

PURPOSE AS AN ASPECT OF INTRAPERSONAL INTELLIGENCE OF ACADEMICALLY GIFTED STUDENTS

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Abstract: *The paper gives an outline of an explorative research whose topic was purposefulness as an aspect of intrapersonal intelligence, searching for an answer to the following question: in what a way can academic giftedness (success during studies) be a determinant of purpose, sense of life and an indicator of intrapersonal intelligence of students? The research aim was to consider the existence of connectedness between academic achievement and conceptualization of purpose. Systematic non-experimental observation was used. Research sample is a convenience sample, consisting of students from the universities of Belgrade, Novi Sad and Niš (N=724). Students with average grade above 9,00 are taken as potentially gifted (Renzulli, 1978; Callahan & Miller, 2005), a category which was established through academic achievement (N=128; 17,7%). The basic findings refer to the following: (1) Academic achievement is an important factor influencing the way the students understand purpose; (2) Conceptualization of purpose varies depending on gender, age, type of faculty and study program, indicating that there is a need for new studies dealing with the observed phenomenon.*

Key words: *purpose of life; intrapersonal intelligence of academically gifted students; moral self-regulation;*

Introduction

Recent research in the field of giftedness have increasingly more often focused on the field of morality, encompassing purpose of life, as a phenomenon whose essence is in moral value underlying intrapersonal intelligence (Moran, 2009a). The notion of purpose is found in the literature as a special type of giftedness in intrapersonal intelligence (Moran, 2009a), an inner moral compass, stable and general intention to do something considered essential for the personality, having consequences which go beyond personal context (Damon, Menon, & Bronk, 2003). Some authors have also emphasized that purpose is to get to know oneself as well as one's own place in the world, which is very important as a regulator. In other words, the sense of purpose facilitates self-regulation of the way a person is engaged in cultural value activities, emphasizing that the value of this feature of intellectual maturity is above the personality itself (Gestottir & Lerner, 2007).

This is relevant for the undertaken research, having in mind that its starting point was the definition of purpose. Its main determinants imply that a purpose is an inner compass involving engagement in the activities influencing other people, as well as self-awareness, intention and readiness to continue on this road (Marken, 1990). What is also important refers to the viewpoints according to which purpose is seen as a form of psychological control system managing behaviour in the sense of control ranging from external stimulation to internal indications (Kerpelman, 2001). So, purpose is understood as an orienting point of individual's personal behaviour. It serves as a safe direction, i.e. clear orientation in directing one's own powers and strengths. Moran (2009a) views a purpose as an aspect of intrapersonal intelligence, one of Gardner's (1999) intelligences, processing data regarding one's own personality, identity and self-regulation. The same author states that purpose is an ideal whose appearance in the case of young people is expected at the age of final years of secondary school. However, her studies (Moran 2009a) have not confirmed that young people reach the mentioned personal quality at this age, at least not to great extent (26% of N-270 has expressed purpose). Nevertheless, it might be ascertained that relevant literature treats purpose as one form of giftedness in intrapersonal intelligence. This is one of possible ways to define purpose and it is accepted in the current paper. Erikson (as cited in Moran, 2009a, p. 145) considers that strong intrapersonal intelligence is significant for persons who have a need to give their moral support to the world. Viewed from this angle, it could be said that moral orientation of intrapersonal intelligence acknowledges the influence one person has on another. It is considered that

these abilities are manifested as needs of an individual to be useful to others. In other words, one's own needs are surpassed (Kagan, 1989).

Empathy is another angle of moral orientation. It is a form of emotional component of moral giftedness expressed in such a way that young people can better than others understand themselves and their own abilities (Moran & Gardner, 2006); this is also true for their caring understanding of other persons, with highly expressed empathy. Numerous studies (Damon, 2008; Damon, Menon, & Bronk, 2003) emphasize their expressed abilities in setting themselves aims, in understanding intentions, in self-regulation and persistence (Parks, 1986), as well as in consistent self-understanding. It is considered that consistent self-understanding, as a pro-social facilitator, extends to its past and future personalities. Self-understanding is defined as understanding and giving sense to future development, i.e. as a purpose crystallizing and guiding individual development. Numerous authors (Damon, 2008; Damon, Menon, & Bronk, 2003) nowadays consider that young people should develop the abilities of self-understanding as early as possible, having in mind that the purpose, i.e. self-understanding explicates the direction of actions; there are also research outcomes claiming that this feature is crucial since a purpose crystallizes development by integrating a personality (Damon, 2008; Moran, 2009b; Quaglia & Cobb, 1996; Rathman, 2005).

