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Ph.D. Thesis Summary

**TALENT MANAGEMENT IN
HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS**

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1. Introduction

In a society clamoring for innovation, how can we transform native skill potential into eminence? This is not a rhetorical question but a pressing challenge to current education systems. If education systems focus on a one-size-fits-all approach, they must pay more attention to an invaluable resource: gifted students. These children, gifted with above-average abilities, represent a promise for the future and an enormous responsibility. They need more than a standard curriculum. They need an educational environment that stimulates their curiosity, nurtures their passions, and gives them the tools to turn their potential into outstanding achievement.

This thesis explores school talent management, critically and systematically analyzing this field's theoretical framework and educational practices. Effective talent management is a strategic necessity and an essential vector of long-term competitive advantage in fierce global competition. According to the National Institute of Statistics in Romania, we have approximately 200,000 children with high aptitude potential under 15. However, Romania can be proud of one of the highest percentages of gifted children in Europe, representing approximately 6% of the 3.211 million children under 15; only a tiny percentage, 2%, benefits from the necessary support to develop their full potential. This alarming situation is mainly caused by parents' and teachers' low level of information regarding the optimal measures and strategies to guide these special children. With an education system adapted to them, 98% of them will be identified and able to offer something to society.

In Romania, we have legislative levers (Law no. 198/2023) that provide special rights and measures for talented children capable of high performance. However, the education offered to them is evanescently realized in practice due to the non-allocation of funds for specific projects and programs, the land-lapsed expertise in the psychopedagogy of talents, and the need for administration of these issues at the ministry level. It, therefore, becomes imperative to build "fast lanes for fast vehicles" in schools, as some students already have slower educational paths. Developing standards and measures for teachers and those who interact with gifted students is a pedagogical and technical valuable approach to ensuring quality and excellence in education. Gifted students succeed if given the attention and training they need; this is only possible when school institutions develop effective talent management. Building a solid support network is essential to nurture the extraordinary potential of gifted children and youth. This involves the close collaboration of dedicated teachers and principals, parents, and subject matter experts, each playing a crucial role in creating and implementing educational strategies and programs tailored to the specific needs of these students.

Human potential is so dynamic and pluralistic that it cannot be superimposed with a general formula that fits all students into a Procrustean bed of ontogenetic development. Thus, a paradigm shift is required in the contemporary educational context regarding the perception of students' aptitude potential. All teachers must adopt a dynamic and constructivist perspective, recognizing that students' talents are not fixed and immutable but are a flexible construct capable of continuous development through stimulating and personalized educational experiences. By using differentiated teaching strategies, access to specific educational resources, curricular enrichment programs, and transdisciplinary educational approaches, we can create an environment conducive to their harmonious development. It is the responsibility of all of us, from teachers, school counselors, and principals to family and society, to professionally cultivate high predispositions so that these students can assert and fulfill their exceptional potential, both for their benefit and at the societal level.

Considering the previously presented considerations, we plead through this thesis for the need to develop and implement effective talent management measures and practices at the level of educational institutions. The implications of this approach can be significant for the entire educational spectrum, potentially revolutionizing the way we identify and nurture talent in schools.

1. 1 Talent management in education

In a comprehensive sense, specialized literature generally outlines management as the ability to ensure the fulfillment of objectives through the human resources available within organizations (Muntean-Trif, 2023). Being a complex and dynamic multidimensional concept, talent management systemically integrates components to fulfill the objectives of selecting, developing, and promoting talents in the educational field (Subotnik, 2023). A noteworthy aspect is that this concept can be interpreted as a subfield of organizational management, applied and adapted to the requirements and specifics of the educational field.

Although talent management is generally associated with academic, administrative, and human resources, specific principles and practices can be successfully adapted and implemented in the pre-university education system. In this context, educational institutions are essential in identifying, supporting, and promoting talented students and teachers. In the educational space, analyzing recent surveys, we can see that the phrase talent management has experienced a favorable development in the last decade as a result of the need for educational institutions to establish viable strategies in order to obtain competitive advantages and outstanding long-term results (Siong & Razah, 2023). It is widely recognized by educational organizations that gifted students are essential assets capable of fostering innovation and societal progress precisely because of their unique knowledge, skills, and abilities (Mohammed et al., 2018).

