational requirements, the financial support from the state (in the Czech Republic) is incomparably lower than that of students of a specialized class. In the article *Gifted class pushes teachers to the max*, one of the asked teachers says that “teaching gifted education is like teaching a specialized class without the support that is given to special ed.”<sup>2</sup>

In the Czech Republic, it is rather hard to find resources or teaching materials that would be specifically dealing with the gifted education. Some possibilities lie in translating materials from foreign languages such as English or German – and in teachers willing to translate them and prepare them for the students.

### 1.7.5 Education of the gifted in the Czech Republic

It would be wrong to think that in the Czech Republic there is no interest for the education of gifted students. Important long-term aims of gifted education are stated in a so-called White Paper - in National Programme for the Development of Education in the Czech Republic (2001) and in Long-term aims for education and the development of the education system (2002). Both of these documents are important for further education of the gifted.<sup>1</sup>

Aside from the White Paper, many enriching programs and facultative courses are offered by various schools, creating one important thing – possibility. Although there are not many schools specifically designed for gifted education, gifted children still have the possibility to choose a school which they (or their parents) find best for their future education – for example, suitable educational programs can be found in the form of many high schools<sup>2</sup>. On the Faculties of Pedagogy in the Czech Republic, there have been several courses about the gifted education and its importance, educating future teachers in this matter.

#### 1.7.5.1 *Mensa gymnázium*

Founded in 1993 as eight-year high school Buďánka by a group of parents gathered around Kateřina Havlíčková, the purpose of this school was right from the beginning to offer special education to children whose skills were above average and who required special care. Although the beginnings of the whole

project were rather problematic, in 1996 Kateřina Havlíčková alienated the school to Mensa. This connection was very successful, with many members of Mensa functioning as teachers of the gifted students. Also, the high school offered around sixty facultative courses which the students were allowed to choose from right from the first year of study.

In the 90's, one of the leading figures of the high school was PaedDr. Tomáš Houška, author of many publications dealing with pedagogy, such as *Škola hrou* or *Inkluzivní škola*. He supported the idea of great rights for students of Bud'ánka. During this period, the school was amongst one of the most prestigious high schools in the country.<sup>1</sup>

#### *1.7.5.2 My visit on Mensa gymnázium*

During my research I have visited and observed the praxis of Mensa gymnasium (see pic.8-9 in the Appendix). It follows many aims of the original school, allowing its students to choose from a great variety of facultative courses, such as astronomy, the phenomenon of sci-fi and others. Some of the students are allowed attend university courses, especially in terms of mathematics and physics. To be accepted on the school, an applicant has to pass an IQ test (aside from other regular tests), with a minimal IQ score of 130.

One of the interesting facts about the teaching praxis is, that each lesson of any subject lasts for two ordinary teaching lessons (one lesson therefore lasts for ninety minutes). When asked about this phenomenon, Vojtěch Matoušek, one of the older students of Mensa gymnázium says, that he cannot imagine it otherwise: “I do not know what we would learn in forty-five minutes. We need this time – the lessons would otherwise be too short!” Ondřej Mrázek, one of his classmates, totally agrees: “I thought that this is a normal procedure in all the schools... Well, we do not learn much (he smiles), but still, forty five minutes? Come on!”

Instead of deep respect towards teachers, I have seen something best described as a kind of unwritten pact, between the two parties, with students

acknowledging the position of the teacher, allowing him or her to teach them and tell them new information about a given subject, with the teacher accepting their personal freedom (to a certain degree, I have not come across any signs of misbehaviour, mostly there was more whispering and loud remarks than it would be allowed on a regular school).

During my visit it was clear to see that each of the students is an individual, with his own areas of interests etc. But through the work of teachers, all the individuals worked together as a group and there were many signs of friendship etc.

One of the most specific phenomenon occurred during the lesson of physical education, when, despite the fact that the two classes of boys were competing with each other, there were no signs of rivalries etc. Also, students which performed rather worse during this lesson were not punished or criticised by the rest of the class, which is a common phenomenon in other schools – the atmosphere was about entertainment and understanding.

During a break, gifted students behave as any other students, according to their age. For their relaxation and entertainment, there were several computers stationed in the corridors of the school, which were accessible for anyone. Also, there were few dance pads, allowing the students to compete against each other during the break.

Another interesting thing I learned during the research was observing even those parts of the curriculum, in which some of the students were not gifted. Such experience came in the form of an English lesson, in which the students were divided (even between grades) according to their level of language. The lesson with lower performing students was almost the same as it can be seen on a regular school with students making mistakes common to anyone. When asked by the teacher about their opinion on one of the themes (because of the time of a year the main theme was “Christmas”), students produced a few uncommon and interesting remarks, but otherwise, their performance in their non-gifted area was totally comparable to that of non-gifted students.

### *1.7.5.3 Conclusion on the visit of Mensa gymnázium*

Mensa gymnázium offers its students various facultative courses and therefore it gives great opportunities for enrichment methods. Also, the individuality of each of the student is approached with care and understanding. Students gifted in certain areas are allowed to attend to university courses in order to gain more experience in a given field. Lessons of ninety minutes of teaching time allow both the students and teachers to debate about a given problem in more detailed way. With the methods used during the teaching process and other free-time activities, the rather individualistic students form a group that is able to work together and to respect needs and wishes of its other members.

## 1.8 PERCEPTIONS OF A TEACHER

A few years ago, I have carried out a survey, monitoring the perception of the role of the teacher from the point of view both of the gifted and from the point of view of non-gifted students, looking for significant differences and possible consensus as well. After my visit on Mensa gymnázium, my interest in finding more about the role of the teacher as seen by gifted and non-gifted students increased.

I perceive the role of the teacher as a crucial component for the development of a student. This is important even more when dealing with gifted students, who need a skilled and educated pedagogue.

Therefore, I decided to find out the perception of a teacher's role as seen by gifted and non-gifted students.

As a method of this survey I used a half-structured interview as it would best fit my intentions, to understand the inner feelings and opinions of the respondents. In comparison to questionnaire this method allowed me to lead the interview in a desired direction, learning more about the opinions of the respondents.

The respondents were first asked to describe their favourite teacher and were asked to explain the reasons of their opinion. Then the interview usually unfolded according to their answers, but still following the main theme of the interview – to find the most important qualities of a teacher for gifted and for non-gifted students.

As an example, I present two of the interviews. The first of them was conducted with a gifted student, the second one with a non-gifted. As a personality of the respondent also plays a significant role, both of the interviews are accompanied by a brief commentary on social and economical status of the respondents. For purposes of this work, names of each of the respondents were changed. Both of the respondents agreed with publication of these interviews.