All in all, findings of numerous studies have confirmed the thesis on importance of purpose, i.e. sense of life for psychological development and stability (Bundick, Damon, Yeager, & King, 2010); Eccles, 2008). This is important for pedagogic angle of considerations of the phenomenon. On the other hand, as it has already been stressed in the text above, a large number of persons do not manage to reach this intrapersonal integration. A special angle refers to individuals who are primarily oriented towards personal aims (personal benefit), rather than being aspired to overcome themselves. They are less oriented towards what they can offer to other people. It is considered that they did not actually reach purpose, in a way which could be classified within intrapersonal intelligence, i.e. moral self-regulation overcoming personal benefits. In other words, it could be said that majority of them who have a good self-understanding, with well-defined desires oriented towards their own needs, rather than the needs of others in order to give contribution to their own well-being (Gestottir & Lerner, 2007) do not fall in the group of individuals with emphasized intrapersonal abilities, i.e. moral giftedness. Giftedness in morality domain has often focused on the way intellectually gifted are sensitive towards others or think about the issues of morality (Gojkov & Stojanovic, 2012; Moran, 2009a; Renzulli, 2002; Rest & Narvaey, 1995; Sisk, 1982; Tirri & Nokelainen, 2007, as cited in: Gojkov, 2008). Personal talent is considered to be "extraordinary ability to choose

and reach difficult life aims which are in accordance with one's interests, abilities, value system and contexts" (Moon, 2003, p. 78). This also encompasses Torrence's understanding of "people without limits", who have great achievements. What they have in common is that they have a clear purpose/intention (Moon, 2003, p. 80). Renzulli (1978) distinguishes academic giftedness (high IQ, successful problem solving and knowledge reproduction). Therefore, we considered significant to examine the connection between the components of moral giftedness and high academic achievements.

It is also significant for the current paper to point out that many authors hold that a purpose is an aspect of intrapersonal intelligence, one of Gardner's (1999) intelligences. It could be said that it is also considered a bio-physiological potential of processing data in a way leading to successful problem solving, i.e. new solutions. As a form of intrapersonal intelligence, purpose is, as it is commonly considered for intrapersonal intelligence, in a sense, moral orientation. Purpose is an inner compass involving engagement in activities influencing other people. Erikson (1968) considered that intrapersonal intelligence is manifested in persons who have the need to give moral contribution to the world; from this standpoint, it might be claimed that the moral aspect of intrapersonal intelligence acknowledges one person's influence on others, implying that these abilities are manifested as individual's needs to be of help to other people. This is also seen as a special dimension of purpose within intrapersonal giftedness. One's own needs are thus pushed into the background (Kagan, 1989).

What makes theoretical framework refers to defining the notion of purpose. According to numerous authors, purpose is actually a special ability, equated, as other forms of giftedness, with reaching an expert level at much earlier stages of development (Bloom, 1985; Feldman, 1986; as cited in: Moran, 2009a, p.148). In the domain of morality, giftedness is often considered in regard to the way intellectually gifted are sensitive to others (Silverman, 1994.), or the way they think about or judge moral issues (Rest & Narvaey, 1995; Sisk, 1982; Tirri & Nokelainen, 2007, as cited in: Gojkov, 2008). These approaches emphasize the way individuals understand situations and their moral implications: how a person sees the sense of his/her environment and existence. Consequently, moral giftedness involves intention/purpose which is in the literature dealing with giftedness associated with talent and high achievement. Moral giftedness emphasizes one's power of will to give positive, prosocial contribution to society (Moran, 2009a; Renzulli, 2002).

Therefore, it is defined as extraordinary or premature achievement. An issue dealt with in the research refers to observation of a number of students who achieved purpose in the sense defined above, in regard to their

year of study and their studies success, as an indicator of academic achievement and manifestation of their moral self-determination.

So, it can be concluded that many authors apply both of these features, common characteristics of the gifted, to purpose, as well, extending the area of giftedness beyond the field of academic achievements to extraordinary achievements in the field of leadership and morality (Moran & Gardner, 2006). This is an argument related to more recent theories of giftedness which, having taken into consideration abilities, emphasize the way in which individuals use their abilities, in constructive social purposes (Renzulli, 2002). This statement is also to point out that neither intellectual giftedness nor academic achievement go hand in hand with moral sense.

