
Gifted Children and Education: An Educational Approach

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Abstract: In this paper we investigate the case of gifted children and their position in the field of education. Many definitions have been given to gifted children (from a national, special pedagogical, functional or illustrative point of view) and even the word «charisma», as it is characteristically called, was acknowledged as a term after a 34-year-effort. Various scientists, such as Renzulli, Gardner, and Heller, tried to approach and define charisma and charismatic children. The aim of this research is to determine the characteristics of gifted children, the difficulties they encounter in each level, the causes of the difficulties and the kind of education for these children. The practices of differentiated teaching and flexible curriculum are criticized for the difficulty of evaluating their application throughout the educational process on gifted children. In conclusion, gifted children or students with high skills need respect and treatment not as a minority nor with an elitist mentality. The desideratum is to find out how many children need adapted education, whether they have a high level of perceptiveness or not. If they can acquire knowledge through a tailored to their needs, interdisciplinary, material-enriched kind of education along with a suitable prior Curriculum adaptation, then the education will be effective as it will manage to cover their needs.

Keywords: Gifted Children, Charisma, Education, Differentiated Teaching

1. Introduction

Several definitions from various organizations have been proposed for gifted children. According to the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) “A charismatic person is someone who shows or has the potential to show an excellent level in one or more areas of expression. Some of these skills are very general and can cover a wide range of the person's life, such as leadership or creative thinking skills. Sometimes there are very specific talents that appear in certain cases, such as the special ability in mathematics, science or music.” [12]. Also, according to Marland Report [15], “Intelligent and talented children are those who are acknowledged by professionally qualified individuals and who, as a result of their exceptional abilities, are capable of high performance. These are children who need different educational programs and services in addition to what is

provided by the common school curriculum, so that they realize their contribution to both themselves and society. High performance has to do with one of the following areas: general mental ability, special academic inclination, creative and productive thinking, leadership skills, visual or theatrical/drama arts, and psychomotor ability. These two definitions give us enough clues about the characteristics and particularities of gifted children, which will be examined in more detail in the next chapter.

The term, which is central to this study and quite widely known, is that of "charisma", as it is typically called. In 1921 an attempt was made to define "charisma" by L. Terman. His work, "Genetic Studies of Genius", is the result of a long research on gifted children. In 1938, Thurstone, to whom high IQ deviations are nowadays credited, introduced the “Primary mental abilities” theory, which Guilford later supplemented in 1959. The 1972 USA Marland report

contains the most widespread definition of children's "charisma" (see above). It is worth noting that this is the first international report on charisma. In 1977, Renzulli presented the model of triple enrichment, and in 1983 Gardner introduced the theory of multiple intelligences, which was used as a way of identifying the peculiarities of gifted children [13]. In 1992, Heller considered charisma as a product of genetic and environmental factors according to the Munich model. In 1991, Milgram presented charisma through her model that was in relation to four categories of factors, two of which had to do with aspects of intelligence. There is therefore a 34-year-course observed, during which many researchers have tried to define the concept of "charisma" as clearly as possible.

2. Characteristics of Gifted/Charismatic Children

According to the definition for gifted children, as it was given in the USA by the Department of Education in 1972, these children demonstrate or have the ability to show high levels of performance in general mental ability, special academic achievement, creative or productive thinking, leadership and psychomotor skills. According to the Greek Law (No. 3699/2008) on Special Education and Training, as students with special educational needs are considered "the students who have one or more mental abilities and talents developed to a degree that exceeds the expectations for their age group by far". Thus, gifted children, like all the other children with special and / or educational needs, have certain special characteristics through which we are able to recognize them. Initially, these children begin to articulate and read, at a fairly young – according to the data – age. Secondly, their physical abilities are highly developed and they have a special learning style. In fact, they learn quickly, they like to work alone and have a wide range of interests. Also, they perform productively in a very short time and they need total self-concentration. What's more, they can absorb a large amount of information and process it rapidly. Of particular interest is their great observation skill and the fact that they have a good memory, vivid imagination and sensitivity both to various social problems and other people. In addition, they have a special penchant for mathematics and can solve complex riddles and puzzles. Furthermore, they are able to generalize original ideas and provide solutions to problems. Last but not least, they are more active and can stay focused for a longer time compared to other children. [14].

The already mentioned elements are an important asset for any teacher who has students in the classroom with the above characteristics. Early detection - primarily by teachers - of children with several of these characteristics, is an important "privilege" for the child itself so as for a precocious diagnosis of charisma to be made. Thanks to their early development during every stage, gifted children, must engage in activities intended for older children in order to deploy their particularities.

In conclusion, a child's charisma is not something that should be overlooked, as this way his/her abilities might weaken. On the other hand, overdoing it can cause a lot of problems to the child, especially in the psycho-emotional field. Early diagnosis and its further cultivation can increase the child's chances of satisfaction and happiness for the rest of his/her life [1] [10].

