

## Chapter VII

# **PRESCHOOL TEACHERS' COMPETENCIES FOR IDENTIFYING AND FOSTERING GIFTEDNESS FOR VISUAL ARTS EXPRESSION IN PRESCHOOL CHILDREN**

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**Abstract:** This paper focuses on preschool children having a gift for expressing themselves in visual art forms. The aim of the research is to determine which competencies preschool teachers own and additionally need for identifying this specific type of giftedness and creating and implementing programs to promote it. The research includes questionnaires for two defined groups. The first group is composed of preschool teachers with certain work experience and the second one includes final year students of the Faculty of Education in Jagodina, department for preschool teachers. Questions are designed to assess the competencies preschool teachers have for working with artistically gifted children, whether these competencies were obtained through formal or informal education, and finally which competencies teachers do not possess but do need for working in this area. Collected results will be used to indicate directions for improving initial [undergraduate] preschool teacher education curriculum in Serbia in order to enrich their competencies for efficient work with children gifted for visual arts expression.

**Keywords:** *preschool teacher competencies, giftedness, artistic ability, preschool children, visual arts expression.*

## **Introduction**

Gifted education as we know it today is a relatively recent invention. As Barbara Kerr points out in her Introduction to *Encyclopaedia of Giftedness, Creativity and Talent*, "[...] it is in recent past that education stakeholders realized that, while focusing on identification and remediation of those students who are slower to learn, students who learn rapidly and think creatively are being left behind" (Kerr, 2009: xxvii). Researches on cognitive, motivational and socially affective characteristics of being gifted, as well as the practice of advisory work with gifted children, confirm the thesis that those students have certain specificities which also pose specific educational needs (Altaras Dimitrijevic & Tatic Janevski, 2016: 24).

When considering “giftedness”, authors firstly make sure about their definition of the term, to avoid any possibility of being misinterpreted. The reason for this is the non-existence of a firm general and universally accepted definition of giftedness in all disciplines. In an effort to elaborate the issue, authors of *Exploration of giftedness* give a useful overview of modern concepts, definitions, and theories of intellectual giftedness, and of past and current developments in the field of gifted education (Sternberg et al., 2011). Definitions of giftedness, accepted for further research in this paper, would consider giftedness in a wide and open understanding as expressing natural abilities in a specific area of expression, in a measure significantly above the average for that certain age. What this paper is more specifically interested in, is artistic ability or giftedness for expression in visual arts of preschool children and competencies of their teachers to recognize their giftedness and to help them develop it to the next level, where it could grow into a functional talent. As a child gifted in visual arts expression, this paper will consider a child who shows high intrinsic motivation to engage with art techniques (painting, drawing, sculpting: making, creating and designing new objects), demonstrates highly developed skills (compared to an average for that age), to operate with art tools and to manipulate different materials (paper, cardboard, clay, linoleum), who easily understands and solves artistic assignments and problems, who is continuously interested in exploring new materials and art techniques, and prefers to express themselves using visual art mediums.

Sternberg expresses the opinion that in a highly competitive globalized world, those nations that do not do well with their gifted students put themselves at risk of falling behind (Sternberg et al., 2011:16). This paper is not interested in the competitiveness of a state, or a country, or a nation, achieved through nutrition of their gifted citizens as a valuable resource, but in a child’s well-being, ensured through accomplishment of their own unique, creative, productive potentials. As pedagogues, we should nurture and develop our students’ giftedness and talents in order to help them achieve their full mental, intellectual, creative, and emotional potentials to live healthy and happy lives. In order to make these goals achievable, pedagogues, teachers and others involved need a set of competencies, enabling them to react appropriately in any given situation.

Assessing the structure of competencies of gifted preschool children, prof. Jevtic explains how the years of early childhood are crucial for establishing a child’s learning process and that if all engaged in preschool education waste their time by enabling only a formally defined normative plan of instructed activities, as well as only having a regular approach to working with children, there is a risk of negatively affecting the overall development of a child. She stresses the necessity of a holistic approach to preschool teachers education on the giftedness of preschool children because, as she suggests, preschool

teachers must be competent to recognize gifted children, thus previously knowing the characteristics of different types of giftedness, as well as knowing each gifted child individually (Jevtic, 2009: 251).

## **Identification of artistically gifted preschool children**

There are numbers of modern theories considering art education, relevant to notions of giftedness, creativity and talent, providing scaffolding for further research on artistic modes of thought and expression (Kerr, 2009: 49). In Europe, art education has been identified as a key factor in social and economic development, while offering students valuable opportunity to experience and build knowledge and skills of self-expression, imagination, creativity and communication (Road Map for Arts Education, 2006). What art education encompasses is a scope of versatile areas from engagement with art objects and art-making processes, learning in the domain of art and exploring issues that range from making interdisciplinary connections to social issues and the study of visual culture. On the other hand, there is a need and a responsibility for art teachers to care for those who have artistic potential. While educational policies focus on using art education as a resource for developing other skills, interest and investment in artistically gifted students has been neglected.