Talent management can be seen as a critical enabler for educational institutions to achieve their goals and aspirations by optimizing human capital (Bradley, 2016). Talents are valuable resources and fundamental to fostering innovation and societal progress (Gandy, 2018). For educational institutions, allocating resources to support and promote talented students is an essential strategic investment. In this sense, implementing coherent talent management practices becomes imperative in contemporary education. These practices aim to identify and capitalize on students' potential, increasing the educational act's quality (Behera, 2024).

Talent management requires foresight and setting immediate, medium—and long-term goals. Paula Olszewski-Kubilius (2015) highlighted the vital role of the school manager and the entire teaching staff in establishing systematic and continuous provisions for cultivating and optimizing students' high aptitude potential.

Siegel et al. (2016) considered that after the initial screening process, the director of a school organization must consider two fundamental aspects regarding talent management: (1) the methods and techniques through which specific educational interventions will be implemented for students with potentially high aptitude; and (2) organization of curriculum and

instruction: this aspect follows from the fact that the academic progress of gifted students is greatly influenced by complex, advanced, and substantial educational material presented by teachers at an appropriate pace, accompanied by support and feedback. In addition, the instructional-educational content should recognize their diverse needs and provide them with a balance between structured elements and freedom in approaching new content.

In his study, Robinson (2021) proposes a series of recommendations for creating an informal partnership between a state-level umbrella association and parent-teacher associations in educational units to adopt effective talent management strategies for the class of students. Informal collaboration, realized through advocacy efforts, is an effective mechanism for supporting talented students. Strategic alliances established between educational institutions, parent associations, and non-governmental organizations supporting gifted students' education can generate new educational policies or improve existing ones for this category of students.

Implementing a talent management strategy in the educational area can be strongly influenced by various contextual factors related to resources, management, and material base. According to research by Joyce VanTassel-Baska and Sally Reis (2014), school principals can effectively implement talent management practices by creating excellence classes, also known as honors classes. This approach would allow gifted students to access specific curricular resources and differentiated instruction while participating in regular formal education. Liechti and Sesé (2024) identified nine critical dimensions of talent management that could be included in the overall coordination strategies of a school institution: talent attraction, selection, development, retention, consistency, climate, organizational culture based on excellence, evaluation of authentic and effective management of mentoring programs for high performers.

Therefore, talent management in the educational environment is distinguished by its complexity and multidimensionality. It presupposes a well-defined set of models, strategies, and mechanisms and an organizational culture centered on identifying, supporting, and promoting talent in all its forms of manifestation.

2. The research approach: Objectives and methodology

Building on the concepts discussed earlier, we aim to delve into the issue of talent management in schools. Our research methodology, a mixed design, is a robust approach that involves the collection and convergent analysis of data from various critical actors in the educational system: teachers, school counselors, school managers, and other representative stakeholders. This comprehensive approach not only allows for the formulation of pertinent conclusions but also instills confidence in the validity of our findings.

The first study, which analyzes specialized literature on talent management in the educational area using bibliometric methodology, underscores the increasing relevance of talent management in education. This research, which points to a growing tendency to implement specific practices to support and capitalize on the potential of gifted students, has the potential to impact the pre-university education system significantly. However, it also highlights the need for a more systematic approach and continuous improvement, underscoring the significance of our findings.

In the second study, we investigated the role of attitudes toward gifted students as a mediating factor in the relationship between differentiated educational strategies and talent management. The findings of this study reveal the complex interaction between attitudes, talent management, and differentiated educational strategies implemented in activities with this category of students. This complexity underscores the need for effective talent management and generally favorable attitudes towards the gifted, with which efforts to address differentiated educational strategies may be supported.

In the third study, using an e-Delphi methodology, we analyzed the perspectives of a group of stakeholders regarding current issues and opportunities for intervention and change for the next decade regarding talent management in an educational context. This investigative approach's significant contribution is providing innovative and pragmatic perspectives on supporting and promoting gifted students in the Romanian education system. Addressing the recommendations made by stakeholders in the Delphi study can represent an essential step for teachers, counselors, and school principals in creating a more equitable and stimulating educational environment for all students, including those with high aptitude potential.

