

ISRAELI AND ITALIAN EDUCATIONAL POLICIES ON GIFTEDNESS AND THE LEVERS TO TALENT FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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Sommario

L'articolo presenta uno studio comparativo tra le politiche educative israeliane ed italiane riguardanti la plusdotazione, con particolare attenzione all'ambito linguistico. Nello specifico, vengono indagate le possibili "azioni" capaci di incrementare il talento applicabili, successivamente, al contesto didattico. Dallo studio di una consolidata politica israeliana volta a investire nei talenti, è emerso che tre sono i fattori chiave capaci di farne da leva: 1. L'investimento nelle politiche educative sin dai primissimi anni di età, nonché la selezione, tra i 7 e gli 8 anni, di allievi con plusdotazione; 2. L'esposizione a diverse lingue e l'importanza dell'interdisciplinarietà; 3. La rilevanza di uno studio attivo basato su questioning e reasoning. Sotto un'ala contrastiva, tuttavia, è emerso come il sistema israeliano concernente la plusdotazione abbia carattere selettivo, mentre quello italiano, seppur più recente, vada verso un'ottica inclusiva dove il talento vuole essere messo a disposizione di tutti, non solo degli allievi "gifted".

Keywords: Gifted education, languages, Israeli and Italian educational policies

"Noi siamo quello che impariamo"

(*"We are what we learn"*)

Umberto Margiotta (2018:65)

1. Introduction*

A nation of only 8.9 million inhabitants¹, Israel is commonly referred as the “country of records” (Jews have won 20 per cent of all the Nobel Prizes that have been awarded²) and the “Start-Up Nation” with more than one start-up for every two thousand people (Arieli, 2019:xii). Nourished by the concepts of *ad hockery* and *chutzpah*³, but still rooted in the deep respect of old moral and traditional values, Israel can be considered a guiding light in matter of educational policies. In particular, as far as giftedness is concerned, Israel has a political educational system able to nurture its talents since 1958, reaching its full establishment in 1973, when the (then called) Department of Gifted Children became operative. As Mormando underlines, “(Israele) è senza ombra di dubbio il Paese che predispone più strutture e finanziamenti a livello statale per la formazione di bambini e giovani superdotati dalla primaria all’università” (Mormando, 2011:102)⁴.

In Italy, on the contrary, giftedness has been considered a “State” educational matter only since 2019. This is leading to two different prospects: on the one hand these first actions are still incomplete but improvable, and, on the other hand, recent Italian studies on giftedness are moving toward an inclusive teaching approach which is trying to be not selective or competitive but open to the cognitive peculiarities of each student. The importance of comparing and contrasting two countries divided by 60 years of educational policies about giftedness could be a magnifying glass for those nations (such as Italy) which have just undertaken a new educational path.

* Italian footnotes are translated by the author.

¹ OECD, 2018.

² The Jewish Chronical, October 10, 2013: “Jews have won more than 20 per cent of the 850-plus prizes awarded, despite making up just 0.2 per cent of world’s population. [...] Jews have received awards in all six categories, with the most won in medicine”.

³ Definition of ‘chutzpah’: “From Aramaic through Yiddish, the word entered modern Hebrew as well as English. [...] also used to describe a person or an action that is courageous or daring, particularly in a business context” (Arieli, 2019:203).

⁴ “[Israel] is, definitely, the country that devotes more State structures and funding to the education of gifted children and teenagers from primary school to university” (Mormando, 2011:102).

For this reason, the main points of this investigation will focus first on a description about the peculiarities of language and educational policies for the gifted in both Israel and Italy. The second section details the elements that can support language learning and are able to raise talent and maintain giftedness. In terms of this, three aspects emerged as relevant for Jewish tradition over the Italian one: the investments in early education and the diagnosis of giftedness for all primary school students, the exposure to different languages and the embedded (Jewish) tradition of studying and questioning, for a knowledge built as a community of enquiry.

In conclusion, some of the strong and weak points of the policy for the gifted in both countries are presented.

