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ECHA NEWS

EUROPEAN COUNCIL FOR HIGH ABILITY

SPRING 2016

The First 16 Months of the European Talent Support Network:

Great Progress and Eight Possible Misunderstandings

PETER CSERMELY, *HUNGARY*

16 months after the decision of the 2014 ECHA General Assembly to support, regulate and guide the formation of the European Talent Support Network, the development of this Network became a widely accepted, grass-root self-organization process. The European Talent Support Network now spans more than 25 European countries, and draws interest from all other continents in the world. The Network is a rich source of European cultural diversity, providing a wonderful resource of best practices to apply cutting edge scientific results in the field of high ability and to help highly able people in Europe. The Network started to form excellent joint actions – also involving talented young people from various European countries. After only 16 months this progress is rather remarkable. I owe great thanks to all participants in this process, who devoted their time and efforts as volunteers. The Network already proved to be a self-correcting, learning organization, where the help and guidance of ECHA was a key element of success. An important element of continuous self-correction is to avoid bureaucracy, which may arise during the intensified cooperation process. Trust and personal contacts proved to be crucial in network building. Sharing and giving, transparency, serving others, as well as establishing a joint identity, joint service and community feeling were and remain the key values of the European Talent Support Network.

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CONTENT SPRING 2016

Brief chronology of events after the decision of the 2014 ECHA General Assembly to support, regulate and guide the formation of the European Talent Support Network

a.) 18 September 2014: The General Assembly of ECHA accepted the proposal for the Development of a European Talent Support Network with no votes against and 4 abstentions and elected Lianne Hoogeveen as president, Christian Fischer and Margaret Sutherland (2014-2018), Csilla Fuszek and Colm O'Reilly (2014-2016) as members of the ECHA Accreditation Committee by a secret ballot.

b.) 20 September 2014: the Accreditation Committee had its first meeting in Ljubljana.

c.) 17 October 2014: the Accreditation Committee had its second meeting in Dublin.

d.) 3 November 2014: answers to several frequently asked questions on the European Talent Support network were published on the ECHA web-site (http://echa.info/110-frequently-asked-questions-on-the-european-talent-support-network).

e.) 11 February 2015: a widely publicized open call for applications to be a European Talent Centre was published on the ECHA web-site (http://echa.info/121-call-for-application-to-be-a-european-talent-centre), and was sent (among others) to all ECHA members.

f.) 7 April 2015: 28 applications from 18 European countries (Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland and Turkey) and even one from Brazil were submitted (http://echa.info/125-large-interest-for-the-establishment-of-a-european-talent-support-network).

g.) 14 April 2015: the Accreditation Committee had its third meeting in Nijmegen.

h.) 4 July 2015: after a careful evaluation, 15 of these applications (more than half) was judged by the ECHA Accreditation Committee as passing the 70% scoring threshold of the clearly worded selection criteria, which were published at the time of the open call for applications including the scoring sheet of the applications; after notifying the applicants the organization of the Estonian European Talent Centre informed us that in the meantime there was a sudden unfavourable change in the life of this organization, which made them unable to act as a European Talent Centre in the first round of the applications. This is how the final number of European Talent Centres in the first round of the application process became 14 (http://echa.info/129-breaking-news-the-first-14-european-talent-centres; http://echa.info/high-ability-in-europe/#).

i.) 29 September 2015: the first 14 European Talent Centres were inaugurated in the Brussels building of the European Parliament (http://echa.info/137-talent-support-map-of-europe-info-on-european-talent-centres-was-published) in the presence of Tibor Navracsics, the EU Commissioner of education, culture, youth and sports, Robert-Jan Smits, the Director General of research & innovation, as well as several members of the European Parliament (Kinga Gál/HU hosting the event, Sean Kelly/IE and Igor Soltes/SL). Representatives of all 14 European Talent Centres had their first meeting electing Lianne Hoogeveen as interim representative of the Network, and Csilla Fuszek as interim coordinator of the Network until 31 December 2016. Centre representatives agreed a.) to continue their discussions on a regular basis; b.) to issue a call for the registration of European Talent Points and on the main guidelines of the registration process; c.) to apply for EU funds in Erasmus+, Creative Europe and Horizon2020 calls; d.) to establish a Youth Committee by delegating one young talented person per Centre; e.) to consider the feasibility of the establishment of a European Talent Portal. Representatives welcomed the European Youth Summit (http://www.youthsummit.eu/) taking place in parallel with the 2016 ECHA Conference in Vienna.

j.) 12 November 2015: an open call for the application to become a European Talent Point was published on the ECHA web-site, and was widely publicized (http://echa.info/141-call-for-application-to-be-a-european-talent-point).

k.) 31 January 2016: more than 200 applications to become a European Talent Point from more than 20 European countries were received.

l.) February 2016: preparation of a joint Erasmus+ application (coordinator Colm O'Reilly), Creative Europe application in 2016 (coordinator Csilla Fuszek), as well as a Horizon2020 application in 2017 (coordinators: Albert Ziegler and Heidrun Stöger) was intensified; preparation of a 2nd call for European Talent Centres (now with the possibility of Associated European Talent Centres) is ongoing, and with coordination of Javier Touron a thinking process started on a potential European Talent Space, which will be a 3D virtual world social network for the highly able people in Europe.

m.) 12 February 2016: the Accreditation/Qualification Committee had its fourth meeting in Budapest

n.) March 2016: the Qualification Committee had its fifth meeting in Vienna

o.) 15 March 2016: the second call on European Talent Centres was published

p.) 30 April 2016: deadline of the second call on European Talent Centres

q.) June 2016: the Qualification Committee will have its sixth meeting in Vienna

r.) 30 September 2016: planned deadline of the second call on European Talent Points

s.) November 2016: election of the Council of the European Talent Support Network starting to operate from 1 January 2017.

The 16 months of the European Talent Support Network is an age when an infant starts to walk and speak. However, truly understandably, the infant's very first movements and words are not always correct, and often contain slight errors and misunderstandings. This is very natural, and actually very helpful, since it induces self-correction, which is a key ingredient of progress. In the following part I will list eight misunderstandings about the European Talent Support Network, and will try to formulate a hopefully close-to-consensus version of the related views.

Misunderstanding 1:

The Network is an elite club of a few key players declaring themselves to be elite by self-nomination and self-qualification

Four of the first 14 Centres (29%) are indeed from the organizations of the 5 persons forming the committee judging the applications (obviously, these representatives did not take part in the judgement of their own centre). This was expected, since the Committee members were selected from those institutions, which, in fact, were operating as "European Talent Centres" already much before this process. There will be future rounds of applications most probably each coming year, but definitely in 2016. It is possible that many of the 13 initial applicants that were not approved in the first round will pass the selection threshold in the second round, since in the consultations before, during and after the selection process some centres worked hard to improve their work and/or application further, and made efforts to become qualified as a European Talent Centre. We also know about other organizations from other European countries, which will most probably submit an application in 2016, or later. In January 2016 we received more than 200 European Talent Point applications from 25 European countries. The first 16 months of vigorous growth, the plans for further extensions, the trust, enthusiasm and love how existing Network members welcomed new ones I hope already convinced those, who thought that the European Talent Support Network will be a 'closed elite club' that it is just the opposite of that: a self-organizing, living entity, wanting to help just as many cross-country cooperation within (and even outside) Europe, which is helpful, useful, and which can be organized by the existing capacities.

Misunderstanding 2:

The Network is directed from one central headquarter

Different versions of this statement never specify what is actually this "central headquarter". The European Talent Centre in Budapest? We have 13 more European Talent Centres. Many of them have an equally active role in Network building as the Budapest Centre. ECHA? ECHA does help and guide the formation of the European Talent Support Network and offered help in formulating its regulation at the beginning of the organization process. But this is an initial help, which is needed to use the unique expertise of ECHA members to ensure the high quality and cultural multiplicity of the resulting Network. As the Network grows and gains experience, I guess around its "school age", no direct help will be necessary for its further development. However, these ideas are currently premature, and will be discussed by ECHA and the Network in a few years from now. The Network has already several "leaders", like Lianne Hoogeveen, its representative, Csilla Fuszek, Colm O'Reilly, Anna Maria Roncoroni, Heidrun Stöger, Javier Touron and Albert Ziegler organizing key actions of the Network, Christian Fischer and Margaret Sutherland participating in the ECHA Qualification Committee qualifying European Talent Centres (together with 3 other ECHA members listed above) and the 9 representatives of European Talent Centres (Elisabeth Halmer, Mojca Jurisevic, Jana Klagova, Tessa Kieboom, Victor Mueller-Oppliger, Brone Narkeviciene/ Leonas Narkevicius, Ugur Sak, Johanna Stahl, Stanislav Zelenda) not mentioned in the list above. This "leader list" now includes the representatives of more than 200 European Talent Points and grows from month to month. During the Network development all European Talent Centres and Points remained independent, and are tied only by their voluntarily accepted cooperative actions. This Network will never be a hierarchical, but will remain a network with many horizontal contacts.

Misunderstanding 3:

The Network is a scale-up of the Hungarian Talent Support Network

The European Talent Support Network was established by a completely different process than the Hungarian Network. ECHA, with its traditions of 25 years, high quality membership, multitude of experiences reflecting the cultural diversity of Europe, and, last but not least, solid scientific background gave an unprecedented unique help in the formation of the European Talent Support Network. ECHA accepted the network building programme in a very democratic process, where the original plans were modified several times (and they are still being modified as practice and experience suggests), which already at the very beginning made the structure and forms of the European Network completely different of the Hungarian Network.

Misunderstanding 4:

The Network is only a bureaucratic burden, which gives empty titles to its participants

Why is the participation in the European Talent Support Network different from conferring titles and having administrative ballast? The qualification of European Talent Centres and the registration of European Talent Points increases several benefits of inter-organizational cooperation, such as

- exchange of best practices;
- increase the number of cross-country research projects in the field;
- increase of the stability and robustness of everyday work (due to the increased exchangeability of colleagues in case of maternity/paternity-leave, sickness, personal problems, etc.);
- increase of community-feeling giving emotional and structural help for those participating in the network;
- increase of the effectiveness of using material resources in a region;
- increase of cooperation between talented young people enhancing their creative productivity (e.g. by using peer-support to become more excellent);
- extension of the number of gifted/ talented people receiving recognition and support;
- extension of the number of people (teachers, mentors, parents, experts, scientists or business people) involved in talent support;
- creation of better and/or more effective chances to obtain local, corporate social responsibility, national and EU funding;

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Editorial

ANNETTE HEINBOKEL, *GERMANY*

This spring 2016 issue of ECHA News is full of information from conferences, the 21st World Conference on Gifted and Talented Children in Odense, Denmark, and the 15th ECHA Conference in Vienna, Austria. Having attended many conferences it's interesting to note what is new – and also that the basics that have been known for decades are still the same, but are being adopted by more and more states, school districts, individual schools and teachers.

Being German, I of course know more about the development in Germany: you, the members of ECHA, are responsible for providing the other members with information about your countries.

The latest development in Germany.

After the 'Kultusministerkonferenz' (the body of all the 16 ministers responsible for education) had published a paper called "Förderstrategie für leistungsstarke Schülerinnen und Schüler" (Strategy to Promote High Achieving Students) in June 2015, the individual ministries met to discuss further developments. Three ministries at present dominated by conservative parties met in December 2015, 13 ministries dominated by socialist / green parties followed suit in February 2016.

