School counseling for promoting giftedness in Romania

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Abstract

The present paper, “School Counseling for Promoting Talents” is organized on the concrete-applicative dimension, according to the necessities and the psychological profile of the category of gifted beneficiaries in Romania and, by being based on the existence of minimal current information in the Romanian educational system in what concerns the applicative dimension of counseling services in promoting talent as well as from the perspective of continuous formation of teachers as counselors.

Keyword: school counseling, talent, teacher, didactic skills;

1. Problem Statement

In the context of current events (ethical conflicts, insecurity, the emergence of new information and communication technologies, the reduction of social cohesion, distrust in traditional institutions, etc.), Romania encounters changes which represents a challenge for the revitalization and development of the educational system. One of the fundamental problems that the Romanian Educational System considers is rethinking its own educational system with the main purpose of making it compatible with the ones in UE, in the context of globalization and sustainable generation of highly competitive national human resources able to function effectively in today's society and in the future. School in Romania, built as an open and receptive system is sensitive to changes in government policy, which develops strategies on short and long term, concerning the current educational policy. Equally, the Romanian school life is governed by its own norms and principles, which define the relative autonomy of the educational system within the social macro-system.

In this context we can also include the necessity of valuing human resources as an act that is imposed by the organizational management and by the intern logic of school as an institution. School cannot and should not become an institution segregated by individuals and society and even if in the last 20 years there have also been such moments, it emerges in Romania an environment favouring the development of autonomous and creative personality, with the purpose of acquiring the educational ideal underlined in the 2nd article, 3rd paragraph of the National Educational Law. The harmonious development of individual personality, the reduction of psycho-behavioural and social inadequate attitudinal aspects that appear during the educational process make a systematic activity of psycho-pedagogical counselling more than necessary.

In Romania there is a well individualized and defined tradition even from the 1930s in what concerns this domain and this is the main reason why the psycho-pedagogical assistance represents an important element in the Romanian school reform that started in 1989 and so it is an important part of the projects developed for the renewal of school institutions. It represents a connective element between the specific problems of the post-modern society and the
solutions, which have to be identified and systematized in this educational environment. Together with the school specific instructive-educational dimension we can also notice how the psycho-pedagogical assistance that is necessary for the efficient integration of students according to the particularities and the challenges that are more often given by the Romanian social economy takes shape. The teacher confronts with students that possess a superior intelligence, who have a more rapid way of learning and who also poses an advanced capacity of generalization during the educational-instructive activity and so they depend on the quality and on the structure of the curriculum and of their initial and continuous training level (Eskay, 2011).

2. Purpose of Study

Specialists in psychology and Education Science have noticed that in Romania the development and the implementation as well as the process of adapting certain specific programs meant for teacher training in the field of gifted children psycho-pedagogy are concepts and mechanisms that are strongly connected to the familiar ideas concerning giftedness in postmodern society, human resources and given materials, the internal policy of the education system as well as to the educational policies that are considered.

The motivation for proposing this study is based on a current information void in the Romanian educational system but it is at the same time based on the concrete-applicative dimension, the elaboration of a coherent counseling program, that is adequate for the necessities and the psycho-pedagogical profile of gifted beneficiaries in Romania, because a society problem in Romania is the one concerning the social loss in supporting, promoting and protecting excellence caused by the inadequate educational service offered by specialized institutions (unfavorable educational climate, the failure of certain categories at the macro level of the system and of the process of education as well as at the micro level represented by the presence of teachers that are not well trained in this field).

3. Methods

In 2007 the Romanian Parliament adopted a Law regarding the education of gifted young people capable of high performance." The provisions of this law indicate the need for pedagogical assistance for gifted children, through psycho-pedagogy specialists in the field of excellence. But considering the issue of continuous counselling training, the knowledge regarding their performance, the level of training of these teachers who work in pedagogical support centres and offices in order to offer appropriate counselling services for gifted children in a pedagogical approach is a necessary process meant to optimize the psycho-individual potential of the gifted individual. It is necessary to start a special investigation in this direction.