The term artistic ability is often defined as advanced ability in the visual arts as it relates to conceptions of giftedness, creativity, and talent (Kerr, 2009: 50). This ability will not necessarily develop into adult artistic productivity because, in preschool years of a child, it may only be related to a pleasurable engagement with art making, which can disappear when a child grows up. In order to keep and develop this ability or giftedness, a child needs a support system including educational institutions and family.

Most studies imply that when assessing students' giftedness, teachers work most efficiently while using some list of characteristics or check lists, when they have enough time to observe and meet students and when they do have a certain education (formal or informal) in the field of identification of giftedness. Teachers themselves believe that their evaluation increase accuracy of identification based on testing, because they have direct contact with students, and researchers agree that teachers' opinions are undoubted factors in the process of identifying gifted students (Altaras Dimitrijevic & Tatic Janevski, 2016: 55). This is even more relevant in identifying an artistically gifted child, having in mind that authentic assessment in the arts may only be performed by the teachers themselves, as a continuous effort to improve learning through a better understanding of creation and communication processes in the classroom (Kárpáti & Gaul, 2013: x). As a supplement to some existing tests, such as Torrance Tests of Creativity (TTC) or Clark's Drawing Abilities Test (CDAT),

which can be used to measure art appreciation, art aptitude and drawing abilities, Stanley S. Madeja points out some advantages of “authentic (non-standardized) evaluation methods” such as observation techniques as a research methodology in evaluation in the arts since “[...] they are characteristic of a more humanistic and less mechanistic approach to describing the phenomena; they are compatible with the diversity of the arts experience (which tends to be non-linear). Because observation reports are more descriptive of a non-linear process or event they are based on primary data – student work – rather than on secondary data – student performance on a test. Thus, they provide concrete examples of the actual experience while taking a neutral stance as to the worth or value of the experience” (Madeja 2013: 20). Madeja also warns on this method’s disadvantages since being non-standardized, they are subject to personal interpretation, which implies that observers have to be trained. On the other hand, identifying the artistically gifted still comes mostly to the knowledge of the domain, personal judgment and intuition than to a scientific approach. With no precise and scientifically defined instruments to measure artistic ability, it comes down to a teacher’s competence to notice, recognize, test and identify artistically gifted child. In the article “Identifying Artistically Talented Students in Four Rural Communities in the United States”, authors Gilbert Clark and Enid Zimmerman described their observation that each community (a region or even a school) needs specifically designed identification measures, developed by teachers and community members in addition to those standard ones in order to efficiently identify artistic giftedness. Authors also listed a number of their recommendations as guidance to the teacher’s work in this direction (Clark & Zimmerman, 2001: 104–114).

Having this in mind, we have come to the point where we need to put in question professional competencies of teachers to carry out such a responsibility. More precisely, this research starts with questioning the level and quality of knowledge, skills and abilities of preschool teachers, gained through their formal initial [undergraduate] education to operate in the domain of artistic giftedness in preschool children.

As one step forward to exploring the question of whether preschool teachers have, competencies for identifying and fostering artistically gifted children, and if they do, on what level, this research focused on a narrow sample of respondents in order to make a solid starting position for further exploration of the issue.

## **Methodology of the research**

As previously elaborated, this research emerged from the question: Are preschool teachers competent to recognize, identify, and successfully work

with children gifted in visual arts expression? An additional question is: If they do have necessary competencies for working with artistically gifted children, how were those acquired and how well developed are they?

The hypothesis of this research is that in order for every preschool teacher to have these competencies, a responsibility for it is in initial [undergraduate] preschool teacher education. More precisely, it is a presumption that curricula of initial [undergraduate] preschool teacher education programs need to be created aiming at developing competencies for working with artistically gifted children.

The goal of the research was to determine if preschool teachers have competencies for recognizing and fostering giftedness for visual art expression in preschool children. An additional goal was to ascertain if existing competencies were acquired through formal education. These goals were aimed at understanding if present and past programs incorporated topic of artistic giftedness effectively enough to promote teachers competent to work with artistically gifted children.

The research conducted was empirical, and the method of research was descriptive. It was conducted by applying the technique of survey. Instruments used within this technique were questionnaires. The first type of questionnaires was aimed at experienced preschool teachers. Questions were designed to comprehend how teachers evaluate their competencies for working with artistically gifted children and how they assess their initial [undergraduate] education role in acquiring these competencies. The focus group for this part of the research were teachers working with children aged from 4 to 6 years old in preschool institution "Pionir" in Jagodina.

