

Figure 1. The number and classification of conflicts for EC group

There is a significant decrease in the number of conflicts: from 75 to 24, almost three times fewer conflicts in the final phase compared to the initial phase. The conflicts that were recorded are mild and medium range (12 and 8, respectively). There are still 4 severe conflicts whose duration was longer than three days and which had as subject the fact that the children did not like one or another of their colleagues.

To emphasize that the results obtained by us are really due to the method we used, we will compare the final results of the experimental class with the results obtained in the control group. The comparative results between the two classes in the final phase are presented in figure 2.

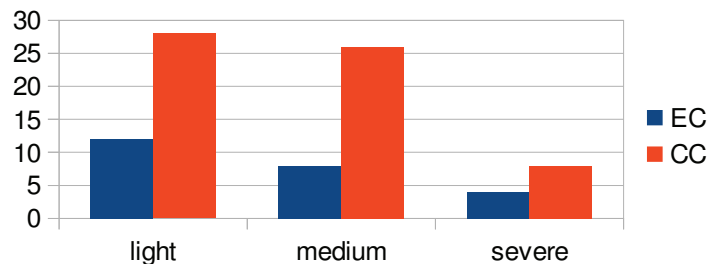


Figure 2. The number and classification of conflicts at final evaluation

We can notice that in the control group there is also a decrease in the number of conflicts, but this is much smaller than in the experimental group. The number of conflicts between children in the CC is maintained approximately at the same level and a decrease in them is due to the evolution and natural growth of children, accompanied by an intellectual maturation. However, for the EC, the decrease in the number and intensity of conflicts is significant, demonstrating that the children have learned strategies for the friendly management of conflicts and for the peaceful resolution of the stressful situations that may occur in their everyday's school life.

The hypothesis formulated at the beginning of the research was therefore validated by this small study: the counseling and mediation sessions introduced to the class led to a decrease in the number of conflicts and their intensity. The main objective was achieved: children learned strategies for friendly conflict management, which helped them to achieve assertive behaviors and to better integrate into the daily life of the class.

Conclusions

The programs of mediation of conflicts between children in the primary cycle must be part of the daily activity of social workers in schools. We believe that such intervention programs can be easily used by social workers, thus contributing to the creation of a truly academic climate in the school, in which children learn and acquire social skills that will help them integrate more easily into adult life.

We believe that such intervention programs should be piloted, together with the social workers, at macro level as well in order to ensure that all schools are receiving proper training and to ensure that the program is included in the school's curricula. We also believe that is important to integrate teaching children social and emotional skills, because this seems to be something that they are struggling with when they are at school. We recommend piloting an approach in which skills are taught for conflict resolution and where students are also taught the differences. By perfecting these skills, children can become themselves mediators in conflicts between their peers, helping them understand the causes of the conflict and providing them with opportunities to resolve the conflicts so that they can change their behavior into one positive and constructive.

Brackett and Salovey (2006) proved that there is a connection between classroom climate and students academic achievement. This means that by helping children managing conflicts, leads to a better relationship among students and furthermore help students to achieve better results.

Acknowledgement: We hereby state that the subjects involved in our research were informed about the voluntary character of their participation in this research, about the understanding of information and of that fact that withdrawal from research is possible at any time without negative consequences upon the participant. The research complied with all ethical research standards, the research participants/participants` guardians giving their consent to participate in the research.

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GIFTED CHILDREN EDUCATION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD- PRACTICAL STRATEGIES

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Abstract: *The identification and education of gifted children at an early age remains a challenge and a priority objective of Romanian education. Undoubtedly, children have certain exceptional abilities when entering school, it is the educators` duty to identify these innate skills and to stimulate them so that they reach the performance level. The challenge of the school is to find the means and methods of early intervention to promote a differentiated education that will help the whole group to develop, but which will take into account individualities to promote learning according to the needs of the children. Stimulating the development of each child according to his/her abilities requires a flexible curriculum and differentiated and personalized teaching strategies. In our article we will outline some strategies used in educating gifted children by focusing education and instruction on the child.*

Key words: *identification; education; strategies; special education; stimulation.*

1.Introduction

Early identification of gifted children is the first step in their proper education and in influencing the development of innate skills. Identifying and educating gifted children is a challenge for educators no matter what position they are in, parent, guardian, teacher. Family, of course, represents the most important pillar in the child's education. Education starts at home, in the family with examples, lifestyle, rules of behaviour and an orientation towards the development of children's abilities. School, however, is the organization that has the most appropriate levers for identifying gifted children and for stimulating the development of innate skills (Davis, J. L., Moore, J. L., 2016). These predispositions are often more difficult to recognize, which is why identifying gifted children by the school is a challenge that educators face. Such identification shall take place before these skills diminish, dissipate, and become unrecognizable. It is known that if you do not intervene early to develop the skills, they may remain hidden or may even be lost (Gagné, F. 2009).

