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Global Principles for Professional Learning in Gifted Education and Italian Primary Teachers

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Résumé de l'article

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Global Principles for Professional Learning in Gifted Education and Italian Primary Teachers

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Abstract

Aligned with the 10 Global Principles for Professional Learning in Gifted Education (WCGTC, 2021), this exploratory study investigated the co-construction of inclusive differentiated instruction for a fourth grade gifted student with three general education teachers in a North Italy public education primary school using learning menus and learning contract strategies. The research questions examined responses of general education teachers toward (a) an identified gifted student, (b) inclusion practices in the primary classroom, and (c) co-constructed interdisciplinary curricula for a gifted student. Conducted during a six-week timeframe, the primary researcher conducted Pre- and Post-Intervention Focus Groups, established an instructional baseline, planned interdisciplinary activities in five academic subjects, suggested lesson extensions, and concluded with a Parent Interview. The primary researcher provided professional learning experiences in accordance with the Italian Ministry of Education ministerial law n. 562 (2019) that mandated inclusion of children with giftedness in the category of special education needs. Analysis of Pre- and Post-Intervention Focus Groups results indicated improved dispositions of teachers toward a gifted student in general education primary classrooms, development of inclusive classroom practices with guidance from a gifted education specialist, and documented competencies co-constructing interdisciplinary curricula integrated with 10 Global Principles for Professional Learning in Gifted Education.

Keywords: Professional learning; gifted education; Italian primary teachers.

Introduction

Despite its legendary support of the arts and sciences, Italy lacks formalized educational services for children and adolescents with giftedness, talents, and creativity. The roots of teacher training in Italy replicated Napoleonic educational reform in France with the "normalized" pedagogy of the Paris Ecole Normale Supérieure. Established in 1810, the Scuola Normale Superiore in Pisa similarly trained promising high school students under a centralized and uniform system embracing the ideals of the Enlightenment. Although these highly selective schools graduated eminent scholars, they excelled in their respective fields of study than as pedagogues (Phelps & Miller, 2019, Chapter 1, p. 18).

In 1905, Alfred Binet assessed intellectual ability of Parisian school children with an intelligence quotient as the ratio of "mental age" and chronological age with 100 as normal or average. Since Binet viewed intelligence as a flexible rather than hereditary construct, schools could ameliorate the academic performance intellectually disadvantaged children with instruction designed to enhance their intelligence. In the United States, the normal school movement evolved into educational systems based on democratic principles known as "Common Schools" in the United States through the reforms of Horace Mann. Under the leadership of Lewis Terman, the Binet-Simon Intelligence Test expanded into the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Test with the capacity to assess superior potential in children and adapt school instruction to address their cognitive abilities (Phelps & Miller, 2019, Chapter 1, pp. 20-21). This convergence of trends in teacher education reforms, compulsory primary and secondary schools, and standardized intelligence testing changed the political, societal, and academic landscape to advance specialized educational programs for high ability children and adolescents in the 20th century.

In response to the Soviet launching of Sputnik in 1957 and the subsequent government sponsored Marland Report in 1972, the United States initiated specialized educational programs for

children and adolescents with giftedness, talent, and creativity. Scholarly journals in the United States, Australia, New Zealand, and Korea emerged to support the fledgling field. In Europe, Arthur Cropley founded the *European Journal of High Ability* in 1990, and several Turkish journals began publishing since 2010. Professional organizations including the European Council for High Ability (ECHA) and the World Council for Gifted and Talented Children (WCGTC) sponsor biannual professional conferences for its constituents.

The WCGTC recently published *Global Principles for Professional Learning in Gifted Education* (2021) as guidance for educators, policymakers and teacher education programs at local and national levels. These 10 Global Principles affirm legislative action, practitioner organizations, and advocacy initiatives during the past 10 years that serve as the Zeitgeist for the present study. Specific examples of these advances include the 2019 enactment of Italian Ministry of Education ministerial law n. 562; founding of professional organizations such as Talent Point in Florence and TalentInclusivi National Schools Network, legislative advocacy including testimonials to the Italian Parliament (Pfeiffer & Henson, 2021), international partnership of SEM Italy (Milan & Reis, 2020), and independent consultative training programs and enrichment camps.

The 10 *Global Principles for Professional Learning in Gifted Education* (WCGTC, 2021) provide a foundation to collectively guide legislation, professional organizations, partnerships, and consultative activities. These 10 principles provide descriptions, dispositions, and documentation relative to high quality outcomes in professional learning in gifted education: (1) **tiered content**, (2) **evidence-based**, (3) **holistic**, (4) **broad**, (5) **equitable**, (6) **comprehensive**, (7) **integral**, (8) **ongoing**, (9) **sustainable**, and (10) **empowering**. Accordingly, we aligned our three research questions with these Global Principles, noted in bold font:

1. How does **ongoing** and **integral** professional learning in gifted education help primary school general education teacher form **holistic** and **equitable** dispositions toward students identified with giftedness?
2. How does **broad** professional learning in gifted education equip primary school teachers to practice inclusion as an **evidence-based** rationale in their general education classrooms?
3. How does **sustainable** and **empowering** professional learning in gifted education develop competencies as co-creators of **comprehensive** and **tiered content** for students identified with giftedness?

Teacher education and professional learning

Teacher training in Italy

Candidates in teacher preparation programs in Italy select a primary, middle, or high school grade level focus. For example, primary school teachers meet university requirements in a five year Primary Teaching Education program. University teacher training programs lack specialization in Gifted Education coursework to qualify as gifted facilitators. Once credentialed, professional teachers find many professional learning opportunities through associations and universities that offer short training courses. Once again, these courses need specialized content, skills, and dispositions appropriate for gifted education. In 2018, LUMSA University in Rome provided an innovative six month hybrid Master School program in Gifted Education for professionals with graduate degrees.

