Gifted education in Argentina

Paula Irueste
Abstract: In this article, we review the advancement of gifted education in Argentina which has been scarce and discontinuous, particularly, in the public sphere. About the primary conception of giftedness and/or talent, we mention the obsolete struggle between those who only consider a high intellectual coefficient (IQ) versus a more comprehensive perspective, considering a greater number of variables and data obtained from different sources. Regarding to talent and giftedness’s evaluation, we found a greater efficiency in identification from parents than from teachers who mainly identify academic talent. Related to the development at school, most of our studies find the deficiency of teacher’s training as a relevant fact. Strategies applied by teachers are moderate and applied in an intuitive way. It is also found that families with some talented or gifted member do not find restraint by the educational system looking for options in extra-school environments. The main contributions and scientific findings in Córdoba are related to the opening of a free Public University Service and the validation of reliable measuring instruments with statistical local data. The absence of legal instruments, which regulate the identification and the educational responses, remains a difficult to provide appropriate programs and services for the exceptional students. Finally, as future lines of research we consider to increase the ones recently initiated, related to the effectiveness of parents in the identification of talents and /or giftedness and the early identification in children from different social contexts.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Paula Irueste has a degree in Psychology and a PhD in Health Sciences both from the National University of Córdoba, Argentina. As a result of his doctoral thesis she specializes in the field of high intellectual abilities. She is also a university expert in diagnosis and education of the most able students, from the UNED, Spain. In 2015 creates the Children’s Area in Neuropsychology Service at the School of Psychology, UNC, Argentina, in which the early detection and educational responses are carried out, with a huge impact in the community. Besides, the author is a collaborator Professor at the Open University of Catalonia (UOC), Spain, where it is one of the responsible of a course about students with high abilities in the classroom. She is also the academic responsible of grade and post grade’s courses about this field in the School of Psychology, UNC, Córdoba, Argentina.

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT
In 2015 the author was awarded with a postdoctoral fellowship from the Science and Technology’s Secretary of the National University of Cordoba, Argentina, through which a free Public University Service was opened. This service is the first and only in the country that proposed the objectives of early giftedness and talent identification of children between 4 and 8 years old. Besides, behavioral, and learning difficulties are also early identified in children of that age. In addition to the identification activities, the Service develops informative workshops for parents and teachers and enrichment workshops for gifted and talented children. The author of this article is the director of this Service and its opening has had a wide impact receiving multiple queries and carrying out the identification process in more than 200 cases during the first year of operation. This was reflected in various notes and interviews published in local mass media, material that is attached in the “Appendix 1” section of this article.
1. Development of gifted education in the country

In Argentina, unlike other countries, the development of education for the gifted and talented has not been deployed in depth, not even continuously. In the first place, there are no specific laws regulating the way in which public and private schools, national and provincial, should develop the potential of each child, starting with the identification of these abilities to, then, design the best and most appropriate response that can benefit the integral education of each child. For this reason, the actions that we find in the direction of this theme are isolated activities and, generally, belongings to private management institutions. Advancing toward progress and development in detection and educational responses for gifted and talented children has been scarce in the public sphere.

Ceballos, Guatrocchi and Ziraldo (2016) carried out a study of the most important developments aimed at the advance of this subject in the country. The authors found that in 1991 the “Support to Creativity and Talent” Association of Parents was created in Buenos Aires, a non-profitable association that aimed to promote a permanent action to inform parents, teachers and authorities about the existence, problems and methods to support parents and children with high intellectual abilities, considering the special educational needs for these children.

During the following year, this association founded in Buenos Aires the first integral school for gifted children in Argentina. This school, called Creativity and Talent Institute, provided kindergarten level (children from 4 to 5 years old), basic general education and, for years, had also opened a secondary level with similar orientation. This Institute remained open from 1993 up to the end of 2002, having to close its doors because of economic difficulties and the absence of government support to this special education project. Toward 1990 the Norbridge College was founded by the Ricart Foundation, also in Buenos Aires, which initially was an exclusive school for gifted and talented children, but since a few years opened its doors to the entire student population. Norbridge colleges were the first in Latin America to have a High Potential Center for outstanding students, designed at Harvard University. This center carries out research tasks that are disseminate in national and international congresses to the academic community and advises to schools and families from all over the country who request their services. The president and founder of the Norbridge College is Dr Daniel Ricart.

