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## COMMUNICATIVE BEHAVIOURS IN THE SPOTLIGHT: THE IDENTITY OF A POLISH HIGH SCHOOL INTELLECTUALLY GIFTED STUDENT AND THE FORMATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION CURRICULA

The paper makes reference to the concept of identity which constitutes the result of the interaction of four parameters comprising the model of the Imperial Tetragon of Embodiment (ITE) by Puppel (2009, 2011). With reference to the above theoretical framework, this contribution makes an attempt to describe the status of the ITE parameters in relation to the communicative behaviours of a Polish high school intellectually gifted student with regard to his functioning in an educational institution (which will enable one to establish the identity of the aforementioned learner). Notably, it is postulated that the potential of intellectually gifted students should be given due consideration in the process of forming higher education curricula.

KEYWORDS: identity, Imperial Tetragon of Embodiment, intellectual giftedness, communicative behaviours of a Polish high school gifted student, higher education curricula

### INTRODUCTION

'Identity' is a term that enjoys great popularity in various areas of scientific research at present. It is analysed, *inter alia*, in the field of linguistics, literature, anthropology, sociology, pedagogy or culture studies. Accordingly, one can encounter numerous definitions of the above concept and advanced theoretical frameworks aimed at explaining issues related to it. To exemplify, one can mention the works by Ardener (1992), Bauman (2007), Baumeister (1986), Bausinger (1983), Całbecki (2013), Denek (2009), Giddens (2006), Hall (1992), Kłoskowska (1992), Mach (1994), Paleczny (2008), Wawrzak-Chodaczek (2009) *inter alios*. This paper will refer to the model of the Imperial Tetragon of Embodiment (Puppel 2009, 2011) that will be applied to the analysis of the communicative behaviours of a Polish high school intellectually gifted student in relation to his functioning in school space (which will result in describing the identity of the above learner). Accordingly, the following sections will demonstrate the idea of identity with reference to the basic assumptions of the Imperial Tetragon of Embodiment (ITE), the concept of

intellectual giftedness, characteristics of intellectually gifted individuals and research into the identity of a Polish high school intellectually gifted student. Finally, the paper will address the issue of higher education curricula in reference to the needs of intellectually gifted learners.

### IDENTITY IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE IMPERIAL TETRAGON OF EMBODIMENT (ITE)

The Imperial Tetragon of Embodiment (Puppel 2009, 2011) represents a model in which all forms of embodiment, represented by embodied agents (i.e. biological, social and cultural entities), develop identity which originates from the interplay of four parameters: militancy (M), trade-offs (T), utility (U), displays (D) (Figure 1). Importantly, all products of embodied agents (as elements of culture) evolve into institutions constituting the most elaborate social forms (out of all the structures of public space). The aforementioned institutions also evolve identity, which can be identified via the analysis of the status of each ITE parameter (i.e. militancy (M), trade-offs (T), utility (U), displays (D)).

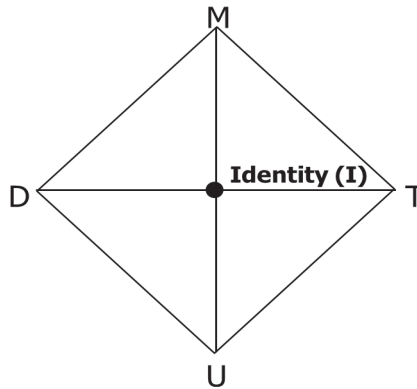


Figure 1. Imperial Tetragon of Embodiment (Puppel 2011: 11)

Each ITE parameter is equipped with specialised meaning. ‘Militancy’ represents different forms of aggression, the extreme case being the destruction of other competitive forms of embodiment in contact. ‘Displays’ designates attractiveness, which can be presented via diverse display modes, i.e. audio-vocal, graphic or multimodal-multimedia. In the case of language, ‘displays’ refers to the use of high communicative resources. ‘Trade-offs’ signifies a variety of exchanges, their bidirectionality being emphasised. In the field of education ‘trade-offs’ pertains to the exchange of knowledge between teachers and students, importance being placed

on the bidirectional aspects of educational processes. ‘Utility’, an economically-oriented concept, refers to the idea of usefulness perceived as the rate of satisfaction with a variety of resources. It rests on the notion of economic benefits implying that the increase in the resources of an institution raises its utility.