In the early ages when we refer to giftedness, in fact, we refer to the child`s precocity in a certain area or in general. At this age when the child is experiencing unprecedented development both psychically and physically, it is difficult to identify the giftedness. Some children can be identified at the age of three by skills that go beyond their biological age. We are often surprised by these children who

know how to read, count, ask questions above their age level. Giftedness means a very rapid development compared to most children of the same chronological age, showing an uncommon curiosity, quick learning abilities, but especially a completely different ability of seeing the world around them as compared to children of similar age. In addition to these specific features, the gifted presents an inexhaustible energy, the desire to discover how things work, exasperating adults with inexhaustible questions. At the same time, they have an exaggerated sensitivity and an inclination towards perfectionism. These specific characteristics make them get bored quickly, to experience frustration or even depressive states of mind (Ford, D. Y. 2013). Identifying the gift is important because it requires specialized interventions.

2. Identifying Giftedness

2.1. Specific traits of giftedness

For school, the identification of gifted children is a challenge, and the identification process is often difficult and not eloquent. The identification of the gifted requires investment of time and resources (J. Swanson, 2016). Authentic identification is achieved through a complex set of evaluation means over an extended period of time. Cognitive, motor and social development is rapid and varied at young children. It is very possible that one aspect of cognitive development may not be obvious at one point and in the following moments it will shock through accuracy. That is why the test results are fluctuating, or they do not give real results. A true identification of the gifted can be considered when the results are conclusive following the observations made over a longer period, during different activities, in different circumstances, following verbal behaviours, taking into account the parents', relatives' references, analysing the children's products.

2.2. Parents references

The discussions with the parents are most often revealing. They can confirm the observations made by the teachers in the classroom regarding the children's behaviour and their unusual abilities. Of course, all parents' stories must be passed through the rational filter, often out of too much love for the children, they exaggerate their skills and therefore are not objective. But in most cases parents are realistic predictors of children's developmental abilities and needs. That is why teachers need to pay attention and note down these references and use them for confirmation and for an individualized educational path, following the progress of each child.

2.3. Children's Products

The portfolio with the children's works is another way to record the children's progress, to detect the specific skills used during the individualized intervention by developing an educational path adapted to the needs of the gifted child. The portfolio represents a collection of children's works (paintings, drawings, practical works, writings, stories, observations, etc.), which can be done within the

formal, non-formal or home-based activities. All observations must be noted in the child's personal observation sheet. Teachers will follow: language development level, problem solving skills, level and depth of questions, accuracy of information, logic and relevance of the child's answers, level of creativity, focus on the task, interest in spiritual and existential aspects, objectivity in self-assessment, preference for complex tasks, interest in novelty, ability to essentialize, ability to interpret phenomena and explain images. Depending on all these observations, one can proceed to the elaboration of an individualized plan of educational interventions in kindergarten. For educational interventions, the general principles of intervention should be taken into account in the case of the gifted: individualization of learning, educational alternatives, individualized curriculum, personalization of learning in the classroom, child-centred learning. Good practices in the field highlight appropriate strategies for stimulating skills that effectively contribute to the development of their skills without overstating children's tasks.

3.Strategies for developing gifted children's abilities

3.1. The role of educators

Educators are the decisive factors in identifying and educating the gifted (Henshon, S. E. 2010).. They represent the people who are appointed and prepared to intervene for the benefit of the children, they create a liaison between kindergarten, family and community. Educators have the methodological and pedagogical intervention tools to help the gifted integrate into a community, they know the most appropriate strategies of educational intervention to stimulate and develop the child's native potential. It's a challenge and a great moral and social responsibility for a teacher to work with gifted children. The gifted are an asset for the society, they are the engine of humanity's progress. This is why it is very important for children to attend kindergarten. Educators have the skills to work with the gifted, using differentiation methods and personalize the educational path of each gifted child.

3.2.Methods for educating gifted children

The most commonly used methods of educational intervention are: acceleration, centres of interest, special classes for the gifted, mentoring.

