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Giftedness and Language Teaching: a case study.

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*“To the girl
I once was,
Thank you
for never
giving up.*

*Love,
The girl
I am today.”*

-Hanna Shebar

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Introduction

Giftedness is an extraordinary and, at the same time, controversial phenomenon, discovered and explored during the last three centuries. Since its discovery, the tendency of researchers was to examine the topic from a psychological standpoint, trying to understand the attributes of the phenomenon and to structure a unique and standardised strategy for its identification. In the last fifty years, the research extended to the definition of teaching methods and strategy which result more appropriate for gifted learners. A landmark for this topic were the many studies and theories of Joseph Renzulli, who introduced a new conception of gifted behaviour, as he refers to it in his disquisitions, and founded in the U.S. one of the most famous specialised centres for development of giftedness, the Renzulli Center for Creativity, Gifted Education and Talent Development.

Previous studies revealed that this particular aspect can be treated under two different headings: the cognitive and the emotive. From a cognitive perspective, giftedness involves the presence of an extremely high cognitive intelligence, measured by IQ standardised tests, precociously developed problem-solving and leadership skills, an excellent memory, a creative and original thought and approach to the tasks. Gifted children can fluently and autonomously read and write at the age of three, are interested in scientific and social topics and they can effortlessly discuss about them with adults and professionals. It is frequent that their main passions are reading, studying, and increasing their knowledge about scholastic and non-scholastic themes, even though sometimes they are inclined to have unordinary passions. They also tend to enjoy creative activities, such as learning how to play musical instruments, drawing, painting, or practicing in storytelling activities.

Therefore, it is fundamental to allow students to develop their qualities in scholastic and educational contexts, motivating and stimulating them with the more suitable teaching devices for their needs. This approach to giftedness can enhance their academic performance and develop their talent. In addition, a proper and careful teaching strategy can avoid some complications generally caused by untreated talent, such as burnout, angry attitudes, lack of interest for the school subjects or even boredom and drop out.

Furthermore, giftedness is remarkable for its emotive, social and behavioural traits. There is a tendency for gifted children to demonstrate an outstanding emotive intelligence, which is observable in their concern for social and moral issues. They also show a deep sensitivity, both in the sensorial and the emotive areas, which sometimes causes feelings of inadequacy, fear of failure and even depression. Hence, researchers and psychologists emphasise the necessity of a proper psychologic therapy, in order to allow them to acknowledge their peculiarities and accept them. Moreover, it is fundamental to create a favourable and supportive environment in the familiar and educational contexts.

In the didactic field, gifted students are considered to have special learning qualities and, on the other hand, some weaknesses. Heretofore, teachers used to believe that gifted students didn't need specific lesson plans, nor they needed their help or consideration in class. Hence, many gifted students didn't reach the extraordinary achievements they could, or, conversely, they appeared to be incompetent. In the worst cases, they abandoned school. The great number of studies in the field stresses the relevance of the role of teachers as primary influence for gifted students' motivation in class. Teachers have to be sensitive to the special needs and qualities of giftedness and they have to employ all possible teaching strategies to meet these needs, in order to develop the students' excellence and ambitions for the future.

Notwithstanding the research on the field is constantly increasing, still there is a lack of knowledge about the English language teaching for gifted students. Since they demonstrate especially advanced qualities, such as memory, creativity, and thirst of knowledge for other cultures and languages, it would represent an enormous waste not to enhance their linguistic capabilities. Thus, conceiving new and more inclusive strategies in which students have to practice their knowledge of English by concretely using their skills and competences could improve their academic performance and provide the society with extremely specialized and capable linguistic experts.

The aim of the present dissertation is to delve into the conception of giftedness and its traits in a psychological and educational perspective, focusing on the importance of differentiated and supportive teaching for these students with outstanding achievements and on the necessity to incorporate this perspective in the national educational system, which nowadays still doesn't offer the adequate measures for the development of talent.

The most relevant theories on the main English language teaching approaches and strategies for gifted students are exposed and discussed from a critical point of view, considering their impact on the gifted individuals and the possible improvements of their implementation.

In the first section, an introduction of the main theories and approaches of the language teaching is presented. After a preliminary distinction between the principal terminology about glottodidactics, an important reference to the communicative and the inductive approaches is reported, in order to understand the line of thoughts on which the personalised activities for the gifted student rely on. Moreover, another theory about teaching approaches is shown, namely the Krashen's theory of the Natural Approach, which highlights the differences between acquisition and learning. Afterwards, the phases of the inductive learning process are analysed and, moreover, the necessity and effectiveness of authentic materials is commented, according to the research and experiments in the field. The chapter ends with an observation on the most successful strategies applied in language class, which lead language learners to achieve learning goals and acquire knowledge and competences. Strategies related to the communicative approach and the designing of a Mixed Abilities Class (MAC) are discussed, in order to conceive the most appropriate manners to improve language learners' competences and wellness in the scholastic environment.

In the second section, the most famous and complete definitions of giftedness are provided, including the Three Ring's Conception of Giftedness by J. Renzulli and other models picturing the cooperation of the many aspects of giftedness. Thus, the different cognitive and emotive traits are examined, including the positive and negative consequences they involve. Furthermore, this section examines the national and international laws about teaching strategies to gifted students and, more generally, inclusive teaching, showing their effectiveness in the Italian educational system and the real condition of learning of gifted students, whose needs, despite the existence of many regulations, which grant them an adequate education according to their needs, aren't totally satisfied. In conclusion, this section describes the most appropriate teaching strategies for gifted students, focusing on English language teaching and offering some proposals for engaging activities and tasks.

In the third section, the individual activity plan of a middle school gifted student is proposed and deepened. The investigation goes on the preliminary information about the gifted individual, her interests and propensions, her learning experience at school and her expectations from the activity planned. Furthermore, there are exposed some information about the parenting experience of the gifted individual's mother, about the evaluation of giftedness and her opinion about the school education of her child. Thus, the section examines the activities planned and realised for the gifted student, with the aim of improving the student's speaking skill, as well as her other linguistic competence and capabilities, as problem solving and leadership skills, the capability to manage and overcome new challenging situations and to perform activities in a creative manner. The indicated skills are meant to improve the gifted student's approach to English learning, as well as to any situation external to school, supporting and encouraging her to get out of her "comfort zone" and implement her talent to the full.

More specifically, the activity consists in five lessons with the aim of simulating a tour, guided by the gifted student, in a cultural site in Padua, the Palazzo della Ragione. The activities start with two introductory lessons regarding a topic that links two of her main interests: art and science. In the third lesson, the gifted student is involved in the production of a concept map, which is demonstrated to be a really effective teaching tool for gifted students. In the fourth lesson, the gifted student practically organises the journey from her home to the cultural site and chooses the more appropriate communicative method for her oral presentation at the Palazzo della Ragione. The fifth and last activity takes place in the cultural site, where the gifted student provides some visitor with the information she collected and studied in the previous activities.

During the activities, the teacher and the student speak English, in order to improve the gifted student's fluency and her confidence with the spoken language. Furthermore, there are exposed some reflections about the execution and the results of the student, with a focus on her approach and her interest in the topic of the activities. In conclusion, the section includes the feedback of the gifted student about the activities and the aims she reached thanks to it.

Section 1. Foreign Language Teaching: a reflection on terminology, theoretical approaches, and strategies.

In the course of the last two centuries, there have been many changes in the Italian and European society, which acquired the characteristics of the “mass society”. In line with these changes and the many innovations brought in XX century, the needs of the society were deeply influenced, and teaching processes and methodologies changed too. In particular, a considerable relevance was given to languages, as a result of the abolition of national boundaries during the two World Wars and the Cold War, which caused massive migration flows in foreign countries. For these reasons, the European countries became more complex societies, in which existed many ethnic minorities, and, as a consequence, different cultures and languages.

Since 1994, indeed, it is possible to notice an increase in glottodidactical studies, namely studies on applied linguistics which deal with native language and foreign language teaching. More specifically, glottodidactics is a synergy of communication, psycho-pedagogical and linguistic connotations, which are strongly correlated in language teaching.

At the end of the XX century, the school environment underwent a massive evolution, moving from a old-fashioned and rigid teaching tradition to more openminded and innovative strategies, which demonstrated a more student-centred orientation and a specific focus on students’ educational needs. This line of thinking is still present in the contemporary school systems, which developed more specific and, in some cases, personalised didactic strategies, in order to improve the education and school subject learning of students, as well as to create a favourable and challenging school environment.

1.1. Terminological introduction to foreign language teaching

Before analysing the evolution of foreign language teaching, it is fundamental to make a core distinction on some terminology of the field of glottodidactics and foreign language teaching theories, which is often confused and misunderstood. The main distinguishment regards the meaning of the terms “approach”, “method”, and “technique”.

The first term indicates a connection between the theoretical conceptions of glottodidactics and their practical application in methods. More specifically, as affirms Landolfi (2000), the aim of the approaches is to draw up some guidelines regarding teaching, based on the theory of foreign language teaching and to create methods, which have to be coherent and respect the principles of the theories. Firstly, the perspective of approaches depends on its focus: Landolfi (2000) examines the relationship between teachers and students, providing an example of the dichotomy of approaches focused on this aspect, which are the teacher-based and the student-based approaches. The stress is put on the coherence and consistence of principles in theory, approach and method: this synergy offers better results in learning process and higher motivation for the student. Furthermore, Landolfi (2000) remarks the well-known relevance of the consistency of approaches with the learning styles of students, which is essential to take in consideration in order to provide them an effective teaching.

On the basis of the appropriate approach, teachers develop didactic and educational methods. A method represents a set of rules, materials and procedures oriented to the students' acquisition of knowledge and competences. According to the reflection of Balboni (2002), profitable results can be achieved only in those conditions in which the method is "adequate" for the approaches to realise and coherent in its internal structure. As well as for approaches, in the selection of the educational method, appropriateness to the environment, the school subject and the students' learning characteristics is an essential aspect to take into consideration.

In conclusion, the third term, techniques, refers to the daily and factual didactic practices. According to Landolfi (2000), techniques are rules and procedures which allow students to perform a formal learning activity. In turn, they are transformed into didactic practices, which are affected by learners' needs and are implemented due to the characteristics of the educational context in which they take place.

Focusing on the terminology used to determine the principles and components of language teaching, Nunan (1998) provides a further distinction between the syllabus design and methodology of teaching, stressing the difficulty in sustaining the distance between the present terms. The scholar points out that "the syllabus design is concerned

with what, why and when; methodology is concerned with how.”¹ Referring to the definition expressed in the Longman Dictionary of Applied Linguistics, Nunan (1998) states that methodology is the study of teaching principles, practices and procedures, considering the study of the nature of linguistic skills and the procedures for their improvement, the designing of lesson plans and the evaluation and comparison of teaching methods.

Despite the many distinctions and definition of these terms, in the field of glottodidactics it is frequent that the term “methodology” and “methods”, as well as the other aforementioned terms, are used erroneously or confused with each other. Thus, it is fundamental to keep in mind the various distinctions and shades of meaning, in order to better understand the theories and observations of the scholars in the area of glottodidactics.

1.2. The inductive perspective of the Communicative Approach

Before the increase in research on glottodidactics and on foreign language teaching theory, didactic activities were planned due to a deductive teaching process.

The deductive method of teaching involves a teacher-centred approach to presenting new content to students. It begins by providing rules to learners along with examples, which are followed by specific activities, so that they can practice.²

The deductive method can be seen as a more traditional and passive teaching strategy, since it requires students’ attention to the teacher’s explanation in class, but not involving them in any active way during it. Learners are provided with a great amount of information, and they are directly expected to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills. Though, this approach may seem controversial, because of the lack of practice and of interactive time spent on the exposed information. For these reasons, this approach appears more teacher-centred, as if the teacher were a master in his or her subject, and students were supposed to listen and learn the knowledge “directly from the horse’s mouth”, without rethinking, selecting, reformulating it.

¹Nunan, David, (2000). *Language Teaching Methodology. A textbook for teachers.*, Pearson Education Ltd, Edinburgh, p. 2.

²Vannikat, Anagha, (2021). “Deductive Method of Teaching.”. Available on the website: <https://blog.teachmint.com/deductive-method-of-teaching/>

After some years spent on the research on the most effective teaching approaches and methods, scholars realised that the deductive approach didn't perfectly conform to the needs and qualities of students, nor to the aims of language teachers. Thus, the practice started to move from the deductive teaching process to a more versatile one, the inductive approach, which literally means that the learning was based on observations on language and culture made by the students, on an active comprehension of their functioning and linguistic and non-linguistic components. In this view, the role of teacher loses responsibility and space, becoming a language expert and guide for students, whenever they need it.

Despite the apparently positive aspects of inductive approach, Balboni (2002) affirms that, even after thirty years, not every teacher actually implements a totally inductive approach, since they still deem students irresponsible and students' autonomy unreliable. Another claim is that teachers prefer to feel omniscient and to work *ex cathedra*, maintaining their role of supremacy. Balboni (2002) hypothesises that this behaviour is due to the belief that a less superior role is excessively degrading for teachers, who should always feel respected.

The exploration of the area of foreign language teaching led specialists to understand the priorities of learning a foreign language in scholastic contexts, conceiving that the most relevant aim of the whole process of teaching and learning languages is the acquisition of appropriate and sufficient capabilities to communicate in a comprehensible and successful way. This cognizance influenced the approaches to foreign language teaching, and, consequently, its methods and techniques, trying to include more communication activities and tasks, with the aim of improving communication skills in foreign languages learners.

The aforementioned conception became the starting point of the production of the new more student-centred approaches. In 1972, the scholar in the field of ethnolinguistics Hymes coined the term "communicative competence", referring to the knowledge of social conventions, correct use, and interpretation of language, appropriacy to socio-cultural contexts and the selection, on the basis of this knowledge, of the more adequate strategies to express meanings in communicative events.

Afterwards, in his study, Bachman (1990) discusses the role and components of communicative competence. Firstly, he distinguishes two main features: one is the

knowledge of language, which can be assumed as a more theoretical aspect of competence; the other is the acquisition of two types of abilities, which are organisational and pragmatical competence. The organisational competence contains two sub-competences: grammatical competence, which regards the knowledge of the language structure, grammar and syntax and textual competence, which involves the capability to effectively understand the language, to create utterances and texts in a coherent and cohesive manner. On the other side, the pragmatical competence includes the illocutionary competence, which is the ability to use and control the functioning of the language and the sociolinguistic competence, concerning the capability to detect contexts and to use language in an appropriate way according to them.

Moreover, Swain (1990) adds a further form of competence named strategic competence, which involves the ability to communicate the intended meaning with a second language. For greater clarity, the set of communicative competences is visible in Annex 1. Halliday (1975) examines the main functions on which communicative competence relies on, which are:

- Instrumental function: communicating is useful to satisfy primary needs.
- Regulatory function: human use communication to “regulate” other human beings’ behaviour, for instance with reproaches.
- Interactional function: in order to establish social relationships, it is fundamental to have communication competence.
- Personal function: communication enables one’s own expression of beliefs, ideas, and opinions.
- Heuristic function: children explore the world and make new discoveries firstly with communication acts.
- Imaginative function: communicating acts can design mental projects and improve imagination.

The cited conceptions named the communicative approach, whose aim is to develop language learners’ communicative competence through interactive and authentic methods and techniques. To summarise, the focus is shifted from the mere knowledge of language and its functioning to a more active and purposeful use of language, with two principal aims. As in the previous teaching approaches, the grammar,

vocabulary, and syntax bear its relevance, in order to allow the student to understand the propositional meaning of utterances. Moreover, the pragmatic weight of utterances, as, for instance, the intentions, the requests, or the suggestions masqueraded under a simple sentence, acquires more value, leading students to face real communicative situations, in which many messages are implicit.

The precise value of an utterance is given by the interaction of its structural and lexical meaning with the situation in which it is used.³

As affirmed by Swain (1985), the pragmatic side of a language establishes and influences the value of discourses, making it acceptable for real contexts. For this reason, the emphasis on foreign language learning needs to be put on communication capabilities and abilities development, in order to allow students to manipulate language and achieve pragmatic goals by means of it. As a matter of facts, teaching strategies tend to include comprehension activities, which involve the pragmatic competence of language learners. To give an example, Swain (1985) cites the comprehension skills of making predictions from specific situations and of negotiating meaning. The skills cited by Swain are generally perfectly applied in L1 and, on the contrary, their development in a foreign language can be difficult.

According to Serra Borneto (1998), since the communicative approach is founded on actions and factual activities, rather than on knowledge, the principal tool of this approach is the activity, the “task”. It is possible to observe, in this way, that there is a terminological shift from the term “exercise” or “drill”⁴, namely mechanical works on language, to a more active and challenging works, which imply the comprehension, manipulation, interaction and production of new utterances in the learned language, providing students with a more global view. Serra Borneto exposes the examination of Candlin (1987) regarding the components of a task, which are:

- Input data, which could have a linguistic or non-linguistic form.
- Roles, which represent the relation between the participants of the task.

³Swan, Michael, (1985). “A critical look at the Communicative Approach.”, in: *ELT Journal*, v. 39 (1), p. 5.

⁴Serra Borneto, Carlo, et al., (1998). *C’era una volta il metodo. Tendenze attuali nella didattica delle lingue straniere.*, Carocci Editore, Roma, p. 143.

- Setting in which the task takes place.
- Actions, which are the procedures necessary to realise the task.
- Monitoring of the task, carried out by the teacher.
- Outcomes achieved by the task.
- Feedback and evaluation by both students and teachers.

The language acquisition process has been subject to many examinations also in recent times, aiming to reach a global and complete teaching approach. This is the orientation of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), which placed linguistic-communicative competence in the components of communicative proficiency. On the basis of the structure designed by the CEFR in 2011, a distinction is provided by Novello (2022), who distinguished in the field of linguistic-communicative competences:

- Linguistic competence, which refers to the lexical, grammatical, semantical phonological and orthographical and orthoepic competences.
- Sociolinguistic competence, which includes the knowledge of sociocultural traits and uses of language. In this category, for instance, it is possible to place idioms and idiomatic expressions, or differences in register and style.
- Pragmatic competence, which is related to the production and use of linguistic acts in communication situations. For instance, between these competences it is possible to include the capability to understand and use irony and parody, as well as the proficiency of discourses.

After a deep observation of the theory regarding the communicative approach, it is fundamental to set the foundations for a successful teaching practice which pursues the aims and the principles of the communicative approach. Flanders (1972) reflects upon the communication and the interaction of teachers with their students and identifies two forms of influencing intervention. Firstly, teachers might have a directive influence on students, in the cases in which they teach exclusively *ex cathedra*, offering students' knowledge about concepts and procedures. In this influence, teachers often criticise their students' work, attributing themselves on a supremacy role.

On the contrary, a non-directive influencing intervention involves the examination and consideration of feelings during lessons, the encouragement of students' action, trying to relieve anxiety and fear to make mistakes, accepts their ideas and elaborate them

in class, in order to develop further competences. Moreover, uses questions to stimulate students' personal reflection. If persistently and patiently applied in class with students, these suggestions may bring about a noteworthy improvement on teaching and learning processes, as well as to the educational aspects of school contexts.

In conclusion, it is fundamental to affirm that, through the communicative approach, which appears more careful to the affective aspects of teaching and learning a foreign language, the students' needs are positioned at the centre of the whole process design and implementation. Consequently, students feel more motivated to approach foreign languages and practice more on it.

1.3. The Natural Approach of Krashen

As observed in the previous section, in the second half of the XX century, there is a prevailing orientation towards the process of learning, rather than the products, and, on these premises, further reflection is made on the components of the process, particularly on the students' needs and behaviour. In accordance with this trend, affective methods are conceived and realised for language teaching. More specifically, these methods take into account the affection of students during the learning process, namely their feelings, responsibilities, and motivation in language learning.

As in the case of the communicative approach, students become the centre of the learning and exercising phases, which, thus, are personalised according to their participants and their characteristics. Similarly, studies in the field of language teaching produced a learner-centred and less static approach, which the American scholar of linguistics Krashen (1941) called the Natural Approach. The adjective "natural" refers to the similarity of learning paces and principles between the acquisition of L1 as children and L2 as learners at a later age. The Natural Approach is founded on the previous reflections of Krashen, who separated the acquisition and the learning of a language.

- Acquisition refers to a natural and subconscious absorption of the language, through its comprehension and use. The phenomenon of language acquisition is similar to what occurs in the early childhood, when the child captures utterances and gradually learns his or her native language, even if he or she doesn't already know (and can't be totally aware of) the grammar and syntactic rules of the

language spoken. Thus, it is possible to move from acquisition to learning, but the contrary is impossible.

- Learning regards an intentional study of a language, starting with the acquisition of grammar rules. It is more usual that learning occurs in foreign languages learners, who manage to use the learnt rules in their speaking.

More specifically, Krashen affirmed the necessity of a “comprehensible input” for the improvement of competences. As the scholar demonstrates, a successful development of linguistic competences can be achieved only with a measured approach, which offers the student an input adequate to his capabilities. Thus, Krashen formulated the Input Hypothesis, represented with the mathematical formula $i+1$, in which “i” represents the learner’s competence level, while 1 is the additional difficulty included in the input, in order to develop competences. In accordance with Villarini (2021), in Krashen’s conception there is a dominant influence of the scientific and informatic innovation of his time. As a matter of facts, the scholar, living in the ‘40s of the twentieth century, pictures learning as an information flow, which moves towards a definite mental path of elaboration and acquisition.

Firstly, Krashen pictures as first step of the learning path the affective filter, which is figuratively placed at the entrance of learners’ mind and filters input, by means of emotions, anxiety, motivation, and personality of the learners. Any information which appears impossible to examine is automatically refused by this fictitious barrier. Thus, it is fundamental for the teacher to work on and lower that barrier, reducing anxiety, tension, fears, and discomfort and stimulating learner’ motivation, in order to allow the students to capture as much information as possible.

According to the hypothesis of Krashen, the school environment is another strongly influencing factor for L2 learning, since it can raise the affective filter. The presence of classmates, often seen as competitors, as well as the necessity of school tests and interrogations, produce stereotyped feelings of disinterest and anxiety in students. On the contrary, an outdoor learning can be more appreciated since it appears less demanding and formal. With the purpose of lowering the affective filter, a perfect learning environment should appear to students as an extra scholastic or outdoor situation.

Krashen’s hypothesis regarding the mechanical process of learning continues on a second phase, in which the information is processed. During the present phase, the input

is processed and, afterwards, intakes, which include information, rules, and procedures of the language, are obtained from it. This information undergoes a further process of elaboration by the monitor, whose aim is to acquire conscious knowledge about the language and the linguistic functioning and, finally, to autocorrect any possible mistakes. The learning process finishes with the production of an output, in which information is checked and reviewed, in order to avoid mistakes.

Nonetheless, further observations on Krashen's theory point out that there is no scientific evidence of the existence of the aforementioned mental devices placed in Krashen's learning model. Despite the criticisms, the existence of an affective filter which limits and affects the perception of information is globally accepted, as well as the need to "keep it low", in order to give the students a maximum provision of information.

1.4. The inductive learning process and its phases

In accordance with the previous theories about communicative and inductive approaches, it is possible to distinguish, in the daily scholastic praxis, a sequence of phases in the learning process. Scientific research in neurolinguistics led to the formulation of five main principles which should be regarded as the core of teaching approaches. As affirmed by Danesi (1988), they are:

- **Directionality:** in accordance with neurological studies about learning acquisition, it is globally accepted that the mental process of learning a language involves both the right and left hemispheres, as affirmed in the theory of Bimodality (Danesi, 1988). Thus, it is fundamental to design a teaching strategy in order to involve firstly the right hemisphere, for instance with more contextualising and sensorial activities, and secondarily the left one, which works with more mechanical and formal activities.
- **Modal focusing:** Danesi (1988) affirms that in some learning phases it is necessary to focus on perceptions related to the left hemisphere. In this way, the learner analyses and organises the concepts, by means of the synthesis abilities of the right hemisphere.
- **Contextualisation:** following the principle of directionality, it is fundamental to move from general and contextualising techniques to more detailed and deeper ones.

- Inclusion of creativity: to achieve the goal of a complete and successful learning, it is fundamental to reinforce the students' creative approach to tasks, involving the creative traits of right hemisphere.
- Personalisation: the present principle involves the creation of a connection between the topics, concepts, and rules of a language to learners' personal experience. By means of personalised activities, even linguistic competence is improved.

As a result of studies and research in the field of psychology and didactics, teachers acquired the necessary skills and knowledge to design didactic units in a strategic and goal-oriented way. In that respect, the main contribution was provided in the first decade of XX century by the German Gestalt, a school of thought which reflects on the value of experience and active perceptions. Consequently, the beliefs of this school of thought were adapted to glottodidactics and enriched by Titone and Freddi's following models (1976,1979), producing a six phases action plan to follow for the design of didactic units.

The first phase of the plan, called "Inchoative" by Titone (1976), can be also named "Motivation". It consists in an introductory moment, in which propaedeutic information is provided and students' attention and curiosity are aroused, as a "warming up" activity. Students are shown the links and references to the topics of the previous lessons and are brought to feel the need to learn more. It is evident that this preliminary phase is an essential part of the whole learning process, since it increases students' interest and will to acquire new knowledge and capabilities. Thus, during this phase, the teacher should evidence the necessity to learn the topic which he or she is introducing and raise students' motivation to take an active part in the lesson.

Thereafter, the second phase, called "Globality", offers a global view of the topic, by means of materials as oral or written texts, audios, videos, images, and so on. The students are gradually immersing in the topic, and, as a matter of facts, it is possible to notice that the focus is slowly shifting from a general to a more detailed and specific observation and perception. In line with the beliefs of the Gestalt, the communicative approach should always consider the globality of communication and materials. For this reason, the students are provided with contextual and sociolinguistic information about the materials used.

After a detailed observation of the materials proposed by the teacher, follow three phases in which the students are led to deeply examine the contents and to autonomously reflect on them. These three phases are Analysis, Synthesis and Reflection, also summed up as “Activation” by Serra Borneto (1998). During this time, students reflects and exercise on specific aspects of the topic, as linguistic abilities, communicative acts, grammar, and cultural models. The teacher’s role is more and more transparent, in order to offer them the possibility to freely apprehend and delve into the lesson’s topic and to raise their awareness about their responsibilities towards study and learning. More specifically, Mezzadri (2022) affirms that

Nella fase dell’analisi vi è lo spazio per affrontare una riflessione su quanto acquisito, per permettere di monitorare le conoscenze e di sistematizzarle. Idealmente alla fine del percorso lo studente sarà in grado di sintetizzare e raccogliere i frutti del lavoro svolto, saprà gestire e utilizzare le conoscenze e le competenze in modo autonomo.⁵

Moreover, the phase called “Synthesis” consists in summarising and decontextualising the information observed and analysed in the previous phases, according to Bruner’s (2002) conception. The author divides human thinking in two types: in the first one information is detected by the external world and described in a specific context, while in the second type, the thought is decontextualised and more abstract. A decontextualised and abstract conception of learnt information appears to be the aim of the phase of Synthesis. Afterwards, the Reflection further provides a re-conceptualisation from a personal perspective of the students, who autonomously work on the contents of the lessons and acquire knowledge and capabilities. These three learning phases, indeed, should be designed with the specific aim of realising an autonomous reflection and synthesis on the contents of the lesson, in order to move from an unconscious learning towards acquisition, recalling Krashen’s dichotomy of learning/acquisition.

