

## 10. SPECIFIC EDUCATIONAL MEASURES FOR THE PROMOTION OF ARTISTIC EXCELLENCE AT EARLY AGES

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**Abstract:** *Teachers can play an important role in identifying, supporting and evaluating educational measures that meet the needs of gifted and talented children. Regardless of the educational policy adopted at national level to encourage the education of gifted children, it is important to analyze how teachers are trained in order to work with children possessing potential and exceptional artistic skills.*

**Key words:** *art education, gifted children, educational policy*

### Introduction

We intend to analyze the educational component of artistic excellence at early ages, citing an excerpt that refers to this issue:<sup>292</sup> “...Whereas, for practical reasons, educational systems must be constructed in such a way as to provide adequate education for most children, there will always be children with special educational needs, for whom one must take special steps. One of these categories is the one of the gifted children. (...) Obviously, no country can afford to waste talents, and, if the intellectual potential or others, are not identified in time, it would mean a huge loss of human resources. For this purpose, it is necessary to implement the appropriate measures.” Research done in this area show that the percentages of children capable of excellence are not negligible. According to the assessments made and the criteria used in different countries, gifted children are 3-10 % of the school population.

### Concepts and policies regarding the educational excellence in art education

The challenge to address the present theme was first presented by the Eurydice research in 2006, which has also proposed a record and analysis of educational policies relating to the promotion of excellence and the main measures introduced in the European education systems to educate gifted and talented children, to encourage forms of excellence at primary and secondary levels (ISCED levels 1-3).

This comparative study included 30 countries that are members of the Eurydice network. What is surprising is that the preschool stage has been omitted from this study, otherwise a very important stage in the early detection of skills, especially the artistic and sporting ones. In specific literature, a variety of terms are used to describe children capable of excellence. These terms cover different concepts depending on their origin, their cultural context and how the intelligence and talent are manifested.

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<sup>34</sup> Recommendation No. 1248 / 1994 of the Council of Europe concerning gifted education, discussed and adopted in the Assembly of 7<sup>th</sup> of October 1994 (31st session, see Doc. 7140, The Report of the Culture and Education, Rapporteur: M. Hdjidemetriou).

In addition, the terminology adopted is related to educational policies designed to benefit these children.<sup>293</sup> We note that in most countries where the group is indeed defined, educational measures, formal or non-formal, have been introduced so as to meet their needs. It is observed that in the majority of countries and regions that use the two terms "gifted" and "talented" to refer to children with exceptional potential, have adopted a set of criteria to identify them (special psycho-physical-intellectual capacities, oriented scientifically, artistically towards leadership or management, towards the environment, or kinesthetic ones).

Returning to the present analysis, we refer to children who demonstrate artistic potential, taking into consideration that not all countries have established criteria for classification. In total, 17 of the 31 countries and regions included in this study have clearly defined criteria for classification.

Classification criteria aimed at measuring the inter-personal, emotional, psychological, intellectual, artistic performance (this refers to the creative skills in all areas of artistic expression, such as dance, music, or visual arts; the most widely used criterion being that obtained in tests of skill). According to current educational policies in the countries covered by this study, the education of the intellectually giftedness children and the promotion of excellence in schools, is either an integral part of general education, or it is subject to special educational measures. Any kind of non-formal measures are placed alongside the formal ones. Almost all countries offer both formal educational measures, and non-formal ones. Literature related to the insurance of education for gifted children and the development of complementary talents points out several possible options that can be generally classified into four groups: 1) more advanced or more activities, provided for under the general educational preparation, 2) differentiated teaching (or differentiated curriculum), 3) non-formal activities and 4) accelerated promotion.

**More advanced activities and more varied** among the different types of educational measures, are found more often in secondary education than in the primary one and are always combined with other types of measures: 13 countries offer such activities in primary education, and nineteen countries in secondary education. Another type of measurement encountered is that of differentiated teaching, practiced either within groups of kids with mixed skills, or in separate groups.

Such an approach is generally supported by the legal framework. However, the difference must be made between the levels of primary and secondary education, with reference to groups of mixed abilities children and those of separated skills groups. At ISCED level 1, both types of stipulations appear in equal measure, while for groups of mixed abilities of children at ISCED levels 2 and 3 they are less common. At these levels, the stipulations consist in the setting up of classes or schools for arts or sports.

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<sup>35</sup> Specific educational measures to promote all forms of excellence in schools from Europe, 2006, European Eurydice Unit Brussels, pages 7-12.

**Non-formal activities** are as common as differentiated teaching. However, non-formal activities for groups of children with mixed abilities are far less common than those for homogeneous groups. It should be noted that the government is often responsible for the organization of competitions in the various artistic disciplines. One of the most common measures, in both the primary and the secondary, is the one of promoting the accelerated method. Where there are such measures, they are generally supported by a legal framework. This type of measure is met in most countries. In four countries (Luxembourg, Sweden, Liechtenstein and Romania), the accelerated promotion is the only measure that applies to primary education.

**Other specific educational measures** refer to centres of excellence for the gifted, their parents and teachers, or from special educational support networks which exist in half of the countries included in this study. Thus, it becomes clear that, in order to be supported educationally, this group must first be clearly defined. In these countries, the existence of the criteria is therefore a prerequisite for giving attention to such young people.

However, three countries (Estonia, Greece and Slovakia) have no official grading criteria to identify skills. From the information obtained, particularly in those that relate to the implementation of special educational measures, it is observed that countries take into consideration the children capable of excellence and the integral approach, on the one hand, and on the other, the separatist approach.

