

WorldTalentWeb

Newsletter of the World Giftedness Center

Issue 20 - October 2022

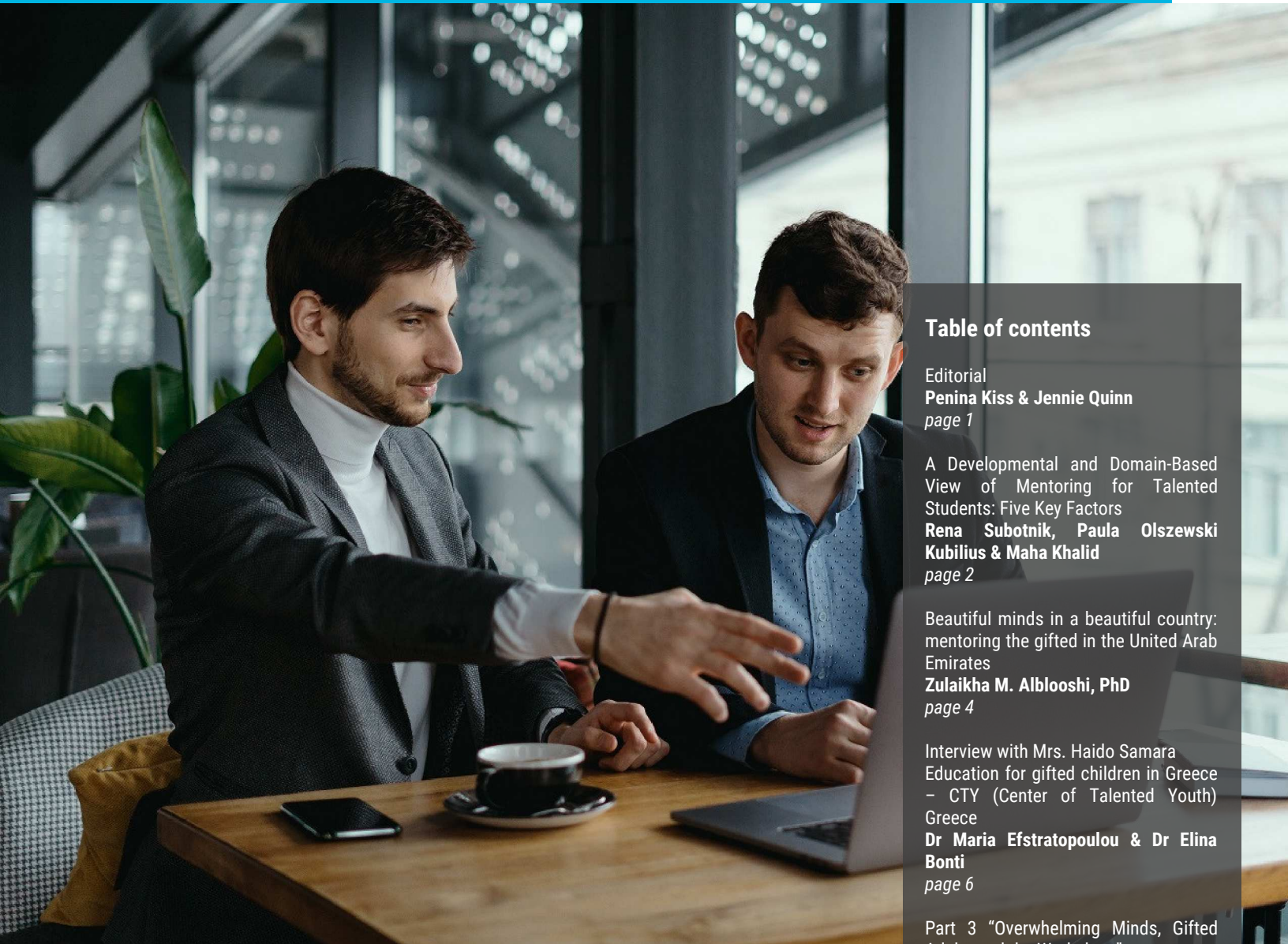


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Editorial

Penina Kiss & Jennie Quinn

Welcome to the October edition of the WorldTalentWeb newsletter. It's spring here in Australia and everything feels washed green and new. The promise of summer is just around the corner and we are excited to bring you some inspirational articles around the themes of service and mentoring for gifted students.

The recent death of Queen Elizabeth 11 has cast a spotlight on the enduring gift of service to others. Teachers provide this daily for their students without a second thought as do nurses and those in professions whose sole purpose is to meet the needs of others.

This capacity to care deeply for those around us goes beyond a sense of duty, something the young queen Elizabeth must surely have felt the enormity of. It's what drives us to get up in the morning determined to try that new teaching strategy with our challenging Year 9 class. The one that keeps us awake at night with their personal stories of inequity and heartache.

