

PEDAGOGICAL SUPPORT OF PERSONALITY SELF-DEVELOPMENT OF GIFTED ADOLESCENTS IN UKRAINIAN AND THE USA SCHOOLS

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Abstract

Ukraine is undergoing a new stage in its history. That causes changes in all spheres of our life, including education. A student, with his own, personal interests, is placed in the center of educational process. Special concern is given to gifted students as a great potential of the future of our people. To find the best ways and methods of creating a supporting atmosphere for their personal self-development is my key objective. It has always been difficult to put new approaches into practice. We believe that experiences of foreign countries can be of use for the benefit of our educational system, our children, our country.

Introduction

In my native country great changes are taking place in practically all spheres of men's activities in particular in Education. In the State National Program "Education" (Ukraine XXI Century, 1993) among principles of realization of the Program, the principle of humanization is underlined which lies in asserting a man as the highest social value, in revealing, as full as possible, all his abilities, in meeting different educational needs [21]. Besides, a person-centered approach in education is proclaimed to be given priority in National Doctrine of the Development of Education in Ukraine in the XXI Century (2002) [21]. That's why more and more attention is paid to introducing person-centered technologies. Such changes are being put into practice not without hardships. It's vital to learn from educational systems of other countries, especially from such highly-developed country as USA being aware of possible drawbacks and of all merits of such approaches. Special concern is given to gifted students as a great potential of the future of our people. Gifted adolescents are a very special category of children, who need a lot of attention and support on the part of teachers and other school personal due to peculiarities of their development. Very often schoolchildren simply do things they are supposed to do at school without realizing the depths of their personalities, interests, inclinations, their selves. That's why we do believe that pedagogical support at a definite period of a child's life (teen-age) in understanding one's own personality that'll prompt self-development at its deepest levels is vital.

The aim of the research

To study and investigate thoroughly the system of psychological and educational methods and strategies of support, that facilitates development of personal self of gifted adolescents in schools of USA. In order to achieve the objective it is important to explore some theoretical and practical issues such as who is considered to be the gifted, how are the gifted identified, types of giftedness and its relation to creativity, what is meant by "self-development" and how does it correlate with "self-actualization", class-room activities, forms of learning and support (individual/group), ways and methods employed to create supporting environment, person-centered approach and the scale of its usage especially in education of gifted adolescents, types of schools or classes involved in such teaching and learning (open/alternative education), difficulties gifted students might come across and system of counselor's work to help in overcoming them, personality and professional skills of a facilitator, how well such school-leavers may fulfill themselves, etc.

In the light of person-centered approach "pedagogical support" is understood as a system of educational activities which uncovers potential of the personality and includes help given to students, teachers and parents in overcoming social, psychological and personal difficulties. There is a difference in terminology used in the two countries. In current native pedagogy the semantic meaning of the pedagogical support was analyzed by T. Anohina. She points to the more widely spread in educational systems of different countries, including the USA, term "school counseling and guidance" underlining wide usage of the term "guidance" in native pedagogical literature. Having compared the two terms she concludes, that the latter is broader in meaning and denotes "help in any challenging situations of choice, decision-making or adaptation to new conditions" as well as "the process of giving help to an individual in his or her self-knowledge and perception of the environment with the aim to apply them for successful learning, career choice and development of his or her abilities" [1; 72-73].

School counselors play a vital role in meeting the needs of gifted students in their buildings. Historically, early forerunners J. Dewey and H. Mann were focused on training and advice, in particular education and vocational guidance, and on interpersonal relationships. A front-runner in the response to the USA educational reform in the early 1900s, Jesse B. Davis, was the first person to develop public school counseling and guidance programs. In 1909 Parsons wrote "Choosing a Vocation", a highly influential book that called for the designation of school teachers as vocational counselors. Other schools took Parsons's example and began implementing their own vocational guidance programs. In 1936, the George-Deen Act

