



SOUTH-WEST
UNIVERSITY
·NEOFIT RILSKY·
BLAGOEVGRAD, BULGARIA

VOLUME 2
2004



SCIENTIFIC
Research

ELECTRONIC
ISSUE

STRATEGIES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE “GOLDEN CHILDREN OF THE SOCIETY” IN THE EUROPEAN PEDAGOGICAL SPACE

From “Educational Background and Dialogue in the European Pedagogical Space”(symposium)

Dobrinka L. Todorina

South-West University “Neophit Rilski”

In Blagoevgrad

Faculty of Pedagogy

Department of Elementary Education

Telephone: +359 73 46269

+359 73 8889124

+359 73 8889127

summary

It is not unnatural that the problem about the development of the “golden children of the society” /according to Plato/ today occupies an important place in the European and respectively in the Bulgarian pedagogical space¹. Children with a high degree of intellectual development and special abilities can be relied on to become the driving force of the entire economic, social and spiritual life. They are called to stand in good stead for themselves and for the society with their non-standard thought and imaginativeness, with their well developed competence to search, to build up, to compete, to work out difficult problems by the sentence of optimal variants.

Fortunately, in the last few years the question about the gifted children is being discussed more and more often. Experts search for more effective strategies to spot their talent and develop these children.

The expectations from the Bulgarian pedagogical workers are connected with the creation of the European pedagogical space. They must do their best so that the solution of every topical problem, such as the one offered in this publication, is based on the general European philosophy for a gradual limitation of the differences between the Bulgarian educational system and the educational systems of the developed European countries, keeping the national specificities and priorities

It is not unnatural that the problem about the development of the “golden children of the society” /according to Plato/ today occupies an important place in the European and respectively in the Bulgarian pedagogical space². Children with a

¹ The last news is that on the Day of the Leaders of the Bulgarian National Revival, the Minister of Education congratulate the prize-winners of the International School Olympiad and their teachers and promises more financial resources for the work with the gifted children. /see the newspaper “Standard” 02. 11.2003, p.3/

² The last news is that on the Day of the Leaders of the Bulgarian National Revival, the Minister of Education congratulate the prize-winners of the International School Olympiad and their teachers and promises more financial resources for the work with the gifted children. /see the newspaper “Standard” 02. 11.2003, p.3/

high degree of intellectual development and special abilities can be relied on to become the driving force of the entire economic, social and spiritual life. They are called to stand in good stead for themselves and for the society with their non-standard thought and imaginativeness, with their well developed competence to search, to build up, to compete, to work out difficult problems by the sentence of optimal variants.

Fortunately, in the last few years the question about the gifted children is being discussed more and more often. Experts search for more effective strategies to spot their talent and develop these children.

The expectations from the Bulgarian pedagogical workers are connected with the creation of the European pedagogical space. They must do their best so that the solution of every topical problem, such as the one offered in this publication, is based on the general European philosophy for a gradual limitation of the differences between the Bulgarian educational system and the educational systems of the developed European countries, keeping the national specificities and priorities. The same thing refers to the creation of the European space for higher education. Because of this in the analysis of the problem under discussion we will first interpret the ideas of some European organizations.

I. STRATEGIES OF SOME EUROPEAN ORGANIZATIONS CONCERNING GIFTED CHILDREN

An important strategic act in the European pedagogical space is the foundation of the European Council for High Abilities – ECHA /1, p.53-56/, with the purpose of stimulating and supporting the development, the dissemination and the application of knowledge, connected with the process of the development of gifted people of all ages. The activity of ECHA includes:

- A round of international conferences on every two years;
- A consecution of seminars and symposiums in all Europe;
- A network of national correspondents;
- A joining of the schools towards the World Educational System;
- An issue of an international diploma in pedagogy for gifted children.