What is really interesting about the development: whereas conservative parties and/or teacher associations have been in favour of gifted education for decades (however, they did not always do what experts deemed to be 'state of the art' or 'best practice' in this area), socialist and/or teacher associations had a negative attitude towards gifted children, their parents and the whole business of gifted education. This seems to be changing. Ties Rabe SPD (Socialist) senator for schools in Hamburg, said: "Right wing people look after the clever ones, left wing people after those that have been left behind: it doesn't work that way." In reality the promotion of bright children is a question of social justice, therefore a "genuine left subject".

For those who understand German: „Die Rechten kümmern sich um die Schlauen, die Linken um die Abgehängten: So funktioniert das nicht" (…) In Wirklichkeit sei die Begabtenförderung eine Frage der sozialen Gerechtigkeit, ein „echtes linkes Thema" also (Die ZEIT, 25.2.2016).

As I wrote in the autumn 2015 issue of ECHA News: Let's see what will finally end up in all the classrooms – and how long that will take.

Annette Heinbokel, editor
Contact: annette.heinbokel@swbmail.de

Financial Report
01 January 2015 – 31 December 2015

TESSA KIEBOOM, *TREASURER, BELGIUM*

Contact:
tessa.kieboom@cbo-antwerpen.be

OPENING BALANCE 01.01.2015 **46.416,12 €**

IN		**OUT**	
full membership (*)	10.480,98 €	Ingenico monthly fee	1.061,01 €
student membership (*)	26,35 €	Transaction charges	21,04 €
corporate membership (*)	1.148,16 €	bank costs + charges PC banking	31,20 €
		legal cost De Mul Zegger	370,50 €
Net interest	32,89 €	Dicks' ECHA News	2.177,70 €
		Annette Heinbokel ECHA News	1.050,00 €
conference video	38,00 €	T&F HAS	11.362,56 €
T&F overpayment GBP->EUR	1.805,74 €	Website ECHA	4.050,00 €
		Müller ECHA Conference Vienna	392,00 €
		ECHA Seminar BXL	840,00 €
		Hoogeveen BXL	65,00 €
		Trademark ECHA	1.754,50 €
		World Council membership	231,48 €
		Vienna Conference Fee Van Tricht	198,00 €
Total IN	**13.532,12 €**	**Total OUT**	**23.607,00 €**

(*) as a result of credit card payments membership fees are no longer rounded figures because of costs charged

CLOSING BALANCE 31.12.2015 **36.341,24 €**

- increase of the visibility of the issues related to giftedness, high ability and talent support leading to a better chance to change related policies;
- help the establishment of internationally supported / grounded minimum standards of talent management and talent support programmes in a region, country or (finally) in Europe.

Not titles, but all these options are the real values of the European Talent Support Network. Importantly, the data we need to register European Talent Points are needed to share them with others ensuring cooperation. From European Talent Centres we need somewhat more data but this is to ensure the high quality of these organizations. Please let us know if you find any segments of the forms, which you think are not needed, not necessary or too complicated.

Misunderstanding 5:

European Talent Centres are more powerful, more prestigious than European Talent Points

Both European Talent Centres and European Talent Points are equal players of the mutual cooperation in the European Talent Support Network. European Talent Points have all the benefits of the Network (including the support of European Talent Centres). European Talent Centres have some more responsibilities: they organize cooperation in a region, in a country and/or in the whole of Europe. European Talent Centres do not have "power" or "authority" over any European Talent Point. This was one important reason why a suggestion was made to change the word accreditation to qualification in the acceptance of European Talent Centres in order not to imply a hierarchically higher position of Centres in the Network than that of Points.

Misunderstanding 6:

The Network is requiring conformity of its European Talent Centres and European Talent Points to central guidelines and requirements

In the European Talent Support Network there are no "central guidelines' or other 'requirements' which restrict, modify or re-direct the activities of any European Talent Centre or European Talent Point. Requirements, such as the ability to communicate in English, are only there to ensure efficient cooperation and – mostly in case of European Talent Centres – to guarantee a high quality and reliability of work. Multi-cultural diversity, a great richness of Europe in the field of gifted education, should be preserved and fostered by this process. In fact, the first 14 European Talent Centres were already highly diverse. Their determination to cooperate at the European level is their most important common denominator – besides high quality work in their own field related to gifted education and talent support.

Misunderstanding 7:

The Network is for talented people only and does not serve the gifted or the highly able

There are decade-long debates on the precise meaning, content and differences of the expressions "talented", "gifted" and "highly able" (any many similar expressions used in the field). Though the European Talent Support Network has the word "talent" in its name, its Centres, and Points are supporting a wide range of gifted and highly able people (young and older alike). The Network does not restricts talent to "high achievement", since its members understand that giftedness and high ability have a million forms, and exactly the novelty of this million forms is giving Europe those strikingly, disruptively, and astonishingly novel solutions, what the novel challenges of the 21st century require. As it was nicely stated in the 2014 ECHA General Assembly decision: the Network "sees the individual at all different ages and their context irrespective of socio-economic status with interconnections at pre-school, school and university level." The Network will never 'brainwash', 'domesticate' or 'control' gifted individuals, since it highly honours the individuality and freedom of development of gifted people. The Network wants to open new (also Europe-wide and world-wide) dimensions for growth for the highly able, and to prevent any measure, which reduce their possibilities to develop.

Misunderstanding 8:

The Network and ECHA became cards in a political game

There is a growing intensity of contacts between ECHA, the European Talent Support Network and the European Parliament, the European Commission, as well as the governments of European countries (particularly those, who serve in the actual EU-presidency trio). These contacts are important to increase the chances of financial help of talent support from the EU and European countries, as well as the inclusion of gifted education and talent support-related matters into educational (and many other) policies both at the EU and at the member state level. All these were long-time goals of ECHA, which were also stated in the Articles of ECHA as parts of the aims of the organization. The Network will never sacrifice the rights of gifted and highly able individuals for individual treatment, freedom and special education as a part of a political compromise.

Please note that the above sentences were my attempts to formulate a close-to-consensus view in key issues of the European Talent Support Network. These views are based on several discussions with Network members. However, despite of the many discussions, we need to refine them further. Therefore, I ask all readers of this summary to write their criticism, questions, or comments to my email address (see below). Thank you very much for your views, help and contribution to make the European Talent Support Network even better!

***Peter Csermely**, President of ECHA*
Contact: csermelynet@gmail.com

21st World Conference of the World Council for Gifted and Talented Children – Odense, Denmark, August 2015

OLE KYED, *DENMARK*

"Being born in a duck yard does not matter if only you are hatched from a swan's egg"
Hans Christian Andersen conveys this message in his fairy tale about "the ugly duckling". Exactly this story about the small duckling being bullied and hunted but ending up rustling its feathers, curving its slender neck and crying joyfully from happiness fits quite well into the Danish opinion about being gifted and having talent. In the end it will show that you have managed. You will forget all the pain, the many years of frustration and exclusion, the loneliness and the low confidence in yourself. It is all forgotten the day you find your place in life and get good results.

One of the reasons that so few Danish teachers and other professionals participated in the 21st World Conference in Odense, the home town of Hans Christian Andersen, was that the Danish schools had just opened after their summer holidays. Teachers and professionals were fully occupied, even though the subject and theme of the conference was relevant and exciting for teachers and other professionals. How can the theoretical knowledge be implemented through didactic measures in the daily life of children? How can we "Turn research into practice", an area which is still to be introduced into Danish educational institutions for school teachers and kindergarten teachers.

Of the 550 participants from all over the world about 110 persons from Denmark came throughout the week and participated some of the time.

For the many participants in the conference it was a rich experience. There was plenty of sharing of experiences among participants from the various countries. There was a very broad spectrum of themes and presentations. There were lots of discussions about learning environment, educational methods, educational differentiation, classroom culture, emotional development etc. The participants inspired each other and many returned home with brand new ideas for concrete measures in their daily work and life. Lots of talks about establishing national and international networks and websites where didactic questions can be discussed. How to find the gifted children in the classroom and how to handle their specific problems and use their resources. It all contributed to the focus on how to find and release the potential of every pupil. And now that the conference is a couple of months behind us we can see that a process has started. Professionals working with gifted children and their challenges have experienced a growing interest and curiosity concerning their work, both from schools and from municipalities.

As a new thing the organizing committee – together with the parent organization Gifted Children – had chosen to arrange a Parents' Day the day before the opening of the conference. It was held on the Sunday and this made it possible for about 80 parents and teachers to participate. The theme was: "Your child is gifted – what now?" The participants had the opportunity to meet three members of the present executive committee, the chairman Leslie Graves *("Three Generations of Giftedness – no Bed of Roses")*, Julia L. Roberts and Ken McCluskey *("Is it ADHD or Just Energy?")* as well as Shirley Kokot *("Your Child is Gifted – what now?)* and Dorothy Sisk, one of the founding members of the World Council.

I had the opportunity to participate with a workshop *("What does it mean to be gifted in the Danish culture? – Challenges and barriers")*. The day offered a lot of opportunities for exchanging experiences among the parents and the international professionals working in the field for many years. It was a unique chance for the parents, but certainly also for the professionals.

In connection with the conference a new book in Danish – the 2nd edition of 'The Intelligent Child' – was successfully launched, helping to create a focus on the theme.

Among the post conference options there was a visit to the Science Center Sorø, where the Nordic conference committee met and planned for future Nordic conferences in giftedness. The next conference will be in Vasa, Finland – 1st and 2nd September 2016.

To organize a conference like the World Conference is hard work and takes a lot of energy in people's spare hours. The logistics need to be well prepared, and due to a new system things did not turn out as planned and expected. We learned that it is a good idea to have very close co-operation with the world council.

Denmark still has a long journey ahead concerning acknowledgement of gifted children's needs and problems, and this path is traveled mainly by a few fiery souls. Luckily we see these people both here in Denmark and in our co-operation with other countries.

The little Danish swan is still quite bashful, but we do not put our head under our wings anymore. We lift it and go forward towards new and higher goals in a still stronger way.

Ole Kyed *has worked as a school psychologist for more than 40 years and has been the prime motor for the whole debate about gifted and talented children in Denmark. He has been the Danish delegate at ECHA for many years and the Danish delegate to the World Council for Gifted and Talented Children*

Contact: info@olekyed.dk

Impressions of 15th ECHA Conference in Vienna, Austria

ATHINA PAPAKONSTANTINOU, *GREECE*

Taking part in a conference was a new experience for me and I feel really lucky that the 15th ECHA conference in Vienna gave me this opportunity. My first impression and most decisive was the sense of hospitality and intimacy that the organizing team conveyed to participants. The warm environment of the Hall of Science, the smiling faces of people working at the welcoming point helped me from the beginning to feel part of this conference. Most of all, I feel grateful that I had the opportunity to meet fellows from around the world to exchange experiences and new research ideas.

Conference in Motion – On the way to Krems (Photos: Heinbokel)
Roy Kübrich, Barbara Saring, Jaana Rasmussen, Viire Sepp

There were 609 participants, mostly from Austria of course (231), but also large groups from Germany (72) and the Netherlands (49) and even from as far away as Kazakhstan, Thailand and Sierra Leone.