It's what drives us to seek and implement pedagogies for contemporary technologies that make our learning spaces accessible and engaging whilst inspiring the most creative endeavours. And it's what compels us to embed social and emotional learning that enables our students to develop their understanding of self and others, to have a voice and agency and to build skills which inspire passion and give wings to future world leaders, changers and indeed service providers.

This edition of the WTW newsletter is all about the gift that is mentoring, in my opinion, one of the greatest of all the services we can provide for our gifted learners. We're conscious that we've spoken before about our passion for this provision as a way to meet the academic and social-emotional needs of gifted students and this is a testament to our belief in its power to do remarkable things.

In recent research undertaken for Macquarie University regarding neurodiversity and its impact on academic success, one of the most successful research-based practices was indeed mentoring. Placing neurodiverse higher education students (who in large part may constitute twice-exceptional learners) with peer mentors helping them navigate social-emotional and executive functioning challenges can make all the difference (Haft et al., 2019, DuPaul et al., 2021).

The authors in this month's edition showcase the excellent service mentoring affords to the gifted. Drs Rena Subotnik, Paula Olszewski Kubilius and Maha Khalid share 5 important factors for mentors to keep in mind when bringing students along their talent trajectories. Dr Zulaikha M. Alblooshi discusses the Local Mentoring Program (LMP), one of the newest additions to the Hamdan Bin Rashid Al Maktoum Center for Giftedness and Innovation and its significance to the UAE landscape of talent development and gifted education.

Drs Maria Efstratopoulou and Elina Bonti interview Mrs Haido Samara, Computer Science Professor and the Academic Dean of the Center of Talented Youth in Greece about this unique Center. Amongst its many endeavours, the Center also harnesses the power of mentoring through their involvement with the Global Talent Mentoring Program. And finally, Dr David Rempel and Catalina Beckhoff bring us the third instalment in their qualitative research series; What Factors Enable Gifted Employees to Fulfil their Potential within Organizations? We hope you enjoy the 20th edition of the WTW newsletter.

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A Developmental and Domain-Based View of Mentoring for Talented Students: Five Key Factors

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Based on materials presented at the 1st World Giftedness Center International Conference, October 18-21, 2021, and published in Subotnik, R.F., Olszewski-Kubilius, P., Khalid, M., & Finster, H. (2020). A developmental view of mentoring talented students in academic and nonacademic domains. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*. doi: 10.1111/nyas.14286

Mentoring is an essential component of gifted education for talented students. This brief article outlines the most important factors for mentors to keep in mind when bringing students along their talent trajectories.

1. Differentiate teaching and mentoring

What is the difference between teaching and mentoring, and why is that distinction notable? Both roles are important and doing without one or the other can negatively affect the growth that students experience in their development. A teacher has unlimited knowledge to offer a student; on the other hand, a mentor brings perspective on the domain beyond the school curriculum. An excellent talent development program will not only provide the skills and knowledge associated with that stage of the talent trajectory, but also provide a longer and wider view of what the domain of talent is about and what is needed in the future to be successful. It's important to note, however, that teachers can also learn to serve as mentors, and serve as conduits to mentors for students and they will need to in order to be effective as talent developers.

2. Each trajectory stage can be matched with a different type of mentoring

Mentors can provide the following contributions according to their personality and needs of the student: (a) role model for work in a career or in work/life balance, (b) a cheerleader through the ups and downs of talent development, (c) a provider of professional contacts and insider knowledge, or (d) serve as an intellectual sparring partner or sounding board for ideas.

The mentoring relationship can look different at different stages of talent development – from potential to competency, competency to expertise, and beyond to transformational creativity. As students are becoming attentive to a domain, a mentor can engage interest as a role model. A role model doesn't necessarily have to have an individual relationship with a student but can provide a living example of the possibilities of being a scientist, historian, or poet, especially when potentially talented students see a role model of someone who "looks like them." As students become more competent, they might be matched with a mentor who reinforces their interest and provides

access to sources of more advanced knowledge and skills. At the highest level of mentoring, a student is selected by a mentor as a person with promise in the field.

3. Different domains have different trajectories

Domains vary as to when they begin, peak, and end. This is important to know because it affects when students can be more reliably identified, and when we introduce advanced coursework and a different mentoring relationship. For example, a mathematically gifted child might need to engage with a mentor in late elementary school, while a future social scientist might have this same experience only in late secondary school or even at the university level. As students gain the requisite skills and knowledge, mentors place more emphasis on modeling and coaching for psychosocial skills and insider knowledge (access to networks of information, attitudes, and behaviors rewarded by gatekeepers) that allow their students to stand out and, if necessary, endure pushback derived from proposing creative ideas or performances that challenge the status quo.

4. Distinguishing features of mentoring at advanced stages include promoting psychosocial skills and insider knowledge.

We have all experienced a broken heart when a student does not take an opportunity offered to them to develop their talent. This may be because they are simply not that interested in the domain, even if they exhibit real potential, or they may be concerned about the disapproval of friends or family. Most often, however, young people will avoid situations where they may fail and disappoint themselves or others. Concurrently, they may sense that they are at an unfair disadvantage because they are not an insider with connections and networks.