In the conclusion of the learning process, there is the Evaluation phase, when the students have to demonstrate their knowledge and abilities in a practical manner, showing the previous learning phases results to the teacher. In this phase, the teacher examines the commitment and the product of learning and establishes an evaluation in line with his or her observations. Evaluation can be carried out with testing, presentation of projects and

⁵Mezzadri, Marco, (2022). “Dal 1960 a oggi: riflessioni sull’influenza della Teoria della Gestalt sui dispositivi didattici per l’insegnamento linguistico.”, in: *EL.LE*, v. 11 (2), p. 151.

group works or during the lesson, namely an *in itinere* evaluation. In case of negative results, the teacher is supposed to support students, in order to “recover” the learning results. Balboni (2002) states that a de-conditioning phase should be added here, in order to increase interest in practicing language skills. He proposes the implementation of de-conditioning activities involving movies scenes or webchat with L2 speakers, highlighting the absence of merely didactic aims.

Thus, a complete and successful didactic unit should contain the aforementioned learning phases, which need to be specially designed according to the characteristics and the needs of all the students of the class. It is noteworthy to highlight that teachers are required to include in an appropriate and balanced way all the students, thinking about any possible modifications to the phases, with the aim of allowing them to benefit from the lesson contents for their personal and scholastic development.

1.5. The relevance of authentic materials

When selecting commercial materials, it is important to match the materials with the goals and objectives of the programme, and to ensure that they are consistent with ones’ beliefs about the nature of language and learning.⁶

As affirmed by the researcher Nunan (1998), the selection of teaching materials requires particular attention by teachers, who have to observe and understand the needs of their class, set the lessons standards and the goals, as well as the final goal of their teaching, and find the most appropriate materials, which should be compatible with the characteristics observed.

Nunan (1998) continues on claiming that the contents included in the selected teaching materials impact and change the way in which students perceive the language. Thus, it is recommended to use materials including every aspect of language and not exclusively grammar and lexical ones, in order to provide students with a global view of language and, as a consequence, improve their linguistic and non-linguistic competence.

In addition, on the basis of the aforementioned theories about the communicative approach in foreign languages teaching, it is possible to argue that the best and more

⁶ Nunan, David, (1998). *Language Teaching Methodology. A textbook for teachers.*, Pearson Education ltd, Edinburgh, p.209.

efficient materials are authentic sources and tools, namely materials taken from the real communicative world of the taught language. To give an instance, some useful substituents of written texts can be books, articles, journals, public transport tickets, leaflets, and brochures. Moreover, fictional audios and oral texts can be substituted by interviews, podcasts, speeches, songs, or audio-visual material as movies, cartoons, videos on the web, and so on.

Authentic materials present a wide range of qualities, which contribute to the improvement of linguistic skills and comprehension in language teaching lessons. Firstly, Serra Borneto (1998) acknowledges the spontaneous language used in authentic materials, that are, as previously mentioned, meant for native speakers. Thus, for example, the oral discourse is more fluent, while written discourses present a refined and complex syntax and lexicon.

In contrast with the specifically structured and produced teaching and learning materials, which deal with topics and language aspects with merely didactic aims, authentic materials are meant and produced for native language speakers and, for this reason, contain important cultural aspects, which can be effortlessly understood by intended readers. Thus, the use of authentic materials enables students to meet a new culture, sometimes dialects and typical expressions of the language, preparing them to extra scholastic situations. Serra Borneto (1998) discusses the relevance of using authentic materials because of the intense cultural component they provide. The author cites Boylan (1998), which refers to this peculiarity as “cultural-communicative approach”.

With the aim of delving into the adoption of specific didactic tools, Novello (2022) states that authentic materials are functional in language teaching, since they display a real use of language and culture, and they are a perfect tool for every level of language knowledge. Moreover, the researcher Peacock (1997) compares artificial materials to authentic ones and attests the extremely stronger capability of authentic materials to increase learners’ competences of on-task behaviours, to enhance concentration and involvement to the task.

In line with the aim of a complete and successful implementation of authentic materials, it is fundamental to follow two main processes (Novello, 2022), which are

selection and adaptation to the teaching activities. Novello (2022) remarks the main affecting factors of the first process, namely the selection:

- Analysis of students' needs and characteristics, which are the foundation of the whole teaching strategies designing and, as well, of its tools and sources.
- Motivation and stimulation that materials could generate, since it is fundamental to meet students' interests and propensions.
- The communicative competence required by the authentic materials, which should always be similar to the competences had by language learners, in order to avoid demotivation and frustration from anxiety and feeling of incapacity. It is important to respect the level of knowledge of students, but, on the other hand, tasks have to be slightly more difficult (as affirmed in Krashen's theory of "i+1"), in order to develop new competences and skills.
- Sociolinguistic varieties proposed, which should be consistent with the contents of the lessons.
- Communicative aims: the authentic materials proposed should be always supportive in the achievement of linguistic communicative goals.
- Designed teaching activities: in the course of the selection of any kind of materials, teachers have to plan the phases or moments in which they believe the materials can be useful and effective.

Moreover, the researcher Novello evidences that the process of adaptation of authentic materials is based on some principles:

- The teachers select materials on which students are going to focus during the learning process, in line with the competences the teachers expect to develop and to the teaching goals.
- The materials are adapted in order to ensure an acceptable comprehension, in order to allow students to access the contents, but maintaining a certain level of newness and difficulty.
- Activities proposed should allow students to enhance their communication skills and achieve their communicative goals.
- Variation of types of authentic materials, in order to train students to work with differentiated inputs that can engage different cognitive styles and intelligences.

In conclusion, authentic materials appear essential for the development of communicative competence. Therefore, they are often used by teachers who plan their teaching activities on the basis of the communicative approach, since the selection of these materials allows students to face real contents and develop communication skills which can be applied to authentic conditions. The same aim is shared by the implementation of authentic tasks, as affirms by McGrath (2002), since language learners are led to observe, understand, and replicate the communicative behaviours of the real world. In this way, students learn also how to perform in real contexts and outside the classroom.

1.6. Strategy: from theory to practice

On the basis of the previous reflection about the improvement of teaching approaches and methods achieved in the last decades, it is fundamental to outline the main teaching strategies derived from the theories and studies above mentioned and commented.

A preliminary explanation of the definition of the concept of “strategy” is essential in order to better understand the participation of teaching strategies in the achievement of teaching objectives and competence. The term “strategy” derives from the military field and indicates “a general plan or set of plans intended to achieve something, especially over a long period.”⁷ Torresan (2022) describes this concept as a “zipper” between abstractness and concreteness in the teaching context. Moreover, the author includes some main characteristics of strategies, stating that they are:

- Experimental: influenced by the context and with unpredictable results.
- Implicit: their results aren’t always visible.
- Generally conscious and intentional: they can be expressed in words.
- Combinable: they are frequently used in synergy with other strategies, in order to offer better results.

Furthermore, in the concept of “teaching strategy”, Torresan (2022) recognises two sub-strategies, learning strategies and class teaching strategies. The first category gathers all the strategies representing the learning behaviour and attitudes of students in

⁷Online Collins Dictionary. Available on the website: <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/it/dizionario/inglese>

regard to a specific subject. Thus, a behaviour can be considered a strategy for the way in which it relates to the learning objectives of the student. On the contrary, the class teaching strategies regard the teachers' competence, experience and commitment to lesson planning and teaching objectives.

Analysing the differences in the goals of language teaching strategies, Rubin (1987) distinguishes three kinds of strategies: learning strategies, which aim to focus on the mere language learning process; communication strategies, that orient the competence to take part in a conversation and transfer meanings; social strategies, which provide a full immersion in the target language, particularly when the learner has to face conversation for a pragmatic reason.

[...] language learning strategies are important to be known and applied, not only by the teacher but also by the language learners.⁸

In line with the opinion of many authors in the field of language teaching theory, Khairi Ikhsan (2015) stresses the necessity of a collaboration between students' and teachers' strategies in the achievement of linguistic competence and in the improvement of students' skills. Torresan (2022) agrees with Khairi Ikhsan (2015), expressing this opinion with the words "strategic student" and "strategic teacher".

A strategic student's behaviour is characterized by curiosity, flexibility, and capability to take and overcome risks, and, in particular, by the ability of the student to use his or her competences to reduce or eliminate the deficit in his or her communicative and linguistic competence. The strategic student is capable of acquiring grammar rules and using them to communicate, improving his or her competence with practical activities and conversation. This attitude should be encouraged by a positive and supportive school context, in which the main role is performed by a strategic teacher.

In comparison to traditional teachers, who base their approaches and, thus, strategies, on their experience and predefined and already implemented lessons, strategic teachers plan class activities in a functional way, considering the uniqueness of the students and creatively varying teaching strategies and creating new ones, aiming to maximise the teaching results. The principal characteristics they should have are

⁸Khairi Ikhsan, M., (2015). "Language Learning Strategies for Foreign Language Learning and Teaching.", in: *TELL*, vol. I (2), p. 28.

creativity and capability to overcome new challenging conditions, in order to conduct an efficient planification of the teaching strategies implemented in the activities in class. Moreover, their interest and love for the taught language should be always evident to students, in order to spread enthusiasm and passion in their individual learning processes.

The teaching design can be distinguished in two main levels: macro-design and micro-design. The macro-design involves the projects regarding the entire course. On the other side, micro-design concerns the single lessons and activities which compose the school subject course. Macro-design is conditioned by many factors, highlighted by Torresan (2022):

- Students' profile. (Previous competence, needs and expectations)
- Methods and objectives.
- Materials.
- Spreading of the contents over time.
- Evaluation system and recovery methods.

The lesson plans have to be conceived in line with the aforementioned factors and should always be flexible and editable in time, providing the teachers with an orientation of the most appropriate approaches to implement during the courses. The teacher should always consider the priorities evidenced by the students' needs and propensions, in order to plan a successful and challenging, but at the same time, acceptable set of school lessons for language learners.

In the course of micro-design, the teachers deal with the organisation and planification of single lessons or modules. They have to take into consideration the topic, the level of the class and of each individual, the interests, and the criticalities, in order to plan an interesting lesson, which should be always consistent with the macro-design of the course, in order to be effective. For instance, Torresan (2022) categorised some activities in groups: tasks, analysis, exercises, and icebreaker. Each of these categories includes strategies which should be put in relation and be coherent among themselves to work efficiently with students.

Moreover, it is fundamental to understand how a teacher can choose between the many activities that can be implemented in a linguistic class. Torresan (2022) summarised some parameters that can help teachers to establish the most appropriate strategies.

- Acceptability: the teacher establishes a strategy conforming to students' needs and levels, to their propension to work in groups or in couples and to their learning style and pace.
- Coherence: the activities are consistent with declared and effective functions (extrinsic coherence) or they include coherent functions (intrinsic coherence).
- Cohesion: the activities are organised in balanced phases (internal cohesion), or the activities is planned in a fluid way in the main learning course (external cohesion).
- Effectiveness: the activity realises the predetermined functions.
- Harmony: the activities present strategies planned and implemented in a synergic perspective.
- Clarity: activities are conductive in a comprehensible and transparent manner.
- Accessibility: the activities are conceived in accordance with the students' level and needs (these aspects should be preliminary observed by teachers during the macro-designing and concretely considered during micro-designing)
- Students' centrality and control: learner-oriented activities improve learners' motivation and participation.
- Extra-learning value: the activities include the implementation and practice of soft skills and competences not related to the mere acquisition of the language.

Moreover, as stressed in the previous sections, teachers' priority in the production of a lesson and activities plan should always be the satisfaction of learners' needs, in accordance with their capabilities and interests, in a supportive and always inclusive manner. This perspective is pursued by the Mixed Abilities Class (MAC) theories, which represent a set of inclusive approaches and strategies, aiming to differentiate the curricula according to the individual differences of each language learner. Ur (1996) indicated the main aspects which the teachers have to consider during the structuring of a MAC (See Annex 2). In order to structure a healthy, flexible, and positive, the teachers have to consider these differences and support students in the development of their linguistic and non-linguistic competence, enhancing their talent and their peculiarities. For this purpose, Caon (2006) investigates some possible strategies for teaching in a MAC and exposes four main aspects on which a differentiated teaching method should be based:

- Variety of teaching strategies in the same class: different contents, materials, and strategies.
- Flexible organisation, in which learners are divided according to their language learning level.
- Cooperation and mutual support among students, in order to share responsibility and tasks.
- Implementation of differentiated or stratified tasks and materials, due to the students' level.

Şalli-Çopur (2005) delves into some possible solutions for the design of activities in MAC, which pursue the goal of differentiating and improving the participation of students during the lessons:

- Multisensorial activities, which involve different cognitive and intellectual styles and enhance motivation through the variation of materials used.
- Extra-curricular activities for those students who finish their tasks before the others (as in the case of gifted students, which is analysed in the following section).
- Cooperative learning and group working, with differentiated tasks.
- Open answers, which lower the affective filter, relieving students' fear of failure and stimulating their creativity.
- Personalised and adapted tasks and materials, which take into account the interests of students.
- Drama simulations and games.
- Extra material, which can be studied individually or in groups, according to the learning paces.
- Individual portfolio, which includes all the curricular and extracurricular activities conducted during the course.
- Visits to multimedia centres, in which students can study deeper the topics they are interested in.

Furthermore, it is essential to affirm that the differentiation can be realised in multiple levels, according to the peculiarities of the class. Favrot (2004) proposes a partial differentiation, in which students work at the same topic in the same day, but with different tasks; the differentiation of topics, with a variety of contents, objectives and

linguistic and non-linguistic support tools; finally, the differentiation on opposite parameters, in which the activities are structured according to the characteristics of the students.

To summarise, the main objective of the MAC designing is to focus on students' language acquisition and wellness in the scholastic environment. Thus, teachers should put all their efforts in order to develop a healthy context, in which every student feels important and central, avoiding any exclusion or discrimination.

1.7. Proposals of teaching strategies in language classes

The great number of experiments and studies in the glottodidactical and neurolinguistic field produced a series of good practices and suggestions for the teaching process, which can be converted into effective teaching strategies for language acquisition. More specifically, the massive contribution of Torresan (2022) collects a variety of strategies, according to the neurological processes and functions they develop, and distinguishes them on the basis of their teaching aims. Primarily, Torresan (2022) analyses the teaching strategies which generate specific attitudes in the students and divides them into six sub-categories: cognitive, linguistic, metacognitive, regulatory, dynamic, and oriented to social mediation.

Cognitive strategies represent a set of strategies used by the teachers to stimulate students to perform specific mental operations. They are:

- **Detecting the occurrences:** the student is asked to underline or circle an element (for instance, phonemes or words) which appears many times in the same text (oral or written) and, in some cases, sign the number of occurrences. This strategy can be used during the pre-comprehension phases or during the analysis and synthesis phases, which are described in the subsection 1.4.
- **Combining:** the teacher provides students with two forms of information and asks them to link them one to the other. For example, students see (or hear) five words and five images representing the words. In particular, this strategy demonstrates successful results during the analysis phase, involving and stimulating reading and listening skills.
- **Comparing:** the activities can be based on seeking similarities and differences among texts, images, or other resources (particularly authentic materials).

Differences or similarities can be easily identifiable, involving comprehension and improvement and implementation of lexical knowledge, or more difficult to seek, encouraging students to discuss in group or in pairs and express their opinion. The aims of this strategy are evident: students improve their comprehension skills and use their oral or written production during the comparison and the discussion with their peers.

- **Discriminating:** the strategy can be based on a positive, negative, or reciprocal discrimination by students. The discrimination activities require a careful reading or listening, and a following reuse of information acquired.

- Positive discrimination focuses on an element which should be separated from the rest. For instance, some techniques can be the use of multiple answers or True or False exercises. Since it is easy for students to guess the correct answer without effectively exercising, teachers can ask students to reason their answers.

- Negative discrimination is based on the research of an element to exclude. It includes exercises like “find the error” or “find the intruder” in a specific set of elements.

- Reciprocal discrimination is developed when two contents are joined, and the students examine and distinguish them. Torresan (2022) offers an exemplificative activity, in which two written texts about different topics are mixed and students have to underline the sentences of one of the two texts.

- **Retrieving from memory:** the information previously acquired and memorised are retrieved and shared, in accordance with their form. It can be linguistic, regarding lexicon or linguistic features, metalinguistic, for the retrieval of grammar, extralinguistic, dealing with non-verbal information and contents, and, in conclusion, semantic, regarding the meaning offered by the contents offered to the students.

- **Reading quickly:** this strategy is oriented to improve some particular reading skills of language learners, namely:

- the scanning, which consists in the research of specific objects and information in a written text.

- the skimming, the research of the main sense (gist) of the text.

- the search reading, which is based on the research of information regarding a specific field (usually, by looking at the lexical components).

This strategy aims to improve the fluency in reading process and to provide an initial comprehension of the contents of the text.

- Spurring the divergent thinking: students' creativity, as well as intrinsic motivation, is stimulated through activities including exploration and challenging moments. Thus, strategies which involve the divergent and innovative thinking have a fundamental role in the learning process. For instance, the students can be provided with a limited set of resources and be asked to compose written or oral texts by means of the information acquired from it. Moreover, the students can employ their creative thinking in the creation of associations or analogies between concepts or materials, on the basis of the input offered in the course of the lesson. The linguistic oral production can be realised also in the generation of simulations and role plays, in which students' creativity is strongly encouraged, while the affective filter is lowered, and their personality is defined and re-defined. Furthermore, the student can also be encouraged to produce written texts, adding new sections to a given text or transforming it through a process of manipulation and rearrangement.

- Expressing a judgment: during the course of the lessons, the students are required the development of critical thinking skills. The teachers can use this strategy to exercise their perception and mental elaboration of the reality, asking them to express their opinions on linguistic and non-linguistic matters. Thus, the students' commitment to tasks involves both comprehension and production skills.

- Formulating hypothesis: after a deep analysis of meanings, forms, and values, in line with their linguistic level, students can express their opinion regarding the contents observed. The strategy involves a primary analysis of the materials offered, followed by a written or oral discussion, in which the speaking or writing skills are involved and developed.

- Classifying: the strategy is based on elements which need to be put in a rank, according to a specific factor, which can be explicit or implicit. In the first case, the students are required to simply order the contents; on the other hand, in the latter case, students have to discuss the classification of the contents. This debate can be

organised in groups or in couples, including a brief brainstorming activity, which enables the speaking skills.

- **Reordering (jigsaw):** the students are provided with a series of objects (for example, words, sentences, parts of a text, etc.) in a casual and non-sense order. They are firstly involved in a deep reading and comprehension activity, which is followed by an assimilation of the sense of the exercise and, in the end, by a rearrangement of the information according to a specific sense.

- **Repeating:** the repetition activities reinforce the memory in a stable and more permanent way. Some examples of repeating strategies can be:

- The re-use of information, by means of shadowing, memorisation, drilling or answering without elliptic sentences.
- The repetition of listening or reading. It is fundamental to stimulate motivation by means of general questions, followed by more deep investigations on specific elements.
- The repetition of a written or oral text and the transcription of an oral text, which confer fluency, cohesion, and re-elaboration.

- **Choosing:** offering the students the possibility to choose in what activities they can take part means directly enhance their motivation, their self-esteem, and their well-being. This activity favours a student-centred approach, which leads to better oral and written production, as well as to the development of students' sense of responsibility for their learning.

- **Selecting:** the students participate in activities of observation and selection of specific linguistic and lexical objectives. This strategy shows good results in the pre-comprehension phases, as in the case of warm-up activities.

- **Synthesising:** students are involved in a fundamental cognitive process in language learning since synthesis requires a comprehension and hierarchisation of the information acquired. Thus, this strategy is characterized by a complex and multilevel mental requirement. Despite this difficulty, synthesis activities can be structured according to the language level, for instance with:

- Note taking on oral or written texts (useful also for L1 comprehension).
- Timeline and logical sequences.
- Schemes collecting the key points of the synthesis.

- Lecture notes, which focuses on the filling of notes with the most relevant information.
- Text reduction, which consists in the elimination of useless parts of a text. It is different from the summary since the text isn't effectively manipulated and altered.
- Re-elaborating of linguistic or non-linguistic materials: the students have to manage and manipulate input, in order to achieve a specific aim. This strategy can be implemented in tasks or in projects, which gather a series of tasks to reach a bigger and more complex result.
- Visualising: the strategy aims to the production of a mental image or representation of the language, the linguistic aspects, and concepts of a lesson. In these representations, students freely recognise connections and differences. Visualising produces good results when preceding the production activities.
- Grouping: the students establish links and relations between concepts, objects and materials and make them evident and explicit by representing them in groups. The teacher can provide the categories of the groups or can let students imagine the most appropriate for the activity they are conducting.
- Listing (eliciting): the strategy can be oriented to the development of grammar knowledge and competence (for instance, the recognition of a certain category of morphosyntactic forms, like collocations), or to more semantic and pragmatic aims, such as the comprehension and eliciting of ideas and information.

The second sub-category of strategies proposed by Torresan (2022) includes the linguistic strategies, which have a direct impact on the language and, therefore, on the linguistic skills owned by the students. They include:

- Comparing: also known as “gap noticing” (Schmidt, Frota 1986), the strategy refers to a deep observation of the differences and gaps between two linguistic features. It can be direct or indirect, on the basis of the person that proposes the comparison, and it can be applied on a whole text or on textual and linguistic elements. The strategy strongly enhances the linguistic analysis and reflection capabilities of the language students.

- **Completing:** the students are provided with incomplete resources, which can be filled in an oriented way, by means of some suggested answers, or in an un-oriented way, allowing the student to find his or her own answer.
- **Manipulating:** the strategy consists in textual modifications and variations related to them, involving students' flexible thinking. The practical applications of manipulation can be seen in:
 - Insertion of missing elements in a text, such as words or brief sentences.
 - Contraction of a text, eliminating unnecessary elements
 - Substitution of some elements, such as words or brief sentences, with equivalent elements.
 - Variation of specific elements: reformulation of specific features of a text, as the change of genre of the characters in a story.
- **Exploiting:** after a deep linguistic analysis on a text, the students are asked to clarify some references. This strategy, for instance, can be applied to teach or improve the understanding of relative pronouns, asking students to explain or write to what subjects they are referring to.
- **Compensating:** the act of compensation occurs in case the student doesn't know how to express a specific meaning or idea, thus, decides to mince words, use hyponyms and hypernyms or non-verbal communication. This strategy develops the re-use of linguistic knowledge, as well as the pragmatic competence in the language studied.
- **Reconstructing:** the students are provided with some portions of a text (or with clozes) and asked to recover it. Afterwards, the teacher can offer them the original text, in order to make a comparison with the original version. This strategy can be focused on the comprehension or on the re-use of language; moreover, Torresan (2022) distinguishes two types of reconstructing strategies:
 - Weak reconstruction, which consists in a local reconstruction, for instance with clozes.
 - Strong reconstruction, which is a massive reconstruction, based on a limited number of words. For instance, the teacher can read a text and students take notes about the words they hear and, thus, they reconstruct the whole text on the basis of their annotations.

- **Transcribing:** the teacher asks the students to transcribe in a faithful way the input, which can be provided in a written or oral form. In the first case, the students are given a limited time to copy the text and thus, they are led to memorise some parts of the text and write it in a later moment. While, in the oral form, the dictation activities have been deeply studied and experimented, obtaining many effective strategies, among which, for instance, can be the reading and dictation in pairs or in small groups, as well as the running dictation, involving the translation abilities.
- **Promoting questions:** the role of questions during the lesson is fundamental, though the affective filter can negatively influence the number of interventions by students and, moreover, teachers can be viewed as the only ones who should talk and ask questions in class. Thus, the teacher should subvert this equilibrium and allow the students to enhance their communicative competences.
- **Promoting inner speech:** the strategy allows the student to freely express himself or herself in a different language, not feeling judged or being afraid of making mistakes. It can be associated with repetition, performing a mumbling activity, which consists in a repetition of messages and sentences in a low voice.

In regard to the metacognitive strategies, Torresan (2022) distinguishes a series of activities aiming at developing students' conscience about the learning processes, in order to develop, as well, their autonomy and their motivation. Among these strategies, the author includes:

- **Reflecting on one's beliefs and attitudes towards language learning:** the reflection on the language and culture learning is fundamental in order to acquire knowledge about the learning process itself and to make students more aware of their approaches to study and participation in class language activities. Moreover, the strategy develops also non-linguistic related competences, as motivation and learning and scholastic responsibilities.
- **Planning:** as a preliminary activity, the structuration of a plan improves the organisation capabilities of students as well as the teaching results. For instance, Foster (1996) demonstrates that designing an oral presentation improves the fluency, accuracy, and complexity of the presentation itself. In the planning activities, a fundamental tool can be the mental map, which graphically represents

a concept, or a text. Moreover, spending time on planification raise awareness about the personal value of a task.

- Controlling and monitoring. More specifically, the controlling activities are related to the *ex-post* verification, while, monitoring occurs *in itinere*, during the commitment of a certain task. The aims achieved by means of these strategies include the activation of production and comprehension skills, as well as metacognitive reflection on the activities and process carried out.

- Reviewing: the students are asked to observe and correct their own texts (single review) or their classmates' ones (peer review). In contrast to monitoring and controlling, the reviewing activities are focused on the results of cognitive processes.

Furthermore, the sub-category of the strategies oriented to regulative aims collects the activities which positively impact the emotional sphere in order to improve the language learning process.

- Refining the feeling: the centre of the activities is represented by the feelings experienced by students and on the sharing of the emotions perceived in class. This strategy joins the language learning process and the development of the emotive intelligence, which Gardner defines as interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence in his Theory of Multiple Intelligences (further information are provided in Section 2). Expressing mood and feelings helps students to better understand themselves and others and creates a connection between the classmates.

- Relaxing: as affirmed by the psychiatrist Lozanov in his theories about suggestopedia, the best conditions for the implementation of students' memory during teaching activities can be set by means of relaxing techniques. This strategy should be preliminary in every activity, in order to improve the pre-comprehension and lower the affective filter, allowing memory to work at its best.

