ECHA
EUROPEAN COUNCIL FOR HIGH ABILITY

Editor´s Foreword

Dear conference delegates,

At the moment, you have just opened an electronic material which is a selection of the reviewed and most highly valued papers which were presented at 11th International Conference of European Council for High Ability (ECHA).

We are happy that we could host more than 300 participants at this prestigious conference dedicated to Gifted Education. The authors of the papers are not just the representatives of European continent, they come from all over the world. The issues they address in the field also vary from the psychological to pedagogical provision.

After the announcement we received more than 50 full papers which were reviewed by three reviewers – Ms. Johanna Raffan (United Kingdom), Prof. Kirsi Tirri (Findland) and Dr. Lucie Vaňková (Czech Republic). This book of proceedings includes the best 18 out of the mentioned 50 papers. All of them are of high academic quality and address the recent topics in the field of Gifted Education. We believe this CD will bring you the opportunity to read through some of the most valuable paper presentations you might have heard at the 11th ECHA conference and for those of you who did not take part, to enjoy at least this part.

The rest of the research and practice papers we received in the form of the full papers will be exhibited at the conference website.

We wish you a pleasant conference and rich share of your professional views and experience.

READ PROCEEDINGS

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Jitka Fořtíková
11th ECHA Conference Chair

Greek teachers' attitudes towards the gifted students with learning disabilities

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Attitudes towards giftedness and learning disabilities

The increasing research efforts on the educational provision of the gifted children have highlighted a category of gifted children that presents high abilities in combination with learning difficulties. Gifted students with learning disabilities (GSLD) are considered as students with special educational needs, who require the design and implementation of special educational programs for the early identification of their exceptional abilities and the specific learning difficulties they have to confront with (Yewchuck & Lupart, 2000). The GSLD recommend a heterogeneous school population, in which many combinations of giftedness and learning disabilities can be found in both directions of negative academic-school characteristics and positive cognitive and verbal abilities and skills, effective non verbal communication, autonomy, and leadership skills (Crawford & Snart, 1994; Hannah & Shore, 1995; Vespi & Yewchuck, 1992). Such a heterogeneity of the GSLD school population seems to add difficulties to teachers in the gifted students' identification (Yewchuck & Lupart, 2002), as they often cannot accept the simultaneous existence of giftedness and learning disabilities and they generally find difficulties in accepting the existence of this particular population.

Giftedness and learning disabilities are usually faced as two situations that are placed in the two utmost poles (Dix & Schafer, 1996; Fetzer, 2000; Silverman, 1989; Yates, Berninger, & Abbott, 1995). Research data have shown that the GSLD are seldom nominated by teachers, so that teachers cannot satisfy their educational needs in the setting of the mainstream school or in collaboration with suitable educational programs (Baum, Cooper & Neu, 2001; Blacher, 2002; Brody & Mills, 1997; Daniels, 1991; Dix & Schafer, 1996; Dole, 2001; Fetzer, 2000). It is supported that teachers tend to focus mainly on the specific learning disability/ies, so they rarely estimate and nominate high abilities (Brody & Mills, 1997; Davis & Rimm, 1994; Cline & Hegeman, 2001; Little, 2001; Winebrenner, 2003; Yewchuck & Lupart, 2002). Nevertheless, teachers are not aware of the specific characteristics of these students and the specific educational changes that are essential for their needs satisfaction (Fetzer, 2000; Weinfeld, Robinson-Barnes, Jeweler & Shevitz, 2002).

The present study aimed to investigate teachers' attitudes towards the GSLD in Greek primary public schools. One of the main purposes of the study was the exploration of teacher's attitudes in regard to the characteristics of GSLD and mainly in regard to the coexistence of contradictory characteristics. The term "attitudes" is thought to regards relatively enduring organization of beliefs that prepares individuals to live in proper ways within a certain society (Rokeach, 1968). Each society with its educational institutions care for the formation of the proper attitudes toward educational procedures by the internalization of the relevant values or by the projection of the relevant symbols, rules, norms and beliefs (Dowling & Osborne, 1985; Molnar & Lindquist 1988). Our hypothesis was that it might be difficult for teachers to accept the contradictory beams of characteristics of GSLD, so that they would mainly focus either on giftedness or on learning disability/ies. Some other specific purposes of the study was to examine the teachers' attitudes for "educational strategies of provision", selecting among those strategies that appear to be successful and effective in the international literature, to explore their attitudes in regard to the most suitable school setting for the education of the GSLD and the "categories of persons" who are able to nominate and help the GSLD. We supposed that, due to teachers higher familiarization with the existence of learning disabilities, they would likely accept that they cannot identify and develop the abilities of these

students, but on the contrary they might believe that they can help in the identification of their learning disabilities.