2. A Brief Overview on Israeli and Italian Language Policy and Educational Policy for the Gifted

In Israel, even though the innovative educational policy for the gifted does not appear to be strictly related to language, the two aspects are deeply interwoven by different elements of mutual influence, rooted in the shaping of a society, brand new and lively in its minds and purposes but with an ancient, long-standing tradition at its heart.

In a similar way, the history of multilingualism in Israel is a quite complex and still controversial matter, embedded in nourishing past elements (on this occasion left to further readings⁵) that unroll like a long ribbon of events into the present day and give shape to the current status of its languages. Without going into detail about historical changes in language policy, it may be stated that currently, in Israel, three main languages (two official, Hebrew and Arabic; one semi-official, English) plus many other non-official languages coexist. Hebrew is the main language, while Arabic is spoken by (about) 20% of the population. Despite the inclusion of Arabic in the curriculum, use of the two languages is unequal⁶. However, there is an open-minded approach to maintain multilingualism, as Spolsky underlines:

⁵ Cfr. Spolsky, B. (1997) and Tannenbaum, M.; Michalovich, A., Shohamy, E. (2020).

⁶ Tannenbaum et al. (2020:582) underlines that “whereas 95% of Israel’s Arab citizens are proficient in Hebrew, 95% of Israeli Jews do not know Arabic”.

The prime importance of Hebrew and Arabic as languages of instruction for the two communities has been reaffirmed. There is a recognition of the need for each community to learn other's language, and an additional year has been added to the teaching of Arabic as a requirement in Jewish schools. The use of English as the first foreign language is explicitly stated [...]. French and Russian are encouraged as languages of special significance, and other languages are also encouraged. In addition, new immigrants are encouraged to maintain their home languages while acquiring Hebrew. (Spolsky, 1997:144)

Just from this statement we can infer how Israeli culture and society is permeated and “soaked” by a rich variety of languages (as mentioned above, in order: Hebrew, Arabic, English, French, Russian, and home languages). Indeed, Tannenbaum claims that: “Israel has vast multilingual potential” (Tannenbaum et al., 2020:583).

As far as English is concerned, it holds a special place in Israel thanks to its high social and economic position (Reshef, 2020; Tannenbaum et al., 2020; Yoel, 2020). Indeed,

It enjoys a prestigious status, its knowledge is shared by all graduates of the Israeli school system, exposure to it is high, and it plays a significant role in the professional and cultural life of large portions of the population, especially among the affluent and educated social strata. (Reshef, 2020:734)

In addition, it has a strong bridging value between the two main communities of the country:

English plays an additional and unique role in Israel – that of a neutral language that is neither Jewish nor Arab, neither Hebrew nor Arabic. This neutral language can be used to mediate and negotiate tension and conflict. (Yoel, 2020:48).

Section 3.2 of this article is partly devoted to underline the importance of English, the focus both on it as a mean to raise verbal giftedness, and as an instrument to convey talent.

Moving onto the perspective of education, Israeli compulsory schooling starts for children at the age of 6: elementary school (grades 1-6), intermediate school (grades 7-9), high school (grades 10-12, for students between 15 and 18 years old). They all then have to serve in the army (compulsory service of three years for all young men, and two years for women) before they can enrol at university. Looking specifically at languages: Hebrew is taught from grade 1 onwards at Jewish schools while it is introduced in Arab schools at grade 3 (and vice versa). Foreign languages form part of the curriculum at grade 6, so that for the most part, children are gradually exposed to three different languages by the end of primary school. As far as secondary school is concerned, English "is taught as a compulsory subject during all school years" (Tannenbaum et al., 2020:582).

Primary school in Israel is important not only for the introduction of languages but also for the process of filtering and diagnosing of giftedness, where every single child is involved (see St. Aubyn, 1999), as shown in section 3.1.