The second type of questionnaire targeted final year students on Preschool Teacher Education of Faculty of Education in Jagodina. The goal was to examine the quality of knowledge these students obtained regarding artistically gifted children during their studies. Students who took part in the research are going to be preschool teachers soon, they are yet to get experience in the work, so the question is: What competencies do they bring into their jobs, right after graduating from initial [undergraduate] preschool education? The questionnaire was also designed to test students' self-confidence regarding the researched issue.

In order to give a solid framework for assessing and representing results of the empirical research, a summary of initial preschool teacher education programs in Serbia was given, with a more detailed review of the initial [undergraduate] preschool teacher education program curriculum of the Faculty of Education in Jagodina.

## The research

### *Formal initial [college/undergraduate] education for preschool teachers in Serbia*

Educational policy in Serbia has been facing many changes and redefinitions on all levels (preschool, elementary school, high level education) since 2000. Goals, visions and focus topics often depend on a leading political structure. Faculties of Education get affected by both laws and regulations at high level and primary level education, having to adapt their programs accordingly. How this will be implemented, depends on each faculty individually to improve, redefine and reform their curricula. There are nearly twenty public higher education institutions in Serbia, including 7 Faculties of Pedagogy or Education and 11 High vocational schools, implementing initial education for preschool teachers. Even though basics of all these programs are the same, there are inevitable differences, not only depending on the unique curricula and syllabuses but there are also differences as a result of human factors included in every single course.

The basics of initial preschool teacher education curricula make courses from the areas of pedagogy, psychology, sociology, methodical-didactic subjects (mathematics, elementary science, maternal language, arts and sports), while other mandatory and elective subjects differ from school to school.

In order to determine how all these curricula treat giftedness in visual arts expression, large scale research would be needed. Research conducted on “Preschool teachers’ competencies for working with gifted children” in 2017 suggested that preschool teachers are of the opinion that their best developed competencies are for recognizing spatially-pictorial and musical giftedness, while competencies for developing pedagogical profile, individualization of work with gifted, and developing individually educational plan are insufficiently developed. As most desirable methods of improving these competencies, questioned teachers listed additional education and cooperation with professionals from the relevant fields, pedagogues and psychologists, as well as systematic cooperation of preschool institutions with schools for initial preschool teacher education (Nikolic et al., 2017).

### *Questionnaire for preschool teachers*

“Teachers of gifted students must possess competencies not required of general educators. They have the same foundational competencies as other educators (e.g., classroom management skills, organization, lesson plan development), but must add other competencies to their repertoire when teaching gifted students. These competencies include the knowledge, skills, and

dispositions that provide appropriately paced education with sufficient depth and complexity for gifted students to make reasonable yearly progress in their academic development” (Kerr, 2009: 164). Having in mind this quote, empirical research on preschool teachers’ professional competencies for working with artistically gifted children started with one preschool institution as a research sample.

There are 37 preschool teachers employed in Kindergarten “Pionir” in Jagodina, 31 of whom are responsible for children aged from 4 to 6, which is the age relevant for this research. All 31 teachers took part in it. In order to assess their competencies for working with artistically gifted children, these preschool teachers were asked to complete a questionnaire, composed of four groups of questions.

The first group of questions was directed at assessing information on employment status, level of education, and school of their initial preschool teacher education in order to get the background for assessing collected answers.

*Table 1: Work experience*

Question	over 30 years		between 10 and 20 years		less than 10 years	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
How long have you been working as a preschool teacher?	4	12,9	14	45,1	13	41,9

Dividing years of employment in three groups, the question showed that 4 teachers had work experience of over 30 years, 13 of them had worked for 10 years or less, and 14 teachers had been employed between 10 and 20 years. This gave us a picture of a collective with experienced preschool teachers who for years had learned in practice how to understand a child’s nature and to foster them. This information also shows that the majority of teachers gained their preschool teacher diploma over 15 years previously, when initial preschool teacher education curricula differed from those present today.

Initial preschool teacher education in Serbia is conducted through three or four year-programs, depending on the type of higher education school – High vocational schools offer three-year programs, while Faculties offer four-year programs. There are also master and additional programs for upgrading the three-year level studies. Six of the questioned preschool teachers had a master’s degree, while the rest of them had gained a diploma of initial preschool teacher education (there was no division of those with three-year education from four-year because many of questioned teachers had enrolled in one-year upgrading studies).

The next group of questions asked for “Self-assessment of competencies for working with artistically gifted children”.