3. Research approach: presentation of studies

3.1 Talent management in an educational context. A bibliometric analysis

We used bibliometric analysis to identify publication trends in scientific databases with a focus on talent management in the educational context. Bibliometric analysis is an investigative methodology that has become popular among researchers in both the social and science and technology fields (Ellegaard & Wallin, 2015). This method allows the visualization of bibliometric aspects from a large amount of scientific data (Danvila-del-Valle et al., 2019). The scientific mapping technique integrates classification and visualization, intending to illustrate the configuration of a particular research field by segmenting its constituent components (such as key concepts, central themes, authors, and citations) into coherent groups (Zupic & Čater, 2015).

The bibliometric analysis tool used was vOSviewer version 1.6.20. Through the tool, we built conceptual maps that include fundamental concepts and central themes associated with talent management in an educational context, as well as a bibliographic analysis of authors who have published scientific articles in this field in the last decade.

This study focuses exclusively on analyzing the existing literature on talent management in the educational context. Eighty-six scientific articles were selected based on specific inclusion criteria: publication years (2014-2024), types of documents (scientific articles, e-books), and topics (talent management; development and promotion of talents in an educational context). The titles of the scientific articles were subsequently stored in RIS format and accompanied by an abstract and key terms. An article archive in RIS format, compatible with VOSviewer 1.6.20, was created using Zotero, the specialized bibliographic reference management software. Through the examination carried out with vosViewer, in the last iteration, we identified an increase in the frequency of terms, arriving at the formation of three distinct groups/clusters that show essential concepts and themes associated with talent management in the educational area.

The scientific mapping of the central themes associated with talent management in education highlighted that talent management is eminently associated with the higher education segment. We can notice a high interest in the current surveys (Bradley, 2016; Wallace, 2018; Romiani, 2023; Bean et al., 2021) to attract the concept of talent management to the operative level, represented by school organizations, at the level of institutional management.

In cluster 2, the concept of ethics is also associated with talent management in an educational context. Neumeister and Burney (2021) believe that school organizations have an ethical responsibility to ensure that gifted students have an optimal educational environment, considering their unique abilities and needs. Cluster 3 of the bibliometric analysis highlights connections between strategic human resource planning, talent selection, and human resource management. This thematic grouping shows that advances in pedagogical approaches and the cultivation of soft skills such as leadership, teamwork, and problem-solving make notable contributions to improving the quality of human resources. These associations emphasize the need for a strategic human resource management approach that prioritizes education to cultivate talent, ensuring a well-trained workforce capable of sustaining and developing existing industries and creating new ones (Alam & Dewi, 2023).

In conclusion, the bibliometric analysis identified the main themes, concepts, and research directions regarding school talent management. We performed a co-citation analysis, and based on the vOSViewer tool, we highlighted the authors with investigations in the field of talent management research from the last decade. Even though talent management is a relatively recent topic that has attracted the interest of both researchers and practitioners, there is still a great need for further scrutiny. Talent management in the educational area is essential because it contributes to the development and exploitation of the potential of each student, ensuring an environment conducive to performance and innovation. Through effective talent management, schools can help create a positive educational environment where diversity of abilities and talents is recognized and valued.

3.2 The mediating role of attitudes towards gifted students on differentiated educational strategies and talent management in an educational context (study 2)

In this study, we wanted to analyze how general attitudes toward gifted students influence the use of differentiated educational strategies in the classroom and the management of talents at educational institutions. The following questions guided our investigative approach: What are the general attitudes of teachers and principals in Romania toward gifted students? What factors predict the effective management of talents at the level of educational institutions in Romania? How do the attitudes of teachers and principals toward talented students influence talent management practices at the level of educational institutions in Romania?

The group of participants involved in this study was one of convenience, consisting of 322 teachers and principals from pre-university high school education in Romania. This study involved the translation and adaptation of three research instruments from the specialized literature: A scale for the assessment of attitudes towards gifted students and their educational needs (Gagné & Nadeau, 2018); Differentiated Instructional Strategies Rating Scale (Heacox, 2002; Caldwell, 2012); Educational et al. (Ayati & Asgari, 2019).