In Italy, most practicing teachers in Italy seem unaware of — or unwilling to acknowledge the existence of gifted children. To address the need to teach all students, the Italian Minister of Education convened a technical committee to convene gifted education experts in Italy with the charge to write national guidelines in 2018. However, once completed, the ministry failed to publish the guidelines. Consequently, general education teachers in Italy need comprehensive guidelines or professional standards available in other countries such as the United States. The two national regulations that provide guidance categorize gifted children with special education needs for personalized education plan (n. 562, 2019) and a formalized process for grade acceleration (n. 5, 2021). The *Global Principles of Professional Learning in Gifted Education* (WCGTC, 2021) support **comprehensive**, **sustainable** and **ongoing** in-service training for primary, middle, and high school teachers as they adopt an

empowering broad program of **tiered content** and **evidence-based** practices that **equitably** and **integrally** address the **holistic** needs of gifted children and adolescents.

Teacher training in gifted education

A research study in Australia reported only 51% of teachers attended a training course on gifted education during their careers (Fraser-Seeto et al., 2015). They also found teachers often lacked the knowledge, skills and strategies to recognize and accommodate the needs of gifted students. This documented deficit provides strong rationale for inclusion of gifted education during initial teacher training programs (Fraser-Seeto et al., 2013) and motivation to offer professional learning on topics such as how to differentiate teaching for high ability students. The WCGTC Global Principles could guide these types of inclusive efforts.

Teacher training plays an essential role expanding teachers' content knowledge, pedagogical skills, and professional dispositions in gifted education. However, the "myths" about individuals with giftedness persist through time (Treffinger, 2009). Changing teacher beliefs and perspectives about gifted children and adolescents remains a formidable challenge. Teachers' prejudices and fears hinder didactic differentiation, especially towards gifted students (Brigandi et al., 2019). Emphasizing the WCGTC Global Principles of **evidence-based** and **equitable** practices during initial teacher training could **empower** teacher training programs. Desimone and Garet (2015) advocated for a professional learning conceptual framework characterized by a focus on content, active learning, coherent, sustained, and collective participation. Preparation for professional learning that explores teacher attitudes and beliefs toward gifted students may uncover persistent myths that hinder inclusive teaching and learning in P-12 schools. When Lassig (2009) found a significant relationship between primary school teachers' attitudes toward intellectually gifted in Australia and their education, she recommended additional teacher training and school-wide participation in gifted education. Unrealized teacher attitudes about the gifted such as elitism, self-sufficiency, and difficulty forming relationships with peers hinder teachers' implementation of best practices offered during professional learning experiences. Miller (2009) suggested examining underlying teacher perceptions to determine how they may fail to recognize cognitive characteristics of giftedness: broad knowledge, finding new uses for things, advanced vocabulary, enjoyment of experimentation and discovery, drawing conclusions, perceiving patterns, generating imaginative and original ideas, and boredom when unchallenged (p. 94). Moreover, teachers need understanding of the social and emotional characteristics of giftedness: preference of older students or adults' company, balancing academic and social activities, quietness, social adeptness, respectful of traditions, volunteerism in local communities, streetwise, good school behavior, respect for the elderly, difficulty accepting less capable persons, and willingly helping others (p. 94).

Coleman et al. (2012) advocated for improved teacher training in gifted education through their engagement in national support networks. Legislation such as the American TALENT Act of 2017 and the 2019 Italian ministerial note n. 562 promote **integral, broad, and sustainable** professional learning in Gifted Education. Dissemination of the WCGTC Global Principles through national associations such as the American Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), Association for the Gifted (TAG), National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) could lead to **empowering** and **comprehensive** change in professional learning in Gifted Education. In Italy, the Italian Gifted and Talented Education (GATE-Italy), EuroTalent, STEP-Net, Italian Association for the Development of Talent and Giftedness (AISTAP) could provide similar impetus toward **evidence-based** and **ongoing** professional learning in Gifted Education. With increasingly heterogeneous classes, teachers need **integral** and **equitable** networks and teams to manage complexity. Coleman et al. (2012) recommended professionals such as psychologists, educators, staff, and administration who work within school settings exchange information and understanding to support a new paradigm of professionalism in Gifted Education.

According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2017), effective professional teacher training focuses on content related to a discipline or pedagogical/didactic type with active learning by teachers who

collaborate and support each other and feedback from an external expert with sustained duration. Peters and Jolly (2018) recognized the importance of starting with beliefs, and Desimone and Garet (2015) recommended an ideal duration of quality training at 20 hours or more. Sayi (2018) found an external supervisor knowledgeable and skills in **evidence-based** practiced in gifted education possessed the essential ability to address problems for training that exceeded 40 hours. Rowley (2012) acknowledged willingness of teachers to consider unusual ideas and reflect on different educational needs important for education that includes gifted children and adolescents. According to the European Agency (2012), teacher beliefs should include respect for all forms of diversity and the promotion of academic success for each student as indicators of **equitable** and **empowering** professional education. Reid and Horváthová (2016) embraced **sustainable** teacher training in terms of educational policies, purposes and practices that develop human potential on the basis of **holistic** individual needs. Desimone and Garet (2015) found **broad** teacher training with strong connections between practice and lesson planning and the actual classroom **integral** to professional learning. Watters and Diezmann (2013) reported teacher training with teacher project requirements related to the reality of the classroom. Coleman et al. realized teaching practices that consolidated over time created bridges toward flexibility, innovative, and inclusive practices (Coleman et al., 2012).