The enactment of the Federal Law of Education (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, Argentina, 1993) referred for the first time to the gifted children’s education. The area was in charge of the Direction of Special Education. According to the Framework Agreement for Special Education (Ministry of Culture and Education, Buenos Aires, 2000) it was proposed to carry out a continuous training on this issue to achieve a good level of awareness, for both teachers and the orientation schools’s teams. The pursued objective was to use instruments for detection in the entire school population but this aim could not be achieved, neither wide nor permanently. The result was a widely range of different actions in each province of the country.

Continuing with this chronology, Ceballos, Guatrocchi and Ziraldo (2016) recorded that in the year 2000 the private management Center for the Development of High Potential (Vergara Panzeri, 2010) is founded, also in Buenos Aires. Its objectives were to: identify children and young people gifted or talented, make school orientation to the institutes and regular schools where identified children and adolescents attended. This center also promoted the implementation of the dynamics of enrichment and acceleration (in those cases that are considered appropriate) on the regular classroom. This center wanted to attend students with different educational needs and spread the subject in the educational, professional, and family areas. This last objective was materialized in the offer of courses, seminars to parents, teachers and professionals, not only in person, but also in a distance way.
In the same direction, and specifically about High Abilities, UNESCO (2004) publishes the book “The education of children with talent in Latin America”. The emphasis was situated on the recognition of individual differences as a way of avoiding difficulties at the students experiences, and promoting the fully develop of their abilities. To achieve this, it is strongly necessary to modify the homogenizer paradigm of the traditional school to one, based on diversity, through which the differences are taken as opportunities to optimize the development of people.

In the year 2015 is created, in Buenos Aires, “Parents Ambassadors for High Intellectual Abilities Argentina” which is a self-convocated group of parents of gifted and talented children. This group works around the treatment of topics relating to the high intellectual abilities, striving to reverse the huge ignorance that surrounds this theme at the country and the problems derived from its inappropriate treatment as well as the lack of attention to the specific educational needs of these children. One of the objectives of this association is to make visible that despite the existence of the article 93 at the National Law of Education (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, Argentina, 1993) which says that the territorial education authorities have to organize or facilitate the design of programs for the identification, early assessment, monitoring and orientation of the students with special talents or abilities and make easier or enlarge the schooling process, this is not known, applied or respected. In synthesis, this parent’s association requests to the Argentinian Ministry of Education that regulates and implements article 93 of the National Education Law, creating a Secretary for the attention of the high intellectual abilities and implementing teacher’s training programs.

Particularly in Cordoba, Irueste (2012) conducted a prospective, observational, cross-sectional, analytical study in five schools in Cordoba, Argentina, in order to determine if among the children designated by their teachers as inattentive or hyperactive, during the first and second grade at primary school, there were some with differential intellectual abilities compared to their reference group. In this study, teachers were asked to designate which students were considered as inattentive or hyperactive. It was applied an intelligence and a creative test, and a motivation questionnaire to the designated group and also to the control group.

The author not only found that there were children with High Intellectual Abilities in the designated group, but also there were children with the same characteristics in the control group. This indicated that high intellectual abilities are ignored by the educational system. On the other hand, Irueste and González (2010) evidenced that 37 teachers from both, public and private sphere, recognized the lack of training in special education in general as well as in diversity education specifically (85 and 86% respectively). This evidences the urgent need to train teachers, provide them with contributions that can be applied in the classrooms: training not only in what are considered to be problems in the classroom, but also in those situations that are not problems but are considered like that. This study concluded that the educational system does not provide to the special educational needs of children with High Intellectual Abilities; not in a legal way, neither in the daily practice.