Indeed, giftedness in Israel has a long and nurtured tradition,

the education of gifted learners was being discussed within Israel's education Ministry as early as 1958. By 1961 the first residential programme for gifted disadvantaged teenagers had been established. By the late 1960s a variety of after-school enrichment activities were in place and, in 1971, a school for gifted learners was opened in Tel Aviv. (Dracup, 2012)

With the institution of the Department for Gifted Children in 1973 and before the year 2000, these were the programmes for gifted students:

- Enrichment centres for students aged 6-18 and enrichment programmes (afternoon-extra-curricular activities, weekly enrichment programs);
- Pull-out classes or special school-based classes with special curriculum but within regular schools (as opposed to separate

schools for the gifted), for children from the primary to the upper secondary school.

From the year 2000 on, the use of the Internet changed the concept of giftedness. In addition to the enlargement and improvement of the existing programs, distance learning (online classes) started to become established

as a basis for future learning. [...] We made a decision in 2002 to change the concept of the Internet site. It was clear that in order to meet the needs of the gifted students, especially in the periphery, the activities had to be organised systematically. [...] These students usually master the necessary technological skills, know English well and are ready for independent learning. (Rachmel, quoted in Dracup, 2012)

Today, under the supervision of the Division for Gifted and Excellent Students (former Department for Gifted Children) of the Ministry of Education, there are mainly:

- Special classes within regular schools where gifted children study with their gifted peers (and share very few moments with “normal” students), from grade 3 or 4 to high school;
- Weekly enrichment programs or pull-out programs, where gifted students “enjoy social connections with both regular students from their regular school [...] and other gifted children with similar needs from the pull-out program” (Peysers, 2005:231). As Vidergor (2010:19) underlines:

pull-out program main objectives, regardless of culture, stated by the Division are: (a) developing interdisciplinary and strategic thinking; (b) acquiring independent research skills; (c) enhancing the ability to become excellent performers at solving problems and processing and creating new knowledge actively; (d) encouraging curiosity, personal initiative, and innovation; and, (e) developing good inter-personal communication teamwork

skills. (Division of Gifted and Excellent Students, 2008/2009)

- E-learning courses;
- Afternoon Extra-Curricular Activities, with particular and different subjects than those of normal curricula.

Programs for the gifted are also supported by challenging projects such as the “Genius Program” offered by the Weizmann Institute of Science for students with an IQ of 155 points or more.

As far as the Italian compulsory school system is concerned, it is quite like the Israeli one in its stages (though the years don't fully coincide). Mandatory from 6 to 16 years old, primary school (commonly preceded by 3 years of kindergarten, not compulsory but strongly recommended) starts at 6 and lasts 5 years; lower secondary school goes from 11 to 14 years old (3 years) and upper secondary school lasts 5 years, from 14 to 18/19 approximately. The army is not compulsory and about 66.9% of Italian students⁷ start their university studies after completing their secondary school studies.

At this time (2021), there are not any special programs for the gifted or special courses established or standardised by the Ministry of Education (Ministero dell'Istruzione). In the next section, the way to diagnose and support giftedness in Italy is viewed. Historically, it is worth remembering the Emilio Trabucchi school for the gifted, a unique example of private school which lasted only 9 years (1984-1993); as well as the many programs supported by Eurotalent Italian, and other programs issued by different private associations.

As far as language teaching is concerned, in addition to Italian as mother tongue, English is the first foreign language taught in Italy, even though in a way which is still not very effective, as Santipolo underlines:

Attualmente in Italia l'inglese viene insegnato obbligatoriamente dai 6 ai 16 anni, cui vanno aggiunti gli ultimi tre anni di scuola superiore e, in alcuni casi, anche

⁷ “Rapporto 2020 sulla Condizione occupazionale e formativa dei diplomati”; www.almalaurea.it

qualche anno nella scuola dell'infanzia. Si tratta, ad ogni modo, di un periodo di studio molto lungo che non sembra tuttavia sufficiente a garantire agli allievi il raggiungimento di un livello accettabile di competenza, tanto da generare non di rado in loro un senso di frustrazione (e derivante demotivazione) alla prima occasione in cui si confrontano con la lingua reale. È dunque evidente che il sistema, a dispetto del molto tempo speso, non conduce ai risultati auspicati ed auspicabili⁸. (Santipolo, 2016:180).