3.2.1. Acceleration

This method consists in passing in an accelerated way through the curriculum considered to be common trunk. Some children may skip a class, or enrol earlier in the preparatory class (J. VanTassel-Baska, 2015). Unfortunately, the Romanian educational system does not allow to skipping a class or two. This method is considered to be "*appropriate educational planning. It means matching the level and complexity of the curriculum with the readiness and motivation of the student*". (S., Steenbergen-Hu, & S. M., Moon, 2011)

3.2.2. Interest centres

In these centres children have different teaching material at hand and they can choose to work at any center they want, as long as they want and also have the possibility to move to another center if they get bored. These centers offer children the opportunity to interact, work together, collaborate or if they can work properly themselves. Each child has the opportunity to work at his own pace. This form of learning is *“most effective and efficient means for schools to provide more challenging coursework, giving these children access to advanced content and providing them with a peer group.”* (Lee, S. Y., Olszewski-Kubilius, P., & Thomson, D. T. 2012).

3.2.3. Special classes for the gifted

A number of researchers support the idea of special classes for the gifted, but some ethical issues arise, the segregation of children, their differentiation into elitist classes leads to various problems of discrimination, even if it is a positive one. On the other hand, special classes for children with giftedness in a certain area are undoubtedly a great opportunity. They have specialized teachers who know how to work with the gifted, specially trained teachers to teach these students, the level of the class is homogeneous, the students have common interests. All these are advantages for such classes. In Romania, an alternative to these classes are the Centers of Excellence, where gifted children can participate in specialized classes. A shortcoming is that these centers are more concerned with children gifted in the fields of mathematics, physics, chemistry, or giftedness is not restricted to these areas, it occurs in all segments as H. Gardner demonstrates in his work *Multiple Intelligences* (Gardner, H., 2006). There are other options as well, such as children's clubs, afterschool programmes, Saturday schools, or summer programs, online learning etc.

3.2.4. Mentoring

Through mentoring, the mentor-teacher guides the work with the gifted persons after a special school program which is called *an individualized learning plan*. This syllabus contains enriched, developed, individualized content, learning tasks with higher degrees of difficulty than those stipulated in the classroom syllabus, graded on learning units and time units according to the subject matter to be taught. The mentor will guide the gifted in the acquisition of knowledge, capabilities and skills, in the process of skill development and development of native skills by:

- Teaching them how to learn;
- Making them aware of their personal learning style;
- Teaching them how to use the most efficient learning methods and procedures;
- Making them aware of their strong and weak points;
- Teaching them overcome their limits;
- Teaching them objective self-assessment.

Mentors are able to develop a programme for the personal development of the gifted, they know how to use modern methods to help them learn more efficiently, what processes and techniques to use to build transferable communication abilities, teamwork, learning, time management, problem solving, negotiation, listening, creativity, computer use skills, etc., what educational means to use to facilitate the development of the gifted according to their exceptional endowment. The practice has shown that the gifted who are mentored achieve better results, become efficient in solving the different learning situations they encounter at school daily, become more self-reliant, more confident and participate more actively in school and extracurricular activities, as well as gain self-esteem. The mentor guides the gifted to the preferred methods by which he can learn effectively, so as to accumulate the information needed, to build the skills and competences which are necessary for their personal development and the development of their innate giftedness (National Association for Gifted Children, 2010).

A relationship based on trust is developed between the gifted and their mentor. Acceptance of the gifted as they are leads to favourable results. The mentor's priority objective is to constantly guide the gifted to develop according to their giftedness. In the mentoring activity, the mentor pursues the permanent guidance of the gifted to achieve the planned and projected goals in the personalized curriculum, stimulating learning by using the most suitable methods to make development more efficient. They use effectively adapted educational means, corrective adjustments that are necessary during the application of the mentoring programme. (Adele Faber, Elaine Mazlish, 2002).

The mentor guides the gifted towards the acquisition of skills that develop their critical thinking, sense of responsibility and objective self-assessment. The teacher-mentors only intervene if they notice confusions, gaps, misinterpretations, blockages, distance from the work task. Important is the aspect that the mentor involves the students in making decisions regarding the ways to solve the different problems. It is known that due to their extremely sensitive psychological nature, the gifted present an increased emotional lability, so the mentor intervenes with a great deal of pedagogical tact and chooses the appropriate educational intervention methods (A. Robinson, 2010). During the mentoring activity, the teacher-mentor is moderator, coordinator, mediator, facilitator and counselor (supporting the gifted students in difficulty).

Conclusion

In order to really interfere in the preparation of the gifted children it is necessary to carry out an early identification plan, maybe even in kindergarten. Once identified as gifted, they must participate in activities that help them develop in their field of endowment to the level of excellence. It is not enough for a child to possess exceptional skills, they must be developed through sustained work, study, perseverance and psycho-pedagogical guidance.

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