

Recognition of talented children

Recommendations for Teachers



Background

The TALENT project emerges from a strategic collaboration between seven European countries, including Croatia, Italy, Greece, Malta, Cyprus, Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Spearheaded by the Centre of Excellence of Split-Dalmatia County (CI SDZ), this project brings together a diverse consortium of universities, non-governmental organisations, and network organisations. This partnership leverages the unique strengths and experiences of each member to address the multifaceted challenges faced by young athletes pursuing dual careers in sports and academics.

Initiated on December 1st, 2022, and set to span over 30 months, the TALENT project is designed to foster a comprehensive approach to talent identification and development. By incorporating advanced educational techniques and innovative sports science technologies, the project aims to create a supportive ecosystem that facilitates the harmonious growth of young talents in both their educational pursuits and athletic endeavours.

This multinational collaboration is not just a pooling of resources but a fusion of cultural perspectives and expertise, which enriches the project's approach and enhances its applicability across different socio-economic contexts. The synergy of this diverse consortium is anticipated to set new standards in the detection and nurturing of sports talents, offering a model that can be adapted by other regions around the world.

Purpose of the project

The primary goal of the TALENT project is to seamlessly integrate sports and education to support young athletes in managing dual careers effectively. This integration is crucial as the demands of maintaining high performance in both academics and athletics can place significant stress on young individuals, often leading to burnout or early dropout from one or both fields.

Objectives of the project

- **Development** of methodologies for early talent identification
- **Adaptation** of educational programmes to meet the needs of athletes
- **Establishment** of a supportive environment that involves coaches, educators, and families.

Purpose of the TALENT Recommendations

Through the developed online platform, these recommendations are targeting teachers, parents, coaches, sports clubs and decision makers to better understand what the needs of talented children are, in order to support their development and prevent drop-out from school or from sports.

Introduction

As an educator, you play a crucial role in shaping the academic and personal development of young athletes who try to balance their passion for sports with their studies. Supporting talented students in managing dual careers requires flexibility, understanding, and tailored teaching strategies. This booklet provides practical recommendations on how to create an inclusive learning environment, accommodate training schedules, and foster motivation to prevent school drop-out. By recognising the challenges student-athletes face, you can help them succeed both in the classroom and in their sports careers.



The role of teachers in the talent development process

Teachers play a vital role in shaping young minds and fostering talent development. Their expertise, passion, and dedication provide the foundation for students to discover and nurture their abilities. While teachers typically care for children, fostering curiosity and basic skills, teachers guide students through primary education, helping them build academic foundations. By tailoring teaching methods to students' unique needs, providing encouragement through recognition and commendation, and incorporating experiential learning opportunities such as projects, experiments, and field trips, they can cultivate critical thinking and problem-solving skills essential for real-world success.

Beyond the classroom, teachers also play a crucial role in building strong relationships with parents to support students' growth. Regular meetings with parents help track students' progress, address challenges, and align support strategies at home and school. When a student demonstrates exceptional talent in a particular field, educators can facilitate connections with mentors who provide specialized guidance and encouragement. Ultimately, these professionals are pillars of the education system, equipping students with the tools, resources, and confidence they need to reach their full potential.

Here are some ways in which you can effectively support your student-athlete within the school setting, ensuring they thrive both academically and athletically.

1. Mentoring inclusive environments

Mentoring inclusive environments presents a multifaceted exploration of talent recognition, talent development, and support within educational settings. By recognising the signs of talents in classroom settings and understanding the nuances of talent identification, teachers can lay the groundwork for personalised learning experiences that cater to the unique strengths and interests of each student.

2. Signs of talent in classroom settings

Teachers play a crucial role in identifying and nurturing students' talents, distinguishing between natural giftedness and developed talent. Giftedness refers to innate abilities in intellectual, creative, socio-affective, or sensor-motor domains, while talent emerges when these abilities are systematically refined to an advanced level. Although all students possess unique strengths, those who are gifted often stand out from their peers, requiring targeted support and opportunities to help them cultivate their potential.

Being different from others underscores the critical need for an inclusive approach in education. An inclusive educational approach ensures that every student, regardless of their abilities or differences, has the chance to develop and apply their talents. By creating a supportive learning environment, teachers can encourage students to explore their skills, engage in meaningful learning experiences, and receive the guidance they need to progress. This approach not only benefits gifted students but also fosters a culture of growth and development for all learners.