### 1.8.1.1 Interview with Jane

#### **Jana Nováková (21) – Gifted**

In these days, Jana studies on the Faculty of Pedagogy of Charles University in Prague, with fields of study of Czech language and Mathematics. Previously, she attended a private eight-year high school. Since the third year, she always got distinction. She graduated in Czech language, English language, Maths and in social sciences – she succeeded in all of them and was awarded the “A” marks in each of them.

She comes from a divorced family and she lives with her mother and a brother, who is six years younger. Her hobbies include creative writing, drawing and LARPs (Live Action Role Play, games in which a certain theme is set and each of the participants-players creates or is given a specific role. For a more detailed description of LARP, see the appropriate part of this thesis.) She has created two LARP projects herself for the participants of the Mensa camp in years 2005 and 2007, which were inspired by G.R.R. Martin’s *A Song of Ice and Fire (A Game of Thrones)* fantasy saga and by the saga of *Lone Wolf*, written by J. Dever. Her own stories have won several times one of the first three places in the competition *O loutnu barda Marigolda*. She attends to a creative writing course. She has great interest in alternative medicine, namely the art of *reiki*, which she practices herself. Her IQ score is above 150.

If one should use the classification of Mönks and Yppenbug as it is presented in their book *Nadané dítě*,<sup>1</sup> it is possible to say the following.

1. **She excels in the area of intellectual skills** – this can be seen in her study of reiki, or in her study performances and outputs.
2. **She excels in the field of creativity and productivity** – as can be seen in her various drawings.
3. **She excels in the field of art, in the creative field** – as can be seen in many of her short stories. Nowadays, she writes her own saga, dealing with northern mythology, legends of Valhalla etc.

4. **She excels in the social area, showing the leadership activity** – which can be seen from her work as the organizer during the summer camps in 2005 or 2007, where she was to manage a group of about sixty young people ageing from thirteen to twenty, many of them gifted and individualistic.

And now for the conversation itself:

**Jane, if you were to characterize your favourite teacher, who would it be and how had this person won your sympathies?**

Well, this is quite easy – we used to have an exceptional teacher of Mathematics on high school. She was brilliant, because she completely understood her subject, in comparison to other teachers, who were only “one chapter ahead” of us. This teacher had a perfect authority in her class, but she had also a good sense of humour, therefore when she made a mistake, she was able to laugh at her own errors.

**Did this teacher make some differences between gifted and non-gifted students in the class?**

She certainly did. For example, if someone finished the appointed task earlier than the rest of the class, he or she was given a chance to prepare for the next lesson, to read some book or magazine of his own or to whisper with someone, who had fulfilled the task as well. We were also allowed to help other classmates who had difficulties with the task. Sometimes, she prepared some extra materials for us – such as arithmetical exercises taken from entrance exams to universities, exercises taken from mathematical competitions etc.

**You mentioned helping other students. How did you perceive the whole class? Were you happy in the class?**

To be honest, I did not give a darn about the class as a whole. I was simply not interested in it. I had some good friends among my classmates, but I did not care much about the rest. Not that I would not help them or something,

on the other hand, I think I helped them a lot, I let them copy my homework and stuff. After all, I study on the Faculty of Pedagogy now, so there could be some connection (she laughs).

**So far, you have studied on the Faculty of Pedagogy for two years. If you were asked to say who is a teacher to you, how would you describe him or her?**

Teacher is someone who makes you learn things, because otherwise one never learns on his own. Moreover, it is someone who motivates you for your studies. For me, one of my teachers was important even for the decision of my future studying career.

**Could you be more specific about the studying career?**

Well, my favourite teacher on high school was the already mentioned teacher of Maths, followed by an exceptional teacher of Czech language. And here I am, on a Faculty of Pedagogy, studying Czech language and Maths. If all the teachers were as good as those two, I would not be able to choose what to study.

**You mentioned the motivational role of the teacher in terms of self-study. Have your teachers motivate you in terms of extra-curricular activities?**

They certainly have – especially in terms of participation in some competitions etc.

**Were you successful in these activities? How important it was for you?**

I was quite successful in those activities. But it was not important.

**Why?**

Let's say – I win a competition. And what? I am pleased when I get an “A” in a subject. But I know that I am good, I do not need to win a competition to realize it. My self-realization lies in learning the ability to get over anything that occurs in my life, but this is hardly limited only to school. For me, self-realization is to lead an ordinary, happy life – with a boyfriend, family, children...

**Thank you. So far, we have discussed the characteristics of a favourite teacher. Could you tell me if you have had a teacher that you disliked and why?**

I did not like much our teacher of chemistry. Her lessons were non-systematic, sometimes even chaotic. Moreover, she used to make silly mistakes in her lectures and it was clear that she did not understand some of the themes. And she lacked authority. She was unable to maintain it.

**So, it is the authority and knowledge of a teacher which are important to you?**

Absolutely. If I start to be better than my teacher, then he or she does not have the right to teach me. This applies both to the knowledge and authority. If I start to lick him or her in any of those fields, the teacher loses me.

**Have you ever sought the help of a teacher in other area than in the educational process, for example to advise you in some personal issues etc.?**

Well, the teacher is important for me to be a friend as well – but I still understand his or her position of the teacher. And I deal with my personal issues myself.

### **Therefore, if a teacher is a friend, everything is easier?**

Not everything, but it helps. If someone cuts somebody some slack, he or she surely will not have my sympathies. But if someone inspires me by his or her abilities and attitude, I try my best to fulfil the appointed task as successfully as possible. But if the teacher does not interest me, I simply fulfil the task, with marks ranging from A to C, but I am not interested anymore.

### **Thank you for the interview.**

You are welcome.

#### *1.8.1.2 Interview with Josef*

##### **Josef Novotný (18) – Non-gifted**

Nowadays, Josef studies at Vocational School of Management in Pilsen and he would like to study anglicistics in the future. He comes from a decent family. He has a sister who is four years older. According to Josef, he has good relationships with all the members of his family. One of his big hobbies is japanology and almost everything that is connected to it – he likes Japanese manga comic books, their legends, the language itself. His school grades are not bad, but he is rather average in his school outputs, his school performances are usually graded somewhere between “B” and “C”. His IQ score is about 100.

And now for the conversation itself:

##### **Josef, if you were to characterize your favourite teacher, who would it be and how had this person won your sympathies?**

Well, the sense of humour is what matters. A teacher without a sense of humour is no good. Moreover, he must not think of himself as being somehow

superior to his students and he must not misuse his position. But, on the other hand, he should be able to get respect and he must not – as the saying goes – let the others to piss him off. And, what is most important, he should enjoy the teaching.