was approved by Congress; this act allowed for the creation of the Vocational Education Division of the U.S. Office of Education. An extension of this act was the introduction of the position of state supervisor of guidance in state departments of education. The National Defense Education Act (NDEA) was initiated in response to Sputnik, a space satellite launched by the Soviet Union. The purpose of the NDEA was to promote studies in math, science, and foreign languages. The NDEA sought to identify children with particular abilities in these academic areas. Although this was the original intent of NDEA, this act also provided funding for improving school counseling programs and for training counselors. This decade saw the greatest increase in the number of school counselors in a decade. In 1960s an American Personnel and Guidance Association (APGA) report was edited that defined the role of and the training standards for school counselors. In 1962, Gilbert Wrenn wrote a seminal piece that further defined the role of the school counselor. Specifically, Wrenn wrote that the school counselor should fill four functions: counsel students; consult with parents, teachers, and administrators; study the changing student population and interpret this information for administrators and teachers; and coordinate counseling services in the school and between the school and the community. In the 1970s the profession became increasingly strong. Headquarters for the APGA were established in Alexandria, Virginia, and several strong divisions were chartered, including the Association of Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) [11]. In 2000, the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) developed a set of socioemotional guidance and counseling program criterion. These criteria rested on a provision of an affective curriculum and differentiated guidance strategies to support gifted learners in schools with an emphasis on meeting the needs of underachieving and at-risk gifted students. Generally, it has fallen to the gifted educator to provide a great deal of the programming to meet the social, emotional, and career needs of the gifted in addition to their academic needs [20]. Recently, the school counseling profession has drawn attention to and highlighted the school counselor's involvement with their gifted students [12]. The American School Counselor Association's (ASCA) position statement on the school counselor's involvement with his or her school's gifted population states that the school counselor "assists in providing technical assistance and an organized support system within the developmental comprehensive school counseling program for gifted and talented students to meet their extensive and diverse needs as well as the needs of all students". This assistance and support includes participating in identification, acting as an advocate, providing group and individual counseling, recommending resources, engaging in professional development regarding gifted services, and promoting an understanding and awareness of gifted students' unique needs. This latter clause refers to 10 specific areas of underachievement: perfectionism, depression, dropping out, delinquency [4]. Though counseling profession has its long history in education, the gifted students have got its attention not so long ago.

Most native psychologists consider giftedness as "such combination of abilities which ensures a person's success in any activity" [3; 24]. Although interpretations of the word "gifted" in the USA seem limitless, there are a handful of foundational definitions that may be categorized from conservative (related to demonstrated high IQ) to liberal (a broadened conception that includes multiple criteria that might not be measured through an IQ test). According to National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) "Gifted individuals are those who demonstrate outstanding levels of aptitude (defined as an exceptional ability to reason and learn) or competence (documented performance or achievement in top 10% or rarer) in one or more domains. Domains include any structured area of activity with its own symbol system (e.g., mathematics, music, language) and/or set of sensorimotor skills (e.g., painting, dance, sports) [22]. The Javits Act (the only federal program dedicated specifically to gifted and talented students) uses the federal definition of "gifted and talented students," which is located in the definitions section of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act: "Students, children, or youth who give evidence of high achievement capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who need services and activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop those capabilities" [22].

J. Borland emphasizes the importance of defining giftedness in gifted programs which "should be apparent: The definition used determines whether certain children will be labeled "gifted." [5]. Besides definition problem of giftedness we have come across a wide variety of words such as "Genius, Talented, Prodigy, Exceptional, Superior, Precocious, High IQ., Rapid Learner, Gifted etc. (which) are only a few of the terms, colloquial and professional, which are used quite interchangeably to mean the same thing" [16]. The earliest definitions of giftedness in USA were expressed as IQs above a certain cutoff. Soon alternative conceptions of giftedness were proffered, leading to the "expansion of the concept of giftedness" which also changes the procedure of identification. While measures of intelligence or cognitive abilities are widely used in gifted identification, many authors have issued cautions regarding the application and interpretation of scores for this purpose. Such issues include the possible depression of scores from ceiling effects, the cultural loadings, the arbitrary choice of cutoff scores, the Flynn effect when using recently revised tests, the

inclusion of processing speed in many of the measures, and the uneven profile of abilities found in gifted students [8, 10, 17]. Measures of intelligence or cognitive ability may underestimate the potential of highly creative children. R. Sternberg pointed out that test situations can be highly anxiety provoking for some students, that the tests are measuring not just ability or intelligence but also previous learning or achievement, and that precise scores do not necessarily reflect valid scores [19]. Despite their weaknesses, when used with care and consideration, in the context of an assessment that includes multiple sources of information, measures of intelligence or cognitive ability have the potential to provide valuable information in the gifted identification process [13]. Alternative approaches beyond the use of the IQ test in identifying gifted students include multiple measures and multiple sources of evidence (nominations, nonverbal measures, portfolio assessment, dynamic assessment, auditions, and gifted rating scales) [15].