3. Inclusive practices for talent recognition

Talent recognition should be integrated into the learning process through inclusive practices that nurture cognitive abilities such as:

Reflection

Concentration

Decision-making

Problem-solving

Leadership

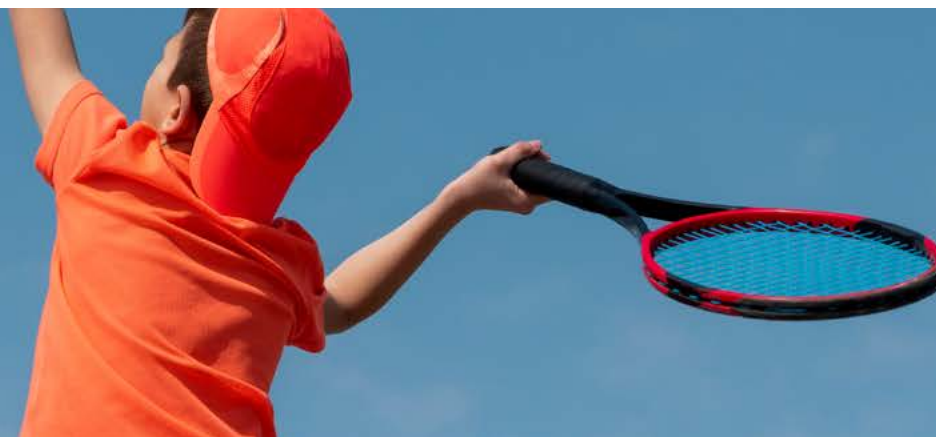
Vigilance

Quick thinking

These practices should encourage active participation and research while considering environmental and intrapersonal factors like motivation, self-management, and adaptability. Recognising talent, particularly in sports, should extend beyond physical abilities and include perceptual-cognitive skills that allow individuals to excel in multiple domains. By fostering interactions with their environment, inclusive practices enable talented individuals to apply their skills beyond their primary area of expertise, ensuring holistic development. Rather than being confined to a specific field, talent development should provide opportunities for growth across various disciplines, allowing gifted athletes to maximise their potential in diverse areas.

When working with a potentially gifted or talented individual look for the following signs:

- A. Reflecting** on the issue at hand included self-initiated analysis of the problem, critical review, and detailed evaluation of phases in the process to determine the best course of action
- B. High level of concentration** to the task at hand, paying attention to details and asking for clear explanations and justifications
- C. Taking responsibility** for their own actions and decisions
- D. Not deflecting** from problems, but looking at them as challenges which lead to quick problem-solving solutions
- E. Exhibiting initiative** to lead the team and taking into consideration each team members thoughts and ideas
- F. Paying close attention** to the actions of their team members and rarely losing concentration and motivation.



4. Implementation of Personalised Learning Plans (PLP)¹ for talented students

The system develops personalised learning methods and educational content for students with unique characteristics and interests. Dual-oriented learning is becoming relevant in the context of increasing creativity, social significance, and cultural value of the result, thereby contributing to the self-organisation of the cognitive activity system, goal setting, and the change of semantic attitudes.

Implementing Personalised Learning Plans (PLPs) for sport-talented students can contribute to the student's self-organisation and goal setting and requires close collaboration between educators, coaches, parents, and students.

You, as teachers, need to be aware (in close cooperation with coaches and parents) on how to recognise the special needs of talents in order to successfully implement PLPs for talented students. Here are five points you should have in mind:

A. Recognition of talents

You need to be aware of the characteristics and behaviours associated with giftedness to accurately identify talented students who may benefit from PLPs. Without this awareness, talented students may go unnoticed, and PLPs may not be initiated for those who need them.

¹ For more information on Personalised Lesson Plans here:

www.researchgate.net/publication/320587985_Key_Features_of_Personalized_Learning

B. Understanding diverse needs

Gifted students have diverse needs and may require different approaches to learning compared to their peers. You must be aware of these diverse needs to tailor PLPs effectively. Without this understanding, PLPs may not address the specific needs of talented students, resulting in suboptimal outcomes.

C. Individualisation of support

PLPs are designed to provide individualised support and resources to help gifted students reach their full potential. If you are aware of the unique needs of talents, then you can personalise PLPs to address specific strengths, interests, and challenges of each student. This individualised approach maximises the effectiveness of PLPs and ensures that talented students receive the support they need.

D. Collaboration and advocacy

In order to have a collaborative and supportive school environment, you need to advocate for the needs of talented students. You need to understand the importance of PLPs, while collaborating with colleagues, administrators, and parents to ensure their successful implementation. This collaborative effort enhances the effectiveness of PLPs and promotes positive outcomes for talented students.

E. Monitoring and adjustment

You play a key role in monitoring the progress of talented students and adjusting PLPs as needed. Awareness of talents enables you to recognise signs of progress or areas requiring modification in PLPs. By actively monitoring and adjusting PLPs, you can ensure that talented students continue to receive appropriate support and opportunities for growth.