**Is it important for you that the teacher completely understands the subject he or she teaches or is it enough for you when the teacher knows how to explain the subject matter so the class can understand it?**

That depends on the teacher. University teachers should be real professionals in their field of focus, but for a middle school teacher, it is more important to be able to present the subject matter to the class clearly and in a way they can understand. I do not think a teacher needs to be an expert. His main task is to present the curriculum to his or her class clearly and correctly. On the other hand, teacher still needs to have great knowledge in his field of study not to make silly mistakes.

**So the needed level of a teacher's knowledge can be found in comparison to the class or grade which he or she teaches?**

Yes, in a way.

**You also said that the teacher should have an authority amongst the class, but you also mentioned that he or she should not misuse it. Could you be more specific on this matter? For example, where do you see the limits of using the authority?**

That is a hard question. For example, if a teacher happens to dislike one of his students, it is easy for him to make this student repeat the whole grade. The teacher starts to ask the disliked student difficult questions, he or she can keep the student in detention (well, that is not allowed, it is a bodily restraint and this could lead to many problems). If the teacher really makes a student repeat the whole grade, the life of the student can be totally changed.

**I take it that it is important to use the authority wisely and in bounds of law. And what about motivation, is it important for you when the teacher motivates you towards some goal?**

Well, a teacher can motivate, offer an advice or something, this can do no harm. On the other hand, he or she should not impose it on the student. When the teacher describes the profession of a bricklayer, well, why not, someone may like it and may become a bricklayer in the future. But another student is more interested in thatching, because it is done in great heights, for example. And here the teacher should not try to discourage this student, even if he does not like thatching. This is just a little example.

**Is it important – or at least pleasant for you – when the teacher offers some possibilities of extra-curricular activities?**

This offer of extra-curricular activities is alright. One of my hobbies on middle school was drama education. This is just another thing which helps in developing of the character of the student and it tightens the relationship between the teacher and the student even more. But again – if the student is not interested in such activities, the teacher should respect this decision.

**Now, if you were asked to describe who is a teacher for you, what would you say?**

Well, a teacher is someone who shares his or her knowledge with other people. It is another person in the lives of his or her students who forms their characters, maybe even in a greater way than the parents. It is a person, who teaches others in order to be able to exist even in the future, who teaches them skills and knowledge which are important to be able to look after oneself. Above all, the teacher does this for a small salary and with minimal respect.

**Well, that was rather too general. Do you see teachers this way yourself?**

I try to, yes.

**Thank you very much. Now, how would you describe a disliked teacher?**

Hmmm, such a kind of teacher would be some kind of a moron, who shouts at his students all the time, without any reason and who behaves like an idiot or who thinks himself or herself better than the class.

**To summarize it: In a teacher, you need a sense of justice and sense of humour. The teacher has to understand his subject matter, but only in terms of the needs and requirements of his or her students.**

Yes, that's right. But it is not bad when the teacher understands more than the subject matter...

**Thank you very much for this interview...**

You are welcome.



### 1.8.2 Conclusion on the perception of a teacher's role

In a complete agreement with the results of a research mentioned by L. Hříbková<sup>1</sup>, the results of my interviews show, that for a gifted student, it is the qualification and authority of a teacher, which plays the vital role. For the gifted, it is not important for the teacher to act as a friend – this is much more important for the non-gifted students. The sense of humour is valued by both groups of students, although the non-gifted group values it more. The sense for justice is valued equally high by both groups. In comparison to the gifted students, the personal charisma of the teacher is much more valued by the non-gifted students.

In terms of what a teacher should not do, both groups agree on misuse of his or her authority, favour some of the students above others only because of personal preferences and demanding too difficult tasks from the students.

When all the results of the interviews are put together, both gifted and non-gifted students perceive the role of a teacher as follows:

**A teacher is someone whose main purpose is to pass his or her knowledge upon his or her students, motivate them to learn, help the in the process of learning and therefore prepare for the future.**

## 2 ALTERNATIVE WAYS OF TEACHING ENGLISH

In my research, I focused on alternative, specialized ways and methods, which can be used for the gifted students to help them with their specific needs in the learning process. J. Laznibátová, V. Fořtík, J. Fořtíková and other respected authorities in the field of the giftedness all agree on the fact, that, unlike normal, average students, gifted children normally do not like revising the curriculum, because they can usually learn it on the first try (although, we are speaking of their specific area of giftedness – mathematics, linguistic skills etc. They still need revising the curriculum in fields in which they are not gifted in). If a teacher keeps revising in the usual way, gifted students get usually bored very quickly and they often start to disturb the rest of the class.

I have been a lector of summer camps organized by Mensa of the Czech Republic (later by Prague by Night) for several years and I have seen some of the approaches towards gifted children.

In the following part of the thesis, I would like to present the work with the gifted on the summer camps and present several unusual ways of teaching English to the gifted as I have seen it (and practiced) during my research. Although, usually, these ways (or at least some of them) need a lot of preparation, I believe that they can be a real enrichment of the usual methods and as far as I know, they are usually met by gratitude of the participants.

After presenting the summer camps and their purpose, I have divided the possible alternative ways of teaching the gifted into individual categories, according to the type of the method used. The methods I present on the following pages are: Drama education, Using Board games and Live Action Role Play.

## 2.1 SUMMER CAMPS OF MENSA AND THEIR PURPOSE

The very first summer camp of Mensa of the Czech Republic was organized in the year 2003, under Václav Fořtík and Jan Vodička's supervision. One of its main purposes was to assemble as many gifted children as possible and to give them a chance to experience a camp that would be rather different from others (see pic.10-13 in the Appendix). The age of the participating children was from around eleven to twenty and it is important to say that not all of the participants were gifted children (there was no entrance test to the camps etc.), although these people formed an important and rather numerous group. Also, there was a small group of Bulgarian gifted students present, along with their teacher. The main sections and program lines of the first camp were (the English section was accepted later):

1. **Logic** (presented mainly by V. Fořtík, J. Vodička and others through various quizzes and mathematical problems)
2. **Drama education** (taught by Zdeněk Turek, Jan Šotkovský and other students of DAMU in various workshops)
3. **Creative writing** (explained by writers Lucie and Petra Lukačovič through series of lectures with the participants trying to write their own stories/poetry according to a theme given etc.)

The philosophy of Mensa summer camps, as formed by Fořtík and Vodička, focused on many important aspects of the work with the gifted children:

The first aspect of the philosophy was that every participant of the camp was **free to choose** on which activity, which was announced for the following day, to participate. Therefore, it was possible for the participants to choose, for example, Drama Education one day and Creative writing the other. The program of each of the lines was carefully organized in separate units making it easy for each of the participants to understand the message of each individual lesson, despite their previous participating on this line of program or the other. The next theme of each of the program lines was announced in the evening of the previous day and the participants were to put their names on a sheet of paper, signaling their interest in

the activity, giving the lecturers a better idea of preferred activities and (later) the important feedback.