Method

The sample of the study consisted of 70 elementary schools teachers, 33 males (47%) and 37 females (53%) with their age ranging from 25 to 59 years. As for the years of previous teaching experience, 37 teachers (53%) had experience of 2 - 13 years and 33 teachers (47%) of 14 - 28 years. All the teachers of the sample worked in public municipal primary schools in the broader area of the capital, Athens.

For the exploration of teacher's attitudes towards GSLD, a questionnaire was created for the purpose of this study, which composed of 71 questions: 52 closed questions were the core questions (Cronbach Alpha=.70) and 8 questions referred to the most preferable educational provision strategies for the GSLD. The teachers were called to answer with a "Yes"(1) or "No" (0). Additional questions referred to the participants' demographic characteristics and 4 open-ended questions asked whether the teachers have ever met a GSLD and which were the main specific characteristics. Only 20 teachers answered positively these open-ended questions (28.6%), as the rest of them had never met a GSLD.

The questionnaire is separated in four parts: The first part examines attitudes toward the GSLD specific characteristics and whether teachers believe that they are able to nominate these students' characteristics. The second part regards teachers' attitudes towards the education of GSLD and mainly their attitudes towards the adoption of educational methods that seem to be effective for these students. The third part is composed of questions that investigate teachers' attitudes towards possible ways of intervention and specific persons among the "significant others" and categories of experts who could be able to help in their identification and satisfaction of their needs. The fourth and last part of the questionnaire contains questions on the most preferable educational provision strategies for the GSLD, the 4 open-ended questions and the demographic information.

The questionnaire was administered at schools in the morning of a certain day, and by the end of the day was given back.

Results

The frequency distributions for each question revealed that teachers are able to identify many of the characteristics of GSLD towards both directions of high abilities and learning difficulties. The same holds for the exploration of mean scores for each question.Teachers seem to recognize the students' characteristics that refer to learning disabilities, e.g. "excessively disorganized" (M=.76, SD=.41), "illegible handwriting" (M=.91, SD=.28), "difficulties in learning by heart" (M=.81, SD=.39) or "difficulties in reading, although he/she is intelligent" (M=.90, SD=.30), but also high abilities and giftedness, e.g. "highly intelligent, although he/she achieves less than the average" (M=.97, SD=.17), "high verbal abilities" (M=.79, SD=.41), "an extreme sense of humour" (M= .90, SD=.30) and "high facility in computers knowledge" (M=.91, SD=.28).

It deserves special attention that teachers seem to recognize the existence of giftedness and learning disabilities as separate characteristics and contradictory sets of characteristics but they cannot accept their existence inside the same cognitive area; For example, they recognize to a large extent that a GSLD is possible to "have a talent

in arts or music and some learning disabilities related to an academic subject" (*M= .97, SD=.17)* or "high achievement in maths and low achievement in understanding a text" (*M= .83, SD=.38)* . On the contrary, they do not seem to accept that a GSLD may "present exceptionally high abilities in reading comprehension and also reading difficulties" *(M= .49, SD=.50)* or "having high abilities in higher mathematics but low achievement in easy mathematical problems" (*M= .33, SD=.47.)*

A very hopeful result is that Greek teachers seem to accept, to a large extent, that GSLD are students with special educational needs (*M= .90, SD=.30)* but not the same needs as the population of the gifted students has *(M= .14, SD=.35)*. The teachers' recognition of the existence of special educational needs in these students justifies their choice of individualised teaching methods. Thus, in regard to the suitable methods of education of the GSLD, the teachers appear to be particularly positive for the necessity of rewarding their exceptional achievements *(M= .96, SD=.20)*, their high abilities *(M= .97, SD=.17)*, as well as for the necessity of individualized teaching specific techniques *(M= .90, SD=.30)*. However, they do not appear to accept, to a large extent, that they can allow the GSLD to use alternative methods of writing, e.g. a word processing program, expressing this way their negative representations on the new technology suggested methods. Besides, teachers do not express positive attitudes in regard to the usefulness of being flexible with the time margins of written examinations completion for the GSLD *(M= .43, SD=.50)*.

