

## 9. ASPECTS OF SUPPORTING GIFTEDNESS AND TALENT BY EDUCATIONAL POLICIES IN ROMANIA

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**Abstract:** *The topic of supporting the children and young talented through educational policy and strategies is increasingly interesting for the researchers in the psychopedagogy of excellence. Lack of support leads to a double problem: on the one hand can result in loss of talent, on the other hand a waste of human resources extremely useful to society. The purpose of this paper is to briefly present the state of concerning for this topic in Romania. Thus, we conducted a brief overview of the conceptual meaning that it has educational policies and educational strategies among local researchers and we analyzed the main legislative documents relevant for giftedness support in our country. Our approach has led us to identify some positive aspects and deficiencies of supporting talent and giftedness through national educational policies.*

**Key words:** : *educational policies, support, talent, giftedness*

A reference work for the field, *International Handbook on Giftedness*, 2009 Schavinina (Eds.), intends to describe a wide range of issues related to phenomenon of giftedness and talent. Two parts of this work, namely XII (*Policy Implications and Legal Issues in Gifted Education*) and XIII (*Giftedness Research and Giftedness Education Around the World: Institutional and Regional Exemples*) focus on the national and institutional policies in supporting giftedness and talent. Thus 10 among the 78 articles in the volume concern explicitly this issue. The need to support the development of giftedness and talent is reported by default in other articles. For example, the conclusive article, *Research on Giftedness in the 21st Century* (Ziegler, A.) emphasizes what other researchers (Alencar & Arancibia; Maree, Bester, & van der Westhuizen; Matthews; Monks & Chandler; Noble & Childers; Subhi; Tsai et al.; Warwick, Van Tassel-Baska; Karnes & Stephens; Carroll, Crowe, Earle, Orland, Moon, Ross, & Subotnik) have discussed in some items of the Handbook. Ziegler writes, “the education of gifted persons is seen as one of the great challenges of the 21st century, which causes some nations to record social deliberated adjustments, in order to encounter these challenges”. (Ziegler, A., 2009, in: Schavinina, 2009, 1511).

The foreword of the editor summarizes, in its last sentence, the hope to support those gifted and talented in both macro- and micro levels: “I sincerely hope that every educational system worldwide, the parents and other educators will be able to develop the unique talents of every child on earth”. (Schavinina, 2009, x). Moreover one must understand the policy of supporting talented people, as customization of educational policies formulated and implemented beyond the big decisions, beyond any macro strategies. It is even advisable to formulate them on the institutional level, because the schools are often closer to the direct beneficiaries (pupils and students). They are able to make decisions by considering local economic specifics. A so high rate of works (over 10%)

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interested in discussing giftedness and talent as integrated into educational policies indicates the growing interest on the reality that the implementation of theoretical information provided by research should be supported in action. The education policies as decisional acts have an important role in making these actions possible.

To what extent one may speak about supporting young talented through national educational policy in Romania? What institutions stop taking account of this? Two important laws in force, the Law of National Education and the Law concerning the Education of gifted young people, capable of high performance, show at least a good intention on cabinet levels, since “laws are tools that support educational policies promoted by the government” (Ciolan, 2008, 383). Despite of those, implementing and evaluating these policies prove to be a weak point of state governance in Romania.

### **I. Policy to support giftedness and talent in the context of educational policy as public policy**

Romanian thinkers - philosophers, historians, sociologists - were concerned about the relationship between politics and education since the education policy has begun to build its own subject, in the early 20th century. The first work dealing with this topic in pedagogical perspective was Ștefan Bîrsănescu's “Politica Culturii. Studiu de pedagogie” (“Culture Policy. Study of Pedagogy”, 1937, republished in 2003).