Also, following the philosophy of the free choice, the participants were allowed to choose not to participate on any of the activities of a given day. They were allowed to rest or to walk through a nearby forest (always with a lecturer nearby), to read a book, play a board game etc. This aspect, in my opinion, largely contributed to the feeling of self-confidence of each of the participants.

The second aspect of the philosophy of the camps was represented in the form of the so-called “**hobbit indexes**”, small notebooks that were given to each of the children. If a child participated in some of the activities announced by one of the sections, he or she was awarded a few points (“gold crowns”) for their interest and participation. In the end of the camp, each of the children was allowed to choose a small present according to the amount of their “gold pile”. Among the presents, one could find various books, CDs with IQ tests, but also some of the board games, which were often played during evenings or breaks in general.

This aspect of the philosophy functioned as a great motivation for all the children to participate in the offered program.

Also, the participants of the camp were encouraged to make their own program for the others. If someone was willing to do so (there was one girl who explained the others the basics of Arabic in which she was much experienced, for example), he or she was greatly supported by the lecturers (the girl with the Arabic was given a room for her lecture, papers, notebook for presentations etc.) and also awarded richly in terms of the gold crowns and the hobbit index.

Another important part of the philosophy was that the participants were told to announce their successes and ideas to the lecturers. If the idea was interesting, the given participant was again awarded (there was a boy who explained rules of one of rather complicated board games to a group of Bulgarian participants in English, who told it later to one of the lecturers and was rewarded.) Therefore, the participants were led to understand the importance of “being heard”.

As was already mentioned above, aside from the main program lines, there were various other activities supporting the idea of giftedness and teamwork, such as tourneys in some of the board games (*Die Siedler von Catan*, *Carcassonne*, *Ohne Furcht und Adel* etc.), drama improvisations, or various team building activities,

which took part mainly during the first days of the camp, creating a pleasant atmosphere for most of the participants, who quickly got to know each other.

Altogether, this philosophy and activities of the summer camps were so successful that they were used in the following years again and again, with the ideas of free choice and hobbit indexes working together with great efficiency to the joy of both the participants and the lecturers. Similar philosophy was later accepted by another organization of summer camps, Prague by Night, although the idea of giftedness was not of a primary concern.

### 2.1.1 English section in the program of summer camps

Originally, as was mentioned above, the English section was not present in the first summer camp organized by Mensa of the Czech Republic. Nevertheless, it was added shortly afterwards, representing an individual program line of another summer camp of Mensa of the Czech Republic, “VLK”, supervised by J. Fořtíková and J. Vodička, the primary focus of which lied in Art Education and Logic, although the English section played an important role as well. VLK followed similar philosophy as the first of the summer camps, focusing again on the idea of free choice and hobbit indexes.

Those participants, who were interested in the English section, were offered many activities, such as tournaments in specific board games, during which it was important to communicate with other players (such as *Die Siedler von Catan*) – the communication was, of course, allowed only in English. Other activities of the English section were debates on various themes (which worked effectively with the need of the gifted children to get down to brass tracks), watching movies in English (supported by English subtitles) and working with them later in some of the activities or – again – in debates.

Same as with the first Mensa camp, the participants of VLK were encouraged to come up with their own ideas and activities for the other children.

One of the new possibilities (in comparison to the first of the camps) was to present oneself in a daily newspaper, containing of two pages, one written in Czech,

the other in English. Participants who were willing to contribute to the newspapers were given assistance and supported by the lectors to do so – therefore, there were several poems written by the participants, few short stories and brief commentaries about the camp activities. Again, this activity was greatly rewarded in the form of gold crowns.

As the results of the English section and the satisfaction of the participants were above expectation, this section quickly found its rightful place in the program of the whole camps and it is met with enjoyment of its participants every year since.

## 2.2 ENGLISH SECTION ON SUMMER CAMPS TODAY

For a better picture about the activities of the English section on nowadays Mensa camps, I have interviewed Václav Mužík, who leads the English section for several years now.

**Václav Mužík** (23) studied Electrical engineering, telecommunications and computer technologies on Czech Technical University and now works for a company dealing with programming electronic cards. He has City and Guilds Certificate in International ESOL, level B2 (Communicator) and City and Guilds Certificate in International Spoken ESOL, level B2 (Communicator). He lives in Prague.

And now for the interview itself:

**Václav, you are a head of the English section of Mensa summer camps for several years. Could you tell us how did you get to this position?**

No problem. I have been a lector on Mensa summer camps for 4 years now. Originally, after few years as a regular participant of Mensa camps, I started as an instructor of *poi*, but eventually, when my English skills were discovered (he smiles), I was given this opportunity in the English section.

**Could you now give us a picture about the participants of your English program? How numerous the group is, the average age etc.?**

It is hard to give definite numbers, as there is the unwritten rule of the free choice of the program, so the number of participants varies each day. The program of the English section, as well as all the other program lines, takes place every day, usually in the morning – this depends on the interest of the participants. But to return to your question – usually, I have from six to eleven participants each day – the camp itself has usually from eighty to a hundred participants. The age of the participants varies as well – I have lectured a group with two six years old girls, the oldest member of the group was seventeen. So, the average age lies somewhere in between. Well, normally it is about fourteen years of age. Their English was not very good, something above elementary level, although some of them were about intermediate level.

**You mentioned an age range from six to seventeen years of age and mixed levels of English. This sounds like a challenge to me...**

Well, it was a kind of a challenge... That's right. But eventually, the whole group worked together quite well, there were no bigger issues. All the participants enjoyed the activities and respected each other. To my satisfaction (he smiles).

**Could I ask you about the methods and activities you used during the individual sessions?**

Well, following the philosophy of the camps, I tried not to push the participants more than they allowed me to do. Each of the sessions lasted for two hours, beginning with a debate on a given theme – such as “How do you feel?”, “How do you enjoy the camp so far?” and so on. After this warm-up, I moved to other activities, which usually consisted of some board games played in English or in some drama activities, again in English.

**Could you be more specific about these methods you have mentioned?**

I am a big fan of board games. Nowadays, there are really thousands of them, offering different themes and game styles. For the English lectures, I have chosen those board games, which are concerned primarily with the linguistic and vocal skills of the players, such as *Dixit*, *Activity* etc. To win in these games, a player needs to describe an object or a picture on one of the cards and the other players usually guess the correct answer. In the end, a player who scores the most points wins.