From the lower secondary school, a second (and only in some schools, a third) foreign language (usually French, Spanish or German) is introduced, even though there is still lot to do in the Italian roadmap for language teaching and learning.

3. The Elements which support Language Learning and are able to raise talent and maintain giftedness: Israel compared to Italy

3.1 Investments in early education and diagnosis of giftedness for all primary school students

Israel is a young nation with the highest fertility rate percentage in comparison to any other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development country (a mean of 3.1 children per woman, compared to the average of 1.6 in the OECD countries, as well as compared to Italy which is in the third-to-last position with fewer than 1.3 children per woman⁹). In Israel, preschool enrolment rates for children aged 0-2 is 56%, compared to a mean of 35% in the OECD and an average of less than 30% in Italy. In 2017, the preschool enrolment rate for children

⁸ “Nowadays, in Italy, English is compulsory taught from the age of 6 to 16 years old. To this we should add the last three years of secondary school and, sometimes, some more years in the kindergarten. Despite this long period of studies, students do not reach an adequate level of competence. This could often generate, among them, a sense of frustration (and consequent demotivation) on the first occasion they approach to the language in real context. It is evident, therefore, that this system, despite the high amount of time devoted, doesn't lead to the expected results” (Santipolo, 2016:180).

⁹ Data: OECD, 2020.

aged 3 to 5 in Israel was a striking 99% (average OECD: 87.2%¹⁰; average in Italy: 92%). As Dana Vaknin (2020:28) underlines:

The time spent by children in preschool is a predictor of achievement later in life [...] The PISA test found that 15-year-old students who had spent two years or more in preschool had higher achievements on cognitive exams – math, reading and science – relative to children who had spent less than a year in preschool.

Pre-school enrolment also develops young children's interpersonal intelligence; in a very recent survey about social giftedness in early childhood, Porath (2020) found that in some young children, aged 4 and 5, the understanding of other's intentions was already well developed:

Socially gifted children's central social structures were more developmentally advanced and complex than those of their peers; they were advanced in their capability to think about how feelings, thoughts, and actions are linked, and offered rich, sensitive rationales for why others behaved the way they did. (Porath, 2020:89)¹¹

As far as primary school is concerned, the diagnosis of gifted children in Israel starts in grade 2 or 3 (7 or 8 years old) and includes **all** children (Peyser, 2005; Nevo & Rachmel, 2009; David, 2016):

All elementary school students in Israel are eligible to a free screening for giftedness. [...] These examinations [...] have two stages: in stage 1 all students take an initial "filtering" examination in literacy and arithmetic. The top 15% achieving students of each class are invited to take the stage 2 examinations which aim to assess the general

¹⁰ Data: OECD, 2019.

¹¹ It is important to underline that sociality is not a feature of all gifted students, nor for all their lifetime, as Hanna David (2020:8) points out "Many gifted children feel very good in various social situations, like to belong to several social circles, initiate social parties, conferences, family-gatherings and the like. However, many others, especially the highly gifted, do not."

cognitive ability of the students. After stage 2 of the examination is performed, the top 1.5-5% of students are invited to participate in a variety of programs for the gifted and excelling [...]. (David, 2016:104)

Once children are diagnosed as gifted, they are supported with special programs throughout their school career. As Nevo and Rachmel (2009:243) state:

There are two major reasons why an organization should establish special programs for gifted children. The first one is to help individual gifted children maximize their capacities for their own sake, rescuing them from unchallenging environment in their “normal” classes. The second reason has to do with the welfare of others rather than of the gifted individuals: investment in gifted children as a promise for a better future for the society.