Several reformulations of the items were made in order to obtain a better adaptation of them to the Romanian population. The internal consistency coefficient Alpha Cronbach indicated good psychometric qualities of the instruments (assessment of attitudes towards the education of gifted students and their educational needs Alpha Cronbach = 0.72; assessment of differentiated instructional strategies Alpha Cronbach = 0.95; assessment scale of talent management in an educational context Alpha Cronbach = 0.93). We subsequently performed descriptive and correlational statistical analyses. Mediation analysis was performed in SPSS® version 28, using Macro PROCESS v4.3 (Hayes, 2023).

As expected, general attitudes toward gifted students significantly positively affect differentiated instructional strategies used in the classroom. In other words, favorable attitudes toward gifted students lead to implementing differentiated educational strategies and practices in the classroom. Teachers who recognize and appreciate the talents of these students are more willing to adapt their curriculum resources and teaching strategies to meet their specific educational needs. Correlational analyses revealed that general attitudes toward gifted students are significantly negatively associated with gifted management in school settings and differentiated instructional strategies used. In promoting and developing talents, there needs to be more openness at the management level and differentiated educational strategies. These results are supported by other studies (Cross et al., 2018; Dare & Nowicki, 2019), showing that teachers need support and access to gifted psychopedagogy specialists to differentiate instructional-educational activities. Although teachers show openness to improving and diversifying the school offer and favorable attitudes towards gifted students, they face several significant constraints. The lack of time, support from the school management, and the necessary resources represent significant obstacles to implementing pedagogical and didactic offers adapted to the specific needs of this category of students.

The results of the mediation analysis also showed that management practices can negatively influence the application of differentiated educational strategies if they are not implemented correctly or if they are not supported by favorable attitudes toward the gifted. Effective talent management at the level of school institutions and generally favorable attitudes can support efforts to address differentiated educational strategies. When gifted management at

the school level is inadequate, teachers may need more resources and support to provide an educational environment that accommodates these gifted students' unique abilities and needs (Lee, 2018; Troxclair, 2013).

3.3 The perspectives of a group of stakeholders on talent management in the educational area (study 3)

The conceptual framework for this study is based on the following theoretical models considered necessary for the generation of changes in order to support students with high aptitude potential in high school education institutions: the theory of the development of excellence proposed by Rena Subotnik (2019), the dual model of giftedness made by Robert J Sternberg (2024), systems theory (Gordon, 2022), complexity theory (Stewart, 1991; Battram, 1999; apud Morrison, 2012) and the model of complementary associations in group problem analysis.

Consistent with the assumed methodological design, the study's first objective was to explore current issues regarding educational services provided to gifted students. The second objective is to use a Delphi methodology to collect and analyze data from a group of experts in several iterative rounds/stages to identify and describe possible measures, actions, and educational changes specific to gifted students in the Romanian education system. The following questions were the basis of our e-Delphi research approach: What are the current problems identified by stakeholders regarding the educational services offered to talented high school students in the Romanian education system? Which of the identified problems regarding providing educational services for high school students capable of high performance require priority to be solved? Regarding the identified problems, what measures and actions are considered appropriate by the stakeholders to support talented high school students in the Romanian education system? What changes are perceived by the group of experts as possible and probable for talented high school students in the Romanian education system until 2034?

In selecting the group of participants, we considered the following inclusion criteria: (a) administrative position in a public or private school institution that has a unique program for students with high aptitude potential; (b) position in an organization intended for those capable of high performance (centers of excellence, institutions that promote a gifted curriculum/for high ability students); (c) author of books/articles in the field of psychopedagogy of talents; (d) graduation from a form of higher education, aimed at specializing in the analysis of educational

policies, expertise in management and educational leadership. Demonstrated competence in any of these categories was the basis for selecting participants for the study.