Bîrsănescu handles education policy in the context of the broader analysis of cultural policy, following the trend of the times. He chooses to define cultural policy by addressing the broadest understanding of culture and policy: “Cultural policy is any governance activity that tends to organize culture for the community and individuals: culture of education, culture of creation and spread of culture” (Bîrsănescu, 2003, 37). His definition is extremely useful in the context of this paper, since we are interested both in the object of educational policies and in the educational policies ass supporting 'creative', gifted and talented individuals. Bîrsănescu believes that education policy has as its object, “preparing individual and the whole nation for a future activity and the policy for cultural creation refers precisely to that activity, which follows naturally the training, in the meantime subjecting the latter to new conditions: to be creative” (Bîrsănescu, 2003, 86). Therefore education policy practiced by a State, an institution, a party, economic environment, and even by individuals, must be completed by a policy of “care” for creation - as in the language of early 20th century - or a policy of “supporting” performance and performance potential – as in the language of our times. Bîrsănescu's approach on education policy overlaps with the understanding of education policy as public policy.

Romanian contemporary authors concerned with the topic of educational policy stress that Anglo-Saxon literature uses “politics”, respectively “policy/policies” as two different words, which is not the case in the Romanian language. This situation gives different meanings when the terms are associated with the one of “education”. In the debate on “Politică educațională: expertiză,

dezbatere, decizie” („Education policy: expertise, debate, decision”) organized in 2003 by “Education 2000+” Center and „Focus-Educația” Reflection and Initiative Group, Miroiu explains synthetically that the term “policy” covers broader the conceptual and operative area of public policies, including educational policies. In turn, “politics” refers to the exercise of power relations in society, in other words how the organized interests influence the way policies are made (Miroiu, 2003, 10). The sources of Anglo-Saxon origin reveal that indeed, for example, International Routledge Encyclopedia of Education, 2008, discusses separately “the politics of education”/“educational politics” and “education policy” respectively.

In the first case, educational politics refer to “interests involved in the debate between individuals, groups or organizations in deciding the nature and the direction of education. These interests involve the nature of relations between the stakeholders” (McCulloch, 2008, 444). Continuing the in-depth analysis of the term, McCulloch distinguishes between educational politics and politics of education. If “education policies deal with the tensions and negotiations between stakeholders in the educational sphere”, the politics of education imply “considering the power in the relationship between state and society. This is an approach that emphasizes the sociological dimension of power relations inside a state” (McCulloch, 2008, 444).

Mark Olsson, the author of the article concerning “education policy”, does not provide a strict definition of educational policy. Instead of this, he chooses to explain the trend of meanings of the on how “educational policies make their way in a democracy which appeared in the social sciences, dominated by intellectual traditions”. This trend results from the fact that, in the first half of the 20th century, the general perspective in functionalist sociology and systems theory have been applied to educational problems as well (Olsson, M., in: McCulloch, 2008, 198). Olsson argues that recent definitions of “political process emphasize the procedural and the implementation aspects in understanding policy as whatever governments choose to do or not do. The policies in this regard have been therefore seen as a form of supporting the social system” (Olsson, M., in: McCulloch, 2008, 199). Even if Routledge Encyclopedia does not offer a clear definition for “education policy”, we can deduce the meaning of Olsson’s article on education policies as public policies.

In any case, as Lazăr Vlăsceanu notes, the definition area of “educational policy” is spanning inside the definition area of “education”. Referring to the policy of formal and non-formal education as well, the author argues that “educational policies consist in the design, implementation and evaluation of structures, activities and specific results of the educational system” (Vlăsceanu, L., 1995, 154). Vlăsceanu approaches analytically the term of “educational policy” and distinguishes two sets of guidelines:

a) areas of reference in the discussing educational policies: structures (educational institutions), activities (teaching, learning, evaluation, management) and results (output streams, related to inputs).

b) initiating and conducting a program of educational policy that would involve several phases: data collection; processing and interpretation; diagnosis - characterization of system status; design – anticipation of an organizational type; implementation; evaluation by comparison with initial objectives.

The concept of *policies is frequently joined* in the literature with the one of *strategy*, regardless of their originary sector: economic development and finances, social development, education, etc. The relation between the concepts of “policies” and “strategies” is complex: from coordination and mutual subordination to overlapping semantics. Both policies and strategies imply an act of decision with a higher or lower character of generality and therefore they are often used as synonyms.