- Capturing resonances: the strategy involves the philosophical and religious dimension, involving students in questioning activities, in which they wonder about spiritual and vital concepts.

- Considering successful experiences: the narration of positive moments of students' lives strengthens the speakers' self-esteem and, at the same time, encourages the listeners.
- Consolidating habits: the strategy aims to produce consolidate attitudes in students' learning behaviours, supporting them in the research of the most effective methods to acquire linguistic knowledge, in line with personal interests and propensions. If applied in groups, this strategy reveals itself strongly successful, since develops intrinsic motivation and comparison between the students.

In light of the essentiality of multisensorial activities, Torresan (2022) included in his strategies that generate specific behaviours in students a subcategory that gathers some dynamic and oriented to social mediation strategies, whose aim consists in making learning activities more active.

- Moving: the body movement is considered a resource, according to the Total Physical Response theory, which encourages teachers to involve a dynamic dimension in their teaching strategies, making the lesson contents memorable. The movement can be free, associated or organic.
 - Free movement is the simpler one; it can be applied in any strategy.
 - Associated movement combines linguistic and dynamic dimensions in the course of the lesson.
 - Organic movement requires a strong connection between verbal and non-verbal dimensions, which act in a synergic way to produce communication. Under this category of strategies, it is visible the role playing and the acting of dramas.
- Sharing personal contents: the expression of opinions, experiences and feelings allows students to communicate using the language according to their level, to create active listening contexts, to promote a supportive and friendly class environment, to strengthen the personalities of the individuals and to support students in the acquisition of information about their peers through the use of a different language. As a matter of fact, the inclusion of personal information during the lessons raises the curiosity and motivation of students, keeping them more focused.

- Reflecting: the students are asked to express their impressions about their peers. This strategy implies language production in a socio-relational perspective, allowing students to notice aspects of themselves and their personalities, which can be visible only from the outside. Thus, the reflecting activities determine an improvement of self-awareness and sense of belonging to the school community and the group.
- Collaborating with peers: in line with the principles of the communicative approach, the interaction with peers acquires a fundamental role in teaching strategies and has a positive impact on every phase of the learning process. The communication appears more authentic and manipulable, the affective filter is lowered thanks to the symmetry of knowledge between the peers and new linguistic features are easily learnt. There are many activities that can be set up according to the group working strategies. Some of them are:
 - The collaborative structure, in which every student offers his or her contribution to a wider and more complex product, according to his or her level of knowledge and competence. This strategy can be implemented in pairs or in groups, according to the number of participants. In pairs, Storch (2001) observed that students can create a competitive, dominant, or collaborative interaction. While, in group activities students have the opportunity to compare themselves to different conditions, though if the collaboration isn't balanced, the interaction can become a bad experience.
 - The management of information, which can result in the negotiation, when two or more students share their information and collaborate, or the asymmetry, in which there is an information gap. Information is partially shared among the participants and the teacher can manage its spread, allowing students to gather together information (cooperative asymmetry), to “fight” to get further information from the peers (competitive asymmetry) or to maintain their information and not to communicate (unsolved asymmetry).
 - Co-construction, in which every student contributes personally to achieve a common goal, which can be a text or a simulation.
- Playing: as affirmed by Botturi and Low (2009), playing is a challenging activity regulated by some principles and that happen in a determined time. Particularly

with young language learners, playing enables the application of language in a more practical context of use and develops social abilities, as the management of emotions and behaviours. Through playing activities, language provides opportunities for the enhancement of creativity and divergent thinking, includes all the students without limitations caused by their knowledge levels, and, furthermore, appears exciting and funny.

The second macro-category examined by Torresan (2022) embrace the strategies regarding the choice and use of teaching materials and resources. The present series of strategies is divided into some sub-categories, namely: strategies for the transversal facilitation, strategies for the facilitation of the exercise of abilities, holistic strategies, modulation and auto-production strategies, challenging strategies, and consolidation strategies.

In the first sub-category there are those strategies oriented to involve some linguistic components and abilities. Namely, they are:

- **Appealing to familiar elements:** a massive support is offered to students when, in the course of the teaching activities, they have to face familiar concepts, words and linguistic features or they are placed in familiar contexts. The strategy shows good results because of the not excessive “distance” from the students’ worlds, which has a great impact on the diminishment of difficulties.
- **Allowing the use of native language:** in contrast with the beliefs of authors of the communicative and direct approaches, during the foreign language learning process, the native language can perform a supportive role, making easier discussions and explanations of complex concepts and avoid misunderstanding. For instance, one of the main strategies adopting the L1 is mirroring, a translation technique applied during the correction of written texts. Moreover, role play activities, in which two students talk in different languages and a third performs the role of interpreter, effectively improve students’ comprehension and oral production skills, as well as the capability of code-switching.
- **Encouraging the comparison with other languages (translanguaging):** in order to better understand the functioning of a language, other foreign languages known by students can be implied in the course of the lessons. For instance, parallel translation

can be provided, offering students more information for the comprehension of the foreign language learnt.

- Defining an adequate progression, which can be applied to the phases of a single activities or among a series of activities. The strategy involves simple and general activities at the beginning, which become more difficult and demanding during the process.
- Verifying the correctness: students are allowed to review their production and exercises and look for any possible mistakes. It is linked to the group working strategies previously exposed and shares with them the same aims of analysing and re-use linguistic knowledge in the correction of peers' exercises.

Furthermore, Torresan (2022) exposes the strategies oriented to the facilitation of the application and improvement of abilities, which are:

- Managing texts accessibility, which aim to support students' understanding, by means of modifications of the layout, inclusion of figurative representations, use of specific formats. Other fundamental strategies can be the relieving of bad feelings and anxiety, through some preliminary relaxing activities, or promoting a healthy and supportive environment in class. Moreover, also the simplification of texts and the slowing of reading pace, the provision of lexicon necessary during the activities and the use of contents about similar or the same topic can facilitate the language learning process.
- Facilitate the production of oral and written texts: the teacher can ask the students to produce brief output, which allows them to monitor their language use, particularly in the speaking activities. Teachers can also present models of texts or speeches to give examples to the students. Similarly to models, teachers can provide students with guides, which give indications and suggestions about the grammar and syntactic structure required by the tasks. In the course of the lesson, the facilitation can occur by means of a previous provision of the lexicon that is going to be included in the activities, by offering students more time to reflect on what they want to communicate and to find the most appropriate ways to express the messages.

Holistic strategies regard a connection between forms and contents, integrating codes and abilities. Torresan (2022) indicates the following holistic strategies:

- Involving different codes (multisensorial strategies): studies in the field of neuroscience and neurolinguistics affirms that information which involve the use of multiple senses acquires a more stable place in students' memory, since they are based on associations with emotions and feelings.
- Including integrated activities: during the activities, the students are led to imply different linguistic skills. This strategy is strongly supported by the communicative approach, which is based on the practice of linguistic skills to achieve specific aims. Moreover, the synergy between different competences has a positive impact on general competences and reinforces all the skills.
- Designing specular activities: the activities should be designed to make form and contents match. For instance, the strategy can imply the dictation of a text regarding the rules and uses of dictations, as a sort of metalinguistic activity.

In the set of strategies related to the implementation of materials and resources, some strategies of modulation and self-production are taken into exam. More specifically, they are:

- Differentiating: the strategy is based on the conception of the differences among students, who are provided with differentiated or stratified tasks, in accordance with their needs and interests. Moreover, the discussion on differentiation techniques and strategies is further deepened in the following Section, in regard to the special needs of gifted students in language teaching processes.
- Characterising activities in accordance with their openness or closeness: close activities are characterised by a predefined process of performance, established times, and learning paces, and close answers. On the contrary, open tasks allow student to control their involvement and to commit to activities in the way they prefer. The level of openness should be chosen by the teacher in line with the class, their learning profiles and paces and the subject.
- Formulating activities on the basis of students' ideas (self-production): students produce the materials for the teaching process and the teacher organises it in a functional way for the teaching processes.

In contrast to the strategies aiming to facilitate the language learning process, challenging strategies are focused on the increase of the level of difficulty in the activities, since the students' learning shouldn't be always or excessively facilitated. Students should develop problem-solving skills and feel sure about their competences even when they have to face complex tasks. Among challenging strategies, Torresan (2022) recognises:

- Providing authentic texts: as aforementioned and discussed, the employment of authentic materials implies many difficulties and risks, due to the authenticity and absence of didactic adaptations, which challenge students to face the real language and its real functioning.
- Providing “oversized” texts: this strategy is based on the previously commented conception of Krashen about the formula “i+1”, according to which the teacher provides the class with difficulties that exceed their competences and their language level, in order to lead them to autonomously find a solution to compensate the lack of knowledge. It is fundamental to claim that the materials shouldn't be excessively difficult, in order to avoid provoking frustration and damages to self-esteem.
- Create conditions of communicative pressure by limiting the time to complete a task. In the written production, the students are “obliged” to overcome the fear of the blank page, while in oral production pressure stimulates an improvement of fluency and spontaneity. Moreover, students are challenged by unpredictability, and, applying of this strategy, they can understand how to manage it in real conditions. It is important to mention that an excessive communicative pressure can inhibit students and provoke them stress.

The last sub-category of the set of strategies regarding the implementation of materials and resources observed by Torresan (2022) regards the consolidation strategies, which can be divided into:

- Recapping: the teacher summarised with schemes, lists or key points the topic discussed in the course of the lesson, in order to evidence the connections between each topic and to clarify eventual misunderstandings. Moreover, frequently textbooks and exercise books provide students with concept maps at the end of each chapter.

- Progressively delving into the topic: the strategy stresses the necessity to repeat more times and in a more detailed manner the contents of the lesson, including further and more specific activities, in order to deepen the knowledge and competences.
- “Recycling” of tests, exercises, and texts during the course of the lesson. This strategy involves a more global use of materials, which are reviewed after some time and after the acquisition of general knowledge of them.

After a deep observation of the teaching strategies proposed to students, which focus on them and on their educational and learning needs, it is essential to observe some strategies concerning the teacher and his or her teaching method in class. Torresan (2022) distinguishes these strategies in two main categories, which present in turn some sub-categories.

Firstly, it is important to observe the strategies regarding the communication of the teacher in the scholastic environment. The sub-categories included are ostensive strategies, speaking process control strategies and strategies with an emotive impact. The first ones are focused on the illustration or presentation of the correct methods to perform tasks or to the methods for the reasoning of decisions. Therefore, they include:

- Illustrating: the teacher provides indications on how to carry out a certain task during the lessons. In this strategy are contained exemplifications and explanation.
- Presenting: in the traditional school system, the presentation of contents and rules was the primary (in some cases, the unique) teaching strategies. After the Natural Approach of Krashen, the teachers’ presentations shifted from rules to “input”, which is “rough” and requires students’ re-elaboration. The students acquire a more active role in the learning process and, as previously exposed, the teachers acquire the role of linguistic guides.
- Reasoning one’s choices: the attitude towards the teaching process and the students should always be transparent. For this reason, the teacher has to motivate his or her choices and exploit the aims of each activity conducted.

Furthermore, among the strategies regarding the control of the speaking process, it is possible to examine:

- Monitoring the speech: during the teaching process, the communication should be clear and accessible to students. In order to facilitate the comprehension and suggest strategies to ask for support, the teacher can indicate some fundamental sentences or questions which can be used by students when they don't understand what the teacher is telling them.
- Measure the speech: in accordance with the theory of the Silent Way, produced by Gattegno (1972), the teacher should reduce his or her speaking and encourage students to explore more autonomously. This strategy follows the principles of the inductive approach, which focuses the orientation of the whole learning process on the student, as main character of the linguistic activities.

Strategies that deal with the influence on the feelings of the students, according to Torresan (2022) can be summarised in:

- Surprising: during the language learning activities, the inclusion of unexpected elements positively impacts the memory and the curiosity of students, involving all the senses. For instance, the teacher can modulate his or her voice, use masks or play with his or her facial expressions.
- Implying sense of humour, which provides a relaxed environment in class, in which students feel free to experience their feelings and associate them to the contents of the lesson.
- Storytelling: the narration of stories offers the listeners new instruments to perceive their own personality. Moreover, students' fantasy and imagination are developed in this process.
- Storytelling about personal facts and experiences, reinforcing the relation with students and creating a sense of connection with them.
- Recognising: the teachers should respect and understand students and their needs and interests, promoting their autonomy and self-esteem. It is fundamental to favour an environment of trust and reciprocal respect, in which both roles acquire a specific relevance.

In conclusion, Torresan (2022) identifies two strategies regarding the performance of students: asking questions and correcting. The first strategy aims to value the acquisition of language features, knowledge, and competences, by means of verification

questions, which should be based on the comprehension or on the production. Moreover, they can present an open answer, as well as a close and predetermined one, in line with the contents involved. They can be polar or generative, authentic, or rhetorical, suggesting or transparent, convergent or divergent, referential or inferential.

The second strategy concerns the correction of students' production, discussing the necessity of a correction, its depth, and times. Torresan (2022) states that the teacher can focus on the correction on the communicative mistakes or on the errors about previously acquired knowledge on structures. Furthermore, the teacher can also use the errors to organise specific recovery activities. The teacher can report the errors and ask students to correct them autonomously or offer a personal correction; it can also be possible to involve the students in the evaluation process, when, for instance, the teacher asks the students to correct the mistakes of their previous productions. Regarding the timing of correction, Torresan (2022) exposes two possible strategies: the correction at the end of the production or the simultaneous correction.

In conclusion, it can be argued that teaching approaches, methods and strategies strongly contribute to the acquisition of linguistic, extralinguistic, cultural and personal acquisition of students, offering them new opportunities and instruments for the development of communicative competences, which can be applied also in extra-scholastic and, at a later stage, work environments. Despite the main factor that conditions the interiorisation of a language is the student's commitment to the tasks and activities, the teacher acquires an essential and influencing role in their process of learning and acquisition of foreign languages, as well as in the stimulation of their motivation, curiosity, creativity, and engagement in the course of the lessons.

Section 2. Exploring the concept of Giftedness

2.1. The evolution of a unique definition

Working at school, teachers get to know the style of learning and inclinations of each of their students. Some of them show particular propension and interest in scientific or humanistic subjects, others appear to prefer physical education to more theoretical and passive lessons. Some of them need to be constantly encouraged to study more and to be more focused, others show a more independent and autonomous learning style. Moreover, teachers have to deal with a great number of students, who present different needs, interests and approaches to learning and studying. Thus, their role, as far as possible, is to observe and identify these characteristics and provide students with an optimal and student-centred learning condition, in order to enhance their abilities and knowledge and direct them towards their future profession. Since they have to perform a so complex and engaging task, they need to be trained to design programs which have to be effective and functional for all the learners in the class.

Nowadays, it is increasingly frequent for teachers to encounter in their class students evaluated as “gifted” by professionals. The concept of giftedness indicates the presence of an extraordinary talent in one or more areas of knowledge, which interacts with other behavioural, social, and personal aspects. The most cited definition of giftedness and his constituents belongs to one of the most influential experts in the field of talent and giftedness, Joseph S. Renzulli, who in 1978 theorised the Three Ring’s Conception of Giftedness:

Gifted behaviour consists of thought and action resulting from an interaction among three basic clusters of human traits, above average general and/or specific abilities, high levels of task commitment and high levels of creativity. Children who manifest or are *capable of developing* an interaction among three clusters require a wide variety of educational opportunities, resources, and encouragement above and beyond those ordinarily provided through regular instructional programs.⁹

According to the aforementioned model, giftedness is represented as the synergic combination of three different clusters of traits evident in the gifted person. It focuses not

⁹Renzulli, Joseph S., (2016). “The Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness. A Development Model for Promoting Creative Productivity.”, In S. M. Reis (Ed.). *Reflections On Gifted Education*, Waco, TX: Prufrock Press, p. 77.

merely on the results obtained because of the above average abilities, but also on the process, including the task commitment and the creativity as primary factors of achievement. As a matter of facts, a successful giftedness occurs when the aforementioned clusters of traits intersect.

Delving into Renzulli's model of giftedness, it is possible to identify some sub-components. In relation to the component "above average abilities", it is important to consider the width of the area concerned: these abilities can be general, expanding and being applied across all the areas of knowledge, or specific, which refers to a more limited and specialized range of knowledge, abilities and skills. When a gifted student demonstrates extremely developed abilities in one specific area of knowledge, the teachers should allow him or her to follow him or her inclination.

The definition of the cluster of traits "task commitment" by Renzulli (1978, 2016) covers the global meaning of motivation: it concerns the gifted student's interest into the accomplishment of a specific problem or task even for a long period of time, as well as the persistence and, in some cases, even stubbornness on an achievement. Analysing the influence of the motivation level in the gifted student's learning process, two sources of motivation were detected by Renzulli: intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. The first one is innate to the gifted student, who feels competent and involved in a specific task. Conversely, the latter one appears as an external input, which can be material or abstract, stimulating the individual to accomplish the task. An instance of extrinsic motivation is the obtaining of a prize or a compliment by adults, which increase the self-esteem of the student. Thus, it is also common that extrinsic motivation reinforces intrinsic motivation, having a synergic effect on the gifted.

Furthermore, creativity, considered as "the tendency to generate or recognize ideas, alternatives, or possibilities that may be effective in solving problems, communicating with others, and entertaining ourselves and others"¹⁰ is another noteworthy trait of giftedness. It enables gifted children to practice their knowledge in problematic situations and to find alternative and original solutions.

Referring to the views of Renzulli, high levels of creativity and task commitment are equally relevant aspects which influence the peculiarity of gifted students.

¹⁰Franken, Robert E., (1994). *Human Motivation*, Brooks/Cole Publishing Company, p. 396.

Undeniably, if the gifted shows high abilities, but lacks a creative approach to the tasks proposed to him, the results of his or her actions will be inefficient. Likewise, if he or she isn't adequately committed to performing the task, his or her achievement won't be productive.

In conclusion, Renzulli (2016) stresses the importance of conferring the right relevance to each of these clusters, preventing the mistake of overemphasizing high abilities and overlooking the others two principal traits included in his definition. In 2009, the researcher added some new influencing co-cognitive factors of the inner personality and of the external context of gifted people, namely the optimism, the courage, the romance with a topic or a discipline, the sensitivity to human concern, the physical and mental energy and the vision and sense of destiny. This successive theory contributed to the gradual expansion of the concept of giftedness towards more behavioural aspects.

2.2. Common characteristics of giftedness

In the present time, giftedness is no longer considered as a permanent and static phenomenon, but as a combination of different influences from the contexts of gifted individuals' lives to their culture, their education, and attitudes. Thus, a complete and valid individuation of giftedness has to flexibly take into account all the facets of the evaluated subject.

Moreover, after a discussion of the first official definition proposed by the NAGC (National Association for Gifted Children) in the U.S., which affirmed that gifted children show exceptional abilities in one or more fields of knowledge, the author Zanetti (2017) stated that

Tradizionalmente si riteneva che un elevato quoziente intellettivo fosse l'unico tratto distintivo dei bambini. Oggi la concezione maggiormente accreditata della plusdotazione è di tipo *multicomponentiale*, comprensiva quindi di diversi aspetti – non così facilmente misurabili –, come la creatività, la motivazione, la capacità di leadership e la perseveranza.¹¹

¹¹“Traditionally researchers deemed that the high intelligence quotient was the only distinctive trait of gifted children. Nowadays, giftedness is considered as a multi-factorial phenomenon that includes different not easily measurable aspects, such as creativity, motivation, leadership skill and persistence.”, Personal translation.

Zanetti, Maria Assunta, (2022). *Bambini e Ragazzi ad alto potenziale: Una guida per Educatori e Famiglie.*, Carocci, p. 21.

Therefore, it is possible to perceive giftedness as a combination of different aspects, which can be disclosed by gifted individuals in many fields and at many levels. Moreover, even the potential to show an outstanding level of competence in one or more fields of knowledge and domains of life can be considered an attribute of giftedness, which requires to be encouraged to express itself.

The evidence from the recent studies about giftedness indicates some of the main traits which can be frequently observed in gifted people. Nevertheless, before proceeding to examine the traits and characteristics shown by people with extremely developed capabilities, it is fundamental to underline that each gifted person is different and may not manifest all the traits claimed in the research. Moreover, many gifted students tend to mask their talent in class and sometimes even “suppress” it, with the aim of appearing as their classmates and avoid discriminations or bullying.

Novello (2022) analysed and collected a great number of traits of giftedness indicated in the many studies on giftedness by authors, as Clearinghouse (1985), Clark (2001, 2002), Web and Gore (2012), Winebrenner (2012), the Gifted Development Center (2013), Leavitt (2017) and Renzulli (2018). According to the researcher, the main traits which emerge from the gifted individuals are:

- Learning speed: gifted students are capable of acquiring, understanding and memorize or learn concepts and abilities in brief periods of time. In class, their learning is faster in comparison with that of their classmates, thus they don't need to spend much time on repeating concepts.
- Logical thinking: gifted individuals are capable of correlating information taken from different topics and reflect upon them in an original manner. For this reason, in the lesson plans it is fundamental to add some interdisciplinary activities, which stimulates the transfer of knowledge in different areas of knowledge.
- Abstract thinking: the gifted individuals prematurely develop the capability of recognizing patterns, analysing, and synthesising concepts and make connections in a wider sense. In neurologically typical individuals, this capability develops at the age of 11 or 12, while gifted show this trait in the early years of life.
- Complex cognitive processes: gifted children are able to elaborate complex idea and opinions.

- **Insatiable curiosity:** giftedness can result in a strong thirst of knowledge of the gifted student, who questions himself or herself about many aspects of life, death, nature, and religion. The gifted intends to understand the connections and the reasons in what neurologically typical children consider as taken for granted.
- **Desire (and need) for more in-depth knowledge:** the gifted student appears extremely interested in the topics discussed in class or in external context. Therefore, it is frequent that this desire to learn more and better leads the gifted to make additional research on his or her own, to search words and terms heard in class on the encyclopaedias and ask many questions to the teachers. On the other hand, some teachers do not appreciate many questions from the students, inhibiting their curiosity and excluding the possibility for the whole class of learning something new and not included in the conventional program.
- **Creativity:** as mentioned in the research of Renzulli (1978), gifted children develop an outstanding creative approach to tasks and problems, express their potential through drawings, paintings, and music. It is frequent that they express interest in telling and writing stories and literature.
- **Independence:** gifted children prefer to be involved in individual tasks and to solve problems with their own capabilities.
- **Concentration:** teachers and parents report gifted students' strong capability to focus for a long time on activities.
- **Perfectionism:** the individuals present an extreme task commitment and involvement, which must be necessarily flawless. Though in some cases there could be present external conditions which don't allow the students to achieve a perfect and complete result. Thus, the excessive strain on perfection manifested by the gifted students becomes an obstacle for them, causes lack of self-esteem, crisis and, in the worst cases, even burnout.
- **Developed organisation abilities:** gifted children present good organisational skills, writing or drawing to-do lists in their daily lives and at school, arranging their days and their plans.
- **High observation capabilities:** gifted individuals are acute and meticulous observers and analyse their perception about the external world. It is frequently

noticed that gifted children at their early age ask adults for more explanation about natural changes and phenomena.

- Desire to experience: due to their insatiable curiosity, gifted individuals frequently experiment and explore new situations.
- Analysis of relations and correlations: because of their high capability to observe and collect information about the external world, gifted children constantly process it and wonder about their perceptions, finding new relations, causes and justifications and producing hypothesis.
- Problem solving ability: it is observed that gifted children develop in the first years of their lives a strong ability to overcome difficult and new situation. In this process usually intervenes their creativity, which provides unconventional solutions.
- Application of known models: gifted children tend to apprehend and interiorize models and concepts and apply it in new problems.
- Proposal of unconventional and creative solutions.
- Prodigious memory: since childhood, gifted individuals show a strong capability to remember concepts, events, and sensations. It is relevant to consider that in some cases mechanical or de-contextualised repetition can be difficult, as for multiplication tables.
- Language proficiency: the language skills and knowledge of gifted individuals, even in early childhood, are advanced. To cite an example, studies revealed that two-years gifted children are able to use complex tenses as subjunctives. Perhaps, this proficiency is rooted in the capability to apprehend linguistic models, mix them, and reproduce it in different contexts, as well as from the strong perceptive attitudes demonstrated by the gifted students, which allows them to understand the shades of meaning and the structure of sentences. Furthermore, as previously stated, gifted students have a highly developed memory, which is the main tool to learn a great amount and variety of terms.
- Desire to be involved in challenges: gifted individuals demonstrate a good capability to overcome stressful conditions and they appear to prefer cognitive tasks and situation which evaluate their abilities. Moreover, the involvement of their competence in challenging activities causes them a feeling of satisfaction.

- Precociously acquired writing and reading skills: the present trait is developed mostly in an autonomous way by the gifted children, who practice and observe, effortlessly correlating signs and sounds.
- Extreme sense of justice: giftedness leads individuals to reflect on moral and ethical behaviour in social contexts. Gifted people feel the necessity to express their opinion and to take side of excluded or discriminated people. To give evidence about this attitude, it is noteworthy to reflect on the behaviour of the gifted student who took part in the case study subsequently analysed. Indeed, in the gifted student's class there is a non-Italian speaker student, who is often bullied or laughed at, and he generally doesn't receive any particular support even by teachers. The gifted student always tries to include and help him during the lessons, claiming that his exclusion is unfair.
- Outstanding sense of humour: in gifted children's behaviour enthusiasm, hilarity and sarcasm may be frequently observed, through jokes and report of interesting and fun facts.
- Feeling for aesthetics and appreciation of beauty and elegance.
- Deep sensitivity and tendency to experience deep and intense emotions: gifted children develop an extreme sensitivity about life, nature, and existence problems. Their sensitivity towards bad situations leads them to suffer and to think about consequences and further problems deriving from happenings. In some cases, they explicit their discomfort with tears, silence and, in worst cases, depression and anxiety, even in early childhood.
- Empathy: given their outstanding capability to observe and derive information, gifted individuals perfectly understand and interpret shades of facial expressions and tones of voice, as well as mood and implicit messages.
- Sensorial sensitivity: gifted individuals' tendency to feel more and deeper appears not to be limited to emotions, but also includes the advancement of the five senses, which allow the gifted to draw more information from the external world, by means of touch, sight, hearing, smell and taste.