Teachers also tend to believe that GSLD are students who are not able to overcome their learning difficulties by themselves but with the support of an expert *(M=.93, SD=.26)*. However, in regard to "who are the people who can help the GSLD", the teachers accept to a large extent the importance of their own contribution. They consider that they can provide a suitable educational environment for the development of high abilities *(M= .97, SD=.17)* and, at the same time, they can contribute to the treatment of the learning disability *(M= .93, SD=.26)*. Furthermore, they believe that teachers are able to indicate both the GSLD high abilities *(M= .94, SD=.23)* and their learning disabilities *(M= .93, SD=.26)*. However, they do not accept that the GSLD educational provision is only of student's family duty *(M= .01, SD=.23)*. Positive attitudes are also expressed in regard to the benefit of individualised programs for the GSLD within the mainstream school *(M= .89, SD=.32)* and possibly with the support of special classes *(M= .90, SD=.30)*. However, teachers do not accept for the GSLD neither to attend special classes for the learning difficulties *(M= .03, SD=.17)* nor to attend a special school for gifted students with special programs focused on learning difficulties *(M= .34, SD=.48)*.

Some statistically significant differences emerged for the subgroups of the sample in relation to teachers' gender, age and previous experience in teaching at school settings. Female teachers tend to believe more (*M*=.89) than male teachers (*M*=.67) that the GSLD "are excessively disorganized" $F\ (1, 68) = 5.52$, $p<.05$, they also believe more (*M*=.97) than males (*M*=.82) in the existence of contradictory characteristics of giftedness and learning difficulties *inside* the same cognitive area such as a set of difficulties in writing a text but also a rich vocabulary $F\ (1, 68) = 4.83$, $p<.05$. Females also believe more (*M*=1.00) than males (*M*=.82) that the GSLD confront with difficulties at school with any knowledge that is not interesting for them $F\ (1, 68) = 7.99$, $p<.01$.

In regard to teachers' age and previous experience in teaching, statistically significant differences were presented between teachers of 40-59 years old (*M*=.45) and teachers of 25-39 years old (*M*=.22) on the issue that the GSLD need educational provision to confront mostly with their learning difficulties than to enrich their high

abilities $F(1, 68) = 4.15$, $p < .05$. Additionally, the older teachers ($M = .13$) and with longer previous experience of 14-28 years in teaching ($M = .12$) believe less that school teachers are able to take care of the educational needs of the GSLD, in comparison with the younger group of teachers ($M = .38$), $F(1, 68) = 5.91$, $p < .03$ and with the group of teachers with less experience in teaching of 2 to 13 years ($M = .35$) who are less pessimistic on the issue $F(1, 68) = 5.26$, $p < .03$.

In the open-ended questions, teachers expressed their fear for the GSLD future in the areas of low self-esteem (45%), underachievent at school (25%), dropping out of school (10%) and behavioural problems (10%). However, some teachers also expressed their hope for high success in the specific areas of their high abilities (10%).

Due to the limited size of the sample, the 21 questions of the third part of the questionnaire that referred to people who can identify and help the GSLD were factor analysed, in an exploratoty level, with the method of principal components and Varimax rotation. Exploring the intercorrelations Pearson r for the 21 questions, the majority of them that were statistically significant ranged from .31 to .61. Three factors were revealed that explained 33.21% of the total variance: Factor 1 "teacher's contribution" (11.91%) Factor 2 "family contribution"(10.96%) and Factor 3 "experts and government contribution" (10.34%) (Table 1). These three salient factors presenting a coherent set of attitudes underlined the importance of the development of high abilities with the support of family, teachers and experts.

Discussion

A set of interesting attitudes towards the GSLD emerged in relation to "the significant others" who are able to support and help within and out of school: Family, teachers, the experts on the issue, as expected, and the government, in order to develop their high abilities and confront with their learning difficulties. They also believe that GSLD are students who are not able to overcome their learning difficulties by themselves, as teachers and parents often seem to believe in the international literature (Fetzer, 2000), but they need special support by specific educational programs and with the support of an expert.