On the contrary, in Italy there is not a shared and consolidated method to assess or diagnose each primary or secondary school student in order to discover and maintain talent, thus “supporting the gifted is not a recognised issue in Italian educational policies” (Freeman, 2002:91). The identification passes through the attentive eye of the class teacher (yet not well trained to recognise giftedness) who, in turn, together with the *Consiglio di Classe* (Class Council) and the family, decides to undertake further analyses to the profile of his/her brilliant student. The identification, or “certification” of giftedness (*certificazione*) is mainly done by members of the CNOP (*Consiglio Nazionale Ordine degli Psicologi*), following the main lines provided by the Council of Europe. If a student has an IQ of 130 points or more on the Wechsler scales (but it is not the only point of reference), then she/he is “labeled” as gifted. Just from this, it is easy to infer that if a teacher is not very attentive, careful, or trained, the risk of omitting numerous brilliant students is rather probable.

Officially, the Italian Ministry of Education (*Ministero dell'Istruzione*) only recognised the status of gifted students in 2019 (61 years after the Israeli Ministry), by including a short paragraph regarding their position among SEN students (Special Educational

Needs, or *BES, Bisogni Educativi Speciali*)¹². Even though a lot has still to do for the Italian roadmap of giftedness, the most relevant trend is to go through a tailored, inclusive teaching approach for all students: “Considerando la crescente eterogeneità che caratterizza le classi italiane, risulta evidente l'importanza di una didattica rivolta alla personalizzazione”¹³ (Lucangeli, 2019:97).

3.2 *Exposure to different languages: Language Giftedness or Languages for Giftedness?*

As stated in section 2, Israeli students are exposed to at least three languages throughout their school career. Not surprisingly, one of the key points of Israeli policy about giftedness is interdisciplinarity and the knowledge of languages is embedded in it. The importance of interdisciplinary thinking is overtly underlined by Peyser (2005:230): “The Ministry of Education favors a holistic approach to gifted education; the purpose of most special frameworks for gifted children is not to boost specific talents, but to nurture multiple areas of ability in a balanced fashion.”

As a consequence of this policy, many programs for the gifted are issued in different languages and involve different subjects. For example, the *Math-by-Mail project* of the Weizmann Institute of Science (Dracup, 2021) offers set of problems translated into English, Russian and Korean. Another example is provided by Vidergor & Eilam (2011:146) and concerns Israeli pull-out programs: “The most common

¹² (Nota MIUR n. 562 del 3 aprile 2019) Alunni e studenti ad alto potenziale intellettuale. In base alle segnalazioni ricevute dalle scuole e alle comunicazioni scientifiche dei settori accademici di riferimento, emerge come fra la popolazione scolastica siano presenti bambini ad alto potenziale intellettuale, definiti Gifted children in ambito internazionale. A seguito dell'emanazione della Direttiva 27.12.2012, molte istituzioni scolastiche hanno considerato tali alunni e studenti nell'ambito dei Bisogni Educativi Speciali. Tale prassi, assolutamente corretta, attua la prospettiva della personalizzazione degli insegnamenti, la valorizzazione degli stili di apprendimento individuali e il principio di responsabilità educativa. Anche in questo caso la strategia da assumere è rimessa alla decisione dei Consigli di Classe o Team Docenti della primaria che, in presenza di eventuali situazioni di criticità con conseguenti manifestazioni di disagio, possono adottare metodologie didattiche specifiche in un'ottica inclusiva, sia a livello individuale sia di classe, valutando l'eventuale convenienza di un percorso di personalizzazione formalizzato in un PDP.

¹³ “Considering the growing heterogeneity of Italian school classes, it is important to implement some tailored teaching methods” (Lucangeli, 2019:97).

subjects taught are math, the sciences (space, medicine, computers, and astronomy), languages (English, Chinese, and Japanese), arts, and law” (Division of Gifted Education, 2008/2009).

The special link between sciences and languages is very strong indeed. English, as stated before, has the status of being considered the language of science and innovation: “English in Israel plays a major role, both as a global and a local language in multiple domains such as business, academia, media, and education, as well as in daily interactions” (Shohamy, 2014:1).