Psychosocial skills training is an integral component of the development of performers. Olympic athletes learn to avoid distractions and maintain confidence even in light of failure. Similarly, in conservatory education, musicians practice managing nervousness, dealing with doubts and worry, and performing at a high level in stressful situations. But performers are not the only ones who can use these psychosocial skills. We argue that academically talented students are just as likely as performers to be subject to performance anxiety, loss of focus or confidence, or lacking in strategic decision making.

Another set of important psychosocial skills that are conveyed by a good mentor are often forgotten because they are subtle and require good judgment. They include, among others, increasing your persuasive abilities, promoting yourself tastefully, and dealing with envy and competition.

5. Finally, insider knowledge is a factor that is especially relevant for students from groups that are currently underrepresented in a local gifted program.

Insider knowledge is information that is not made explicit within talent domains and is gained by access to experts in the field. This information, like everything else in talent development, is developmental and domain specific. For example, stressing how important your work is in a research article, makes it more likely to be cited (a form of tasteful self-promotion!).

We hope this short piece reinforces the following points for our readers:

- Mentoring and teaching talented youth can be organized developmentally.
- Research in various domains allows for categorizing mentorships according to the degree to which the mentor and student interact and how they are selected by one another.
- A central role of mentoring is modeling and guiding the acquisition of psychosocial skills and insider knowledge.
- Insider knowledge is of special significance for the talent development of underserved populations.

We present this chart (Figure 1) to integrate everything we touched on in a visual representation. Please feel free to contact us with any questions or comments.

Figure 1

Talent Development Stage	Mentoring Roles	In addition, providing Psychosocial Skills (Examples)	Insider Knowledge Example
From abilities to competencies	From a distance: role modeling Up close: emotional support and cheering	Helping young people become open to new information and skills	Information on available outside of school activities seeking financial support for participation. Which teachers to seek out to advance your knowledge.
Competencies to expertise	Match ups with student offering role modeling, emotional support, and serving as an idea sounding board and intellectual sparring partner	Restoring self-confidence after meeting other talented students Learning to stand up for your ideas and persuading others of their value	Help with promotion and tasteful self-promotion.
Expertise and beyond to transformational creativity	Selecting students and offering them a sparring partner, networking connections and insider knowledge	Capitalizing on your strengths, strategic risk taking, engaging supporters and sponsors	Inoculating yourself from those who would undermine your efforts What are hot topics or arenas for your creative work.



Beautiful minds in a beautiful country: Mentoring the gifted in the United Arab Emirates

Zulaikha M. Alblooshi, PhD

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Hamdan Bin Rashid Al Maktoum Center for Giftedness and Innovation, Dubai

In 2018, 14-year-old Mohamed began learning how to look for and look through scientific research on space science. Fast forward to today, Mohamed works confidently on his research side by side with a veteran researcher at Mohammed Bin Rashid Space Centre in Dubai. Though, this article is not about the story of Mohamed, but rather about the Local Mentoring Program (LMP) that made it possible for Mohamed and others to soon follow suit, to recognize his potential and to work towards making his unreachable dream an everyday reality. Before getting down to the practical details of the program, it is important to learn a bit about the context in which it took place.

A few schools in the early 1950s led formal education in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Within four decades, however, endeavors to initiate talent development programs for school children led to the founding of the department of Special Abilities Programs for talent identification and development under the Ministry of Education and Youth. Shortly after, in 2001, the dire need for more innovative, yet structured approaches to cater for the gifted was recognized in the set-up of the Giftedness Center as part of the Hamdan Bin Rashid Award for Distinctive Academic Performance. The Center took on planning, designing, and delivering its programs towards four key long-term objectives that will support gifted individuals throughout and beyond their school education:

- Building novel education levels for gifted and talented children in parallel with their standard education levels
- Designing individualized learning paths, aligned with gifted children's education levels
- Overseeing the advancement of gifted and talented children through the levels
- Planning the giftedness curriculum in accordance with the education level of gifted and talented children

The Center, which more recently has been expanded and renamed as Hamdan Bin Rashid Al Maktoum Center for Giftedness and innovation, became right off the bat the birthplace and guardian of several programs and initiatives centering on giftedness identification and development and nurturing creativity, locally, regionally, and internationally. Each one of these programs and initiatives follows a methodical approach and is derived and fed back into the master plan of the Center, leaving little room for chance or errors. The aforementioned Local Mentoring Program is part of the "enrichment" route of the talent development mandate at the Center. Enrichment programs essentially aim for supporting talented people to specialize in any field they desire, while allowing them to stay with their same age peers at the same time. Besides their learning value, these programs

can be especially advantageous because they can be delivered within conventional school settings and elsewhere in the community, specifically at institutions that provide educational services for gifted and talented persons. This very nature of the enrichment programs inspired the principal goal of the LMP. That is: to provide constant, specialized, and bespoke support for the gifted and talented students in the UAE with the aid of locally and internationally distinguished experts in multiple scientific fields, that will ultimately benefit both gifted children and their community to realize the best possible investment in the potential and capabilities of the gifted and the experts.