Global principles for professional learning

The World Council for Gifted and Talented Children formed a committee of 24 educators from 19 countries to effect change for gifted children and adolescents at local and national levels through 10 *Global Principles for Professional Learning in Gifted Education* (2021). Recent world events underscored the need for creative and innovative approaches to complex problems. Universal teacher training in Gifted Education promotes inclusive learning for all students. The 10 Global Principles created an infrastructure from the collective expertise of committee members to guide all educators as they provide appropriate teaching and learning for all students. Since all educators work with gifted students in some capacity, **tiered content** calls for a range of short programs, in-service, and part- or full-time education with a sample framework for three tiers of professional learning in regular classrooms, specialized programs, and gifted education classrooms. The gold standard of **evidence-based** practice ensures quality research on the nature of gifted students and effective professional learning in teacher training programs that include specialized content, pedagogical skills, and professional dispositions appropriate for gifted learners. **Holistic** professional learning addresses the whole child with consideration of a whole child perspective, whole school approach, whole life view, and whole community endeavor. Given the diversity of gifted learners, **broad** professional learning represents various levels and forms of giftedness, various assessments for identification, different gifted program models, and a range of service delivery options. **Equitable** professional learning in Gifted Education considers the wide heterogeneity of students by ameliorating underrepresented groups of gifted students, retaining diverse gifted learners in gifted programs, and recruiting teachers from diverse backgrounds. **Comprehensive** professional learning includes the whole school community of psychologists, educators, and special education teachers, acknowledges the responsibility of school administrators for all school programs, supports the social and emotional needs of gifted students, and understands the connection between advanced ability and special learning needs as learning differences. Professional learning that engages the whole school community forms an **integral** continuum of services with specialty areas including special education, career and technical education, and the arts. **Ongoing** professional learning relies on a base of current and seminal research, results in changed practice, aligns with the Zeitgeist of change in school communities, and sets achievable goals that rewards expertise in the field. When professional learning forms a component within larger policies, it gains a **sustainable** presence with clear requirements, specialized standards and goals, current evaluation programs, and adequate funding. With the first nine Global Principles in place, professional learning creates an **empowering** environment with evidence-based information, advocacy messages about gifted education, communication through social media, networking opportunities, and coordinated efforts of leadership to advance Gifted Education.

Inclusive practices in gifted education

Classified as "exceptional," gifted children need access to inclusive education (Sutherland & Stack, 2014) that addresses their special needs. For example, gifted children often experience problems in social relationships and emotional management (Neihart et al., 2015). Socialization difficulties may result from teaching focused on a standard learning level and boredom from learning experiences lacking new and advanced content (Wiley, 2018).

The Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) sanctions valuing all students and staff, reducing barriers to learning and participation in the classroom, interpreting the difference between students as a learning resource and not as a problem to overcome, recognizing school inclusion reflects the process of inclusion in society. Adopting inclusive teaching practices means offering learning opportunities to gifted students as well (Stack & Sutherland, 2017). At the beginning of the 21st century, USA encouraged pull-out program services for gifted student (Gallagher, 2000) as a suitable and exclusive environment. However, since 2015, American gifted students remain primarily in the regular classroom (NAGC, 2015) in order to experience as much differentiated teaching as possible.

Personalized learning that places the student at the center of teaching forms an inclusive mode. This practice recognizes the unique and individual nature of students with their own palette of emotions and preferred learning modalities. Fisher (2009) reported dialogic teaching promoted personalized learning through the Socratic method with student reflection on their beliefs in different contexts. This type of dialogue includes all students and differentiates instruction based on student interests, curiosities, and talents.

Differentiated education aligns with the principles of inclusive teaching when instruction develops specific potential ability of individuals within a classroom. Tomlinson (2018) defined "differentiated instruction" as "an instructional model that provides guidance for teachers in addressing student differences in readiness, interest, and learning profile with the goal of maximizing the capacity of each learner" (p. 279). This didactic concerns the content, processes, product, and learning environment, and it varies according to the specific needs of the students. According to Roberts and Inman (2015), four good reasons to differentiate teaching for gifted students include promoting continuous learning, using time productively, stimulating brain activity, and ensuring equity for all students. Differentiation then becomes the "equalizer," based on the readiness of the students (Tomlinson, 2018). Teachers can avoid extremes teaching gifted students when they calibrate constructs of concrete-abstract, simple-complex, structured-open tasks, less independent-more independent, and slower-faster.

Montgomery (2015) distinguished two methods of developmental differentiation that contribute to inclusive learning environments. Structural methods with acceleration and pull-out programs focus on products, whereas integral methods with differentiation, enrichment, and mentoring concern cognitive processes. Inclusiveness of gifted children increases using integral methods that place the student with their individual needs at the center of learning.

Pfeiffer (2013) reported the Schoolwide Enrichment Model (SEM, Renzulli, 1977) one of the most inclusive models, oriented towards the development of all students. The SEM promotes the participation of all pupils based on their individual interests and talents with three types of enrichment activities. In Type I enrichment, all students explore a topic. Some students investigate a topic in Type II enrichment, whereas a few students with sufficient ability, interest, and task commitment study a topic in depth. Collectively, the SEM promotes authentic learning by putting knowledge into practice with real world learning (Renzulli & Reis, 2014).

The Young Scholars Model (Horn et al., 2021) goes beyond the label of giftedness and enhances the strengths of students from kindergarten to high school. This model provides a comprehensive approach for inclusiveness of underserved populations as a schoolwide effort. Horn et al. (2021) addresses issues of identification and retention of historically underrepresented students in advanced academic programs. The model suggests four levels of inclusion through (a) critical and creative

thinking in the regular education classroom, (b) consultation between the general education teachers and gifted education specialist to develop activities for students who demonstrate ability in specific subjects, (c) a gifted education specialist arranges advanced activities for those students who excel in several areas; and (d) ad hoc groups formed for students who demonstrate exceptional skills in academic subjects such as mathematics, language, arts, social studies, and science.