The learning of languages not only has an intrinsic value itself but, especially for gifted verbal students, it has a strong impact and interrelation with values such as empathy, fairness, sense of responsibility toward other people, commitment to the community or the whole society. Given that some of the main characteristics of the verbally gifted are to: “recall ideas easily and learn at a sophisticated level, [...] use different forms for special purposes, [...] put ideas together in unexpected ways. [...] reason analytically and synthetically in complex ways” (Bailey, 1996), the exposure to different languages clearly helps to nourish and maintain these features. According to a larger view, “Language proficiency is an advantage that contributes to the social life of gifted children also in the long run” (David, 2020:8).

Verbal talent can be seen as a national resource if employed in a right way helping gifted students to build their path, even though, as David underlines, “There are even studies showing that having an extremely high IQ is a disadvantage for a political leader” (9). Indeed, as Peyser underlines, besides the cognitive goals set by the Ministry of Education for the gifted, many goals are addressed to the emotional and social sides of the individual: “developing sensitivity toward others and an ability to appreciate other qualities in people beside intellectual talent”, “nurturing assertiveness, developing interpersonal communication and ability to work in a team, and developing social involvement and leadership ability” (Peyser, 2005:230).

In Italy, the study of giftedness related to language learning is a brand-new discipline, increasing in importance and in line with the Israeli concept of interdisciplinarity. Indeed, as Novello (2016:113) stresses:

L'apprendimento di una o, meglio, più lingue può portare ad eccellenti risultati con i bambini/ragazzi plusdotati. Oltre a chi possiede un forte sviluppo dell'intelligenza logico-matematica (che predispone a un più fruttuoso apprendimento linguistico) ottimi risultati possono essere raggiunti da tutti gli studenti gifted se perseguite alcune strategie che accomunano la glottodidattica e la didattica per studenti ad altissimo potenziale intellettuale¹⁴.

3.3 *The embedded tradition of studying and questioning, building knowledge as a community of enquiry: Modern Western teaching methods for the verbally gifted are intrinsic in Jewish culture*

Umberto Margiotta (2018:143) wrote: “Si prende atto con costernazione che generazioni più colte non sono, per questo, più avvertite del bene comune e delle responsabilità sociali. E che dunque non basta in più conoscenza per ottenere cittadini migliori”¹⁵. Just from this statement we can infer how knowledge is nothing without a strong sense of community, justice and social commitment: values which are rooted in gifted students' sensibility¹⁶. To support this, many schools in Israel, e.g. the eminent IASA¹⁷, besides the fundamental pillars of *excellence and leadership*, add *community services* to their main aims.

¹⁴ The learning of one or, better, more languages can lead to excellent results with gifted children/teenagers. Beyond those who have a strong development in their logical-mathematical intelligence (which are more inclined to have a fruitful language learning), excellent results could be achieved by all gifted students if some teaching strategies able to combine language teaching to the teaching methods for high potential learners are pursued (Novello, 2016:113).

¹⁵ “With dismay, it is acknowledged that more educated generations are not, for this reason, more aware of the common good and social responsibilities. Therefore, more knowledge is not enough to obtain better citizens” (Margiotta, 2018:143).

¹⁶ “[...] L'estrema sensibilità a questioni sociali e morali, legate a tematiche quali giustizia e uguaglianza, dimostrando capacità di argomentazione simili ad un adulto” (Silverman, 1994, cited in Lucangeli, 2019:32, *Gifted, la mente geniale*).

“[...] The extreme sensibility to social and moral issues, linked to themes such as justice and equality, showing a reasoning ability similar to that of an adult.”

¹⁷ “The Israel Arts and Sciences Academy (IASA) is Israel's first and only residential high school designed specifically for excellent students of extraordinary potential.” (From <http://school.iasa.org.il/about-iasa/>)

Especially for languages, some modern Western teaching methods¹⁸ oriented toward verbal giftedness are:

- The *Socratic Circle*, based on questioning and reasoning;
- *The Enrichment Seminar*, used to develop cognitive skills but also “to meet the social and emotional needs of gifted learners” (Simpson, cited in Danielian; Fugate & Fogarty, 2018:29);
- The simulation of a public debate, where verbally gifted students are asked to formulate and defend issues of common interests;
- Other techniques based on strategic thinking, problem solving, decision making, questioning etc.