In the Center, the Local Mentoring Program is promoted as the program that builds scientific communication operations between gifted students and experts in a variety of academic fields, according to a specific scientific methodology, during which the student acquires various scholarly and research expertise in a specialized field. The Center, also, adopts a special definition for mentoring that reflects on the concept and application of mentoring in the Program: the process through which the scientific and professional connection is enhanced between students identified as talented or academically distinguished and specialized scientists who have a high reputation at the national or global level, through a systematic and consistent work mechanism. The LMP is underpinned by scientific criteria that are closely observed in all mentoring operations. These criteria are classified under five fundamental areas:

- Planning and organizing: Catering for gifted students requires activities that are planned and designed based on the gifted needs and aspirations
- Curriculum and content knowledge: The quality of services for gifted students must encompass the curriculum and teaching methods, so as to meet their needs and aspirations
- Professional development: Gifted students need top experts specialized in talent development, professionally trained, who use state of the art educational methods and constantly develop them to meet the needs and aspirations of the gifted students
- Relationships and creativity incubating: Gifted students need positive, stimulating, and safe environments that provide them with the appropriate tools to unleash their creative abilities. Such environments should embrace constant connections with parents, community, and business owners, to align gifted children's potentials with the needs and aspirations of their community

- Continuous assessment and development: The Program requires a systematic evaluation process to assess the impact of the services provided to the gifted and to highlight the effectiveness of the program's activities in developing students' talents.

Through the clearly stated criteria (available upon request from the author), the Program emphasizes that each individual learning path for the gifted is designed by an expert scientific researcher specialized in the same area of interest as that of the student together with a supervisor specialized in giftedness programs and initiatives. The expert and the specialist mainly work on building the mentoring program according to five integrated components: knowledge content, learning skills, critical thinking skills, scientific research skills, and finally personal and social skills. The LMP is implemented across four successive levels over approximately four school years. Through these levels, the student's knowledge in a specific scientific field grows exponentially. Firstly, the student is enrolled in the first level, *The Explorer*, and then gradually advances to the other three higher levels: *The Researcher*, *The Student Supervisor*, and *The Future Scientist*. To allow the student to carry on developing their area of interest, the LMP highly recommends expanding the program into post-secondary education.

As the LMP requires students who are relatively long-term and highly committed to developing their area of interest, the Program seeks to recruit only students with certain dispositions, through two highly selective screening stages: initial and final selection. Typically, gifted students in the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grades between the ages of fifteen and seventeen are invited or self-nominated to enroll into the Program. However, they can only be accepted into the Program if they present and meet these qualities:

- Showing clear and evident scientific interest
- Presenting high motivation towards learning and achievement
- Having good knowledge in a specific scientific field
- Having a fervent desire and motivation to work on their own on developing their knowledge and abilities, and having the ability to initiate communication with the specialists when needed
- Have shown remarkable interest and distinction in a given scientific area during their past participation in gifted programs

While some features of the LMP are standardized across most mentoring programs, such as providing the opportunity for gifted students to interact with distinguished specialists in their scientific fields of interest and learn about their research areas, LMP students enjoy specific features that are unique to the Program. Namely, the Program's high emphasis on building advanced research skills in school-age children and developing self-regulation learning skills in the gifted. Also, while most mentoring programs offer either one-on-one or online communication mediums between the student and the expert, the LMP offers both channels, allowing for an in-depth and more beneficial interaction between the two groups.

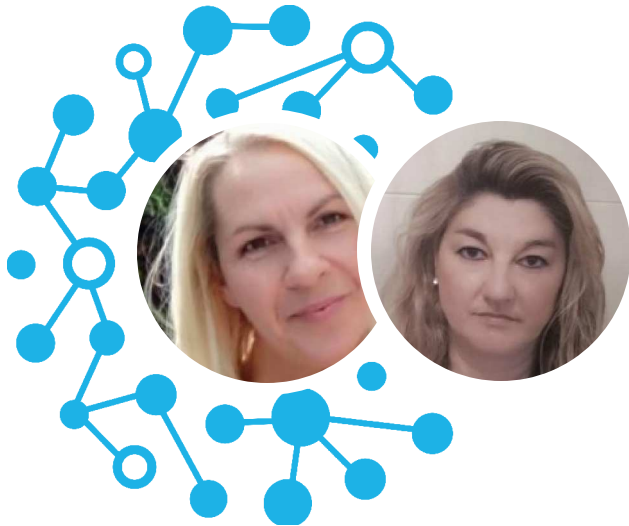
As best as the LMP's team strives to realise its objectives in accordance with the latest evidence-based methods to operate and enhance the Program, its success faces some critical challenges. To name a few: difficulty in identifying students' genuine interest, scheduling conflicts between school requirements and the Program's assignments, experts being over occupied with their own work, the inevitable experts' withdrawal from the Program, and the unforeseeable pandemic that hit educational systems as hard as it did all aspects of our lives for the past two years. To overcome these challenges, the Program's operators proposed several strategies, including but not limited to effective coordination between the expert and school, and creating a database for experts and specialists in various academic and scientific fields.