Public policies as expression of a general purpose, or of a national / global desirable condition, are called strategies, e.g.: Sustainable Development Strategy of Romania, European Commission Strategy for Development of Higher Education, etc. In this context, some authors use the concepts of policies and strategies as synonyms (Dascălu, N., 2011), while others distinguish between the two, considering policies as subordinate to strategies (Macmillan, H., 2000, Căprioară, 2007). In relation to policies, strategies are also seen as ways of implementing the decisions made by policies; e.g.: allocation of resources to different actions depending on the analysis of policies’ environment. In this case, strategies are subordinate to policies.

Educational policies as sector of public policies will be understood in the present work as political decisions on prioritization of the aims, allocating resources, formulating criteria for measuring the efficiency and effectiveness of the process. These decisions will be related on public or specific educational issues of general interest. Educational strategies will be also understood as decisional documents, related to educational policies, on the choice of objectives, content, methods, means and resources in solving an educational issue of public interest (Cretu, 1985, Anghel, 2013)

## **II. Analysis of documents concerning national education policy**

Draft laws concerning direct or indirect support in supporting performance have been proposed by the Ministry of Education to Government and further to Parliament, which finally approved them. After 1990, there were adopted two laws of education – *Legea învățământului* (“Law of Instruction”), adopted in June 1995 and *Legea Educației Naționale* (“National Education Act”), adopted in January 2011. We may add to these a law supporting performance, adopted in 2007 – “Law no. 17, on the education of gifted young people, which are capable of high performance”. These documents were subjects to several regulations and changes made by Ministerial Orders and Government Decisions.

**II.1. Law of Instruction** (*Legea învățământului*), or “Law No. 84”, adopted in June 1995, republished in *Monitorul Oficial* (“Official Gazette”) with the number 606/10 December 1999

The Educational Law adopted in 1995 has not a special and distinctive chapter for gifted children and teenagers, but there are many articles for this category which refer to the curriculum, to the organization of special classes, to the competences of the teachers. The article no. 16 (the 2<sup>nd</sup> paragraph) stipulates that „students with high aptitudes and exceptional academic performances (...) can skip classes”, then the competences must be demonstrated after an exam and two years of school or faculty could become one year of study. The management of the gifted education can be sustained by the law in this way. It is not the only one possibility for the organization of the studies. The article 24 (2) settles the situation of the special classes. The schools are free to organize classes with teaching in German, French or English for talented children in foreign tongues, or special classes for talented children in maths, in computer sciences etc. The admission in higher education is possible if the students have important distinctions obtained into the international competitions or rewards into the National Olympics competitions, conforming to the article no. 59 (2<sup>nd</sup> par.).

The Romanian Educational Law no. 84 from 1995 has no special chapter for gifted children but its philosophy indicates a receptivity and high reserve for talented issues. The performance is sustained in different ways – individualization and personalization of curriculum was possible since the special classes were organized and skipping or acceleration of the classes was settled. Considering the status of this legislative act – the first one in education after the communist era - the discussed aspects are very important. The attitudes and the decisions of the central institutions given to the learners and to the gifted learners are more opened. Despite of the fact that it could not offer at that time a coherent educational policy for the gifted children, the endorsement of the law from 1995 can be considered a start.

**II.2. National Education Act**, or “Law Nr. 1” (*Legea Educației Naționale*) adopted on 5 January 2011, published in *Monitorul Oficial* with the number 18/10 January 2011, provides in its 14<sup>th</sup> section - differently from the law of 1995 – a special chapter concerning education for children or young people of high performance. There is to appreciate the definition - even if not explicitly – of giftedness and talent in terms of potential performance and not as proved performance.

Article 57.1, stipulates the support undertaken by the State for this special population through activities conducted in schools and centers of excellence, the latter being coordinated by *Centrul Național de Instruire* (“National Training Center Differential”, see paragraph 2). This institution, subordinated to Department of Education, was legally established since 2007 by Law 17/2007, but could not operate from “lack of space”. In order to establish this Center, chief members of civil society environment, with support of IRSCA Gifted Education, and EDUGATE (“Romanian Consortium for the Education of gifted and talented Young”), conducted various activities with national and international echo (on may cite here

[http://www.supradotati.ro/comunicat\\_EDUGATE-cum-ar-arata-Romania-cu-o-educatie-de-excelenta.php](http://www.supradotati.ro/comunicat_EDUGATE-cum-ar-arata-Romania-cu-o-educatie-de-excelenta.php), retrieved at 02.04.2015)

Paragraph 3 stipulates the continuity of policies supporting performance through sectorial and institutional policies. The responsibility on providing human, material and financial resources, curricula, information, is transferred to local inspectorates and schools. This article encourages schools to access other funds than the budget stated by central institutions.