Based on the above, Novello (2022) included in her studies a description of the behavioural and attitudinal aspects observed in gifted students:

- Propension to spend time with adults: a recurrent situation occurs in those cases in which children with a high cognitive potential prefer to spend time with more mature people. This behaviour can be explained since they don't recognise the disparity in the cognitive levels between them and their peers, which appears to be an obstacle for their social inclusion. This trait is visible in early childhood and in adolescence, which is a moment of detachment from parents and of difficulties in being part of the society.
- Leadership: when they are included in groups, gifted individuals often perform the role of motivating leader of groups, trying to inspire and stimulate his or her peers.
- Energetic behaviour: gifted individuals are energetic and active and this aspect sometimes causes sleep problems and troubles with rest. Perhaps, since they can't help freeing their energies, in the scholastic context they are erroneously diagnosed with ADHD.
- Disputes with authorities: gifted individuals always expose their ideas and don't accept decisions imposed by adults without a previous consideration and discussion of its reasons.
- Nonconformity: the alternative thought and sense of justice of gifted individuals lead them to have an unconventional, singular and well distinguished attitude, making decision without being influenced by other people's choices and opinions.
- Easily provoked boredom: particularly at school, gifted students demonstrate a sense of boredom, detachment, and disconnection from the rest of the class. Those bad feelings can end in refusing to accomplish the task assigned by the teacher, in being unengaged during lessons and, in the worst situations, in repudiating the school system, environment and society. Boredom and detachment are normally caused by the excessive easiness of tasks proposed to them, as well as by the ignorance of their special needs, which require differentiated teaching strategies and work.

As previously stated, the reflection on traits and attributes of giftedness must take into account the behavioural, cultural, educational, and socio-economic differences of gifted children, which can demonstrate the characteristics of giftedness in various

manners and quantity. Thus, they should not be expected to embody a unique and perfectly distinct prototype of individual and student.

2.2.1. Common characteristics of English gifted learners

As previously mentioned, gifted children and individuals demonstrate extremely developed abilities and characteristics in many different fields of their life. Looking specifically at the attributes of giftedness which are involved and implemented at school, it is possible to determine a series of traits which reveal themselves fundamental for the learning of English as a foreign language in the primary, middle and high school. The statistically most frequent aspects have been studied and collected by Lowe (2002) and Deveau (2006) and they are exposed hereafter.

- Empathy and interest in different cultures.
- Curiosity about the functioning of the language.
- Understanding of grammar models and lexicon in the sentence.
- Description of the language with technical terms.
- Capability to extract meanings and make inferences.
- Ability to identify, memorise and reproduce sounds.
- Flexible thought.
- Advanced memory.
- Deduction of rules from examples.
- Capability to make contrastive analysis.
- Capability to relate new concepts to well-known ones in a creative way.
- Capability to apprehend chunks.
- Care for details.
- Proficiency in L1.
- Interest and capability to acquire and manipulate grammar structures and advanced lexicon.
- Capability to understand models and relations in the language and in the comparison between more languages.
- Understand the intercultural role of languages.
- Code switching ability.

- Ability to synthesise in a creative way the linguistic elements learned from a language.
- Identification of cause-effect relations and vision of language as a holistic system.
- Ability to rapidly recall concepts.
- Advanced communicative skills.

Since gifted students present the aforementioned qualities in learning foreign languages and understanding their functioning, it is important to introduce them to stimulating and challenging contexts, which consider their high cognitive level and put it into practice through activities for the improvement of their language skills. Furthermore, it is relevant to claim that not all gifted children have a potential for language learning, though they still need differentiated programmes which might help them to develop good capabilities with languages.

2.2.2. Critical traits and weaknesses of giftedness

Despite the many strengths visible in gifted children, in some cases they tend to manifest problematic behaviours in different areas of their lives, requiring special attention and care by parents and teachers.

Firstly, from a socio-relational perspective, they recognise their difference in comparison to their peers and classmates, due to their more mature thoughts and concerns, deriving from the asynchronous development between cognitive and emotive intelligence. This perception can lead them to feel inadequate for their peers and to develop relational disorders. In worst cases, gifted children are bullied by their classmates and thus tend to exclude themselves from social groups and to feel the necessity to spend time alone.

In addition to the asynchronous development between cognitive and emotive developments, according to Tunnicliffe (2010), the asynchronous development is also displayed in the differences in the physical and social development, causing problems such as the discrepancy between ideas and physical capabilities to realise them, the isolation from peers and difficulties in playing or the preference of a company composed by more mature people, who demonstrate a similar approach and perception of life. Indeed, it is quite usual that gifted children are used to spend time and discuss with adults, excluding themselves from activity with their peers and classmates.

The author Cairo (2001) distinguishes three main fields in which it is possible to determine potentials and weaknesses of gifted individuals (see Annex 3). Focusing on the gifted children's weaknesses of socio-relational and personal behaviour, it is significant to notice the great number of complications of giftedness, which must be considered by people interacting, teaching and educating these peculiar children. If these traits aren't controlled and managed in a proper way, they can lead to even more serious consequences, as depression, scholastic dropout, inability to control emotions and frustration and social exclusion.

In the matter of scholastic context, it is common to experience problematic conditions with gifted students and their school environment. The most frequently evidenced negative characteristic of giftedness is boredom, which can be caused by the student's disinterest in the topics of the lesson, the excessive number of repetitions of the same topic, the lack of stimulations and complexity in the tasks or the non-caring behaviour of teachers. Moreover, another frequent attitude of gifted children is the hiding of their potential to appear similar to their classmates and to feel part of the class, avoiding the sensation of inadequacy.

As the researchers Alfohdly, Aljafari, Alabdullatif, Alghamdi, AlOtaibi and Alarfaj (2021) stated in their article, which analysed and collected the opinions of many scholars in the field of giftedness, that boredom and inadequacy in school context can lead to profound and, in worst cases, even severe consequences:

- Students don't finish the work: the present behaviour can be caused by a lack of interest in the subject or in the topics or by a previous knowledge about the topic. As a matter of facts, gifted children take pleasure in studying non-related to school themes at home. Thus, it is probable that they have already achieved the level of knowledge and practice necessary for them.
- Students experience anxiety and fear of failure, because of their perfectionism. Moreover, if the students manifest this attitude for a long time, they can start to procrastinate, to avoid challenging situations and tasks and to fail to perform tasks.
- Students don't seem interested in the lesson, get easily distracted and disconnected. This behaviour takes place because the needs of the students aren't satisfied. It is also possible to claim that the involvement of the students in the

course of the lessons depends on their motivation, which has to be continuously stimulated by teachers.

- Students' sensibility can lead to emotional outbursts or to period of gifted abstinence, namely periods in which gifted individuals don't show their potential or tend to hide it from the teacher and the class.
- Student can generate negative feelings out of group work, in case it reveals itself unsuccessful. Indeed, it is frequently observed that gifted students prefer to work alone, since they are generally concerned about being misinterpreted or not appreciated by the group.

Winebrenner (2012) detected some other bad behaviours of gifted children, when they don't feel their needs and their peculiarities understood and properly met. Among these criticalities, it is possible to observe frustration, non-acceptation of orders, disconnection from the lessons, manipulation of discussions, refuse of their own or others' imperfections, non-conformist attitude and disturbance or distraction during the lessons.

Moreover, Dilsizian (2002) commented on the criticalities of giftedness and stressed on the importance of a differentiated and personalised program for them.

Se i bambini intellettualmente dotati sono poco sollecitati dal loro ambiente s'instaura uno squilibrio tra quello che essi sono potenzialmente in grado di realizzare e ciò che li sollecita. [...] Nella quotidianità scolastica è frequente per questi bambini dover ripetere inutilmente schemi già appresi e dover seguire un insegnamento dove processi mentali sono suddivisi in sequenza troppo brevi: questo è fonte di stress. Doversi continuamente adattare al ritmo degli altri può essere motivo di frustrazione.¹²

Similarly to the opinions of the aforementioned researchers in the field of giftedness, Dilsizian discusses the struggle of these students in contexts in which they aren't offered the possibility to fully express their needs, their talent, their interests, and, especially their

¹²Dilsizian, Seda, (2002). *Promozione dei Talenti, Un'Istanza Democratica – Ticino.*, p.11. Retrieved from https://www4.ti.ch/fileadmin/DECS/DS/Rivista_scuola_ticinese/ST_n.247/ST_247_Dilsizian_promozione_talenti_istanza_democratica.pdf

“If intellectually talented children aren't properly stimulated by the environment, an imbalance between what they can potentially realise and what stimulates them arises. [...] In everyday school life, it is frequent that these children have to repeat in vain already acquired schemes and have to assist to teaching strategies in which the mental processes are divided in too short sequences: this causes stress to them. Being obliged to adapt oneself rhythm to that of others can be the cause of frustration”, Personal translation.

sensation of frustration. The latter, indeed, can be manifested by behaviour of shyness and exclusion from the class, or, on the contrary, by anger, hyperactivity, and disturbance to the class. In these situations, the students have their potential undervalued and not properly stimulated. Dilsizian (2002) continues on describing the symptoms showed by gifted students in these problematic conditions:

Caratteristiche comuni a maschi e femmine dopo qualche tempo di sottostimolazione sono: forte demotivazione e rifiuto di applicarsi, perdita della fiducia in sé, atonia ed apatia, disturbi dell'alimentazione e del sonno, emicranie croniche e dolori addominali od altri disturbi psicosomatici. Dopo diversi anni di sottostimolazione i disagi si aggravano: l'apatia si accentua, il sentimento d'incapacità non può più essere superato di propria iniziativa, si creano lacune culturali in diversi campi, l'individuo s'isola, si sviluppano disturbi nevrotici e depressione che perdurano fino all'età adulta.¹³

Thus, focusing on the needs of the students, even at their early age, is fundamental for their present and future well-being, reckoning as previously mentioned that giftedness expresses itself in non-permanent and variable forms, particularly when it is not accurately stimulated.

In contrast, as Dilsizian claims, at school can also occur situations of overestimation and overstimulation of gifted capabilities and knowledge. The overstimulation of gifted students' potential can be caused by their own need or desire to obtain an active role in the class group, trying to conform to the general cognitive level of their classmates, as well as by the excessively high expectations of their parents or teachers. Furthermore, the overstimulation can be also provoked by gifted students' own excessively high expectations on their capabilities, which can fail to be met in moments of real difficulty with learning and study.

To sum up the present reflection, it is interesting to notice that her observations refer to the condition of gifted student education of the first years of the XXI century, considering that at that time in Italy giftedness hadn't been effectively explored as concept

¹³Ivi, p.12.

“Common characteristics to males and females after a brief period of under stimulation can cause a strong demotivation and the refuse of commitment, loss of self-esteem, atony and apathy, eating and sleeping disorders, chronic migraine and abdominal pain or other psychosomatic disorders. After many years of under stimulation, the malaises worsen: apathy is accentuated, the feeling of incapability becomes impossible to overcome by oneself, cultural shortcomings grow in different areas, the individual tends to isolate from the society and neurotic disorders and depression develop and persist even in adulthood.”, Personal translation.

and phenomenon. Nonetheless, nowadays the condition of gifted students in the public schools remains almost unaltered.

From the general perspective of life and development of children's personality and approach to the activities of life, as school, social relations, and global issues, it is relevant to regard the role of parents in daily life of these children. As a matter of facts, parents represent the first and main source of education and ideal of life.

The research of Yilmaz and Yalçın (2021) focus on the relevance of gifted children's psychological resilience, seen as the ability to heal oneself from psychophysical illnesses, changes or bad conditions in life, the ability to cope with crisis and stressful situations. According to their observations, the self-confidence, and problem-solving abilities in synergy with their developed cognitive abilities, contributes to create a perseverant and resilient personality.

Though, despite that, children with certification of giftedness need to receive an appropriate education, which should impose them boundaries and responsibilities. For these reasons, the researchers stress the importance of a balanced behaviour showed by the gifted children's parents, which shouldn't be overprotective and should offer the opportunity to research and experience and to struggle with difficult situations. Thus, the researchers disapprove the attitudes of helicopter parenting, namely the overprotective and intrusive approach to children which can influence in a negative way the resilience and autonomy of gifted children.

In conclusion, the gifted children can demonstrate criticalities, which have to be contrasted, if possible, by understanding in a deeper manner their needs and their feelings. This condition should represent the main aim of the people around the gifted, which have to ensure an adequate and positive environment for the mental health and the cognitive development of their outstanding talent.

2.3. Legislation regarding giftedness

Since giftedness has begun to be relevant from a psychological and, afterwards, scholastic perspective, the national and international regulatory systems started to make laws about giftedness, gifted education, and teaching strategies for gifted students.

Primarily, the work of European Union on the production and implementation of a legislation of giftedness appears noteworthy. In 1994, the European Council discussed

the importance of taking into consideration the high value of gifted individuals in the national school systems of Member States, producing the Recommendation n. 1248, which gave voice for the first time to many gifted individuals who didn't see their needs satisfied.

Moreover, the discussion went on the significant loss of Human Capital in the European Union, due to talent migration in other non-European countries. The main purpose was to raise consciousness of the undetermined and crucial condition of gifted children in the Member States. According to the European Council, the most effective measures to take were the voting and implementation of laws for the promotion of support for gifted children, the promotion of research in the field, in order to get more knowledge about the nature and behaviour of gifted children, as well as the situations which cause them discomfort and sufferance, the application of training and support programs for teachers and students, the establishment of the appropriate educational climate, according to the needs of the students, the avoidance of stigmas and discriminations, favouring an inclusive environment at school and, lastly, the improvement of the synergy between professionals, parents and teachers, aiming to support and offer a supportive intervention.

Despite that, at that time in some Member States there wasn't the appropriate knowledge and experience about giftedness. Thus, the majority of them didn't effectively apply the principles of the Recommendation in their national instruction law.

Afterwards, in 2013, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) produced a recommendation about the enhancement of gifted students' potential, providing some strategies and suggestions, which should have been adopted and integrated into the national legislation of European countries. In detail, the recommendation considered two main aspects of the development of giftedness: the specialistic teaching training and the application of personalised strategies for gifted students.

In regard of the first aspect, the EESC described the necessity to offer an initial and ongoing training to teachers, in order to increase awareness of giftedness, individuate more talents at school and implement more effective strategies for their development. Moreover, the recommendation expresses the need to instil social values, as, for instance, the acceptance of humanism and multiculturalism, the educational use of ICT and the encouragement of creativity and innovation. The same relevance is given to the

improvement of the understanding of the traits of giftedness, in order that teacher can recognise and discern the gifted students in their classes.

Besides, the aim of the development of gifted students' values and abilities is intended to be achieved by designing and implementing new and more stimulating teaching strategies. To this purpose, EESC provides some suggestions for teaching body, distinguishing some ordinary measures, such as the "Presentation of content with varying degrees of difficulty, flexible groups, variety of activities and extension of basic curriculum."¹⁴, some less ordinary measures, as the individual adaptation of curriculum and, in conclusion, some exceptional measures, which involve flexible strategies as the fast-tracking of the curriculum.

In this respect, the general mission of the European Union is to prevent the emigration of gifted students in other parts of the world to study and to further develop their talent. Thus, the EESC suggests to the EU Member States to introduce laws which favour the implementation and improvement of teaching strategies to appropriately manage their talents and to improve the value of inclusion in the national instructional systems.

In spite of the many international and national regulations in the field of giftedness and gifted education, the evidence in the scholastic system doesn't show a unique and perfectly organised strategy in every country of the European Union. As a matter of facts, the Working Document "Specific Educational Measures to Promote all Forms of Giftedness at School in Europe" by the European network EURYDICE (2006), that collected and analysed information about the European education systems, shows a map of the European Member States and the strategies implemented for gifted students in their national education system in 2006. (See Annex 4) As it is possible to observe in the picture of European countries, most of the Member States decided to implement non-school based educational measures, excluding the school system in this planification. On the contrary, a few countries decided to implement educational measures for gifted children at school and among them it is possible to notice Italy.

In the Italian scene, giftedness has been repeatedly the main topic of discussion for new legislature and for a unique definition of teaching strategies in the instructional

¹⁴Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on 'Unleashing the potential of children and young people with high intellectual abilities in the European Union' (own-initiative opinion), (2013).

system. In response to the Recommendation n. 1248 of the Council of Europe and the numerous discussions about the phenomenon of giftedness and talent, the Italian legislature adopted the DD n. 1603 of the 11/15/18, setting up the Comitato Tecnico Nazionale per la tutela del diritto allo studio di alunni e studenti ad alto potenziale intellettuale, a committee whose main aim is to grant the rights of gifted and talented students. Nevertheless, this new committee didn't produce any specific teaching strategy for gifted students, nor effectively contributed to the training of professionals and teachers in the school system.

In 2019, the Italian Ministry of Instruction, University and Research (MIUR) made law in the Nota 562/2019, stating that gifted children are considered students with Special Educational Needs, acknowledging the needs to receive specific and differentiated teaching and to discuss more this topic, in order to improve the instructional system.

Despite a note may appear to be an official and effective strategy to achieve the goal of inclusion of students with extreme talents, in the reality the decision about the production of a personalised program for gifted students is up to the teaching body of the gifted students' school. As a matter of facts, the Nota n. 562/2019 states:

[...] la strategia da assumere è rimessa alla decisione dei Consigli di Classe o Team Docenti della primaria che, in presenza di eventuali situazioni di criticità con conseguenti manifestazioni di disagio, possono adottare metodologie didattiche specifiche in un'ottica inclusiva, sia a livello individuale sia di classe, valutando l'eventuale convenienza di un percorso di personalizzazione formalizzato in un PDP.¹⁵

Therefore, the regulation cites gifted students in the category of SEN students and acknowledges the need to improve the school system, with the aim of considering the special needs of gifted students in a more practical and active way. However, SEN students are not obligatorily provided with a PDP, since teachers of these students may not be adequately prepared and trained to design and implement in their lessons personalised plans capable of effectively and completely satisfy gifted individuals' needs. Since giftedness is a recently investigated aspect of students, it may be observed that

¹⁵MIUR, Nota n. 562 of 04/03/2019, p. 3. "The Teaching Body of primary school is charged to choose the most appropriate strategy. In critical situations with discomfort manifestations, it can adopt specific teaching methodology in an inclusive perspective, both on an individual level and on a class group level, considering the potential convenience of a personalised approach, officialised in a PDP, Personalised Didactic Plan.", Personal translation.

teachers don't know properly what it means, what are its signals and how to approach to these students.

For the present reason, many teaching bodies decide not to implement personalised didactic plans for gifted students, denying them the opportunity to develop their potential and their capabilities at school, as well as provoking the aforementioned conditions of bad conduct or discomfort both at school and in gifted individuals' private lives.

2.4. Teaching strategies and inclusion

On the basis of a close and careful observation of the concept of giftedness and its consideration in the international and national scenario, it is fundamental to affirm that, even though a great number of gifted students doesn't receive an appropriate differentiated teaching, some teaching strategies aiming to improve their potential have been investigated and tested. In regard of the application of the abovementioned strategies, it is important to state that they are based on the principle of inclusion, which should be the core belief of every form of teaching, in every school grade and with every student.

La centralità della persona e la conseguente valorizzazione delle peculiarità di ciascuno è un imprescindibile pre-requisito nella realizzazione di percorsi pedagogici e didattico-educativi all'interno di una società complessa, nella quale la qualità delle intelligenze rappresenta la risorsa fondamentale a cui dedicare impegno e attenzione istituzionale.¹⁶

As many researchers stated, the teaching strategies and the education of students in the public school must be person-oriented, including the conception of qualities, needs, criticalities and learning styles of every student in the class and aiming to provide them with an optimal and inclusive education. Firstly, it is fundamental to foster the values of inclusion and awareness of differences as an enrichment for the environment, since this sort of children's education can result in open-mindedness at a later age. In the specific case of gifted students, particularly in their school environment it is fundamental to raise

¹⁶Rigon, Francesca, Pedron, Martina, Lucangeli, Daniela, (2017). "L'iperdotazione cognitiva a scuola: la didattica a sostegno del talento.", in: *Psicologia e Scuola*, Giunti Editore, p.46.

"The person-centred approach and the consequent enhancement of everyone's peculiarity is an essential prerequisite in the realisation of pedagogic and learning-educational paths in a complex society, in which the quality of talents represents the main resource requiring institutional commitment and concern.", Personal translation.

awareness of the different paces and forms of intelligence, with the aim of allowing gifted to freely express their potential and of promoting a stimulating and supportive for the entire class. Moreover, considering the strong ethical and moral beliefs and involvement of gifted children, creating an inclusive environment can further develop their sense of justice.

In order to promote an inclusive atmosphere at school, teachers have to examine and evaluate every student's behaviour, learning approach, interests, competences and propensions and to implement the most appropriate strategies for their learning process. Specifically, in the case of gifted individuals, it is important to notice that each gifted shows his or her peculiarities, thus it isn't possible to establish a unique strategy for them. In the school system, as affirmed by the previously mentioned legislation on giftedness, teachers have to investigate the best approaches to enhance their gifted student's potential and to promote a motivating class context. The final aim of this investigation is design and implement a personalised curriculum for the gifted student, which contains the information about the student, the educational objectives, the best strategies to achieve them and any further targeted interventions.

Anderson (2014) revised the notorious Bloom's Taxonomy of Learning, which classified the different thinking skills and supports the teachers to design personalised interventions and strategies. In Anderson's revision, four types of general knowledge are distinguished:

- Factual knowledge, which is related to the terminology, details, and basic elements of a specific field.
- Conceptual knowledge, which entails the classification and generalisation capabilities.
- Procedural knowledge, which is the capability to distinguish methods, processes, and cause-effect processes.
- Metacognitive knowledge, which considers the capability to reflect on the cognitive processes and on the knowledge itself.¹⁷

¹⁷Anderson, Lorin W. et al, (2014). *A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching, and Assessing: A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives.*, Pearson Educational Limited, Edinburgh Gate.

From these assumptions, derives a differentiation of six thinking skills, according to which teachers should design the personalised plans for students. As in Bloom's Taxonomy, Anderson divided the thinking skills in two orders: the lower order thinking skills (LOTS) include remembering, understanding, and applying; the higher order thinking skills (HOTS) include analysing, evaluating and creating. Thus, it is fundamental to consider these thinking skills, in relation to giftedness and talent, and to structure functional and supportive strategies to exercise these skills.

An additional consideration of talent and intelligences is done by Gardner in his Theory of Multiple Intelligences, in which different learning styles and domains of intelligence are shown. Namely, they are visual and spatial, bodily-kinaesthetic, musical and artistic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, linguistic, and logical-mathematical. The relevance of the studies of Gardner for the designing of personalised didactic plans for gifted students can be found in the identification and awareness of the areas of learning in which students perform better and are more interested in. As a matter of facts, an effective instruction is based on the possibility for gifted students to apply their profound intelligence through their learning styles.

Furthermore, as Novello (2021) affirms, "The school can't overlook a category of students which often experience discomfort and, as a consequence, the risk of school disaffection."¹⁸ As explained by the author, the school system has to comprehend the needs of gifted students and avoid any form of homologations of gifted individuals, since it can provoke them a feeling of discomfort and make them experience discrimination and exclusion from the class. Moreover, the author, focusing on the foreign languages teaching and learning, states that an effective strategy can be the proposal of stratified activities, which are planned with the aim of differentiating the tasks in line with the levels, paces, interests and propensions of students.

With an outlook on the research in the field of gifted education, it is possible to indicate many studies and experiments with the common aim of improving the school offer for these students and of developing their unordinary talent. Lucangeli (2019) proposes the analysis of Baum (2004) and Winebrenner (2012), who offered some suggestions to the scholastic system, in order to develop their gifted students' potential.

¹⁸ Novello, Alberta, (2021). "Studenti con plusdotazione e inclusione: una questione di politica linguistica.", in: *EL.LE*, 10 (2), p. 197.

Firstly, she cites the research of Baum (2004), which affirmed the necessity of promoting the talent through a supporting and stimulating environment, in which meetings with professionals in the field of knowledge preferred by the student are organised, or in which the teaching strategies are more practical and experience-based, or include tasks based on projects, problem solving activities, simulations and discussions. Moreover, the scholar affirms the necessity to design activities and create an open environment, in which students have the opportunity to express their opinions and competences. In conclusion, Lucangeli (2019) stresses the relevance of offering compensation strategies for gifted students' weaknesses and criticalities, in order to avoid or relieve stress and frustration.

Regarding the necessity to sustain and improve the learning process of gifted students, Winebrenner (2012) identifies some valuable and adequate strategies:

- Avoiding repetition and excessive assignments on the same topic
- Accelerating the pace of lessons, according to the pace of learning of the gifted student.
- Avoiding restrictions in the contents of the curriculum and offering the opportunity to delve into the topics in which students are interested.
- Changing the role of the teacher. As a matter of facts, since '60, the teacher doesn't perform anymore the role of "master" but becomes a "guide" and a support for students' learning, in order to give them more responsibilities about their scholastic and personal development. It is particularly important for gifted students.
- Involving the family in the support in the development of the student.

Lucangeli (2019) includes further suggestions to the teaching body of gifted students:

- Designing complex activities in order to avoid boredom and disconnection.
- Implementing personalised challenging activities in order to sustain the talent, considering the student's capabilities.
- Dissuading the student from nurturing a dysfunctional perfectionism, which is visible in excessive preoccupation and fear of failure and mistakes. An instance could be the realisation of tasks and activities which are complex, but don't present a single correct answer.

In according to Zanetti (2019), hereafter there are mentioned the main teaching strategies adopted at school, in those cases in which the gifted student is provided with a personalised didactic plan, designed, and implemented by the school teaching body:

- Flexibility in the teaching process, according to the educational needs of students and to their characteristics. It can be realised through formative objectives and programs, conformed to the needs, and learning style of the gifted student. Moreover, it can be concretised through personalised evaluation criteria, in order to consider the globality of the student's learning profile, including extracurricular and enhancing activities.
- In-depth and more specific exploration of themes studied in the class plan through, for instance, integrative documents or projects.
- Enrichment of the school curriculum with new information, authentic materials and tasks non-regarding the topics of lessons. This strategy can be also applied in groups, in order to include more complex and challenging activities.
- Compaction of the curriculum: the student is given the responsibility to manage the parts of the class program already acquired.
- Differentiation: the teaching body designs a personalised didactic plan, in which all the characteristics and interests of the student should have an influence.
- Acceleration: the student is offered the chance to “accelerate” their curriculum, according to the pace of their learning process.
- Grade skipping (only one time): the student skips a year of school. This strategy can present some risks, as the emotive asymmetry, which means that the student, particularly in the primary school, can be not enough emotionally developed as the classmates.
- Auto-learning and auto-regulation of learning: the student independently manages the pace and style of his or her learning, as well as the activities to improve his or her knowledge and competences.
- Use of multiple intelligence: the teaching body uses the Gardner's theory of Multiple Knowledge and personalises activities in line with the intelligence shown by the gifted student.

- Promotion of wellbeing of students in class and school environments, creating a comfortable and supportive environment, in which students have the possibility to express themselves and their capabilities.

