



## **Direct and Indirect Acts of Labeling Gifted Pupils in the Pro-labeling Pedagogical Situations**

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The labeling gifted pupils is related to the unsparing treatment of the label “gifted” which creates inappropriate teachers’ emotions and attitudes towards giftedness. Labeling should be given through “direct acts”, which include specific pro-labelled actions and speech toward gifted and can be easily identified and eliminated. However, also the “indirect acts” exist, which are hidden in educational procedures. The study aimed to identify the pro-labeling pedagogical situations and describe the direct and indirect acts of labeling. The qualitative research was conducted in elementary schools in the Czech Republic, with class observations and teacher interviews as data sources. Nine pro-labeling pedagogical situations were identified which were typical with signs such as overemphasizing the differences between gifted pupils, unavailability of activities for other pupils, accentuated selection, and rigidity. The direct acts of labelling included naming gifted pupils by specific names, explicitly expressed instructions for gifted pupils, and presenting increased expectations for their performance. Acts of indirect labeling occurred in situations where the primary purpose was to engage gifted pupil, assemble a group of pupils with a strong performer, quickly activate pupils in competitions, develop the pro-social skills of the gifted, help weaker pupils, assign extra tasks according to recommendations and assess specific tasks for the gifted. The study highlights the existence of indirect acts of labelling next to the direct acts. Limiting the theory of labeling only to direct acts can lead to legitimization and frequent use of inappropriate pro-labeling pedagogical situations against gifted pupils.

**Keywords:** gifted pupil, labeling, pro-labeling pedagogical situation, direct and indirect acts of labeling, qualitative research

### **INTRODUCTION**

Caring for gifted individuals tends to be prioritized by every society. Improving the identification and education of gifted pupils positively impacts gifted individuals and society as a whole. However, development is also accompanied by increasing problems related to the insensitive treatment of the ‘gifted’ label. Inappropriate forms of labeling can negatively affect the life path of gifted individuals and their environment. Within

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the school environment, teachers should strive to prevent inappropriate labeling of gifted pupils, detect inappropriate pro-labeling pedagogical situations and mitigate their negative implications.

In practice, some pedagogical situations directly lead to inappropriate labeling. These situations are readily observable and thus easily identifiable, prompting an inclusive teacher to eradicate them. Acts of direct labeling include specific actions and speech that lead to inappropriate labeling. Professional sources record some the problems connected with implications of (direct) labeling and attempt to resolve them (as indicated below). However, also encounter indirect labeling exists, secondarily directed at gifted pupils via indirect acts. Indirect acts of labeling are hidden, not explicitly expressed, and thus can hide a threat to the development of gifted and other pupils in the classroom. Professional articles note this problem in subtopics (see below), though they do not anchor them in the issue of labeling gifted pupils. This can lead to a narrow view of the emergence of difficulties in gifted pupils because of inadequate use of pro-labeling pedagogical situations.

The intention of the study is to describe the basic pro-labeling pedagogical situations and to identify which of them feature as acts of direct and indirect labeling of gifted pupils. The study seeks to highlight a commonly occurring problem of pedagogical practice with gifted pupils, especially in relation to indirect labeling.

### **Labeling Gifted Pupils and Its Implications**

Classical Labeling Theory deals with the process of constructing an individual's personality in relation to the existence of labels (Becker, 1973; Goffman, 1963). Labels are the societal connotations attributed to words used to describe specific groups of individuals, profoundly impacting the lives of those who are labeled (Matsueda, 2014). Labels can be directed toward individuals either directly or indirectly (Gleason, 2019; Kroska et al, 2023; Link & Phelan, 2014; Neil et al., 2015). Direct acts of labeling are person-to-person oriented when one person discriminates against another based on openly and directly expressed prejudicial attitudes. Indirect acts of labeling are the secondary effects of rules, systems, or procedures. These indirect stigmatizing processes are hidden, harder to identify and prove, and therefore very dangerous.

Labeling is defined as a socio-cultural process (Damico, 2021), which is described as follows: after being assigned a label, the individual is separated from the original group and directed towards individual or collective separation within a group with the same attributes (Rist, 2017). The separation of the individual further deepens the labeling process, as the directed attributes and related acts are already more distinct and more targeted. This leads to the internalization of the attribute in the individual's character (Kolb & Jussim, 1994), who later begins to demonstrate the assumed content of these attributes, thus displacing the real characteristics of the individual (Shang-Yu et al., 2020).

Labeling theory has been widely applied to giftedness (e.g., Gates, 2010; Guignard et al., 2021; Meadows & Neumann, 2017; Wiley, 2020). The essence of the problem lies in the treatment of the 'gifted' attribute, which, particularly in relation to intellectual

giftedness, is viewed with great sensitivity by society (Freeman, 2013). The attribute is associated with accepted and extensive projections, which create different social attitudes on a scale from supporting elitism to denying care for the gifted (Delisle, 2001; Gagné, 2018; Iyekolo et al., 2020). Projections convey to gifted pupils an inadequate image of their personality and then offer their families and teachers a dysfunctional model for the further development of these children. (Dessie & Sewagegn, 2019; Hébert & Sergent, 2005).