The Extension Menu or Learning Menu (Winebrenner & Brulles, 2012) offers students choices among eight activities. The teacher creates the learning menu based on contents, interests, multiple intelligences and differentiates tasks by cognitive level, i.e., Bloom's Taxonomy. Winebrenner and Brulles promote positive and inclusive classroom climates through a "Learning Contract." The Learning Contract consists of objectives the student plans to achieve, learning extensions the student chooses, and logistics managing the project that both student and teacher sign. The contract help students develop self-understanding, self-efficacy, and self-regulation as they manage and achieve goals and projects.

Methodology

This study explored *Global Principles of Professional Learning in Gifted Education* (WCGTC, 2021) implemented with three primary teachers in a North Italy school. The research questions concerned teacher dispositions toward a fourth grade student identified as gifted, inclusion practices in general education primary classrooms, and teacher competencies as co-creators of differentiated curriculum. A challenge providing professional learning in gifted education concerns motivating general education teachers to differentiate instruction for students with giftedness. The study recognized the need to reach beyond traditional lecture-based teacher education practices (Brazzolotto, 2018) by integrating evidence-based practices (Asquini, 2018) and promoting co-construction of knowledge and skills through qualitative research (Silverman, 2011). The research design analyzed *Global Principles of Professional Learning in Gifted Education* based on evidence during Pre-Intervention and Post-Intervention Focus Groups and a concluding Parent Interview.

After receiving school and parental permission to conduct the study, the primary researcher hosted a one-hour online Pre-Intervention Focus Group to identify previous didactic strategies used with the student, teacher perceptions of the student, roadblocks encountered, and shared instructional goals. After transcribing and analyzing the Pre-Intervention Focus Group responses comments, the researcher met with teachers to develop inclusive goals to improve behavior of all fourth grade students, modify instruction for nine-year old "Marco" identified with giftedness in the regular education classroom, and provide ongoing professional development to improve teaching children with giftedness. The teachers established instructional goals for Marco to understand his potential, engage in enrichment activities that enhanced his academic potential, and redirect affective behaviors when necessary.

The co-constructed didactic strategies included learning menus and learning contracts for Marco using data collected during the Pre-Intervention Focus Group. The study based learning menus and learning contracts on Winebrenner and Brulles practices (2012) that encourage inclusion in the regular education classroom and tracks accountability through goal setting and work accomplished. The learning menus for Marco used existing course syllabi in Geography (see Appendix A), Mathematics (see Appendix B), and Italian (see Appendix C). Although the research proposed menus for Science and History, teacher time constraints precluded them during this intervention.

After the teachers used the learning menus and learning contracts for approximately four weeks, the primary researcher conducted a Post-Intervention Focus Group with the teachers to reflect on the four-week intervention with Marco. After the Post-Intervention Focus Group, the primary researcher and teachers revised the learning menus based on recommendations to improve future interventions for Marco. The study concluded with a parent interview after the Post-Intervention Focus Group

Participants

Participants in the study included three primary school teachers who requested professional development to improve their instructional practices with all fourth grade students, and specifically for "Marco," a gifted student. All three teachers were female. One teacher with 10 years of experience as a primary teacher in the same school taught Italian. A second teacher who taught math and science began her second year at the school, and the third teacher of history and geography joined the school faculty that year. All three teachers experienced the intervention as on-the-job professional learning in gifted education. A psychologist identified "Marco" as gifted through clinical assessment, and the teachers received information about his identification on a need to know basis. Marco received instruction in a mixed ability fourth grade classroom with 25 students. Marco lived at home with his parents and his 24-year-old stepsister.

Results

Pre-intervention focus group

The Pre-Intervention Focus Group responses indicated the teachers distinguished characteristics of gifted exceptionality from non-exceptional fourth grade students: "[Marco] is very good at drawing, and he has shown deep insight, unlike other children." The teachers also observed challenges in the affective domain related to peer interpersonal relationships: "[Marco] cannot control his movements ... he gets up and teases other children ... this behavior is lessening somewhat now, especially with children in with disabilities."

Teachers reported results from previous interventions intended to improve interpersonal relationships between the gifted student and age-peer classmates: "We made him a tutor, and he took on this on responsibility. There was improvement, but after a while, we decided to eliminate the tutoring." Their previous intervention attempts seemed directed toward reducing Marco's inappropriate behavior in their classrooms rather than an effort to support his academic strengths. Teachers noticed improvement when they implemented a contingency schedule to reward academic performance with additional recreational time: "Then the time bank ... every time students performed well in a scholastic activity, we added an extra minute of break time they used for drawing."