Then in 2015, Irueste opened a free Public University Service at the School of Psychology, National University of Cordoba. This Service is called Neuropsychology Service, Children’s Area. The service’s aims consist on giving orientation to parents and teachers in the approach to diversity and to promote an early detection of talent and giftedness in children from 4 to 8 years of age. At this moment, also in the School of Psychology of the National University of Cordoba, postgraduate courses on the Attention to Diversity are given, contemplating the disability and the high intellectual capacities. Besides, an optional seminar was included in the curriculum of the degree in Psychology, in the fourth year of this career.

2. Difficulties in the development of talents at scholar and family contexts

As mentioned previously, Ceballos, Guatrochi, and Ziraldo (2016) informed that in Argentina, with the enactment of the Federal Law of Education (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, Argentina, 1993) it was considered for the first time the education of children with high intellectual abilities. Before this, none of the previous educational laws declared the existence of children with
talents or giftedness, nor referred to their special attention. In the present, the current education national law 26.106 (Ministry of Education, Argentina, 2006), does not include in any of its sections the high abilities as part of the special needs concerning to the Direction of Special Education. Specifically in Córdoba exists the General Direction of the Special Regimes; in its resolution 667 (Córdoba’s Ministry of Education, 2011) it adheres to the mentioned law and refers that special education should be given, preferably, in regular schools, thus reducing or eliminating all kinds of physical or environmental barrier and considering an organization that prevents to make difficult the integration. This has been widely applied in the field of disability; however, does not take place in relation to the high intellectual abilities in the schools of public administration in this province.

As said before, Irueste (2012) noted an absence of identification of children with High Intellectual Abilities. For this study, it was followed the guidelines of Intellectual Giftedness Detection Protocols (teachers and parent questionnaires) which are considered by the Ministry of Culture and Education of the Valencian Community (2002). The results indicated that the performance of the “parents” group in the four areas that compose the questionnaire (creativity, social competence, communication skills) were significantly higher than the scores obtained in the “teachers” group. Teacher’s scores are higher in the areas of “learning ability” and “social competence”, while parent’s performance are better in assessing their children’s “creativity” traits. These results matched with contributions from previous researches that found that teachers tend to value exclusively those skills most related to academic performance (Denton & Postletwaite, 1985; García Yagüe, 1986). In this case, it was found that 40 parents largely detected features of high intellectual ability in children above 37 teachers who completed the sample.

Continuing with the school’s contexts, Ceballos, Guatrocchi and Ziraldo (2016) confirmed the findings of previous research in Córdoba, indicating that in relation of a total sample of 60 teachers, 53.3% reported not have received training in High Intellectual Abilities. From the total, 64.4% indicated that they had occasionally been in contact with children with High Intellectual Abilities and 68.9% had never participated in identification processes. On the other hand, 55.6% reported poorly knowing the educational responses for these students. In general terms, most of the teachers reported not having received training in High Intellectual Abilities and those who had some kind of training it was really scarce. The most frequently used strategies found consisted in performing extra activities, as an educational response, whose aim is to keep children busy; only a few propose acceleration as an alternative. Some teachers pointed to curriculum enrichment as an option for students with High Intellectual Abilities. The authors concluded that there is a notable lack of training in this field. Teachers say they feel more capable of dealing with children with disabilities. Knowledge in educational responses is scarce. The application of strategies is done in a moderate and an intuitive way. Finally, there is also evidence of a lack of educational responses at the institutional level for these cases. In addition to this, Fellauto, Tomasini and Vargas (2016) investigated the characteristics of school’s work with children in an initial level, between three- and five-years old, who according to the teacher’s criteria presented giftedness and/or talent. The authors inquired about the conceptions and strategies of intervention of kindergarten teachers with children with these characteristics. They also inquired about the difficulties that may arise; both in the identification and for make a differentiated work. The sample was constituted by 57 kindergarten’s teachers from public and private educational spaces in Córdoba. The results showed that although most of the teachers know the main characteristics of children with giftedness and/or talent and are able to differentiate these concepts, there is an absence of training, knowledge and specific tools to be able to correctly identify these students and give an educational response that allows teachers to work with them in a different way. This means a new challenge for both education and professionals in Psychology, to expand the view on the subject, questioning representations and expectations regarding to these children and incorporating new strategies in the different learning settings.