The ‘gifted’ attribute and its implications may be both positive and negative (Gates, 2010; Heward, 2013). Positives are more frequently mentioned in the personal and academic domains of gifted development (Berlin, 2009; Henry et al., 2019; Kerr, Hufmann & Hufmann, 2019; Mammadov, 2019; Meadows & Neumann, 2017; Sastre-Riba et al., 2019; Thomson, 2012). The positive implications include the perception of higher self-esteem, coherence in life goals, satisfaction in one’s growth, confidence in one’s abilities and skills, the offer of academic development, and the opportunity to have better academic performance. On the other hand, the authors also mention negatives such as fear of academic failure, environmental pressure and increased expectations, perfectionism, and preference for cognitive development at the expense of other areas of personality. The social domain is one of the most debated in relation to the implications of labeling, with authors leaning toward negative implications (Meadows & Neumann, 2017; Coleman et al., 2015; Cross et al., 2014; Geake & Gross, 2008; Striley, 2014). Among others, they mention unintended social isolation and total alienation, perceptions of significant behavioral differences between gifted children compared to peers, elitism or underestimation of the gifted, and bullying of the gifted.

According to Heward (2013), labeling is a necessary part of caring for the gifted. It is also a condition of their development. However, it must reflect the professional educational approach to be positive for gifted individuals (Tirri & Laine, 2017; Millum et al., 2019).

### **Context of the Labeling Gifted Pupils for the Study**

Labeling is a complex process varying according to specific factors surrounding gifted pupils. This study focuses on the context of labeling described below, which is crucial for delimiting further thinking about the topic of labeling.

The focus is on gifted pupils who have successfully undergone a thorough diagnosis of intellectual giftedness by Education Counselling Services. (NUV [National Institute for Education], 2018). Based on the results, the diagnosed pupils are included in one of four levels of “supportive measures” in school education; these define the depth and form of differentiation and individualization in education (MSMT [Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports], 2016). The pupils study according to the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or another study contract. Based on data from the Czech School Inspectorate (ČŠI, 2019), 0.08% of the pupils in the Czech Republic are identified and defined as “gifted.” This is a very narrowly and conservatively defined group of exceptionally intellectually gifted pupils whose identification and education are explicitly grasped, formalized, and compulsorily reported in the Czech Republic. It is the features of the above-defined group that may predispose gifted pupils to a greater risk of labeling than

would be the case for other gifted pupils conforming to modern more liberal definitions of giftedness (see Dai, 2009).

The study centers on the concept of labeling within the educational context of the Czech Republic, a country in Central Europe, as outlined by MSMT (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports) in 2011. We follow gifted pupils in the ISCED 1 level of education (approx. the age from 6 to 11), in the mainstream (non-selective) inclusive elementary schools. Labeling in pro-labeling pedagogical situations is identified, and both direct and indirect acts of labeling gifted pupils are noted. The primary emphasis is placed on the teacher's crucial role in the observed pedagogical situations.

### **The Pro-Labeling Pedagogical Situations and the Direct and Indirect Acts of Labeling**

In accordance with Clarke et al. (2015), the pedagogical situation is perceived as a broader phenomenon in school teaching, the extensive context of which influences and co-creates the whole situation. It is a situation that repeatedly emerges in different contexts. A pro-labeling pedagogical situation is a situation intervening in the creation of negative implications of labeling. Such a situation, which is unethical in relation to gifted pupils and other school education participants, leads to ineffective preference or disadvantaging of (any) pupils in terms of gifted pupils' development and to non-respect of their educational needs. When identifying pro-labeling pedagogical situations, we look at all the educational tools that lead to the achievement of the educational goal of the lesson (Richmond, 2018; Klement, 2012) and seek answers to at least some of the following auxiliary questions that facilitate our decision whether to classify the situation as pro-labeling during data analysis: Is the gifted privileged or undervalued? Is their giftedness prominently highlighted? Is their giftedness being developed at the expense of others? Is it "all things to all people"? Is the gifted over-selected and is this selection effective? Is there an overuse of a particular phenomenon emphasizing inappropriate labeling? Do gifted pupils or their classmates exhibit specific traits that may imply labeling? On the basis of theoretical starting points (see below), we assume that pro-labeling pedagogical situations can be applied to gifted pupils by teachers using direct and indirect acts of labeling.

In classical Labeling Theory, defining the direct and indirect acts of labeling is quite often (Gleason, 2019; Kroska et al, 2023; Link & Phelan, 2014; Neil et al., 2015). Attention is drawn to the fact that acts of direct labeling should be perceived in connection with acts of indirect labeling, which leads to a comprehensive understanding of the entire Labeling theory. (Gleason, 2019). However, direct and indirect acts of labeling in giftedness are not yet anchored in applied research. Professional sources, however, touch on partial aspects that may be related to direct and indirect acts of labeling gifted pupils.