**So, you used rules of the board games without any changes?**

No, it was almost the other way around. The game of *Activity*, for example, requires a player to describe or draw or perform a situation or an object written on one of the cards and present it to the other players. For the English program on Mensa camps, I changed the rules and therefore the participants were asked to describe the object in English, despite the action written on the card (drawing, performing etc.).

**Was this method successful?**

As far as I can tell, it was. Many of the participants of the summer camps kept coming to my program every day since their first visit, despite the idea of free choice. The children were looking forward to the board games and enjoyed it quite much.

**You mentioned the idea of free choice. Do you still use hobbit indexes as well?**

Well, it is not exactly as it used to be, but the motivation through point evaluation of activities of the participants is still in use. Yeah, that was another thing I used during the English sessions. As the level of English of the participants was rather worse, I used the idea of point evaluation to make them come with better



answers and reactions in general. It was pleasant to see that after a few days even the low participants were trying to form longer than one word answers.

**And what about the drama projects you mentioned?**

Sometimes, following the work with the board game, I divided the group into smaller groups and they were asked to perform an improvisation on a given theme. The themes were usually daily situations, such as “A driver at a gas station with no money” and so on. It was, of course, all in English.

**What about the shyness of the participants? Was this problematic?**

Well, maybe at the beginning. But after few days, the participants were enjoying this very much. It was a great source of laughter. It also served as a kind of an icebreaker activity, therefore getting the participants to know each other even better.

**As the camp was organized by Mensa, I presume there were some gifted children present. Were any of them attending your English program?**

Yes, there was one boy, aged twelve, who was gifted. I approached him with care, because he was – as far as I can tell – showing signs of introversion. At first, he did not reply much to the questions, he was rather silent. His English was rather average. After few days I nominated him for one of the improvisation scenes. He was again rather silent, giving one word answers. The next day, I nominated him once more, giving him a role that was required to speak quite a lot and I kept doing this the whole camp (he visited my English sessions almost every day), trying slightly to push the limits. It was my personal victory seeing him to grow, to lose much of his shyness and improving his relationships with other participants.

**What about the other participants? How did they react to this boy?**

They were absolutely excellent. They accepted him in the group and they were trying to help him to feel comfortable. I did not experience any inconvenience in this matter.

**So, you mentioned activities like improvisation or board games. Were there any other activities you practiced with the children?**

Well, one day, I explained them the basics of limericks. They were quite interested in it and therefore I asked them to write down a limerick or two of their own. They enjoyed the whole activity quite much and even some of the limericks were quite good.

**Thank you very much for your time.**

You are welcome.

### 2.2.1 Conclusion

Although some changes have been made in the course of activities of English program line of the Mensa camps, the basic aims of the course still apply – with the use of unusual, interesting methods an interest of the participants is aroused. Therefore, the participants often forget about the whole process of teaching, which only adds to its successfulness.

## 2.3 THREE ALTERNATIVE WAYS OF TEACHING ENGLISH

In the following part of my thesis, I would like to write about three unusual methods that can be used for teaching English. It is my opinion that despite the fact that these methods are more difficult to prepare than standard ones, they can be a source of excitement and interest for many students and, because of the special learning habits and needs of the gifted students, these methods can support their usual longing for new, untried approaches.

The three ways I would like to present are: Board games, LARP and Drama education. Each of the alternative methods is given a separate article, which contains an introduction to the basics of the method, followed by purpose of using such a method and a few examples of usage of such a method.

### 2.3.1 Board Games

It is a well known fact that all people learn through games. There are many famous quotations comparing various aspects of human life to a game. One can often hear a phrase that adults forgot to play and that it is essential for them to learn it once again. PhDr. Eduard Bakalář CSc., in his book *I dospělí si mohou hrát* (Praha, 1976) points out the importance of keeping one's mind active and fresh as long as possible and he continues by comparing the importance of physical education through various series of physical activities to mental exercises through various series of tests, quizzes and games.<sup>1</sup> Antonín Jančařík in his book *Hry v matematice* (Univerzita Karlova v Praze, Pedagogická fakulta, 2007) writes about suitable games for mathematically talented people and stresses the importance of games in the development of a child, saying that: "*In the process of a game, children learn new skills in a relaxed, "by the way" manner and skills learned this way are better remembered than if only memorized.*"<sup>2</sup>

During my research, I have seen the positive results of appropriate use of games during the teaching process. No matter if the games used were in form of riddles, memory games, they were usually met with interest of the students

(although this may vary with the age of the students). And it is interest that is often so hard to awaken in a gifted student.

As I have personal experience with playing board games of various kinds, I was curious about the potential of their use as another teaching method. After speaking with V. Mužík and visiting the summer camps of Mensa of the Czech Republic, I have come to the conclusion that board games can certainly be used for the enrichment of the curriculum.

### *2.3.1.1 Board games suitable for teaching English*

For the purposes of teaching English, I find it essential for a board game to be oriented towards one of the “four skills”, which are essential for a good development of English – listening, speaking, reading or writing.

In the following lines, I would like to present a few board games (namely *Rory’s Story Cubes*, *Dixit* and *Once Upon A Time*) that can be used as a teaching tool during English lessons (see pic.14-16 in the Appendix). Each of the games is given a brief summary of the game rules, possible number of players and possible applications.

#### ***Rory’s Story Cubes***

**Author:** Rory O’Connor

**Publisher:** Gamewright

**Number of Players:** 1-12

**Playing time:** 20 minutes

**Year Published:** 2005

#### **Description:**

There are nine cubes with various symbols on each of their sides, such as sheep, magic wand, turtle and so on. The players have to roll all the 9 cubes and

then form a story using each of the symbols. As there are no exact rules given, the game allows the players to create their own, along with various themes to talk about etc.

### **Possible ways of using *Rory's Story Cubes* in a teaching process:**

The simple basics of this game create great possibilities for the teacher to work with. Some of the suggestions given in the game box contain the following:

- Roll all 9 cubes and look at the face up images. Pick an image that will be the starting point for your story. Beginning with “Once upon a time...” make up a story that somehow links together all 9 face up images.

- Think up a title or theme for a story. (Examples: “The beach”, “My fantastic vacation”, “Dream”.) Then roll all 9 cubes and try to tell a story that relates back to the title or theme.

- Divide the cubes evenly among the players. (It is ok if some get more than others.) Starting with one player and continuing in a circle, take turns rolling the cubes and adding to the story based on the face up images. Stop after all 9 cubes have been rolled, or continue rolling for additional rounds.

As one can see, this game can be used for enhancing speaking and listening skills of the players, as a mental workout or for literacy development.

The gifted children can be interested in describing the individual symbols and their combinations in a new, unusual way. Also, as this game is completely playable solitaire, a teacher can use it as a reward for a gifted child who is finished with his or her work before the rest of the class. Such a student is then asked to roll the cubes and write a short story (or a poem) according to the face up symbols.