Among the large number of remarkable workshops, some of them really drew my attention. I was particularly fascinated by a workshop presented by Christiane Fischer-Ontrup entitled: "Developing Motivational and Self-Regulation Skills in Gifted Students with Learning Difficulties – From an Individual Training to a Group Training" in which skilful techniques used by instructors helped young gifted underachievers to cope with factors that used to restrain their potential.

A while later I presented research work, about "High Ability Students' Family and Class Dynamics as Emerged through Family and Class Drawings", carried out by my supervisor, professor Aikaterini Gari, and two MsC students at the School of Psychology, Ioanna Mandaliou and me. It was an intriguing experience for me and despite the preceding stress, finally left me nothing but good memories. In future I hope I will continue researching and deepen my knowledge in facilitating and inhibiting factors of motivation.

On the Friday the "Conference was in Motion": participants were taken by boat to the Danube University in Krems. There was a lecture on the boat by Gabriele Weigand on Gifted Education and Cultural Diversity and an impressive interview with Ari Rath on 'Gifted people leaving their home countries and realizing their talents'. Rath had to leave Vienna in 1938 and went to Palestine. Until his retirement he was Editor and Managing Director of the Jerusalem Post. – At Krems there were also lectures and presentations, and on the way back participants enjoyed the gala dinner.

One point I would like to mention, is that paper presentation sessions should be scheduled in a way that more people could watch each presentation, as in my own session only five people were present in the hall and among them four were presenters.

Athina Papakonstantinou *is a MsC student at the School of Psychology, Department of Philosophy, Pedagogy and Psychology, University and Kapodistrian University of Athens*

Contact: apapak@mail.com

State of the Art – Educating Gifted and Talented Students in Denmark

BIRGITTE ARNVIG, *DENMARK*

In 2014 a new school[1] reform[2] became law for all state schools in Denmark. One of three main topics is driven by the fact that the state school (Folkeskolen) must challenge all pupils to reach their full potential. In Denmark there has never before been a policy to accommodate gifted or talented students in primary and secondary school as in other European countries. Nevertheless, since 2003 there has been a law that at High School, there should be some kind of attention given to this special group of students. In 2011 the Government published a report on how to accommodate the education of gifted and talented students in Denmark. Since then some municipalities have worked on this singlehandedly, creating offers and strategies to accommodate and develop options for the special needs of gifted and talented students. In this article the state of the art will be divided into three topics concerning the law and education for gifted and talented students as follows

- **Government statutes**
- **Municipalities' strategies and activities**
- **Non-Governmental Organizations**
- **Competitions & Camps**
- **Conferences**
- **What needs to be done**

The government's point of view

In light of the Report of Talent in 2011[3], it suddenly became legal to talk about the need to provide special education for Gifted and Talented (G&T) students. Before it had never been a real issue unless the education referred to sports, the sciences or math. Of course the change in the high school curriculum, in 2003, had also had a huge influence on the way of seeing the needs of special education for G&T students. Thereafter Denmark had its first science education lab in Sorø, donated by Maersk Mc. Moeller in 2008-2009, and then came science high schools and state schools with a special profile for sports.

The school reform in 2014 reviewed learning in new G&T areas, requiring:

- State schools (Folkeskolen) must challenge all pupils to reach their full potential
- Allow state schools to create talent classes in the area of sports & music
- Divide students into teams half the time they are in school
- Time for in-depth academic study
- Three levels of challenges – national goals

Upper secondary education – high school (grammar school) reform (2003)

- Special offers for gifted and talented students
- Opportunity to study at university[4]

In 2003 the Government changed the high school system. One of the notable changes was that it was statutory to provide educational opportunities to G&T students. High schools are allowed to collaborate with universities, allowing G&T students to study at university level while still attending high school.

The Academy for Talented Youth[5] (ATU) is one option for G&T students. A lot of high schools have committed themselves to ATU, because then they do not have to create other special programmes for the G&T students at their school in order to satisfy the statutes. It is an option where the students can join educational programmes in school or after school, join excursions, lectures at universities, etc.

It started in Copenhagen and has now expanded throughout Zealand to the middle of Jutland and Fyn and is a fine and good supplement for their interests and development.

Upper secondary education

Today there are all in all 232 (state and non-state) high schools in Denmark. Almost half of them, 114, have a special profile. The upper secondary education normally lasts three years, because of the special profiles some of the schools expand the duration by one year.

See list of profiles below.

Upper Secondary Education

www.statistikbanken.dk	Number	Expanded
Profile Gymnasium	114 out of 232	
Team Denmark – Sports	18	1 year
http://eliteidraetsgymnasier.dk/gymnasier/		
Science	88	
http://science-gym.dk/gymnasier.htm		
Music - MGK – Music Base Course	8	1 year
http://www.musikalskgrundkursus.dk		
Drawing and Art, Visuel HF Viborg	1	1 year
Elite Business College, Niels Brock	1	
✓ Rybneers, Carpentry	1	
http://www.rybners.dk/se-video-med-dyG&Tige-elever-fra-talentvejen/		
✓ IB, International Baccalaureate	18	

[1]school means state school from grade 0-9, age 6-15, covers primary and secondary school.
[2]http://eng.uvm.dk/Education
[3]http://www.uvm.dk/service/~/media/UVM/Filer/Udd/Folke/PDF11/110414_Talentrapport_hele.ashx
[4]http://www.uvm.dk/Uddannelser/Gymnasiale-uddannelser/Forsoeg-og-udvikling/Udviklingsplanens-anden-fase/Indsatsomraade-7-Talentudvikling
[5]http://ungetalenter.dk/frontpage

"Youth School" (Ungdomsskole) statutory

- Masterclass, education and leisure time activities, late afternoon school, 7th grade and up (13-18 y.)

In Denmark it is compulsory that every municipality has a so-called Youth School. Children from 7th grade and up – 13 to 18 years old – can join the school in the evening hours, receive education and do leisure time activities. Some of these schools offer master classes. The students can be taught in special G&T areas e.g. space lab, how to become a writer, politics and debate. Sometimes they have to submit an application or just join the class.

Municipalities' strategies and activities

In Denmark there are 98 municipalities. During the last five to eight years more and more municipalities have developed strategies concerning the needs of G&T students. A survey[6] among the 98 municipalities showed, that at least 14 municipalities provide education for G&T students, though most of the education is accommodated at secondary or upper secondary schools. Very few municipalities have programmes targeting primary schools including 5th grade. 74 municipalities chose not to answer the survey. Here are some examples and a short comment of what characterizes each municipality.

Municipality

- **Greve** *has worked with G&T students since 2007. It was politically approved in 2013. Every year the headteachers have to explain how they have worked with G&T students and what they have accomplished.*
- **Gentofte** *is one of the first municipalities to create a consulting team to support the teachers of G&T students. Four teachers with knowledge about G&T students are connected to the team and offer special courses for teachers.*
- **Slagelse** *– the politicians have decided to train to teach G&T students. They specialize in different public school profiles for example: Antvortskovskolen[7]. Learning Tech lab (Lego & Robots), peer to peer teaching and more*
- **Sorø** *– the politicians have just decided upon a new strategy for G&T students; e.g. camps, training teachers, master classes etc.*
- **Hoersholm** *has worked for many years to support G&T students. Hoersholm is one of the pioneers in the field. Because of the long term work, the G&T programmes are today incorporated into the daily school system.*
- **Lyngby-Taarbaek** *is in its development phase. They joined a network of internet sites where they upload education, etc., concerning G&T students. http://skolenivirkeligheden.dk/lyngby-taarbaek*
- **Esbjerg** *– The Blaabjerggaard School – today known as Vita School (Vitaskolen) has for several years had success with a class for talented students they created called Da Vinci. The school participates in research with The Danish School of Education (DPU), concerning G&T students.*

Private Schools – Charter Schools for G&T students

In 2004 the first school for gifted children was founded near Copenhagen. It was the Mentiqa school – later it changed its name to Atheneskolen. In the following years three more Mentiqa schools were founded. Unfortunately only one of these schools still exists today. Other schools have adopted the concept of having special education for G&T students. Private schools – Charter Schools tend to open new classes only for G&T students, which are often combined with the high school. For example, the G&T students can attend the upper secondary school beginning at the 8th grade and meanwhile attend high school.

Primary and secondary schools for G&T in Denmark

- **Mentiqa**
  - *Hadsten* ***closed***
  - *Odense (Fyn)* ***closed***
  - *Aalborg (Jutland)*
- **Atheneskolen**
  - *Copenhagen – Soeborg (Zealand)*
- **Koege Real Private School and Gymnasium**
  - *From 4th grade*

Examples of upper secondary schools for G&T five years programme

From 8th grade – five years

- **Koege Real Private School and Gymnasium**
- **Bagsvaerd Kostskole and Gymnasium**
- **Oeregaard Gymnasium**

Non-Governmental Organization

- **UNF[8] – The Youth Science Union**
  The UNF is a science union for young people and has existed since 1824. A unique institution whose main purpose is to spread knowledge about the sciences to young people. They have departments in Copenhagen, Aalborg, Aarhus and Odense, and cover all of Denmark.
- **Gifted Children[9] – social union for gifted children**
  Gifted Children is a social union whose purpose is to support gifted children in the top five percentages of the intelligence scale. They support these children's families through activities, networking and sharing knowledge. They also help and consult teachers and schools to support gifted children and contribute to the public debate about how to accommodate gifted children.

The union has officially existed for a decade and has about 1500 family members.

Competitions and camps

During the last decade or two, it has become more common to participate in competitions and camps. This goes for both secondary and upper secondary school. The Danish business community supports some of these competitions to encourage young students to excel in their field and hopefully to explore the joy of inventing and brainstorming, and because we need more educated scientists in Denmark. Here are some examples of bigger competitions in Denmark.

[6]Survey made by Birgitte Arnvig, birgitte@arnvig.org for more details.
[7]http://antvorskovskole.slagelse.dk/om-skolen/learninG&Techlab/learninG&Techlab-hvor-er-vi-nu
[8]https://unf.dk
[9]http://giftedchildren.dk

Competitions – national and international

- **State School – secondary School**
  - Unge forskere[10] (science)
  - Min vildeste idé[10] (science)
  - First Lego League[11], world wide, (Lego Robots)
- **Grammar school – upper secondary school**
  - Georg Mohr[12] (math)
  - Unge forskere[10] (science)
  - Forskerspirer[13], (science), University of Copenhagen,
  - Olympic games: World Wide (physics, biology and math)
- **Other**
  It is not only in the field of science that there are competitions, but also in areas such as bricklaying, carpentry and hairstyling. Every year the Danish Television (DR) has the international competitions for conductors in the Malko[14] competition.

Camps

It has become more common in Denmark to create a camp during vacation or at school. The student can submit an application through a school, a union or as a private person depending on the institution that creates the camp.

- **Examples of camps**
  - Sciencecamp[15] at Sorø Sciencetalenter (Science)
  - UNF[16] camps (Science)
  - Technical University of Denmark[17], DTU, (Science)
  - Camps for private schools[18]
  - Danfoss Universe[19] (Science)
  - Boarding School[20] (How to become a writer)

Right now it is very popular to create science camps, but more camps for sports, arts, and writing have been allowed.