Direct acts of gifted labeling are face to face oriented, explicitly clear (spoken) and at first glance apparent acts of labeling directed from the teacher to the gifted pupil. Direct acts of labeling can be evident from a number of studies. First, these are the professional considerations handling the naming of pupils as "gifted" during their identification and the implementation of special educational programs (Borland, 2005;

Matthews & Jolly, 2022; Meyer & Plucker, 2022; Peters, 2022a; Tordjman, et al., 2021) what can lead to inadequate implications of labeling gifted individuals. Evidence of direct acts of labeling can also result from studies in which gifted pupils describe how they perceive their own giftedness (Gates, 2010; Tercan & Yildiz Biçakci, 2023). Direct acts of labeling can be found in studies of teachers' expectations and attitudes toward the pupil's cognitive performance (Baudson, & Preckel, 2016; Matheis et al. 2017; Mofield & Parker Peters, 2018), which are directly and openly projected by teachers to gifted pupils.

Indirect acts of labeling are the secondary effects of rules, systems, or procedures and should be hidden in the various educational tools that are used by the teachers. Some of the following procedures can be dealt with in indirect acts of labeling. For instance, Freeman (2005) or VanTassel-Baska et al. (2020) describe dysfunctional forms of segregation, in which a gifted pupil is ineffectively removed from a regular group of peers that leads to his/her labeling as gifted. Robinson (1990) mentions inappropriate competitive activities based on high performance, resulting in the redundant highlighting of gifted pupils. VanTassel-Baska et al. (2020) and NAGC (2016) mention a pedagogical strategy in which the gifted are overly classified as tutors, which dysfunctionally emphasizes the superior social position of the gifted pupil.

Based on the theoretical framework, the following research questions are defined:

- What are pro-labeling pedagogical situations? Why are the situations “pro-labeling”?
- Which pro-labeling pedagogical situations lead to direct labeling? What are the direct acts of labeling?
- Which pro-labeling pedagogical situations lead to indirect labeling? What are the indirect acts of labeling?

Under the research specifications, the focus lies on the teacher as the architect of labeling, who facilitates labeling through pedagogical situations that promote pro-labeling.

## **METHOD**

### **Participants**

The participants were “gifted pupils” (see above), their classmates, and teachers. 12 elementary schools (inclusive schools with socially and cognitively heterogeneous pupils) in district towns in the Czech Republic were visited and 24 gifted pupils (18 boys and 6 girls) and 15 teachers (all female) were studied. The school's class size ranges from 16 to 31 pupils, with up to three pupils classified as gifted.

The research was conducted with elementary schools, where there is at least one "gifted pupil" in the heterogeneous class of pupils. These schools were searched through an analysis of school websites or the Gifted children Facebook group, where information on the existence of such gifted pupils is commonly found. We used the convenience sampling (transport accessibility of the school; schools that agreed to our research) and purposeful sampling (i.e. schools with gifted pupils) of primary schools.

## **Materials**

The primary data source was observation of teaching where we looked for “pro-labeling pedagogical situations” (see above). Secondary data originated in interviews with teachers. Interviews lasting from ten to fifteen minutes and were held immediately after the observation of the teaching. Teachers were asked for a specification of the context of the identified situations, such as Why does the situation classify?, What is the situation good for?, What are the conditions of the situation (what happened before)?, What are the teacher’s further intentions with the situation for the future (what will follow)?, How often does he/she use the situation?, etc. The data were recorded in paper-and-pencil form with due to support the naturalness of data collection.

The research was conducted by a research team which consists of three academics, women who have focused on research in education or psychology for over ten years. All are professionally involved in gifted education. The contribution of the research team was spotted in increasing the objectivity and validity of the data during their collection and analysis. Researchers spent approximately 80 hours in the research field during years 2020 - 2023. The research was conducted with the approval of The Ethical Committee of Tomas Bata University in Zlin.

## **Procedure**

Pro-labeling pedagogical situations were identified by researchers directly in the field. Presentations of the situations and discussions on whether to classify them as labeling occurred at team meetings. In the next phase, the situations were analyzed by the study’s author in the primary data analysis. Elements of grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) were used. Open coding involved repeated thematic unpacking, naming themes, and assigning codes to themes. The basic categories were indicated by grouping concepts into higher orders. A follow-up technique was the partial use of axial coding. As the codes and categories were reorganized, the themes were saturated, and a final version of the pro-labeling educational situations was produced and published (Klimecká, 2023). After the identification of pro-labeling situations, there was room for secondary data analysis in order to identify direct and indirect acts of labeling. After repeated collection of data and their analysis in a new research context, the theory presented here gradually emerged.

## **FINDINGS**

We have identified nine labeling pedagogical situations (nine main categories), which we further divided into direct and indirect labeling. The results are summarized in Table 1, which explains why the situation is pro-labeling (column a) and why it is an act of labeling (column b), which is further explained in the Summary section. We do not present entire pedagogical situations, but parts of them in which labeling is most evident. We always try to describe the situation and use concrete examples to outline why the teacher applies it and what the direct/indirect labeling consists of. We use the abbreviations T = teacher, GP = gifted pupil, C = classmate, and R = researcher to cite pedagogical situations directly.