Four-week intervention

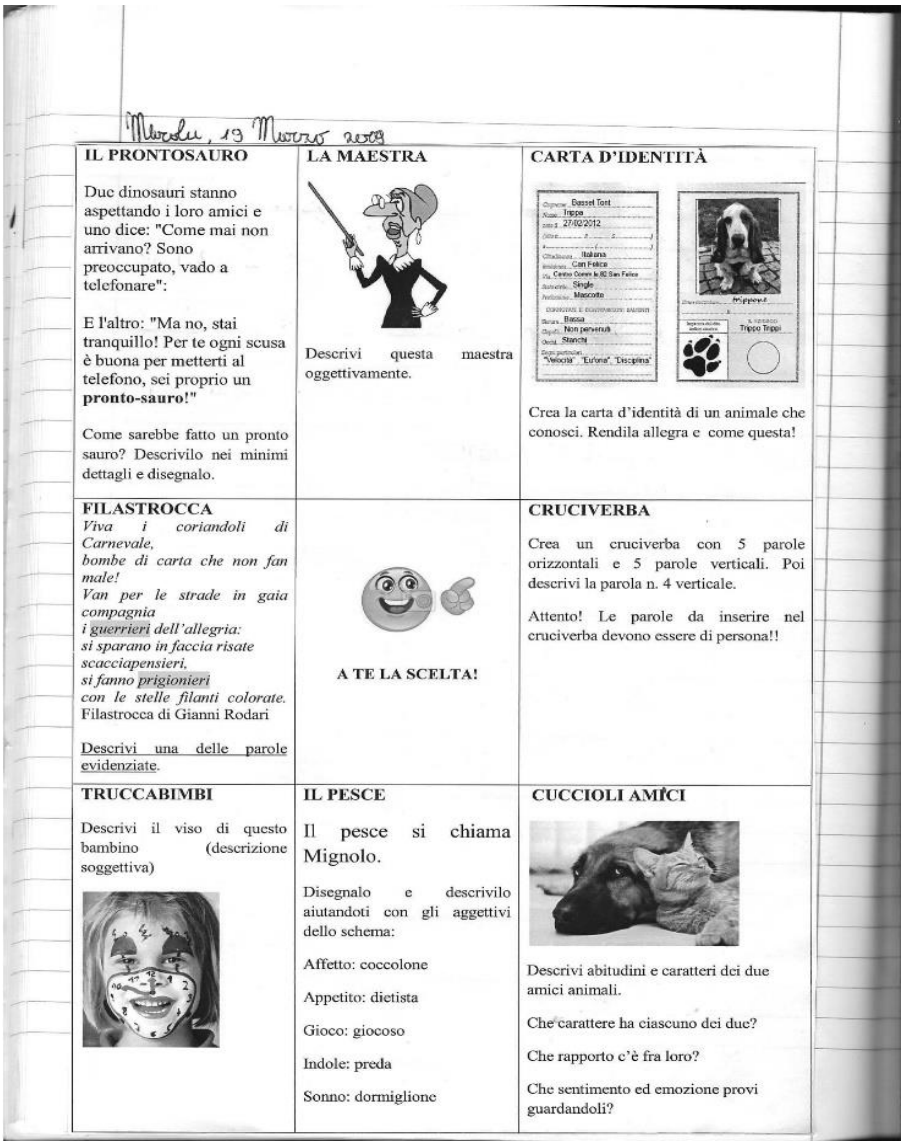
Teachers adapted regular education classroom materials based on the instructional goals written that addressed Marco's cognitive and affective needs. These modifications resulted in four-week learning menus for core subject areas (see Table 1). Examples of Geography Learning Menus included choices for Marco to advance his learning potential. For example, in the "city and hill" geography activity, the teacher adjusted the instructional pace by changing "city" to "mountain" and asking, "What at the common aspects? Differences?" (see Appendix A). However, in the Mathematics Learning Menu, the teacher increased practice of repetitive transformation of fractions into decimal numbers exercises to find the solution. The teacher also reduced eight instructional sessions into five sessions by removing the more complex concepts and operations (see Appendix B).

Table 1: Co-constructed curriculum intervention.

Academic Subject	Learning Menu
Mathematics	Decimals and fractions
Italian	Subjective and objective description
Geography	City and hill
History	Egyptians
Science	Ecosystems

Due to long-held views, the teachers decreased—rather than increased—complexity in some proposed learning menu activities. They seemed to equate traditional special education practices of reducing complexity with Marco's exceptional status, despite his advanced cognitive ability. For example, the Italian teacher replaced the proposed, "describe of Haute-Savoie region in southeastern

France" with a subjective description to "describe the face of a child" in the Italian Learning Menu. She also changed the more abstract Mandala image to the more concrete traditional image of a fish (see Figure 1).



Mercoledì, 13 Marzo 2019

IL PRONTOSAURO

Due dinosauri stanno aspettando i loro amici e uno dice: "Come mai non arrivano? Sono preoccupato, vado a telefonare":

E l'altro: "Ma no, stai tranquillo! Per te ogni scusa è buona per metterti al telefono, sei proprio un **pronto-sauro!**"

Come sarebbe fatto un pronto sauro? Descrivilo nei minimi dettagli e disegnalo.

LA MAESTRA

Descrivi questa maestra oggettivamente.

CARTA D'IDENTITÀ

Crea la carta d'identità di un animale che conosci. Rendila allegra e come questa!

FILASTROCCA

Viva i coriandoli di Carnevale,
bombe di carta che non fan male!
Van per le strade in gaia compagnia
i guerrieri dell'allegria:
si sparano in faccia risate scacciapensieri,
si fanno prigionieri
con le stelle filanti colorate.
Filastrocca di Gianni Rodari

Descrivi una delle parole evidenziate.

A TE LA SCELTA!

CRUCIVERBA

Crea un cruciverba con 5 parole orizzontali e 5 parole verticali. Poi descrivi la parola n. 4 verticale.

Attento! Le parole da inserire nel cruciverba devono essere di persona!!

TRUCCABIMBI

Descrivi il viso di questo bambino (descrizione soggettiva)

IL PESCE

Il pesce si chiama Mignolo.

Disegnalo e descrivilo aiutandoti con gli aggettivi dello schema:

Affetto: coccolone

Appetito: dietista

Gioco: giocoso

Indole: preda

Sonno: dormiglione

CUCCIOLI AMICI

Descrivi abitudini e caratteri dei due amici animali.

Che carattere ha ciascuno dei due?

Che rapporto c'è fra loro?

Che sentimento ed emozione provi guardandoli?

Figure 1: Co-constructed Italian learning menu.

Post-intervention focus group

After the four-week learning menu intervention, the researcher conducted a one-hour onsite Post-Intervention Focus Group with the three teachers to review student progress, assess instructional goals, and revise learning menu contracts. Teacher responses provided support for Research Question 1: Primary teachers formed more positive **holistic** and **equitable** dispositions toward Marco after **ongoing** and **integral** professional learning in Gifted Education. The Italian teacher reported Marco achieved cognitive and affective objectives during both individual assignments and small group activities. She specifically appreciated progress Marco made socially by asking to work with a classmate experiencing academic difficulties. Marco's interactions with small group members demonstrated less conflict prior to the co-constructed curriculum changes.