This game can also be used as a tool for written homework, using the 9 cubes to give the children the basics of the story they are about to write, which can be combined with a given theme.

For more skilled students, this game can be combined with its expansion “Rory’s Story Cubes Actions”, which add verbs (again represented by symbols) to the game.

## ***Dixit***

**Author:** Jean-Louis Roubira

**Publisher:** Asmodee

**Number of players:** 3-6

**Playing time:** 30 minutes

**Year Published:** 2008

### **Description:**

One of the players is the storyteller for the turn. He looks at the six images in his hand. From one of these, he makes up a sentence and says it out loud, without showing the card to the other players. The other players select amongst their six images the one that best matches the sentence made up by the storyteller. Then, each of them gives their selected cards to the storyteller without showing it to the others. The storyteller shuffles his card with all the received cards. All pictures are shown face up, randomly, and every player has to bet upon what picture was the storyteller's.

If nobody or everybody finds the correct picture, the storyteller scores no points and each of the other players scores two. Otherwise the storyteller and whoever found the correct answer score three. Players score one point for every vote given to their own picture.

The game ends when the deck is empty. The greatest total wins the game.

### **Possible ways of using *Dixit* in a teaching process:**

This game offers many possibilities for a teacher to use. Although the game rules recommend three to six players, it is absolutely playable even in larger groups. The student who maintains the role of the storyteller in a given turn (this role changes every turn) is encouraged to describe the picture in English to the other players, who have to listen carefully to the description. As the cards are full of

symbols and images (see Attachment), usually no game of *Dixit* is the same, it is always possible to come up with a new description of a card.

It is therefore upon the decision of the teacher if he or she wants the students (according to their age and level of English) “just” to describe the card as precisely as possible or to try to play according to the normal rules, which create space for imagination and creativity.

For these possibilities I find this game extremely suitable for work with gifted students. They are allowed to show the others their own ideas in a way, that is usually accepted by all the players, gifted or non-gifted. Teacher can easily give a limit of the playing time in order to keep the rest of the lesson intact. Teachers can also try to motivate the students to form more elaborate sentences by awarding them extra points for such a description. The game (when dealing with experienced English users) also allows a player to describe it via famous quotations or sayings (such as Shakespeare’s “I am a Fortune’s fool!” for a card of two lovers sitting around a table etc.).

This game is usually met with excitement even amongst adult learners of English.

### ***Once Upon A Time***

**Authors:** Richard Lambert, Andrew Rilstone, James Wallis

**Publisher:** Atlas Games

**Number of Players:** 2-6

**Year Published:** 1993

**Playing time:** 30 minutes

#### **Description:**

Once Upon A Time is a game in which the players create a story together, using cards which show typical elements from fairy tales. Cards represent characters (“The Prince” etc.), items (“Sword” etc.) or actions (such as “Two people fall in love”). One player is the storyteller and creates a story using his or her cards.

Storyteller tries to guide the plot towards her own ending. The other players try to use cards to interrupt him or her and become the new Storyteller.

The winner is the first player to play out all her cards and end the story with his or her Happy Ever After card (such as “And the parents were reunited with their long-lost child.”, “And so the prophecy had been fulfilled.” etc.)

To illustrate, using the cards mentioned above, the story could unveil as follows:

*“Once upon a time, there was a beautiful Prince /the storyteller plays out a card showing the Prince/. He wanted to slay an evil dragon, so he took his Sword with him. /the storyteller plays out a card showing the Sword. Afterwards, he is interrupted by another player, who plays out a card showing the action “Two people fall in love”, and this player becomes the new Storyteller/. After the fight, the Prince slew the dragon and married a beautiful princess and they fell in love. And they lived happily ever after. /the current storyteller plays out his or her Happy Ever After card, ending the story/.*

#### **Possible ways of using *Once Upon A Time* in a teaching process:**

This game, in comparison to *Dixit*, requires the players – students- to be able to understand the descriptions written on the cards. Fortunately, the theme of fairy tales is usually well known amongst the students and also the pictures on the cards usually solve the problem quickly.

Similarly to *Dixit*, it is up to the teacher to limit the number of cards in each player’s hands (usually each of the players start with 5 cards and 2 Happy Ever After cards), to give a time limit for the game session etc. It is also possible to invite more players to the game or to divide the class into smaller groups. After the process of creating the story, each of the group can be asked to tell their story to the rest of the class.

Also, this game can be effectively used as a form of homework, when students are asked to write down their story.

For a gifted student, this game represents a pure act of creation – he or she “has to” create a story, to use his or her imagination and fantasy. One of the issues



that may arise during the game is in the possibility of interrupting the gifted student in their process of storytelling, which can lead to frustrations etc.

Another interesting fact about this game, when compared to *Dixit*, is, that it can be used as a team-building activity, with each of the groups trying to come up with the best story they can think of. The competitive atmosphere is usually lower, as there are no points to be gained. Instead of counting points, the students usually focus on creating an interesting story.

For older students (or adults) I would recommend the expansion *Once Upon A Time: Dark Tales* which adds new cards to the game, that can create an atmosphere of fear and horror (such as “Revenge”, “Hard times”, “Someone is Punished” etc.). In this expansion, the Happy Ever After cards are replaced by Harsh Ending cards (such as “It is said that he will haunt that place until she forgives him” or “This is the terrible fate that awaits those who commit murder” etc.).

### 2.3.1.2 Summary on the Use of the Board games:

It is impossible to name all board games that can be used as alternative methods for teaching English. Those mentioned above form only the tip of the iceberg but they can be used for the English lessons quite easily, the rules are easy to learn.

To mention some other board games, one can think of the famous Scrabble, a game of forming of words, or of some modern cooperative games, when all the players play together as a team against the game mechanism – such as *Shadows over Camelot*, *Arkham Horror* and its numerous expansions or *Pandemic*, where the players face the threat of epidemic diseases and try to find a cure in a race against the clock. It is important to say that most of the cooperative games are rather long, but can be used during outdoor school and so on.

### 2.3.2 LARP

LARP is an abbreviation, meaning Live Action Role Play. One of the definitions describes LARP as follows:

*“A live action role-playing game (LARP) is a form of role-playing game, where the participants physically act out their characters’ actions. The players pursue goals within a fictional setting represented by the real world, while interacting with each other in character. The outcome of player actions may be mediated by game rules or determined by consensus among players. Event organizers called gamemasters decide the setting and rules to be used and facilitate play.”*<sup>1</sup>

For a better understanding of this term, it is helpful to think of LARP as of a special type of improvisational theatre play, where certain rules are given and must be followed (see pic.17-19 in the Appendix).

