

OPTIMIZATION OF THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS FOR GIFTED CHILDREN

Ana Maria Oțelea

PhD Student, "Constatin Stere" University of European Political and Economic Studies, Moldova

Abstract: Moreover, these kids have a special in-built motivation to learn, explore and discover. The stronger their desire to know, the more involved the child is in the respective activity, thus getting special, original and creative outcomes. Such children often choose to do a certain thing themselves, and do not accept others to do things for them, even when they encounter obstacles. They like to learn new things and search for various solutions for the activities they get involved in. They also display fluent thinking, being able to find or come up with a wide range of related ideas, to anticipate many consequences, as well as solutions. However, these children are always original; they come up with unusual new ideas, as they are able to make non-conventional connexions between the information they acquire. A gifted child has the ability to notice relationships between apparently unrelated objects, facts or concepts. Thus, his/her thinking process elaborates new steps and answers or even proposes improvements.

Among educational interventions considered with regard to gifted children we mention: grouping them in special classes, curricular adjustment, academic acceleration, differential teaching (Yolanda Baenito, 2003).

Keywords: gifted child, curricular adjustment, differential teaching, academic acceleration, teacher training

The sooner aptitudes are identified, the better, since childhood years are the key of future development. In order to create a development culture for gifted children it is mandatory that we understand the importance of investing in their development. This commitment should be at the core of each organization and ranges from the promotion of a learning environment in which training at the work place replaces the habit of sending employees to attend traditional training courses to stimulating efforts meant to improve collaboration. Today's children are tomorrow's teenagers. They deserve support and high quality education based on individual skills and competences.

Among educational interventions considered with regard to gifted children we mention: grouping them in special classes, curricular adjustment, academic acceleration, differential teaching (Yolanda Baenito, 2003).

1. Curricular adjustment

Curricular adjustment is particularly important. This educative strategy involves the elaboration of individual educative programmes. These programmes are supposed to be applied along the academic year in substitution of the general syllabus. Obviously, this adaptation produces effects upon the curricular project as well as on the general education plan. According to Yolanda Benito (2003), the educative project confers coherence and continuity to the educative action, including both pedagogical and organizational principles. The curricular project traces individual adjustments in relation to the characteristics, the learning rhythm and the individualization of each student, while the learning units help achieve the syllabus for the respective education stage.

Curricular adjustment should provide answers for a series of questions such as: *What and why do we teach? Where and when do we teach? Whom and how do we teach? What.*

how and when do we evaluate? (Yolanda Benito, 2003). In order to answer the first question of the series, one must resort to personalized adjustments. The contents must be selected according to the type of educational needs, the student's motivations and interests, the student's development stage and degree at a given moment. These aspects also influence our teaching methods. In order to achieve accurate evaluation, one must take into account the overall student's work, as well as the information obtained from parents or other teachers with regard with the progress a specific student has made. The evaluation must be based on specific adapted criteria, applied throughout the training and educational process.

2.Differential teaching

Differential teaching is a largely used method, practised either within the normal classroom with mixed groups of children, or in separate groups. Such an approach is generally supported by law. However, one must make the difference between primary and secondary school levels, as far as the provisions for groups of children with mixed abilities and separate abilities are concerned. At these levels, legal provisions focus on the organization of specialized classes or schools for arts or sports. We should mention the fact that, in primary education, students are mainly grouped according to their aptitudes, whereas specialized classes or even schools for gifted children are less common.

3.The grouping in special classes or schools

Grouping children in special classes according to their capacities provides them with a good opportunity to take part in educational programmes fit for their level. The establishment of special schools is unfortunately conditioned by their often controversial financing. The already existing schools focus on individual special abilities, inter-stimulation, parents' and authorities' support and collaboration. The teaching staff includes highly qualified primary school teachers, generally specialized. Didactic activities are organized in generally smaller classes which are well-equipped (Carmen Crețu, 1997). Some of the most famous specialized schools are: *The Secondary School of Akademogorodok* in Ukraine – specialized in the development of academic aptitudes such as mathematics, physics and chemistry; the *Yehudi Menuhin* school in England, which hosts students with special talents doubled by high intellectual capacities; the school founded by *Leta Hollingworth in New York* – hosts 3rd and 4th grade students with an IQ over 130; *The Independent Boarding School Milfield* in England, where children are selected based on tough exams that test their intellectual potential and special aptitudes.

4.Academic acceleration

The acceleration of studies consists in an educational strategy that allows students to advance one or more academic years in order to benefit from an educational environment that corresponds to their competences. According to Carmen Crețu (1997), the main forms of acceleration of studies applied in educational practice are: early admission to 1st grade, telescoping curriculum, grade skipping/combined classes and continuous progress. As Van Tassel-Baska states, the criteria used for academic acceleration are: the nature of the subject and the field where the special gift is manifested, the student's preferences, mutual support and interaction, the necessity to operate additional changes within the curriculum, the opportunity of including extra-curricular amplification and their support, teacher's approval and flexibility" (Yolanda Benito, 2003:120). Whenever the student can benefit of this strategy, s/he ceases to get bored. The level of challenges increases, allowing thus the flourishing of satisfaction, motivation and self-esteem.

5.Improved syllabuses

Another strategy meant to support gifted children is the enrichment of syllabuses. This concept has not yet been clearly defined. Sometimes it refers to extra-curricular activities, including the activities targeted at the children with learning difficulties. Some other times, the same concept may refer to additional activities performed in the classroom

along the ones proposed by the syllabus (Carmen Crețu, 1997).