An important finding is that the teachers of the sample seem to accept the existence of contradictory characteristics between the two poles of giftedness and learning disabilities, but not inside the same cognitive area. This result is supported by Brody and Mills (1997), who concluded that it is really difficult for teachers to accept that students may have simultaneously exceptional abilities and learning disabilities within a certain cognitive area. On the contrary, they seem to believe that the GSLD may have talents or special abilities in arts or in music or high achievement in maths, but also some learning disabilities related to an academic subject or in understanding a text (West, 1997).

However, they do not accept easily the usefulness of alternative methods of teaching within classroom e.g. the method of writing with a word processing program, possibly revealing their negative representations for the new technology suggested methods within school environment (Diamantakou, Ntavou & Panousis, 2001); or being flexible with the time margins of written examinations completion for the GSLD, expressing this way the restricted limits of self-activity that teachers have in the mainstream of the Greek educational system (Freiderikou & Tserouli-Folerou, 1991).

Another interesting finding is that teachers have positive attitudes toward the benefit of individualised programs in regular schools (Shevitz, Weinfeld, Jeweler, & Barnes-Robinson, 2003). However, they have simultaneously negative attitudes in regard to the education of these students in an undifferentiated school program of the mainstream school, expressing negative attitudes not only in regard to the placement of these students in special schools for children with learning disabilities, but also in regard to their integration in special schools for gifted students. It appears that our hypothesis that teachers would be negative to special education for this group of students was confirmed. These results are in line with research findings of the international literature, in which the GSLD "are placed in the middle" between programs for the gifted and specific programs for learning difficulties (Clark, 1997; Silverman, 1989; Speirs Neumeister, Adams, Pierce, Cassady, & Dixon, 2007; Tallent-Runnels & Singler, 1995; Tannenbaum & Baldwin, 1983).

In general, female teachers, the younger teachers with age of less than 40 years and with less than 14 years of previous experience in teaching, seem to be less pessimistic and more sensitive to the special characteristics and needs of the GSLD. On the contrary, the older teachers and the teachers with many years of experience tend to express mostly some conservative attitudes, believing that more emphasis should be given to the treatment of learning difficulties and not to the development of high abilities (Vaidya, 1997).

The present study exploring how the Greek elementary school teachers confront with the GSLD population in the Greek public schools aimed to offer some initial, useful information for future research studies. The category of the GSLD seems to consist of a domain of research which is rarely investigated internationally, and this holds much more for the Greek research studies. A specific characteristic of the Greek educational community is the lack of specific programs for the gifted population (Gari, 2003; Gari, Kalantzi–Azizi, & Mylonas, 2000; Gari & Mylonas, 2004) and the development of a few educational programs for learning difficulties. Nevertheless, it seems to be of grate importance for all the "significant others" within school and family, and especially for the primary education teachers, to help for the better understanding of the GSLD needs and promoting the design and implementation of specific educational programs for both the gifted students population and for the GSLD. Furthermore, cross-cultural research studies regarding teachers' attitudes towards the GSLD could be of great value, in order to indicate the variety of strategies that the European countries employ for the educational provision of the GSLD in school settings. The accumulation of research information may help to understand better the GSLD and promote specific educational programs planning and implementation.

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Table 1. Factor Analysis for the 21 questions of the third part of the questionnaire

Factor loadings			Items
1	2	3	
	.42		Only family can help a GSLD
	.65		Family can easier indicate high abilities
	.50	.46	Government can mainly indicate the needs of the GSLD
	.46		Family can easier indicate learning difficulties (LD)
	.40	.53	Cooperation between family, experts and teachers is necessary
	.52		The GSLD needs help only for their LD
		.85	Experts can only manage with LD
.51			Teachers can treat the LD of the GSLD
.59			Teachers can develop high abilities of the GSLD
.82			The GSLD need firstly the development of high abilities
.82			High abilities development can help LD treatment
	.77		The GSLD need first the treatment of LD
.38		.62	Lack of treatment can lead to school failure

