Is it possible to identify gifted children in the extreme highlands of the Andes or in the depth of the Amazon jungle? This is the core question of my academic life. It was first asked as a provocative question on July 1991, while I was attending the Educational Research Workshop *Education of the Gifted in Europe: Theoretical and Research Issues*, a milestone event for gifted education in Europe (Mönks & Pflüger, 2005). At that moment, my country was immersed in a bloody armed conflict, and gifted education wasn’t a priority. However, enrichment programs became a key alternative to improve the quality of education in regular classes (Alencar, Blumen, & Castellanos, 2000).

Giftedness and talent development occur in different parts of the world, where opportunity and commitment (Cross & Coleman, 2005) support its growth. Both, intrinsic variables to the individual, so-called learning capital by the learning resources approach (Ziegler & Baker, 2013), and the opportunity for talent development toward excellence, so-called educational capital by Ziegler and Stoeger (2017), are necessary; the latter is highly dependent on the opportunities provided to the individual along the life-span and the culture where he/she develops.
Current Status of Gifted Education and Talent Development in the Andean Countries

In the early 1970s, the Marland Report (1972) triggered a watershed moment for the study of the highly able around the world (Jolly & Robins, 2016), and became the catalyst for gifted education programs in South America. Countries such as Brazil, Peru, and Venezuela provided support for teacher training and a Chilean gifted program emerged from a private initiative. Yet, due to the polarized nature of South American societies, by the beginning of the new millennium, gifted education was perceived as an “elitist” concept. People perceived giftedness as a neoliberal tendency, meant to violate principles of democracy and equity. This situation disturbed many scholars of the region, and there was a need to re-shape the conceptualization of gifted children toward a more inclusive proposal, to advocate for gifted education as an educational right to be addressed (Donoso-Romo, 2014; Hornsey et al., 2018; Mönks, Ypenburg, & Blumen, 1997; Wechsler, Blumen, & Bendelman, 2018).

The first comprehensive resource available on gifted education in Central and South America (Alencar & Blumen, 1993) was published in Heller, Mönks, and Passow’s (1993) *International handbook of research and development of giftedness and talent*. It provided a critical review of the scientific research on gifted education done until the 1990s, updated in its second edition (Heller, Mönks, Sternberg, & Subotnik, 2000). Later, Benavides, Castro, and Blanco (2004) published a descriptive review on the resources available on gifted education in Latin America and the Caribbean, aiming to compare the Hispanic American gifted education trajectory to that of the United States of America (Gallagher, 2009).

Studies on gifted children in the Andean and Amazon region have led us to consider giftedness as a social construct, highly dependent on cultural and developmental factors, as well as on educational opportunities. Hence, we need to restrain our need to frame a narrow one-size-fits-all conception of giftedness toward a dynamic one shaped by the values, concepts, attitudes, and the language of the culture (Blumen, 2020). In multicultural contexts, where poverty conditions are inherent to the native populations, students who perceived greater obstacles during acculturation are more sensitive to social exclusion. Challenging experiences in acculturation may lead to heightened reactivity to socially hurtful events (Hornsey et al., 2018; Mazzoli, 2013).
A Developmental, Cross-cultural, Inclusive Approach

In Peru, my home country, there is high ethnic-linguistic diversity, with 42 native languages spoken in the Andean highlands and the Amazon rainforest. Likewise, the three main socio-geographical regions contribute to the different worldviews that influence perceptions of giftedness (Blumen, 2020). Therefore, an integrated developmental, cultural, and inclusive school approach was critical to better understand the gifted and talented children of the Andes and the Amazon region.

The Developmental Approach

The developmental approach recognizes the dynamic nature of developing abilities and every process involved in the path toward gifted performance (Porath, 2006; Simonton, 2005). It understands giftedness as the guise of certain characteristics at different stages of development and includes the diversity among children and youth with performance, in both cognitive and social-emotional areas, as a characteristic to be addressed from a developmental perspective. Moreover, initiatives coming from scientific settings revealed that cognitive and conative factors with correlated variables such as access to opportunities and perseverance (Ambrose, 2016) need to be considered. The development of expertise (Sternberg & Davidson, 2005) involves training and interventions in domain-specific skills, as well as self-regulated thinking to achieve levels of expertise and outstanding performance in adulthood (Stoeger & Ziegler, 2016). Although traditional models of talent tended to focus on personality traits, an emphasis on the dynamic interaction of the person with the environment is needed, in order to have a better understanding of the processes related to high achievement under poverty conditions.