L. Silverman states, that “The inner world of the gifted - “how the gifted think, feel, and experience” - is clearly missing in many current definitions” [18]. Out of this reason the practitioners, parents, and theorists who gathered in Columbus and latter became known as “Columbus Group”, constructed a new vision of giftedness with the interest in the phenomenological experience of giftedness. The new definition took into account the inner experience, awareness, and heightened intensity of gifted individuals and it is influenced by Dabrowski's Theory of Positive Disintegration: “Giftedness is asynchronous development in which advanced cognitive abilities and heightened intensity combine to create inner experiences and awareness that are qualitatively different from the norm. This asynchrony increases with higher intellectual capacity. The uniqueness of the gifted renders them particularly vulnerable and requires modifications in parenting, teaching and counseling in order for them to develop optimally” [6]. This definition is in line with child-centered approach as “Being child-centered means respecting children's autonomy, providing experiences that enable children to follow their passions and be self-actualizing, and seeking to understand things from the child's point of view. The strongest argument for child-centeredness is that it regards children as ends, not means. It provides conditions for children to flourish, become themselves, and it does not impose a way of being on them” [9].

Typological and individual differences which are made up by peculiarities of nervous system, temperament, needs, interests, specific characteristics of different age group children, moral, volitional, emotional qualities, levels of ability development, that is everything that form uniqueness or individuality are shown in personality self-development. Self-development is considered from various perspectives by philosophers, psychologists and educators. In education it is defined as “process of personality purposeful influence on one's own self with the aim to elaborate physical and moral qualities, strengths, spirituality, intensification of abilities, inclinations, and formation of new knowledge and skills necessary for functioning as well as for self-realization” [2]. Self-knowledge, self-determination and self-perfection are the components of self-development. Self-realization (self-actualization according to A.Maslow) unites all other processes of personality progress. To see self-development through self-realization of personality means to realize his or her advancement from self-affirmation to self-revealing of abilities, character, will and feelings. Gifted students' subjective experience of development has not been studied extensively and is therefore not well-known [14]. Self-development is inherent to a mature integrated person. But such personality does not appear at once. A certain level of personality development is required for the need of self-development to emerge and the work on oneself is being effectively done. The logic of subjectivity development of a person suggests that there are sensitive periods for this or that kind of activities to unfold. The moment of personality addressing self-development lies within adolescence, a period when a child discovers his or her own self on social, personal and existential levels, and is in search of his or her place in the system of people relationships, and is eager to be the creator of his or her own biography.

Roeper's conception of education places the autonomous self-development of the child at the center. It is based on a true identification of the gifted learner- acknowledgment and acceptance of the child on his or her own terms. Achievement, as Roeper saw it, is a byproduct of education, not the goal of education. Once children are accepted on their own terms and given love, guidance, and support, they can achieve as an expression of who they are, not at the cost of who they are [9]. Theories and models in gifted education differ in the degree to which they can accommodate self-actualization. Dabrowski's and Maslow's theories point in the direction of well-developed accounts of how gifted children think, feel, and experience, and of their self-defined interests and goals. These theories help to carry on and develop the centuries-old tradition of child-centered education (Quintilian, Komensky, Locke, Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Froebel, Tolstoy, Montessori, Hollingworth) [9]. Considering the tension between two aspects of gifted education: talent development growth Y. Dai and J. Renzulli concluded that “talent development is a process in which pursuits of one's interests and cultivation of one's strengths lead to outstanding attainment. This process is, by nature, personally meaningful, integrative, and self-actualizing. A child-centered gifted education without a salient component of talent development and achievement neglects the most important rationale for the provision of gifted education. On the other hand, a technical orientation in talent development will not serve

well, either. Integration of two aspects of gifted education, talent development and personal growth, is not only possible, but crucial for a sound, balanced, and progressive agenda for the new century” [7].

Conclusions

In such a short account we have only managed to outline the main issues dealing with pedagogical support, personal self-development and giftedness which constitute the core of the study. Nowadays Ukraine needs professionals in the sphere of gifted children education and we hope to enrich Ukrainian Pedagogical Science with new knowledge and tools in this field. We believe that person-centered approach can be best applied in practice with respect to gifted adolescents as there is a necessity of pedagogical support based on the internal gifted adolescents’ need in democratic support of their personality self-development as well as the great variety of their gifts and talents.

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