Table 1  
Direct and indirect acts of labeling the gifted pupils

	Pro-labeling situations	a) Evidence for labeling	b) Acts of labeling
Direct labeling	Extracurricular Activities	Solely for GPs. Unchangeable group. A distinctive selection of GPs.	Explicitly formulate instructions for differentiated tasks. Specifically address the GPs. Present the increased expectations of the GP's performance.
	Individual Projects	Formalization of giftedness. Regularity and rigidity.	
	Increased Expectations of GPs' Performance	Reinforcing specific groups of learners and their roles.	
Indirect labeling	My Handy Helper	Unnecessary highlighting of giftedness.	Engage an active (disruptive) GP. Assemble a group of pupils with a strong performer (GP).
	I Have to Hire You	Selection (including unhelpful one).	Quickly activate pupils in competitions.
	Help Each Other	Selection is the goal of learning.	Develop the pro-social skills of GPs. Help the teacher with weaker pupils.
	Group Competitions	Regularity and rigidity. Others can theoretically work on the activity, but not in reality.	Assign extra tasks according to pedagogical recommendations. Normatively assess specific tasks for GPs.
	Supplementary Tasks	Reinforcement of the group of GPs and their roles.	Apply methods developing giftedness.
	Challenges		

### Direct Acts of Labeling

#### *Extracurricular Activities*

In the Extracurricular Activities, the gifted pupil is significantly removed from the classroom team into individual or group work (with other GPs) and is engaged in a teaching topic that is not related to the current lesson, for example, preparing gifted children for competitions or completing activities from leisure clubs for the gifted. Extracurricular activities are assigned for diagnosed gifted pupils or otherwise significantly gifted pupils.

Other pupils work on a different, conventional topic.

T: "When we have much revision to do with the class, or when we do something that the gifted already know and wouldn't enjoy, I assign them to prepare for competitions..." / T: "The school has a club for gifted pupils. There, they develop in what they are good at... They consolidate this activity not only in the club but also during class time when they have already finished their work."

The instructions for the organization of the work are explicit. The teacher straightforwardly defines the group of gifted pupils to whom she directs quite different activities and in some isolated cases does not avoid publicly referring to gifted pupils as "blockers" (pupils who work in a block study), pupils from a club, our gifted, boffins, bright sparks, or MIND (abbrev. from a Czech phrase *MImořádně Nadané Děti*, i.e., extraordinarily gifted children).

T: “Boffins go to the table; they take their worksheets. The Logic Olympiad (a competition) is here in a month.” / T: “All the MINDs stay on the carpet, I’ll be right there with you. The others go to your desks.”

Teachers are likely to be aware of the inappropriateness of increased attention to the gifted. In defense, they argue that it is an ingrained system within the natural diversity of society.

T: “These pupils are used to it. There are, for example, three dyslexics in the class, and for those, no one is surprised that they do shortened notes, that they are tested only orally, that they work in another class with an assistant, and have other concessions. We are all different... We know the gifted are gifted, so why hide it?”

#### *Individual Projects*

In the Individual Projects strategy, the gifted pupils must prepare a “project” in or out of class and then present the results of their work to classmates. The projects are directed to diagnosed gifted pupils or other significantly gifted pupils. Other pupils do not work on the projects. T: “The gifted who have an IEP (Individualized Education Plan), I require those presentations. I have a very bright girl there, she’s not diagnosed as gifted, but I give those presentations to her sometimes too.”

These strategies are being assigned via explicit instruction presented in front of all the pupils, similar to positive feedback.

T: “In my class, the three gifted ones work according to our agreement. They have six projects a year. We pick the topics together here ... They work on them in class when they have finished something early, and if they want it perfect, they finish it at home.” / T: “Thank you for a perfectly prepared project ... Yes, it is definitely worth applauding. And I would assign you another project today after school ...

#### *Increased Expectations of the GP’s Performance*

The last category of direct acts of labeling is the Increased Expectations of the GP’s Performance, where the teacher openly presents such expectations to the class. The teacher tries to excuse the failure to deliver if the pupil does not achieve the expected performance.

Pupils are asked to work in groups. They are all given one common assignment. T: “I hope Kamil (GP) doesn’t do it for everyone here as usual...” / Teacher in the course of explaining a mathematical operation: “Children, who can see the mistake there? Not even Pepa (GP) sees the mistake? / The teacher gives instructions for calculating math examples and adds: “And try to count as nicely as Nela (GP), so you can catch up.” However, after the time limit, Nela is overtaken by other pupils. The girl responds by crying. The teacher speaks to her in front of the class: “Please don’t be sad, it’s okay, you just didn’t do well today. Next time you’ll be first again.”



### **Indirect Acts of Labeling**

#### *My Handy Helper*

My Handy Helper is a strategy where the pupil is activated by simple activities related to teaching organization (handing out teaching aids, writing on the board based on dictation, organizing didactic games, advising a classmate). Although teachers theoretically assign these activities to all the pupils, the essence of the task – to activate the gifted pupil – is that the target group is again an active, fast-working gifted pupil. T: “So, of course, all the pupils could help me, but the helping ones are especially those whom I see that they need, that they need some kind of extra activity.”

The educational strategy is usually not planned by the teacher. It is applied spontaneously to respond to the actual situation, such as here:

In the Czech language lesson, pupils practice synonyms and antonyms. GP works very fast. The teacher asks him to go to the board and write the words uttered by his classmates in two columns (synonyms and antonyms). Then the pupils work in pairs. T: “Now, my handy helper will hand out the paper with the synonyms and antonyms, and it is up to you to divide them into columns.”