The research purpose was that of identifying key quantitative and qualitative aspects, that develop the offer and the request of psycho-pedagogical assistance services for gifted children in centres and psycho-pedagogical offices in Romania, taking into account the level of continuous counselling teacher training.

Research objectives:

O1. The radiography of the existing state of fact regarding the training of school counsellors in psycho-pedagogical assistance centres and offices in order to carry out characteristic activities for promoting talent;
O2. The identification of interventional strategies used by counselling teachers to identify, cultivate and counsel gifted children.
O3. The identification of an appropriate educational-formative approach, of a rational requirement, which circumscribe the scientific, pedagogical, methodological and managerial competence, which a counselling teacher should have in order to psycho-pedagogically assist talented children;
O4. The highlighting of possible advanced solutions by teachers, students and parents in order to overcome the difficulties encountered during the process of counselling gifted children.
The investigation would cover a blueprint of the training level of school counselors in secondary education in North-West of Romania in terms of promoting talent, taking into account the following indicators: human resources (number of people involved in specific programs for this category of students, specialization, skills, continuous training), the organization of services (following the application of pedagogical assistance provided for talented students, as well as for their parents and teachers) and not the least important one, the material, embodied in equipment and specialized tools. By following the above mentioned objectives the hypothesis is supported by work with relevant subdivisions.

**Main hypothesis:**
Providing counseling services for talented students (in psycho-pedagogical assistance centers and offices) is performed poorly in terms of counseling methodology.

**Secondary hypotheses:**
SH1. Counseling teachers providing pedagogical support for talented students bear in mind the necessary development of specific professional skills
SH2. Counseling teachers who assist talented students do not have specific professional training necessary in this area;

Considering that the existing information in the literature can be only partially relevant to the current situation a prior interview with a total of 400 teachers (100 pre-school teachers, 100 primary school teachers, 100 secondary school teachers, 100 high school teachers) actually involved in daily class work was considered necessary. The following variables have been considered in terms of research: initial training, the specialization of teachers respectively the number of years that have passed by since they started working in the educational system, the institution where they hold their job, the age, the educational level that has been obtained, their type and the type of continuous training that has been considered.

In addition, the research methods and tools that have been used have had one main purpose, namely that of gathering data that once analyzed would offer answers on this theme of research. During the investigation there have been used qualitative and quantitative research methods: the questionnaire-based survey and the semi-structured interview-based survey. The process of interviewing the subjects possessing characteristics, competences which should be possessed by the counseling teacher in order to work with gifted students is also an important element of research. The interview consisted of a grid of identification used by counseling teachers who considered the “benefits” and the "limits" in terms of their training in order to pedagogically assist talented students.

### 3. Findings and Results

By reference to information obtained from the investigation there were outlined the findings on the basis of which the conclusions will be outlined. Thus, the purpose intended by the research was achieved through the obtaining of the diagnostic study meant to identify those coordinates which conclusively and comprehensively show the quantitative and qualitative aspects that circumscribe the pedagogical support activities designed to promote talent in our country. It has also been analyzed the dimension of continuous training in correlation with the quality of the results that have been obtained during the process of counseling and promoting talents.

In what concerns the research objectives it can be said that they were correlated with the general hypothesis and with the secondary ones, ensuring the consistency and the validity of the study. We mention the fact that the need for this study stems primarily from the lack of a clear national radiograph in terms of qualitative and quantitative standards of pedagogical advice offered in schools, this issue being directly correlated to the level of counseling teacher training in promoting talent through pedagogical advisers, phrase revealed in a complete and complex manner and through the questionnaire method.