Since this organization works in co-ordination with the European Council, on the XVII session of the Regular conference of the European Ministers of Education in the European Council many working relations were outlined about: the training of teachers to work in classes with different levels of children' abilities; to adapt the education towards the individual needs of every pupil; to stimulate the creative groupings; to develop and to introduce different programs for work with gifted children; to enrich the European thesaurus of the education with a glossary³ about people with high intelligence, gifted people, giftedness, talented people, creative work; to apply legislative control on the realization of the differentiated programs in all countries that signed the Cultural Convention; to create an European Centre for sources of information about gifted children; to take

³ For such glossary see in “Стратегия за развитие на надарените ученици” by D. Todorina, Blagoevgrad, 2001.

special care of the “talents in shadow” in the minority and in groups with a different culture, etc.

The purpose of the collaboration between the European Council for High Abilities and the European Council on the training of the teachers incorporates:

- The improvement of the teachers’ training including some elements connected with the education of the gifted pupils through a course of lectures, adequate to the receiving of a diploma in pedagogy;
- An issue of a European certificate or diploma awarded by the University in Nimeg on the leadership of the European Council in collaboration with the European Council for High Abilities.

We learn from Internet⁴ about the foundation of the other European organization – the National Association for Gifted Children /NAGC/. It is a national charity covering England, Wales and Northern Ireland, but it is open for all European countries. The long-term objective of this organization is to ensure that appropriate provision is made for children to develop their gifts and talents to the maximum. In the short term the Association aims to bring immediate help and support to these children, their parents, teachers, Local Education Authority /LEA/, and others professionally concerned with their development.

The members of the National Association for Gifted Children motivate their strategy in the following way: “We are here to help. It is our hope that this website is both informative and easy to navigate. We want you to be able to find the information you need quickly and easily so that you can move onto the next stage of your enquiry with the minimum of effort”.

According to the Association, the view that a child is very able or gifted can stem from a number of different sources:

- Parents may notice that their child (0-4yrs) develops skills quickly as compared with peers;
- Friends may draw attention to early speech, and the use of a wide vocabulary (0-4yrs);
- Health visitors and doctors may notice rapid development (0-4yrs)
- Playgroup/Nursery teachers may find the new child able to do far more than usual (0-5yrs) for their age;
- Primary and Secondary teachers may note tasks accomplished with ease coupled with a demand for challenge, which if not satisfied, is rapidly replaced by the boredom (4-adult).

The members of the Association underline that the very able and gifted children need to be identified so that their intellectual and their social/emotional development can be well managed and not stifled. How this should be done, however, depends on the age of the child, and whether they are happy or presenting problems to parents and/or to school.

The position of the organization about the identification of the gifted children is expressed by the observation of the characteristics in favour and against this process. For example, the only possible and the best strategy for under-fours include:

⁴ www.nagebritain.org.uk; E-mail amazingchildren@nagebritain.org.uk

- Carried out by those who know the child best – parents;
- Does not stress the child in any way;
- Carried out in unthreatening environment (home, playgroup and peep-group).

We can see some negative effects when:

- The parents need to assert their conclusions on others sceptics;
- The outcome is open to challenge by professionals.

The Association gives some advice in the cases, when the child does not want to go to school, is bored at school, is unhappy and has become withdrawn, then the parents need to work in partnership with the school, the class teacher and the Head to expose the issues in a non-confrontational way.

One of the questions discussed is about the role of the Local Education Authority, which can assess the gifted children, if they have learning or behavioural difficulties and the school must act on the findings of the assessment. There is, however, no legal basis for a Local Education Authority assessing a child on the basis of high ability.

The necessity of Consistent School Policy for gifted children with learning or behavioural difficulties at school is of great importance. The School Head shares that: “We fail to identify many of our most capable children and we don’t challenge them enough. This can lead to disaffection and chronic underachievement. We owe it to these children to help them realise their potential. That means working with schools, parents and local authorities to establish and spread good practice. We must celebrate the abilities of our most able children and encourage them to achieve at the highest level. The attitude that gifted children can cope by themselves has let down too many young people.”⁵

Many research workers from Europe and all over the World, including from Bulgaria, give their contribution to the question about the work with gifted children in the pedagogical space. Their efforts for the development of the gifts and talents must be estimated positively.⁶

I.A VARIANT OF A STRATEGY FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF GIFTED CHILDREN

Here I will offer my ideas about a strategy for the work with gifted pupils. To achieve good results in the development of the gifted children in the pedagogical practice, I think that it is important to start first with the training of the pedagogical staff. This is in unison with the task to ensure good conditions for the creation of a European space for higher education in connection with the support and the improvement of his quality /6, p.16/, as well as with the purposes of the European Council for High Abilities.