Method

Research topic of this explorative study is purpose as a form of intrapersonal giftedness. We were interested in the issue: what is it students care about and consider important and how they structure their efforts in order to harmonize them with the values they estimate as important. Our intention was to explore the extent to which they consider moral dimension of situations and actions significant and how this dimension influences their efforts to build their personalities.

Furthermore, an answer *to the following question* is searched for: in what way is purpose, as a form of intrapersonal intelligence, manifested in the observed students; is there a connection between academic achievements and conceptualization of purpose.

Aim of the research is to consider the existence of connectedness between academic achievement and conceptualization of purpose. We intended to explore the way students with high academic achievements (average grade during studies above 9,00) understand their purpose of life. We were also interested in how the rest of the students (average grade during studies below 9,00) conceptualize their life purpose.

Basic hypothesis is that there is a statistically significant connection between academic achievement and conceptualization of purpose, in the sense of identification of purpose of life and more emphasized prosocial contribution to society, as a significant indicator of moral self-regulation.

Working hypothesis refer to the following:

1. Academic achievement statistically significantly influences the way the students understand purpose and the presence of empathy derived from prosocial reasons.
2. Academic achievement (average grade during studies), gender, type of studies (program orientation) and the year of studies are

statistically significant variables connected with purpose as an aspect of intrapersonal intelligence.

Variables:

Predictive: gender, year of studies, faculty and department, success during studies;

Criterion: conceptualization of purpose (structure, shape, form) – what makes purpose / sense of life, elements of structuring of indicators of moral self-regulation – indicators of coherence of structure of intrapersonal intelligence and its manifestation.

Research instrument was a modified Likert type scale (SKS-1), construed according to Moran (2009a, p.158), in order to estimate how research subjects identify their life aims. The intention was to see whether and in what way they feel that they have found sense or identified a purpose they think is a good orienting point in their lives, as well as how they construed it. The same instrument covered the pieces of information referring to predictive variables (studies success, gender, year of studies, faculty and department).

The tasks to be undertaken in order to reach the research aim were:

- to establish the structure of purpose, i.e. to get to the essence of the structure of the sense of life and see how ethical sensibility can be the core of life sense;
- the relation between purpose and the variables, aiming at considering the reasons contributing to the found state and more clearly determining the intentions, i.e. sense of life.

The research was conducted according to an anonymous questionnaire including open type questions referring to a short description of their own life purpose, its explanation, i.e. why they consider it valuable to dedicate their lives to it. There was also a question referring to the field in which the subjects had most activities and success, in the sense of achievement and reaching their potential, followed by an explanation why they were engaged in these activities and the reasons for their success. The questionnaire was designed so that the responses can be used to identify purpose, sense and satisfaction in life.

Systematic non-experimental observation was used as a method. Categorizing of answers involved 3 independent evaluators (doctors of pedagogic and psychological sciences, university professors and researchers), familiar with the phenomenon and the subject issue, whose assessments were harmonized and categorized in the following categories:

1. Purpose of existence, i.e. life:

- Empathy for prosocial reasons;

- Self-oriented aims.

2. Important life aims:

- What life aims are important;
- Why are these aims important;
- In what a way should aims be achieved.

Research sample is a convenience sample, consisting of students from the universities of Belgrade, Novi Sad and Niš (N=724). Students with average grade above 9,00 are taken as potentially gifted, as a category which confirmed itself through academic achievement (N=128).

Statistic processing: descriptive statistics, Chi-quadrade independence test was used to confirm the existence of statistically significant correlation between the observed variables and conceptualization of purpose as a factor of moral self-regulation. Another question is also included: in what way purpose is manifested as self-regulation of students with high academic achievements; cluster analysis was used to identify structures within the collected data.

Results and discussion

The basic hypothesis is supported by the following finding: it was established according to Chi-square independence test that there is statistically significant correlation at the level 0,05 ($\chi^2 = 14,552$; $p = 0,001$) between the variable *average grade of the subjects* and the variable *understanding of the purpose of life*. The value established according to the Chi-quadrade test implies a low influence ($V = 0,14$) of average grade of students during studies on their understanding of purpose of life. In other words, in spite of the fact that the correlation is not high, it is statistically significant. It could be concluded that academic achievement is a significant factor influencing the way the students understand life purpose. The structure of purpose, especially in regard to prosocial aspect – empathy, can be seen in Table 1:

Table 1: Correlation between academic achievement and understanding of empathy (purpose of life)