Danish Conferences

Given the size of Denmark, there is a lot going on concerning the sharing of G&T knowledge. In 2015 the international *World Council for Gifted and Talented Children (WCGTC)* held its conference in Denmark in Odense. Before that Sciencetalenter[14] in Sorø had established a Nordic cooperation to share knowledge which holds a Nordic conference every year. Next year the conference will be held in Finland.

- **Science Talents[21] – Sorø**
  - Annual Nordic Conference for three years. In 2016 it will be held in Finland
  - Annual Day of Talent – the second Thursday in December
  - Annual Parliament Day at "Folketinget" in May
- **ATU (ATU.dk) – grammar school, annual**
- **University College (UCC) – Public school**
- **Talent Denmark (sport) (talent-dk.dk)**
- **Parent day related to WCGTC**

What we need to do

To accommodate G&T children and students we need to focus on who these kids are. Right now we are simply not good enough at identifying the kids. Danish research shows that 40 percent of the children do not thrive, another study shows that a gifted child will at some point during school not thrive. It is necessary that we have tools to identify the children before they enter school because many students lose interest in learning and they become underachievers. Teachers and pedagogical staff need the right education to accommodate these children's needs and development. We need to do more research in Denmark to understand the behaviour and needs of these children. We have to develop textbooks and educational material to support teachers and students. And finally we have to educate teachers to educate the G&T students.

***Birgitte Arnvig**, cand. pæd., has studied at the Danish School of Education. At present she educates teachers to identify and accommodate the needs of gifted and talented children in school as well as after school, and she has an interest in gender issues among gifted and talented children.*

Contact Birgitte@arnvig.org

[10] http://ungeforskere.danishsciencefactory.dk/content/unge-forskere-english
[11] http://dk.hjernekraft.org
[12] http://www.georgmohr.dk
[13] http://forskerspirer.ku.dk
[14] https://www.malkocompetition.com/about/history?lang=eng
[15] http://sciencetalenter.dk
[16] https://camps.unf.dk
[17] http://www.dtu.dk/Samarbejde/Gymnasier-og-skoler/Til-elever/Camps-konkurrencer-olympiader
[18] http://talentcamp.dk
[19] http://universe.dk/oplevelse/science-camp/
[20] http://osterskov.dk/arrangementer/
[21] http://sciencetalenter.dk

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Annette Heinbokel
Bismarckstr. 100
28203 Bremen · Germany
Phone: +49 421 69675131
annette.heinbokel@swbmail.de

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The Dynamics of Gifted Students' Psycho-Educational Provisions in Greece

AIKATERINI GARI, *GREECE*

Gradual changes are being noticed in Greece regarding high ability students' education. The Greek Centre for Talented Youth (CTY-GR) was established in Greece in summer 2013, supervised by the Johns Hopkins University Center for Talented Youth[1] and funded by the Stavros Niarchos Foundation. It has been set under the auspices of the Greek Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs and organized a great range of educational activities such as summer camps, CTY-Online programmes for students of 9-15 years of age and weekend programmes for primary school pupils of 11-12 years[2]. One year earlier (April 2012), the Greek MENSA had organized an One-Day Conference at "Megaron, the Athens Concert Hall", entitled "Gifted and Talented Children and their Needs"[3], bringing together academics, child development experts, psychologists, teachers and parents who have special interest in high ability children and adolescents' needs. Meanwhile, in the winter of 2015, the "Hellenic Society for the Educational Provision of the Creative/Gifted/Talented Children and Adolescents"[4] has completed its tenth anniversary since its establishment, which means that it completed ten years of scientific activities for teachers and parents, mostly organized in Athens and in some rural areas of Greece, in close collaboration with the "Centre for the Development of Creativity" of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens focusing on the socio-emotional and psycho-educational characteristics of gifted and talented students in the Greek mainstream educational system. In fact, it has fulfilled a "first wave" of activities towards the state school community members' awareness and sensitization on creativity, giftedness and talent, focusing on teachers' and parents' beliefs via lectures, symposia, one-day conferences and various conference participations. Additionally, it implemented some initial psycho-educational interventions to some groups of teachers, mostly in state schools in Athens and a few state schools in smaller cities[5]. During this period, more and more parents and also teachers in state schools appeared to be interested in the ways they can meet the needs of high ability students within school and family and adopt specific strategies that may encourage their gifted psychosocial adaptation and well-being.

Research projects that have also been conducted with Greek teachers since 2000, tried to explore their attitudes towards the characteristics and educational needs of high ability students' (Gari, 2003; Gari, Kalantzi-Azizi, & Mylonas, 2000; Gari, & Mylonas, 2004). Although many studies have been conducted cross-culturally, examining teachers' perceptions, opinions and attitudes towards gifted children and their education, a clear picture on this issue does not exist so far (McCoach & Siegle, 2005; Tirri & Tallent-Runnels, 2004). Gender, socio-economic status, self-perceptions of giftedness, perceived knowledge of giftedness, contact with gifted persons, academic performance and previous experience of special gifted programmes appeared to be some of the important factors that differentiate their attitudes/opinions (Allodi & Rydelius, 2008, Sept.; Troxclair, 2013). In Greece, this picture seems to be much more unclear, due to a lack of systematic pre-service and in-service teachers' training on gifted children's educational and psychosocial needs (Gari, & Mylonas, 2004). The variables of teachers' field of expertise, prior teaching experience and working in special vs. general education that have recently been studied are significantly associated with their attitudes (Polyzopoulou, Kokaridas, Patsiaouras, & Gari, 2014).

For a deeper exploration of Greek teachers' beliefs, a research study, included in a broader research project was initially conducted with 568 teachers, females (50.4%) and males (49.3%), working at state schools in Athens (49.6%) and other smaller urban areas (50.4%), of primary (56.3%) and secondary education schools (43.7%). For the majority of the teachers (78.4%), teaching experience from both state and private schools was more than 11 years, while a large percentage of them had not attended postgraduate studies (51.8%) and approximately one third of them (32%) had attended seminars on special education and specifically on learning difficulties, sensory impairments and disabilities but not on gifted/talented students.

A questionnaire of 39 items was created for this study, based on Gagné & Nadeau's questionnaire (1985) and the McCoach & Siegle's questionnaire (2005) with a 7-point scale (1 "strongly disagree" to 7 "strongly agree"). Specifically, it consisted of Gagné & Nadeau's 34 original items and 5 additional items – culture bound – on how much teachers desire to attend a programme for the education of the gifted, how much their attitudes are positive/negative towards special programmes and ability grouping as well as to the extent they have met gifted adults in the past and gifted students in their classes.

Results showed that there were more similarities in beliefs than in differences, regarding teachers' positive attitudes towards the social value of gifted students and the idea of giftedness as a social capital, while the school-wide enrichment model was seen positively by the majority of them.

Two reliable factors emerged that were similar to two of the five original scales of Gagné and Nadeau's questionnaire: "school acceleration" (α=.85), "social value" (α=.78), while two other original scales were missing ("needs and support" and "ability grouping"). Additionally, two new factors emerged that incorporated the five culture bound questions "The gifted should be supported in mainstream schools/classes" (α=.60) and "I have met gifted children in Greek society/schools" (α=.84). These new factors point to the idea that gifted students and adults are easily met in teachers' everyday life at school and in society, and also that state schools

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should meet gifted students' needs, permit them to skip a grade under specific circumstances and establish funding of special programmes for the gifted.

Teacher' beliefs were differentiated in terms of place of working at school, section of education they worked in – primary and secondary – and gender. Teachers in smaller cities (M=5.11) and secondary education (M=5.08), as compared with teachers in Athens (M=4.83) and primary education (M=4.90), accepted more the belief that mainstream schools should meet the needs of gifted students and should financially support students with special difficulties as well as students with exceptional abilities (p<.001, p<.05, respectively). Additionally, teachers in Athens (M=4.44), the younger teachers with less teaching experience of 1-15 years (M=3.94) and males (M=4.36) answered that they had already met gifted individuals in personal relation networks and also gifted students in class, as compared with teachers in smaller cities (M=4.04, p<.01), with teaching experience higher than 16 years (M=4.29, p<.01) and females (M=4.11, p<.05). These results, presenting a detailed frame of teachers' beliefs in Greek state schools, show that those who teach in smaller urban areas and in secondary education are interested more strongly in understanding the educational needs of the gifted and supporting them financially with specific educational strategies and programmes, as had already happened in Greek state schools for students with learning difficulties. On the other hand, teachers in the capital, younger teachers and males seem to be more familiar with the gifted individuals in class and everyday life and seem to be more clearly predisposed to nominate them and try to provide special facilities in mainstream classes.

The necessity of providing knowledge and training on giftedness and talent for Greek pre-service and in-service teachers seems to be of great importance, along with the demand for establishing specific programmes within mainstream Greek educational system. Following the "parallel initiatives" that some Greek educational institutions had already taken, state school teachers should have chances to facilitate and support gifted students in mainstream schools and also to support themselves to be more effective in class (Tirri & Tallent-Runnels, 2004).

Aikaterini Gari *is Assoc. Professor of Social Psychology at the Faculty of Psychology in the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens and appointed Director of the "Centre for Creativity Development" (2012-). Since 2014, she has been a member of the Executive Council (2014-2018) of the International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology (IACCP). She is elected Chair of the Executive Committee Board of the "Hellenic Association for the Promotion of Education for the Creative, Gifted, Talented Children and Adolescents" (2003-2012, 2013-2015, 2016-) and also National Correspondent of the "European Council for High Ability" (ECHA) for Greece.*

Contact: agari@psych.uoa.gr
giftedness@psych.uoa.gr

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[1] http://cty.jhu.edu/students/index.html
[2] http://www.cty-greece.gr/el
[3] http://gifted.mensa.org.gr/lang=en
[4] http://www.gifted.gr
[5] http://www.gifted.gr

NEW BOOK

Heinbokel, Annette (2016).
Eine Klasse überspringen – sonst wäre ich fipsig geworden,
LIT Verlag, Münster

„I would have become fipsy had I not skipped." Although she is 80, Margret still remembers the boredom she felt in first grade in primary school. Today there are still children who are not challenged in school. When there are no extra tasks, there is no enrichment or if it is not enough, grade skipping one or more classes is a good option to counter lack of challenge. This book contains the experiences of parents, interviews with adolescents and the opinions of adults, who had skipped a grade. The adults were born between 1917 and 1987. 90 per cent of the women and 80 per cent of the men would skip again if circumstances were the same.

"There is nothing more unequal than the equal treatment of unequal people."
T. Jefferson

Gifted Education in Slovakia According to the Programme APROGEN

JOLANA LAZNIBATOVÁ, *SLOVAKIA*

The care and nurturing of gifted students varies with each specific country in which teaching occurs, and it also evolves over time as the experience of a particular programme grows. The outcomes of gifted education vary with such factors as the country's history of education, its culture, people, economy and the overall level of the country's educational system.

Why is it necessary to care for the gifted? There are at least two reasons why it is necessary to support gifted students and programmes aimed specifically at their growth:

- **Individual** – gifted education provides the opportunity for each person to achieve full development of their personality, abilities and talents, thus realizing their potential.
- **Social** – although talent is individual, it is a strategic human resource and an important component of a country's wealth. Gifted education benefits all citizens.