5. Provision of enrichment opportunities within the classroom

For talents to emerge, it is essential to provide a range of enrichment activities that enhance motivation, self-regulation, a willingness to learn, cognitive skills, and emotional control. For talented or gifted athletes, enrichment programmes should facilitate the transfer of their sport-related abilities to classroom activities, allowing them to apply discipline, focus, and perseverance in an academic setting.

Sport naturally fosters satisfaction, confidence, high engagement, and meaningful learning experiences. Integrating these skills into the classroom as enrichment opportunities can help keep talented individuals motivated and support their continued development. Activities should be designed to stimulate their ability to take initiative, make decisions, and lead, ensuring they can apply their talents across multiple domains.

Here are some proposed activities:

A. Team building activities to induce interaction and collaboration with others in the classroom

B. Challenging tasks which ask for detailed analysis, decision-making and reflection on good and bad decisions

C. Activities with a planning phase (e.g. project-oriented activities) which require a set of preparatory actions such as a to-do-list, scheduling and consulting with other team members

D. Developing negotiation skills reflecting on a win-win scenario

E. Introducing goal-oriented projects to promote collaboration, communication, teamwork, dedication, focus and evaluation.

6. Social and emotional support

As a teacher, promoting the social and emotional well-being of talented individuals requires understanding their unique emotional needs and social expectations. Developing emotional intelligence has been identified as a key factor in fostering emotional growth and resilience among gifted students, as it helps them manage stress, adapt to challenges, and integrate their thoughts, emotions, and behaviours in both academic and everyday settings. Emotional intelligence is essentially the skill of recognising one's own emotions, as well as recognising the emotions of others, and based on that, appropriately regulating one's emotions and behaviour, which allows us to have successful relationships (with ourselves and others). While some research suggests that gifted students do not struggle with social exclusion, others argue that they often feel invisible, leading to a lack of coping mechanisms when set apart from their peers. Recognising these specific emotional traits and addressing them through targeted support can enhance their cognitive potential, social adaptation, and overall well-being.

It's important to promote the development of the following skills:

- A. 3 Selves (self-efficiency, self-confidence and self-esteem)
- B. Autonomy
- C. Ability to connect with others and build healthy relationships
- D. Sense of belonging
- E. Emotional intelligence

Peer-interaction is another component which needs to be promoted within the classroom. Here are some questions that can be used in the classroom which promote positive peer interactions:

- A. How do I feel about my peers' thinking and feelings?
- B. How do I feel about my thinking and feelings?
- C. How do I expect others will react to my intentions?
- D. What could others misinterpret about my intentions?
- E. How would I formulate the intent of others based on their actions and words?



7. Promote cooperative learning

Within the classroom environment, **formal cooperative learning** consists of students working together over several weeks to achieve shared learning goals and jointly complete specific tasks and assignments.

Through this teaching-learning methodology, the teacher becomes the director of the learning process, and the student becomes the actor. The role of the teacher is fundamental because they oversee the structure of the learning environment, construct the activities according to the learning and socialisation objectives and teach the social skills required to deal effectively with cooperative activities.

More specifically, the teacher:

- **Provides** the groups with feedback in itinerary
- **Guides** questions posed by the students
- **Relaunches** the issues with further stimuli
- **Helps** the group explore all possible avenues
- **Monitors** the processes by leading the groups to reflect on activities based on their experiences making reflective analyses of both learning and socialisation.

When emphasis is given on flexible scheduling, group collaboration, and peer support it may improve academic performance, enhance time management skills, and increase the sense of belonging among student-athletes.

8. Career and life skills development

You can support student-athletes by helping them prepare for their future, whether in sports, academics, or professional careers.

A. **Guidance on higher education opportunities** – You could inform student-athletes about scholarships, university sports programmes, and academic pathways that align with their interests.

B. **Career counselling** – You could provide guidance on alternative career options to ensure that student-athletes are prepared for life beyond sports.

C. **Teaching transferable skills** – You could emphasise skills such as teamwork, leadership, discipline, and goal setting helps student-athletes succeed in various life domains.

Conclusion

Teachers play a vital role in supporting student-athletes by offering academic flexibility, fostering a supportive environment, collaborating with coaches, and providing emotional and career guidance. By adopting these approaches, you can help student-athletes balance their dual responsibilities effectively, ensuring their holistic development and long-term success. Schools must recognise the importance of this role and provide teachers with the necessary resources and training to support student-athletes in the best possible way.

Further information can be found on the project's website

www.talent-edu.eu





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