The interplay of the parameters described above gives rise to identity (inside the tetragon, c.f. Figure 1) which is changeable and, hence, requires constant monitoring. In favourable circumstances one of the ITE parameters may begin to dominate, i.e. it may be imperialised (maximized). Accordingly, the resulting identity may get either displays-dominant, utility-dominant, trade-offs-dominant or militancy-dominant. In other words, identity originates from the interplay of the same set of attributes which represent a dynamic relationship – the parameters are the same but their proportions are different at diverse points of time (identity characterised by the balanced contribution of the ITE attributes is of little probability).

As already mentioned, the ITE model will be applied to analyse the communicative behaviours of a Polish high school gifted learner in terms of his functioning in school space (which will lead to establishing the identity of the aforementioned student). Since the communication used by the student under analysis is determined by certain characteristics represented by gifted individuals, the following two sections will demonstrate a short outline of the concept of giftedness and distinctive features of the gifted respectively.

### CONCEPT OF INTELLECTUAL GIFTEDNESS

The conceptualisation of ‘giftedness’ is fathered upon Galton (1869) who defined a gifted person as someone possessing a gift, i.e. an exceptional talent manifested in adulthood. He postulated that a significantly higher intellectual ability possessed by some individuals is genetically transmitted. The above idea of giftedness, described with reference to intelligence and heredity, was expanded by Terman (1916, 1925) who supplemented it with high IQ. According to Terman’s terminology, gifted children are individuals endowed with the IQ of 140 or higher. Significantly, not only did Terman believe that IQ was inherited, but also he considered it a strong predictor of success in life.

Terman’s theory, aimed mainly at defining and describing intelligence understood as an inheritable trait, was challenged by Hollingworth (1926). She acknowledged the claim that giftedness was inherited but put greater emphasis on the influence of environmental and educational factors on intelligence. Accordingly, she concentrated on how gifted children should be nurtured and educated, i.e. how their potential could be developed.

The above early definitions of giftedness provided background for further development of problems regarding the gifted, which resulted in almost an endless

and overwhelming number of conceptions and ways of defining the notion under analysis (cf. Stenberg and Davidson 2005). Due to the limited scope of this paper, this section will refer only to a sample of standpoints selected in view of providing a theoretical outline that will suit the needs of the research presented in the further part of the article.

As highlighted by Bainbridge (2016), in the field under analysis one can differentiate between the following basic slants in accordance with which giftedness is viewed as:

- a predictor of adult achievements,
- a potential which ought to be nurtured,
- asynchronous development,
- a relative ability.

Frameworks that approach giftedness as a predictor of adult achievements relate, apart from IQ, to motivation or creativity and task commitment. According to Bainbridge (2016), this type of theories can be exemplified by the Three Ring Conception of Giftedness by Renzulli (1978, 1986). The above model by and large refers to gifted behaviour (and not individuals) that is presented as an interaction occurring between such human traits as very strong task commitment, above average ability and a high degree of creativity. Accordingly, a person who develops gifted behaviour is in possession of the array of interacting traits which he/she applies to a given field. Individuals characterised by the ability to develop an interaction between the aforementioned traits should be provided with special educational programmes.

Approaches that perceive giftedness as a potential that must be nurtured differentiate between the child's capability of achieving and what the child will actually achieve. The child's potential constitutes only an element of giftedness. The development of this potential is crucial in terms of achieving success, which is conditioned by the environment in which the child is placed. As stated by Bainbridge (2016), the group of proposals oriented towards the significant role of an appropriate environment in the process of evolving the child's potential may be exemplified by the Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (DMGT) introduced by Gagné (2008, 2009).