Since the future prosperity of any society depends on the development of its youth, no public or private organization can afford to waste the talent of gifted individuals. We are of the opinion that gifted education will thrive and be most effective only when it receives support on these four levels:

1. **Political** – governments, parliament, and the Ministry of Education are well-informed of the benefits of gifted education and have a positive attitude toward its implementation
2. **Economical** – approval and allocation of funds for the gifted
3. **Social** – overcoming the barriers and negative views on gifted education in public schools
4. **Teaching** – development of textbooks, teacher training, programmes, etc. for gifted students

Views on the number of gifted individuals in a population vary widely. Traditional statistical data, according to Gaussian distribution, indicate the population of gifted individuals is 2-3%. However, psychologists report, "We have as many gifted as we can identify and diagnose." Economists and politicians argue, "We have as many gifted as we can secure financially." The European Council in the *Declaration of 1248* states that one in five children in Europe is gifted. This means that the gifted make up about 20% of the population (this includes those gifted intellectually, artistically, and children with sporting abilities, as well as other types of giftedness). Educational experts in this field believe that if enough favorable conditions were created to promote and develop students' gifts and abilities, 20-25% of the population would be able to demonstrate exceptional performance in their area of giftedness, as a result of gifted education, in any type of human activity (Freeman 1996).

Psychologists stress that it is necessary to identify and support gifted children as soon as possible and at an early age. This may be compared to the principle in medicine: the sooner you start, the better and more efficient care is implemented. Despite this, professionals, as well as the general public in Slovakia, continue to debate fundamental options regarding the education of gifted students. Which path will best serve this population:

integration, inclusion
vs.
differentiation, exclusion

The parents of gifted children are keenly aware of the problems of gifted pupils' education in mainstream schools. First, there is the fact that they receive relatively little attention and thus they lack development of their intellectual potential. Second, students do not need to take full advantage of their capabilities to achieve very good or excellent results compared to average students. The reason that teachers don't dedicate much time to highly gifted children is because

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they are usually a small percentage of the overall class size. Slovakia, or rather, the former Czechoslovakia, was the first in Europe to begin addressing the issue of gifted children. This was based on the decision of the Ministry of Education to ask professionals – psychologists from the Research Institute of Child Psychology in Bratislava – to define the word "gifted". A team was then created to compare different types of talents: math, intellect, sports, arts, languages and more. In practice, this meant that the Ministry of Education required us to quantify levels of children's abilities in school, across various disciplines. At the same time, pupils were selected to participate in specialized classes at their schools.

This initial activity influenced scientific circles to intensively analyze the problems of gifted and talented children. In 1981, I presented and defended the first professional doctoral thesis on gifted education titled, "The Development of Mathematically Gifted Children". Summarized research results on different types of giftedness followed, and were compiled in "Psychology of Giftedness ", published in 1987. This book became a real springboard for further work with gifted children in Slovakia.

In 1991, fellow Czech and Slovak psychologists and I founded the *Czechoslovak Society for Gifted Children*. At this time, the parents of preschool children who noticed unusual abilities in their offspring began to approach us. These parents of 4-5 year-old children asked us for counseling services because they didn't know what to with children who could already read, write, count, recognize continents, countries of the world and their capitals and flags of states. The children were interested in many animals and their way of life, especially dinosaurs, knew a lot about the human body, about cars, and could recognize negative numbers. Many were curious about religion or philosophical questions and so on. It was parents who asked whether there was a school for such gifted children. They were an inspiration, and encouraged us to develop an alternative education programme for gifted children (Laznibatová 1993). The Ministry of Education agreed to validate alternative forms of education for gifted children.

Accordingly, it was on 1st Sept. 1993 when the pilot programme began in Bratislava, and the first classroom for gifted children opened. In 1996, this initial group of intellectually gifted students completed the entire first 4 years of primary education, in only 3 years' time. It was clearly confirmed that these children were developmentally ahead of their peers, and it was imperative to create other forms of work with and for them. Thanks to great interest from the parents to start educating gifted children, on 1st Jan 1998 the Ministry of Education set up a separate school for very gifted children, which was officially included in the network of Slovak schools at that time. In 2001, I published a comprehensive monograph about the experience of working with these children: "Gifted Pupils, Their Development, Education and Support" (Laznibatová 2001).

Next, an important milestone during this period was the gradual opening of classes for gifted children in various major cities of Slovakia, which worked under the same principle of applying alternative approaches and methods to working with gifted pupils. Official verification of such alternative forms of education of gifted children, under the heading *The Project of Alternative Care for Gifted Children*, was completed in 2007. This became the longest-running pilot programme in the history of the Slovak school system, comprising 14 years of study. The success and efficiency of working with intellectually gifted pupils resulted in a critical change in the country's educational system. For the first time, the education of gifted children was written into legislation, as outlined in the *School Act. 245/2008 Coll., paragraphs 103-109.*

In addition to this differentiated form of gifted education, the issue of "individualized approach" in an integrated classroom was addressed during this time. However, teachers in Slovakia were not generally prepared to work with or support gifted students; therefore, these practices with gifted children in the form of integration have not been altogether successful and effective. It was confirmed that it is not possible to work with gifted students by focusing solely on their performance in school and competitions. It is necessary to also address various aspects of their personality, emotional and social peculiarities, and other specifics of the development of gifted children.

Our philosophy and the concept of gifted education within *The Project on Alternative Care for Gifted Children* (1993-2007), was

based on the notion that gifted pupils should receive specific support and care, first by identifying them and then offering them a quality educational programme, prepared so that none will be denied the chance of developing his/hers potential at the highest possible level (within the Convention of the Rights of the Child). The aim of our work with the gifted had the following aspects applied:

- Individually differentiated approaches for every gifted child
- Expanding, deepening and enriching the standard curriculum
- Increased psychological care in the educational process
- Taking into consideration the particularities and specificities of each individual gifted child

Additionally, psychologists and educators tried to create adequate conditions in an accepting school environment for the development of intellectually gifted children, the goal being to stimulate and develop higher levels of thinking and encourage their development in personal, emotional and social capacities. Together, the team of professionals working with gifted children gradually formed new ways and methods of teaching and interacting with their students. The final output was a separate educational programme for gifted children – APROGEN Programme (*Alternative Programme of Education for the Gifted*, Laznibatová 2014), which provides educationally complex conditions for the continuous development of gifted students from age 5 to 18 years.

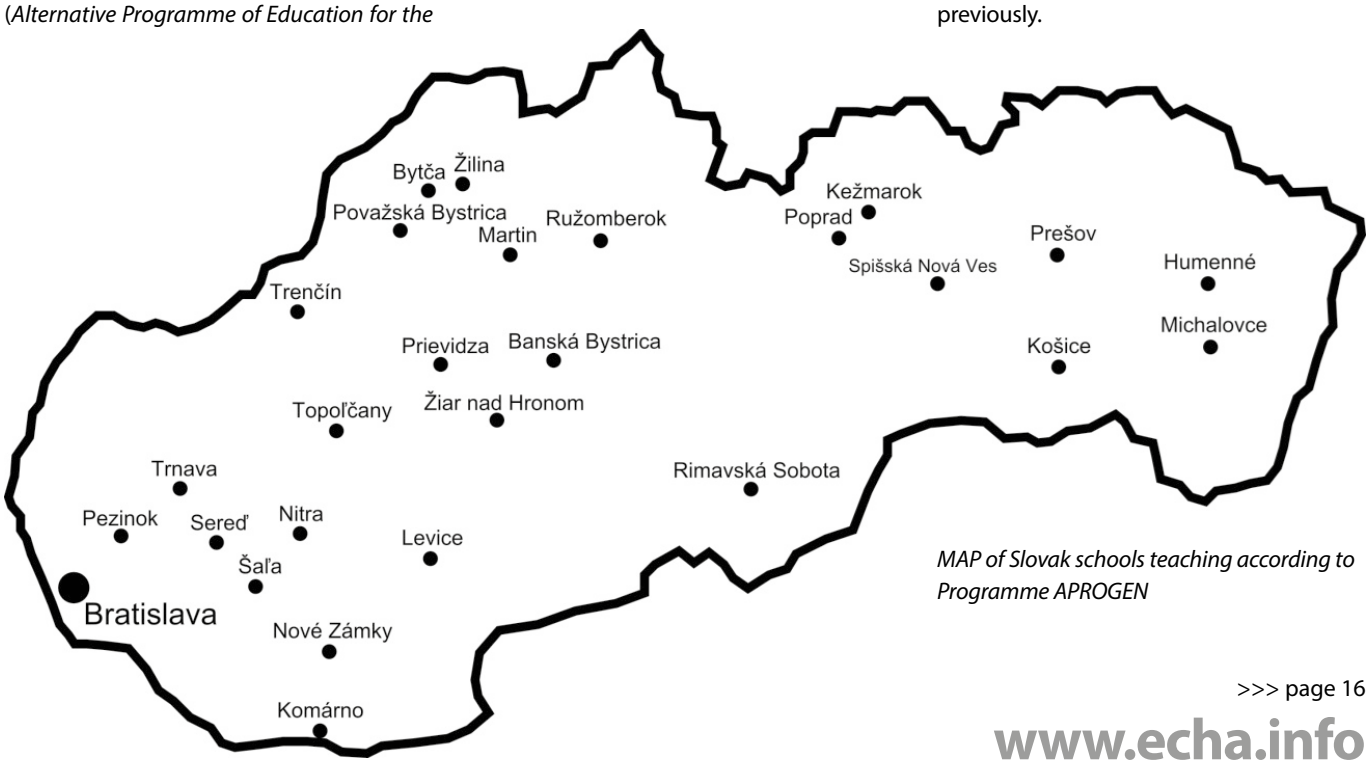
During our entire experience of working with gifted children, we noticed certain behaviors of gifted students, which can occur in either increased or decreased levels in the general population of children. They are:

- Reduced adaptability in the environment (adaptability)
- Reduced ability to communicate (communication)
- Reduced level of social contacts (sociability)
- Increased activity (hyperactivity)
- Increased sensation and perception (overexcitability)
- Increased imagination (imagination)
- Increased emotional sensitivity (over-sensitivity)
- Increased affectivity, explosiveness (impulsivity)
- Increased anxiety (anxiety)
- Increased maladjustment, closeness (individualism)
- Increased refusal of authorities (nonconformity)
- Increased need to be the first to stand out (ambition)
- Increased effort for perfection, fear of failure, the need to avoid failure (perfectionism)

Such reactions, traits and characteristics do not occur in each gifted child or equally in every child, but in the educational process it is necessary to take into account the incidence of the individual personality. Our work is characterized by three basic levels of practice in the educational process:

- Acceptance of their personalities
- Acceptance and tolerance of their differences
- Non-directive, non-authoritative approach to them.

From 1996-1997, with agreement from the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic, with the support of mayors and school councils, as well as the cooperation of local psychological counseling centres, schools started opening additional classes for gifted children at the primary level. The new programmes applied the same methods of selection and diagnosis of gifted children as the APROGEN programme, with the same principles of work and educational processes. The Slovak Republic now has an entire network of primary schools with classes for gifted children and a separate school for gifted children, all within the state school system. These schools apply the methodological approaches outlined previously.