Related to the family context, it is important to reflect on how the structure and dynamic of a family take place when there is a specific condition: a talented or a gifted child. There are very few local studies that report the particularities of these families. If it is considered that the social conditions,
the school and the family, are an essential support for the person with high intellectual abilities, knowing them is the first step in order to think about new interventions that could orient and give tools (Valadez Sierra & Gómez Pérez, 2010). In this sense, it is important to consider the results of the study carried out by Mazza, Nicolás, and Panichelli (2016) in Córdoba, about structure and dynamic in families with a talented or gifted member. The obtained results showed that most of the 20 families interviewed had a structure with clear boundaries between subsystems; with respect to roles and functions, were found to be more frequently shared by both members of the parental couple, although it is evident that there is a predominance of the mother in regard to household tasks and child rearing, and of the father with respect to work and economic provision of the family; on the other hand, they found a predominance of a parental style with authority in both parents and a direct communication between the members of the family; the borders with the mesosystem are mostly semipermeable, finding a high disagreement in relation to the school as a good support for the child. In relation to the extended family, and to other environments where the child interacts, they were not reported as relevant.

As we can see, in general, families do not find restraint from the educational system when they have a member with talent or giftedness, needing to look for strategies and answers in extracurricular areas.

Summarizing, there is a proved lack of training in teacher in relation to the field of high intellectual abilities. The educational system does not contain families who present a member with this singularity. Parents are more effective identifiers, especially in terms of creativity, while teachers are more likely to identify academic talent, focusing specifically on academic performance. Teachers, who apply some type of strategy, after the detection, do it in a moderate and intuitive way. There is a marked diversity in the permeability of each institution when they have to receive suggestions and intervention strategies, depending considerably on the style of each school institution and the members that compose it.

3. The primary conception of giftedness

As in most countries, Argentina has also developed the already obsolete struggle between the definition of gifted through an elevated intellectual coefficient (IQ) versus a much broader and more comprehensive view. In the country there are still associations that consider that if a person obtains 130 points of IQ or more is considered gifted. Irueste’s team do not adhere to this position as it is consider that IQ is just one more data in the entire evaluation process. We consider essential having a comprehensive model that assesses as many areas as possible and obtaining data from different sources, such as the child, parents, teachers and the pairs, if this results appropriated. We follow the Castelló and Battle’s model (1998) also taken by the Research Team in High Skills from the University of Murcia (Ferrándiz García, Prieto Sánchez, Ballester Martínez, & Bermejo García, 2004; Prieto Sánchez, 2011). This team with robustness in empirical data, and equally huge generosity to welcome professionals from developing countries, has provided us theoretical support and practical training in the research stays held there. They take the model of Castelló and Batlle (1998) and find it solid in terms of measurement in the different typologies of high skills. This model proposes as fundamental criteria for the definition of the giftedness: the dependence of the context and social needs, the importance of production, the weighting of factors involved, qualitative differentiation between gifted and talented in terms of internal characteristics and production potential and ability to measure characteristics. Thus, Ferrándiz García (2012) adds that there are two groups of exceptional individuals: the gifted, who are the exceptional intellectuals, in the sense that they have a set of characteristics that guarantee a high level of functioning of the entire structure of the intellect. And, on the other hand, the talented ones, who are characterized by extraordinary partial performances in some factor of the mentioned structure or in other areas not strictly intellectual.