PRAGUE 08
ECHA

EUROPEAN COUNCIL FOR HIGH ABILITY
16TH - 20TH SEPTEMBER 2008 - PRAGUE, THE CZECH REPUBLIC

From Giftedness in Childhood to Successful Inteligence in Adulthood

11th International Conference of European Council for High Ability

Programme and the Book of Abstracts

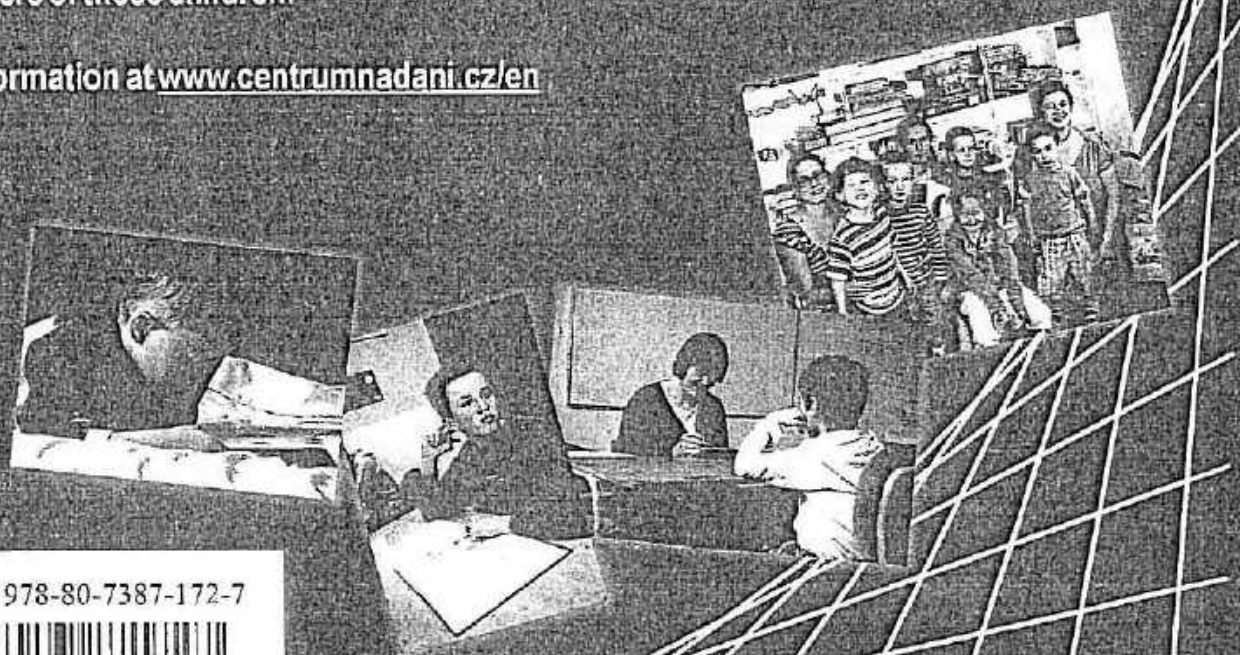
The Centre of Giftedness - YOUR 11TH ECHA CONFERENCE ORGANISER

Let us introduce a non-governmental organisation The Centre of Giftedness. The Centre was founded as a reflection of activities realized by the group of experts: the psychologists, educationalists and other professionals, who have been realizing provision for the group of exceptionally gifted children in the Czech Republic.
The founding members of the Centre are actively involved in providing the net of complex services for the group of children with exceptional talent or potential. The aim is to provide a wider range of services mainly for schools, which carry the provision for gifted children in our state the group of families (parents and their gifted children).

Regular Activities of the Centre:

- international meetings of gifted children families, conferences and professional happenings;
- psychological provision (counselling and testing) for the gifted children from their early years up to school age;
- realisation of in-service teacher training courses and other professional activities for teachers and psychologists who dedicate their professional carreer to the gifted;
- publishing the new educational materials for teachers and parents of gifted children;
- cooperation with nursery schools and centres, elementary and secondary schools, universities and other educational institutions;
- promotion and professional support of the projects of schools and organizations which focus on the gifted children population;
- organisation of inspiring out-of-school and leisure activities for schools and gifted and talented children and youth;
- organization of summer camps for the families with gifted children and youth and the teachers of these children.

More information at www.centrumnadani.cz/en



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