Results from the Post-Intervention Focus Group provided support for Research Question 2. Teacher responses indicated primary teachers reflected on **broad** professional learning to practice inclusion as **evidence-based** rational in the general education classrooms. The geography teacher

found Marco appropriately accomplished Geography Learning Menu activities. He respected the modified instructional delivery, and he responded positively to available book selections. However, the geography teacher noted Marco required teacher intervention when he engaged in particularly energetic behavior and several competitive incidents with a classmate during drawing activities. The mathematics teacher stated Marco completed very little work, despite the Mathematics Learning Menu and signed learning contract. Instead, Marco chose a simple mathematics activity that he miscalculated (see Figure 2). The teacher reported Marco seemed very distracted and that he calculated incorrectly because he skipped the verifying resolution step. Although initially planned for history and science classes, teachers lacked time to implement those learning menus.

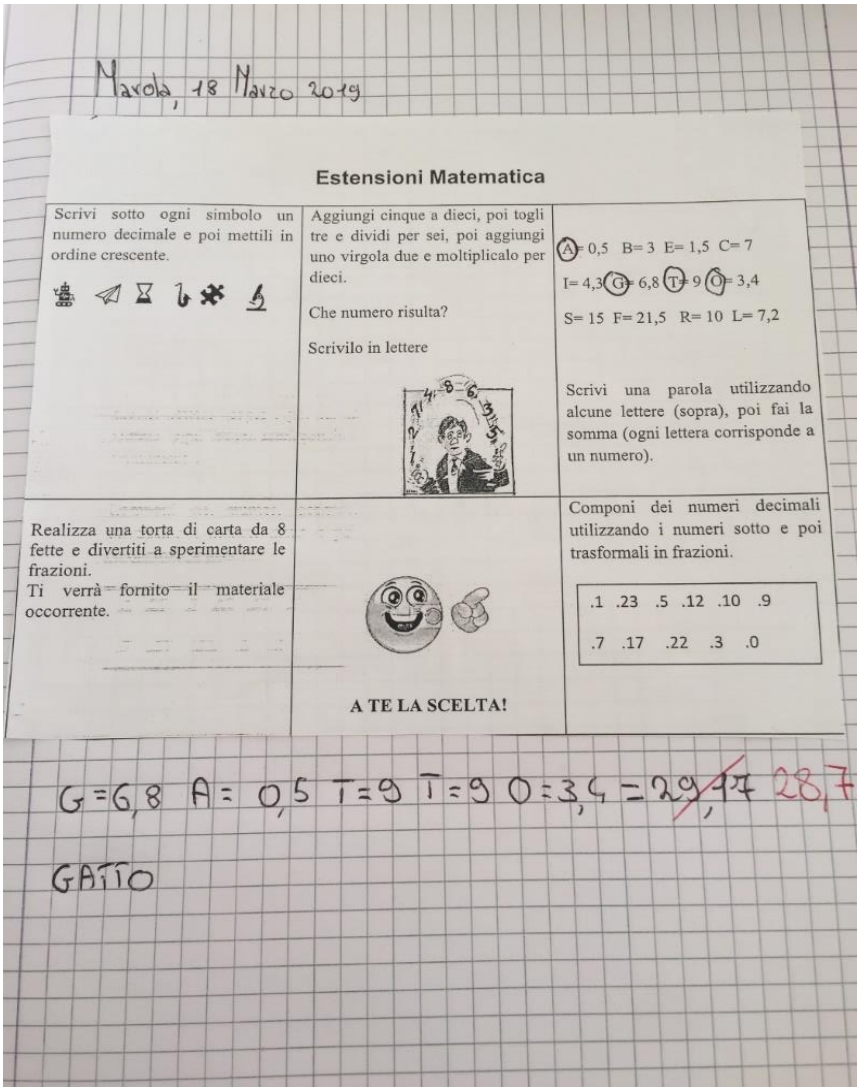


Figure 2: Co-constructed mathematics learning menu.

Evidence for Research Question 3 from the Post-Intervention Focus Group responses indicated teachers increased competencies co-creating **comprehensive** and **tiered content** learning menus and learning contracts as **sustainable** and **empowering** professional learning experiences in Gifted Education. Overall, teachers found the learning menus and student contracts provided student choice in proposed tasks, excellent background resource material, in-depth individualized enrichment, and an offering of creative ideas in teaching and learning. One teacher realized the learning menu approach permitted flexibility with instructional pacing. For example, if Marco completed work early, he remained engaged in the learning process by moving onto additional activities. Another teacher suggested a web links list resource to provide Marco more autonomy during independent enrichment activities.

Parent interview

The study included parent feedback after the four-week intervention. The primary researcher interviewed Marco's parents to determine if they noted some improvements at home, i.e., doing his homework. When Marco told his family he received new activities at school, he expressed enthusiasm about the change. He also explained the learning contract to his older sister as an "absolute commitment" because he gave his word to complete the work when he signed the learning contract. Parents said they had never seen their son so inclusive and happy at school. The Parent Interview indicated overall support for Research Questions 1, 2, 3 examining teacher dispositions, classroom inclusion, and co-construction competencies.

In summary, following the Post-Intervention Focus Group, the primary researcher and three primary teachers reflected on the **broad** co-construction experience. They revised the learning menus with structured enrichment projects as **evidence-based practices** and more precise instructional guidance to reduce guesswork yet maintain complexity in the academic **tiered content** (see Appendices A-C). One teacher requested further clarification on this **sustainable** enrichment protocol, as she wished **ongoing** use of learning menus and **equitable** student learning contracts. Teachers reported overall positive **holistic** student receptiveness and enhanced academic potential of all fourth grade students, especially **empowering** for Marco. Thus, the primary researcher found **integral** and increased ability of general education primary teachers in co-constructing **comprehensive** inclusive learning activities for Marco while also addressing the academic potential and behavioral concerns of his chronological age peers. Marco's parents reported his invested effort academically and joy encountering differentiated instruction based on his interests, choices, and abilities.