	<i>Empathy – prosocial contribution to society – sense, purpose of life</i>	↗ —
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		<i>Contribution to changes</i>	<i>Fight for equality, freedom</i>	To do good deeds	To be a proper member of society	I am still searching	To move things in one's profession	To give love, to help others	Religion ethics	Hedonism	<i>Contribution to mankind</i>	Life itself as a purpose	
Average grade	above 9	<u>36</u>	<u>2</u>	17	14	6	14	5	1	30	<u>0</u>	3	128
		28,1%	1,6%	13,3%	10,9%	4,7%	10,9%	3,9%	0,8%	23,4%	<u>0,0%</u>	2,3%	100,0%
	below 9	<u>86</u>	<u>10</u>	42	42	22	49	27	19	258	<u>9</u>	32	596
		14,4%	1,7%	7,0%	7,0%	3,7%	8,2%	4,5%	3,2%	43,3%	<u>1,5%</u>	5,4%	100,0%
Total		<u>122</u>	<u>12</u>	59	56	28	63	32	20	288	<u>9</u>	35	724
		16,9%	1,7%	8,1%	7,7%	3,9%	8,7%	4,4%	2,8%	39,8%	<u>1,2%</u>	4,8%	100,0%

The data in the Table 1 indicate that prosocial empathy in academically gifted is manifested in 29,7% of cases, which is close to findings of other research pointing out that purpose, integrated with all three dimensions, is not common; former studies have found that only 25% of young people have purpose as a form of intrapersonal giftedness (Damon, 2008). Slightly higher percentage was found in current research, which is not difficult to understand, having in mind that the finding refers to gifted students, i.e. selected population. On the other hand, it also seems important to point out here that the data have shown that a solid number of students not classified within academically gifted (26,2%) also manifested emphasized prosocial empathy. This finding imposes the need for further search for answers explaining the phenomenon, in the sense of factors influencing the formation of prosocial empathy. In other words, it might be concluded that academically gifted students more than others manifest the awareness of the need to get engaged in the change of social reality in immediate and broader environment, as a form of intrapersonal giftedness, i.e. moral self-regulation. If this is backed up by the aspects referring to fight for equality (1,6%) and moving things in one's profession, as a way of change of social awareness (10,9%), which might be understood as a broader context of prosocial

empathy, it is an indicator that the number of the gifted who have emphasized prosocial empathy is higher than 50%.

Around 27% of students who did not fall under the group of academically gifted have also manifested emphasized prosocial empathy. Nevertheless, apart from the established statistically significant difference in favour of academically gifted, it is not such that its manifestation might be associated solely to giftedness; as a consequence, new questions are raised. What seems imposed here as important is the total value of manifested prosocial orientations in purpose, opening up a new question regarding the sample, i.e. examination of the factors underlying this finding. One of the possible causes might be cultural influence, which should be checked in a comparative research.

What is also important for the confirmation of the first hypothesis are the data derived from the cluster analysis showing a solid discriminatory value of clusters, i.e. classification of statistically significant differences between the formed clusters (groups), in regard to each variable individually (a way to achieve one’s life aims, empathy, purpose of existence, personal aims, life aims – chosen as most important, life aims). This is only one of the indicators of the confirmation of the first hypothesis, i.e. a sign that there are significant correlations between the observed variables, which are to be seen in the Graph 1. Structure and values of these clusters are given in the Table 2 and Graph 3.

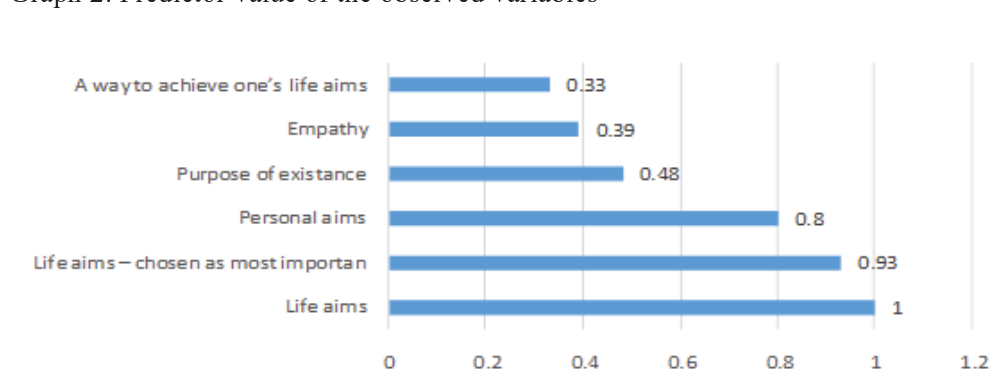
Graph 1. Clusters quality—a diagram of medium values of established clusters



The data given in the Graph 1 show that 6 predictor variables were included in the analysis, and that 4 clusters were identified. Chosen variables show solid quality (value is 0,3). In order to establish whether the clusters really differ, a technique of visual observation of graph showing line diagrams in the Graph 1 was used, indicating a good discriminatory value of

clusters, i.e. classification of statistically significant differences between the formed clusters (groups) in regard to each individual variable.