The Local Mentoring Program may be one of the youngest additions to the growing body of mentoring programs worldwide. Further, as of its

current state, it is still implemented on a limited scale. Nonetheless, its significance to the UAE landscape of talent development and its contribution to giftedness education is extremely promising.

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Interview with Mrs. Haido Samara EDUCATION FOR GIFTED CHILDREN IN GREECE – CTY (CENTER OF TALENTED YOUTH) GREECE

Dr Maria Efstratopoulou, Associate Professor,
Special Education Department, College of Education, UAE University
Dr Elina Bonti, Assistant Professor,
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1. CAN YOU PLEASE DESCRIBE YOUR ROLE IN CTY GREECE?

I am a Computer Science Professor and the Academic Dean of CTY Greece. My primary responsibility is to supervise the academic staff and coordinate the academic program, ensuring the quality of instruction and addressing student performance issues. I work together with the Director of CTY Greece, Dr Georgia Tsoulfa and the Office Manager Mrs Athina Vezekiadou, on various dimensions of the program, which include identifying the gifted students, offering them their courses and preparing teacher-training programs to teachers across Greece. Finally, I assist the CTY teachers with the preparation of the courses and the teaching skills and methods all year round.

2. TELL US ABOUT CTY IN THESSALONIKI, GREECE.

CTY Greece has become a reference point for Gifted Education in Greece, since it offers advanced learners opportunities to reach their academic potential through extra-curricular Enrichment Programs with a broad scholarship fund. The program also supports the students' families through research and advocacy. At the same time, CTY Greece supports educators through a variety of free professional development workshops, centered on the best teaching practices employed in CTY classes and aimed at motivating, inspiring and engaging students. It also uses ways of assessing learning informally (non-formal assessment methods). Our recent teacher-training program is targeted at making teachers more aware of the need to cultivate the 21st century skills in their gifted learners, since it is very likely that a majority of these learners will find themselves in the boardrooms of the future, making decisions and needing to work well with their colleagues, and eventually, drive their local economies forward.

3. WHEN, HOW, AND BY WHOM WAS IT INITIATED/DEVELOPED (WORLDWIDE)?

The initial program goes back to 1979. It started at John Hopkins University by a Psychology Professor named Julian Stanley, who initiated the program as a research project, and later on, he developed it to become an academic program aimed at high-ability students.

CTY Greece began in 2013 and today it is one of the five divisions of the American College of Thessaloniki, Greece "Anatolia". 2013 was a period during which Greece was going through a financial crisis. A foundation called 'Stavros Niarchos' (SNF) offered funding and brought the program to Greece as means for supporting the Greek economy and for assisting gifted/talented students.

Searching for a school which shared the same visions, SNF together with John Hopkins University identified 'Anatolia College' (in Thessaloniki) as the most suitable, non-profitable organization to host this program.

At first, the program began with ten students, who, along with the educators attended a 3-week academic program and teacher-training program. Later on, the program was named CTY (Center for Talented Youth) and until today, we have been offering several kinds of programs (i.e. one-day programs, online programs, and summer-residential programs in over 18 cities around Greece).

It should be noted that CTY is an 'enrichment' (not acceleration) program.

4. WHO IS ELIGIBLE FOR THE PROGRAMMES OFFERED – ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA (AGE/ EDUCATION/SCHOOL)?

Talent search: Eligibility to attend the CTY program is determined through testing. More specifically, in order for a student to be eligible to take the CTY Greece program, he/she should participate in the Center's Exams, that take place every year in different cities around Greece. (For foreign students, this qualification can be acquired through the John Hopkins University (JHU) Center).

Our program is characterized by high accessibility, i.e. every gifted child in Greece can attend the program, irrespective of his/her financial background, if he/she scores well on the exams. More precisely, until today, over 1200 students have received scholarships for our summer program, which cover their transport and tuition fees, as well as their accommodation expenses. Scholarships are awarded based on the student's ranking on the exams and based on their family's annual income.

5. WOULD YOU GIVE US AN OVERVIEW OF THE ASSESSMENT CRITERIA FOR ADMISSION TO THE PROGRAMMES?

We administer exams across several areas of Greece and Cyprus in order to identify the students eligible for the program. The 'talent search' reaches even remote islands and/or villages around Greece, to identify learners, who often are unaware of their giftedness/talent.

The test is created by JHU and it has two different sections: Language and Mathematics. If the student scores well on the Language section he/she becomes eligible for the Humanities Courses. If he/she scores

well on the Mathematics section, he/she becomes eligible for the Science Courses. Finally, if the student scores well on both sections, he/she is free to choose between both sections.