Discussion

The enactment of Italian Education ministerial law n. 562 (2019) that mandated inclusion of children with giftedness in the category of special education needs increased interest for professional learning in gifted education. However, without published guidelines, teachers need assistance from trained professionals in Gifted Education. This study documents the implementation of the ministerial law by exploring teacher dispositions toward gifted students (Research Question 1), inclusion practices in the general education classroom (Research Question 2), and teacher competencies co-constructing differentiated curricula for a gifted student (Research Question 3). When examining responses between the Pre-Intervention and Post-Intervention Focus Groups, teachers demonstrated positive responses aligned with 10 *Global Principles for Professional Learning in Gifted Education* (WCGTC, 2021).

According to Fraser-Seeto et al. (2015), general education teachers often lack knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to recognize and accommodate the cognitive, affective, and academic needs of gifted students. When the primary school in North Italy requested assistance for support co-constructing differentiated curricula for gifted students, they responded out of frustration based on their lack of success with identified gifted students. They needed guidance from a trained professional in Gifted Education to address their deficits in **tiered content** in the general education classroom, **evidence-based** practices for inclusion of gifted students, and **empowering** support to co-create differentiated curricula. The three teachers in this study appreciated **sustainable** and **ongoing** professional learning needed for **broad** learning experiences in a general education with mixed abilities. Coleman et al. (2012) reported enriched in-service training with a support network. The teachers gained **empowering** competencies guided by feedback from an onsite external professional with training in Gifted Education. This feedback encouraged **holistic** learning experiences for the gifted student, and the collaboration of teachers, student, parent and school administration supported a **comprehensive** network of active learning that combined content and practice (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). The Parent Interview reported Marco's cognitive, affective, and academic well-being improved during intervention because the learning contracts and learning menus favored his interests, choices, and abilities as **evidence-based** practices in Gifted Education (Desimone & Garet, 2015). **Integral** professional learning directly involved the teachers co-creating learning contracts and learning menu activities based on Marco's strengths, interests, and choices as **equitable** and inclusive practice (Watters & Diezmann, 2013).

Global Principles of Professional Learning in Gifted Education (WCGTC, 2021) aligned with Research Question 1 showed distinct improvement in teacher dispositions toward Marco as teachers gained **holistic** knowledge about his cognitive, affective, and academic needs. They expressed less frustration about the student and their lack of progress providing appropriate instruction during the Post-Intervention Focus Group than the Pre-Intervention Focus Group. During the Four-Week Intervention, the teachers experienced **evidence-based** practices with the learning contract and learning menu that promoted inclusion for Marco in the fourth grade classroom. The Pre-Intervention Focus Group indicated the teachers primarily focused on Marco's classroom behavior. However, his increased classroom inclusion supported Research Question 2 as teachers discarded previous behavior management strategies and focused on Marco's specialized interests, abilities, and choices as an exceptional child, as defined in ministerial law n. 562 (2019). According to the Parent Interview, Marco cooperated willingly with the learning contracts and learning menus, and he seemed happier at school that prior to the Four-Week Intervention. By addressing his cognitive and academic needs, the teachers reported fewer behavior issues with Marco's classmates (Winebrenner & Brulles, 2021). Wiley (2018) reported difficulties socializing gifted children often relate to teaching toward the average student or standard level of learning. When teachers reported a positive response co-creating the "Extension Menu" during the Post-Intervention Focus Group, they provided support for Research Question 3 regarding their competencies developing curricular supports for gifted children. Moreover, the Extension Menu supported Research Question 2 as an inclusive instructional strategy for all students in the classroom (Winebrenner & Brulles, 2012). Aligning the study with the 10 Global Principles underscored changes in teacher dispositions, skills, and products expressed during the Pre- and Post-Intervention Focus Groups. As educators, administrators, support staff, and parents gain awareness of the 10 Global Principles as guides for local and national professional development in Gifted Education, children and adolescents with giftedness can experience appropriate teaching and learning experiences designed to support their unique strengths, interests, and choices in P-12 schools.

Conclusion

This exploratory study demonstrated how national legislation, professional learning, and Global Principles work together to effect positive change for Gifted Education in P-12 schools and classrooms in Italy. However, its significance shows general educators, specialists in gifted education, and the Global Principles working together can promote quality services for gifted children and adolescents in all schools around the world. Promoting inclusiveness in the general education classroom requires teachers engage with both specific ad hoc strategies and appropriate instructional materials. Moreover, this study underscores the need for ongoing professional development to implement new governmental regulations effectively. With little if any training, general education teachers need professional learning based on Global Principles to co-construct academic content and deliver inclusive learning experiences that benefit all students. General education teachers need multiple levels of planning instruction followed by intentional reflection to ensure teaching engages the cognitive and affective domains of students with giftedness. When the primary teachers in this study depended on instructional material connected with existing curricula and syllabi, they provided minimal instructional guidance to complete activities. However, as their attitudes, skills, and productivity changed, they improved the teaching/learning experience for all students.

Conventional teacher training programs in Italy and other countries that acknowledge the distinct cognitive and affective characteristics of individuals with gifts and talents improve inclusive practices. Teachers who encounter curriculum models designed to increase complexity gain competencies in providing student choice. Well-prepared teachers offer a variety of quality resource materials to enhance the teaching and learning process. Most importantly, educators who co-construct interdisciplinary experiences that extend beyond traditional classroom walls and school programs.