MAP of Slovak schools teaching according to Programme APROGEN

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Because artistic and sporting talent can be developed through other institutions (sports schools, sports clubs or art schools and conservatories), we believe that the education of intellectually gifted students must be provided by primary schools. The APROGEN programme provides an educational programme for gifted children age 5 to 18 years old, available all day from 7 am to 5 pm in the school environment. There is before-school and after-school care, where children have the opportunity to develop their abilities, skills and creativity in a variety of hobby groups. We strive to ensure not only the development of a student's intellect and performance (knowledge, expertise, ability to process and retain information), but also each individual's personality (emotional health, sociability, communication, empathy, etc.).

After a relatively long period of intensive work in the area of gifted education (nearly a quarter of a century), we have confirmed that certain factors should be taken into account to avoid common mistakes:

1. It is not true that a gifted child must master double or triple the amount of curriculum compared to other children.
2. It is not true that every gifted child is equally gifted in all subjects, and that they must handle them all perfectly. Many gifted students are disharmonious or disproportionate, and there are only a few individuals who are multi-potentional.
3. It is not true that a gifted child has no behavioural problems – quite the opposite. Many gifted children are dealing with issues such as hypersensitivity, maladjustment, perfectionism, communication problems, etc.

At our school for the gifted, the SPMNDaG, we apply different educational methods and approaches as appropriate for each student. This means that children are not pushed to perform all at the same level. We respect each individual's interests and the personality of the child, and we encourage and support the involvement of parents. The school also plays an important role in the child's psychological development through everyday psychological services. These services support personal competences and individual development through expert assistance in solving the day-to-day problems of gifted children.

To help each student develop good habits and a good attitude toward learning, we provide special programmes. These include early morning community classroom sessions for younger students to cultivate a positive atmosphere for teaching. For older students, we offer consultation as a learning aid, which is a specific part of the educational programme. We also include mentoring for high school students as a sort of bonus to help develop personal competences and coping strategies, such as building stability and personal integrity in order to realize their potential and talents. At the weekends we organize meetings for parents and their preschool age children where we prepare some fun and educational activities. In the meantime the parents are offered consultation services with a psychologist or seminars on different topics about gifted children. These and many other innovative elements form the foundation that we have developed within the APROGEN programme. The goal is to provide continuous education and training for intellectually gifted children from the first grade of primary school to the last grade of secondary school.

It should be noted that the educational process of gifted pupils is, of course, primarily in the hands of well-trained teachers. Slovakia's experience highlights the issue of the importance of quality teacher training for educators who work with gifted children. This issue remains unsolved. The readiness of teachers working with gifted students is at an unsatisfactory level. Even during the years of the pilot programme, teachers were not trained systematically. Another pending issue is the lack of pre-school education for younger gifted children. But the most urgent issue is the absence of specialized psychological centres. We cannot seem to overcome the bureaucratic obstacles that hinder the creation of such specialized centres in Slovakia (proposed *Centre for Gifted and Talented Children*). In the absence of these services, psychologists from the School for Gifted Children assist in this work; however, they provide these services without the official certificate that would have ensured the establishment of the *Centre for Gifted and Talented Children*.

Obstacles aside, at this point in our 22-year history of working with gifted students in Slovakia, we can speak of the specific results of our work. The unique benefits of the APROGEN Programme are seen in the following areas:

1. The development of new educational/ training practices and a new psychological / educational approach for working with gifted children
2. The development of new forms and methods of work in the education of gifted pupils
3. The creation of alternative teaching materials, textbooks, worksheets and supplementary textbooks for gifted pupils
4. The development of new curricula for gifted children – children identified as having special educational needs (State Educational Programme for Intellectually Gifted Children)
5. The adoption of legislative documents which elaborate and define adequate educational conditions for the development of gifted students
6. The continued progress in overcoming social barriers and improving public attitudes toward the need for gifted education

Additionally, the School for Gifted Children in Bratislava organized seven specialized international conferences to broaden the knowledge of issues related to gifted education, supplement professional competencies for teachers, and to improve the level of awareness for parents. Topics of these conferences were as follows:

1999 Realization of the Gifted Child's Potential
2001 Identification and Recognition of Gifted Children
2003 Gifts and Talents for the 3rd Millenium
2005 Specifics of Development and Development of Potential for the Gifted
2008 Differentiation, Individualization and Personalization in Education
2011 Innovative Forms and Methods of Work with Gifted Children
2014 The Synergy of Talents, Gifts and Creativity as a Factor in the Successful Development of Society

The real and lasting measure of the effectiveness of our work with gifted students, however, lies with the students themselves, and is demonstrated by their results at various competitions and on school exit examinations. However, it is particularly evident in the percentage of our graduates who are successful in their studies not only at universities in Slovakia, but especially at universities abroad. These results are documented in the publication Gifted Students in Elementary, Middle and High School (Laznibatová 2012). In conclusion, we believe that in the near future we can resolve the unsolved issues in caring for gifted children, most tangibly through the establishment of the Centre for Gifted and Talented Children. Our hope is to continually foster greater support of gifted individuals in Slovakia.

***AJolana Laznibatová**, PhD, CSc., has been working in the field of psychology of giftedness for more than 30 years. She is involved as an expert in teacher education for gifted children, both in Slovakia and the Czech Republic as well as Poland and she organized several international conferences on gifted children in Slovakia.*

Contact: laznibatova@centrum.sk

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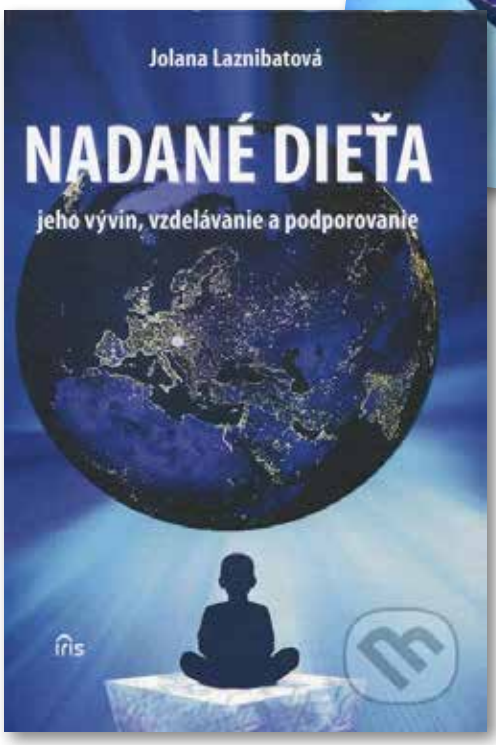

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First International Panel on Topics of Global Concern Related to Gifted Education at the 15th International ECHA Conference, in Vienna, 2016

The 15th International ECHA Conference in Vienna was the site of the first international panel on topics of global concern related to gifted education. The session was designed for both European and non-European conference participants to compare views and best practices associated with talent support across various continents. Selected participants from a broad range of countries were invited to present brief statements in response to two timely topics selected by the moderators, Rena Subotnik and Peter Csermely:

Topic 1.
What are the missions of gifted programmes in different nations? Does the answer depend on whether the educational system is centralized or not? Does it depend on whether the programmes are focused on talent in domains or general giftedness?

Topic 2.
The underrepresentation of certain groups of children in gifted programmes in each of our countries (e.g. low income, immigrants). How prominent is the concern? How is it being addressed, if at all? Are these programmes working to close gaps in identification and successful participation?

The session elicited a large audience and many commented about how little ECHA participants know about the basic structure of other countries' educational systems and how those systems serve their most talented and vulnerable students. What follows here are the unedited comments made by panelists. Each was asked to limit his or her remarks to not more than 700 words.

Whether or not you attended, if you would like to see more cross-national comparisons in response to a particular question please let us know by writing your ideas for future topics.

Rena Subotnik *rsubotnik@apa.org*
Peter Csermely *csermelynet@gmail.com*

Contributions to Topic 1:
What are the missions of gifted programmes in different nations? Does the answer depend on whether the educational system is centralized or not? Does it depend on whether the programmes are focused on talent in domains or general giftedness?

Australia

Aranza Blackburn
black_ba@bigpond.com

In Australia, education has generally been the business of the states, who have offered free, compulsory, and comprehensive education to all students, alongside private, independent and religious/systemic schools. This system has been in place since European colonization in 1788, with the first schools set up by Irish Catholic religious orders. Gifted Education was largely non-existent even until modern times, though a 2001 *Senate Inquiry on the Education of the Gifted* went some way towards recognizing the specific learning needs of this population, and the setting up of a national research centre at the University of New South Wales.

In 2008, with the 'Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians' the federal government set the blue-print for the nationalization of the curriculum. In this document the focus is on the promotion of 'equity' and 'excellence' with Australian students becoming prepared to take their place in the world. Gifted students are considered in the *Australian Curriculum* (now at version 8) under'student diversity', and support is recommended through planning for personalized learning by drawing on content from other grades, using general capabilities (e.g. literacy skills, critical thinking skills), and using the cross-curriculum priorities of *sustainability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, and Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia* that are embedded across all learning.

The gap in deliberate support for gifted students until the emergence of the Australian Curriculum had been filled by different states in different ways: e.g. South Australia has the Ignite programme, where gifted students are accelerated through several years of high school in less time, available in select schools; New South Wales has selective high schools (fully selective, partially selective, and a virtually selective stream for rural students) for students from year 7 onwards, and Queensland has its Academies for students from years 10 to 122 in the areas of Creative Industries, Health Sciences, and STEM. Comprehensive schools continue to offer popular support choices such as in-class differentiation, pull-out and weekend gifted programmes, and talent opportunities. Acceleration and early entry into both school and university are also options. Such diversity between the states and the momentum towards a national curriculum, supported by the work from GERRIC (Gifted Education Research, Resource and Information Centre), mean an exciting time for students and teachers of the gifted. Unfortunately, no additional funding is channeled to schools for the specific needs of the gifted.

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Malak Alabdulltif Al-Hasa
malaakalabd@gmail.com

The mission of gifted programmes in a nation is a reflected view of its values and cultures. Therefore, it differs according to the nation's attributes. However, any gifted programmes' mission should consider the needs for the community as well as for the individual.

"What is the mission" is an important question but it must not stand alone; we have to consider the "how, why, who, where and when". How can this mission be done? Why is it important? For whom? Where should it be implemented? And when?

Saudi Arabia, which has a centralized education system, has made many efforts in the field of gifted education. It provides a range of opportunities to help gifted students develop their talent and abilities. In fact, gifted programmes should take into account both talent in domains and general giftedness. The main goal of gifted programmes is to help and catalyze the gifted to shift their natural abilities to be developed competencies. In Saudi Arabia we need more efforts to have a clear vision.

These opportunities contain the three main services in gifted education, enrichment, acceleration and counselling service. They implement by three main stages identification, awareness and education. In spite of all these efforts, there is a need to spend more on developing education policies that can help these programmes keep going and sustained. Despite that, orientations have recently been made to give more attention to modify gifted education policies and programmes.

Brazil

Denise Fleith *(fleith@unb.br)*

Mission of gifted programmes in Brazil: to increase the number of gifted students identified and to provide education consistent with their needs and abilities. Enrichment programmes (after school programmes) are the most common strategy to serve gifted students. Most of the programmes were public in nature. Services provided within the classroom are much rarer.