The idea of giftedness in the asynchronous perspective (cf. Columbus Group 1991; Morelock 1992; Silverman 1997; Bainbridge 2016) points to the uneven development of children who are gifted. This approach concentrates not only on intelligence but first of all on emotional aspects characteristic of the gifted (i.e. their feelings, thoughts, experiences), particular attention being paid to heightened sensitivity. The Columbus Group defines giftedness as asynchronous development in the way presented in the quotation below.

Giftedness is *asynchronous development* in which advanced cognitive abilities and heightened intensity combine to create inner experiences and awareness that are qualitatively different

from the norm. This asynchrony increases with higher intellectual capacity. The uniqueness of the gifted renders them particularly vulnerable and requires modifications in parenting, teaching and counseling in order for them to develop optimally (Columbus Group 1991).

Educational institutions may apply the definition of giftedness understood as a relative ability. In accordance with the above idea students in a given school are classified as gifted in relation to the performance of other students, i.e. learners who represent the top percentage of the performance of the school student population (e.g. 5 or 10 percent) are identified as gifted individuals who require a more challenging curriculum than the one regularly offered by the school. 'Giftedness' perceived in the above sense is relative as a given individual may be classified as gifted in one educational institution, whereas in a different one he/she may be viewed as not gifted (which introduces confusion) (Bainbridge 2016; VanTassel-Baska and Johnsen 2007).

#### GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE GIFTED

Gifted individuals are equipped with a number of characteristics that make them different from the other members of the population. They learn faster and more deeply, possess excellent reasoning abilities, high verbal skills based on extended vocabulary and magnificent memory. As emphasised by Diezmann and Watters (2006: 3), "gifted students have an advanced knowledge base compared to their non-gifted peers". The gifted are also characterised by high levels of creativity and curiosity and frequently master theoretical ideas with only few repetitions (Bireley 1995; Davis and Rimm 2004). They tend to question authority (Kennedy et al. 2008: 41). As children, they often learn to read quite early (but not all early readers are gifted) (Bainbridge 2016). Gifted children may also have difficulty in communicating with mates, which originates from differences in personality, motivation, interests and vocabulary use (Diezmann, Watters and Fox 2001: 3). As a result, gifted children frequently opt for the company of adults or older children (Davis and Rimm 2004). Significantly, giftedness may not affect all intellectual areas. To exemplify, a gifted individual may achieve excellence in the sphere of logic but simultaneously can represent an average level in the case of other spheres (cf. Ruth 2001).

The gifted may experience isolation (chiefly when they do not function among other gifted individuals). In order to be accepted by their mates, they attempt to conform to their level, i.e. they try to hide their intellectual abilities by applying underachievement and using lower communicative resources (Świątek 1995). The isolation described above does not generally originate from the phenomenon of giftedness *per se* but is the result of the negative attitude of society that attaches

a stigma to superior intellectual ability (Plucker and Levy 2001). According to Silverman (1997: 38), “[d]evelopmentally advanced children, like the developmentally delayed, are at risk in a society that prizes sameness” due to the principle that “[t]he albino bird is often destroyed by the normally-colored members of the flock”. The isolation in question can be prevented by placing gifted individuals in peer groups of similar abilities and interests (Robinson 2002; Lardner 2005).

