Chapter 9

Analyzing Teachers’ Competencies in Regular Classroom Practice With Gifted Students in Slovenia

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ABSTRACT

The highest level of educational quality can be achieved with teachers’ awareness of their fundamental responsibilities in teaching gifted and talented students, knowing their capacities and characteristics and their different needs. The chapter presents research on teachers’ self-assessment of their competencies, efficacy, and attitudes towards gifted students in Slovenia. Such students should have the opportunity to develop their skills not being limited by the class average. A selection of appropriate teaching personnel is needed to accomplish such achievement. The obtained results are presented in relation to three research questions and expose that teachers in Slovenia are usually inadequately informed on working approaches with gifted students; they tend to have low self-esteem in identifying children personal characteristics and commonly choose inappropriate teaching strategies. The study discusses different options that would allow teachers to ensure as best education for the gifted children.

INTRODUCTION

A high-quality education begins with competent teachers involved in education at all levels. In gifted education competent teacher is one who contributes positively to the learning environment by providing unique personal characteristics, energy, strong interest in students and extraordinary strengths in the following roles: subject expert, pedagogical expert, Communication skills, Mentoring, Systematic and formative assessment. Chapter starts from the premise, that only those who are competent, effective and

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know a student well, could offer an advanced level of education to a gifted student. Consequently, teachers of gifted students should develop high level of interdisciplinary expertise, coherently including balanced knowledge of different scientific fields, as pedagogy, psychology and other relevant (school) issues. An adequate teacher’s training in the area of identification and pedagogical orientation may significantly contribute to the valid and reliable evaluation of students (Ferbežer, 2005). Strmčnik (1995) believes that the most difficult obstacle preventing faster development of gifted student could be low awareness and low qualification of the teachers, which result in a non-stimulating school atmosphere. Researches (Ferbežer, 2005; Hodge & Kemp, 2008; Kukanja, 2006; Kukanja Gabrijelčič, 2015; Pfeiffer & Petscher, 2008; Pfeiffer & Jarosewich, 2003; Renzulli, Siegle, Reis, Gavin, & Reed, 2009) draw attention to the problem of insufficiently qualified or even unqualified teachers in the area of identifying the characteristics of gifted students and further educational work with them. Lack of knowledge and understanding of giftedness was proposed to be largely responsible for the mistaken beliefs held by teachers. The identification of cognitive and socio-emotional characteristics and needs depends exclusively on their implicit beliefs, attitudes and manifestations they have about gifted student (Clark, 2002; Gross, 1994). Since implicit beliefs are part of hidden curriculum, the importance of the latter should also be considered in teaching of gifted students. Gordon (1982 in Jančec & Lepičnik Vodopivec, 2017) suggested that hidden curricula is established in many different ways. First, the affective outcome of education, where beliefs, rules and attitudes that are compulsory for social integration or affiliation to the group present the main core of the implicit beliefs of teacher and gifted students. If giftedness is valued in the classroom and learning organized with goal to develop students’ potentials, the teacher would more likely to put an additional effort in work which is not required by the program or any other policy of institution, but it is good for students per-se. Secondly, hidden curricula can be developed through school context (Gordon, 1982 in Jančec & Lepičnik Vodopivec, 2017, p. 20), which it is considered as a systematized learning that takes place in the school setting, and affects the values, attitudes and habits of students and the school. Considering this perspective, question of social relations and prejudices towards gifted students as a reflection of society as a whole can emerge and determinates classroom learning environment. Consequently, possible unexpected, unintended interaction between teachers and gifted students can arise. Therefore, research (Geake & Gross, 2008; Pierce, Adams, Neumeister, Cassady, Dixon, & Cross, 2007) also suggested that unqualified teachers rely exclusively on their own perception, giftedness stereotypes understanding and expectations. According to their views, non-competent teachers could identify only a small set of students being potentially gifted. Teachers, who are involved in teaching gifted students without being adequately trained, cannot sufficiently support the development of students' needs, interests and potentials (Geak & Gross 2008; Szymanski & Shaff 2013, p. 20). Since teachers have a major influence on learning and teaching environment, the characteristics, skills, knowledge, and teacher training of gifted students should be the concerns of all gifted legislation in every country.

**BACKGROUND**

Reviewing current literature, laws in education and contemporary (school) practices, authors present some of the main difficulties in field of competences of teachers in gifted education, that could limit appropriate work of teachers with gifted students already at the beginning of teaching process. Despite of little success in gifted and talented education in Slovenia (legislation, educational measures, identification, provision, teacher education) there are still some major gaps that authors would like to