Towards a European Talent Support Network

PETER CSERMELY, HUNGARY

Dear ECHA Member!

Our next General Assembly will convene on September 18th, 19:00 during the next ECHA Conference in Ljubljana (please mark this date in your calendar, and submit your registration to the ECHA Conference today here: https://www.echa2014.info/registration/). Recently all ECHA members received a copy of my proposal to the General Assembly of ECHA on the formation of a European Talent Support Network (if you happened not to receive the proposal by any chance, please do not hesitate to ask a copy at the email below). The proposal includes the suggestions of the members of the General Committee of ECHA, honorary members of ECHA and several ECHA national correspondents.

Sharing the opinion of many ECHA members it is my firm belief that one of the major goals of ECHA for the coming years is to lead the development of a European Talent Support Network of all people involved in European talent support, including researchers, teachers, mentors, but also talented young people themselves and their parents. ECHA will have multiple benefits from this leading role. First and foremost, the high level of expertise ECHA has had in the more than 25 years of its existence and is having, exemplified by its prestigious journal, High Ability Studies, will have much more effect in the discovery and development of young people with high abilities. ECHA’s leading role will guideline and ensure the high quality of the network formation process, especially at its beginning. However, it is not my intention at all to form a small “exclusive club” of a few institutions. Enrichment, acceleration, openness and mutual cooperation of the European Talent Support Network should be its major hallmarks.

European Talent Centres would serve as coordinators of talent support related activities, building a contact structure going beyond their own country. It is very important to note that none of these European Talent Centres should act as THE main node of the network, but all of them should serve the common goals benefiting young people with high abilities. ECHA’s leading role will guideline and ensure the high quality of the network formation process, especially at its beginning. However, it is not my intention at all to form a small “exclusive club” of a few institutions. Enrichment, acceleration, openness and mutual cooperation of the European Talent Support Network should be its major hallmarks.

I am sure that in the coming year our firm ECHA spirit will lead us to a much stronger and happier ECHA than ever. My vision is to make this enrichment of ECHA a self-maintaining process, where young talents of our days will serve as teachers, mentors, role models of the future talented generations and will strengthen ECHA, maintaining its high standards and multi-coloured traditions. Ultimately, we need to build a talent-friendly continent here in Europe. It is my great pleasure to serve this process – together with the treasures of expertise of fellow ECHA members. I am very happy to receive your comments and suggestions on this network building, enrichment process; sent them to the email below.

At the close, showing the continuity of our traditions let me echo the saying often mentioned at the beginning years of ECHA: Echa-cha!

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Editorial

ANNETTE HEINBOKEL, GERMANY

This is a rather small issue of ECHA News. I hope you find it interesting nonetheless.

Peter Csermely, ECHA’s president is promoting the idea of a European Talent Support Network. He is collecting your ideas how to implement such a network. These ideas will be discussed during the 2014 ECHA conference in Slovenia.

Mojca Juriševič, the organizer of the conference, presents not only the conference, but also the Slovenian school system and what the country does for gifted education. And Ole Kyed, the organizer of the 2015 conference of the World Council for Gifted Children in Denmark, describes developments in his county.

Akke Tick reports on a well organized international conference that took place at the CBO in Nijmegen, Netherlands.

We mourn the loss of James Gallagher who died aged 87. His contribution to the gifted movement is well known, especially to members of the World Council for Gifted Children and to participants of its conferences.

And last but not least, after Lower Saxony there is a report on the situation of gifted children in one of the other German states: Hamburg. Being German, of course I know more about the German situation that about other countries.