*Table 2: Self-assessment of competencies' quality*

Statement	excellent		good		satisfactory		informative		non-existing	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
I consider my competencies for working with gifted children:	2	6,45	18	58,06	6	19,35	1	3,23	0	/

Preschool teachers had to answer five questions within this section. The first one asked for their assessment of competencies for working with gifted children in general. They needed to rate these competencies on a scale from excellent to non-existing. The majority of 18 (58,06%) teachers considered their competencies good, 2 of them would say they were excellent, 6 teachers believed their competencies satisfied basic necessities for working with gifted children. While none of the respondents circled the last answer on the scale, 4 of them did not give any answer to this question. It was not determined if they could not or did not want to approach self-evaluation in this form.

The rest of the questions were directed toward teachers' understanding of artistic giftedness and respondents were asked to circle one of the given answers, which were supposed to confirm, negate or partially confirm the given statement.

*Table 3: Self-assessment of competencies for working with artistically gifted children*

Statement	true		partially true		not true	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
I can easily identify a child gifted for visual arts expression.	31	100	0	/	0	/
I possess competencies for identifying and nurturing giftedness in visual arts expression.	13	41,94	18	58,06	0	/
I am acquainted with tests for assessment of visual-spatial abilities in preschool children.	2	6,45	17	54,84	12	38,71
I am acquainted with methods for nurturing and developing giftedness in visual arts expression in preschool children.	10	32,26	20	64,52	1	3,23



This part of the research showed that respondents were highly confident about their competencies for identifying a child gifted for visual expression, but only 41,94% were confident about competencies for nurturing this giftedness, while the others had doubts about it. Even though all respondents confirmed possessing competencies for identifying artistic giftedness, only 2 of them were familiar with tests used for that purposes, while 38,71% were not familiar with these tests at all. Question number 4 slightly modified and more precisely defined question number 2 from the Table 3, leading to the conclusion that when giftedness for visual arts expression is identified by themselves or some other party, preschool teachers consider themselves knowledgeable and skilled to implement appropriate methods in order to foster this giftedness (32,26% completely and 64,52% partially acquainted with applicable methods). So, even without conducting tests, these teachers can employ their knowledge and experience to, at least, nominate artistically gifted children.

The following group of questions was created to comprehend preschool teachers' opinions on the contribution of their formal education to the development of competencies for working with children gifted in visual expression. Respondents had to answer by confirming or negating seven given statements. Questions and answers from this section are shown in Table 4.

To the question if competencies for working with gifted children were gained exclusively through formal studies, 41.94% answered affirmatively, 22.58% negatively and 35.48% of respondents would say it was a partially correct statement. After aiming at giftedness in general, respondents evaluated their initial program syllabuses slightly better when considering competencies regarding dealing with artistic giftedness: 45.16% respondents would say they gained these competencies through formal education, 41.94% would say this a partially true statement, while 12.90% would say that they did not obtain these competencies through their initial education.

*Table 4: Initial studies' contribution to the development of preschool teachers' competencies for working with children gifted in visual arts expression*

Statement	true		partially true		not true	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Competencies that I possess for working with gifted children have been obtained exclusively through my initial studies program.	13	41,94	11	35,48	7	22,58
Initial studies enabled me with basic knowledge and competencies for identifying and working with children gifted for visual arts expression.	14	45,16	13	41,94	4	12,90
My Bachelor studies' curriculum included visual arts expression giftedness as a study area.	10	32,26	17	54,84	4	12,90
Subject Methods of teaching art in preschool equipped me with sufficient knowledge of giftedness in visual expression and competencies for working with such gifted children.	7	22,58	21	67,74	3	9,68
Art subjects' syllabuses enabled development of my competencies for working with children gifted for visual arts expression.	3	9,68	19	61,29	9	29,03
Practical artistic work within art subjects provided techniques and methods for nurturing and developing giftedness in visual arts expression of preschool children.	15	48,39	11	35,48	4	12,90

With the next question, the aim was to find out if any of the respondents could say their initial education curriculum included visual expression giftedness as a study area. Results showed it was true for 32.26%, not true for 12.90% while it was partially true for 54.84%. Due to discrepancies among the answers of teachers even graduated from the same school without a significant time gap, the only intelligible conclusion is that no curricula introduced giftedness in visual arts expression as a particular or distinct subject, or at least part of the subject syllabus, therefore preschool teachers had only a subjective understanding according to their own involvement in studying. This result is interpreted as understanding that artistic giftedness was studied through most of the preschool teacher initial education programs, but not directly and usually not separately from other types of giftedness.

Having in mind that giftedness as a phenomenon is being studied mostly within pedagogy and psychology, but on the other hand being interested in giftedness for visual arts expression, the next question asked which study areas introduced preschool teachers to artistic giftedness and competencies for fostering it. Responses to this question are shown separately in Table 5.