This study demonstrated the importance of co-construction between regular education and specialists in Gifted Education, guided by *Global Principles* (WCGTC, 2021), to reform traditional curricula and implement instructional interventions for children and adolescents with giftedness. General education teachers need guided practice modifying, adapting, and implementing strategies for

children and adolescents with giftedness. Teachers who co-construct instructional decisions during this reforming process gain confidence and assurance of success when permitted to select methods well suited to their teaching style and academic content. Teachers who combine their own professionalism with evidence-based practices gain competence selecting effective instructional practices. When permitted to reflect on their own practice, general education teachers participate in the change process by focusing on their own strengths and learning to improve inclusivity that develops potential in all children.

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About the Authors

Martina Brazzolotto, *Ph.D.* provides professional learning experiences on giftedness, talent development, and creativity for P-12 teachers throughout Italy. She served on the Italian Ministry of Education Committee on Giftedness and is a delegate from Italy to the World Council for Gifted and Talented Children. She completed PhD studies at the University of Bologna with specialization in special education and dissertation research on giftedness in the regular education classroom. She co-founded the TalentInclusivi national network of school in Italy, teaches primary school in Campodarsego, and published two professional books, *Teaching for Talent Development* (2019) and *Gifted Education Through Talent Development* (2020). Martina conducts international collaborative research through post-doctoral studies at Emporia State University in Kansas, USA.

Connie Phelps, *Ed.D*. directs the Gifted, Talented, and Creative program at Emporia State University where she received the inaugural Dr. John E. King Endowed Professor award that recognized her impact on students. She previously taught middle school gifted students; provided consultation services for high school gifted students; and identified elementary gifted students in the Wichita Public Schools. She completed doctoral studies in Elementary Education at the University of Arkansas and earned graduate degrees in Elementary Education at East Texas State University and Gifted Special Education at Emporia State University. She directs the Great Plains Center for Gifted Studies where she researches giftedness, talent development, and creativity. She leads Gifted Program accreditation reviews and serves as a lead site visitor for the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation. She served on the Global Principles for Professional Learning in Gifted Education Committee of the World Council for Gifted and Talented Children.

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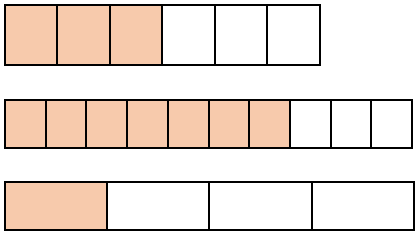
Appendix A

Geography Learning Menu

School Trip Have you ever taken a hill trip? On the hills? Describe the landscape you saw. 	**Pollution** What could man do to decrease pollution in the hills? 	**Farmhouse** Create a plan (with legend) of a farmhouse in the hills. Also include animals and plants. 
Crossword Puzzle Create a crossword puzzle with clues with these words: -agriculture - terraces - companies - slope - summit - vegetables - anthropization	 **THE CHOICE IS YOURS!**	How did the hills form? 
Flora Draw at least 5 plants that are born in the hills. 	**Mountain and Hill** What are aspects in common? What are differences? 	**Test** Create 5 multiple choice questions to help the teacher write a test on the hills. 

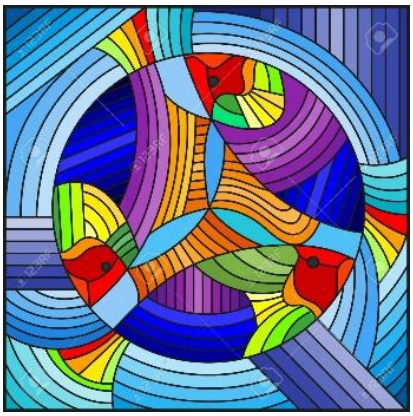
Appendix B

Mathematics Learning Menu

Write a decimal number under each symbol and then put them in ascending order. 	 Turn the fractions (above) into decimal numbers.	Write a word using a few letters (above), then add up (each letter corresponds to a number). A= 0,5 B= 3 E= 1,5 C= 7 I= 4,3 G= 6,8 T= 9 O= 3,4 S= 15 F= 21,5 R= 10 L= 7,2
Turn each fraction into a decimal number.  10/3 14/5 21/4	 **THE CHOICE IS YOURS!**	Dial decimal numbers using the numbers below and then turn them into fractions. .1 .23 .5 .12 .10 .9 .7 .17 .22 .3 .0
Add five to ten, then remove three and divide by six, then add one comma two and multiply it by ten. What number is it? Write it in letters. 	Complete the sequence of numbers: 7; 10,2; …..16,6; ….. 23; ….. How much is the sum of the integers? And how much is the sum of the decimal numbers?	Make up a problem with decimal numbers and solve it. 

Appendix C

Learning Menu of Italian

Guessing Game *My life can last a few hours. What I produce devours me. Thin, I'm fast. Big, I'm slow, and the wind scares me a lot. Who I am?* When you find out what it is, describe it in detail.	**Mandala** Describe the image. Highlight objective and subjective elements. 	**Your Kitchen** Write a descriptive text. Make a drawing of your kitchen. 
Nursery Rhyme Describe one of the highlighted words. *Long live the carnival confetti, paper bombs that don't hurt!* *Van on the streets in good company, the warriors of joy: laughter is shot in the face* *Jew's harp, they take prisoners with colored streamers.* by Gianni Rodari	 **THE CHOICE IS YOURS!**	**Energy** Describe following the ladder: • what is that? • how is it produced? • how is it transferred? • the different types.

Haute Savoie  Describe the landscape of Haute Savoie in southeastern France.	**Flowers** Describe first a violet and then a primrose. In the end, highlight the differences.  	**Crossword Puzzle** Create a crossword puzzle with 5 horizontal words and 5 vertical words. Then describe the word number 4 verticle.