The first of these theoretical models are characterized by a very clear commitment to an 'integral' policy of gifted children. Norway corresponds most closely to this model, while the other three Nordic countries (Finland, Sweden and Iceland), along with Malta, is very much of it. At the other extreme, the educational policy for the forms of excellence can be considered as being very selective. As a result, in addition to this theoretical model there are many specialized schools for different areas (vocational).

According to the information available, no European country has adopted a variant of this model. However, some countries are much closer to it than others, as is the case of the Czech Republic, Latvia and Poland. These countries offer a wide range of special measures for different groups of students and schools to promote various kinds of talents, especially in secondary education.

### **Excellence in art education at early ages**

We note that for the artistic education adapted to early ages there are no studies, research and institutional and legislative concerns. Parents, through primary education, are the first to contribute much to guide the child, both formally and informally. Preschool children need and require a direct and very close communication with their parents. During the preschool period, as in the case of other ages, parents are the best support and allies, they must use the children's own interests as a guide and support them. All these experiences should be centered on the child, to be generally acceptable and logically to be selected in the direction of the child's interests and not the interests of the parent.

In preschool children can be found in the different artistic talents, so long as there is a desire to do so<sup>294</sup>. Talent is not a miraculous quality that cannot be identified. The problem that arises is not that of the impossibility of identifying gifted children, but rather one of priorities. Very little time is allocated to children gifted. Most of the educational systems are based entirely on the group tests, and since the group tests fail to highlight the gifted children, particularly those with special abilities, at least half of them remain unidentified, remaining actually only under the family's attention.

Since gifted children have special developmental characteristics, there has been created an educational system that takes into consideration these features and that can use the huge skill potential and direct the education of these children in particular. The first centre for gifted education geared towards science, but not to the arts or sports, were developed in about the same time in the USA, China, Australia, the former Soviet union, India, and in many European countries. There are centres devoted to this system of education in Austria, Spain, Croatia, France, England, and in other European countries, and programmes for gifted children were introduced in most schools.

The network of units dedicated to gifted education go from kindergarten to postgraduate education. Recently, that is in the last 10 years, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Republic of South Africa, Brunei and other countries have turned to the development of this system. Currently such centres are also developing in other countries from the Middle East, Africa, South America, which have not been integrated into the first wave of expansion of the system. Europe is integrated in the system, almost completely. In Central and Eastern Europe, one can identify the development of gifted education in Serbia, Slovenia, Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Romania.

### **Teacher education from the perspective of artistic excellence at early ages**

Teachers can play an important role in identifying, supporting and evaluating educational measures that meet the needs of gifted and talented children. In some countries, in which higher education institutions enjoy greater autonomy, the decision is left up to them. The problem of the education for the gifted children and its approach is a compulsory subject in pre-service teacher training in almost half of the European countries. In the remaining countries, the theme is optional or not covered in official recommendations, except Lichtenstein and the German-speaking community of Belgium (in the secondary education), where the training of teachers is made abroad.

This issue is treated as a separate subject or integrated with other disciplines (for example, as part of a course on differentiated teaching or special educational requirements in general). Two countries (Greece and Slovenia) have approached the topic from a double perspective: treating it in special modules and its integration into broader themes. In Germany, Latvia, Austria and

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<sup>294</sup> Martison, R.A., 1974, 'The Identification of the Gifted and Talented,' Superintendent of Schools Ventura County, Ventura, California

Slovakia, the problem of education of excellence is treated only as a separate discipline.

Integrated approach is preferred in half of the countries concerned. In ten of the countries, the dissemination of knowledge about education of excellence and its promotion is not mentioned in the official recommendations. In the 17 countries where the subject is included in the other disciplines, the treatment is generally completed while training for differentiated teaching. The United Kingdom (Scotland) adopts a similar approach about meeting the needs of pupils with special educational needs. In Slovenia, education for excellence is included in a more general context of psychological problems.

There are three directions of training, such as **a separate discipline**: gifted education is treated as an independent subject and taught as such; **integrated approach**: the subject is addressed in a broader theme, through other disciplines generally oriented towards children with special educational needs or to differentiate teaching methods in normal classes; **discipline without references in official documents/institutional autonomy**: the existence of courses on the subject and its approach is at the discretion of training institutions.

In 18 countries, teachers in primary and secondary education can take continuing education courses on gifted and talented education. In most cases, these courses vary very much. In two countries (Malta and Norway) with an educational policy that aims to satisfy the needs of all children and that have not adopted specific measures for gifted children, there is no training on the subject of education of these children. In Malta there is no recommendation in this matter in the initial training of teachers. Also, in Denmark, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Finland, Sweden and Iceland there is no reference to this problem at the training courses. In several countries (such as the Czech Republic, Spain, France, Portugal and Slovenia), special courses are available for the specialists in educational psychology in schools, but not for kindergartens.

## Conclusions

It is obvious that research and innovations in education will open new horizons in this area and, in particular, those will be the results of the various educational policies already under way. It is necessary to understand that an educational alternative educational can and should be oriented to the principles of intellectual endowment, that is emancipation, not manipulation, which does not come in conflict, but also overlaps and comply with the existing education system, but it also constitutes a curriculum, educational programmes, methodologies and practices that can enrich the offer of kindergartens.

It is the time for Romania to have a systematic educational program dedicated to the development of individual artistic abilities of children and their orientation to the acute needs of evolution. It should be thought of as an alternative educational oriented towards the amplification, diversification and the use of the qualities of children with artistic potential.

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