Table 5: Distribution of respondents' answers

Statement	art teaching methods		pedagogy		Psychology		none	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
I gained competencies for working with children gifted for visual expression through subjects:	17	54,84	4	12,90	6	19,35	4	12,90

Respondents were not limited to only one answer but could circle all subjects they felt contributed to their competencies for working with artistically gifted children. Having Methods of teaching visual arts, Pedagogy, Psychology or none of them as possible choices, 54.84% of answers were given to the Methods of teaching arts, 19.35% to the Psychology, 12.90% to Pedagogy and another 12.90% answers went to “none of them”. This order of answers was anticipated, since Methods of teaching arts is lectured by art field professionals, while the other two subjects mostly deal with giftedness in general. Therefore, the following question referred to the level of knowledge regarding visual arts giftedness, acquired within lectures of Methods of teaching arts (Table 4, question number 4). Only 9.68% of teachers would disagree that the level of acquired knowledge was sufficient, 67.74% would say it was partially sufficient for what they face in their working practice, while 22.58% of respondents believed the knowledge they acquired through this subject was sufficient enough.

Methods of teaching arts as a subject is assisted by a group of visual arts subjects, with diverse variations in subject concepts and syllabuses, depending on each school program. With a presumption that these kinds of subject can potentially provide useful practical skills and techniques for developing artistic giftedness in preschool children, teachers were asked if they benefited from such subjects in this context.

When it comes to acquiring competencies for working with artistically gifted children, only 9.68% answered affirmatively to such contribution of art subjects, 29.03% answered negatively and 61.29% answered it was only partially true. But when it comes to learning techniques and methods for developing artistic giftedness from practical art subjects, higher scores were noted: 48.39% agreed, 12.90% disagreed while 35.48% partially agreed. When it comes to existing discrepancies within these answers, one of possible explanations is that in elective courses students can choose so those who attended artistic courses benefited more in this area.

The last group of questions was created to inquire into preschool teachers' encounters with artistically gifted children: 96.77% said they met such children throughout their career, while 48.39% of teachers believe there are artistically

gifted children in their current groups. And to the final questions, if they think that initial preschool teacher education programs should consider studying characteristics of each kind of giftedness in children separately, 87.10% answered affirmatively, but to the question if acquiring competences for working with artistically gifted children must be done through initial studies, opinions were divided: 61.29% agreed while 38.71% disagreed.

*Table 6: Distribution of respondents' answers*

Question	Yes		No	
	F	%	F	%
Have you met children gifted in visual art expression in your career?	30	96,77	1	3,23
Do you have children gifted for visual art expression in your current group?	15	48,39	16	51,61
Do you think that initial studies' program for preschool teachers should treat characteristics of each kind of giftedness in children separately?	27	87,10	4	12,90
Competencies for working with children gifted for visual arts expression must be obtained through initial studies of preschool teachers	19	61,29	12	38,71

What comes as a conclusion from this questionnaire is that in this one Kindergarten, there are teachers who are confident in their competencies for recognizing children with giftedness for visual arts expression. Most of these teachers also feel competent to implement methods in order to foster this giftedness. The fact remains that there are also preschool teachers who feel uncertain in this context and would use additional knowledge, practice and skills to work with artistically gifted children. Most of the teachers who participated in this research agreed that initial preschool teacher education should enable the acquisition of competencies for identifying and fostering visual arts giftedness for teachers' effective and efficient work. As presented through this part of the research results, a significant number of preschool teachers could not thank their initial studies for acquiring necessary competencies for working with preschool children with artistic giftedness.

#### *Questionnaire for final year students of initial program for Preschool teacher education*

The second part of this research was aimed at final year students of Preschool teacher education. Fifty-seven students, finalizing their preschool teachers' studies at the Faculty of Education in Jagodina were questioned in

order to collect data on the level and quality of competences for working with artistically gifted children they would rely on in their upcoming careers. Unlike the questions for preschool teachers which were designed to get respondents' own opinions on the competencies they had, the questionnaire for students had more of a test-like structure. The goal was to check what students know about giftedness for visual art expression and how confident they are in that knowledge. Knowing the curriculum of the program they are graduating from, this data would be used as an indicator of the curriculum's contribution to the competencies discussed.

Questions were separated in three groups. The first group tended to examine students' knowledge on giftedness in general; the second group questioned their knowledge on the artistic giftedness and ways of identifying artistically gifted children; the third group of questions aimed to understand if these students would appropriately approach work with artistically gifted children once they entered a preschool group as self-reliant teachers. In general, through testing students' knowledge, the goal was to assess the contribution of Preschool teacher program curriculum to the development of competencies for working with children gifted for visual arts expression.