The answers provided by the respondents represent a criterion in the analysis and questioning approach on the quality of teacher training in the education system for supporting the promotion of talent. The investigative
approach that was developed is just one element of the complex mechanism of elaboration and implementation from behalf of local decision makers in taking concrete steps for identification, cultivation and promotion of children capable of high performance, from raising standards in terms of specific training practitioner advisors in order to obtain more favorable results in this field. The results support the following methods used (percentage) to identify talented students in school: 87% -individual psychological testing, 55% - psychological group testing, 85% -the evaluation of school performance, 70% - school performance evaluated by the teacher, 90% - testing creativity, 85% -intelligence quotient, 60% - testing academic, standardized knowledge, 37%, knowledge tests conducted by teachers in class, 15% - psychological assessment of apparent data and 4% - parent evaluation. Remarkable in this complex activity is the lack of positive emotional intelligence tests, of tests concerning the level of self-knowledge or of the level of intrinsic motivation.

The results have demonstrated that potential, talent development and educational differentiation are directly or indirectly defined by practitioners through psycho-pedagogical assistance strategies with the help of the multifactor model of excellence considered by F. Monks, the psychosocial model of excellence considered by A. Tannenbaum and the global success model considered by the psychologist novel C. Cretu. Thus an identification, cultivation and promotion of talented subjects are achieved using all these theories in a proportion of 75%, whereas by using a single model only 35% is achieved. The quantitative and qualitative analysis of the results of the semi-structured interview-based survey showed that a rate of 90% of surveyed teachers want a change in what concerns the unique school programs that are structured for normal students, which cause substantial lags for talented students and boredom in class. Also, 65% of them claim that the segregation of students according to their intellectual potential would allow the achievement of goals concerning specialized education in the case of gifted children in Romania. This issue was also sustained in our country by M. Jigau [1], who is a specialist in this field but a more practical application was expected, even if more projects meant for classes of gifted children have been developed and tested by Carmen Cretu[2,3]. 45% of the teachers consider that the lack of gifted children in normal classes tend to conduct to much less immediate and visible positive influence on normal children, as competition at the highest level is missing this way. 70% of the teachers have proposed teaching methods in terms of working with gifted students: enriching the individual working program, the application of a differentiated and personalized class curriculum and its rapid acceleration or promotion in this structure, organization and functioning of the national education private and religious system state.

This represents a correlation at the macro-system level in promoting talent as well as an important step towards the improvement of the process of school counseling. The results of the analysis have outlined the weaknesses of the system in terms of teacher provision of appropriate pedagogical assistance; a small number of specialists that can provide training from this perspective has been identified; the lack of motivation of counseling teachers counselors for working with these groups of students has been noticed specifically in terms of methods and appropriate information support; the reduction in offer of courses meant for talent promotion within the curricula of faculties that specialize school counselors has been noticed as well. The results have demonstrated that the low percentage of identified gifted students or students oriented towards pedagogical assistance centers (between 2% and 5%) represents a limit in the pedagogical assistance approach meant for talented children, the insufficient popularization in what concerns the development of training programs for counseling teachers in this respect and the lack of a mentoring system meant to allow information flow and involvement in activities related to promoting a specific talent is another deadline identified. Lack of financial resources for the sessions held in the country or abroad, participation fees at courses difficult to honor also represent an obstacle.

Through the pedagogical intervention has been achieved an overall picture of the main quantitative and qualitative aspects which shape the demand and the supply of pedagogical support services meant for talented students in terms of continuous teacher training.

4. Conclusions
From the perspective of the Romanian space radiograph, it has been observed that, in terms of school counseling in promoting talent, there was not an organized, clear and coherent concern in terms of counseling teacher training for providing assistance to support pedagogical talents. This vision in comparison with the same process taking place nationally is the result of an ideology that has exercised an influence on the educational system in Romania until 1989 but it is also due to the fact that the faculties of Psychology and Educational Sciences have been eliminated or assimilated by other majors for certain periods of time because an initial training focused strictly on individual knowledge was not wanted at that time, of its peculiarities and of the intervention strategies meant for promoting talent. An informational and a professional vacuum have been created but which will improve gradually through a new rethinking of the education system and through close collaboration and cooperation with international specialists.

References


