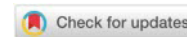


# WAYS TO ENGAGE EXPERT ASSOCIATES - PEDAGOGUES IN EDUCATIONAL WORK WITH GIFTED STUDENTS

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**Abstract:** Giftedness is among the most complex pedagogical phenomena of today. Its complexity arises from the multidimensional nature of the potentials it develops from, as well as its inherent resistance to uniformity. Consequently, working with gifted children remains one of the most challenging aspects of modern educational practice. Effectively addressing this process requires the active involvement of all educational stakeholders, along with strong collaboration and cooperation among them. Consequently, a study was conducted to examine teachers' perspectives on the most common methods of involving expert associates—pedagogues—as well as the nature of their collaboration when working with this student population. The study included 107 teachers who had experience working with gifted children over the past ten years. The findings indicate that teachers highly value the role of pedagogues in identifying and nurturing giftedness, emphasizing the significance of their instructional and advisory work, as well as the support and assistance they provide in working with gifted students. Furthermore, the research highlights that key forms of pedagogues' engagement include teamwork and the establishment of professional teams at the school level, as well as collaboration with artistic, cultural, scientific, and sports organizations, along with representatives and institutions from the local community. Based on the research findings, the key pedagogical implications emphasize the need for a more structured and ongoing professional development of all educational stakeholders in the field of gifted education. Additionally, the results point to the importance of strengthening both horizontal and vertical integration, fostering networking, collaboration, and cooperative engagement among all participants in the educational process.

**Keywords:** gifted students, expert associates - pedagogues, participation, engagement, educational work.

**Field:** Social sciences

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The foundation of successful educational and instructional work with gifted students lies in a thorough understanding of the phenomenon of giftedness, the specific educational needs of gifted students, and the competent planning, programming, and implementation of appropriate didactic-methodological approaches that foster and actualize their potential. The development and encouragement of giftedness largely depend on the effectiveness of the teacher, who is expected to be innovative, creative, and adaptable, providing support to students through the application of creative techniques and procedures, as well as the development of strategies that stimulate creativity and the advancement of giftedness (Sekulić, 2023) in both curricular and extracurricular activities.

The complexity of educational work with gifted students presents numerous challenges for teachers as direct facilitators of instruction. While regular classroom instruction provides a foundation for effective differentiation and individualization, both of which positively impact the development of gifted students, practical implementation often encounters multiple barriers in this domain. The predominant challenges faced by teachers include the inability to execute differentiation and individualization at various levels, reluctance to move beyond the constraints of prescribed curricula (Calik & Birgili, 2013), an unstimulating learning environment, insufficient support for implementing these instructional strategies, and a lack of specialized institutions that provide adequate resources for gifted learners (VanTassel-Baska & Stambaugh, 2005). Additionally, teachers encounter significant managerial challenges in working with gifted students. These challenges primarily relate to teachers' leadership competencies, which are essential for establishing a productive learning atmosphere, organizing instructional tasks at multiple levels of complexity, and fostering a diverse range of activities that encourage independent thinking, intrinsic motivation, and divergent thinking among gifted students (Čudina-Obradović, 1991). A pluralistic approach to instructional activities entails a flexible organization of teaching that incorporates a diverse range of methods and techniques, including problem-based and mentorship-driven instruction, research projects, panel discussions (Gallagher & Gallagher, 2013), and an integrative approach to learning. Emphasizing self-initiated learning and autonomy through interactive methodological strategies—such as brainstorming, mind mapping, guided imagery, provocation, and the use of humor in instruction

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(Marković, 2020)—establishes an optimal foundation for nurturing giftedness. Additionally, the integrated use of modern educational technologies plays a crucial role in gifted education, not only fostering talent development but also enhancing active teacher-student interaction, independent learning, critical thinking, and student motivation (Rudenko et al., 2021). Furthermore, these technologies contribute to the development of entrepreneurial skills and active participation in activities of varying complexity and nature, equipping gifted students with the competencies necessary for dynamic engagement in diverse learning experiences.