In 2005, the Ministry of Education established High Abilities/Giftedness Activity Centres in each of the 26 Brazilian states and the Federal District. The centres were launched to improve educational opportunities for gifted students by providing training for teachers, offering support to families, and providing resources and technological equipment. However, not all Brazilian states implemented a centre for the gifted. The number of students identified as gifted and placed into targeted services remained low, due in part to socio-cultural resistance to specialized programmes for students seen as already privileged when the country faces challenges such as illiteracy, learning disabilities etc. Misconceptions about giftedness partially explain this scenario.

The Ministry of Education provided guidelines for working with gifted students. However, their implementation depends on the secretary of education of each state. Sometimes a municipal department of education decides to offer a programme for gifted students. The number of gifted students that attend Brazilian programmes is negligible compared to the quantity of students enrolled in basic education, as shown in the School Census 2014.

In Brazil, most programmes focus on general giftedness. There is no such programme specifically for an area (for example arts, sports, academics, etc). However, the identification process takes into consideration the talent domain of the student. Besides the activities carried out are planned according to the students' interests and talents.

The most recent definition of gifted and talented was disseminated through the National Policy of Special Education on the Inclusive Education Perspective, published in 2008: gifted students are those who demonstrate high potential in one or more of the following areas – intellectual ability, academic aptitude, leadership ability, psychomotor and artistic ability –, as well as creativity, learning and task involvement.

The theoretical framework adopted in most of the programmes is Joseph Renzulli's. There is some variation in the way that gifted students may be identified, though the public school system process usually involves some combination of teacher and/or parent nomination, teacher judgment based on observation, achievement data (e.g. school grades, standardized test scores), psychological evaluation (e.g., IQ score or other general ability measure, or measure of creativity), and portfolio assessment.

Brazil does not have university-level teacher training programmes focused on gifted education. Instead, teachers receive in-service training which may include courses offered through a university or another organization that specializes in the needs of gifted and talented students, or training provided by other teachers or school staff with experience in gifted and talented education. Depending on access to experienced teachers, this approach can potentially result in instructional strategies for gifted children that are not sufficiently differentiated from regular classroom approaches and strategies.

Russia

Natalia Shumakova
n_shumakova@mail.ru

I suppose that in general the mission of gifted programmes in different nations (countries) is determined be three main factors:

1. The level of economic development and the main strategy of the country's development.
2. Cultural and historic peculiarities.
3. Needs in progress in creative abilities of the gifted, the specific features of their development.

From this point of view it is not very important for the mission of programmes for the gifted whether the system of education is centralized or not, neither whether they are focused on talent in domains or general giftedness. Vice versa, the focus on these programmes is under the influence of the factors mentioned. For example, the mission of gifted programmes in Russia during the period of industrialization was characterized by the vast development in science and technology and the support of children talented in these spheres.

At the same time cultural and historical features of our country specify the high value of general development of a child, which was reflected in deep appreciation of the mission of gifted programmes – namely general giftedness.
Actually nowadays the mission of gifted programmes in our country is characterized by the following features:

- To provide the starting points for development and improvement of educational system in Russia under the idea: the way of teaching the gifted today is likely to be used in teaching all children;

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- To provide conditions for finding the possible wide range of potentially gifted in different domains;
- To provide personal creativity development in the gifted enabling them to use their gifts in society on the basis of cognitive motivation, intellectual abilities and competences.

Nowadays the government of the RF pays considerable attention to the problem of gifted children and talented young people. Thus, the main directions for supporting gifted children and talented young people of the order of government dated November 2015 "Measures for support of children with extraordinary abilities" are:

a) to provide individual work for the gifted to form and improve their cognitive interests, including tutors' and trainers' assistance;
b) to provide gifted children career guidance by increasing their motivation in job spheres required in the labor-market.
c) to provide assistance in employment after leaving school;
d) to provide psychological and pedagogical accomplishment of the gifted.

According to these resolutions every school is supposed to provide support for gifted children. However, there exists a net of schools specializing in teaching the gifted. Such schools aim at developing giftedness in specific domains (for example, natural sciences, music, art and craft, sports).

Recently the opportunity to teach gifted children at home became quite real. The parents of elementary school children usually take this opportunity. At the age of 6-9 it's easy for parents and tutors to arrange studies at home. When this period is over they go on with their studies in ordinary schools.

Turkey

Sule Gucyeter
sule.gucyeter@usak.edu.tr

I am delighted to announce the latest reform movements for gifted and talented students that influence the missions of gifted programmes in Turkey. According to the regulation, every government school has to open a resource room (support room) for gifted and talented students. This is a very hopeful development, because a school that has a student who is identified as gifted and talented has to offer a resource room for the student. This regulation gives opportunity to develop appropriate programme models for the gifted and talented student in the school. However, there are not many experts in schools and universities who specifically study gifted students and gifted education programmes. Thus, what teachers will teach in the resource room is not clear and many teachers have no experience with gifted and talented students. On the other hand, teachers not only play an important role in educating gifted students but they also play an important role in the identification processes as nominators. All these reasons show that teachers need to know more about gifted and talented students.

Before the regulation, there were many programme options for the gifted and talented which were science and art centres, science and social science high schools, university based weekend programmes, special classes in special schools, differentiated school programmes and enrichment programmes in some special schools. Many of the programmes have common problems with lack of teacher expertise on gifted education, lack of appropriate programme content, and lack of instruments for the identification of general intelligence and specific talent in a domain.

Does the answer depend on whether the educational system is centralized or not? In Turkey, the educational system is centralized and rigid in terms of skipping many grades. Students cannot take a course in a higher grade. This makes it difficult to meet the needs of gifted and talented students, especially highly intelligent ones, with appropriate options.

Does it depend on whether the programmes are focused on talent in domains or general giftedness? Some of the programmes focus on talent in specific domains and some of the other programmes focus on general intelligence. There are some problems in the identification processes of these programmes about matching the definition of giftedness or talent adopted by the programme and instruments that are used in the identification of gifted students for the programme.

A few universities offer a bachelor degree for teachers of gifted students in primary school, however after graduation they are placed as primary school teachers if they are able to pass the teacher public personnel selection examination. Another few universities offer graduate level degrees as master or PhD. With increasing the number of experts in gifted education, these experts can offer elective or compulsory courses about gifted and talented students for pre-service teachers in different teacher education programmes. Experts should also offer programmes for teachers who will teach in the resource room. If teachers are sufficiently trained in gifted and talented education, we can reframe and enrich our missions of gifted education in Turkey.

Contributions to Topic 2.

The underrepresentation of certain groups of children in gifted programmes in each of our countries (e.g. low income, immigrants). How prominent is the concern? How is it being addressed, if at all? Are these programmes working to close gaps in identification and successful participation?

USA

Tyler Clark, *Executive Administrator, World Council for Gifted and Talented Children*
thomas.clark@wku.edu

The United States is witnessing underrepresentation of gifted minority students. In 2010, Plucker, Burroughs, and Song authored *Mind the (Other) Gap* that highlighted the small percentage of low-income students and racial minority students scoring at the advanced level. The 2013 follow-up report, *Talent on the Sidelines,* demonstrates that this concern is still relevant.

Nisen (2015) discusses student identification in a particular US school district. In 2004, the school district only used a referral programme for identification. Despite 60% of the students in the district being Black or Hispanic, a mere 28% of identified students were Black or Hispanic. In 2005, a universal screening process was introduced. All second grade students were given an ability test and the top performing students were then given an IQ test. In 2006, the percentage of Black and Hispanic students identified rose 16 percentage points to 44%. While this identification method helped better represent racial minority students, budget cuts led to the elimination of the procedure in 2011.

Not only is identification an obstacle, but gifted minority students also face other challenges. Many of these students are underachievers due to social-emotional needs. Some of these students feel as if achieving at high levels will result in them betraying their cultural identity.

The research presents some recommendations to help with this issue. Identification procedures should include multiple criteria and case study information (Davis, Rimm, & Siegle, 2011). As Lohman (2005) indicates, "many of the most talented minority students will not have had opportunities to develop high levels of the skills valued in formal schooling" (p. 335). This makes it incredibly important to base identification on more than one criteria. It is also important to involve family members in the learning process. It has been found that parents of minority students are very interested in their child's learning. Teachers must work to connect with these families to help the child (Ford & Thomas, 1997).

Though there are some programmes around the nation working to make this problem smaller, it is not wide reaching. Reports in the media are bringing more interest to the topic, but we still have a long way to go.

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USA

H. James McLaughlin
hmclaughlin@rollins.edu

US Migrant Children and the Special Services Gap. Definition of "Migrant Children". The US has more than 3 million migrant farmworkers, and about 500,000-800,000 school-age migrant children under age 18 (many of whom have dropped out of school) (Free, Kriz, & Konecnik, 2014). About 90% of these children are Latino, and 33% need special services in ESOL (Human Rights Watch, 2010). Many children work in the fields with their families in the summers, after school, and sometimes even during school hours.

The US Migrant Education Programme (MEP) serves children and youth aged 0-21 whose families labor in the agricultural system and who move across school district and state boundaries several times within a 12-36 month period, to find work. In 2013-2014, there were 348,000 migrant children who were eligible for MEP services. However, only 62% of eligible children actually participate in the programme. So a significant number of farmworker children receive no special services (Ed Data Express, 2016).

Risk Factors for Children. General life factors raise many risk factors for migrant farmworker children. There are the physical hazards of work in the fields, the social isolation of living often in humble lodgings provided by farm owners, and family separation when a child stays in one location while some family members travel to labor. There are also socio-economic disadvantages associated with receiving low wages and no benefits, and with unsteady employment. These disadvantages have an effect on children's schooling.

Educational risk factors include the low education level of parents, the common inability of parents to help with homework because of language differences and prior academic background, school attendance problems because of the need to travel and to work, and insufficient funding for compensatory programmes that might help these students.

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Systemic factors also influence migrant farmworker children's educational success. The USA has a decentralized, state-driven educational system. This means that when children move across state lines, there will likely be different textbooks, different school schedules, some different courses, and even different basic learning standards.

This non-coherent national system leads to problems with being able to identify the gifts and talents of migrant children. If a child is only in a school for 3-4 months at a given location, there simply is not enough time to assess their learning capacities and needs, determine effective interventions, make placement decisions, and implement some sort of special programme for them. The challenge of helping migrant children in these conditions is daunting, and that challenge can only be met if we pay attention to the systemic, academic, and interpersonal needs of the children.

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Brazil

Zenita C. Guenther – CEDET
zcguenther@gmail.com

The small proportion of underprivileged students in gifted programmes is well recognized along with the fact that they also rank considerably low on IQ tests. However IQ tests are still used in most gifted education programmes in the world (Freeman, Raffan, & Warwick 2010).