From a developmental perspective we need to consider cognitive and conative factors, together with access to learning, since talent development involves training in domain-specific skills, as well as self-regulated thinking to achieve an outstanding performance in adulthood (Ambrose, 2016; Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Sternberg & Davidson, 2005; Stoeger & Ziegler, 2016; Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Worrell, 2011). Thus, the dynamic interaction of person/environment needs to be considered in order to have a better understanding of the processes related to excellence.

Oh and collaborators’ cross-cultural study (Oh et al., 2016), with 1794 participants from five countries, revealed that a learning-goal orientation and
a performance-based approach to motivation predicted positive perceptions of a high-achieving classmates’ intellectual ability in all participating countries but Peru. Though Obando’s (2019) study with 268 students (age range 14–18) from the Residential Academy for the High Achievers revealed that the mastery-approach goal—a subtype of achievement goal following Elliot and Muruyama’s model (Elliot & McGregor, 2001; Elliot & Muruyama, 2008)—and the incremental theory of intelligence—a subtype of Dweck and Leggett’s (1988) model of implicit theories of intelligence—were predictive variables of academic resilience, with the mastery-approach goal functioning as a mediator between the incremental theory of intelligence and academic resilience.

Obando’s (2019) study showed that those students that perceive intelligence as a skill that can be developed learned to follow self-imposed standards to measure their ability, considering errors as part of the learning process; and their self-concept seemed not to be menaced if they didn’t show high achievements in every moment. Also, sex differences were found in reflective and adaptive help-seeking and the incremental theory of intelligence, with women scoring higher than males. Therefore, high-achieving women considered that personal effort contributes toward their high performance, more than high-achieving men.

Additionally, Alcántara’s (2019) study on academic engagement, academic stress, and well-being with young scholars coming from ethnic diverse backgrounds, who were studying at a culture-sensitive university, showed that despite their high levels of stress, young scholars felt engaged toward their learning, and managed to keep their academic performance. It seems that the peer mentoring support that the university provides is a facilitating factor for young scholars coming from ethnic-linguistic diverse backgrounds. Therefore, it seems that cognitive and motivational processes are significant as facilitators toward keeping high levels of learning performance.

The Cultural Approach

The cultural approach recognizes the influence of culture in the conceptualization of giftedness, respecting the cultural context in which the gifted child and youth are being raised, providing fair identification and intervention programs (Blumen, 2016a, 2016b; Freeman, 2015; Persson, 2012; Renzulli, 2019). This is a key condition, particularly for those children and youths coming from native towns, whose mother-tongue is different from the mainstream culture.
The Blumen and Cornejo Lanao (2006) study with gifted children in Peruvian rural areas reveal that: (a) Children from the Andean highlands show more similarities with Māori components such as collective giftedness, sensitivity toward interpersonal domains, hospitality and humbleness, intuition, spirituality, and leadership through role-modeling, than with gifted Peruvians living in urban areas (Bevan-Brown, 2011); and (b) gifted children of the Amazon rainforest tend to exhibit a giftedness view very similar to those of the Australian Aboriginal reported by Gibson and Vialle (2007), in relation to linguistic intelligence, spatial intelligence as a survival ability strengthened by parental practices, interpersonal intelligence, and spiritual intelligence in term of the strong connection established with the motherland.

The lack of culturally fitted considerations in Peru refrained policies related to talent identification services in the community for more than a decade (Blumen, 2013). Among them was the term “gifted” which in Spanish involves a deterministic meaning, related to “the chosen one,” which was totally rejected by the majority of the population. After it was changed to “highly able,” a term which provides a more dynamic and pragmatic meaning to the concept, easier to be understood by teachers, parents, and policymakers, a change of the law was possible to support them.

However, disparities in academic achievement among the highly able students show that students coming from culturally/linguistic diverse contexts are often overlooked for programs for the high achievers, and inequities in the screening and identification procedures for students living in rural areas post new challenges on the fairness of the processes.