2.5. Didactic proposals for ELT to gifted students

After an observation of the strategies for the development of giftedness and talent, it is relevant to examine some didactic proposals for English language teaching, which can be useful for teachers which have to face the problems of gifted students' boredom, disconnection, and disinterest in the lesson. Novello (2021) considered some strategies which involve the main characteristics of giftedness, namely problem-solving capabilities, creativity, curiosity, and task commitment. The suggestion offered by the researcher can be synthesised in:

- Designing problem solving activities, which consist in the resolution of a problem by means of the language, in order to use it in a practical way. This proposal respects the objectives of the communicative approach of Hymes (1973).
- Proposing creative activities, in which all the student's abilities are called to action. Moreover, this kind of activities are more stimulating and exciting than traditional and frontal lessons.
- Design activities in a stratified way: the researcher refers at this proposal as "trattazione di un argomento a spirale"¹⁹, which means that the student has the possibility to choose how much explore and be involved in the topic of discussion, and autonomously analyse it in a deeper way.
- Autonomously setting goals: students are required to set some communicative goals and to autonomously achieve them. This kind of activities improves their sense of responsibility and raises awareness about gifted students' own limitations.

In a revision of the strategies and proposals for gifted student English teaching, Novello (2022) included a set of activities, which aim to stimulate and to enhance students linguistic and linguistic-related capabilities. These activities are classified according to

¹⁹Novello, Alberta, (2016). "Insegnare le lingue a studenti gifted. Strategie didattiche per la plusdotazione.", in: *Romanica Cracoviensia*, 16(2), p. 116.

the characteristics of gifted students, in order to better understand how they are interconnected and developed. (Available in Table 1)

Table 1: Didactic proposals for English teaching to gifted students²⁰

Characteristics	Teaching activities
Deduction of rules and examples and curiosity about the language functioning.	Problem solving Semi-autonomous or autonomous reflection on the language classification
Recognition of models	Comprehension of authentic materials
Capability to make inferences and flexible thinking	Explicitation of inferences (linguistic pragmatic and cultural) Creative activities of comprehension
Unusual association of ideas	Grouping into lists, objects, symbols, etc.
Memorisation of lexicon	Frequent introduction of new vocabulary
Capability of contrastive analysis	Comparison between two languages
Distinction, memorisation, and reproduction of sounds	Phonetic exercises Exposition to listening
Creative use of language	Creative production (for instance, stories, scenes, poems, idioms, diaries, etc.) Practical laboratories Invention of games and activities Creative projects
Translation ability	Translation for third persons (as a mean of support)
Sense of humour	Watching and reproduction of comics Creation of linguistic jokes

²⁰Novello, Alberta, (2022). *La classe di lingua inclusiva. Gli studenti con altissime abilità.*, Mondadori Università, Vignate, pp. 111-112.

	Reading of jokes
Interest in other cultures	Exploration and discussion of other cultures
Multiple interests and advanced comprehension of disciplinary issues	Interdisciplinary CLIL
Appreciation of speaking activities	Discussion Arguments Interview Debates Description Role playing
Autonomy	Open activities
Use of compensation strategies	Matching terms to descriptions
Advanced problem solving; positive leadership, sense of justice; sensitivity, comprehension of cause-effect relations; ideals; concern about social and political issues	Problem solving (even in groups) about themes related to real life and useful to society
Interest for reading	Autonomous reading, preceded a phase of formulation of hypotheses and followed by creative activities of comprehension and production.
Cognitive processes related to speaking skill	Brainstorming Organisation of ideas Categorisation of ideas Correlation of ideas Hypothesis on keywords Exercises on chunks Phonetic exercises
Cognitive processes related to listening skill	Exploitation of inferences (linguistic, pragmatical and cultural) Selection of information

	Hierarchization of information
Cognitive processes related to reading skill	Exploitation of inferences (linguistic, pragmatical cultural) Discussion on themes Intra-textual and inter-textual connections
Cognitive processes related to writing skill	Selection and organisation of ideas Selection of information Creation of verification questions

As it is possible to observe in the aforementioned proposed activities, gifted students need a more interactive and continuous stimulation, which can be implemented by means of authentic materials, technologies, creative tools, such as drawings, maps, mind maps, and textual or audio-visual materials.

In accordance with the research of Marzetta, Mason and Wee (2018), a fundamental tool for English language teaching and learning for gifted students can be the production and comprehension of concept maps. The present tool represents a multisensorial instrument through which students can organise, correlate, and visualise their ideas, creating a holistic view of a topic or a content. Marzetta, Mason and Wee (2018) state that

ELA (English Language Acquisition) and GT (Gifted/Talented) students may be presented with the same information in class, but different mental models may lead to different meanings and understandings.²¹

Indeed, the use of concept maps in scholastic and non-scholastic contexts involves different intelligences and visive learning, which allows the student to develop their creativity and figure out further innovative and original connections and interdisciplinary links, new solutions and approaches to problematic conditions and, finally, a deeper reflection and understanding of the topic. On the contrary, the use of this tool is not

²¹Marzetta, Katrina, Mason, Hillary and Wee, Bryan, (2018). “Sometimes They Are Fun, and Sometimes They Are Not: Concept Mapping with English Language Acquisition (ELA) and Gifted/Talented (GT) Elementary Students Learning Science and Sustainability”, in: *Education Sciences*, 8(1):13, p. 3.

similarly functional and challenging for those students who don't manifest any particular extreme visive competence.

In line with the aforementioned reflection of giftedness and gifted students' education, the studies in the field remark the indispensability of considering the whole set of competences, qualities and weaknesses, interests, propensions and peculiarities of the gifted students, in order to involve them into really effective activities for them and avoid boredom. Moreover, the strategies designed for the gifted students can involve other students and improve their competences as well, creating a stimulating environment for the whole class and eliminating feelings of discrimination and diversity. As a matter of facts, the inclusion of students with different learning styles and levels of knowledge determines an improvement of the overall capabilities and of group working skills, which are going to be deemed as extremely relevant in their future work.

In conclusion, an essential requisite of English teaching, as well as in any other school subject, is the preparation of teachers to properly design and cope with gifted students' education, which is supposed to be the global aim of national and international educational system, which should offer the possibility to take part to training courses and specific training for teachers and students of didactic courses at the university. Nowadays, in the Italian scene, the scholastic system doesn't provide enough valid and complete education and training about giftedness and appropriate teaching strategies for gifted students. Improving this field of instruction and education would provide a better recognition of gifted individuals and, furthermore, a tangible opportunity for gifted students to develop their talent and have a more active and beneficial role in the society.

Section 3. The Personalized Activity Plan

3.1. Preliminary information and observations

The experimentation consists in the planning of some individual teaching activities, which aimed to improve primarily the speaking skills of English language of the gifted student. Moreover, they were programmed in order to develop the other linguistic competences, as listening, reading, and writing skills, as well as the sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences, as fluency, coherence and cohesion and appropriate use of informative and conative communication. The following are drawn from a preliminary questionnaire, which was administered to the gifted student, in order to know her experience, her opinion and her passions and interests.

The activities involve a twelve-years-old female gifted individual, who is thereafter called “V.”. The student attends the second year of an Italian middle school in the province of Padua. Her native language is Italian. She shows a particularly developed knowledge about Italian grammar and lexicon. She received an evaluation of giftedness when she was 6 years old and attended the 2nd grade of primary school. Her parents requested a professional evaluation for giftedness after a report made by V.’s teachers at school. The teachers noticed V.’s well-developed maturity and strong curiosity and her tendency to get bored and unfocussed during the lessons. When V. received the certification of giftedness, the whole family had a positive reaction and tried to find the more effective ways to improve their approach to the exceptional quality of their daughter. Firstly, her parents attended a parent training course, in which they had the possibility to compare their experiences with other parents of gifted children. During the course and in this comparison, they noticed many similarities in their daily lives. Furthermore, during the evaluation of giftedness, the professional didn’t test V. for Specific Learning Disorders (SLD), nor for Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), but she has never shown any typical feature of these disorders.

On the scholastic perspective, V.’s parents submitted the certification to the school secretary’s office, in order to request and obtain a personalized didactic plan for her primary school instruction. Unfortunately, the teachers were not prepared to work with gifted students. Thus, V. didn’t receive any specialized support strategy and her needs

were not met. During the years of primary school, V. felt bored and disconnected from the lessons. She often used to draw or to scribble the workbooks during the lessons, because the topics discussed in class were already clear to her and she didn't feel the necessity to repeat them, nor to listen to what the teacher was saying. Moreover, she didn't want to ask the teacher to give her some differentiated materials, in order not to disturb the class. During the last years of primary school, V. complained about the school instruction and didn't want to go to school, preferring to stay in bed in the morning.

In the middle school, V.'s parents chose to submit for a second time the certification of giftedness, but, as in primary school, the teachers were not able to design a personalized program for the gifted child. Currently, V. is normally attending her lessons, often feels bored of the school and of the subjects studied. She prefers to study and analyse deeper the topics she is interested in at home, in her spare time. During the lessons, when she notices something interesting to investigate, she habitually doesn't ask for further information, but she prefers to autonomously investigate the subject at home.

From a socio-relational perspective, V. doesn't show any difficulty in her behaviour. She is friendly, strongly supportive, and sensitive. She has a good sense of humour, though she is shy with people she doesn't know. Moreover, she knows how to address to adults and authorities as teachers and people she doesn't know. It is peculiar to notice that, when V. is at school with her classmates, she shows a tendency to analyse the behaviour of her peers and to understand their reasons and causes, delving into their social and familiar problems. She demonstrates a developed sensitivity and empathy, taking the side of bullied people and non-Italian speakers. In particular, V. often helps one of her classmates who has problems with the Italian language. After the school, V. usually meets her friends, and they walk in the city and chat.

In her spare time, V. usually reads thriller books, draws, and writes stories. In her experience, she attended a course of storytelling for adult people (she was believed to be 16 years old) and her work was really appreciated. She attends a sport course, which allows her to spend some time with her friends after school and to train. V. is also keen on science and maths, which are her favourite school subjects. For this reason, she practices and studies them also in her spare time and intends to work in the scientific field. Specifically, she still doesn't have a precise and clear perspective on a future job, though she would like to join her interest in science and her storytelling and writing skills. V.'s

mother proposes her to become a researcher in some specific field of science, in order to write articles about a topic she is keen on.

Since she is not supported by any personalized didactic plan, she has never experienced many activities which could involve her skills and her capabilities into exercises and lessons. She affirms that according to her, gifted students have different needs and should receive a particular attention, in order not to get bored and to develop their spectacular abilities. Moreover, she affirmed that in some lessons the teachers proposed some group activities, during which she and her classmates discussed about some topics about the school subject.

Delving into her abilities and interests in English language, in the questionnaire she stated that she appreciates English languages and sometimes practices it on her own, by trying to read some stories written in English. In her beliefs, English language will be useful for her future, with the aim of relating to non-Italian speakers and also because English language can give access to international jobs. Nevertheless, she claimed that English language teaching at school is not enough satisfactory for her needs, because it doesn't suit her needs and capabilities, which are much more developed. Moreover, she also affirmed that English language teaching in her class is scarcely interesting, appropriate, and stimulating for her. During the lesson, the activities proposed by the teacher are generally based on listening and oral comprehension and on reading and comprehension of written texts, sometimes with the addition of some questions. The activities she likes the most are the creation of concept maps, the group reading and discussion of the themes of written texts, and the reading and comprehension of written texts through some questions. According to her auto-evaluation, her reading skills are well-developed. Furthermore, she attributed a middle score to her listening, writing, and speaking skills.

The personalized activity plan is based on V.'s intention to improve her speaking skill, focusing on the fluency and pronounce of her speaking in English. The aforementioned activities aim to meet the needs of the gifted student, who believes that the most practiced skills during the English lessons at school are listening and reading, with an excessive spending of time on the grammar aspect. V. claimed that in her class the language is not practically applied and that a deeper exercise is needed for the capabilities of writing and speaking. As a great number of studies about giftedness and

gifted education state, during the English lessons the student feels the need to explore some topics of her interest, as, for instance, science, technology, or literature. On the contrary, at school the most discussed and studied topics are English culture and grammar. It is evident the necessity of the gifted student to apply in a technical or more specific field her knowledge of English.

In regard of her expectations for the individual activity proposed, she deemed important the involvement of her personal interests in the activities, such as science, technology, art, and literature. Furthermore, when she was asked what competences she was supposed to develop through the personalized activities, she answered that she primarily expected an improvement of her English language knowledge and abilities. Moreover, the student expected the activities to be based on authentic materials and facts. This aspect has been carefully considered during the programming of the activities. Besides, she believed that the activities could be useful to learn something new about the topics that are going to be the focus of the planned activities, and she also cited the possibility to develop their problem-solving abilities, her fluency, and her comfortability with English language. Eventually, V. acknowledged her fear of making mistakes and her anxious behaviour towards English speaking, affirming that her expectations on the activities included the support for her in relieving the fears and anxiety she usually experiences. Moreover, as frequently observed in gifted students' perfectionist behaviour, she often feels frightened of failure: this fear leads her to stay in her comfort zone and be shy. According to the affirmation of her mother, V. shows all of her potential when she experiences situations of discomfort, complications, and challenging conditions. This behaviour is related to the strong capability of managing complex circumstances and to solve problems with an original approach.

To summarise V.'s answers to the preliminary questionnaire designed to better understand the beliefs and attitudes of the student, which are available in Annex 5, the student demonstrated her necessity to be challenged and stimulated, in order to develop her personality and her capabilities. It is interesting to relate this aspect to English language learning: it offers many challenging situations and allows the gifted student to develop her propension to produce alternative solutions, as well as it encourages the student to be more resilient and aware of her abilities.

3.2. Lesson plan and reflection

In order to improve her skills in spoken English, V. has been involved in a series of personalized activities. More specifically, according to the needs and interests of the gifted student, five individual English lessons have been programmed. The general aims of the activities included the improvement of V.'s knowledge and competences in English language, with a focus on her speaking skills, and the practical application of her interests in the lessons, which dealt with art, science, and storytelling. Furthermore, a fundamental purpose of the activities was the development of V.'s critical thinking skills, considering, for instance, the organisation of the journey and the tour, the brainstorming, and the public speaking skills, which have been beneficial during the last activities. After an analysis of V.'s approach to challenging situations, it was agreed that the activities should be oriented to reduce her performance anxiety in speaking English and support her with many brief speaking activities during the lessons. Since V. reported an introvert and shy personality, another important aim was to help her to feel at ease with unknown situations and people.

In conclusion, the fundamental principle considered during the creation and implementation of the personalised activities was their amusing and interactive characteristics. The typical frontal lessons and explanation she usually takes part into were avoided, in order not to cause boredom or distraction.

The five activities regarded the study and exploration of one of the most important cultural sites in the city of Padua, the Palazzo della Ragione, which has recently become the place in which history, science, and art of the city of Padua met. Primarily, V. focused on the study of the art and science shown in the Palazzo della Ragione, gathering the most important information about the cultural site and the scientific experiment contained in it. Thus, she learnt how to become a perfect tour guide and was challenged to autonomously arrange the tour. Eventually, she prepared a discourse which was presented to some "visitors" during the last lesson, performing an innovative and enjoyable role-playing activity.

3.2.1. Activity 1. Let's visit the Palazzo della Ragione!

In the course of the first activity, the gifted student was proposed an article about the history, art, and architecture of the Palazzo della Ragione. After some preliminary questions, which help her to “warm up” before the real lesson, she carefully read the article. Thus, she practiced with the most important terms of architecture lexicon. Moreover, V. was provided with a grammar exercise about the imperative verbs, and she also had to find possible differences in the meaning of the two different structures used for imperative verbs in English. In the conclusive activity of the lesson, the student had to draw a map, according to the oral indications of the teacher. The present activity involved her creative abilities as well as her listening and comprehension skills. The lesson lasted one hour and a half. The complete plan, enriched by the details of the lesson is exposed in Table 1.

Table 1

Table of Activity 1: Let’s visit the Palazzo della Ragione!

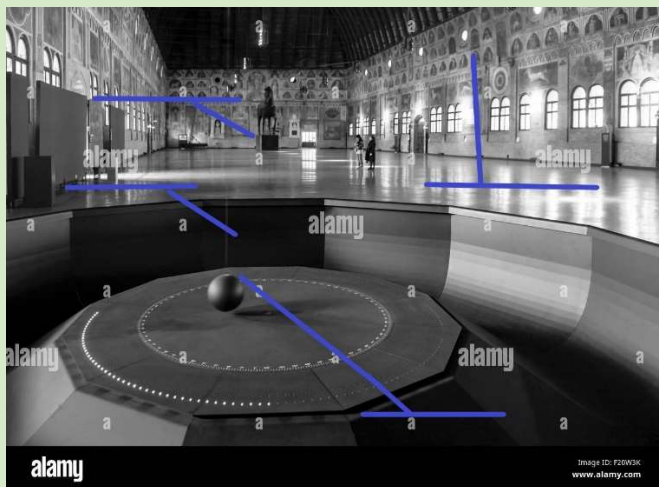
Objectives	Abilities	Competences	Activities	Assessment
Comprehension of oral texts and acquisition of main information	Reading Speaking Listening	Linguistic: -lexicon about art	Discussion about the topic	Observation
		-Use of imperative	Reading and comprehension	
		Sociolinguistic: -register -informative and conative communication	Match of images and terms Grammar exercise	
		Pragmatic: Coherence Cohesion Fluency	Production of a map and a tour route	

Phase 1: The lesson starts with a question to the student: she is asked if she has ever seen the Palazzo della Ragione in Padua.

- If she answers yes, then, the lesson continues with the question “What was the feature that you liked most about it?”
- If she answers no, the lesson continues with a brief explanation given by the teacher “It is a majestic building in the centre of Padua. And links justice, science, and art.” Thus, some photos are shown, and she is asked if she would like to see it from the inside.

Phase 2: The gifted student is provided with an article about the Palazzo della Ragione. She fills in the gaps with the right terms, which will be also added to her personal art glossary. After that, she gives each section an original title.

Phase 3: The student is shown two photos of the Palazzo with the indication of some objects. Thus, she writes down the terms referring to the object pointed.



Phase 4: The student is provided with a grammar exercise about imperative form. This activity has to be done orally. After having found the imperative verbs, the student and the teacher discuss about possible different shades of meaning of the structures of imperative verbs.

Find the verbs at the imperative form in the text and underline them. After that, transform them into the exhortative form “Let’s+ infinite form of vb”.

Ex: “Look at the frescoes!” → “Let’s look at the frescoes!”

Phase 5: The student is asked to draw a map of the Palazzo, according to the information orally given by the teacher. Afterwards, she names the key points of the map, which will be used in the third lesson. In conclusion, the student chooses what topic she wants to focus on in the second lesson: astrology Pietro D’Abano or the pendulum of Foucault.

During the first lesson, the student demonstrated a great ability to read and write in English. She didn’t make any mistake and showed a good vocabulary about art and architecture. Moreover, she was keen in the topic and frequently asked for more information about the Palazzo della Ragione and its functions in the past and in the present. Furthermore, she acquired information and new terminology in only one repetition, even when she was asked if she needed a second repetition. During the Phase 2 (see Table 1), she named each section of the article in a creative way. In this moment, it was possible to notice an initial feeling of embarrassment and anxiety. Initially, V. tended to give simple and brief names to the section, but the teacher encouraged her to be more creative, by providing her some humorous examples. Thereafter, the student released her creative thoughts and produced hilarious titles.

In the course the grammar exercise in the Phase 4, V. claimed that, during her English lessons at school, the topic of imperative verbs hadn’t been dealt with yet. However, she was introduced to this form of verb during the primary school. Thus, the teacher briefly explained the functioning and showed the structure of imperative verbs, providing practical examples visible in the article. Afterwards, V. immediately understood the explanation and was able to perform the exercise.

Through the Phase 5, she drew the architectural scheme of the Palazzo della Ragione, adding names and information and showing her perfectionist behaviour traits. In the end of the first and introductory lesson, she got to know the language teaching methods and approaches that were going to be implemented for all the lessons and she appreciated them, claiming that she had been having fun and was interested in the themes discussed. Moreover, she didn't show boredom and was absorbed by the activity, though she was slightly shy.

In the final moments of the lesson, she was given the opportunity to choose the field of knowledge to focus on during the second activity. There was the possibility to delve into astrology of Pietro D'Abano and the physics experiment of Foucault, one of the objects present in the Palazzo della Ragione. She chose the latter, following her passion for science.

3.2.2. Activity 2. The Pendulum of Foucault: how does it function?

The second lesson focused on the scientific aspects of the Palazzo della Ragione. It was discussed about the bond between history and science, mentioning two of the most prominent scientists and researchers, Galileo Galilei, and Leon Foucault. Moreover, the concept of rotation and revolution of the Earth were examined and explored, in order to define why the experiment of the Pendulum worked out. The lesson was enriched with a creative moment, in which the student imagined a Whatsapp group chat of the scientists studied during the lesson. In the concluding part of the lesson, some contents of grammar, namely the use of passive form of verbs, were explained and practiced. The lesson lasted one and a half hour. The complete plan of the lesson is exposed in Table 2.

Table 2

Table of Activity 2- The Pendulum of Foucault: how does it function?

Objectives	Abilities	Competences	Activities	Assessment
Comprehension of oral texts and acquisition of main information.	Listening Speaking Reading	Linguistic: -lexicon about science -passive form of verbs	Discussion about the topic Watching and comprehension of a video	Observation

Re-elaboration of information in a creative way.		Sociolinguistic: -informative and conative communication	Reading and re-elaboration of information Grammar exercise	
		Pragmatic: Coherence Cohesion Fluency		

Phase 1: The student is asked if she has ever heard of the quote *Eppur si muove* by Galileo Galilei. Then, she tries to explain its meaning in English. Then, the teacher introduces the successive discoveries made by Foucault, who confirmed the theories of Galileo.

- **If the student knows them:** she explains its meaning in English. Then, she is asked if she knows how Foucault confirmed the theories of Galileo after two and a half centuries.
- **If the student doesn't know them:** the teacher explains that the quote "Eppur si muove" (in English "Still it moves") was pronounced by Galileo when he went out from the Inquisizione, a court of justice similar to the Palazzo della Ragione. It is important to explain the heliocentric hypothesis and to affirm that none believed him, but after many centuries, in 1851, another important scientist demonstrated this hypothesis, Leon Foucault. The teacher explains that Foucault used a pendulum to confirm that the night-day cycle is caused by the rotation of the Earth, not by the movement of the Sun. After collecting this information, the student acknowledges the power of research, study and experimenting.

Phase 2: The student is provided with a video explanation of the Earth rotation and revolution (on the site: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CfMNgS0D0Sc>). The video can be slowed down and subtitles can be added if the student needs to. The student can also take notes about the explanation.

Phase 3: After having seen the video, the student is going to link the most important terms mentioned in the video to their corresponding definitions or explanation.

- | | |
|---------------|---|
| 1. Rotation | a. spherical model of the planet Earth |
| 2. Revolution | b. the most massive object in the solar system. All the planets rotate around it because of its gravitational pull. |
| 3. Axis | d. the orbital movement of the Earth around the Sun. It takes 365 days, 5 hours, 59 minutes, and 16 seconds to be complete. |
| 4. Globe | c. the spinning of the Earth around the axis. It needs 23 hours, 56 minutes, and 4.09 seconds to be complete. |
| 5. Sun | e. imaginary line which joins the North Pole and the South Pole vertically. |

Phase 4: The student is given a storyline of the main events related to the discovery of the rotation and revolution of the Earth. After reading the storyline, the student can understand the actual movement of the pendulum by watching the video available on the website: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VooAOjIPIgk&t=60s>.

Thus, the student selects the most interesting information and creates an imaginary Whatsapp group chat with Galileo Galilei, Leon Foucault, and the scientists of their time.

Phase 5: In the storyline, there are a few passive forms of the verb. After a brief explanation of the structure of this form, the student identifies the structure and finds the passive verbs.

The structure is: Subject + To be + past participle.

Example: Galileo's theory [...] is published.

During the second lesson, the emphasis was placed on the interests and propensions of the gifted student. As a matter of facts, V. showed an intense curiosity for scientific matters, and she autonomously decided to delve into the scientific aspects of

Palazzo della Ragione, which represents a bond between history, art, physics, and science. Her passion was demonstrated in the fluency of her answers to the questions of the Phase 1, as well as in her willingness to continue the lesson without any pause. She was informed about the history of Galileo and tried to explain it to the teacher, adding information taken from her personal knowledge. During the Phase 2, she was absorbed by the video explanation, and she didn't even feel the need to slow down the video, nor she needed any subtitles. In the replies to the preliminary questionnaire, she affirmed that in the spare time she sees videos in English about her interests. Thus, it is possible that she had already seen the video of the Phase 2.

Moreover, an important mention on the delightful skills of V. is her capability to understand and implement grammar rules that she hasn't studied at school. As evidence, in the case of the Phase 4, she was provided with a storyline with verbs at the present tense. During the "conversion" of the storyline into the Whatsapp group conversation, the student tried to use the verbs as an English native speaker would have done. She applied some grammar rules about present perfect and past simple tenses, topics that have never been discussed at school. Furthermore, the conversation had to be set in a simple and unformal way, thus she decided to add some slang expressions. This demonstrated her capability to comprehend the original text and manipulate it, reorganising and synthesising its information. The activity stimulated her imagination and creativity, allowing the student to be herself and improve her self-esteem. Eventually, it is possible to acknowledge that an activity with hilarious contents helps the student to perceive the lessons and their contents as moment of leisure, rather than boring assignments.

The lesson was concluded with the vision of the video of the Pendulum of Palazzo della Ragione, which was showed to V. with the aim of letting her better understand the functioning of the experiment and its location in the cultural site. She appreciated the concept of bonding two important features of life, namely science and art. The student showed curiosity for the following lessons and asked for more information, being more confident and extroverted. It is fascinating to notice that the stimulating activities proposed to her improved her mood and her attitude toward the teacher. Apparently, she started to feel more comfortable and considered for both her capabilities and personality.

3.2.3. Activity 3. How are you going to communicate during the tour?

The third lesson was based on the necessity to improve the communication and public speaking skills of the gifted student, who affirmed to feel anxious about speaking in English in front of many people. Furthermore, V. needed to implement mind maps in her activity, in order to understand the best methods to categorize and synthesize information and present a perfect tour. Thus, the lesson started with a discussion about the beliefs of the student about tour guides, also considering her personal experiences.

Consequently, the vision of the video explanation of the job of tour guides and of some tips to become a better guide gave the student an idea about the right approaches to visitors she should have had during the visit. This information was collected and pictured in the mind map, which was a helpful tool to organize, categorize and put into relation notions and hierarchize them in line with the student's point of view. Afterwards, the knowledge about tour guiding was put into effect, showing a photo of the Colosseum to the student, and asking her to apply what she had previously learnt. It is important to notice that the focus was only on the approach to visitors and on the communication abilities since she might not have all the necessary information about the cultural site.