⁵ Morris, Estelle. School Standards Minister, September 1998.

⁶ Some of them are represented in “Стратегия за развитие на надарените ученици” by D. Todorina, Blagoevgrad, 2001.

Because of this I suggest a variant of a model to train the students of pedagogy how to identify and develop the gifted children. This model consists of two modules:

A: Module for an orientation in the existing theories about this problem. /2 and 3, p.35/

B. Module for a practical training. /3, p.38; 4, p.401/

The first module is predominated by the strategy for development of gifted pupils based on the humanistic approach by a subject-subjective position towards the others and themselves. Here I suggest some interdependent stages in the realization of this strategy. /2, p.10/:

- A determination of the signs of the gift, the abilities and the talent, characterizing the gifted children;
- An utilization of adequate methods to identify the gifted and talented pupils, including the methods about the determination of pupils' interests and their development;
- An application of effective techniques and technologies to educate and develop the gifted children.

The arrangement of the stages on this way is logically consistent. The students must acquire reliable methods to diagnosticate the capabilities, abilities and interests, of the gifted children, before applying the best technologies for work with them. For this purpose students must know very well the characteristics of these children, the signs of their gift, abilities and talent. The students receive their orientation in the existing theories about this problem, not only through the course of lectures, but through individual preparation as well.

The competence of the students to identify the gifted children and to work with them develops in the next module - "B". This module is accomplished in the form of training /in groups or individual/, which ensures good conditions for self-perfection and self-development. I have envisaged three series with five meetings in each, whose contents and purposes are adequate to the first module for theoretical investigation of the problem. Here we can use different interactive methods of education with varied combinations of frontal, group or individual form of education; different variants of questions and tasks; games; cases and tests; different instruments, applied in the pedagogical space – inquiries, varied individual programs, strategies and technologies and projects; exercises with different level of complexity, which give a possibility to include the students in imaginary and real situations of the pedagogical practice and ensure their creative work.

To win the students over for the cause of "the golden children of the society" it is necessary to work purposefully for their motivation. /5/

III. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the issues discussed above, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- In Europe there already are organizations, which work actively in the European pedagogical space, including the problems with gifted

pupils. They are open for discussion. They expect that the all pedagogues will use their effective offers to realize a general European model.

- The purpose of the European organizations is to help the talented children their teachers and parents by the development and the spreading of information about this problem, which can be used in the pedagogical practice to develop the gifted children of all ages.
- These organizations use different forms, methods and means to achieve this purpose which is topical for the Bulgarian pedagogues, too. They organize international forums and create relations on different levels: teachers – parents; teachers – pupils; parents – class teacher – School Head; School Head - Local Education Authority. They give advices to the teachers, parents and the pedagogical staff. They offer concrete instruments and recognize their passives and actives.
- The strategy for development of gifted children offered here /by D., Todorina/ is adequate to the ideas of the European organizations about the place and the importance of this problem, about the humanistic approach that should be used, about the integrative relations between pupils, teachers, parents and institutions and about the instruments and methods for realization of the main purpose.
- The purpose of the training of the future teachers to identify and develop the gifted children depends on the quality of higher education.

In conclusion I want to say that there is a close relation between the philosophy of the European organizations for gifted children of all ages and the Bulgarian experience, which keeps our national specificities, but reduces the differences between the Bulgarian Educational System and the educational systems in the developed European countries. Therefore we can build together the European Pedagogical Space, giving our contribution to the competitive power of the European values in the World.