Peru, a country with 25 state-funded residential academies for the high performers, needs to face this situation to include students attending rural schools in the Andean highlands, and in the deep Amazon region, in its provision. An identification process which aims to exhibit the diverse ethnic-linguistic minority youths is presented, to promote equity in the identification of the highly able, beyond the limits of the cultural background.

The Inclusive School Approach

The inclusive school approach recognizes the influence of the school context for the development of giftedness (Coleman & Cross, 2001). High performance takes place whenever the opportunities for learning are available and the person takes advantage of them. However, impoverished environments mostly found in the Andean highlands as well as in the Amazon rainforest constitute interferents toward adequate learning.
In the Andean countries, where the majority of the population lives under poverty conditions with limited learning resources, school context is the best setting for learning opportunities. As Cross and Coleman (2005) stated, “when achievement measures are used with foundational domains, assessment issues in terms of identification and outcomes become the same, and performance is the key” (p. 57).

In Peru, the Residential Academies for High Achievers, so-called COARs, by their name in Spanish, were launched in 2010 to serve the talented youths coming from disadvantaged and poverty contexts (Blumen, 2013, 2016a, 2020). Their aim was to foster academic talent in students coming from highly vulnerable conditions, either due to low-income households or due to the intersection of poverty and ethnic-linguistic background. They work under the principles of equity, inclusion, interculturality, and quality of education. They also provide the opportunity to achieve the IB Diploma (International Baccalaureate Diploma). First launched in Lima City, positive results lead to the expansion of the model to every Peruvian region. Their student body is culturally diverse and provides a good example of intercultural partnership among their students, with respect toward their cultural identity.

Identification of the Ethnic-Linguistic Diverse Gifted Student

With the aim to rationalize the on-going conflicting demands to launch a national identification program for the COARs, key information was collected from headmasters, teachers, and counselors from most of the 25 residential COARs, as well as from the officers of the Ministry of Education. Data about their perception of the barriers to admitting minority ethnic groups to the residential Academies for the High Achievers were collected, often mentioning the low performance of applicants from native towns in face-to-face interviews.

Likewise, headmasters and academic coordinators also expressed their concerns about the possibility of rural children coping with the academic exigency of an IB school (International Baccalaureate School), which were similar to those found by Mazzoli (2013) in her study about giftedness and globalization.
Triangulation across multiple criteria was considered in order to secure the inclusion of an integrated developmental, cultural, inclusive approach, and the following criteria were considered:

- An independent team was organized to monitor the complete identification process.
- Assessment criteria were discussed with specialists in gifted education, intercultural education, and the headmasters of the COARs, and were transparent to them.
- The goal was to provide the opportunity for every student who demonstrated high performance in their public school to participate in the identification process. Therefore, requirements involved the best 10 ranked students of their class in both the seventh and eighth grades.
- A total of 84 application centers reaching remote areas both in the highlands and in the rainforests were disposed. As a result, an increase of 18% in applicants was shown, with 34,000 eighth graders, applying for a place in December 2019 (MINEDU, 2020).
- Special accommodations were considered for those exhibiting impairments or learning difficulties and involved (a) accommodations for the visually, auditory, and motor impaired, involving translation into Braille system for psychometric tests, a sign translator for the auditory impaired; (b) accommodations for special educational conditions such as ASD (Autistic Spectrum Disorder), ADHD (Attention Hyperactive Deficit Disorder) (ADHD), and learning differences.
- Culturally sensitive personal interviews involved a female presence for girls coming from aboriginal towns, where gender-related values might affect oral communication.
- The possibility of having the personal interview in their mother-tongue for students coming from native villages was considered.
- Cognitive, motivational, socio-emotional, and creativity aspects were considered.
- Robust psychometric measures were used, including a pilot study with a representative sample of 621 participants with alphas from 0.707 to 0.944, and an average of $\alpha0.965$ for the general battery.
- Qualitative measures were also considered through group dynamics and face-to-face interviews.
- Alignment between assessment and provision was fully considered. Feedback for the finalists was given by their counselor at the COAR to which they were accepted.
In order to identify 2683 high-achieving eighth-grade students from the 34,000 applicants for the COARs following a developmental, cultural, and inclusive approach, a mixed method process was considered. Phase 1 involved the application of a psychometric measure, and Phase 2 considered group dynamics and personal interviews.