Paragraph 4 refers to involvement of the Department of Education in continuing the tradition of organizing “Olympiads and competitions, profile camps, symposiums and other specific activities” and in providing scholarships or other forms of material support offered to gifted. Organizing various school competitions is restated in art. no. 111 (paragraph 1.h) in order to encourage all categories of students, with or without proven performance: “The state budget, through the Department of Education, Youth and Sports, ensures the following expenses related to the education institutions, including special education [...] h) financing the organization of competitions for pupils, on domains such as practical, technical, scientific and creative skills, of cultural and artistic festivals and contests, of interschool sport championships and competitions, with national and international participation, and of international Olympiads”.

There is to appreciate the fact that legislators have finally understood the need for differentiated education of the “capable of performance” and have decided to regulate the ways in which this differentiation should be done: “Children or young students capable of high performance, regardless of their age, are beneficiary of educational programs respecting the particularities of learning and orientation on performance. These programs are focused on deeper learning, on grouping skills, on curriculum enrichment with new areas, such as mentoring and competence transfer, on speeding the graduation, according to individual learning speed” (art. 57.5).

**II.3. Low on the education of gifted young people, which are capable of high performance** (*Legea privind educația tinerilor supradotați, capabili de performanță înaltă*), or Law no. 17, was published in *Monitorul Oficial* no. 43 of 19.01.2007. This act came into force on 18 February 2007.

This law aims to certify the start for coherent policies in supporting gifted and talented people. It was initiated by IRSCA Gifted Education and EDUGATE consortium. (IRSCA Gifted Education is an NGO association. Its activity is recognized on national and international levels: UNESCO partner and member of World Council for Gifted and Talented Children (WCGTC), European Council for High Ability (ECHA - 2006) and Asia-Pacific Federation of the World Council for Gifted and Talented Children (2007), the highest international forums in this concern. EDUGATE is a consortium of associations, institutions and companies working in the excellence education area. EDUGATE is also a national programme on improvement of education in România, joined in the past and nowadays by different organizations, institutions, schools and education specialists. The current leader of EDUGATE

is IRSCA Gifted Education (as <http://www.acum.tv/articol/6503/>; retrieved at 02.04.2015).

At the 1st chapter, into the 4th article there is presented the purpose of the law here discussed: „the promotion and the guarantee of the right of differentially education, (...) creating a law-marking environment for professional elites formation in every domain of activity.” Even without getting a definition, as it laudable happens, with the terms and the expressions such as „gifted”, „performance able young peoples”, „particular needs”, „specialized curriculum” in the 5th article, the collocation „professional elite” is used for precizing the purpose of the law. Choosing these could envisage even the policy for consecration of the talents abled to become elites only if there will be socially approved.

The 2nd Chapter - reglementates the identification of the gifted youngsters, abled with the high performance capacity.

The 3rd Chapter refers to the education of the youngsters abled with high performance capacity through the reglementation of the differentiated curricular ways.

The 4th Chapter is made for the preparation of the authorized staff working with and for the gifted youngsters (teachers, psychologists, social assistants, psycho-pedagogists).

The 5th Chapter reglementates the making of the National Differentiated Instruction Centre (CNID) inside CNE which will have the purpose of „assuring the educational facilities for the gifted youngsters, abled with high performance capacity, (...) and assuring the conditions and the making of the differentiated curricular ways procedures also (...)” (the 25th article)

There will be created the national and the local differentiated instruction centers in the same time (the 6th Chapter of the law discussed). These (the national and the local centers) will have co-related and complementary attributions and activities, all interested in sustaining the talented youngsters. The articles 27th (1st paragraph), the 33rd and the 34th speak about the cohesion between these institutions.

The 7th Chapter (final commands) let us know the fact that all the conditions will be executed in 90 days after its appearing in the Official Monitor.