3. Charismatic/Gifted Children and Greek Reality

In Greece, the concept of charisma was almost unknown until recently. In 29th October 2003, a draft law was passed, which for the first time stated that individuals with certain abilities and talents can receive special educational treatment [10]. In the 1990s, the Law [5] on the "Structure and Functioning of Primary and Secondary Education" was passed. More specifically, music and sports schools were set up so that students with a penchant for these areas could find themselves in an environment where they would feel comfortable and would manage to strengthen their talents at the same time. In 2000, the Law 2817/2000 [6] on the "Provision of Education to People with Special Educational Needs" stated that "People with special educational needs, in the current sense, are considered the people that have significant difficulty in learning and adapting due to certain physical, mental, psychological, emotional and social particularities. In addition, it is stated that "Infants, children and adolescents are also considered as persons with special educational needs, although they do not belong to one of the previous cases, if they need special educational approach and care for a certain period or for the entire period of their school life". At the same time, the Centers for Diagnosis, Evaluation and Support (C.D.E.S.) are organized and operate for the first time. In March 2003, the new Cross-curricular Unified Curriculum Framework (CUCF) and the New Analytical Curriculum (NAS) were published, which explicitly stated the necessity to address the students with special educational needs and that "...individuals with special talents and abilities should have equal and best-suited, as appropriate, opportunities for access to knowledge". In October 2003, the law no 3194/2003 [8] was passed, according to which the gifted and talented students were referred to as "the student population group with special educational needs". During the same period of time, according to the Ministerial Decision (no. 107922 / Γ7 / 3-10-2003), Art Junior High Schools were established in order to cultivate the skills and inclinations of the students who wished to follow the Drama, Cinema, Dance or Visual Arts field without being fallen behind as far as the other sectors of general education were concerned.

4. The Education of Charismatic/Gifted Students

Given the specifics and needs of gifted students, it is

obvious that they need special attention during the educational and learning process. Coleman and Gallagher [11] were the first to refer to various practices regarding the education of gifted children. These practices can be implemented through acceleration, enrichment of the curriculum and differentiated teaching, even in special schools or special support systems.

Acceleration gives children the opportunity to study at a higher level than the one they currently follow. The student can attend courses or classes best suited to older age levels in order to complete the educational sectors at a younger age than the rest of the students [21].

With the term of enriching the curriculum, we mean the development of more material than the curriculum provides, anticipating the in depth and breadth boost of learning experiences [21]. In this way, the greatest possible utilization of the gifted students' abilities, inside or outside the school classroom, is achieved.

Differentiated teaching is the most widespread and popular teaching method for teachers. It refers to the pre-planning of the whole teaching process in a systematic and organized way, which involves both the student and the syllabus in an interactional relationship. It is based on the student's level of learning readiness, the style in which he/she learns best (learning profile) and the motivation he/she has for learning (interests). All these are elements that shape the content of teaching (what will be taught), the process (how it will be taught) and the final product (how the already taught knowledge will be evaluated) in the context of the teaching procedure [20].

Special schools for charitable students are considered the sports, music, art and experimental/science schools.

Especially supportive groups where students, through the help of specialized teachers, attend more relevant to their high skills and abilities courses during certain hours of the day. They spend the rest of the day with their classmates in a "normal" classroom. These programs include the elaboration of assignment plans in the areas of their interest, organized activities aimed at the development of critical and creative thinking, problem solving and decision making [3]

As it can be seen, gifted students have multiple opportunities to actively participate in a school classroom context according to the respective curriculum and at the same time to make the best use of them as far as their particularities and talents are concerned.

At this point it is worth mentioning the need for the right attitude of teachers towards gifted children. As mentioned above, teachers should first identify children who are characterized by charisma after a proper and thorough evaluation. This presupposes constant training and motivation of the teachers themselves. In addition, they should be objective in assessing gifted children by taking into account their educational, emotional and social needs. It is also essential that they implement flexible strategies in order to create appropriate student groups based on the level of the skills and knowledge they wish to acquire [19]. Finally, it is necessary that teachers encourage children's interests and apply a personalized educational program [18]

in order to monitor their progress.

5. Conclusions- Epilogue

The education of gifted students, even today, is at a quite satisfactory level. Undoubtedly, there is always room for improvement. This requires constant training for the teaching personnel, timely and valid identification and diagnosis of gifted students as well as the existence of an appropriate legislative and institutional framework, in order to implement a flexible and differentiated curriculum tailored to the needs of these students.

Regarding the family framework, parents themselves should make sure that their children do not stifle their talents but they express them instead, so as for these talents to be best used in any way. The school itself is difficult to manage and support the particularities of these children. However, there is a way to support these students through creative activities, with the use of new technologies and educational programs that are characterized by enrichment and acceleration [9].

The most important thing is to respect the personality and particularities of gifted children. Let's not forget that all children are equal and should have the same rights to education and learning. Besides, the adaptation of the educational processes to students' abilities so that the learning process is successful should always be a prerequisite for all of us.

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