The repetition of the strategy may lead to the pupil’s exclusion and create problems with the school climate.

At the end of a Physics lesson, the teacher seeks a volunteer to read the temperature on the thermometer and write it in the charts. No one volunteers despite repeated calls from the teacher. C: “Let Ferda (GP) get the measure. He always does it.”

#### *I Have to Hire You*

I Have to Hire You is very similar to the previous situation. The teacher needs to activate gifted pupils who finish the task earlier than others by several activities, which does not fulfill the pupils’ education needs (repetitions and activities without pedagogical aim).

According to the teachers, the activities are aimed at all the pupils; in reality, they are assigned to a stable group of more skilled and fast-working pupils. T: “I don’t limit the extra tasks only to the gifted. If the others are faster, they can work on that too ... but then it’s rather the same people doing it.” The following is an example of the case:

In a Czech language lesson, the teacher assigns a task from a workbook: T: “Do the whole page 16. Matěj wants another task? Yes, there is one! And I would be happy if you could do it all the way to page 18.” / Pupils repeat the verb tenses in Czech. The teacher notices two GPs who have completed the task early. She pairs these pupils and occupies them with a “Scattergories” activity (pupils search for as many words as possible starting with the same letter and classify them under the chosen criteria). After a while, the GP exclaims that they are not enjoying it. The teacher agrees and sends the group

to the board, where she assigns them the “Hangman” activity (revealing the hidden word in the puzzle) and continues her work with the rest of the class.

#### *Help Each Other*

In the Help Each Other strategy, a gifted pupil who has completed a task early, or is expected to complete a task early, is asked to assist slower classmates in solving tasks. These tasks tend not to address the learning needs of gifted pupils. They are assigned haphazardly without a targeted didactic elaboration of the gifted pupils’ pro-social behavior or cognitive domain development.

T: “For example, when we are reviewing a test, I let the gifted pupils sit with the weak pupils, and each weak pupil has a counselor in the gifted one, explaining it to him, attending to him. The weaker one benefits a lot from that, and the gifted one also benefits by having to explain it.” / T: “Metod (GP), when you finish, support the neighbors in front of you.”

Again, all pupils theoretically perform the role of the teacher’s assistant in the class. In reality, however, the “support” is done by the class’s more skillful and active pupils.

T: “So, of course, all the children help me in the teaching. I try to involve them equally.”/ T: “The other gifted one, he is an introvert, that’s why I don’t involve him in the support. The first gifted is very active, and he needs that involvement in the support.”

#### *Group Competitions*

Group Competitions is yet another identified strategy. The pupils are divided into groups where the focus is not on functional cooperation between group members but on individual performance. The teacher, therefore, tries to ensure that the performance of the groups is balanced by having a similar number of gifted pupils in each group.

The four captains (GPs) stand in front of the board and have the task of nominating members for their groups. T: “Fíla (GP) will go aside now, and we will assign you to a group at the end, we will see how the groups look like to make them equal.”

Gifted pupils are thus placed in a privileged position; they are assigned the role of captains. Their participation is usually preferred as they are guaranteed to win. The following examples may indicate the problems in the social climate of the classroom.

In math, pupils are given the task of standing in two rows so that the teacher forms an imaginary line in the middle of the class. The teacher projects numerical exercises on the screen, with each problem always solved by two pupils at the beginning of each row. The faster-counting pupil from each pair goes to sit at the desk. The first group is already seated at their desks in the classroom. The second group, due to a weak pupil, is almost in the original line-up and as a whole loses the competition. P: “Teacher, it’s no use when Milan is in the line. They had all the talented ones in their row ... and we had

Milan.” T: “Let’s calm down, there was the same number of gifted in both groups, so you all had the same playing field.”

However, some of the teachers are aware of the seeds of ethical controversy associated with channeling gifted pupils into captaincy roles. They try to appoint other pupils to these roles, but gifted pupils remain in a privileged position (guaranteed to win), and the classroom is not exempt from problems even in this case.

In the math class, the teacher appoints three captains (these are not gifted pupils) who nominate their classmates for the groups, with the number of pupils in the groups being nine, nine, and six according to the teacher. The teacher strongly influences the captains in their selection. One pupil vociferously objects that the number of six pupils in one group is unfair. T: “There are nine and nine here, there are integrated children (i.e., with SENs) and you have Kuba (GP), that’s why there are fewer of you. It’s more unfair that you’ve got Kuba in there and they haven’t, don’t you think?”

#### *Supplementary Tasks*

Supplementary Tasks are designed for pupils who have previously mastered the assigned activity. Contrary to previous activities, these are different types of tasks based on higher-order thinking operations. These tasks have a deeper purpose – the targeted development of giftedness.

T: “You can’t give the tasks of the same difficulty to the gifted; they have to have something they would enjoy that would motivate them. If I give them to do more and more tasks in the textbook that are based on the same principle, it will just discourage them.”

Some Supplementary Tasks can be directly related to the objective or topic of the lesson. T: “I have bought worksheets, I have thematically sorted them, placed them under specific curriculum, which I am thus expanding for the gifted.” Other assignments appear to have no direct connection to the current lesson. In this case, the teacher seems to have “aces up her sleeve” in the form of worksheets and other materials to use when needed. T: “I’ve done workshops, they were about developing creativity, something like that. We were given tips on websites with puzzles, brainteasers, and ciphers. I’m well pre-stocked for fast learners.”