Ferrándiz García (2012) describes Castelló and Batlle (1998) model and states that the identification protocol is extracted from two already elaborated and baramel measurement instruments such as the Battery of Differential and General Aptitudes (BADyG), (Yuste, 1989) and the Torrance
Creative Thinking Test (TCTT), (Torrance, 1974). This protocol allows the differentiation of the ways in which the high ability can be manifested: giftedness, academic talent, figurative talent, figurative artistic talent, verbal talent, numerical talent, space talent, and creative talent. The model allows to identify gifted and talented students, according to the following typology: (a) students showing simple or specific talents (referring to a single variable); (b) students showing multiple talents (referring to several joint variables); (c) students who show complex talents (referred to several joint variables), within which we can find, academic talent, figurative talent, and artistic-figurative talent; and (d) students who present conglomerated talented in which we can find the combination of intellectual configuration of academic, figurative, and/or artistic-figurative talent with simple or multiple talent. This is the line of work that Irueste follow at the Service of Neuropsychology, Children’s Area in Córdoba, Argentina.

4. Significant contributions and research findings in gifted education in Córdoba
Specifically in Córdoba, Irueste (2015) developed a work plan for a postdoctoral fellowship given by the Science and Technology’s Secretary of the National University of Cordoba, Argentina. The central lines of this postdoctoral fellowship included extension to the community, teaching and research.

In relation to the first line, extension to the community, a free Public University Service was inaugurated by the author of this article, at the School of Psychology, UNC, Argentina as said before. The protocol follow by this Service consists, first of all, in the receipt of the request from parents, teachers, or educational institutions. A data collection form, specially built for this Service, is completed. Then, if appropriate, we apply the measurement instruments; for high intellectual abilities we apply the Battery of differential and general aptitudes (BADyG-i and BADyG E1-r batteries) for children aged four to six years and six to eight years, respectively (Yuste, 1989). We also use the protocol for the early detection of disabilities, disorders, learning difficulties, and high intellectual abilities of Canary Islands (Ministry of Education, Universities, Culture and Sports, Government of the Canary Islands, 2011). For behavioral and learning problems detection, we applied the scale of comparison of evolutorial signs of learning problems and/or the questionnaire of parents’ academical support to children (Mías, 2004a, 2004b). Finally, an interview, to return the results, is conducted with those who requested the consultation. A written report with suggestions and specific material are given in order to be applied at home and at school.

The Service, not only has these advisory activities for parents, teachers or educational institution and the early detection of talent, giftedness or learning problems in children aged four to eight years, but also, offers parent’s and teacher’s training workshops on educational responses to high intellectual abilities and enrichment workshops for gifted or talented children. In 2016, the European Council of High Abilities (ECHA) included the Neuropsychology Service, Children’s Área, as an associate point of talent detection, as a reference in Argentina.

In relation to the second line of the fellowship, teaching, the author of this article gives some postgraduate courses for health and education professionals. The themes that are seen include conceptual differentiation, identification of high intellectual abilities process, an appropriate educational response and the approach to the double exceptionality. At a grade level a seminar is given in the fourth year of the Degree in Psychology career.

Finally, the third line aimed by the fellowship was related to research. Irueste advance at the validation of the Batteries of Differential and General Aptitudes (BADyG-i), (Yuste, 1989) in children from four to six years of age in Cordoba, Argentina. The elements evaluated in the BADyG i include: global factors (general intelligence, verbal intelligence, and non-verbal intelligence), non-verbal tests (non-verbal mental ability, reasoning with figures and logical puzzles), verbal tests (numerical quantitative concepts, graphic vocabulary), complementary tests (auditory perception, perception and graph-motor coordination). The administration is semicollective because it must be performed in very small groups and can be developed in 2 or 3 sessions leaving a time of rest. The estimated time of administration is one hour. The studies show a high reliability in Spanish sample and in relation to
the validity, correlations were obtained, almost all of them significant to a high level of confidence. In Argentina’s sample of four to six years old children was also obtained a high reliability value (Cronbach’s alpha: 0.905), (Irueste & Ferrándiz, 2016). It was corroborated as in most of the theories that study intelligence that to an older age there is a higher level of intelligence. The highest level of reliability is found in children from four years old. At all ages, scores are higher on scales that measure verbal intelligence than those that measure non-verbal intelligence. The results of this research also corroborated that the BADyG is a reliable instrument to measure intelligence and obtain the intellectual profile of the student of this age range.