Yet another problem gifted individuals frequently face is perfectionism, which is facilitated due to the very nature of giftedness – the gifted tend to succeed easily in many activities they undertake. Significantly, perfectionism may develop into a positive or negative phenomenon. The so called normal/healthy perfectionism signifies conscientiousness, high standards and responsibility. Healthy perfectionists generally derive satisfaction and joy from their efforts, mistakes and criticism being treated not as disasters but as stimulants to further progress (c.f. Hamachek 1978; Parker and Mills 1996; Parker 1997; Schuler 1999; Parker 2002; Owen and Slade 2008; Fletcher and Speirs Neumeister 2012 *inter alios*). In other words, healthy perfectionism, which stimulates the process of pursuing one’s excellence, may be viewed as a virtue (Parker and Mills 1996). Neurotic/dysfunctional/unhealthy perfectionism originates from associating one’s own value as a person with achievements, which is supplemented with the assumption that work which is not perfect is not acceptable. Neurotic perfectionism also entails high concern over failures and criticism (c.f. Hamachek 1978; Parker and Mills 1996; Parker 1997; Schuler 1999; Parker 2002; Stoeber et al. 2007; Owen and Slade 2008; Fletcher and Speirs Neumeister 2012 *inter alios*).

Dysfunctional perfectionism can be caused and intensified by behaviours of parents or classmates. Parents, being proud of their child, praise him/her for achievements exceedingly often, which may lead the gifted child to viewing his/her value as dependent of the praise (Davis and Rimm 2004). Classmates, driven by jealousy of the gifted child’s achievements, bully or tease the gifted student about any, even minute, imperfection regarding the gifted child’s clothes, work results, behaviour, appearance or strength. Further strengthening of unhealthy perfectionism occurs if the gifted child reacts to bullying applying underachievement, which produces disdain in his/her psyche for this unsuccessful performance (Peterson and Ray 2006).

## RESEARCH AND ITS METHODOLOGY

The research undertaken in this section represents qualitative analysis based on a case study. It is aimed at establishing the identity of an intellectually gifted individual learning in a Polish high school with reference to his communicative behaviours associated with functioning in educational space. The research participant

selected for the analysis is a second grade student. He is the winner of two voivodeship junior high school competitions and the grade average of his last high school certificate was 5.5. The student participated in an interview which lasted around 120 minutes and provided answers to the following enquiries included in the interview scenario:

- 1) Could you describe your communicative behaviours in relation to your teachers?
- 2) Could you describe your communicative behaviours with reference to your school mates?
- 3) Could you describe your communicative behaviours related to the process of learning?
- 4) Could you describe your communicative behaviours in the classroom?

The questions of the interview scenario aimed at collecting data whose analysis was to provide answers to the following research questions:

- 1) Which ITE parameter dominates the communicative behaviours of the Polish high school intellectually gifted student under analysis in relation to his functioning in educational space?
- 2) How can one define the identity of the Polish high school intellectually gifted student in terms of the interplay of the ITE parameters?

## ANALYSIS OF THE RESEARCH RESULTS

The research data (comprised of the student's answers), have been analysed in terms of the status of each parameter of the Imperial Tetragon of Embodiment. The results of this analysis are presented in the form of numbered statements below.

1. In terms of the research participants' communicative behaviours that signify the level of his communicative resources, one must note the following aspects:
  - the learner under analysis is in possession of high communicative resources and frequently makes use of them during discussions in the classroom forum,
  - the student's high communicative skills result not only from school education but also from private lessons – in the primary school the student had a poor Polish teacher so he was given private lessons to make up for the material. Since private tutoring in Polish language and literature has been continued at the further stages of education, the learner has been provided with appropriate opportunities to develop his communicative resources,
  - as far as the application of the communicative resources among classmates and school friends is concerned, the student under analysis conforms to the general trend represented by students (c.f. Bielak 2016: 8) which is characterised by the general lowering of linguistic norms. The learner admits to using abbreviated communication, slang expressions and vulgarisms.