Graph 2. Predictor value of the observed variables



The smallest cluster is made of 119 subjects, which is 16,5% of the sample, and the largest cluster consists of 227 subjects, i.e. 31,4%. The ratio of the size of clusters is 1,91, which is a significant difference. Criterion value of each of the variables is shown in the Graph 2. The following variable has the strongest criterion value: *Life aims – chosen as most important* and the weakest criterion value is found in the variable *a way to achieve one's life aims*, which might be explained as a lack of one of the components of purpose as a self-regulator, since it refers to the ability to conceive ways to overcome problems, ways to achieve aims. In other words, one element of purpose as moral regulator is weakly or insufficiently clearly expressed in the case of one part of the students; the essence of purpose/sense of life is not fully developed, and it cannot be considered a self-regulator, not even in the sense of moral behaviour; thus, it cannot be considered an aspect of intrapersonal intelligence, as it was defined in the theoretical part of the paper.

In cluster analysis carried out according to Chi-square independence test it was found that there is statistically significant dependence at the level 0,01 ($\chi^2 = 20,719$; $p < 0,001$) between the clusters describing conceptualization of purpose, named as *structural conceptualization of purpose* and the variable *average grade of the subjects*. A small, but statistically significant influence between high academic achievements and conceptualization of purpose was established ($V = 0,17$). So, it could be concluded that there is statistically significant dependence between academic achievement and purpose, i.e. its structural elements: *empathy derived from prosocial reasons, imagination of projection of oneself, purpose in the future and recognition of opportunities for*

engagement, confirming the first hypothesis. In other words, gifted students with expressed empathy, as one of the aspects of moral orientation, have a specific viewpoint regarding understanding of themselves, their own abilities, as well as abilities of others in a caring way with emphasized empathy, which is in accordance with other research (Zahn-Waxler, Radke-Yarrow, Wagner, & Chapman, 1992). This is an indicator of their emphasized ability to set aims for themselves, to understand intentions, in self-regulation and in persistence (Parks, 1986), as well as consistent self-understanding. In other words, academically gifted students understand life well and give sense to their future development, in such a way that a purpose crystalizes and guides development of their personality. According to mentioned findings, purpose also integrates personality and contributes to psychological stability. This further might lead to a conclusion that purpose, as a self-regulator, is also important for academic achievement, which is clearly seen in the cluster analysis of the structure of criterion variables: *Table 2*. Thus, the first hypothesis is fully confirmed, but the question remains: what are the causes and what are the consequences? In other words, in what a way academic success crystalizes purpose, makes sense of life prosocial, progressive and full of contents, and vice versa – to what an extent is understanding of purpose actually a cause of academic success?

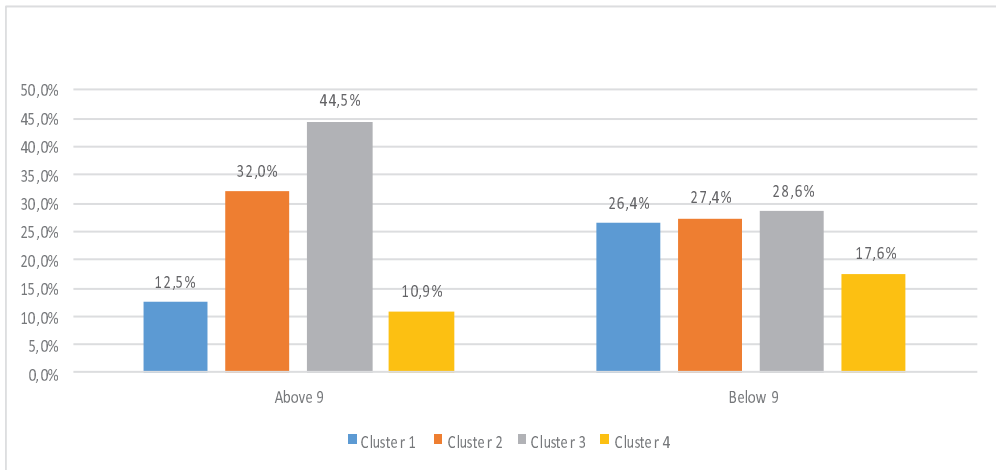
Table 2: Cluster composition in view of the subjects with the average grade above 9 and those below 9