The effectiveness of working with gifted students is based on ten key global principles:

(1) Comprehensive professional education programs, ensuring that all teachers acquire a foundational level of competence in working with gifted students; (2) Experiential dimension of professional development, grounding pedagogical practice in evidence-based research and exemplary instructional approaches; (3) Holistic approach, focusing on the well-rounded development of gifted children across cognitive, emotional, and social domains; (4) Comprehensive engagement with gifted learners, encompassing diverse identification methods, instructional models, and curriculum enhancements to foster talent development; (5) Recognition of student diversity, addressing the wide spectrum of giftedness across different disciplines and domains; (6) Continuous and sustained professional development, particularly in the didactics of gifted education, ensuring long-term instructional excellence; (7) Sustainable approach to educational policy-making, involving systematic monitoring, evaluation, and refinement of effectiveness over time; (8) Empowerment of gifted students and their families, supporting the identification, development, and refinement of their exceptional potential; (9) Unified and cohesive action among key educational stakeholders, fostering an integrated and collaborative framework for gifted education; (10) Integrative approach, cooperation, and collaboration, engaging all participants in the educational process to optimize learning outcomes and maximize student potential (World Council for Gifted and Talented Children, 2021). Respecting these key principles requires all educational stakeholders to engage in active collaboration and maintain a high level of cooperation across various activities and levels of implementation. Considering that the school environment provides a wide array of curricular and extracurricular opportunities to foster and develop giftedness, along with the positive influence of partnerships with external institutions, individuals, and the broader community (Jovanović & Vukić, 2018a), it is clear that a cohesive and coordinated effort among all actors in education is crucial for maximizing the educational potential of gifted students.

For this reason, it is essential to establish a stimulating educational environment in which working with gifted students is perceived as a shared mission among teachers, educational specialists, families, and both the immediate and broader community. Numerous national and international studies (Altaras Dimitrijević & Tatić Janevski, 2016; Jovanović & Vukić, 2018b,v; Jovanović & Minić, 2018; Maksić, 1998; Muratović-Musić, 2017; Pfeiffer, 2013; Rudenko et al., 2021; French, Walker, & Shore, 2011, among others) consistently affirm the significance of these stakeholders in supporting gifted education. However, research exploring the relational dynamics between these parties remains limited. In response, this study examines the relational context of collaboration between teachers and educational specialists (pedagogues) in the education of gifted students. Inquiry-based, problem-solving, project-oriented, and integrative teaching approaches—alongside logical and creative learning and a high degree of individualization and differentiation in instruction (Minić, Jovanović, & Milenović, 2021)—pose significant challenges for practitioners working with gifted students. Educational specialists, particularly pedagogues, play a crucial role in providing teachers with essential support and guidance. Within this framework, pedagogues can offer practitioners various forms of support, including material, financial, personnel, organizational, didactic-methodological, and media-related assistance, ensuring a structured and effective approach to working with gifted students.

The participation of educational specialists—particularly pedagogues—in the education of gifted students can be examined through the lens of their key areas of professional engagement: (1) Planning and Program Development – The process of designing and structuring educational support for gifted students involves developing tailored plans and programs, organizing specific activities and support mechanisms, and continuously revising and innovating curricula to align with evolving pedagogical needs; (2) Ongoing Monitoring and Evaluation – Pedagogues play a crucial role in the continuous assessment of educational practices for gifted students. This is achieved through independent evaluative activities as well as the facilitation of various forms of internal and external evaluation, ensuring the effectiveness and relevance of instructional strategies; (3) Pedagogical Counseling and Instructional Support – This domain encompasses working closely with teachers, parents/guardians, and gifted students to identify, nurture, and enhance their unique talents. It involves fostering creativity and innovation, implementing individualized and differentiated instructional approaches, and supporting the holistic development of

gifted students; (4) Collaboration with the Principal and Other Educational Specialists – Pedagogues engage in this area by creating a stimulating environment and supportive atmosphere that positively influences the development of students' giftedness; (5) Engagement in Professional Bodies and Teams – Pedagogues are actively involved in working with professional teams, especially the inclusive education team, contributing to the development and implementation of strategies for gifted students; (6) Collaboration with Relevant Organizations and Institutions – Pedagogues collaborate with relevant organizations, institutions, and associations within both local and broader communities. These partnerships focus on areas directly related to the development of giftedness and empower students to actively participate in organizations aimed at specific fields linked to their talents; (7) Documentation and Ongoing Professional Development – Pedagogues are responsible for maintaining documentation and engaging in continuous professional development. This includes collaborative work in creating pedagogical profiles for gifted students, developing Individual Educational Plans (IEP3), and planning measures for individualization and tailored activities for gifted learners.

Given the significant participatory roles and collaborative contributions that educational specialists—particularly pedagogues—play in ensuring the quality and effectiveness of educational practices for gifted students, this study also explores these aspects through empirical research.

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The objective of this study is to assess teachers' perspectives on the most common ways educational specialists, particularly pedagogues, participate and collaborate in the process of working with gifted students. The research was carried out in two phases. The first phase involved a group interview with a focus group. The aim of this session was to identify the most frequent methods of participation and collaboration by pedagogues in working with gifted students, which would then enable the second phase of the study to scale teachers' views on these identified participation methods using a purposive sample.