Even though the tasks are theoretically directed to all pupils in the class, in reality, only cognitively gifted and fast-working pupils can master them. T: “Anyone can work on the tasks for the fast learners; there is just a condition that they have to have completed the standard activity correctly.”

The strategy privileges the gifted pupils and puts them in a challenging situation face-to-face with their peers:

A gifted pupil (Šíma) finishes a task early and is asked by the teacher to work on a computer with an educational program aimed at the gifted. C1: “And has Šíma got it again? Or why isn’t he doing it, once again? I might as well do it

ahead of time and then play with the computer here. Oh yeah.” ... C2: “And Ms. Teacher, how come Šíma can work again on the computer? He hasn’t done it yet.” T: “He has done it, three times faster than you, and you better focus on yourself and not check on Šíma.”

### *Challenges*

Challenges are similar to the previous strategy, except that pupils work on tasks segregated from others from the beginning and not after finishing the main task. The tasks are more challenging and aim at higher cognitive goals. The purpose of including the strategy is to develop the pupil’s talents realistically.

T: “These tasks are characteristic of their challenges, problem contemplation, and creativity.” / T: “I can’t force the gifted pupils to do what they already know ...when I have to take longer to give instructions to others, I will give the gifted ones a more interesting task that they would enjoy.”

The activities are targeted at diagnosed gifted pupils and other very gifted pupils. Although the teachers claim the tasks are directed toward all pupils, they target cognitively advanced pupils in reality.

T: “The super challenge is not only given to these two gifted ones; they all have the opportunity to choose it.” R: “How many pupils are actually working on that super-challenge?” T: “Regularly these two, but occasionally someone joins them.”

Challenges are assigned to develop pupils’ talents, especially when other pupils work on less exciting exercises, requiring algorithm repetition. Interestingly, however, the teacher is inclined to use supplementary tasks even when the routine activity is also developmental (and often more interesting) or is conducted within a pedagogical constructivist framework, thus having significant potential for individual pupil giftedness development. It seems, therefore, that the grouping and separation of pupils is often an objective rather than an effective means of teaching.

The topic of the maths lesson is preparation for a family celebration (developing financial literacy). The teacher names the pupils who are not supposed to work on this task (GPs) and assigns them to work on sheets in advanced mathematics. She warns them they will review their calculations the following week in their GP club. The gifted work independently, and the teacher works with the other pupils.

The potential for more significant problems in social relationships may be present in the Challenges variants where the teacher opts for normative assessment. In this case, the gifted pupil is inappropriately promoted while other pupils do not have the opportunity to be assessed in this way. A similar problem arises with the Supplementary tasks strategy.

T: “I give big A’s for every correctly solved task in the superchallenge... R: “And how do you continue to work with the grades, so there isn’t a group of kids who get a bunch of big A’s for the superchallenge and the others get

nothing? T: “The regular pupils, again, they might get an A for an activity, like a little A. Maybe we count, they run to the blackboard, they report, and they do a lot so that the weaker pupils can get that little A. And the superchallenges replace the oral exams. They don’t feel comfortable when they are tested in front of the class, and they would rather solve the super challenge.” / T: “In the classroom, we all collect Minions (a smiley face on a paper circle). They get the Minions mainly for solving the problem quickly and correctly... And if they don’t do something or forget something, they give me the Minion back. Whoever gets a lot of Minions, I round up their final grade toward a better mark on their report card.”

### SUMMARY

A total of nine pro-labeling pedagogical situations were identified (see Table 1). Below, we list characteristics observable in all identified pro-labeling situations. However, characteristics need to be assessed interdependently as the existence of one feature may not be conducive to labeling:

- Overemphasizing the differences between gifted pupils. Gifted pupils are singled out in the classroom, and their differences are overemphasized. Teachers’ attitudes towards gifted pupils are made explicit, e.g., through specific task instructions, addressing, or preferential assessment of pupils.
- Unavailability of activities for other pupils. All strategies were designed exclusively for diagnosed gifted pupils. A certain permeability is observable for some of the strategies (especially the indirect labeling strategies) but only for bright and fast-working pupils (i.e., with a more liberal definition of giftedness). Although for most of the activities, teachers openly mentioned that they were there for everybody, the characteristics of these activities make them clearly ones for the cognitively advanced. By directing the strategies exclusively towards the gifted, an immutable group of pupils becomes established in the classroom and gradually acquires certain privileges, such as better grades, the opportunity to be group captains, work on developmental tasks, organize class activities, etc.
- (Unhelpful) accentuated selection. Strategies are based on the selection of the gifted that lead to the actual development of gifted pupils (Extracurricular Activities, Individual Projects, Supplementary Tasks, and Challenges). However, a significant proportion of the selection strategies do not lead to the targeted development of the gifted (according to Tomlinson, see below), making selection a completely dysfunctional activity, unnecessarily deepening the labeling process. These include My Handy Helper, I Have to Hire You, Help Each Other, and Group Competitions. The teacher also observes that the gifted can perform well when subject to the selection and realizes that it is easier to prepare activities for a coherent group of gifted pupils than to differentiate the activities internally and include all pupils. The selection of gifted pupils is gradually becoming very popular and is used even where it is not functional. The teacher further over-emphasizes the difference of gifted pupils (and their selection) by giving instructions for tasks, specifically addressing gifted pupils, presenting raised

expectations, and selecting very different activities and learning topics from those of other pupils.