2. Due to the fact that high communicative resources are applied by the student not in all situations, the position of the parameter of displays determining the learner's identity is assumed to be only moderately strong.
3. With reference to the parameter of militancy, one should note the following communicative behaviours applied by the Polish high school intellectually gifted student in relation to his functioning in educational space:
  - in the company of classmates the learner's behaviours (both verbal and non-verbal) are survival-oriented. The student, when placed in the jungle of peer relations, has been fighting for survival practically all his school life. The fact that he is more intelligent than the others, receives better test or exam results, wins competitions (or, in general, achieves success) frequently has not been accepted by his classmates, which frequently resulted in jealousy expressed in the form of malicious and bullying communicative behaviours (which also caused the student's malicious or even aggressive reactions). In effect, he has changed his school twice: in the first case, to be put in the environment of peers representing a similar intellectual level, in the second one, to be placed in the company of mates less rat-race oriented. In both cases the decision caused a great surprise or even a shock among teachers and school management as they had not identified any problems,
  - the communicative behaviours of the student are also oriented towards success, which is interpreted as passing his exams with very high results and be accepted at the elitist higher education faculty he has chosen. Since the competition to get a place there is high, he must devote a lot of time to learning to achieve success (i.e. to pass his exams almost flawlessly). In order to reach his goal, he attends extra private lessons. The learner emphasises that his achievements only partly result from what he has been taught at school. To a considerable extent, they constitute the effect of what he has learned during extra lessons given by a private tutor. He highlights that school education comprises only some foundation that can be used to learn more during additional private classes. Only the above way of learning may enable one to achieve success (e.g. to win a prestigious contest or to be accepted at some type of university faculties where competition is extremely strong). Accordingly, the process of preparing for the exams that determine acceptance at an elitist university faculty resembles a battle,
  - while participating in the aforementioned battle for very high exam results, the learner's communicative behaviours are also focused on fighting against stress, tiredness and discouragement caused by the excessive number of educational tasks, resulting lack of free time and growing uncertainty about his exam results.
4. On the basis of the above information it is assumed that the position held by the militancy parameter, in terms of the communicative behaviours applied



by the Polish high school gifted student, is extremely strong. The strength of the militancy attribute may be detected in:

- the research participant's striving (or fight) for a congenial environment in which he can develop his potential effectively and painlessly,
  - the learner's aggressive reactions to frequent cases of teasing and bullying,
  - the student's battle for exceedingly good examination results,
  - the student's fight against discouragement, stress and tiredness.
5. In relation to the status of the parameter of utility, which underlies the communicative behaviours of the Polish high school intellectually gifted student with regard to his functioning in educational space, one ought to take into consideration the following facts:
- the student under analysis recognises his future needs and his communicative behaviours associated with his functioning in school are to a high extent oriented towards achieving success in the fields that are associated with his future career. In other words, the student aims at excelling in what he considers useful in his further life,
  - the above application of the idea of utility seems to be limited by the fact that the learner's behaviours must be also focused on learning subjects that appear in the curriculum but are not connected with the student's specialisation and are not taken by him during the school-leaving exam (such subjects are regarded as totally useless by the research participant),
  - the application of the concept of utility is also limited by the learner's communicative behaviours oriented not towards expanding knowledge itself but towards tailoring exam answers to what is provided in the exam key (as a consequence, exams do not check one's real knowledge but one's skill of adjusting answers to the key, which the student considers useless),
  - one more limitation on the application of the idea of utility is reflected in the student's communicative behaviours concentrated on remembering the excessive amount of theoretical knowledge (the student doubts whether he will have a chance to apply it in his further life).
6. In view of the above information it is assumed that the position of the parameter of utility, in terms the student's communicative behaviours related to his functioning in school space, is only moderately strong.
7. With reference to the status of the parameter of trade-offs, which determines the communicative behaviours of the Polish high school intellectually gifted student with regard to his functioning in educational space, it must be highlighted that:
- the student's communicative behaviours are concentrated on providing feedback to what the teacher is saying (so he participates actively in the classes) but he restrains himself from expressing his real opinions in the classroom forum if they are controversial. The learner states that in the past he used to present his own arguments (which were often contrary to

the teacher's views) and quarrel with his teachers but he gave up. Partly because he realised that you can never win with the teacher and partly because he is fed up with it. There is so much material he must learn that he does not feel like losing his energy having arguments in the classroom forum. He states that he must devote his energy first of all to learning to achieve good results and not to arguments. Therefore, in some situations he keeps quiet. The student also highlights that some teachers have a tendency not to like students who know too much and present their knowledge during a classroom discussion (in order to punish them, they question them excessively). In conclusion, he states that in the case of some teachers it is better not to stand out in the classroom.