The focus group consisted of one teacher from each of the participating schools. The sample in the second phase comprised 107 teachers from seven elementary schools in the Nišava district. Due to the particularity of the research topic, the highest level of representativeness was achieved by selecting a purposive sample of teachers who have had direct teaching experience with gifted students or have worked with an Individualized Education Plan for students with exceptional abilities (IEP 3) in the past ten years. The structure of the sample, in relation to the variables examined in the study, is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Sample structure

<i>School location</i>		
Urban	75	70,1
Rural	32	29,9
Total	107	100%
<i>Teacher years of service</i>		
Up to 10 years	40	37,40
11-20 years	43	40,20
over 20 years	24	22,40
Total	107	100%

Source: Research authors Jovanović & Jovanović

As shown in Table 1, approximately two-thirds of the sample consists of teachers from urban schools (75; 70.1%). Regarding years of professional experience, the sample is nearly evenly divided between teachers with up to 10 years and those with up to 20 years of experience (37.4% and 40.2%, respectively). Only about one-fifth of the sample consists of teachers with over 20 years of experience (24; 22.4%).

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The quality of work with gifted students, as well as its efficiency and effectiveness, is largely determined by the quality of collaboration among all actors involved in the educational process. For teachers, as the direct implementers of this process, a valuable resource in working with gifted students are the professional associates—pedagogues. To identify the most common ways in which pedagogues participate and collaborate in this process, we initially conducted interviews with a focus group. Qualitative analysis of the data obtained from working with the focus group revealed that the key ways in which pedagogues participate include their involvement and collaboration in: (1) the process of identifying gifted children, (2) encouraging and organizing activities for gifted students, (3) direct work with gifted children,

(4) planning and implementing activities for the inclusive education team, (5) initiating and establishing collaboration with scientific, professional, sports, artistic, and other associations, and (6) initiating and establishing cooperation with community-based organizations and associations.

Table 2. Teachers' attitudes towards the ways in which professional associates—pedagogues—participate in working with gifted students.

<u>Approaches to pedagogical involvement in working with gifted students</u>	N	I completely disagree	I disagree	Unable to assess	I mostly agree	У potpunosti се слажем	AS	SD
Participation in the process of identifying gifted children	107	/	1 0,9%	28 26,2%	56 52,3%	22 20,6%	3,92	0,7
Participation in the process of encouraging and organizing activities for gifted students	107	/	4 3,7%	28 26,2%	50 46,7%	25 23,4%	3,89	0,8
Working with gifted children	107	/	1 0,9%	26 24,3%	47 43,9%	33 30,8%	4,04	0,76
Engagement in the inclusive education team	107	/	5 4,7%	22 20,6%	38 35,5%	42 39,3%	4,09	0,88
Initiating and establishing cooperation with sports, artistic, and other organizations	107	/	7 6,5%	19 17,8%	43 40,2%	38 35,5%	4,04	0,89
Initiating and establishing cooperation with the local community	107	/	3 2,8%	7 6,5%	59 55,1%	38 35,5%	4,23	0,69
<i>Teachers' attitudes towards the ways in which professional associates—pedagogues—participate in working with gifted students (based on school location)</i>								
		Location	AS	SD	t-test	df	p	
Participation in the process of identifying gifted children		urban	1,16	0,61	6,055	105	0,000	
		rural	3,37	0,60				
Participation in the process of encouraging and organizing activities for gifted students		urban	1,10	0,78	4,508	105	0,000	
		rural	3,10	0,61				
Working with gifted children		urban	4,28	0,68	5,401	105	0,000	
		rural	3,50	0,67				
Working with gifted children		urban	4,32	0,77	4,388	105	0,000	
		rural	3,56	0,91				
Initiating and establishing cooperation with sports, artistic, and other organizations		urban	4,26	0,82	4,188	105	0,000	
		rural	3,53	0,84				
Initiating and establishing cooperation with the local community		urban	4,29	0,65	1,366	105	0,175	
		rural	4,09	0,77				
<i>Teachers' attitudes towards the ways in which professional associates—pedagogues—participate in working with gifted students (based on years of service)</i>								
	N	Years of service	AS	SD	F-test	p		
Participation in the process of identifying gifted children	107	Up to 10 years	4,15	0,62	3,345	0,039*		
		11-20 years	3,37	0,77				
		over 20 years	3,37	0,65				
Participation in the process of encouraging and organizing activities for gifted students	107	Up to 10 years	4,05	0,81	1,191	0,308		
		11-20 years	3,79	0,8				
		over 20 years	3,83	0,76				
Working with gifted children	107	Up to 10 years	4,2	0,72	1,339	0,267		
		11-20 years	3,93	0,79				
		over 20 years	4	0,78				
Working with gifted children	107	Up to 10 years	4,3	0,75	1,836	0,165		
		11-20 years	4	0,87				
		over 20 years	3,91	1,05				
Initiating and establishing cooperation with sports, artistic, and other organizations	107	Up to 10 years	4,1	0,84	0,185	0,831		
		11-20 years	4,04	0,87				
		over 20 years	3,95	1,04				
Initiating and establishing cooperation with the local community	107	Up to 10 years	4,3	0,56	0,763	0,469		
		11-20 years	4,25	0,62				
		over 20 years	4,08	0,97				