- Rigidity. Labeling is supported by the overuse of identified pedagogical situations and their rigidity. If any sub-strategy were used functionally and flexibly, it would probably not lead to labeling.

The characteristics, as described above, may suggest a labeling process as defined in classical Labeling Theory (Damico, 2021; Rist, 2017; Shang-Yu et al., 2020). It claims a gifted pupil is given a label when they are diagnosed as gifted; this label is then emphasized, i.e., the teacher outwardly presents the gifted pupil's difference and assigns them special tasks. The pupil is then separated from the others; hence the label is reinforced by various means (work in selection, rigidity). The separation becomes overly popular (unhelpful selection), further propelling the gifted in the labeling process. The gifted pupil and the school class then begin to show the implications of labeling (inappropriate comments by classmates toward the gifted, inappropriate self-image of the gifted), which hinders the healthy development of the gifted pupil and the school classroom climate.

Another aim was to find out which pro-labeling pedagogical situations lead to direct labeling and what are the direct acts of labeling. Three situations were identified which indicate to direct labeling: Extracurricular Activities, Individual Projects, and Increased Expectations of the GP's Performance (see Table 1). We identified acts related to direct verbal pedagogical communication from the teacher to the gifted pupils. These included addressing gifted pupils by specific names, explicitly expressed instructions for differentiated tasks emphasizing GPs' differences, and presenting increased expectations for GPs' performance. These manifestations of direct labeling are mentioned in a number of studies described below, although without anchoring in the issue of labeling gifted pupils.

The elimination of the professional use of the name "gifted" during the identification and education of the gifted was emphasized by several studies (Borland, 2005; Meyer & Plucker, 2022). It is moving away from words that convey images of fixed abilities (e.g., gifted) and toward terms that acknowledge intelligence and talent's dynamic, contextual nature (Matthews & Jolly, 2022; Tordjman, et al., 2021). To eliminate labeling, it is also recommended that teachers do not focus on the precise differentiation between pupils who "have and do not have talents" and focus on applying the specific educational needs of all pupils. (Borland, 2021; Peters, 2022a).

Teachers' expectations regarding a student's cognitive performance are elevated when the pupil is identified as "(intellectually) gifted." (Baudson, & Preckel, 2016; Matheis et al. 2017), while teachers' expectations lead to a direct projection of these attitudes toward the gifted (Matheis et al., 2017; Mofield & Parker Peters, 2018).

In the case of direct labeling, teachers are likely to be aware of inappropriately labeling gifted pupils. Nevertheless, some less inclusive-minded teachers openly declared what we considered inappropriate approaches to working with a heterogeneous collective. Such situations were, however, rare. We believe this is also due to the composition of

the research team and the motivation of teachers not to present inappropriate practices to academics from the university. Our reasoning is based on the experience with a pre-survey in which the research team included students of education. Unlike the academics, the students repeatedly observed situations of direct labeling (not elaborated on in this study). Such discrepancy in observations could have been caused by the informal attitude of the university students in the research field of schools and the related “willingness” of teachers to present inappropriate direct labeling, as well as the failure of the student researchers to identify hidden labeling phenomena.

Another aim was to determine which pro-labeling pedagogical situations lead to indirect labeling and what are the characteristics of the indirect acts of labeling. Six situations were found (see Table 1): My Handy Helper, I Have to Hire You, Help Each Other, Group Competitions, Supplementary Tasks, and Challenges. As with direct labeling, the acts of indirect labeling were looked at the educational tools applied by the teacher to achieve the educational goal. Labeling was an implication of the teachers’ choice and application of pedagogical strategies. Table 1, column b, presents the motives of utilizing the strategies: to apply methods that develop giftedness, engage an active (disruptive) GP, assemble a group of pupils with a strong performer (GP), quickly activate pupils in competitions, develop the pro-social skills of GPs, help with weaker pupils, assign extra tasks according to pedagogical recommendations (support measures) and normatively assess specific tasks for GPs. The above motives are classified as acts of indirect labeling. These pro-labeling pedagogical situations were used by teachers “in good faith,” but they gradually became inappropriate due to the existence of the labeling signs described above.

Acts of indirect labeling within the identified situations can be elaborated on as follows. The strategies of My Handy Helper, I Have to Hire You, and Help Each Other were built on selection but did not reinforce learner development. Such a claim is based on the assumption that activities for gifted pupils tend to use higher-order thought operations or otherwise comprehensively develop the personality of the gifted (Tomlinson, 2013). In this case, the acts of indirect labeling were used to engage the active (disruptive) gifted pupil, to develop (albeit in a didactically unsophisticated way) the gifted pupil’s pro-social skills, and help the teacher with weaker pupils. Group Competitions strategy over-selected gifted pupils by emphasizing their differences and giving them preference. The aim was not to target the development of giftedness but to quickly activate a group of pupils and to assemble similarly performing groups with a strong performer. Labeling was not immediate; it appeared with the following phases of these procedures, such as assigning a prominent role and appreciating the gifted pupil. The selection of gifted pupils due to their participation in enriching educational offers should contribute to the development of pupils’ potential (Cavilla, 2019). However, according to Prior (2011), many gifted pupils regard the enriching curriculum for gifted pupils as an organizational and administrative act rather than a real support for the development of giftedness.