Other words speaking with, beginning from the 1st of June 2007 there should appear the visible effects of this law into the educational policies concerning the identification, sustaining and promotion of the high aptitude potential young peoples

We are talking about an equilibrated and articulated law, which offers a jural aid in many ways: the individualization of the curriculum by its own extension and by organizing special classes and schools; improving the didactic staff wanting and having potential for being trainers to these gifted youngsters; creating a national institution and some local affiliated ones for realizing and implementation of educational programs according to the identified needs. The only limit that we can identify concerns the explicit missing of some

reglementations for the problematic of consecration of the youngsters to which the performance potential have become a talent, excellency. We should try searching in other legislative documents.

Press Office of IRSCA claims in a 2008 press release that “the law is not yet supported by the adoption of methodologies that provide the framework for implementing the law. Methodologies were developed and proposed by IRSCA Gifted Education within the statutory period of 90 days prescribed by law and are already by MEC, without being adopted, although they received a favorable notice from the prestigious international fora”. ([http://www.supradotati.ro/comunicat\\_EDUGATE-cum-ar-arata-Romania-cu-o-educatie-de-excelenta.php](http://www.supradotati.ro/comunicat_EDUGATE-cum-ar-arata-Romania-cu-o-educatie-de-excelenta.php); retrieved on 02.04.2015). While 2007 and 2008 were very active in terms of activities supporting the adoption of these methodologies, all the attempts of the Consortium remained unsuccessful. From this perspective we might see as a success the inclusion of the National Council of Differentiated Instruction (Law No. 1 / 2011, art. 99.1) in the National Education Act. This is a sign that the recognition of the special needs for the gifted and talented is a more complex phenomenon, even if the institution is not yet established by a governmental decision.

### **III. Conclusions**

The analysis of the official documents concerning the national education policy allows us to identify several favorable aspects and deficiencies of the national policy in supporting giftedness and talent.

a) Positive aspects of supporting young people through national educational policies and strategies:

- existence of a legislation to support young people, capable of performance. Romania has two laws that support, at least in words, high performance. From this point of view one can say that Romania allinates to other European countries;

- giftedness and talent are defined in terms of potentiality in normative acts at the national level and. Grigorenko, 2000, says that institutions may proceed in three possible ways in designing educational policies for cultivation of talents, according to the definition of "talent": "(1) one may adopt multiple theoretical meanings and at the same time one may develop a system to verify the effectiveness of each approach; (2) one may adopt a single theoretical paradigm followed by the evaluation of its effectiveness, (3) one may remain atheoretical." (Grigorenko, 2000,741). Regarding the Romanian legislation, there has been opted for the second option, choosing Marland model definition, which has the benefit of being quite operational when it comes to organize educational activities and to provide not only demonstrated performance, but also potentiality of performance as well. The model, however, does not provide any attention to technical talent, which is simply included into the academic one. From this perspective on may risk to a limited understanding of the technical talent in its applicative area, and this situation leads to the first weak point in the list below.

b) Deficiencies in supporting young people through national educational policies and strategies:

- delay in effectiveness of the institution which should facilitate the apply of the legislation on supporting children and young performers. Although approved to be created by the law on education of young gifted, capable of high performance (2007), and then by the National Education Act (2011), there is still no governmental decision concerning the activation of all the attributions of the National Council of Differentiated Instruction;

- uninstructed special human resource for the work with gifted and talented people, who have a specific cognition and affectivity, differently developed than by ordinary peers. Teachers act as trained only during their own experience, but they should follow special modules on individualized identification and education of students with potential technical performance as well;

- Romania's economic situation and how it is managed. Underfunding education system in the latter time discourages the academic initiatives. The political inconsistency discourages initiatives from the private sector (economic investors and nongovernmental organizations). Once again we would like to remind the initiatives of EDUGATE Consortium, which were permanently braked after 2009. Moreover, as L. Ciolan has observed, the better developed points in the process of public policies in Romania are in the definition of the problem. The way how the formulation, implementation and evaluation are done as elements of educational policies' development in Romania can be characterized as "inconsistent and insufficiently mature" (Ciolan, L. 2008, 383).

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