In the countries of Northern Europe, such as Finland or Denmark, LARP is perceived as a kind of free-time activity which contributes to the development of the participants and therefore it is supported by several grants from the state.<sup>2</sup> Nowadays, there is the annual Knutepunkt conference, which has been a vital institution in establishing a Nordic role-playing identity and in establishing the concept of Nordic LARP as a unique approach<sup>3</sup>. Since about 2003 Knutepunkt has seen participants from USA, Germany, France, Italy, Russia, Estonia, Czech Republic and United Kingdom among others.

In recent times, in the Czech Republic, LARP activities are beginning to be perceived as enriching free-time activities and therefore its organizers do not have to seek their own sponsors – for example, an annual chamber larp festival *Larpvikend*, which takes place in Brno, was given a grant support of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports.<sup>4</sup>

In the following lines I would like to present the possible uses of this method in the process of English teaching. In a separate section, I present one of the larps, presenting a basic description.

### 2.3.2.1 Possible use of LARP in teaching English:

Although there are various types of LARP games and activities, not all of them are suitable for the purposes of teaching English – some of them contain rules for simulation of fighting or their theme is not appropriate for the students.

The type which I would like to focus on is called chamber larp, which normally works with about ten participants (but there are chamber larps designed for four people as well as for thirty). Chamber larp normally takes about four hours, divided between one hour of explaining all the rules and necessities about the play, two hours of the game itself and another hour of feedback. Usually, a well prepared larp gives the participants a strong story with intensive atmosphere. On the other hand, it would be wrong to think about larp games only as of games dealing with psychological drama or horror themes. Larps with various aspects of comedy or themes like ordinary friendship do occur quite frequently.

One of the larps dealing with aspects of comedy can be found in one of the larps of Kamil Buchtík, a well-known Czech larp organizer, who created a chamber larp for about thirty participants with a simple title – “School”.

Buchtík’s “School” gives the participants the opportunity to choose one of the thirty prearranged characters of regular high school classmates. As the conflicts in the game are prearranged with care and sense of humor, the whole game usually works well and entertains all the participants.

The main purpose of the use of LARP techniques in teaching English lies mainly in the usual importance of communication between all the participants. Normally, a theme is given for each of the LARP sessions, such as a family gathering, police investigation and so on – the possibilities are almost unlimited (there was a larp *Growing up*, which closely followed the story of *Sense and Sensibility* by Jane Austen). Following the above mentioned larp “School”, it is essential for the participants to talk to the other characters in order to achieve their goals. If a teacher prepares such an activity for his or her students, it is my personal experience that it is normally met with gratitude – and if the students are allowed only to speak in English, then “the board is set”.

By performing a given character, participants are allowed to somehow “hide” behind the character and after some time, they lose their shyness and begin

to form more and more complicated sentences. Although there are very often great mistakes in the grammar structure of the sentences, the participants make themselves understood and in the same time they have to listen to the others in order to gain important information etc. Therefore, their self-confidence in use of the language improves through a funny, unusual way.

Gifted students are usually very much interested in such activities. Although not all of them perform characters such as “party guys”, they find quite a satisfaction in performing roles of “quick-witted detectives” etc.

### *2.3.2.2 Midsummer Night's Dream – description of a LARP*

One of the larps which were held in English during the 7<sup>th</sup> Larpvíkend in Brno in 2010 was inspired by the famous comedy of William Shakespeare, his *Midsummer Night's Dream*. I was present on the game event myself. Each of the participants represented one of original Shakespeare's characters from the play, such as Oberon, Titania, Demetrius, Egeus and others. The whole event took four hours.

During the first hour, the participants were to choose a character and to get to know each other.

After explanation of rules and the setting (the whole game took place during a fictional ball held out by Theseus, the Duke of Athens and Hippolyta, the Queen of Amazons), the game itself took place.

In the beginning, it was clear to see the nervousness of some of the participants, as they were not confident in their English skills. Therefore, the first few sentences of the game consisted of only a fixed phrases or expressions, such as “It is nice to meet you.” Or “How do you do.” With the passing time, the participants begin to speak in a more relaxed way. There were many encounters “in character”, such as Demetrius asking Hermia to dance with him and her brisk refusal.

After a few more moments, the participants almost completely forgot about their shyness. As far as I can tell, there were many incorrect sentences, many words

were being described, but there were only a few times, when a word had to be said in Czech. As the original play of William Shakespeare is a comedy, the whole atmosphere was relaxed and entertaining.

When the game ended, the participants were asked by the organizers (Jakub Tabisz and others from a polish larp group *Stowarzyszenie Wielosfer*) to share their feelings and experience. Most of the participants agreed, that despite various levels of English it was not difficult to understand and to make oneself understood. Also, they all agreed on the positive atmosphere of the whole game. In terms of learning, one of the great aspects of this larp was that by performing the characters of the original play, the participants got to know (and to remember) the basic story of the whole play.

#### 2.3.2.3 Conclusion

Thanks to the use of LARP during some of the lessons, a teacher can create fresh, new atmosphere and with the help of the characters of the play, students often shed their restraint and they talk – which is always helpful. For a gifted child, a larp activity represents yet another unusual way of learning, which also motivates the child to speak to the other members of the class, which often works as a hidden team-building activity (this greatly depends on the theme of the LARP). Although creating a larp is rather complicated, it can be a useful and interesting method in teaching English, both for the gifted and non-gifted students.

### 2.3.3 Drama Education

Last of the alternative ways in teaching English I would like to present is the work with Drama Education. After 1991, Drama Education was included in the curriculum conception of the program “Obecná škola”. Although there was a great

boom of popularity of Drama Education, the term is often not fully understood neither by laic or teacher community.

During my research on summer camps organized by Prague by Night, I have seen the positive effect of Drama Education, when after a few ice-breaker activities, the participants get to know each other and lose their shyness (see pic.20-22). One can only agree with P. Murphy and M. O'Keefe, who in their book *Discovering drama* describe the positive effects of drama education as follows: "The artistic and educational benefits of these experiences were of course undeniable, in terms of familiarising children with the language and form of theatre, with developing presentational skills, and with building self-confidence." <sup>1</sup>

In the following lines, I would like to present a few possible uses of drama education in teaching English. In a separate chapter, I present one of the drama projects and its possible variations, *The Children of Lir*, originally by P. Murphy and M. O'Keefe.