Source: Research authors Jovanović & Jovanović

The research on teachers' views regarding the modes of participation and collaboration of educational specialists—pedagogues—in working with gifted students reveals a significant level of involvement and a fairly balanced representation of all collaboration models. The role of the pedagogue in initiating and

establishing cooperation with the local community is somewhat more frequently recognized (AS=4.23), while teachers less frequently highlight the pedagogue's involvement in encouraging and organizing activities or in identifying gifted students (AS=3.89 and AS=3.92, respectively). These differences, along with the high arithmetic mean values, indicate a commendable level of representation of the described forms of collaboration, which may vary slightly depending on the specific context of educational work in individual schools.

Analyzed from the perspective of school location, no statistically significant differences were found in teachers' views on the involvement and collaboration with pedagogues in the process of working with gifted students. However, it is noted that teachers in urban schools less frequently highlight the involvement of pedagogues in the identification process and the organization of activities for this student population compared to their colleagues in rural areas. This finding may be attributed to a greater familiarity of teachers in rural areas with educational specialists, due to the lower number of professionals involved in working with gifted students.

When considering the methods of involvement and collaboration of educational specialists in working with gifted students, it can be concluded that teachers' years of experience play a significant role in their perceptions of various forms of collaboration. A statistically significant difference ( $p < 0.05$ ) in their views on the degree of involvement and collaboration with pedagogues in the process of identifying gifted students was established using the F-test ( $r = 0.039$ ). This difference is attributed to a more positive outlook on this issue among teachers with less experience (AS=4.15) compared to their more experienced colleagues (AS=3.37). While it is important to enhance the level of collaboration between educational specialists and experienced teachers, the results are encouraging as they confirm that novice teachers are not left to their own devices in the process of identifying gifted students. Given that this is a foundational step in the development of giftedness and that competencies for this process are developed with experience, the established results can certainly be seen in a positive light. Supporting this assertion is the fact that teachers from all experience categories positively and uniformly evaluated all forms of collaboration they have with educational specialists-pedagogues in their work with gifted students.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

The complexity of the phenomenon of giftedness and the need for a comprehensive approach in the educational process make this area one of the most demanding fields of pedagogical practice. The quality and effectiveness of working with gifted students necessarily require the involvement and high level of cooperation and collaboration among all participants in the education process, as well as a systematic approach to planning and implementation. Through theoretical reflection on the key issues of the collaborative relationship between teachers and educational specialists (pedagogues) in the process of working with gifted students, and the analysis of the results from the conducted research, the following conclusions and pedagogical implications emerge: (1) Working with gifted students is characterized by a high level of complexity, which demands a thorough approach and a range of pedagogical and didactic-methodological competencies from both teachers and educational specialists; (2) In the process of enhancing competencies for working with gifted students, continuous professional development for teachers and educational specialists is essential, through various forms of professional training conducted at the school level as well as within accredited professional development programs; (3) Educational specialists-pedagogues provide a secure foundation and a significant determinant for strengthening teachers' capacity to effectively utilize various forms, methods, and strategies of instructional work, enabling successful differentiation and individualization of teaching, while also promoting the development and actualization of giftedness in students; (4) The involvement of educational specialists in working with gifted students is most commonly realized through participation in identifying gifted students, organizing activities, engaging in direct work with them, contributing to relevant teams, and initiating and establishing collaboration with community organizations, as well as scientific, artistic, sports, and other associations; (5) Practicing teachers positively assess the level of educational specialists' participation through the aforementioned inclusion models; (6) The level of collaboration and involvement of educational specialists is more distinctly recognized among teachers with less professional experience; (7) Teachers from rural areas more frequently highlight the involvement of educational specialists in the processes of identifying and organizing work with gifted children; (8) Ensuring the quality and effectiveness of instructional work with gifted students is based on collaborative and cooperative work, as well as the networking of all participants in the education process.

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