The psychometric measure involved a group of tests measuring the ability to use and manipulate abstract and symbolic relations. This type of activity is of particular relevance if we want to identify highly able students from vulnerable backgrounds, due to low socioeconomic status, ethnic-linguistic diversity, and rurality, that prevents them to access educational institutes of high quality (Callahan & Hébert, 2014).

This measure included five different batteries. Each battery provided a profile showing the level and patterns of abilities of each student (Feldhusen, 2005). Information about strengths and weaknesses of the students provided valuable information to compensate in those areas requiring consolidation (Horowitz, Subotnik, & Matthews, 2009). In this measure, the subtests were arranged in a way that allowed maximum flexibility in the adaptation of the task difficulty to the abilities of those being tested. Every subtest started with relatively easy items for a student finishing eighth grade, and then sequentially, difficult level became more complex.

The distribution of the items sequenced by level of difficulty, from the low level to the high level, aimed that every student, attending any type of school perceived that he/she was able to reach successful experiences, leading the most able toward their limits. This measure aimed to provide a continuum set for those students coming from different type of schools, including a flexible vision in the data collection. Evaluation was computer-assisted, involving norms that provide the relative position of each student compared to the complete group. The psychometric measure involved five batteries: Reading Comprehension, Math Reasoning, Spatial Reasoning, Fluid Reasoning, and a Socio-Emotional battery, as seen in Fig. 2.1.

The so-called Reading Comprehension battery was related to verbal comprehension skills and involved three subtests related to verbal classification, verbal analogies, and sentence completion. Even though performance was related to evoking verbal concepts, items included in each subtest require mainly flexibility in the use of concepts (Callahan & Hébert, 2014). Subtests were designed to assess relational thinking when the relations are formulated in verbal terms (Makel, Snyder, Thomas, Malone, & Putallz, 2015). Taking into consideration that most of the formal learning process is presented through verbal symbols, the relevance of a verbal test for performance forecast was significant.
The Math Reasoning battery involved two subtests related to building up equations and series of numbers. Problem solving for each test requires a basic ability of storage of quantitative concepts, perception of concept relations, and flexibility in the use of quantitative concepts. Items do not require an

| Area                  | Battery            | Description                                                                 | Subtest                          |
|-----------------------|--------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Cognitive Skills      | Reading Comprehension | Ability to evoke and use of verbal concepts; flexibility in the use of verbal concepts; verbal relational thinking | Verbal Conceptualization         |
|                       | Math Reasoning     | Ability to evoke and use of quantitative concepts; relations between quantitative concepts; flexibility in the use of quantitative concepts | Equations                        |
|                       | Spatial Reasoning  | Evaluation of relations among objects, discrimination and spatial relations | Non-verbal Analogies             |
|                       | Fluid Reasoning    | Analysis-Synthesis; inductive and deductive reasoning                      | Non-verbal Similarities          |
| Socio-Emotional Skills| Socio-Emotional Battery | Evaluation of Adaptation skills, coping with stress, self-confidence, academic motivation | Academic Resilience and self-confidence |
|                       | Cooperative learning | Collaborative learning; team work with ethics; respect towards ethnic-linguistic diversity | Transformational leadership       |
|                       | Personal Interview | Motivation towards learning in a boarding school for high achievers; perceived human and material resources to cope with difficulties | Team work                        |
|                       |                    |                                                                           | Communication skills             |

Fig. 2.1 Display of the areas considered in the psychometric measure, by battery and subtests (Blumen, 2020)
exposure to oral/verbal reading, so the influence of reading ability is kept to the minimum. The ability to reason with quantitative symbols is one of the most required in the educational context. Math, Science, Administration, Management, and Economy, among others, include demands on quantitative skills. Quantitative reasoning, together with verbal reasoning, forms what Makel, Putallaz, and Wai (2012) have called “academic ability.”