To all 29 questions, students' could answer by circling one of possible answers: *Yes, No, I am not certain* and to some questions additional choice was *Partially*, since the answer was potentially more complex than simple *yes* or *no*.

Table 7: Nature of giftedness

Statement	Yes		No		Partially		I am not certain	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Giftedness is reordered genetically	11	19,3	15	26,3	29	50,9	2	3,5
Giftedness and talent are synonyms.	17	29,8	16	28,1	14	24,6	10	17,5

For the first group of questions, results were encouraging, meaning that over 50% of students, by choosing the right answer, demonstrated understanding of the nature of giftedness and confidence in their knowledge. Answer "I am not certain" was chosen in less than 15% on average. The exception was seen for the question "Giftedness is inborn and cannot be developed with external factors", as presented in Table 8. Here 25% of students were uncertain if the statement was correct. However, 86% of students demonstrated knowledge on the nature of giftedness, by giving correct answers to questions if above-average intelligence is a prerequisite for the manifestation of all kinds of giftedness and if "economic, geographic, cultural, family, health and other conditions

can affect (positively or negatively) manifestation of giftedness”, as presented in Table 8. On the other hand, 61.4% respondents believed that a gifted child will manifest his/her giftedness regardless of the environment they grow up in, which is actually only partially correct, depending on many individual factors. Even though understanding giftedness demands a broader scope of knowledge in psychology, it is important for future preschool teachers to know that, if put in unfavourable or discouraging environment, a child may not express their giftedness.

Table 8: *Manifestation of giftedness*

Statement	YES		NO		I am not certain	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Any kind of giftedness will be manifested only in children with high IQ.	4	7	49	86	4	7
Giftedness is inborn and cannot be developed with external factors.	11	19,3	32	56,1	14	24,6
All gifted children will eventually manifest their giftedness regardless of the environment they grow up in.	35	61,4	15	26,3	7	12,3
Economic, geographic, cultural, family, health and other conditions can affect (positive or negative) manifestation of giftedness.	49	86	3	5,3	5	8,8

When it comes to giftedness for visual arts expression in preschool children, students were less confident in giving their answers. For 12 questions in this group, an average of 18.5% of answers went to *I am not certain* (check Table 9). The highest uncertainty of over 30% was manifested within questions “if there are available tests for examining artistic giftedness in preschool children” and if “a preschool teacher needs education within art field in order to recognize artistically gifted child”. A similar case occurred with the question “if it is possible to determine artistic giftedness in preschool age given the presence of general drawing phases”. On the other hand, correct answers were more dominant, therefore indicating solid knowledge of students regarding specificities of recognizing artistic giftedness.

Table 9: Recognizing artistic giftedness

Statement	YES		NO		I am not certain	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
There are tests which can be used to examine visual arts giftedness in preschool children.	36	63,2	2	3,5	19	33,3
It is impossible to determine art giftedness in preschool children given the general drawing phases which characterize that age.	7	12,3	33	57,9	17	29,8
In order to recognize artistically gifted child, a preschool teacher needs education within art field.	26	45,6	12	21,1	19	33,3
Only artists and art pedagogues can recognize artistic giftedness in preschool children.	4	7	46	80,7	7	12,3

To the question “Is it more important to consider the final result rather than the art process when evaluating artistic giftedness”, (Table 10) an encouraging 43.9% answered with No, while 17.5% would partially confirm this statement. Still, 24.6% responded affirmatively to this statement, which is less than expected. However, there is a considerable number of future preschool teachers who will overlook a child’s enthusiasm in exploring art techniques and materials, evaluating exclusively the final result of their work, which is not good. On the other hand, when transforming this question into the opposite formulation as “Enthusiasm and intrinsic motivation of a child for working in art assignments can be an indicator of artistic giftedness” only 12.3% chose negative answer, while 78.9% (answers *Yes* and *Partially*) understood that enthusiasm can be a valuable indicator of a child’s possible giftedness (check Table 10). In addition to the previous statement, “Capability to observe visual details in the environment can be a sign of artistically gifted child” is a statement 86% of students would completely or partially confirm.