		<i>Clusters</i>				Total
		1 st cluster	2 nd cluster	3 rd cluster	4 th cluster	
Average grade	above 9	16	41	57	14	128
		12,5%	32,0%	44,5%	10,9%	100,0%
Average grade	below 9	157	163	170	105	595
		26,4%	27,4%	28,6%	17,6%	100,0%
Total		173	204	227	119	723
		23,9%	28,2%	31,4%	16,5%	100,0%

Graph 3 also show that students with high academic achievements, i.e. average grade above 9,00 are mainly classified in 2nd and 3rd cluster, which shows that these clusters have high representation of the following values: *contribution to better world, justice, equality, empathy – prosocial; understand life – search for its sense, change oneself for the well-being of others, to give one's own contribution to changes, to preserve nation, contribution to mankind, preservation of species, fight for the return of the holy land to Christians, dedication to higher aims – independence, freedom*

and tolerance in the fight for reaching one's own aims and development of society, all manifesting high prosocial purpose.

Graph 3. Differences between subjects in regard to average grade



Having in mind that the established statistical significance of dependence between purpose and achievement is not such that its occurrence could be associated solely with giftedness, the influence of the observed independent variables (gender, year of study, faculty, department) will further be observed, testing the second hypothesis based on the assumption that these predictor variables have significant influence on purpose.

Reflections on *life aims* and their representation in regard to the *year of studies* are observed through Chi-square independence test. It was confirmed that there is statistically significant dependence at the level ($\chi^2=67,287$; $p=0,001$) between the variable *year of studies* and the variable *life aims*. Significant but small influence ($V=0,15$) was found of subjects' year of study and their understanding and formulation of life aims. In other words, students at different years of study think differently about their life aims and formulate them in different ways.

Table 3: Connections regarding years of studies and the way of thinking about life aims

	<i>Life aims</i>	2 —
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		Happy family life	Successful career	Meaningless of life	Secure future	Emancipation	Love for others	Fight for equality and justice	Suppose to others	Contribution to better life of others	Life as its own purpose	
Year of studies	First	31 18,7%	34 20,5%	1 0,6%	15 9,0%	46 27,7%	14 8,4%	2 1,2%	3 1,8%	14 8,4%	6 3,6%	166 100,0%
	Second	49 24,0%	36 17,6%	3 1,5%	19 9,3%	49 24,0%	25 12,3%	4 2,0%	4 2,0%	10 4,9%	5 2,5%	204 100,0%
	Third	57 29,2%	29 14,9%	8 4,1%	18 9,2%	32 16,4%	22 11,3%	4 2,1%	7 3,6%	7 3,6%	11 5,6%	195 100,0%
	Fourth	31 19,7%	37 23,6%	6 3,8%	14 8,9%	32 20,4%	13 8,3%	1 0,6%	3 1,9%	8 5,1%	12 7,6%	157 100,0%
	Fifth	0 0,0%	0 0,0%	0 0,0%	0 0,0%	1 50,0%	0 0,0%	1 50,0%	0 0,0%	0 0,0%	0 0,0%	2 100,0%
Total		168 23,2%	136 18,8%	18 2,5%	66 9,1%	160 22,1%	74 10,2%	12 1,7%	17 2,3%	39 5,4%	34 4,7%	724 100,0%

Emancipation and *fight for equality and justice* are most emphasized elements significantly influencing conceptualization of purpose (structure, shape, form) and make sense/purpose of life of the observed subjects. They are considered in the literature the essential elements of structuring indicators of moral self-regulation and coherence of structure of intrapersonal intelligence and their manifestation, i.e. strength. The finding might be understood as a confirmation of the findings of other research that a purpose, i.e. sense of life, expressed in empathy out of prosocial reasons, is developed through maturation. The data also show the prominence of consistent self-understanding, as prosocial facilitator, considered to integrate personality (Damon, 2008; Moran, 2009b; Quaglia & Cobb, 1996; Rathman, 2005). It is worth stating an argument in favour of previous conclusion that the found statistical significance of dependence between high academic achievement and purpose is not a sufficient indicator to associate manifestation of purpose solely with giftedness.