In the first e-Delphi stage, we collected and analyzed data from 56 stakeholders, some with valuable expertise in talent psychopedagogy. After stage 1 of the e-Delphi study, 12 of the 56 participants withdrew. The total number of experts in the batch for stage 2 e-Delphi (N=44) included educational professionals as follows: university professors (4.5%), directors of school institutions (9.1%), deputy school directors (18.2%), CJEX director (2.3%), CJEX teachers (4.5%), teachers with training in the psychopedagogy of talents (18.2%), specialists in the field educational policies (25%), school counselors (9.1%); NGO manager in the educational field (4.5%), ANC accredited trainers (4.5%). After stage 2 of the e-Delphi study, two more experts withdrew from the 44 participants. Total number of participants for the third e-Delphi round (N=42). This research batch size adheres to the guidelines recommended by the literature (Skulmoski; Hartman & Krahn, 2007). The data collected from the stakeholder group were interpreted using the Atlas.ti qualitative analysis software, version 5.2.12.

The e-Delphi questionnaire used in the first stage provided us with over 120 measures and potential changes to improve the educational offers specific to students with high abilities in Romania and five major problems identified at the system level regarding the educational offers specific to students capable of high performance.

The findings of the initial round allowed us to develop a quantitative questionnaire for stage 2. Following the application of the online questionnaire, in the second stage, the stakeholders identified the following as pressing problems related to the promotion and development of high-achieving students: in a percentage of 83.7% of the stakeholders participating in the study believe that it is necessary to pay special attention to the training of teachers in the education system in Romania, in the field of psychopedagogy of talents; a percentage of 86% of stakeholders consider it eminently necessary to finance programs intended for students capable of high performance, and 84.8% highlight the need to develop digital platforms specifically intended for students with high abilities.

Regarding the measures/strategies identified by the stakeholders to improve the services offered to students with high abilities, we note that in a percentage of 88.4% of the experts, the existence of explicit educational policies at the national level that would viable address the problem of supporting students was considered desirable with high aptitude potential; 69.8% of the experts consider it desirable the financing strategy aimed exclusively at the target category, talented students, in order to reduce the phenomenon of brain drain;

67.4% consider it desirable the strategy of creating interdisciplinary teams in order to develop a differentiated and personalized curriculum for high school students capable of high performance. 79.1% of the experts perceive the development of appropriate administrative structures for promoting and developing talents in public schools as desirable.

The following educational changes were perceived by the expert group as feasible, to support gifted students, until the year 2034: in a percentage of 76.7% of the experts participating in the study consider it feasible to introduce digital portfolios in schools, in which students with high aptitude potential to exhibit their innovative products, thus sharing their achievements with teachers, peers and parents; 78.1% consider it feasible to regulate the organizational charts of school institutions, in order to designate a group of teachers responsible for talent management, and a percentage of 79.1% of the stakeholders perceive as feasible the educational change in which high school students with high skills can have the opportunity to obtain microcredits/certificates in a particular field, issued by both the state and private universities in Romania; and 58.8% of the stakeholders consider it feasible to introduce systematic procedures to modify the curriculum for students capable of high performance; 55.5% of the experts participating in the study consider it feasible to develop virtual libraries containing open educational resources necessary for students with high abilities.

In the third stage, we obtained a high consensus on the following problematic aspects in the field of psychopedagogy of talents perceived by the expert group as essential to solve in order to provide fair support to students capable of high performance: teacher training in the field of psychopedagogy of talents; the financing of programs intended for high-ability students, the lack of digital platforms specially created for high-ability students, the distorted perceptions of high-achieving students. A consensus of approximately 78.6% was also obtained on the following measures perceived by the stakeholder group as desirable in the development of didactic offers appropriate to the needs and capacities of gifted students: the existence at the national level of explicit educational policies that address the issue of supporting students with high aptitude potential: funding directed exclusively to the target category, talented students; the creation of interdisciplinary teams for the development of a differentiated and personalized curriculum for talented students; developing an adequate structure in public schools to facilitate the support of students with high abilities; ensuring continuous training opportunities in work with those capable of high performance, by new technological developments.

For educational changes feasible in the next decade, in the field of psychopedagogy of talents, we obtained a consensus of about 90.5% regarding the creation of a digital portfolio at the level of educational institutions, in which students with high abilities can display their innovative products, as well as the development of digital platforms with activities and

personalized content that allow students with high abilities in Romania, more meaningful educational experiences. We also achieved a significant consensus of approximately 83.3% on the following changes: systematic procedures for changing the curriculum for high-ability students and necessary regulations in school institutions' organizational chart to designate a group of teachers responsible for talent management.