There are two different types of tests, i.e. 1) The 'School and College Ability Test' (SCAT), which assesses the learner's verbal and mathematical reasoning and it can lead to the Elementary, Intermediate or Advanced level of the Program, and 2) The 'Spatial Test Battery' (STB), which assesses the learner's spatial reasoning, and which can only lead to the Advanced level of the program.

6. WHICH ACADEMIC FIELDS DO THE PROGRAMMES COVER?

We offer one-day programs, weekend programs and online programs, while our main program is the summer-residential program, in which students stay on campus (in our boarding school) for three weeks.

The program consists of three different levels:

1. Elementary (Grades 2 – 3)
2. Intermediate (Grades 4 – 5)
3. Advanced (Grades 6 - 9)

In order for a student to change level, he/she has to retest.

The available courses are divided into three main sectors: Science, Humanities and Humanities & Science. Science involves courses such as CSI, Biomedical Sciences, Genetics, Computer Science, Probability and Game Theory, etc. Humanities involve Fiction, Poetry and Language (from a writer's perspective), Psychology, International Relations, etc., while Humanities and Science involve Nutrition, Highway to Health, Filmmaking, and other Hybrid Courses.

The courses for the older students are being held seven hours a day for three weeks and are being taught in English, while the program for younger students is a five-hour daily program, which is also offered in Greek. The available courses in the Younger Students Program are also divided into two sectors, i.e. Science (e.g. The Magic of Mathematical Thinking, Science and Engineering, Robotics, Nanotechnology, etc.) and Humanities (e.g. United Nations and Advanced Geography, The Author's Workshop, etc.).

7. IS THERE ANY OTHER ORGANISATION TO YOUR KNOWLEDGE THAT SUPPORTS TALENTED YOUTH IN GREECE?

Not really...

8. IS CTY INVOLVED WITH ANY OTHER CENTRE THAT OFFERS SIMILAR PROGRAMMES WITHIN THE EUROPEAN OR ANY OTHER CONTINENT?

GTMP

CTY is part of the 'Global Talent Mentoring Program', (GTMP) which is an online mentoring program that fosters excellence in STEMM worldwide for talented youth. Distinctive in its evidence-based, long-term approach, the GTMP aims to bridge geographic and cultural distance, to connect the brightest young minds with distinguished researchers, academics and professionals, in what will become a global pool of talent development. More specifically, GTM pairs gifted students with distinguished educators and researchers around the world, in order to offer students mentoring and career guidance. As part of this program, CTY Greece works with various other schools in Germany, Ireland, the Czech Republic, etc.

Professor Dr Heidrun Stoger and her research team at the University of Regensburg (Germany) lead GTMP. The goal is to make the program available to young people around the world, from all cultures and financial backgrounds, free of charge.

CTY is also a member of ECHA (European Council for High Ability). The 2012 General Assembly of ECHA supported the establishment of the European Talent Support Network (ETSN), which became an independent NGO in 2019. The 2019 ECHA General Assembly, therefore, entitled the General Committee and the president of ECHA to sign a Memorandum of Understanding with ETSN on the long-term cooperation of the two organizations.

Finally, CTY Greece has also become a member of an online training and research program for teachers, called 'European Gifted Education Training' (EGIFT), which is available to preservice and in-service teachers, as well as parents of gifted students. In this program, participants can attend numerous interactive workshops, presentations, etc.

The teachers – educators in CTY Greece consist of STEM teachers, Language teachers and Elementary school teachers. In addition, to maintain the US flavor, we often invite instructors from the US to teach in our programs.

9. WHAT ARE CTY GREECE PROGRAM'S OVERALL AIMS – FUTURE GOALS?

In order to guarantee success in a boardroom, we aim to cultivate the following skills: Communication, Creativity, Critical Thinking, Leadership and Empathy, which are identified as the 21st century skills.

The main goal of our program is to couple gifted students' characteristics with the 21st century skills.

For example, some of the most common characteristics of gifted learners are that they are usually fast learners, who are able to process information in sophisticated ways, they can easily recognize patterns, relationships and connections that others find difficult to see. Moreover, they often have an advanced sense of morality, empathy and fairness, especially regarding global issues, compared to many of their average peers. Thus, CTY is able to tap into such characteristics of gifted students and cultivate their 21st century skills. Once supported properly, we believe that gifted/talented students can become compassionate, empathetic and inspirational citizens, with advanced critical, creative, leadership and problem-solving skills. Furthermore, we strongly believe that such programs can raise the overall level of all students, not only the gifted/talented ones.

Our future goals are to become self-sustainable, to receive more funding from other sources, in order to be able to identify and meet the needs of gifted learners in the most remote places of Greece and raise awareness about giftedness in teachers and parents worldwide. Finally, in the future, we plan to include additional, non-strictly-intellectual expressions of giftedness in our programs (e.g. motivation, creativity, artistic talents, etc.).



