Chapter 2

Students’ Attitudes Toward Education of Gifted Children and Competencies as Future Teachers:
Case Study From Croatia

Jasna Arrigoni
Faculty of Teacher Education, Croatia

Sanja Tatalović Vorkapić
University of Rijeka, Croatia

ABSTRACT

An important prerequisite for organizing a quality educational system for gifted children is well-trained teachers. In this chapter, the development of teacher competencies in gifted, through preservice teacher education coursework at the undergraduate level, is explored. Attitudes toward gifted children and their education are examined from the perspective of students enrolled at the Faculty of Teacher Education in Rijeka, Croatia. Pre-service teacher education students in both the early and preschool education program and the primary school education program were included in the research. Attitudes toward the course “Education of Gifted Children” were examined. Finally, attitudes about gifted children and their education by preservice teachers who had taken the “Education of Gifted Children” course were compared to the attitudes of those preservice teachers who had not taken the course. Results are discussed within the frame of the teachers’ required competencies, attitudes, and study program modifications.

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INTRODUCTION

The progress of any society is often reflected in its most gifted individuals through their innovations and solutions to societal problems. The recognition and nurturing of such individuals is an essential duty of the educational system and teachers. Gifted learners, when nurtured, can become social change agents, and their education may influence societal economic growth (Hanushek, 2012). Talented individuals represent the part of society which can, to the greatest extent, contribute to the prosperity of the country. Renzulli (2002), points out that although talented individuals do represent significant social change agents, the gifted may also demonstrate other components, such as; optimism, courage, passion in a field of interest, sensitivity and empathy for other people’s problems, physical and mental strength, and vision. Teacher education University level programs must develop competencies for new teachers working with gifted students. New teachers’ attitudes towards the phenomenon of giftedness, gifted individuals, and their education is extremely important. The following is a review of one gifted preparation program for future teachers at the University of Rijeka in Croatia.

BACKGROUND

Course Education for Gifted Children: Use and Usefulness

At the University of Rijeka, faculty in Teacher Education offer the course Education of gifted children for students preparing to be primary/elementary education teachers. This elective course became an integral part of the teacher training program in 2003. More than 300 students have completed the course since its inception. The basic aim of the course is to familiarize pre-service teacher education students with basic information about giftedness, so as to develop sensitivity toward gifted students in schools and to gain the competencies needed to work with such students. The content of the course is focused on the acquisition of theoretical knowledge and familiarization with practical examples of working with gifted students. Over the years, the course has been updated regularly in regards to theory, scientific research, and gifted educational practice, especially as seen in the Republic of Croatia. The course consists of the following content:

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