The Spatial Reasoning battery involved two subtests: figural analysis and figural recognition. Items in this battery involved mainly object relations in a certain space. It measured spatial discrimination and spatial ability. Subtests emphasized discovery and flexibility in the manipulation of relations expressed through figural symbols or patterns.

The Fluid Reasoning battery involved figural classification. Items involve figural geometric elements. It measures fluid thinking, part of cognitive potential, an ability that surpasses formal school instruction.

The Socio-Emotional battery involved three subtests related to academic resilience, coping with stress, and goal-oriented academic motivation. Items in this battery aim to measure adaptation ability, coping with stress and anxiety resources, self-confidence, and academic motivation.

In the pilot study, a sample of 621 eighth graders (48% boys and 51% girls) were considered from three different type of schools: regular long-day schools, short-day schools, and multi-grade schools. Schools were located in five regions, representing the mild and upper highlands of the Andes, the mild and deep Amazon rainforest, and the shanty-towns surrounding urban areas. Psychometric analysis revealed alphas from 0.707 to 0.944 among the subtests, with an average of $\alpha = 0.965$ for the psychometric measure involving cognitive and part of the socio-emotional battery.

In the nationwide application, from the 34,000 applicants, only 29,700 showed up at the testing centers. From them, 47 applicants required special accommodations, and 5660 applicants entered the second phase.

Phase 2 involved qualitative measures that included group dynamics and face-to-face interviews. Group dynamics aimed to assess collaborative learning, transformational leadership, proactivity, teamwork with ethics, and respect toward ethnic-linguistic diversity, through an activity proposed to a team of eight students with two leaders, previously trained on the goal and evaluation rubric of the dynamic.

Face-to-face interviewing aimed to investigate the motivation toward learning in a residential school for high achievers, family dynamic supportive elements, and factors to cope with difficulties. Culturally sensitive considerations for applicants coming from original ethnic groups involved (a) starting the interview in their original language, for at least 5 minutes, then switch to
Spanish, the official language of the country; (b) formally telling girls that they were allowed to provide a direct answer to a question asked by a male or by an adult, since in some native villages this behavior is considered inappropriate; (c) a female staff member being sit next to the female student to provide support since in some native villages, a girl being by herself in a room with male-only adults was seen as incorrect. Special accommodations were also considered for students exhibiting visual, auditory, and mobility impairments, as well as for those with special learning needs.

From the 9084 students that belonged to native towns (a record number), only 2115 chose to be interviewed in their mother-tongue, 52 exhibited a need of educational accommodations, and 17 belonged to highly vulnerable reparation groups.

In order to avoid conflicting incentives, the two-step assessment process was applied by the government office. After the two-step assessment process involving psychometric pencil-paper tests, group dynamics, and personal interview, 2700 students were selected to start ninth grade in 1 of the 25 Academies for the High Achievers in Peru (MINEDU, 2020). Among them, for the first time, a visually impaired student, coming from the depth of the Amazon jungle was identified, among other students coming from indigenous backgrounds.

This class started school in the middle of the COVID-19 Pandemic, through the e-learning modality, with laptops provided by the COARs for each student. So, it is possible to establish an inclusive schooling approach in an IB academically demanding school.

Conclusions

To approach gifted education in the ethnic-linguistic diverse Andean countries we need a dynamic concept of giftedness as a social construct, shaped by developmental and cultural factors, as well as by educational opportunities. An integrated developmental, cultural, and inclusive-school approach is key to understand giftedness and talent development in this part of the world. We need to improve our understanding about talent development under ethnic linguistic diversity and poverty contexts. Formal norms of talent promotion are needed in the Andean countries, with the commitment of colleges, enterprises, and the officials of education, in order to support talent development with social responsibility.

There are still some recommendations to follow: (a) the inducement of comparative research about the beliefs and conceptions on the highly able
between the different ethnic linguistic groups is desirable; and (b) acceleration and homeschooling programs need to be developed to provide enrichment to the gifted living on rural areas, where multi-graded schools still prevailed.

Commitment is key for giftedness and talent development in Andean countries. It is possible to identify gifted children in the extreme highlands of the Andes or in the depth of the Amazon jungle using a developmental, cultural, and inclusive-school approach if there is enough ambition to serve with equity and social justice.

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