Currently, Irueste’s team is carrying out the validation of BADyG-E1-r in children aged six to eight years in a local sample. This is the general objective of the Project “Validation of the battery of differential and general aptitudes (BADyG E1-r) in children aged 6 to 8 years in the city of Córdoba” endorsed by the Science and Technology’s Secretary of the National University of Córdoba. At an international level, we have participated in the research “Cross-cultural study on creativity motivation” directed by Dr Albert Ziegler of the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg, Germany. The project aims of this investigation consist in the administration of a questionnaire which encompasses three studies. The first study aimed at demonstrating the relationship between non-cognitive factors of creativity (including creativity motivation, creativity growth mindset, and creativity confidence) and college students’ creativity achievement. The second study aimed at exploring the environmental factors related to college students’ non-cognitive factors of creativity. The third study explores college students’ stereotypical expectations and emotional prejudices on a creative student. As a member of this research team, we have provided all the data referring to the Argentine sample and the data analysis is still in progress.

5. Difficulties in the country to provide appropriate programs and services for gifted learners

The first step in achieving a progress in both identification and in educational response is the enactment of a law that considers a protocol to be applied in all the schools of the country. This work is being strongly promoted by “Parents Ambassadors for High Intellectual Abilities Argentina”, the group of parents mentioned above, who seeing the daily needs of their children realize the urgent need to carry out concrete actions in the diagnosis and education of the more capable students. Similarly, it is of countless importance having data collected by research that gives account of local and national statistics that we do not have yet. The opening of the Children’s Area at the Neuropsychology Service offers an interesting path since in future publications we will have statistical data that can serve to state secretaries to think about new policies of attention to diversity which can consider the needs of highly capable students in regular schooling.

6. Future directions for research and program development

Toward the future, the lines of research that we consider to broaden are related to the findings of Irueste (2012) which show, as said before, that parents are more effective in identifying high intellectual abilities, specifically in the dimension of creativity. For this reason, Despuy, Falconc, and Fleurquin (2017) are designing an investigation that will study in depth, the effectiveness of the parents in the identification of the potentialities of their children.

Another line of research that we consider to extend in the future is related to a first study conducted by Cibanik, Loyola and Tello (2017), which is still in progress, which general objective is to identify high intellectual abilities in four schools belonging to urban-marginal contexts in the city of Córdoba. The authors found that in a total sample of 198 children between 6 and 8 years of age, there are 2 children with talent, one with figurative talent and one with logical, verbal, and figurative talent.

This study has made the data collection through the application of the Battery of Differential and General Aptitudes (BADyG E1-r) mentioned above. The results show that in most of the scales, out of every 10 children, between 8 and 9 do not reach the expected values for the age group in question.
The results are overwhelming. Not only the education system do not response to the two talented children identified, but also it is disquieting what happens to the remaining 196 children who are barely able to achieve an average yield. The importance of this work is to provide data that support open and inclusive public policies to promote the inclusion of the most vulnerable sectors so that all children in Córdoba and, if possible, throughout the country, can access to the minimum levels of performance and learning, essential to reach a well development in their adult life.

It is extremely necessary to receive an state support, either national or local, so that, through lawful instruments, each child can access to the attention of its diversity, as well it is done with disability that receives a state coverage for the special needs required. That is our direction, with the firm intention of extending these services to the whole community, continuing with the actions carried out until now and expanding them further. There is a vast road to be covered in the country to ensure that each child receives an adequate identification of their potential in order to reach an accurate development and to benefit each one of them, their families, the schools and, therefore, for the benefit of all the community.

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