According to Yolanda Benito, curricular enrichment resides in achieving individualized educational syllabuses applied to smaller groups outside the school programme. This strategy allows the acquiring of more knowledge in certain disciplines that can be included or not in the syllabus. The person leading the activity must be a specialist in the field, so that s/he is able to answer all the questions raised by the students.

6.The MESP model

The MESP model represents one of the best models for psycho-pedagogical and social improvement. It is based on the study of the differences in development and characteristics of high potential children. The outcomes resulted from the identification and evaluation process facilitate an accurate perspective on existing differences. Thus, it is possible to guide orientation and interfere in the development of school, emotional, motivational and social factors (Yolanda Benito, 2003). The model is based on two elements: on the one hand, the organization-related one, involving planning and adequate counselling for each student, the development of interests, methodologies and evaluation methods. The second element refers to the actual implementation of the programme. The development of social and relational abilities, creativity, ability to study independently, the analysis of knowledge seen as the processing of information, and last but not least, the development of the respective field.

7.Non-formal activities

Non-formal activities are used as often used as differential teaching. However, non-formal activities for groups of children with mixed abilities are less common than those for homogenous groups. Moreover, these activities are barely mentioned by any legal provisions, since they are generally initiated by non-governmental organisms. We should note the fact that the government is frequently responsible for the organization of competitions in different academic, sports-related or artistic disciplines. One of the most common measures is the method of accelerate promotion. Where such measures are adopted, they are generally supported by a legislative framework, an approach that can be identified in most countries.

II.2 Teacher training

Other specific educational measures refer to the centres of excellence for gifted children, their parents and teachers, or special recipes for educational support. They can be identified in most countries, with some differences. *“Teachers can play a very important part in identifying, supporting and evaluations of educational measures that answer the needs of gifted children and young people. Regardless of the educational policies adopted with the aim of encouraging the education for the gifted, it is important to analyze the way in which teachers are trained for working with young people with exceptional potential and abilities.”* (Specific Educational Measures for the Promotion of all Forms of Excellence in European Schools, June 2000, p. 189).

After the 1970's, the Americans promoted programmes that analyze the development of psycho-pedagogical particularities. Some are aimed at the training of teachers with regard to the identification of gifted children, while others are meant to familiarize them with the psycho-pedagogical particularities of this category of children.

Australia focuses on the immediate need to design collaborative projects between communities and schools or schools and universities. The University of Ottawa, Canada, offers advanced courses for both students and teachers. An unusual state of facts can be noticed in Cuba, where educational activities take place despite the fact that they are not explicitly described in the official documents issued by the Ministry of Education.

In Romania there are various organizations and programmes meant to support and promote gifted children. The legislation regarding the education of gifted young people capable of high performance was unanimously adopted by the Romanian Parliament on

December. According to this Law, "The training of teaching staff required for the education of gifted children who are capable of high performance is based on training programmes that shall include the optimal curriculum and teaching methodologies for their education and training, taking into account their nature and needs. The duration of training for the teaching staff shall be of at least 60 hours per year, for teachers who work in specialized centres, and at least 30 hours per year for teachers who work in schools with specialized classes and who adhered to the training programmes for gifted young people, capable of high performance."

The European Council for High Abilities (ECHA) organized training courses acknowledged at the European level. In several countries, such as The Czech Republic, Spain, France, Portugal or Slovenia, special courses are only available for education psychology specialists.

Some of the best-known special educational programmes for this category of children are: the MENSA programme, Magnet School, the Israeli Programme, the APOGEE programme, the training model for teachers developed by Purdue University, India.

Conclusions: The sooner aptitudes are identified, the better, since childhood years are the key of future development. In order to create a development culture for gifted children it is mandatory that we understand the importance of investing in their development. This commitment should be at the core of each organization and ranges from the promotion of a learning environment in which training at the work place replaces the habit of sending employees to attend traditional training courses to stimulating efforts meant to improve collaboration. Today's children are tomorrow's teenagers. They deserve support and high quality education based on individual skills and competences.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Carmen Cretu, *Psihopedagogia Succesului*, Polirom, Iași, 1997
Carmen Crețu, *Politica promovării talentelor. Dreptul la o educație diferențiată*, Editura Cronica, Iași, 1995
Developing Programs for Students of Hight Ability, August, 1991
Elena Maria Cosmovici, *Identificarea talentelor și problematica selecției acestora în cadrul strategiilor educaționale*, Editura Universitatea Alexandru Ioan Cuza, Iași
Gianina Ana Masari, *Psihopedagogia Succesului*, Polirom, Iași, 2003
Ioan Cerghit, *Metode de învățământ*, Polirom, Iași, 2006
Legea nr. 17/2007 din 09/01/2007 pentru Promovarea Tuturo Formelor de Excelență în Școlile din Europa, Iunie, 2006
Marian Bejat, *Ce este taalentul ?*, Editura Științifică, București, 1971
Marian Bejat, *Talent, inteligență. Creativitate*, Editura Științifică, București, 1971
Miftode V., *Tratat de metodologie sociologică*, Iași, Editura Lumen, 2003
Mihai Jigău, *Copii supradotați*, Editura Științifică, București, 1994
The Education of gifted children in Ibero- America, UNESCO, 2004
Yolanda Benito, *Copiii Supradotați*, Polirom, Iași, 2003