The lesson ended with the organisation of the tour, setting the timing of each part of the discourse, and organising the trip from the student's home to the Palazzo della Ragione. The third lesson lasted almost one and a half hour. Further information is available in the Table 3.

Table 3

Table of Activity 3- How are you going to communicate during the tour?

Objectives	Abilities	Competences	Activities	Assessment
Improvement of communication and organisation qualities.	Speaking Listening Writing	Linguistic: -explaining and discussing metacommunicative topics -verbs to give indications -Synthesis of main information	Brainstorming Discussion Watching a video and learning tips Mind map Role playing Programming a trip	Observation

		Sociolinguistic: -informative and conative communication		
		Pragmatic: Fluency		

Phase 1: The teacher asks to the student:

- What are, according to you, the most important qualities of a tour guide?
- Has she/he to have a specific knowledge about the site or the museum she is showing to visitors?
- What are the suggestions you would give to a guide?
- What are the things that, in your experience, you didn't appreciate about a tour guide?

Phase 2: The student watches the video about the comparison between a GOOD and a GREAT guide. (Visible on the website: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YZ_gclzvol0jm). If the student needs to, she can take notes.

Phase 3: The student creates a mind map with the necessary qualities and abilities of the tour guide. Thus, she puts them in order, according to their relevance. If she has further ideas, she can add information in the mind map.

Phase 4: The student imagines to be a tour guide, a GREAT one. Skipping the starting phase of the tour, she performs a tour guide simulation for the cultural sites in the photo above. The teacher remembers that the focus is not on the information about the cultural site, but on the way in which she gives information.



Phase 5: After having gathered suggestions and tips to become a great guide tour, the student organises practically the tour in Palazzo della Ragione. With the support of the teacher, the student organises the trip from her place to the cultural site, using mobile phone applications like Trenitalia, Moovit and Google Maps (on the telephone of the teacher). If she needs, she can take notes of the indications. Thus, she uses the map she previously drew (during the 1st lesson, see Table 1) and draws the track of the tour, elaborating a time schedule for each part of her guide. Moreover, the student is provided with a table of verbs which can be useful for her to give indication and express movements during the tour.

The third lesson aimed to make the student more at ease with the English-speaking activities which would have followed in the remaining two lessons. During the Phase 1, the student demonstrated herself worried about speaking and making mistakes. Nevertheless, she tried to maintain a conversation and answer to the questions of the teacher. In order to alleviate the student's anxiety, the teacher suggested her to take her time to answer and she started to answer in a good way, even though her answers were not so original and detailed. Therefore, the teacher expressed her opinion and asked her if she agreed or not: it was helpful for the student, allowing her to give some more elaborated answers. If the present attitude is deeply observed, it is possible to understand that she demonstrated her need to be stimulated by new topics and activities and particularly to be challenged by the English-speaking ones.

During the Phase 2, she didn't manifest any difficulty, even though the language of the video was complex. Moreover, the student appreciated the third phase, which stimulated her creativity and original thought, as well as involved her into a brainstorming

activity with the teacher. The production of mind maps revealed itself as one of the most funny and engaging strategies for V., and for sure it was useful for the following activities. In the course of the brainstorming moment, the student and the teacher spoke exclusively in English and the student appeared more confident of her skills, more at ease with the teacher and with the topics. The Phase 4 led the student to experiment the job of the tour guide. She added more information to the explanation and behaved professionally. During the last phase, she managed to autonomously organise the tour of Palazzo della Ragione, considering also possible delays and complications. Consequently, the teacher offered her phone and V. started to plan the journey from her home to the cultural site, which are quite distant. The student asked for support only to define the most rapid track was to get to the Palazzo. During this last phase, the table of verbs shared by the teacher was helpful too.

In conclusion, the activity was based on the necessity to develop her independence and her problem-solving skills, put into practice through the organisation of the tour and the journey. The student demonstrated her capability to manage new and challenging conditions as, for example, speaking in English for a long time and with a complex professional language.

3.2.4. Activity 4. Ready to go!

The fourth lesson aimed to organise the oral presentation of the student, producing a written text of her tour at the Palazzo della Ragione. It was composed of three main activities: production of a synthetizing mind map, reading of the mind map and oral translation of the main concepts, adding details, and linking expressions to the discourse and, at the end of the lesson, writing the whole speech of the tour, on the basis of the mind map previously produced. These activities were the starting point for preparation of the last activity and consisted in different moments of brainstorming with the teacher. The lesson lasted almost two hours. Further information is available in the Table 4.

Table 4

Table of Activity 4 - Ready to go!

Objectives	Abilities	Competences	Activities	Assessment
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Writing the draft of the discourse	Writing Speaking	Linguistic: -lexicon about art and science -imperative verbs -past tenses	Production of a mind map. Reading and synthesis of texts. Production of an oral discourse	Observation from the observation of the mind map.
		Sociolinguistic: -register and conative communication	from the observation of the mind map.	
		Pragmatic: -Coherence -Cohesion -Fluency	Production of a draft of discourse.	

Phase 1: The teacher writes on a piece of paper the word “Palazzo della Ragione” and draws two branches (art and history; physics and science). From here, the organises and orders all the topics she has to deal with in the Palazzo della Ragione during the tour guide.

Phase 2: the teacher asks the student to read again the texts of the Activity 1 and 2 and to select the most important and interesting facts about the Palazzo. Then, the teacher asks her to add them in order in the mind map.

Phase 3: the student tries to read from the map and improvise an oral discourse, adding details missing from the map.

Phase 4: The oral text extrapolated from the mind map is written down by the student. Afterwards, the teacher corrects the grammar and pronounce mistakes.

During the last lesson, the student exhibited more confidence and a more extroverted behaviour towards the teacher. During the Phases 1 and 2, which basically consisted in the production of the mind map, she started to write the basic and more relevant information in form of keywords, gradually enriching the map with more details after some brainstorming moments. In the Phase 3, when the student had to read the keywords and extrapolate an oral discourse, with the relevant links and details, she was worried about losing information or forgetting something important. Thus, she continued to write details in the mind map. In the phase 4, the student “translated” the information taken from the mind map into an oral discourse and improved it, aiming to create a detailed and professional speech for the tour.

From a syntactical point of view, she used many complex structures and managed to use verb forms, which were unknown to her, in a correct way. The typical capability of gifted students to learn grammar without explicit grammar explanations was demonstrated, as well as the creativity in the production of new original sentences obtained by the extrapolation of structures from chunks and fixed expressions. To provide an instance of this attitude, she aimed to include some verbs at the past perfect tense, because she believed that they fitted perfectly in the sentence and conferred the right concept of time. As a matter of facts, the correct tense was the past, therefore the student used it with the support of the teacher.

At the end of the Phase 4, the student expressed the need to read again the text, in order to allow the teacher to check her pronounce and correct any possible mistakes. The reading was fluent, and she demonstrated a good pronounce and tone. The teacher complimented to her for her pronounce and V. showed happiness and satisfaction.

3.2.5. Activity 5 – Look mum, I’m a tour guide!

The fifth lesson represented the realization of the simulated guided tour of the Palazzo della Ragione, in which the student performs the role of the guide. V. acquired the necessary knowledge and verbalized it in front of a public, which can be considered as visitors.

The activities included the technical explanation of the façade of Palazzo della Ragione, its interiors, some artistical features and the scientific experiment of the Pendulum of Foucault, previously examined by the student. During the role-playing

activity of guided tour, the student answered to the questions of visitors and behaved in a professional and appropriate way, communicating with a conative and informative register. The comprehension of the type of register, which had to be used in this context was another important goal. The activity lasted an entire afternoon, including the journey from the student's home to the Palazzo della Ragione, the time spent on the visit, some questions related to the tour and a final reflection on the activities. The lesson was conducted in a new physical place for the student, in which she could perceive many stimulations and experiment new feelings. Though she didn't show distraction or discomfort. Further information about the lesson is visible in Table 5.

Table 5

Table of Activity 5- Look mum, I'm a tour guide!

Objectives	Abilities	Competences	Activities	Assessment
Simulation of a tour of a cultural site in English. Comprehension of the language appropriate to the context.	Speaking	Linguistic: -lexicon about art and science -imperative verbs -past tenses Sociolinguistic: -register -informative and conative communication Pragmatic: -Coherence -Cohesion -Fluency	Role playing activity	Observation

Phase 1: the student goes to the cultural site Palazzo della Ragione. Thus, during the visit, she exposes the discourse prepared during the previous activities, considering the

communication tips studied and behaving professionally. She answers to the questions and gives further information about the city of Padua to the visitors.

During the final lesson, the student had to effectively face her fears and get out of her comfort zone. The activity was successfully carried out, with the support of the teacher during the role-playing activities and in the course of the final questions made by the “visitors”. V. affirmed to feel a bit nervous before the activity started, though she performed perfectly. During the speech, she expressed her interest for the topics of the tour and behaved in a professional and formal way, providing further information and interesting facts about the cultural site. In some moments of the activity, she made some minor grammar or pronounce mistakes, but she kept on talking and didn’t worry about it.

An interesting observation can be done about the fluency she acquired in spoken English: the discourse was clear and spontaneous, there weren’t any interruptions or moments of uncertainty. This is due to her preliminary preparation and commitment to the task proposed. Moreover, she manifested a flawless accuracy in the use and exposition of technical terms, which were repeatedly scanned in order to be clear to the visitors.

From an overall perspective, the student appeared prepared, sure about her capabilities and not excessively worried about possible mistakes. Her English-speaking skills deeply improved, after the many practice activities she was involved in. Furthermore, the set of the activity jointly brought her to believe more in her capabilities and not to undervalue her potential in English learning.

3.3. Tools and strategies

In line with the beliefs contained in every study about teaching to gifted students, the strategies applied with students with an exceptional potential should always be conceived to be interesting, not repetitive and stimulating for their knowledge and abilities. The present case study demonstrated the need for the student to play an active role during the course of the lessons and to be challenged by new and more difficult requirements and tasks. Assumed this necessity, traditional frontal lessons or theoretical explanations were avoided, favouring open activities, discussions and conversations with the teacher,

problem-solving and brainstorming activities and, in general, more practical approaches to English language and particularly spoken English language.

Primarily, it is fundamental to observe the teacher's approach and relation with the student. Since they didn't know each other before the activities, the teacher introduced herself to the student in a comfortable and positive perspective. As a matter of facts, it was important to reassure the student about the possibility of making mistakes with language and about the fact that she wouldn't have been judged or criticised for any errors. The teacher affirmed that there weren't any marks, nor forms of restrictive evaluation on the activities, but only a continuous observation of her interest and commitment to the tasks. This introductory moment represented a first attempt to lower down the affective filter, which obviously influenced the student's behaviour and attitude towards the activities.

Moreover, for the implementation of English-speaking activities, the student was involved in activities such as discussion, confrontation, which in some cases were planned to be similar to a friendly chat but concerned the topics of the activities. Moreover, V. was brought to argument her opinions and to compare them with the teacher's ones or with the document's information. She deeply developed and stimulated her cognitive processes of brainstorming, organisation, and categorisation of ideas, selecting and synthesising of great amount of information and notions, which in most cases belonged to scientific areas. Furthermore, she linked information in a creative and original way, figuring out new relations between the concepts. The most used tools for the improvement of V.'s speaking skills were the warm-up questions at the beginning of the activities, the oral performance of exercises and, particularly in the last lesson, the role-playing activity, which was the final and most stimulating aim of the planned lessons.

In addition, another important aspect of the activities in which the gifted student was involved was the necessity to improve her grammar knowledge. As a matter of facts, V. demonstrated an extremely developed understanding for grammar rules, even in those cases in which she had never been explained them. Thus, some phases of the activities were focused on exercises on verbal forms, which were usually preceded by a brief description of the structure and use of grammar rules. In comparison to the grammar knowledge she acquired at school, her actual grammar skills were far more developed. In fact, she immediately and perfectly carried out the exercised proposed during the

aforementioned activities. This propensity can be explained by her strong capabilities in her native language grammar, as well as by her practice in reading and writing. Thus, she puts into practice grammar rule and this attitude helps her to improve her skills, which should be furtherly developed at school.

During the activity, the most implemented didactic tools for English teaching were videos, written texts and articles, photos, mind maps and grammar exercises. Video were used as explanation of concepts, such as in the activity about the Pendulum (see Table 2), in order to transfer an oral and visual message to the gifted student. They supported V.'s learning by joining orally exposed knowledge to images and sounds, allowing the student to develop her visual memory. Equally to videos, articles and texts had a great role in the activities, being authentic materials and offering a more academic and professional perception. The texts were adapted to the English level of the student, but a few difficult elements about grammar or lexicon were maintained, in order to notice V.'s capability to overcome unknown situations and difficult syntactic structures. In the use of these materials, she was offered the possibility to stop and slow down the videos, to take her time for reading the texts and to re-watch or re-read the contents.

Furthermore, photos and images were applied to speaking activities, as in the case of the simulation of the tour guide (see Table 3). This simulation was supposed to put into practice the tips previously apprehended, allowing the student to make herself at ease with the role of tour guide. Looking at the photos, the student developed a more creative and original approach, including more alternative ideas and opinions in her answers to the task.

One of the most appreciated didactic tools by V. was the production and use of mind maps. The student was provided with a blank paper with a title in the centre. Through brainstorming activities and discussions about the order and position of each object in the paper, the concept maps were produced and increasingly enriched with details (See Annex 5). Mind maps were useful for the student, since they helped her to organise, categorize and create connections between topics and opinions. Moreover, they were the ideal tool to picture and summarise the oral discourse of the Activities 4 and 5.

In the course of all the lessons, the student was suggested to use a personal glossary, in which she could take notes about the terms relative to science, art, history and tour guiding. The glossary revealed itself really useful for the student, who

apprehended how to search for terms already read. V. was also indicated some websites for her research on lexicon and pronounce, with the aim to allow her to improve her English knowledge and skills also when she wants to practice it on her own. Some of the previously mentioned sites were the online resource of Collins Dictionary²² and the website Free Collocations²³.

To summarise, a successful strategy were the drawings of maps and tracks. In Activity 2 (See Table 2), the student was asked to represent the architectural map of the Palazzo della Ragione, following oral instructions given by the teacher. The skills involved were not only listening and oral comprehension, but also creativity and the capability to figure out something from scratch. The student appeared absorbed by this activity and wanted to produce a perfect map, being aware of the fact that it was going to be fundamental during the following activities. The drawing of the tour implied the use of her problem-solving skills, since the student needed to choose the best track to follow in order to avoid confusion and produce a clear discourse, as well as she had to organise in a proper way the timing for each attraction. Moreover, the activities incorporated one of her favourite passions, namely the drawing, in a practical and useful way.

3.4. Conclusive reflection on the results

As previously mentioned, the overall aim of the personalized activities for the gifted student was to improve her English-speaking skills, including the pronounce, the fluency and the correct use of the syntactic structures during the oral activities. Eventually, this aim was reached, as a result of the student's commitment to the tasks and collaboration with the teacher during the activities. Indeed, the student demonstrated a strong need for stimulations and for involvement in more complex and articulated tasks, which consider and require the application of the whole range of her competences, capabilities and qualities.

In the course of the activities, V. developed her English skills, improving her pronounce, fluency, lexicon, and grammar, along with an enhancement of her soft skills. Indeed, the activities required a good practice of problem-solving, brainstorming, and public speaking skills, as well as a good control of emotions and critical thought. In

²²Available on the website: <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/>

²³Available on the website: <https://www.freecollocation.com/>

addition, the writing, reading, and listening skills of the gifted student, that before the activities were more developed than the speaking skills, were taken into account during the activities, aiming to achieve an improvement in those areas.

As the researcher Lowe (2002) affirms in her studies about giftedness and personalized curricula for gifted students, V. showed an intense curiosity towards the functioning of the language and the grammar structures, the capability to recognise grammar models and deduct grammar rules from them, the capability to listen, memorize and reproduce sounds and the creative approach to the production of new sentences. The combination of her interests and English language contributed to the increase of her involvement in the tasks and stimulated her to improve her understanding of the language, in order to obtain more information. Through the use of English language, she acquired new knowledge about science and art, demonstrating an excellent memory and capability to learn new terms. In fact, the terminology related to the fields of knowledge were perfectly learnt by the student, who aimed to know all the technical terms, in order to express herself properly.

Moreover, V. showed more confidence in her capabilities and knowledge about English, being less anxious during the activities in which she was required to express her opinion or to discuss a topic with the teacher. Through the lowering of the affective filter, she felt more comfortable during English language activities, specifically with the speaking ones. It is relevant to notice that at the beginning of the lessons, the student was nervous and always worried about possible mistakes in speaking. Thus, this feeling didn't allow her to talk spontaneously and express perfectly what she wanted to. Afterwards, thanks to the support and constant assurance by the teacher, V. understood that the activities weren't supposed to be an exam, but a challenge for her English capabilities. Thus, she started to take the plunge and talk, answer to the question and joke in English, demonstrating her exceptional linguistic capabilities and abilities.

Besides, the use of topics that catch her attention and attract her interest in her spare time, primarily in the field of science, revealed itself a fundamental strategy for the improvement of English capabilities and knowledge. The student manifested more motivation to study and play an active role in the activities, because of her extreme curiosity. Furthermore, the activities resulted exciting and original, not provoking sensations of boredom or disconnection.

3.5. Feedback by the gifted student

After the conclusion of the activities, V. was provided with a satisfaction questionnaire, in which she could express her opinion about the activity, the learning strategies applied and the teacher. Furthermore, V.'s answers to the final questionnaire are visible in Annex 6.

From an overall view, she affirmed that after the personalised activities, her English language knowledge and capabilities are considerably improved. Delving into each specific language skill, she believed that her English language speaking has been strongly developed, as well as her reading abilities. In relation to the student's writing and listening skills, in the questionnaire she claimed that, according to her point of view, the aforementioned skills have been mediumly enhanced by the activity. This answer depicts the aims of the planned activities, which were supposed to develop primarily the student's oral skills and secondarily the other skills, which are more considered during the school classes. Delving into her attitude towards the speaking activities, she was interviewed about her fear to speak this language and she affirmed that the activities helped her to feel more comfortable and confident about herself and her capabilities, not to feel the fear of judgements by the teachers or the adults.

Furthermore, an interesting fact to examine is the change of V. opinion about her favourite activities in the preliminary questionnaire and in the final one. Before taking part into the personalized lessons, the activities which attracted more V.'s interest were the creation of concept maps, the group reading and discussion and the reading and comprehension of written texts. These activities involve mainly the reading and writing skills, with an emphasis on the capability of selection, analysis and synthesis of concepts and ideas. Thus, the student didn't make any reference to speaking and communicative skills.

In contrast to the preliminary questionnaire, in the questionnaire filled out by V. after the lessons, she was asked to take into account the different teaching methods and to consider the activities carried out in her evaluation. Therefore, she answered that in the course of the lessons her favourite activities were the discussion in pair about topics examined during the lesson, creation of mind maps, the reading and comprehension of texts and the simulation of the tour in the cultural site. Even though V. confirmed her interest in some activities carried out also at school, some new and more interactive speaking activities

were included between her favourites. Specifically, the discussion in pair involved the speaking skills and the capability to express her own opinion and compare it to the teacher's one, whereas the simulation of the guided tour entails the public speaking skills, a prodigious memory to remember all the information for the tour, the capability to keep the attention of the visitors, the ability to manage in a proper way both the communicative and the non-communicative language and finally the ability to manage new unknown situations.

Thus, it should be argued that her appreciation of English-speaking activities developed as a result of her participation and concern in the personalised activities, which consisted of some more active and exciting teaching strategies in comparison to the traditional ones applied in the school context. Furthermore, in the questionnaire she affirmed that the activities she enjoyed the most were those in which the most applied skill was speaking and that she would have appreciated to practice more with these activities if it was possible to. Conversely, the activities which revealed less interesting and stimulating for her were those that included grammar exercises. It was quite possible to foresee this statement since most time of the lessons at school is spent on grammar explanations and exercise and during these moments V. tends to lose interest for the lesson and disconnect from the rest of the class. However, some basic grammar contents were needed in the personalised activities, in order to improve her English general knowledge.

Focusing on the five activities, the questionnaire demonstrated that the most interesting for the student was the Activity 2, that delved into the scientific topic of the Pendulum of Foucault. This result is understandable since the activities were intentionally and carefully designed according to her passions. Furthermore, the gifted student classifies the Activity 5, the last activity that included the simulation of the guided tour, as the most original and complex for her. Indeed, this activity can be considered the more challenging and untraditional, and the obtained result represents the capability of V. to overcome difficult and new situations. The activities she appreciated less was the Activity 3, which implied some explanations about how to become a guide, though she claimed that neither this activity provoked boredom, nor disconnection to her. In conclusion, the student stated that the activities allowed her to acquire more confidence in speaking English, to learn many new terms and to understand better spoken English. In her answers, she also

included the improvement of the ability to produce mind maps, to take part in brainstorming activities and to manage anxiety.

Moreover, from the questionnaire emerged her opinion about the difference between English teaching at school and the English teaching of the planned activities for the case study: firstly, she affirmed that the use of similar strategies at school could effectively improve English level and prevent boredom. Her expectations about the activities were satisfied. Actually, in the questionnaire emerged that she didn't expect the lessons to be such interactive and absorbing, and this aspect surprised her and made her feel more satisfied and engaged, leading her to affirm that she would repeat the experience of taking part in personalised English activities.

In addition to the linguistic perspective of the feedback given by the student, the questionnaire also regarded her sensations during and after the lessons. In particular, V. confirmed the teacher's observations, stating that during the first lesson she didn't feel totally at ease, she experienced shyness and embarrassment, as well as the fear to make mistakes. During the lessons, she gradually started to feel relaxed and appreciated for her capabilities: this feeling encouraged the student to challenge herself and to understand that her fear of failure was unfounded. At the end of the activities, the student showed happiness, satisfaction, and a good mood, starting to joke and talk to the teacher in English without being shy. The present behaviour demonstrated her necessity not to feel judged and, on the contrary, to be stimulated and encouraged to get out of her comfort zone, to make new experiences and face new challenges and problematic situations.

To summarise, the activities had a significant impact on the student, from a linguistic perspective, with the improvement of English skills, and from a psychological point of view, allowing her to make new experiences and to be aware of her capabilities. Though the general aim of the present case study was to improve her language skills, a secondary goal was to make the student more self-confident and positive about her capabilities, in order to better understand the importance of developing and challenging them without feeling excessive fear of the results.

Conclusion

The advent of globalisation, industrialisation and technologies had a massive impact on the contemporary society, promoting international relations and communication. Thus, the learning of foreign languages acquired a strong relevance for the future world citizens. Research and experiments in the field of foreign languages teaching provided many new approaches and methods to stimulate the learning process with new strategies and to enhance personal, professional and scholastic students' competences.

Many authors, as Balboni, Nunan, Novello and Torresan studied the implications of innovative and unconventional teaching strategies, offering a glance on the use of the inductive approach, rather than the traditional deductive approach, which nowadays appears to be extremely formal and impossible to conform with the language learners' needs and competences. The implementation of an inductive approach allows teachers to improve their student's school results, as well as their own knowledge, capabilities, and abilities in the language, offering them a fundamental tool for their future.

Nevertheless, in the reality, the inductive approach isn't totally developed and implemented yet, because of the static approach of school systems, particularly the Italian one, to the teaching and learning processes, and because of the reluctance of many teachers, who prefer to conduct their language lessons in a more traditional and deductive way. Anyway, in many situations, these teachers perform a role of excessive supremacy, which doesn't fit with the premises of a functional and effective teaching approach.

In the particular case of gifted students, this attitude is even more visible. The concept of giftedness has not been totally explored yet, even though the great number of studies and experiments on the topic. On the scholastic perspective, teachers don't have the appropriate knowledge about giftedness, gifted students' traits and talents and, in particular, gifted education. In many cases in the Italian schools' scene, it has been observed a lack of differentiation in the strategies for this category of students, who are ignored by the school system and by teachers, making these especially talented individuals experience discomfort, sorrow, depression, disinterest in school.

Gifted individuals present many peculiar aspects and behaviours, which deserve to be enhanced and developed. They represent a fundamental resource for the whole country, but the national laws and the institutions aren't aware of how to manage this potential, and as often observed in the last century, encourage prominent students to migrate in other countries, in which they can better develop their talent. Moreover, the many legislations about inclusion and comprehension of all the categories of students aren't effective yet, and the school system remains static and traditional, not concerning about the critical situation of many of its learners.

In the international scene, some researchers attempted to found specific schools for gifted individuals, which provide appositely designed language teaching courses for the enhancement of talent. The Renzulli Center, for instance, aims to improve gifted students' learning by means of alternative and more flexible didactic strategies, which allow the addressed of this service to express their potential and nurture their passions in a different and more functional way than in public schools. On the contrary, in Italy just some laws have been approved, but not effectively realised, regarding the differentiation of curricula of gifted and talented students, in line with the principles of inclusion.

The present dissertation pursues the goal to highlight the relevance and necessity of an intervention in this situation, in order to assure a proper and stimulating teaching to gifted students. The conducted experiment revealed the possibility to improve gifted students' language skills and acquisition, by means of differentiated activities and plans, personalised due to their needs, capabilities, interests and propensions. The analysis conducted on the information about the V., the gifted student involved in the experiment, showed an absence of comprehension by the teaching body, who hasn't received the appropriate training to deal with giftedness and to design personalised didactic plans for a gifted student. It is clear that this unsolved situation leads to school problems for the gifted, who feels bored and disconnected from the rest of the class, discouraged to continue studying and committing during the lesson.

After a deep observation and examination of the aforementioned conditions, an experimental didactic plan for the gifted student has been produced, with the aim of improving English language skills, particularly speaking skill, which appears to be the least developed at school. Moreover, the secondary aim of the personalised didactic plan

was to engage the student in more challenging and stimulating activities, in order to increase her motivation in the English language learning.

The experiment demonstrated that, with a properly designed didactic plan, the student responded to the stimulations in a positive manner and managed to improve her linguistic and non-linguistic skills, working hard to go “out of her comfort zone” and develop her abilities. For this reason, it would be desirable to start an effective learner-centred design of strategies, activities, and tools even in the public school, which should be the safest place for students’ talents and education.

Tolan (2012) makes a suggestive and noteworthy metaphor, comparing cheetahs and gifted students in their scholastic profiles, as cheetahs are seen in the zoo.