Part 3 “Overwhelming Minds, Gifted Adults and the Workplace”

Catalina Beckhoff & Prof Dr David Rempel

In the first and second parts of this series, we discussed whether all gifted individuals are able to unleash their potential and whether they can be detected by the known giftedness approaches. Research shows that many intellectually gifted adults are not doing as well as one might expect and some even struggle to pave their way in life (Vreys et al, 2016; van der Waal et al., 2013). As one would expect, studies show that gifted adults are, overall, more successful in their educational careers and in their professional occupations compared to non-gifted adults (Schlegler, 2022). However, as discussed in the first part of this series, not all intellectually gifted adults unleash their potential and many do not readily fit into rigid organizational environments (Van der Waal et al., 2013; Corten et al., 2006). While some gifted adults never learn about their abilities, many gifted adults learn only late in life about their giftedness and often experience relief in finding an answer to their life-long feeling of “being different” and other challenges within their professional or private life (e.g., Kuipers, 2007, 2019; Streznewski, 1999; Jacobsen, 1999). Others may be aware of their abilities but struggle with internal or external pressure or have yet to find acceptance, no matter if they are successful or unsuccessful in their careers (e.g., Fiedler, 2012; Tolan, 1994; Brandišauskienė, 2019). Arising challenges can occur within the work environment especially if one has not yet been able to find “balance”, while clinicians report most of their gifted clients reach out to address painful school experiences, depression, perfectionism, multi-potentiality as well as high sensitivity and emotional intensity (Grobman, 2009; Jacobsen, 1999).

The unconformity and variety of different giftedness approaches complicates the research with gifted adults (Brown et al., 2020), as different theories look at this phenomenon from completely different angles. Common approaches mainly either define giftedness as high performances, the potential for future performances or as a raw potential referring to one’s cognitive abilities (van Thiel et al., 2019). Psychological definitions focus, just like cognitive definitions, on one’s innate potential and view giftedness as a conglomerate of different personality traits (van Thiel et al., 2019). Professionals argue that not all intellectually gifted individuals stand out with high performances and either never take an IQ test or perform under their potential on such assessments due to e.g., anxiety (Kuipers, 2007; Fiedler, 2012). Therefore, psychological approaches aim to identify gifted adults based on broad and fundamental symptoms of one’s giftedness, namely character traits and behaviour patterns (van Thiel et al., 2019).

Giftedness experts commonly describe the fundamental characteristics connected to one’s intellectual giftedness as a heightened drive, great complexity, and intensity (Jacobsen, 1999), emotional intensity, a heightened sensitivity, and great metacognition (Fiedler, 2015), additional to experienced feelings of being fundamentally different

from others, a need for meaning, a preference for individualized methods of learning, a need for truth, a tendency toward perfectionism, difficulty with authority figures, and strong moral convictions (Roeper, 1991). With great potential on one side, differences in the characteristics and preferences of gifted adults can lead to potential pitfalls, especially within the work environment. Knowing and understanding these differences may help those seeking help as well as hiring managers to identify the often, yet, to be unleashed potential. Common characteristics and potential pitfalls of gifted adults within the work environment can be summarized as the following:

Self-concept

Intellectually gifted adults often feel not as self-confident as their peers, which can often be linked to experienced pitfalls and the feeling of being different. This tendency has been described not only by giftedness counsellors but has also been shown by studies among gifted employees, while it remains unclear if this applies to individuals who are high achieving to the same extent (Hossiep et al., 2013). Furthermore, some gifted adults show difficulties to recognize the effects their giftedness has on the environment and others may try to hide their abilities in order to fit in (van Casteren et al., 2021; Vreys et al., 2016). On the other hand, some adults may secretly wish for others to recognize their uniqueness to feel understood and to be able to adjust their work environment (Nauta et al., 2012). While gifted adults often struggle with their self-concept due to experienced challenges and “not fitting in”, they can undoubtedly overcome these challenges and strive with their abilities once they are “in balance” with their gifts (e.g., Corten et al., 2006; Kuipers, 2019; Streznewski, 1999; Jacobsen, 1999).

Sensitivity and perceptivity

A heightened emotional and sensual sensitivity as well as a heightened perceptivity in connection with high intellectual abilities has been widely discussed among scholars and is rated by many as one evident characteristic to identify gifted adults (e.g., van Thiel et al., 2019; Roeper, 1991; Tolan, 1994). Being a tremendous resource on one side, these traits can lead to over-feeling and projection, as well as to a perceived threat to others if the gifted person quickly sees through different layers of another person (Lovecky, 1986). Furthermore, the great information inflow answering stimuli can be very stressful and overwhelming for the sensitive person, possibly leading to quick exhaustion, especially within an unfitting environment. However, gifted adults can learn to channel sensual information gainfully to transform it into a great strength (Corten et al., 2006).

