



Future Academy®'s Multidisciplinary Conference

Tendencies of gifted pupils toward selected aspects of conformist behavior in the context of their relationships with classmates

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Abstract

The aim of the study was to ascertain the degree of conformist behavior of gifted pupils in the adolescent age during the application of different phases of differentiated enriched curriculum. To diagnose the tendency of gifted pupils toward conformist behavior in education, a technique based on the ATER instrument, with the use of the two-factor semantic differential, was applied. We found that most gifted pupils declare non-conformist tendencies in education. By testing the hypothesis, it was verified that the tendency of gifted pupils toward conformism is not affected by the type of school they attend, nor the quality of the relationship of the classmates with the pupils themselves, which the gifted pupil declares, or the quality of relationship of the gifted pupil to other pupils. We also found that the need for gifted pupils to have friends in the classroom encourages a greater tendency towards conformist behavior.

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Peer-review under responsibility of Future Academy® Cognitive Trading

Keywords: conformity; nonconformity; giftedness, gifted pupil; differentiated enriched curriculum; inclusive education; the semantic differential.

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1. Introduction and theoretical basis of the study

Conformity is the tendency of individuals to adapt their opinions and behavior to others. This is the result of real or merely perceived pressure of a person, group or society (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). A certain degree of adaptation is, however, absolutely essential for life or survival and is inherent in both humans and in other forms and animals. From a sociological point of view, a certain degree of conformism is necessary to maintain social order. According to G. Tarde (in Scott, 2006) and his laws of imitation, conformism brings society together, forms a common language, goals and standards in it. However, it depends on to who and what a person is adapting. Exaggerated conformism hampers individuals and society and slows down progress and innovation.

A classic study of conformity from the 1950s of the last century (M. Deutsch, H. Gerard), voiced a presumption with which experts identify until today, namely that the basis of conformity is two needs, the need to be right and the need to be liked (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). The need to be right applies to new situations where we are not certain of our opinion or conduct, and turn to other people. We behave like others, we conform to them. The second, from the perspective of our study a more fundamental cause of conformity, is the desire to be liked and accepted by other people. If being liked is be one of the basic human needs, it is not surprising that an individual is subjected to pressures around them on their behavior and thinking. In this sense, a particularly sensitive period for conformity is adolescence, when the social group has the most significant effect on an individual in their life (Newman & Newman, 2012). The members of a group then identify with its objectives, standards and style of communication. Otherwise, the individual is avoided, marginalized and penalized.

The members of a group hold different levels of conformity. The highest level of conformity is internal, when they themselves identify with the demands of the group and are internally convinced about them. The next level is external conformity, or - if formal, which implies outwardly feigned agreement with the demands of the group, but inside a so-called conflict occurs, which is a contradiction between how the individual wants to behave and judge and what is required by the social environment. The next level is so-called nonconformity, which is a manifestation of the independence of opinion and action, even assuming that the individual is part of a social group. The last, lowest level of conformity, so-called anti-conformity, is a degree of deviation so pronounced that it can lead to deviant behavior in relation to the standards of the group. The risk factors that affect conformity include group size, group composition, group cohesion, penalties for failure to comply with standards, and others. (Coon & Mitterer, 2014)

Exceptionally gifted children, who are characterized by their specific features in the cognitive, emotional and social areas (Clark, 2013) are also included among individuals who may differ significantly from others. Giftedness is most often described as the ability of individuals in the selected area appreciated by the socio-cultural environment, which is quantitatively and qualitatively more developed compared to their peers (Heward, 2013). A gifted pupil for the purposes of our research is defined with the help of the definition one-dimensional and demonstrated performance (Porter, 1999), and is conceived in terms of a high level of intellectual abilities in a field.

Gifted pupils who show signs for intellectual giftedness can become marginalized individuals who are not desirable for the group or school class nor their role model. Demonstration of the giftedness of a pupil, however, is one of the preconditions for the successful development of giftedness. If we focus on the school environment, the teacher offers gifted pupils differentiated education and gifted pupils, by accepting the offer of the teacher in the form of enriching the curriculum, develop their potential. Otherwise there is stagnation in the development of the child.

The teacher as an offer for the development of giftedness applies differentiated enriched curriculum that can be implemented using a curriculum modified in its content, process, environment, product and evaluation, whose components are blended together (Tomlinson, 2013). Modifying the content of teaching refers to qualitative changes in the curriculum content. It is the ability of teachers to plan and apply the learning objectives and thereby offer a differentiated approach to gifted pupils through higher goals. A gifted pupil then has the opportunity to work on more challenging tasks towards higher educational goals (Smith, 2006). The modification process is a change in the management of teaching in terms of the use of educational methods and organizational forms, with a focus on strategies that lead to the development of critical and creative thinking. Environmental modification involves both a personality and relational change (good communication among all participants in the educational process, cooperation, etc.) as well as a space-material change (special teaching aids, classrooms, etc.). Modification of the

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