Table 10: Identification of children with giftedness in visual arts expression

Statement	YES		NO		Partially		I am not certain	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Artistically gifted children can be identified most reliably within art contests.	3	5,3	29	50,9	19	33,3	6	10,5
It is more important to consider artistic results rather than art process when evaluating art giftedness.	14	24,6	25	43,9	10	17,5	8	14
Art giftedness in preschool children is assessed only through comparison of their artistic work with average results for their age.	11	19,3	16	28,1	17	29,8	13	22,8
In the process of identification of artistically gifted children, cooperation of preschool teachers and art experts is of big importance.	27	47,4	4	7	18	31,6	8	14
Artistically gifted children are usually unsuccessful in dealing with mathematic assignments.	2	3,5	39	68,4	4	7	12	21,1
All artistically gifted children manifest equally highly artistic results in all art techniques.	7	12,3	28	49,1	13	22,8	9	15,8
Enthusiasm and intrinsic motivation of a child for working in art assignments can be indicator of artistic giftedness.	28	49,1	7	12,3	17	29,8	5	8,8
Capability to observe visual details in the environment can be a sign of artistically gifted child	35	61,4	4	7	14	24,6	4	7

This set of questions led to the conclusion that approximately half of the students (more precisely 47.58% of the respondents) will graduate competent enough to recognize or identify a child potentially gifts in visual arts expression. On the other hand, the other half will have incomplete knowledge of what it means to be an artistically gifted child, risking depriving those who are gifted of appropriate development. It is of great importance that all preschool teachers are aware that, in accordance to preschool children's developmental level, focusing on the whole process of art production provides richer assessment and education than the end product and that focus in assessing these youngsters is often socially and process oriented (Kerr, 2009: 53).



Considering the final group of questions, it might be said that the general “test” score was positive. While there were still different relations in numbers of given “correct” answers, the majority of students would approach an artistically gifted child in an acceptably efficient and productive way, according to their answers to this questionnaire.

*Table 11: Nurturing giftedness for visual arts expression in preschool children*

Statement	YES		NO		Partially		I am not certain	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Artistic competencies of preschool teachers are prerequisite for working with artistically gifted children.	20	35,1	8	14	22	38,6	7	12,3
A specially organized educative-stimulating environment is prerequisite for developing artistic giftedness.	15	26,3	23	40,4	9	15,8	10	17,5
It is necessary to enable as much individual work as possible to artistically gifted child when assessing art assignment, separately from other children.	12	21,1	22	38,6	16	28,1	7	12,3
It is important to enable diversity of art materials for artistic experimenting to an artistically gifted child.	38	66,7	4	7	14	24,6	1	1,8
An artistically gifted child is always intrinsically motivated, so doesn't need to be motivated additionally.	3	5,3	30	52,6	15	26,3	9	15,8
An artistically gifted child should exclusively have freedom of uninterrupted and undirected research of materials and techniques for their artistic expression.	23	40,4	12	21,1	20	35,1	2	3,5
It is of most importance to let artistically gifted children choose their own subjects and materials for artistic expression.	18	31,6	7	12,3	24	42,1	8	14
It is important to face an artistically gifted child with more complex art assignments compared to their peers.	24	42,1	9	15,8	15	26,3	9	15,8
It is not necessary to give any feedback to artistically gifted child during their work process.	4	7	36	63,2	8	14	9	15,8
It is important to provide more complex art techniques to artistically gifted child, compared to those proposed by a standard curriculum.	26	45,6	6	10,5	11	19,3	14	24,6
It is not necessary to explain characteristics of newly introduced art techniques to artistically gifted child.	3	5,3	50	87,7	3	5,3	1	1,8

Even though one section of students did not think artistic competencies of teachers are necessary for working with artistically gifted children, 73.7% would oppose them (sum of answers *Yes* and *Partially* was considered as correct answers through the Table 11). With 4 students disagreeing, 91.3% of respondents confirmed the statement that “an artistically gifted child should be supplied with as much diverse art materials for art research as possible”. To the statement that “an artistically gifted child is always intrinsically motivated, so does not need to be motivated additionally”, 52.6% gave negative answer and 26.3% answered it is only partially correct statement, while 15.8% were not certain about giving the answer.

Moreover, 68.4% of students would support the statement that “it is important to face an artistically gifted child with more complex art assignments compared to their peers” and 75.1% of them would consider letting gifted child choose their own art mediums and themes in order to express themselves. When it comes to instructing a child’s work, 93% of students knew that although gifted, a child still needs guidance through their work and practical instructions in meeting with new art techniques.

The high number of correct answers indicates that these graduating students have developed decent competencies for nurturing artistic giftedness and this is a general conclusion to this part of the research. However, these competencies should be further advanced. Looking at the other side of the results, towards students who “failed this test”, there is another conclusion: Even though there could be students who paid less importance to this issue or failed to fulfil all of their student’s assignments which would lead to a deeper understanding of it, these results may suggest the need to rethink the existing curriculum and direct it toward more comprehensive studying of giftedness in visual art expression.