Considering that socio-economic-cultural factors overshadow other discriminating characteristics (Guenther (1977) the Centre for Potential and Talent Development (CEDET) developed identification procedures focused on public school students. Such a standing was given to the educational system's peculiarities, described elsewhere as a two-faced system (Guenther, 2011) for stressing the socio-economic breach in the nation, maintained by a passive general acceptance of a double system with identical purpose, organization and attributions. The private system is generally acknowledged as qualitatively superior to the public systems, albeit common knowledge that the separating line between them is solely economical means to pay for the private services. Not surprisingly, gifted kids in private schools outnumber children from public schools when selected by IQ tests. Also internal immigration, given the lack of acceptable living conditions has effects on the education for underserved gifted pupils (Guenther, Harris and Eriksson, 2011). Furthermore, faced with routine health issues, poor education facilities and lack of regular-paying jobs, families send their more able children to work as early as possible. Nevertheless they seldom realize their dreams by moving to big cities, but often are victimized by or attracted into organized crime, prematurely ending their lives (Antipoff, 1992). We all agree that the main path to develop children's potential is education, but in Brazil, after decades of well-documented criticism, we still have noticeable inability to deal with the more able and talented students.

What are we doing: Although not focusing specifically on the student' social status, the Centre for Talent Development (CEDET) is attended by around 500 gifted students from public and private schools, grade 1 to 12, aiming at providing support, stimulation, and encouragement to their development. Once identified by observation data collected annually in the schools, each student works on an individualized semester plan, according to their potential, needs, expressed interests, inclinations, and personal choice. This procedure means to be an alternative to the usual "enrichment activities" which have shown no long term results (Freeman, 2006). In an attempt to broaden their world frame of reference, the centre brings in volunteers from the community to guide specific content work. Over 1000 volunteers have worked at CEDET since its inception, usually 60 to70 each semester.

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Brazil

Eunice Soriano de Alencar
zcguenther@gmail.com

I am from Brazil, a country in South America, with over 200 million inhabitants, and with many challenges especially in the educational field. Some challenges concerning the gifted are due to the unfair income distribution which results in much less opportunities for lower class children to develop their potential more fully. While the majority of middle and upper class

children are enrolled in private schools and usually in extra-curricular activities for part of the day, taking, for example, music or second-language classes, the lower class children are enrolled in public schools, which in general are not well equipped.

The typical education environment is not prepared to meet the gifted students' needs and the number of gifted students participating in programmes is very low. For example, in the Federal District, where I live, there are about 670 thousand students enrolled in primary and secondary school classes and less than 1% of these students participate in programmes for the gifted (a little bit more than 1500). In most Brazilian cities, there is no provision at all for these students.

It seems a paradox, because the country has a long history in gifted education and educational policies for the gifted. For example, the first educational policy for the gifted was edited in 1929. Policies in support of gifted and talented education have been included in several documents from the federal government since 1971. However a gap is observed between what is prescribed in the policies and what is observed in practice.

Under-representation of gifted girls in the programmes, insufficient preparation of teachers to meet the needs of gifted students, scarcity of resources and of counseling services are some of the issues that need to be addressed. Some initiatives have recently been taken to improve the provisions for the gifted. For example, the establishment of the High Ability/Giftedness Centre of Activities in all Brazilian states, with allocation of funds for in-service training for teachers. However much more needs to be done in this direction due to the huge number of unattended gifted students in elementary and secondary schools.

Canada

Salvatore Sal Mendaglio
mendagli@ucalgary.ca

Under-representation of minority culture students in gifted education programmes is a concern in the field of gifted education. My interest in under-representation is on youth of First Nations, a term for indigenous peoples of Canada. As I planned a project on the topic, I became aware of the dearth of research on giftedness and indigenous youth in general. The literature on under-representation tended to be located largely in the USA, dealing with African and Latin American youth. Discussions of causes for under-representation tended to focus on selection procedures for these programmes. While the use of multiple criteria is recommended in the literature, in practice, a particular score on an intelligence test, such as the Wechsler tests, is a predominant criterion. Naturally, such privileging of standardized tests is criticized because test are biased in favor of the majority culture. The limited research on remedying under-representation has focused on the use of culture fair tests and response to intervention.

While I was designing my own study regarding First Nations youth, my first instinct was to use culture fair tests, such as the Raven' Progressive Matrices to identify giftedness. I was unable to conduct the first study that I planned. No matter what I tried, I was unsuccessful in obtaining participants for my study. Inability to investigate the usefulness of a typical approach to identifying minority group children with First Nations students, required that I rethink my approach.

Culture arose in my mind as the pre-eminent consideration when attempting to understand under-representation. The field of gifted education acknowledges that giftedness is a culturally bound construct – conceptions of giftedness may vary from culture to culture. I assumed that First Nations cultures are significantly different from western culture. My thinking led to designing a qualitative study, in which I interviewed a sample of First Nations students, staff and elders associated with a university. My purpose was to gain an understanding of their conceptions of giftedness.

My conclusion from the study surprised me. My findings did confirm, as expected, that the participants' conceptions of giftedness did vary significantly from the common view implicit in selection of students for gifted education programmes. However, I was left with an unexpected feeling – increasing representation of First Nations students may not be universally beneficial. Let's assume that we are successful in using a culturally-bound conception of giftedness and develop appropriate operational definitions. There remains a dilemma – to succeed in a gifted education programme, First Nations students need to accommodate to the programme – programmes are themselves culturally bound. In effect, success in public school education and gifted education programmes, in particular, requires some level of assimilation.

While I began in my consideration of under-representation with a firm belief of increasing representation of students from diverse cultures, in the final analysis, I am no longer so certain. Not only is giftedness culturally bound; gifted education programmes are as well. There is one set of circumstances where I feel that I can support increasing representation: when there is a consistency among conception of giftedness, selection criteria and programme.

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India

Paromita Roy
paromitar@gmail.com

The under-representation of Indian children in gifted programmes as a whole faces a grave challenge to policy makers, teachers and educational institutions. The National Curriculum Framework (2006) does not allude to services for gifted students and participation of high ability students in gifted programmes because gifted education is not a primary concern in India. Reputed institutions in India where gifted students seek admission are not institutions that nurture giftedness but those that admit high ability students based on examination grades and that focus on scholastic achievement. The thrust is more on equity and education for all.

Despite this existing situation, Indian students continue to strive towards realizing their creative goals through perseverance, hard work and overcoming institutional and governmental inability for a more supportive environment. Their multilingual skills and their ability to thrive in less enabling environments make them more adaptable to diverse situations and cultures. Parents of gifted students in India do feel the acute lack of gifted services for their children, but also understand that from the view of its large and unattended population, it is more important to cater to the "have nots" than the "haves". Many Indian gifted students who do not get environments of growth in their country tend to migrate to mote talent accommodating countries. But it is also true that millions of talented students do not have either the means or the opportunity to hone their talents.

Although India has made considerable progress in terms of the numbers of teaching and research institutes, gifted education has not yet caught the serious attention of government and policy makers. It is left to individuals or small groups of educators who devote themselves to the cause of education of the gifted from such populations. The thrust of effort towards education for gifted children is largely scattered and inadequate. Most work done in this area is by non-governmental organizations that work in the area of gifted education and their approaches are based on programme based benefits. Provisions of acceleration, enrichment, curriculum compacting, focused mentor-ship and advanced opportunities are few and far between and not a part of formal education in India. Motivated teachers, by virtue of their passion and dedication towards their craft informally identify creative students and try to encourage and support them in their individual capacities.

Jagadis Bose National Science Talent Search (JBNSTS), Kolkata, an autonomous institution, has been working concertedly in the area of the identification and nurture of economically and educationally disadvantaged students of their region for the last 15 years. Networking and developing local support systems to encourage bright students in science to nurture their abilities is one of the main objectives of the programmes. There lies an urgent need to build a talent network map within India. Some serious work originated from India but a larger, comprehensive picture is missing.

A New Learning Resource for the Gifted

EVE STRAUSS, *SOUTH AFRICA*

It is encouraging to note that recognition of the unique educational needs of gifted children and teens is on the increase internationally – Norway and Sweden are making strides, while the UK and USA continue to grow their offerings in the spheres of gifted education and support. That said, there remain gaps. Many countries lag in their offerings for the gifted; in others, addressing the needs of the gifted may simply not be a priority, as far more fundamental educational outcomes remain a major concern.

While it might be hoped that gifted children and teens are fortunate enough to have knowledgeable parents and teachers who are willing to cater as far as possible to their unique needs, it is likely that many continue to languish in unsuitable and stifling educational spaces.

As has been noted, academic achievement and giftedness do not always go hand-in-hand. The gifted student who excels academically may be praised by teachers, but not challenged further. Meanwhile, the one who does not may have his or her lack of success misunderstood or misattributed. In these cases, the student may find it difficult to comprehend the difference they sense in themselves and its external effects – be they social, emotional, academic or otherwise.

Allowing gifted learners to explore the bounds of their abilities in an environment that keeps them engaged may, perhaps, be regarded as a somewhat murky educational outcome by governments (and indeed, often even within private education) where the focus is rather on the more concrete, measurable outcomes such as pass or failure rates, delinquency and university preparedness. Being a more 'intangible' outcome, it may thus be neglected, although, of course, in the long run, it is in every country's best interest to foster and support the development of its brightest young minds.

In my own country, South Africa, there is some recognition of and support for the differing needs of the gifted. That said, it is by no means country-wide, and likely requires awareness on the part of a parent or informed teacher to suggest appropriate educational extension programmes, psychological support, psychometric assessment and schooling options.

While gifted students may be fast learners, many also learn differently from other students. Their innate curiosity may leave them satisfied with an accelerated version of a school subject (and indeed grade-skipping may also be an option to consider), however, such students may also yearn for exposure to new (or highly specialised) realms of inquiry – realms that, under normal circumstances, they may only encounter at university level or under self-guided exploration, be it online or otherwise.

It was with these sentiments in mind that I founded Thinxygen – an educational content company aimed at gifted students seeking to expand their learning and engagement with ideas beyond the curriculum. An amalgam of the words 'think' and 'oxygen', the moniker seemed natural – for gifted students, thinking, reasoning, creating and exploring are indeed like oxygen. As such, the content is designed in such a way as to draw out and foster this innate curiosity, by exploring not only unique subjects, but by blending content in such a way as to provide both a macrocosmic overview of a subject, while simultaneously delving into its more interesting microcosmic aspects. Unlike the objective of many traditional educational materials, learning is not outcome-based – requiring the student to have gained a certain set of skills or proficiencies upon completion. Rather, the material is designed to be a locus of topic exploration. Signposts, if you will, hint at interesting intellectual detours, and activities allow for (and, indeed promote) different and varied strategies for problem-solving and comprehension. It is hoped that in these texts, the gifted student finds not only interest and a challenge, but above all, enjoyment and fun.

Though sizeable challenges remain for gifted children and teens (and, indeed, gifted adults) it is very encouraging to note the shifts in perception and the increased availability of appropriate support. While such change may be set to proceed in a fairly step-wise fashion, hopefully, the pockets of informed teachers, parents, policy-makers and educational administrators is set to grow. The process may be tentative at first, requiring local adaptation, grass-roots initiatives and reactivity to context, but remains however, a highly worthwhile endeavour. Each new node may foster the growth of more.

In the meantime, particularly in countries where recognition of the unique needs of the gifted remains in its nascent stages, it will fall to informed parents, educators and specialists to suggest appropriate offerings.

Eve Strauss is the founder of Thinxygen. She holds a Bachelor of Science degree (Hons) from the University of London.
http://www.thinxygen.com
Contact: EveStrauss1@outlook.com

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