### 2.3.3.1 Possible use of drama education in teaching English

Despite the fact that Drama education occurs only rarely as a school subject on the Czech schools, various facultative courses can be found in some of schools dealing with drama education, such as "English conversation: Musical", which is taught in elementary school in Bílá street in Prague and it really deals with practicing a musical in English.<sup>1</sup>

One of the great possibilities and strengths of drama education is the fact that via learning not only *about* drama, but also *through* drama<sup>2</sup>, students learn much information about themselves and also about their classmates. Through various vocal exercises, they learn not only the English language, but they also get accustomed to their own voice and to the audience which listens to their speeches.

This all works with gifted students as well. As already mentioned by V. Mužík, some of the gifted students may experience social isolation and this is which drama education can help with. During my research, I have come across a gifted and rather isolated student, who eventually joined one drama group, practicing a

performance inspired by the work of Neil Gaiman. After initial nervousness of the boy (slips of tongue etc.), he eventually performed quite well (he spoke loudly and clearly during the performance, which was not his ordinary custom) and in the end he was able to share his joy for the drama with the rest of the drama group, which accepted him gladly.

As was already stated earlier, there are many possibilities of using drama education in the teaching process. Nowadays, the basic aspects of role play activities are quite common on many of the Czech schools, although they function rather as a kind of amusement for the students. Nevertheless, this form has many benefits for the students (gaining self-confidence etc.).

Another form of drama education can be seen in improvisation, where only a basic setting and characters are given and the actors are then let to perform the story using their own imagination, which again works well with the usual creativity of the gifted.

Drama education can also be used to get the students to know some of the famous literary works or drama pieces – there has been a great drama project dealing with the dramatization of Tracy's Tiger by William Saroyan, where the students (actors) were first to read the book to understand the main theme of it and then they were guided by the teacher to realize it on the stage. Students were free to come up with their own ideas of how to interpret Saroyan's thoughts and in the end the performance was more than successful.

I believe that drama education should have its place in the Czech curriculum, as the possible benefits of it, be it the gain of self-confidence or enhancing one's speaking skills, are great and undeniable.

### *2.3.3.2 The Children of Lir – Example of the possibilities of drama education*

Paula Murphy and Margaret O'Keefe in their book *Discovering drama* present us one of the most famous Irish legends, dealing with cursed children of king Lir, who were turned into swans and only the toll of a Christian bell could save

them<sup>1</sup>. After many years spent on one of the Irish lakes, they finally hear the Christian bell (after the arrival of St. Patrick) and they are transformed back to their human forms. Unfortunately, they all perish during the night, as they have become very old.

The whole activity begins with the teacher in the role of Machaomog, the priest who finally lifted the curse. The participants are then told the background of the story and they are told to form groups. Each of the groups is then asked to think of one of the characters (king Lir, priest Machaomog or the evil stepmother Aoife, who cursed the children) and their point of view of the whole story. Children are then asked to describe their possible reactions to the outcome of the story – which can be done in written or spoken form.

Another possibility of the work with the legend and the points of view of individual characters can be told through so-called Still Images, where members of each of the group act as a kind of a human statue to form an image, showing their classmates the feeling of the character. Each of the members is then asked to describe his or her role in the picture in English.

If working with older students, the teacher can try to give the whole drama play rather serious touch – after some time of describing the feelings of the characters, the participants are given a sheet of paper and are asked to write down one thought which they think is important for the mankind to remember – this should remind all the participants of how the story ends. Such a task requires the teacher to know his or her class completely and to work with them during the whole process of the project carefully. On the other hand, when used with care, this serious tone of the whole project can function as a great team-building and social conscience raising activity.

### *2.3.3.3 Conclusion on Drama Education*

Through drama education, students, both gifted and non-gifted learn to present themselves, they learn not to be shy in the presence of audience and they learn about self-confidence. Also, when listening to other students, one learns about



respect and humility. Aside from improving one's English skills, drama activities can be easily used to improve the social situation in a class or they can serve as team-building activities.

## **2.4 CONCLUSION ON ALTERNATIVE WAYS OF TEACHING ENGLISH**

Modern technologies and resources offer endless possibilities in terms of teaching tools and methods. With a variation of methods, teachers can arouse interest in their students, motivating them in their study. In teaching English, one of the most complicated problems is to make the students talk – with their inner fears of making mistakes or being inaccurate. Through the above mentioned methods, one can use the atmosphere of each of them to make the students forget about their possible failure and let them form their own sentences – even with mistakes. When the game ends, it is easy for the teacher to point out some of the most common mistakes that occurred during the activity. But the children usually feel confident about themselves, as they feel that despite all the mistakes, they are able to make themselves understood – and therefore they are motivated even more into further study. Concerning the gifted students, all the methods and variants mentioned above work with aspects of creativity, imagination and building of self-confidence, the presence of which is very important for such students to be included in the daily process of teaching/learning. Although some of the methods require preparation from the teacher, the benefits and results of their correct use are more than worth it.

### 3 FINAL CONCLUSION

*Come gather 'round people*

*Wherever you roam*

*And admit that the waters*

*Around you have grown...*

- *Bob Dylan, The Times are A Changing*

During the research and the process of writing of this thesis, finding more and more facts about the gifted populations, I was reminded of a famous song by Bob Dylan, *The Times Are A Changing*. As my research showed, many parts of this song can be applied on the situation of the modern gifted population.

In the Czech Republic, the support of the gifted population from the official sites, although better than in previous years is still insufficient. Gifted children and their parents are left to seek advice of those few pedagogues and psychologists, who are educated in the topics of the gifted and who can offer the so much needed help.

In terms of education of the teachers in topics of gifted education, the research showed, that in our country, there are some possibilities of such education (in forms of courses or seminars), although these do not form a part of the basic curriculum, which leads to the fact that such seminars are often omitted by most of the future teachers.

Moving to the gifted children and students, the research showed that most of them are capable in coping with their surroundings. Often, they experience feelings of loneliness or alienation when not accepted by their age-peers or classmates. But they are able to adapt to the society around them and find their place in which they feel comfortable and happy, especially when supported by their families, teachers and others. There are a few organisations which guide and help them in these issues, such as Mensa of the Czech Republic or Centrum nadání. These organisations arrange many meetings and activities for the gifted population, focused to help its participants.

In terms of alternative ways of teaching English and their usefulness, the research showed clearly that through these methods, gifted children can show their often hidden qualities, such as creativity and so on. Although the research also showed that several of these methods are rather time consuming, they can still serve as an important source of excitement, through which the gifted (and the non-gifted as well) can learn in a relaxed manner, leading to better development of their skills.

In comparison to the past, modern world offers several possibilities of an effective approach to the gifted students and their issues. Through their exceptional skills, our society may learn new, important things. It would therefore be shame for all of us to deny their rightful place in the society.

I believe that in the future, with the slowly growing interest in the topic of the giftedness, the gifted will once donate to us a gift of their own superior knowledge.

*For the times, they are a changing.*

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