When we think of cheetahs, we are likely to think first of their speed. It’s flashy. It is impressive. It’s unique. And it makes identification incredibly easy. Since cheetahs are the only animals that can run 70 mph, if you clock an animal running 70 mph, It’s a cheetah!²⁴

As a matter of facts, it is quite easy to identify cheetahs for their speed, as simple as it is possible to identify giftedness for its extremely developed cognitive and personal attitudes. Though, Tolan adds that

If a cheetah is confined to a 10 X 12-foot cage, though it may pace or fling itself against the bars in restless frustration, it won’t run 70 mph. [...] If a cheetah has only 20 mph rabbits to chase for food, it won’t run 70 mph while hunting. If it did, it would flash past its prey and go hungry! Though it might well run on its own for exercise, recreation, fulfilment of its internal drive, when given only rabbits to eat the hunting cheetah will run only fast enough to catch a rabbit.²⁵

The metaphor insists on the attitude of the animal to adapt to the extremely rigid environment of the zoo, in which its prey is a rabbit, and his life context is a little cage. Such animals have a different life from that of captivity, in which they are able to freely manifest their characteristics. Likewise, gifted students demonstrate outstanding cognitive propensions, which deserve to be always stimulated. On the contrary, school system continues offering insufficient and inadequate “rabbits”, involving them in general activities, which are unsuitable to their needs. The metaphor of the environment, furthermore, represent the school environment, characterised by absence of physical and

²⁴Tolan, Stephanie, (2012). “Is this a Cheetah?”, in: *Gifted Education Communicator. A journal for educators and parents.*, v. 43 (1), p.9.

²⁵ Ivi, p. 10.

figurative space for expressing one's creativity, unconventional ideas and opinions, capabilities, and potentials.

A school system that defines giftedness (or talent) as behavior, achievement and performance is as compromised in its ability to recognize its highly gifted students and to give them what they need as a zoo would be to recognize and provide for its cheetahs if it looked only for speed. [...] Children in cages or enclosures, no matter how bright, are unlikely to appear highly gifted.²⁶

The author satirically condemns the scholastic system and functioning, blaming it for the underachievement of many gifted students, who, feeling unappreciated and misunderstood by the school environment, decide to hide their talent, in order to “become transparent among the classmates”.²⁷

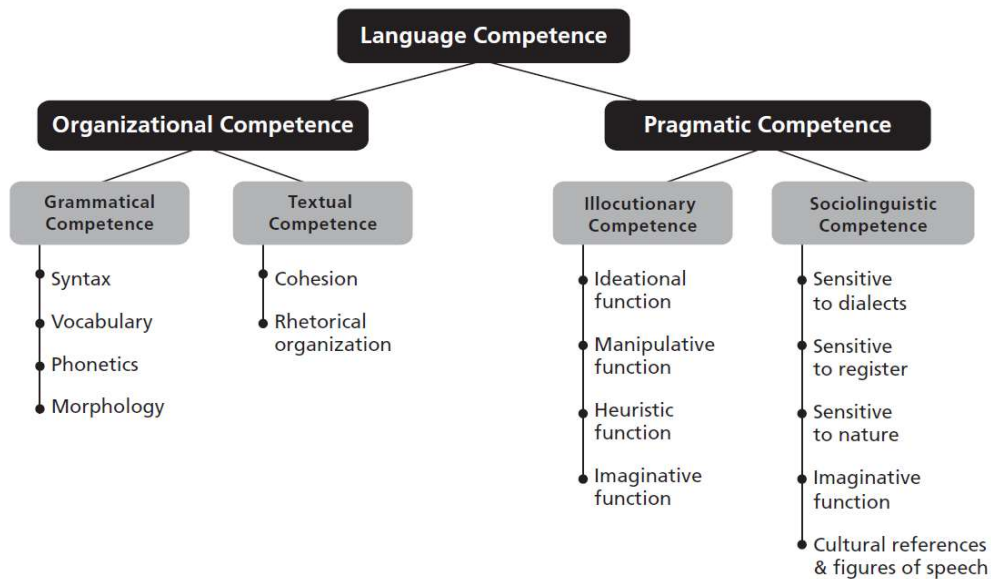
In conclusion, it is evident that this category needs particular attention and concern by the Italian school system, their teaching body and, of course, the environment in which they live, in order to develop their talents. The predictions on the future of the language teaching studies applied to the category of giftedness demonstrate the willingness to stress the necessity to implement some specific strategies for the improvement of students' talents, as well as a deeper and more specialised understanding of the possible implications of personalised didactic plans in the professional careers of the future gifted individuals.

²⁶Ibidem.

²⁷Citing a reflection of the gifted children who took part in the experiment.

Appendices

Annex 1: The table of Communicative Language Competences of Bachman – Source: Bachman (1990)



Annex 2: Differences between learners in MAC – Source: Ur (1996, p. 304).

BOX 21.1: SOME DIFFERENCES BETWEEN LEARNERS IN HETEROGENEOUS CLASSES

<p>language-learning ability language knowledge cultural background learning style attitude to the language mother tongue intelligence world knowledge learning experience knowledge of other languages</p>	<p>age or maturity gender personality confidence motivation interests independence self-discipline educational level</p>
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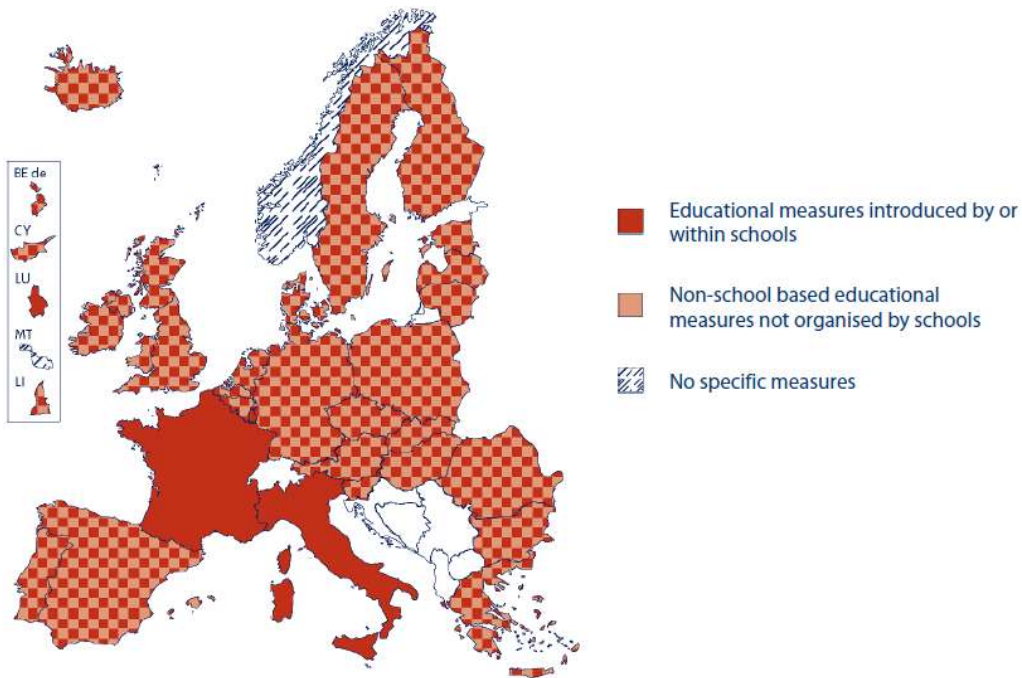
© Cambridge University Press 1996

Annex 3: Potentials and weaknesses of gifted individuals – Source: Cairo (2001)

Aspect	Strength	Weakness
Cognitive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rapidly acquire and apprehend information • Curiosity • Problem solving • Abstraction capability • Conceptualisation • Research of cause-effect relations • Long-lasting concentration • Persistence in their areas of interest 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refusal of routine • Embarrassing questions and excessive interest • Refuse of unclear and non-logical areas of life (ex: costumes and traditions) • Risk of perception as different and cringe • Stubbornness • Resistance to interruptions
Affective-relational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intrinsic motivation • Organisation and leadership skills • High expectations • Sensitivity and empathy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of patience towards slower classmates • Stubbornness • Resistance towards indications • Arrogance to obtain leadership • Intolerance • Perfectionism • Concern • Self-closure • Risk of depression • Excessive influence of critics and opinion from the external world • Submissive attitude
Personal-social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curiosity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excessive interest

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need for honesty and values • Energy • Independence • Variety of interests and versatility • Sense of humour 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hyperactivity • Anxiety for human issues • Refusal of classmates and parents • Defensive responses • Disorganisation • Scholastic dropout • Frustration and difficulty to take decisions • Tendency to become the “clown” of the class
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Annex 4: Map of the European Member States and the strategies implemented for gifted students in their national education system in 2006. – Source: EURYDICE (2006)



Annex 5: The preliminary questionnaire and the answers of the gifted student.

QUESTIONARIO PRELIMINARE

Gentile studente,

nel presente questionario ti saranno poste domande riguardanti alcune informazioni personali, la tua esperienza scolastica, i tuoi interessi e le tue passioni e la tua opinione in merito alla lingua inglese e al suo insegnamento. Nella seconda sezione, sarà necessaria la presenza di un genitore.

Al fine di strutturare delle attività piacevoli e interessanti per te, ti chiedo di dedicare qualche minuto a rispondere alle domande seguenti.

Grazie per la tua collaborazione.

SEZIONE 1. Informazioni personali

- Indica la tua età.
- Indica la provincia in cui risiedi.
- Cosa ti piace fare nel tempo libero?
- Hai degli hobby? Se sì, quali?
- Pratichi sport? Se sì, quali?
- Sei appassionat* di lettura? Se sì, qual è il tuo genere preferito?
- Sei appassionat* di film o serie TV? Se sì, quali sono i tuoi preferiti?
- Quando sei in compagnia dei tuoi amici, cosa vi piace fare?
- Che lavoro ti piacerebbe fare da grande?
- Come definiresti in tre parole la tua personalità?

SEZIONE 2. Questionario per il genitore

- A che età su* figli* ha ottenuto la valutazione di plusdotazione?
- Quali segnali l'hanno portat* a svolgere una valutazione dell* propri* figli*?
- Qual è stata la reazione dell'ambiente familiare rispetto all'esito della valutazione?
 - Positiva
 - Negativa
 - Né positiva, né negativa
- Prima di conoscere l'esito della valutazione, aveva mai sentito parlare di plusdotazione?
Positiva

- Sì
- No
- Altro...
- In quanto genitore di un individuo plusdotato, quali vantaggi e quali criticità evidenzia nella sua educazione?
- In quanto genitore di un individuo plusdotato, svolge o ha svolto un percorso di coaching o parent training? Se sì, racconti brevemente l'esperienza.
- Presentando la valutazione di plusdotazione ai referenti di competenza a scuola, è stata proposta una strategia di supporto specifica per le necessità di su* figli*?
 - Sì
 - No
 - Altro...
- Se sì, quale? Si è rivelata utile e soddisfacente?
- Durante la carriera scolastica della studentessa, quali tra le seguenti attività sono state svolte? (anche più di una risposta)
 - Approfondimenti degli argomenti trattati
 - Differenziazione (piano didattico personalizzato)
 - Arricchimento dell'offerta formativa
 - Compattazione del curricolo
 - Accelerazione dell'insegnamento di una o più materie
 - Salto di classe
 - Apprendimento autoregolato
 - Tutte
 - Nessuna di queste
 - Altro...
- Gli insegnanti di su* figli* le hanno mai riportato difficoltà di gestione delle relazioni di su* figli* con i compagni? Se sì, che tipo di difficoltà hanno riscontrato?
- Oltre alla valutazione di plusdotazione, sua figlia è stata sottoposta a test per il riconoscimento di disturbi specifici dell'apprendimento (DSA) o di un disturbo di deficit dell'attenzione e iperattività (ADHD)?
 - Sì
 - No
 - Non so/Non voglio rispondere
- Se sì, quali sono stati gli esiti?
 - Riconosciuto DSA
 - Riconosciuto ADHD
 - Nessun riconoscimento

- Non so

SEZIONE 3. Quesiti generali sulla scuola e sulla lingua inglese.

- Indica il grado e l'anno di scuola che stai frequentando.
- Indica (se presente) la seconda lingua studiata a scuola.
- Qual è la tua materia scolastica preferita o quella che trovi più interessante?
- Ti piace la lingua inglese?
 - Sì
 - No
 - Non so
- Vorresti usare la lingua inglese per lavoro in futuro?
 - Sì
 - No
 - Non so
- Se sì, indicane il motivo.
- Nel tempo libero ti piace esercitarti con la lingua inglese?
 - Sì
 - No
 - Non so
- Se sì, in che modo?
- Ritieni che l'insegnamento scolastico si adatti alle tue necessità e capacità?
 - Sì
 - No
 - Non so
- Se la risposta alla domanda precedente è **no**, indicane il motivo.
- Secondo la tua esperienza, gli studenti plusdotati hanno bisogno di un insegnamento personalizzato? Motiva la tua risposta.

SEZIONE 4. Quesiti sull'esperienza scolastica.

- Indica, secondo il tuo punto di vista, quanto è interessante l'insegnamento della lingua inglese nella tua classe (1= molto scarso; 5=ottimo)

	1	2	3	4	5	
Molto scarso	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Ottimo

- Indica, secondo il tuo punto di vista, l'appropriatezza dell'insegnamento della lingua inglese nella tua classe (1=molto scarso; 5=ottimo)

	1	2	3	4	5	
Molto scarso	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Ottimo

- Indica, secondo il tuo punto di vista, quanto l'insegnamento della lingua inglese nella tua classe ti stimola a studiare l'inglese in contesti extrascolastici (1=molto scarso; 5= molto)

	1	2	3	4	5	
Molto scarso	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Ottimo

- Quali attività svolgi in classe durante le lezioni di lingua inglese? (anche più risposte)

- Attività di brainstorming
- Role playing
- Classi invertite
- Visione di video, stralci di film o documentari
- Creazione di mappe concettuali
- Attività sotto forma di giochi
- Lavori di gruppo
- Esercizi tratti dal libro
- Lezione frontale
- Attività di ascolto e comprensione
- Discussione di temi in gruppi o a coppie
- Lettura individuale di materiali autentici (es: articoli di giornale)
- Lettura in gruppo e discussione sul tema
- Stesura di riassunti o schemi
- Produzione di brevi testi in lingua inglese
- Lettura di testi in lingua inglese e scrittura delle risposte a domande riguardanti i testi
- Nessuna di queste
- Tutte
- Altro...

- Tra queste, quali sono le tue preferite? (anche più risposte)

- Attività di brainstorming
- Role playing
- Classi invertite
- Visione di video, stralci di film o documentari
- Creazione di mappe concettuali
- Attività sotto forma di giochi
- Lavori di gruppo
- Esercizi tratti dal libro
- Lezione frontale
- Attività di ascolto e comprensione

- Discussione di temi in gruppi o a coppie
- Lettura individuale di materiali autentici (es: articoli di giornale)
- Lettura in gruppo e discussione sul tema
- Stesura di riassunti o schemi
- Produzione di brevi testi in lingua inglese
- Lettura di testi in lingua inglese e scrittura delle risposte a domande riguardanti i testi
- Nessuna di queste
- Tutte
- Altro...

- Indica, secondo il tuo punto di vista, la tua preparazione generale nella lingua inglese (1=molto scarso; 5=ottimo)

	1	2	3	4	5	
Molto scarso	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Ottimo

- Indica, secondo il tuo punto di vista, la tua capacità di listening, cioè ascolto e comprensione (1=molto scarso; 5=ottimo)

	1	2	3	4	5	
Molto scarso	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Ottimo

- Indica, secondo il tuo punto di vista, la tua capacità di reading, cioè lettura e comprensione (1=molto scarso; 5=ottimo)

	1	2	3	4	5	
Molto scarso	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Ottimo

- Indica, secondo il tuo punto di vista, la tua capacità di writing, cioè scrittura di un testo in lingua inglese in modo corretto e fluido (1=molto scarso; 5=ottimo)

	1	2	3	4	5	
Molto scarso	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Ottimo

- Indica, secondo il tuo punto di vista, la tua capacità di speaking, cioè la capacità di parlare in lingua inglese in modo corretto e fluido (1=molto scarso; 5=ottimo)

	1	2	3	4	5	
Molto scarso	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Ottimo

- C'è una capacità tra queste che vorresti migliorare? (anche più risposte)

- Listening
- Reading
- Writing
- Speaking
- Nessuna
- Tutte

- Durante le lezioni di inglese, quali capacità tra queste ti sembra di star applicando maggiormente? (anche più risposte)
 - Listening
 - Reading
 - Writing
 - Speaking
 - Nessuna
 - Tutte
- Durante le lezioni di inglese, quali capacità tra queste ti sembra di **non** star applicando? (anche più risposte)
 - Listening
 - Reading
 - Writing
 - Speaking
 - Nessuna
 - Tutte
- Se ce ne sono, vorresti migliorarle o applicarle maggiormente?
 - Sì
 - No
 - Non so
- In genere, quali sono gli argomenti che vengono trattati durante le lezioni di lingua inglese (es: cultura inglese, letteratura, temi di attualità...)
- Questi argomenti sono interessanti per te?
 - Sì
 - No
 - Non so
- Vorresti che, nel corso delle lezioni di lingua inglese, si trattino altri temi? Se sì, quali?
- Pensi che trattare dei temi più interessanti per te potrebbe migliorare la tua conoscenza della lingua inglese?
 - Sì
 - No
 - Non so

SEZIONE 5. Quesiti sulle aspettative in merito alle attività.

- Cosa ti piacerebbe fare durante le attività extrascolastiche di apprendimento proposte?
- Quali temi ti piacerebbe affrontare?

- Secondo le tue aspettative, quali competenze potresti ottenere grazie a queste attività?
- Gradiresti l'uso di materiali autentici ed esempi concreti durante le attività?
 - Sì
 - No
 - Non so
- Secondo le tue aspettative, indica quanto migliorerà la tua capacità di **speaking** (1=molto scarso; 5=molto)

	1	2	3	4	5	
Molto scarso	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Ottimo

- Secondo le tue aspettative, indica quanto migliorerà la tua capacità di **reading** (1=molto scarso; 5=molto)

	1	2	3	4	5	
Molto scarso	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Ottimo

- Secondo le tue aspettative, indica quanto migliorerà la tua capacità di **writing** (1=molto scarso; 5=molto)

	1	2	3	4	5	
Molto scarso	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Ottimo

- Secondo le tue aspettative, indica quanto migliorerà la tua capacità di **listening** (1=molto scarso; 5=molto)

	1	2	3	4	5	
Molto scarso	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Ottimo

Se hai commenti, suggerimenti, domande o perplessità, puoi scrivermele qui o inviarmi un'email al mio indirizzo istituzionale:

martina.dipierro@studenti.unipd.it.

Ti ringrazio per l'attenzione!

Annex 6: The satisfaction questionnaire and the answers of the gifted student.

QUESTIONARIO FINALE

Gentile studente,
il presente questionario, somministrato al concludersi delle attività, serve a ottenere un feedback oggettivo sulla qualità e sui risultati ottenuti attraverso le attività stesse. Al fine di comprenderne l'efficacia, ti invito a rispondere in modo oggettivo e sincero alle seguenti domande.

Grazie per l'attenzione!

Martina Di Pierro

SEZIONE 1. Quesiti generali sui miglioramenti osservati.

- Da una prospettiva linguistica, in che misura pensi che la tua conoscenza generale dell'inglese sia migliorata? (1=molto poco; 5=molto)

	1	2	3	4	5	
Molto poco	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Molto

- Quale tra queste pensi sia stata l'abilità più esercitata durante le attività?

- Reading
- Speaking
- Writing
- Listening

- Quanto pensi che la tua abilità di **speaking** sia migliorata? (1=molto poco; 5=molto)

	1	2	3	4	5	
Molto poco	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Molto

- Quanto pensi che la tua abilità di **listening** sia migliorata? (1=molto poco; 5=molto)

	1	2	3	4	5	
Molto poco	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Molto

- Quanto pensi che la tua abilità di **reading** sia migliorata? (1=molto poco; 5=molto)

	1	2	3	4	5	
Molto poco	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Molto

- Quanto pensi che la tua abilità di **writing** sia migliorata? (1=molto poco; 5=molto)

	1	2	3	4	5	
Molto poco	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Molto

- Pensi che continuare a svolgere attività didattiche simili (a scuola o a casa) potrebbe contribuire al miglioramento della tua conoscenza della lingua inglese?
 - Sì
 - No
 - Altro...
- Da una prospettiva linguistica, ti senti più fiduciosa nelle tue competenze in lingua inglese?
 - Sì
 - No
 - Altro...
- Da una prospettiva linguistica, in quale quantità senti meno ansia nel dover parlare in inglese (1=molto poco; 5=molto)

	1	2	3	4	5	
Molto poco	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Molto
- Da una prospettiva linguistica, in quale quantità ti senti capace nel dover parlare in inglese (1=molto poco; 5=molto)

	1	2	3	4	5	
Molto poco	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Molto
- Da una prospettiva linguistica, in quale quantità ti senti capace nello svolgere altre attività (listening, reading, writing) in inglese? (1=molto poco; 5=molto)

	1	2	3	4	5	
Molto poco	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Molto
- Considerate le modalità delle lezioni, qual è la skill che hai preferito applicare?
 - Speaking
 - Reading
 - Writing
 - Listening
 - Altro...
- Quali, tra le attività svolte durante le lezioni, ti è piaciuta maggiormente? (anche più risposte)
 - Discussione di temi in coppia
 - Domande e risposte (anche con info personali)
 - Creazione di mappe concettuali
 - Creazione di disegni/rappresentazione di oggetti
 - Visione e comprensione di video
 - Lettura e comprensione di testi
 - Simulazione della visita
 - Esercizi di grammatica
 - Rielaborazione di testi (es: creazione della chat di Whatsapp)

- Pianificazione di azioni da svolgere (es: organizzazione della visita e del percorso Campodarsego-Padova)
- Attività di brainstorming
- Stesura di riassunti
- Altro...
- Quali, tra le attività svolte durante le lezioni, ti è piaciuta minormente? (anche più risposte)
 - Discussione di temi in coppia
 - Domande e risposte (anche con info personali)
 - Creazione di mappe concettuali
 - Creazione di disegni/rappresentazione di oggetti
 - Visione e comprensione di video
 - Lettura e comprensione di testi
 - Simulazione della visita
 - Esercizi di grammatica
 - Rielaborazione di testi (es: creazione della chat di Whatsapp)
 - Pianificazione di azioni da svolgere (es: organizzazione della visita e del percorso Campodarsego-Padova)
 - Attività di brainstorming
 - Stesura di riassunti
 - Altro...
- Tra queste opzioni, quali attività avresti voluto svolgere maggiormente o in modo più approfondito? (anche più risposte)
 - Discussione di temi in coppia
 - Domande e risposte (anche con info personali)
 - Creazione di mappe concettuali
 - Creazione di disegni/rappresentazione di oggetti
 - Visione e comprensione di video
 - Lettura e comprensione di testi
 - Simulazione della visita
 - Esercizi di grammatica
 - Rielaborazione di testi (es: creazione della chat di Whatsapp)
 - Pianificazione di azioni da svolgere (es: organizzazione della visita e del percorso Campodarsego-Padova)
 - Attività di brainstorming
 - Stesura di riassunti
 - Altro...
- In conclusione, cosa pensi di aver appreso nel corso di queste attività da un punto di vista linguistico?

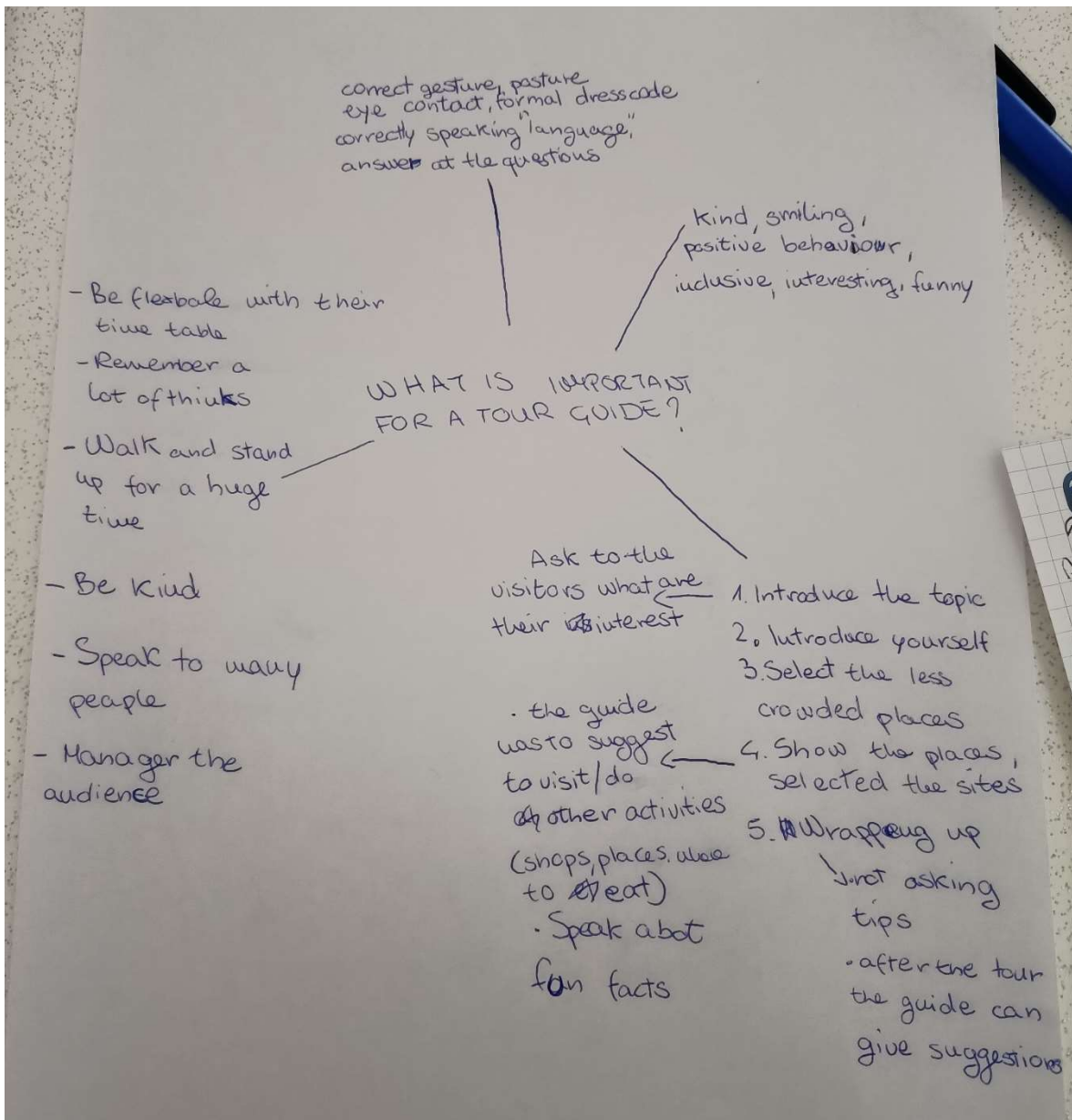
SEZIONE 2. Quesiti sulle opinioni riguardanti le attività.