The same hypothesis involves *faculty and department* as a factor of self-regulation. The dependence between their choice of faculty and understanding of purpose of life is observed according to the Chi-square independence test. It was found that there is statistically significant dependence at the level 0,01 ($\chi^2 = 31,693$; $p = 0,000$) between the variable *faculty* and the variable *structuring of purpose of life*. Low influence was found ($V = 0,15$) of educational institution of the subjects on their

understanding of purpose of life. In other words, subjects from different educational institutions think differently about purpose of life, so that educational institution has also appeared as a significant factor of structuring a purpose. To what an extent have students with different views on purpose opted for different types of studies, i.e. educational profile, and what is the influence of the studies themselves on their understanding of sense of life and moral self-regulation remains an issue to be dealt with in another research. What can be pointed out here is the fact that students of Philosophical and Mathematical faculties mainly have clearly expressed will of power to give positive, prosocial contribution to society and have a clear intention/purpose in the sense of need to give contribution to well-being of others. The finding is not sufficient to make conclusions on the importance of educational institution on prosocial dimension of purpose/sense of life. Nevertheless, it is worth noticing here that there are most students at Mathematical and Philosophical faculty who have high average grade during studies, which might be in favour of importance of academic success, rather than the faculty students enrolled.

Table 4: Connections between the way of structuring of life purpose and the subjects coming from various educational institutions

		<i>Purpose of life</i>			Total
		Empathy – prosocial	Self-oriented	No purpose, vague purpose, nihilism	
Faculty	Philosophical Faculty in Novi Sad	124 33,2%	198 52,9%	52 13,9%	374 100,0%
	Teacher Education Faculty in Belgrade	11 15,1%	48 65,8%	14 19,2%	73 100,0%
	Preschool Teacher Training College in Vrsac	15 28,3%	21 39,6%	17 32,1%	53 100,0%
	Philosophical Faculty in Nis	50 29,6%	87 51,5%	32 18,9%	169 100,0%
	Mathematical Faculty in Novi Sad	26 47,3%	27 49,1%	2 3,6%	55 100,0%
	Total	226 31,2%	381 52,6%	117 16,2%	724 100,0%

Connections between the understanding of purpose of life and *the subjects of various educational profiles* are related to previously mentioned dependence derived from chosen departments. The least number of students who have no purpose/sense of life are from science departments. This is a significant issue for further research, but it might be backed up by the common opinion that social and humanistic sciences give broader world

views from the understanding of social reality. It could be expected that the students enrolled in these departments are more oriented towards conceiving aims and purpose of their own lives and life in general in a prosocial sense.

Table 5: Connections between understanding of life purpose and the subjects of different educational profiles

		<i>Purpose of life</i>			Total
		Empathy – prosocial	Self-oriented aims	No purpose, vague purpose, nihilism	
<i>Educational profile</i>	Humanistic sciences	31 26,3%	76 64,4%	11 9,3%	118 100,0%
	Social sciences	32 32,7%	51 52,0%	15 15,3%	98 100,0%
	Teachers and preschool teachers	27 21,1%	69 53,9%	32 25,0%	128 100,0%
	Sciences	25 47,2%	27 50,9%	1 1,9%	53 100,0%
	Language and communication	111 33,9%	158 48,3%	58 17,7%	327 100,0%
	Total	226 31,2%	226 31,2%	381 52,6%	117 100,0%

Observation of *the structure of life aims according to the gender of subjects*, carried out according to Chi-square independence test, showed that there is statistically significant correlation at the level of 0,05 ($\chi^2=20,275$; $p=0,016$) between the variable *gender* and the variable *personal life aims*. Small influence ($V=0,17$) of gender of the subjects on their understanding of life aims implies that subjects of different genders think differently about their personal aims and formulate them in different ways.

Age was also observed as a predictor variable, i.e. maturation as a factor of manifestation of purpose as moral self-regulator. Connections between the way of thinking about *life aims* and their formulation and *the year of studies* are observed according to Chi-square independence test. It was found that there is statistically significant dependence at the level 0,05 ($\chi^2=67,287$; $p=0,001$) between the variable *year of studies* and the variable *life aims*. Low influence ($V=0,15$) of year of studies of the subjects was established on their understanding and formulation of life aims, confirming the findings of other researchers on the development of purpose throughout life (Damon, 2008).