Differences in motivation and goals

Gifted adults often show high levels of intrinsic motivation, sometimes leading to overdrive if a project really interests them (Vreys et al., 2016). The motivation orientation is typically directed towards creation and the work content rather than towards acting or taking leadership positions, promotions may therefore even be refused by them if these do not match the gifted adults' interests (Hossiep et al., 2013; Schlegler et al., 2018). Furthermore, gifted adults typically strive to constantly learn, to follow their individual, often broad, interests and to devote their energy to a meaningful purpose. Additional to the meaningful purpose, gifted employees often value high ethical and moral standards, which they are often unwilling to dispose of (van der Waal et al., 2013). These differences in the gifted employees' multi-facility, wanting and motivation can lead to pitfalls within the work environment, which are mainly caused by misunderstandings on both sides. Gifted adults are often not interested in career status or even external motivators like bonuses, as many rather strive for self-actualization and self-growth (Lovecky, 1986), employers and colleagues may misunderstand this trait as demotivation.

Abilities and favored tasks

Intellectually gifted people unite different capabilities and competences, such as high information processing speed, high abstract thinking and reasoning skills, the ability to spot commonalities and differences and to draw new associations (Zehetmeier et al., 2019; Kramer & Hazzan, 2006; Schubert et al., 2015). Unsurprisingly, gifted employees, therefore, prefer to be assigned to challenging, complex and creative tasks, while they tend to dislike repetitive and unchallenging tasks. Thus, the starting phase of projects is often the most fitting one for them, while their motivation and focus often wears off in the following project phases (Vreys et al., 2016). Frustration and boredom, sometimes even a bore-out, are typical consequences if gifted employees cannot challenge their mind according to their needs. Within the work environment, it can often be difficult to provide gifted adults with sufficient challenges, as these typically differ that much from the needs of their non-gifted peers.

High standards and perfectionism

Perfectionism has long been linked to intellectual giftedness, which is defined as setting high standards for themselves and others (e.g., van Thiel et al., 2019; Roeper, 1991; Tolan, 1994). This tendency can lead to high performances within the job environment, as well as to unproductivity or procrastination especially if one suffers from the so-called perfectionistic concerns (e.g., Lavrijsen, 2021). Maladjusted perfectionism often hinders gifted employees themselves and others from recognizing the great potential that lies within one overlooked gifted adult.

Work environment

Gifted individuals are typically very autonomous beings and strive for autonomy in everything they approach (e.g., Silverman, 1993; van Thiel et al., 2019). Within the work environment, gifted employees typically require flexibility and freedom, especially regarding how results are produced. Simply following set instructions and processes, just because they have always been that way, is definitely no strength of gifted employees. Often, they question everything and their brain seems to almost automatically look for improvements and to solve problems. This tendency may lead to pitfalls if these suggestions are not communicated effectively as others may feel threatened or offended by the unasked-for advice. Despite the requested autonomy many gifted employees prefer to be given the freedom within a structured environment, with clearly communicated goals and expectations but freedom in choosing their individual methods to reach a certain goal (Nauta et al., 2012). Misunderstanding can arise between supervisors and HR Managers who are often not aware of these exact expectations,

as it is common in most occupations and especially within bigger organizations to follow implemented processes.

Social Interactions and teamwork

Undoubtedly, gifted employees can be highly adapted and well-integrated colleagues who enjoy working in a team. However, they can run into pitfalls due to their communication patterns and preferences and show, overall, a lower motivation towards teamwork compared to their non-gifted peers (Hossiep et al., 2013; Corten et al., 2006). Many apply a rather direct communication style and have little interest in small talk, which can lead to misunderstandings consequently. Furthermore, some have yet to learn how to save someone's face in front of others and to mind social customs. Conflicts consequently may arise due to these misunderstandings, while the gifted employee may only want to communicate honest feedback, others potentially feel offended by this approach. In general, teamwork seems to be most interesting for gifted employees if they can work with like-minded peers. If they are forced to work with colleagues who do not match their intellectual abilities, many feel held back and may get frustrated or demotivated (Persson, 2009; Vreys et al., 2016).

The described character traits and potential pitfalls are often not brought into connection with intellectual giftedness by hiring managers, supervisors, or the gifted employees themselves. Therefore, many employees may struggle to pave their way and to channel their overwhelming minds. Potential pitfalls and conflicts are the highest among those who are unaware of their giftedness or who cannot accept their abilities, as they have often not learned how to adjust their communication and behavior to fit into organizational environments. To avoid frustration, unhappiness or even unhealthy coping strategies, knowledge, and awareness about this side of giftedness may not only unleash a great potential for employers but can bring satisfaction and happiness to those gifted adults who are still seeking answers. Despite the pitfalls, challenges and unfavourable experiences, "underachieving" or "not well adjusted" gifted adults can certainly learn how to cope with their special traits and can learn to find a gainful way of coping with their innate being. Paying attention to the phenomenon of overlooked giftedness across the lifespan can benefit not only every organization but our society. Most importantly, it can help gifted adults to find answers and to seek help if needed so that they can make satisfactory steps towards their own development.

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The *WorldTalentWeb* newsletter is bimonthly published by the World Giftedness Center (WGC) of Hamdan Bin Rashid Al Maktoum Foundation for Distinguished Academic Performance. Dubai, United Arab Emirates



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