In contrast to the above strategies, the Challenges and Supplementary Tasks appropriately developed pupils’ talents as they were based on higher-order thinking operations. They were classified as pro-labeled because they contained the

characteristics of pro-labeling pedagogical situations (see above), such as rigidity (they were rigidly assigned to a fixed group of gifted pupils), overemphasizing the differences between gifted pupils and unavailability of activities for other pupils. The acts of labeling include the application of methods of developing giftedness (rigidly for one group), assigning extra tasks according to pedagogical recommendations (the teacher applies “supportive measures”), and the normative assessment of tasks for the gifted (the teacher unfairly evaluates pupils without taking into account their distinct features and the conditions of their performance). A number of studies draw attention to the potential negative effect of strategies for the development of gifted students (Bui et al., 2014; Peters, 2022b). The problem lies in using strategies in an inappropriate context (Freeman, 2005; NAGC, 2016); VanTassel-Baska et al., 2020, see theoretical background).

Furthermore, we found that direct labeling only applies to diagnosed gifted pupils. Indirect labeling applies to both diagnosed gifted pupils and cognitively more advanced and active pupils who have not been formally identified as gifted. Thus, diagnosed gifted pupils (gifted pupils within our definition) are more at risk of labeling than pupils whose giftedness conforms to more liberal definitions (Dai, 2009). Consistent with Labeling Theory, the explanation may be related to the increased formalization of diagnosed gifted pupils within institutionalization, which reinforces labeling. Hence, giftedness is “verified” by a psychologist (see NUV [National Institute for Education], 2018), and pupils work under “supportive measures” (see MSMT [Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports], 2016) following a particular study contract. The results of their activities are evaluated (study contract evaluation), and the existence of these pupils in schools is compulsorily reported (see ČŠI, 2019).

The study has numerous limitations. We observed labeling in a specific context, which limits the generalizability of the results. Data sources were limited to observations and interviews with teachers. The study results were influenced by the personalities of the researchers, who became part of the research and influenced the labeling albeit in their passive roles. The gender imbalance of research participants is also noteworthy, as the teachers and researchers were women. In contrast, boys were predominant in the gifted pupil population; they, unlike girls whose giftedness is often hidden, more clearly require the teachers to focus on the development of their giftedness (Kerr & Hufmann, 2019). Follow-up research should also map labeling through the lens of gifted pupils themselves, as well as the parents of these pupils, which would provide an adequate picture of the issue.

## **CONCLUSION**

The aim of the study was to describe the labeling pedagogical situations and to reveal which of them bear the acts of direct or indirect labeling. A total of nine pro-labeling pedagogical situations were found, which were characterized by unhelpful selection, rigidity, overemphasis on the differences of the pupils, and unavailability of activities for other pupils.

Acts of direct labeling were directed from the teacher to the gifted pupil and included addressing pupils by specific names, explicitly formulated instructions for differentiated



tasks, and increased expectations of gifted pupils' performance. A positive finding is that direct labeling can be identified and therefore eliminated. Recommendations for eliminating indirect labeling include working individually with teachers, implementing peer observations of teachers in their classrooms, and sensitive reflection on the class visits to improve verbal communication during teaching.

Acts of indirect labeling occurred in situations where the primary purpose was to engage an active gifted pupil, to assemble a group of pupils with a strong performer (GP), to quickly activate pupils in competitions, to develop pro-social skills in the gifted, to help with weaker pupils, to assign extra tasks according to pedagogical recommendations, and to assess specific tasks for the gifted normatively. These motives formed a kind of incentive to label gifted pupils, and the actual labeling occurred only in the "next round of the game," taking place in an inappropriate context. Unlike direct labeling, eliminating indirect labeling is more complex. It is necessary for the teacher to perform an in-depth reflection of his/her pedagogical activity, thereby revealing the interconnectedness of his activities with the pupils and the long-term consequences of teaching. Teachers should systematically develop their didactic competencies to develop internal differentiation strategies and perceive the broader context of the sensitively used educational strategies.

The study addressed the issue of labeling gifted pupils in mainstream primary school settings and highlighted the existence of indirect labeling. The greatest threat of indirect labeling is its common occurrence and the fact that it is applied by the teacher "in good faith". The contribution of the study is the application of the general theory on the existence of direct and indirect labeling derived from classical Labeling Theory to the issue of giftedness.

The research results can lead to follow-up research in labeling gifted pupils. In terms of basic research, it would be appropriate to extend the research presented herein individual case studies of pupils to reveal how indirect acts of labeling affect their lives. As applied research, it is proposed to continue the observation of teaching and interviews with teachers, and thus lead to a reflection of teaching with teachers, an awareness of the use of indirect acts of labeling, which can be the way to improve the quality of pedagogical work with gifted pupils.

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