Previous findings lead to a conclusion that all the involved predictor variables had low, yet statistically significant influence on criterion

variables, i.e. understanding of sense/purpose of life, its structuring and formulation and the choice of ways to their achievement. Thus, the second hypothesis was confirmed, implying the need for further research. Having in mind relatively small influences of all the observed predictor variables, it would be necessary to, in a differently structured research framework, include other variables which might contribute to better understanding of the observed phenomenon. Potential subsequent research would give a significant contribution to pedagogic practice in making efforts to guide the development of purpose/sense of life as a self-regulator of one's own development in the sense of contribution to development of persons' autonomy. There is another methodological issue to be mentioned here: to what an extent would a classification of the variable *success* to more than two categories (above and below 9,00) give a different picture of the importance of success for the observed issue. The reaches of this explorative research refer to new questions for future hypotheses.

Summarizing and providing suggestions

The fact that the findings have confirmed the significance of the observed variables (success, faculty, department and year of studies), i.e. their connections with criterion variables, i.e. understanding of sense/purpose of life and its structuring, leads to a conclusion that the findings of this explorative research are in line with basic theoretical assumptions the research is based on, as well as with the findings of other researchers. Nevertheless, as it was pointed out in the discussion of the findings, certain questions were raised. One of them refers to the fact that success during studies, as an indicator of academic giftedness, is a significant variable in forming of purpose/sense of life, as a form of intrapersonal giftedness. On the other hand, there is also a significant number of students who do not fall within the group of academically gifted, who also have emphasized prosocial empathy and other aspects of manifestation of purpose/sense of life. The findings on the influence of faculty, department, year of studies, have raised another question: is it justifiable to associate purpose/sense of life defined in such a way solely with academic giftedness. Another disputable question is: how come that we have found such a prominence of the total manifestation value of the expressed prosocial orientations in case of the students who were not classified within academically gifted. There is another closely related issue and it refers to the causes, i.e. factors underlying them. So, the finding according to which other predictor variables turned out to be significant, together with the fact that their influences are of similar reaches, points to the need to observe the phenomenon from other standpoints through discriminative analyses. This also refers to a methodological issue:

to what an extent would a classification of the variable *success* to more than two categories (above and below 9,00) give a different picture of the importance of success for the observed phenomenon. This is important contribution for the reaches of the current explorative research, since it refers to new questions for future hypotheses, as well as for educational angle of understanding and development of the observed phenomenon.

It is important in education to make efforts and ensure that development leads towards competent, mature persons, towards abilities for moral orientation of personal and social life, with expressed empathy and clear intentions for self-regulation. Developed self-understanding, understanding and giving sense to future development should be encouraged, since these important features crystalize development through personality integration (Damon, 2008; Moran, 2009b; Quaglia & Cobb, 1996; Rathman, 2005) and as such they are significant for psychological development and stability (Colby & Damon, 1992; Hart & Fegley, 1995).

It is important that nowadays within emancipatory didactics increasingly more attention is paid to self-organized and self-determined learning, implying autonomy of learning, orientation towards self-development, for the ability of self-regulation not to be lost. This also involves development of critical thinking as the basis of developed purpose including integration and personal ability to find importance in personal experience.

There is another finding indicative for the educational angle of observation of this phenomenon and it is that majority of those who understand themselves well have defined self-oriented desires, rather than needs to give contribution to others (Gestdottir & Lerner, 2007). Some studies imply that in certain cultures it is considered that self-oriented aims are a norm; numerous cultural messages amplify the ultimate experience of personal happiness and life satisfaction (Diener & Diener, 1996; Gable & Haidt, 2005). Special attention should be paid in these situation to the ways of developing of critical sense and empathy, orienting moral self-determinations of individuals and overcoming one's own personal interests.

Generally speaking, it seems that moral orientation in education has been neglected, while the sphere of morality in postmodernism and emphasized plurality has been left to an individual and interest groups. These statements can be explained as a consequence of postmodern efforts to create more tolerant view of the way human knowledge is understood, mainly relying on Foucault's standpoints of inseparability between knowledge and power (Fuko, 1997). According to the stated author, common and prevailing ways of describing the world carry potential social practice to act in a certain way. Therefore, certain forms of behaviour have become marginalized, while others are subordinated to others. In others words, what is "normal" in one

setting is based on the currently accepted knowledge prevailing in the given culture. Knowledge is understood here as an effect of discourse, i.e. one form of relations. This allows certain views and behaviours to be acceptable or desirable, depending on the culture. Comparative studies dealing with the issue might be significant for getting to know and understanding of purpose/sense of life as a phenomenon.

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