8. Accordingly, it is presumed that the status of the parameter of trade-offs, with reference to the student's communicative behaviours related to his functioning in school space, is non-dominant.
9. The analysis demonstrated above has shown that the communicative behaviours of the Polish high school intellectually gifted student in relation to his functioning in educational space are determined by the non-dominant status of the parameter of trade-offs, the very strong position of the parameter of militancy and the moderately strong position of the parameters of displays and utility.
10. Due to the above status of the ITE parameters, which condition the communicative behaviours of the Polish high school intellectually gifted student in relation to his functioning in educational space, the identity of the learner under analysis is militancy-dominant, trade-offs- non-dominant, displays-weakly dominant and utility-weakly dominant.
11. The above identity of the Polish high school intellectually gifted student does not seem to be optimal for the development of the student's potential. The dominance of the parameter of militancy should be definitely eliminated, the above process being accompanied by strengthening the status of the other parameters. It is the above modification of identity that should ensure the harmonious development of the student's potential.

#### THE FORMATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION CURRICULA AND THE IDENTITY OF POLISH HIGH SCHOOL INTELLECTUALLY GIFTED STUDENTS

The changes in the system of Polish higher education, which resulted from transformation processes initiated in 1989 (after the fall of communism), led to the occurrence of such phenomena as the sudden growth of higher education institutions (also many private ones), the enormous increase in the number of students and the lowering quality of higher education. In effect, higher education in Poland lost its elite character (Zajązkowska 2016: 83–84) leaving some graduates with lower

competences. At present one can point to very few elitist higher education faculties in Poland, where it is extremely difficult to be accepted as a student due to high competition. Significantly, the massive character of Polish higher education has caused the occurrence of unemployment among graduates of some specialisations (Zajączkowska 2016: 84).

In view of the above, one may ask the question of whether Polish higher education curricula should suit the level of average learners who barely pass each year or whether Polish higher education programmes should be tailored to be more oriented towards the educational needs of intellectually gifted students (the latter would certainly raise the level of Polish higher education and make it elitist). In this paper it is postulated that the development of the potential of intellectually gifted individuals is extremely important to the economy of each country. Therefore, it is the potential of intellectually gifted individuals that should be given due consideration in the process of forming higher educational curricula. Significantly, higher education programmes should be also aimed at strengthening the parameters of displays, utility and trade-offs in the identity of their graduates, the parameter of militancy being eliminated. It is the above attitude that ought to ensure the high level of competences represented by graduates, which in turn should speed up social and economic development in a number of spheres.

## CONCLUSIONS

The present study has described the identity of the Polish high school intellectually gifted student in relation to the communicative behaviours associated with his functioning in educational space. The identity in question, which is determined by the dominant parameter of militancy, the weakly dominant parameter of displays, the non-dominant parameter of trade-offs and the weakly dominant attribute of utility, has been classified as not optimal. In order to facilitate the optimum development of the student's potential, the modification of his identity is recommended, i.e. the dominance of militancy should be eliminated, the status of other parameters being strengthened. In other words, one's quest for high competences should not resemble a fierce fight but rather balanced development. The harmonious development of the potential of high school intellectually gifted individuals should be assured at all educational levels, which is of vital significance for social and economic reasons. Since it is mainly the level of higher education that provides a potential employee with high skills required by employers, it is assumed that higher education curricula should provide intellectually gifted students with competences suited to their potential and needs. In other words, the educational offer of higher education should be aimed at the harmonious development of the potential of intellectually gifted individuals.

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