Although this study's findings cannot be generalized, the informed perspectives of the consulted experts can form a solid basis for developing more effective educational and administrative practices. The recommendations formulated can contribute to refining strategies for supporting gifted students and generate new research directions to analyze in depth the changes proposed for the next decade.

4. General conclusions

This thesis embarks on a unique investigation into the complexity of talent management in the pre-university educational environment. It adopts a mixed methodological approach, integrating quantitative and qualitative methods to analyze this concept comprehensively. In addition to the analysis of management practices aimed at supporting and promoting gifted students, the thesis also evaluates the role of contextual variables, such as the attitudes of teachers and school managers towards this category of students.

Research shows that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to talent management. Instead, a nuanced understanding of the interaction between individual factors (e.g., characteristics of gifted students, their specific needs), contextual factors (school organizational culture, available resources), and relational factors (e.g., attitudes of teachers and school managers towards gifted students). Therefore, this thesis advocates for a holistic and integrated approach to talent management in education. This is not just a suggestion, but a necessity. Such an approach considers the diversity of the factors involved and promotes the creation of a stimulating and inclusive educational environment that can capitalize on the potential of each talented student.

Although specialized literature confirms the importance of talent management in the educational area (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2015; Thunnissen, 2016; Bean et al., 2021; Baska & VanTassel-Baska, 2021; McCoach, Siegel, et al., 2023), some research has investigated how teachers and school managers' attitudes toward gifted students influence the implementation of specific talent management practices. This perspective is essential because the attitudes of teachers and principals can act as a filter, amplifying or diminishing the impact of educational

policies and programs dedicated to these students. Also, a deeper analysis is required of the contextual factors that can facilitate or, on the contrary, represent barriers to the implementation of effective talent management practices at the institutional level.

4.1. Conceptual and methodological contributions

The present thesis brings a series of contributions to the field of psychopedagogy for the promotion of talents, both from a theoretical and methodological perspective. From a theoretical point of view, we have developed a conceptual framework that brings together and articulates various expert perspectives on talent management in schools, thus contributing to a more nuanced understanding of it. From a methodological perspective, this thesis significantly contributes by adapting and validating some research tools to the specifics of the Romanian population. More precisely, the thesis proposes an adapted version of evaluation scales aimed at attitudes toward gifted students and their educational needs, differentiated instructional strategies, and talent management in the educational field. By validating these tools, the premises are created for a more rigorous and more pertinent investigation of talent management in schools in Romania, implicitly contributing to the consolidation of specialized literature.

The conclusions of this research not only open new investigative perspectives in the field of talent management but also provide a theoretical framework that could be the basis for the development of educational measures aimed at supporting the development and promotion of talented students in the Romanian education system.

4.2. Empirical and practical implications

Our research makes significant empirical and practical contributions by investigating the role of attitudes toward gifted students in the relationship between differentiated instructional strategies and talent management. The results demonstrate a complex interplay between these three key elements, underscoring the need for more elaborate management practices to optimize the educational environment for the benefit of gifted students. This is not just a suggestion but a crucial step towards a more inclusive and effective educational system.

Effective talent management in schools involves understanding and recognizing the unique needs of students, promoting talent, and providing appropriate educational opportunities. Principals, teachers, and stakeholders can work together to ensure that students with high aptitude potential have an appropriate level of challenge, support, and perspectives for their development and achievement, personally and societally.

The results of the investigations undertaken in the present work show unequivocally that an essential element in the development of talent management in schools is the paradigm shift at the level of the entire educational institution. This is not just a recommendation but a call to action. Favorable attitudes or the implementation of individual, disparate measures dedicated to gifted students are not enough. A profound transformation of school organizational culture, teaching strategies, and collaboration mechanisms is imperative to create an inclusive and stimulating educational environment capable of providing tangible support to gifted students. Early identification of potential using a variety of methods, flexible and individualized programs adapted to the specific needs of gifted students, adequate training of teachers to work effectively with these students, and active family and community involvement in the gifted development process, all of which can represent factors for effective talent management in the educational area.

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