- Qual è stata l'attività più interessante per te?
 - Attività 1 (Presentazione del Palazzo della Ragione)
 - Attività 2 (Il Pendolo di Foucault)
 - Attività 3 (Come comunica una guida turistica?)
 - Attività 4 (Preparazione del discorso)
 - Attività 5 (Visita al Palazzo della Ragione)
 - Nessuna

- Altro...
- Qual è stata l'attività più originale per te?
 - Attività 1 (Presentazione del Palazzo della Ragione)
 - Attività 2 (Il Pendolo di Foucault)
 - Attività 3 (Come comunica una guida turistica?)
 - Attività 4 (Preparazione del discorso)
 - Attività 5 (Visita al Palazzo della Ragione)
 - Nessuna
 - Altro...
- Qual è stata l'attività più ripetitiva/noiosa per te?
 - Attività 1 (Presentazione del Palazzo della Ragione)
 - Attività 2 (Il Pendolo di Foucault)
 - Attività 3 (Come comunica una guida turistica?)
 - Attività 4 (Preparazione del discorso)
 - Attività 5 (Visita al Palazzo della Ragione)
 - Nessuna
 - Altro...
- Qual è stata l'attività più difficile per te?
 - Attività 1 (Presentazione del Palazzo della Ragione)
 - Attività 2 (Il Pendolo di Foucault)
 - Attività 3 (Come comunica una guida turistica?)
 - Attività 4 (Preparazione del discorso)
 - Attività 5 (Visita al Palazzo della Ragione)
 - Nessuna
 - Altro...
- Hai avvertito delle sensazioni positive durante le lezioni? Se sì, quali?
- Hai avvertito delle sensazioni negative durante le lezioni? Se sì, quali?
- Le lezioni ti hanno provocato noia o distrazione?
- Le lezioni hanno rispecchiato i tuoi interessi?
 - Sì
 - No
 - Altro...
- Le lezioni hanno rispettato le tue aspettative?
 - Sì
 - No
 - Altro...
- Le tue aspettative sull'approccio e sulle strategie utilizzate nel corso delle lezioni sono state rispettate?
- Hai riscontrato difficoltà o problemi durante le lezioni?
- Avresti voluto approfondire maggiormente i temi, se ci fosse stata la possibilità?
 - Sì

- No
 - Altro...
- Preferiresti che si applicasse un approccio simile a quello delle attività individuali svolte anche durante le lezioni scolastiche?
- Descrivi con tre parole il tuo umore generale alla fine delle ore di lezione.
- Oltre all'aspetto linguistico, le lezioni hanno sviluppato in te delle soft skill (competenze trasversali)? Se sì, quali?
- In linea generale, ripeteresti l'esperienza?
 - Sì
 - No
 - Altro...
- Grazie mille per il tempo dedicatomi. Se vuoi condividere qualche commento o qualche suggerimento, scrivilo pure qui.

Annex 7: The mind map produced during the Activity 4 by the gifted student.



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Summary

L'insegnamento delle lingue straniere ha acquisito una rilevanza estrema nel corso degli ultimi decenni, che hanno portato un'ondata di innovazione, permettendo all'uomo di comunicare anche a lunghe distanze con un solo click. L'eliminazione delle barriere geografiche e comunicative ha comportato una maggiore necessità di conoscere le lingue straniere, al fine di poter ampliare il target comunicativo, particolarmente nei settori commerciali e di marketing. Sulla base di questi presupposti si fonda la necessità di migliorare l'insegnamento delle lingue straniere sin dalla tenera età, nonché di orientare l'apprendimento a obiettivi più concreti e pragmatici, quali l'ottenimento da parte degli apprendenti di una lingua straniera di efficaci competenze comunicative.

Considerando la grande varietà di studi e approfondimenti nell'ambito dell'insegnamento delle lingue straniere nelle scuole, si è potuta constatare la forte staticità e rigidità del sistema scolastico italiano, che impone l'uso di un approccio fondamentalmente deduttivo, in cui il docente si eleva a *magister* e insegna *ex cathedra*. Come vari autori hanno evidenziato, il metodo deduttivo ricorre a strategie tradizionali, che mirano al semplice apprendimento delle conoscenze teoriche e grammaticali, trascurando l'obiettivo fondamentale dell'apprendere una lingua: la capacità di parlarla e utilizzarla nel mondo reale.

Il termine "apprendimento", infatti, è ben distinto dal termine "acquisizione", secondo le teorie di Krashen, che sottolinea le differenze tra i due atti cognitivi. Nell'apprendimento, lo studente riceve informazioni dall'insegnante e assorbe le regole, le procedure e i comportamenti linguistici in modo intenzionale e conscio. L'orientamento dell'insegnamento, in questo caso, è basato sull'offerta delle nozioni e sul loro apprendimento. Al contrario, l'acquisizione si basa sul carattere quasi subconscio dell'appropriazione delle nozioni, che sono offerte con naturalezza e spontaneità allo studente, mentre egli è focalizzato sull'uso pragmatico della lingua. In tal modo, le regole e le procedure linguistiche sono interiorizzate dallo studente, che avrà anche ottenuto competenze comunicative nella lingua e non avrà sofferto l'innalzamento del filtro affettivo, che influenza notevolmente il processo di apprendimento sul piano emotivo.

La ricerca in materia supporta la teoria di Krashen sull'Approccio Naturale dell'insegnamento delle lingue straniere ed evidenzia la necessità degli studenti di

acquisire, piuttosto che di apprendere, una lingua nel contesto scolastico. Pertanto, gli insegnanti dovrebbero adattare le loro strategie a questo bisogno, al fine di migliorare l'apprendimento e la motivazione verso lo stesso. L'Approccio Naturale condivide il fine di rendere più pragmatico il processo di apprendimento con l'approccio comunicativo, ideato dalla corrente Gestalt nel XX secolo e sviluppato, in seguito, attraverso diverse tecniche più innovative e stimolanti.

L'approccio comunicativo, com'è possibile dedurre dal nome stesso, si fonda sulla competenza comunicativa ottenuta nel processo di acquisizione di una lingua. Dovendo essere il fine primario dell'insegnamento, la comunicazione in una lingua straniera è continuamente esercitata nell'applicazione delle tecniche che traggono le loro basi teoriche dall'approccio comunicativo. Gli studenti sono motivati ad apprendere tramite lezioni non più prettamente frontali, ma anche più interattive e coinvolgenti, che mettono al centro i loro bisogni, i loro interessi e le loro propensioni.

Inoltre, uno strumento didattico di essenziale importanza negli approcci induttivi è l'uso di materiali non creati appositamente a scopo didattico, ma di materiali autentici e utilizzati nella realtà. È importante considerare che tali materiali sono ideati per un target di madrelingua, che riescono a comprendere la cultura, gli usi e i costumi, l'ironia e le peculiarità linguistiche di una lingua. Pertanto, tali materiali sono pregni di cultura, di espressioni idiomatiche e dialettali e modi di dire che, al contrario, non si potrebbero riscontrare in materiali didattici, prodotti per apprendenti della lingua.

Sulla base delle presenti affermazioni, è possibile stabilire i principi e gli obiettivi di apprendimento e scegliere le strategie didattiche più appropriate, tenendo sempre in considerazione la centralità degli studenti nel processo. Nella concretezza, l'apprendimento e l'insegnamento sono caratterizzati da una serie di variabili, che rendono ogni contesto scolastico e ogni individuo in esso presente unico e irripetibile. Pertanto, come affermato da Caon (2006), sorge la necessità di impostare la didattica in modo più inclusivo, tendendo a osservare, valutare e valorizzare le differenze individuali di ogni apprendente. Con l'avvento della globalizzazione e dell'innovazione tecnologica e psicologica, è possibile individuare in classe una serie di casistiche peculiari e che provocano conseguenze evidenti sul processo di apprendimento. Sia il caso di studenti con una lingua madre diversa da quella del contesto scolastico, affetti da DSA, ritardi cognitivi o con problemi psicofisici di qualsiasi tipo, o che si tratti di studenti neurotipici,

è fondamentale creare un clima inclusivo, in cui ogni studente riesca a sviluppare interesse e capacità verso la materia appresa in modo spontaneo e naturale. Caon (2006) e Ur (1996) esaminano il concetto di Classe ad Abilità Differenziate (CAD), il cui orientamento, come si può presumere dal nome, è fortemente focalizzato sullo studente e sui suoi bisogni. In queste CAD si crea, pertanto, un ambiente flessibile e conformato alle necessità di ogni studente, attraverso l'uso di materiali e di compiti differenziati, la concessione di tempi diversi e la proposta di attività extra-curricolari o di portfolio conclusivi.

Gli ideali di inclusione, la strutturazione di classi con strategie differenziate e con approcci fondamentalmente induttivi e comunicativi sono diventate l'ideale didattico nella scuola del XXI secolo. Inoltre, le tesi precedentemente menzionate sono avvalorate e applicate da Torresan (2022) che propone una grande varietà di strategie didattiche, tra cui l'insegnante può scegliere in base alle competenze che vuole sviluppare negli alunni. Egli sviluppa un rilevante contributo alla didattica delle lingue straniere, proponendo una serie di strategie, applicabili in base ai processi cognitivi e ai meccanismi di apprendimento che gli insegnanti vogliono sviluppare.

Tuttavia, risulta molto comune la perplessità dei docenti verso tecniche di insegnamento più tendenti all'approccio induttivo, rispetto a quello deduttivo. Pertanto, è necessario lavorare ulteriormente alla formazione dei docenti con un orientamento centrato sullo studente, che tenga in conto i suoi bisogni educativi e dell'apprendimento e faccia leva sulle competenze possedute, al fine di integrarle con capacità comunicative e svilupparne delle nuove.

Questo discorso coinvolge ancor più nello specifico il caso della plusdotazione, che è crescentemente rilevata nelle scuole italiane nel corso dell'ultimo decennio, a seguito di una prima produzione normativa in materia. La plusdotazione, o *giftedness* in inglese, è una caratteristica intrigante e complessa di alcuni individui, i quali manifestano capacità cognitive estremamente sviluppate, oltre a un approccio creativo e innovativo e una forte motivazione. Nel contesto scolastico, nella maggior parte dei casi, i bisogni degli studenti plusdotati non sono soddisfatti e, al contrario, le loro capacità sono frequentemente inibite, a causa della non convenzionalità delle loro risposte, idee e opinioni. Si verifica di frequente un appiattimento, o un tentativo di nascondere da parte dello studente, del talento, dovuto al loro sentirsi diversi, non accettati e non inclusi nelle

fasi di insegnamento. È anche fondamentale rimarcare la loro estrema sensibilità e il loro interesse verso le cause sociali, la loro capacità di osservazione e acquisizione di informazioni in modo non tradizionale e straordinario.

Novello (2022) elenca le caratteristiche dell'individuo gifted e, in secondo luogo, dello studente gifted, ponendo particolarmente l'attenzione all'insegnamento e apprendimento delle lingue. L'approccio creativo ai *task*, l'interesse per il funzionamento delle lingue e la facile deduzione di esso attraverso l'osservazione dei fenomeni linguistici, la capacità di apprendere e memorizzare lessico, la sensibilità verso la cultura della lingua appresa e verso le relative differenze culturali, sono solo alcuni degli aspetti che uno studente plusdotato manifesta nel corso di una lezione di lingua. D'altronde, non essendo sempre favorito dal contesto in cui si trova, lo studente plusdotato in alcuni casi manifesta anche criticità, disinteresse, disconnessione e distrazione dal resto della classe, fino ad arrivare al disprezzo verso il sistema scolastico e alla volontà di abbandonare gli studi.

Sul piano normativo internazionale e nazionale, i legislatori hanno considerato la rilevanza del fenomeno e la necessità di provvedere a un insegnamento e a una formazione adeguati a coloro che potrebbero diventare i futuri leader nazionali e internazionali. Nella normativa internazionale, gli organi dell'Unione Europea hanno emesso la raccomandazione N. 1248/1994 e l'Opinione del Comunicato Economico e Sociale Europeo (CESE) sul tema "Liberare il potenziale dei bambini e dei giovani ad elevate capacità intellettive nell'Unione europea", evidenziando la peculiarità degli studenti gifted e suggerendo ai Paesi Membri di gestire il fenomeno attraverso la progettazione scolastica di attività differenziate per gli studenti e, in secondo luogo, l'avviamento di una formazione specifica per gli insegnanti, affinché possano sapere come affrontare la pianificazione di un piano personalizzato (o differenziato) per gli studenti ad alto potenziale cognitivo. L'obiettivo era la diminuzione, per quanto possibile, dei flussi migratori verso paesi extra-europei, la nota "fuga di cervelli".

Nella scena nazionale italiana, l'apparato legislativo ha recepito la raccomandazione, legiferando in materia di plusdotazione attraverso il DD n. 1603 del 15/11/18, che ha istituito un Comitato Tecnico Nazionale per la tutela del diritto allo studio di alunni e studenti ad alto potenziale intellettuale. Gli studenti plusdotati sono stati annessi nella categoria degli studenti con Bisogni Educativi Speciali (BES), a cui il corpo

docenti può proporre l'adozione di un piano didattico personalizzato, che si conformi ai bisogni, agli interessi e alle caratteristiche dello studente, determinando un miglioramento delle sue capacità cognitive e un rafforzamento delle sue competenze comunicative, socio-relazionali e personali.

Tuttavia, questa normativa non ha avuto un impatto concreto nel sistema scolastico, in quanto molti docenti non sono ancora sufficientemente preparati in materia, né ricevono alcun tipo di formazione dallo Stato. Pertanto, è di fondamentale importanza continuare a rimarcare la necessità di un intervento concreto e definitivo nel sistema d'istruzione italiano, al fine di non perdere i talenti della nostra nazione.

Inoltre, tali normative incoraggiano fortemente lo sviluppo di un ambiente scolastico inclusivo e di supporto per la crescita e l'apprendimento degli studenti. Al fine di promuovere un'atmosfera scolastica inclusive, gli insegnanti devono osservare con attenzione e valutare ogni atteggiamento, comportamento, stile e ritmo di apprendimento, interesse e propensione dei suoi studenti, mirando a definire le strategie didattiche più adeguate al loro processo di apprendimento delle lingue straniere. Questa analisi si rivela ancora più importante e attuale nel caso degli studenti plusdotati, che in genere sono sempre considerati "capaci di farcela da soli" e, a causa della loro autonomia nell'apprendimento, vengono totalmente trascurati dai docenti e dal sistema scolastico.

Pertanto, gli insegnanti dovrebbero osservare le caratteristiche individuali di ogni studente plusdotato, in quanto esse mostrano evidenti differenze e definire un approccio personalizzato per il loro insegnamento. In precedenza, si è provato a costituire una strategia che andasse bene per tutti gli studenti gifted, ma, come precedentemente affermato, ogni studente dimostra caratteristiche, punti di forza e di debolezza diversi e ineguagliabili. Quindi, è probabile che una strategia univoca per la categoria di studenti "gifted" non sarebbe efficace per nessuno di loro.

Oltre all'apprendimento scolastico, è fondamentale che i docenti stimolino la motivazione intrinseca all'apprendimento e la creatività dello studente, incoraggiandolo a liberarsi dalla paura di sbagliare e a esprimere le proprie capacità come meglio preferisce. In funzione di ciò, è necessario promuovere un ambiente sano, di supporto e di accettazione delle differenze, sia nel rapporto tra gli studenti, sia nella relazione con i docenti.

Alcuni autori, tra cui Novello (2021,2022), Winebrenner (2012), Lucangeli (2019) hanno individuato alcune tecniche e alcune attività che migliorano l'apprendimento degli studenti plusdotati, includendo anche alcuni consigli per i docenti che si trovano a pianificare delle attività per loro. Tra di questi, si afferma in particolare che è importante evitare ripetizione superflue o esercizi di ripasso di un contenuto, quando lo studente dimostra di averlo già appreso. In tal caso, l'insegnante può accelerare il ritmo della lezione o delle attività dello studente, in modo tale da non provocargli noia o distrazione. Inoltre, è fondamentale che il ruolo dell'insegnante non sia più quello dell'individuo possedente una conoscenza suprema, che impartisce lezioni sempre corrette e che non può essere contraddetto. Anzi, l'insegnante diventa una guida, un supporto nel processo di apprendimento e dà agli studenti più responsabilità per il loro processo di apprendimento. Lucangeli (2019) consiglia al corpo docenti degli studenti plusdotati di pianificare attività complesse e sfidanti, al fine di sostenere il talento, ma evitando, allo stesso tempo, di generare eccessivo perfezionismo, che sfocerebbe in un'eccessiva preoccupazione per gli errori che si possono commettere e frustrazione. Zanetti (2019) afferma che il processo di insegnamento deve essere flessibile e conformarsi ai bisogni educativi degli studenti, sulla base di criteri personali, proponendo agli studenti approfondimenti o attività extrascolastiche, offrendo loro un arricchimento o un'accelerazione del curriculum, oltre alla possibilità di richiedere un programma didattico differenziato.

Novello (2021) considera alcune strategie per l'insegnamento della lingua inglese agli studenti plusdotati, tenendo a mente le principali caratteristiche e propensioni di questi studenti, tra cui la forte motivazione e la creatività, la curiosità e l'impegno devoluto per lo svolgimento delle attività, dei compiti e dei *task*. L'autore ha raccolto delle strategie didattiche efficaci nel coinvolgimento delle caratteristiche cognitive e non cognitive degli studenti gifted. Tra esse, è interessante osservare la capacità di dedurre regole e modelli dalla comprensione testuale e orale, che si sviluppa nelle strategie didattiche di riflessione autonoma o semi-autonoma sul funzionamento della lingua, la capacità di memorizzare una gran quantità di lessico in modo stabile, che è associata all'introduzione frequente di nuovo lessico. Il pensiero divergente, tipico negli studenti ad alto funzionamento cognitivo, è canalizzato e stimolato in attività di associazione e raggruppamento in liste, oggetti e simboli. La creatività nell'uso della lingua e la costante

creazione di nuove frasi, tratte da quanto acquisito dal mondo esterno, sono applicate nella produzione creativa di storie, scene, poesie, filastrocche, nell'invenzione di giochi e attività ludiche e, infine, nella partecipazione a progetti. È importante rimarcare che alcuni studenti gifted manifestano una preferenza verso il lavoro individuale, che consente loro di svolgere le attività secondo i propri ritmi e tempi. Tuttavia, il potenziale degli studenti gifted, particolarmente quando esercitato in attività di gruppo come i progetti, sostiene, supporta e motiva i compagni di classe e favorisce un ambiente di leadership positiva, in cui lo studente plusdotato gestisce l'organizzazione e la collaborazione con i compagni.

Novello (2021), in un'analisi riguardante dei dati statistici raccolti in precedenza, denota la forte predisposizione e preferenza degli studenti plusdotati verso le attività che sviluppino le loro capacità di speaking. L'autore, pertanto, propone lo sviluppo di strategie come discussioni, dibattiti, interviste, descrizioni e role play da svolgere durante le attività scolastiche, al fine di dar voce a questa predisposizione e svilupparla.

A seguito di un'osservazione approfondita delle strategie didattiche più appropriate ed efficaci, proposte dagli autori citati in precedenza, l'analisi si è concentrata sull'applicazione pratica di queste conoscenze con uno studio di caso, al quale ha partecipato una studentessa gifted.

La ragazza che ha partecipato alla sperimentazione, di seguito nota come V., è una studentessa frequentante il secondo anno di una scuola superiore di primo grado in provincia di Padova (PD), valutata come plusdotata durante le scuole elementari. Nel corso della sua istruzione, V. ha richiesto e mai effettivamente ottenuto un piano didattico personalizzato in cui fossero integrate delle strategie apposite per il suo funzionamento cognitivo e per le sue peculiarità. Nell'ambiente scolastico, la studentessa si dimostra diligente, timida, ma sempre brillante nello svolgimento delle attività. Mostra un atteggiamento di frustrazione e di disconnessione dal resto della classe, dovuto, a suo dire, dalla noia provocata dalle continue ripetizioni e ridondanze nell'insegnamento delle materie scolastiche. Nello specifico, V. indica conoscenze discrete nella lingua inglese, che approfondisce di tanto in tanto con letture in lingua. Sul piano emotivo, V. è un'adolescente timida e introversa, dotata di un'estrema sensibilità e attenzione verso i bisogni dell'altro. Ad esempio, dai suoi racconti è emerso che, nel corso delle lezioni scolastiche, spesso aiuta spontaneamente un suo compagno di classe che non è italofono

e ha problemi con la comprensione della lingua. Nel corso delle attività, è stato denotato un abbandono della sua timidezza e della sua *comfort zone*, in favore di un atteggiamento più socievole e solare. È possibile supporre che ciò sia dovuto a un appropriato approccio didattico e relazionale all'individuo, che ha stimolato in lei volontà di esprimere la propria personalità e la propria fiducia. In merito agli interessi, alle passioni e agli hobby, V. dimostra una forte propensione per la lettura e la scrittura, vantando letture di romanzi per adulti e riconoscimenti ottenuti da corsi di storytelling, anch'essi per adulti. Inoltre, la studentessa dimostra a pieno il proprio potenziale creativo, tipico degli individui gifted, nella passione per l'arte e per il disegno. A scuola e a casa, gli argomenti che la attirano maggiormente sono quelli dell'ambito matematico e scientifico, dimostrando una forte propensione verso la razionalità. Sul piano sociale, V. è perfettamente socializzata e integrata, riuscendo ad abbandonare la sua riservatezza dopo aver conosciuto le persone che la circondano.

L'obiettivo didattico nel corso delle attività era il rafforzamento delle capacità di speaking, in cui, da quanto è emerso, l'insegnamento nella scuola di V. era piuttosto carente. Pertanto, la sperimentazione si è fondata sul miglioramento delle competenze di writing, listening e reading in modo propedeutico alle attività di speaking. Nello specifico, le attività svoltesi sono state cinque, ognuna della durata approssimativa di 90'.

Nel corso delle prime due attività, la studentessa ha affrontato due argomenti che richiamavano i suoi interessi. Nella prima attività, V. ha approfondito la storia, l'architettura e l'arte del Palazzo della Ragione di Padova, un sito culturale della città, che raccoglie importanti affreschi e rappresentazioni e, inoltre, accoglie al suo interno un fondamentale esperimento della fisica moderna, il Pendolo di Foucault, che è stato oggetto della seconda attività, sulla base delle preferenze di V.. In questi momenti, la studentessa ha appreso le informazioni necessarie per organizzare una visita guidata presso il luogo culturale di cui si è approfondito, reimpiegando in modo attivo e autonomo la lingua inglese.

Nel corso della terza attività, la studentessa ha osservato le pratiche e i consigli per svolgere al meglio una visita guidata e per comunicare in modo chiaro, assertivo ed efficace. Sono stati utilizzati materiali autentici, tra cui video e spiegazioni di madrelingua inglesi, con il proposito di favorire un'effettiva full immersion nella lingua e nella cultura anglofona. Nella penultima attività, invece, le sue capacità di problem solving e pensiero

divergente sono state applicate nell'organizzazione del viaggio da casa sua al Palazzo, che si trova nel centro di Padova. Successivamente, V. ha impostato le tempistiche e le pause, i luoghi in cui fermarsi e il percorso da percorrere nel corso della visita guidata, strutturando, infine, un discorso in cui sono state raccolte le informazioni più interessanti e curiose in merito al luogo culturale.

Nell'ultima attività, la studentessa ha messo in pratica le competenze comunicative e le conoscenze acquisite, svolgendo il ruolo di guida turistica in inglese e illustrando il patrimonio culturale in una vera e propria visita al Palazzo. L'attività ha incluso una visita effettiva, al fine di far uscire V. dalla sua comfort zone ed esporla ad alcuni elementi di rischio. Come si è notato nelle precedenti attività, le condizioni di stress e difficoltà la incoraggiano a trovare soluzioni e strategie per gestire anche situazioni complesse. La studentessa ne è cosciente solo in seguito, acquisendo consapevolezza delle proprie capacità e rafforzando la propria motivazione e autostima.

Al concludersi delle attività, le osservazioni sui risultati linguistici e non linguistici hanno riportato un miglioramento effettivo delle competenze nella comprensione e nella produzione della lingua inglese, offrendo alla studentessa nuovi spunti di riflessione sull'apprendimento della lingua. Inoltre, è stato notato un evidente cambiamento dell'approccio della studentessa, che si è rivelato più aperto e rilassato nei confronti dell'insegnante. Per esempio, nel corso delle lezioni e nella loro conclusione si sono verificati momenti di umorismo, sarcasmo, durante i quali il filtro affettivo è stato notevolmente ridotto. D'altronde, anche il feedback dato dalla studentessa suggerisce un miglioramento nella lingua, nonché una sensazione di maggiore agio e propensione verso l'approfondimento della lingua. In particolare, V. ha apprezzato l'inclusione di materiali autentici nel corso delle attività, che le hanno permesso di fronteggiare le reali problematiche della lingua e trovare delle soluzioni adeguate e originali.

La studentessa ha, inoltre, affermato che preferirebbe svolgere attività più interattive e coinvolgenti, come quelle proposte dalla sperimentazione, anche all'interno del contesto scolastico e che le attività non le hanno mai provocato alcun senso di noia o distrazione, anzi, hanno favorito un approccio meno formale e frustrante alla lingua e all'insegnamento della stessa, nonché nei confronti dell'insegnante.

Pertanto, i risultati della sperimentazione mostrano un'evidente propensione della studentessa gifted verso il rafforzamento del proprio talento e l'esplorazione delle proprie

capacità, di cui non è resa pienamente consapevole dal contesto scolastico, che tende a standardizzare la didattica e trascurare ogni peculiarità individuale. È fondamentale affermare che, oltre ai miglioramenti sul piano educativo e di apprendimento, una corretta applicazione di strategie appropriate e conformate con i bisogni e le caratteristiche degli studenti gifted permetterebbero una loro crescita anche sul piano emotivo e socio-relazionale.

In conclusione, l'obiettivo del sistema scolastico dovrebbe riguardare l'approfondimento delle tecniche più efficaci per coinvolgere il talento degli studenti nelle classi di lingua nazionali, permettendo loro di sviluppare il loro potenziale e fornendo, allo stesso tempo, una risorsa essenziale per l'intera classe.

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