#### *Preschool teacher education curriculum at the Faculty of Education in Jagodina and giftedness for visual art expression*

In order to comprehensively confirm the previously presented results, it is necessary to introduce students’ learning background, more precisely to look at the curriculum of their study program. The initial [undergraduate] program for preschool teachers at the Faculty of Education in Jagodina (<https://pefja.kg.ac.rs/osnovne-akademske-studije-vaspitac-u-predskolskim-ustanovama/>) lasts for four years. During those four years, students study both obligatory and elective courses / subjects. For the purpose of this research, courses related to children giftedness, and more specifically to artistic giftedness, will be mentioned. These courses on one hand include pedagogy, didactics and psychology, teaching students to understand their role in children’s lives as teachers and

train them to approach children with consideration to their developmental, emotional, intellectual and individual characteristics. Being either mandatory or elective course from these subjects, they target giftedness in general. For example, there is an elective course called Work with gifted children. The goal of this course is to develop professional competencies of students for quality organization of educational activities with children in order to recognize and encourage giftedness. This subject covers everything relevant to the concept of giftedness from pedagogical aspects, enabling students to efficiently apply theoretical knowledge in practice. The shortcoming is in the subject's elective status, which means not all students will take it. Observing this from the aspect of this paper's subject, it cannot offer sufficient competencies for working with artistically gifted children. On the other side, there are courses closely related to children's visual art expression. From mandatory courses in Methods of teaching art and Basics of Visual Arts, through elective courses in different art techniques and artistic work, students have a chance to gain competencies for recognizing and developing artistic giftedness.

The mandatory course Methods of teaching arts for preschool teacher education trains students to prepare and implement art activities while being aware of the characteristics of a preschool child's visual art expression. Even though this is not directly aiming at artistic giftedness, this subject targets it indirectly through lectures on: Characteristics and phases of child's drawing, Visual types of children, Child's drawing assessment, and others. After passing the exam from this course, it is expected that a student is competent enough to understand and assess the quality and level of children's artistic abilities and to develop and apply appropriate teaching methods and styles with regard to children's specific needs. The basics of Visual Arts is a course that provides basic artistic competencies to students in order for them to be able to understand the art process and to be familiar with diverse art techniques and styles. According to the above elucidated, when graduating from the initial [undergraduate] program for Preschool teacher education at the Faculty of Education in Jagodina, it is expected that students will have basic professional competencies to work with artistically gifted children.

Referring to the previous conclusion, this one can elaborate that "more comprehensive studying" implies incorporating artistic giftedness as a separate area of stud into the existing syllabus of Methods of teaching arts in order to introduce students with specific instruments that could be useful in the process of identification, to include several practical assignments of art giftedness identification and to allow students practice development of specific art programs for artistically gifted children.

## Conclusion

Summing up all previously particularized conclusions, the overall result of this research suggests several facts.

The first one: When it comes to giftedness in visual art expression on the level of a preschool child, experienced preschool teachers evaluate their competencies for working with gifted ones as sufficient or good. Most teachers-respondents consider themselves competent to identify artistically gifted children and to implement appropriate methods in developing artistic giftedness. Students-respondents also demonstrated a quality level of knowledge on how to treat artistically gifted children in order to help foster this giftedness.

The second fact is that, regardless of possessing these competencies, most of teachers-respondents do not have enough knowledge and experience on utilizing specific instruments (such as tests) for identifying artistic giftedness. Results from the questionnaire filled out by students also suggest lack of knowledge about available methods and instruments for identifying artistic giftedness. The conclusion is that concrete methods and instruments for identifying artistic giftedness do not form part of the curricula of preschool teacher initial [undergraduate] education.

On the other side, having a significant number of respondents feeling insecure in their competencies regarding certain aspects of artistic giftedness and work in this area (both in the group of teachers and among students) and being of the opinion that the curriculum of [undergraduate] preschool teachers education should deal with artistic giftedness more comprehensively, the final conclusion of this research is twofold:

On one hand, preschool teachers, graduated from different schools' programs for preschool teacher education, included in this research, as well as graduating students from the preschool teacher program, indicated a proper level of knowledge regarding art giftedness and functional level of competencies for working with artistically gifted children. This lead towards the commendation of initial [undergraduate] programs for preschool teachers in Serbia when dealing with this study area, with a recommendation to advance their curricula in order to enable more in-depth learning and development of higher-quality competencies.

The second part of the conclusion directs towards the necessity of a broader study of this issue, aiming to examine existing initial [undergraduate] preschool teacher education programs' curricula in order to identify the ones which could serve as good practice examples, as the recommendation of this paper goes to the relevant higher education institutions to redefine and improve their programs so that preschool teachers acquire high-quality competencies for working efficiently with children gifted in visual arts expression.

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