All these inclusive teaching “techniques” are intrinsic features of the long-standing Jewish tradition, so what we “learn” as methods are clearly part of Jewish way of life and behaviour. If we compare the modern Western techniques based on questioning and reasoning with the concept of *havruta*¹⁹, we can perceive an inner coincidence among them.

Havruta became a term that designed a unique mode of Jewish scholarly undertaking, based on and highlighting the importance of studying with a partner in a social context. [...] The havruta process of learning consists of exchanges of knowledge and discussions of principal issues. [...] Students examine and challenge each other continuously while looking for solutions to problems that require logical thinking, and settling contradictions within a text portion. (Hertz-Lazarowitz & Zelniker, 1995:268).

Even though the concept of knowledge is still closely linked to religion, the way Jewish deal with religious learning is quite enlightening: “The highest, and most valued form of learning is the Talmudic *Pilpul*. This form requires learners to argue a point with logic, coherence and elegance while being scrutinized by experts who are hunting for flaws of logic” (Hertz-Lazarowitz & Zelniker, 1995:268).

¹⁸ Cfr. Danielian, J., Fugate, C., Fogarty, E. (2018).

¹⁹ “The source of havruta is the word *haver* (friend)” (Hertz-Lazarowitz & Zelniker, 1995:268).

The terms “logic, coherence and elegance” underline that the way of reasoning has to be not only sharp and consistent, but also refined in its qualities and manners. Last, but still important, the concept of *ad hockery* (that is the ability of “improvising on the go”, in Arieli, 2019:xviii) is linked to the concept of looking positively at failures, even for learning: “Failure is an important, positive part of life. [...] in Israel, we have the unique ability, as a culture, to look at any event, success or failure, head-on, discuss and learn from it” (Arieli, 2019:58).

4. Conclusion

The Israeli educational system has still some flaws within its educational policy for the gifted, for example the selection examinations are administered by the Henrietta Szold institute and do not test creativity (David, 2014) and there is still a lack of good and trained teachers for the gifted. But, looking at its educational success in the world (as David (2012:81) underlines: “One of the indicators of the exceptional level of Jewish students in the US is the high rate of students in all top US universities”), we can easily infer that this country is able to manage with and invest on human capital in an optimal way. Indeed, Israel is still in the top three of *The Most Educated Countries 2021*, preceded only by Canada (1st) and Japan (2nd), while Italy ranks far below in 37th place²⁰.

Considering this last aspect, the questions which arise spontaneously are:

- *What is the subtle line between **talent** and **expertise**?*
- *When does **excellence** end and **giftedness** begin?*

All the elements are probably going to merge into each other, acting like a good yeast for the growth of people in a society. Indeed, giving that all the environmental factors (epigenetics) are extremely important in shaping an individual education and attitude, Israel is a country where a good and participatory school system and the ability to take advantage of talent has led to a constant surfacing of brilliant and excellent students. As far as languages are concerned, the exposure to

²⁰ Data from [Most Educated Countries 2021 \(worldpopulationreview.com\)](https://www.worldpopulationreview.com)

two or three different languages helps to raise verbal giftedness, which could be very important to mould a student's future career and role within the society.

In Italy, both questions about giftedness and language learning still need improvement. But the first careful steps have already started taking place and some new inclusive (and not selective) teaching methods are becoming established among the modern school techniques for gifted children and teenagers. The importance of considering each learner as first supporter and maker of her/his learning process according to her/his cognitive style can, indeed, bring to light the best aspects of her/his personality.

Indeed, as Margiotta (2018:27) claims: "Non è mai solo la dote naturale a determinare il successo personale, ma piuttosto una delicata interazione tra passione, attitudine, impegno e opportunità, che incoraggia le persone a raggiungere i più alti livelli di successo e a condurre vite ricche di significato e di obiettivi"²¹.

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²¹ "It is not only natural talent to determine personal success, but rather a refined interaction among passion, attitude, commitment and opportunity, which encourages people to join the highest levels of success and to lead meaningful lives full of objectives" (Margiotta, 2018:27).

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