During the third world conference in Jerusalem in 1979, Harry Passow gave an overview of gifted education worldwide. About Germany he said just one sentence: “Germany has got grammar schools.” It seems there were a number of people in the audience who knew the German situation: they reacted with giggles. At that time West Germany was still rather proud of its three tier system, with ‘main schools’ (then attended by most of the pupils), ‘middle schools’ and a comparatively small number of girls and boys attending ‘grammar schools’ – and some special schools for children with handicaps, but also for children gifted in music, sport or ballet. In East Germany the school system was very different. However, they did have a number of special schools with boarding facilities not only for music and sports, but also one for circus artists - and for children who were intellectually gifted. As they were state schools, there were very little or no school fees.

The first results of the PISA studies at the beginning of this century that compared achievements of pupils in different countries, subjects and ages were a shock. Since then one reform has been chased by the next, some ideas were good, others were introduced rather hastily, not well supported and quite often changed when the government was replaced at the next election.

The problem: Germany is a Federal State, consisting of 16 states. They can decide on education policies independently – and they do. The result is that the German school system is more and more like a patchwork blanket, similar patterns but different colours (or vice versa). Today it is impossible to speak of THE German school system. Therefore in Hamburg as a very recent development they now have ‘Stadtteilschulen’, which can only be translated as ‘schools in the urban quarter’ (see article). They are attended by all the children who are not at one of the state grammar or one of the private schools.

Let’s see if it will be possible to get reports about any of the other German states. And if you want to report something about your country: your contribution is most welcome.

Annette Heinbokel, editor
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Quote

Talent hits a target that no one else can hit.
Genius hits a target that no one else can see.

Arthur Schopenhauer

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A Warm Welcome to 14th ECHA Conference
Rethinking Giftedness: Giftedness in the Digital Age

We are delighted to invite you to the 14th ECHA Conference to be held in Ljubljana, Slovenia, from 17th to 20th September 2014.

The European Council for High Ability
The Faculty of Education University of Ljubljana
MiB, d.o.o., the conference organising company

MOJCA JURIŠEVIČ, SLOVENIA

Dear colleagues of the European Council for High Ability,

It seems that the time and the theme of the 14th ECHA conference perfectly overlap with the current trends in our society. Namely, the first 14 years of the new millennium have brought so many new challenges in different parts of our everyday life that a need to reconsider the key concepts and strategies in gifted education has spontaneously evolved.

It is therefore no surprise that the conference will explore the possibilities and challenges that the “digital age” offers to the education of the gifted across the lifespan. In addition, the conference will highlight current trends in research and practice considering how to best support and nurture giftedness now and in the future. We are proud to welcome a number of brilliant speakers, leading experts in the field of (gifted) education, who will each examine the conference theme from their own perspective relying on their own research results. The first and the current president of ECHA, Joan Freeman (UK) and Peter Csermely (Hungary) will critically outline the challenges that ECHA has encountered so far and discuss open issues that this organisation should be able to face in the future. The developer of the Actiotope Model of Giftedness and gifted training programmes, Professor Albert Ziegler from Germany, will present a critical overview of the current methods used in gifted education and propose an action plan on how to support gifted students in confronting the digital age. Among the keynote speakers we also are delighted to welcome Professor Norbert Jaušovec, one of the leading Slovenian experts in neuro-psychology and creativity, who will discuss the main findings of the research in neuro-physiology related to intelligence and creativity and their impact on the understanding of giftedness. Further we are also very happy that Professor Marta Fulop from Hungary, an internationally recognized researcher in the psychology of competition will be able to talk on the individual psychological components of successful and adaptive coping with competitive experiences and winning and losing as a constant in today’s life of the gifted. And a great surprise – we are extremely proud and thankful that Professor Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (Hungary-United States) will address us through video conferencing and discuss the latest research results in the positive psychology related to gifted education.

The conference will also be a place to listen to many acknowledged speakers who will discuss various theories and practices in educating the gifted in different European and more distant educational context: Maria Rosa Angelo (Italy), Sheyla Blumen (Peru), Jasna Cvetković Lay (Croatia), Csilla Fuszek (Hungary), Lianne Hoogveen (Netherland), Martin Kubala (Czech Republic), Slavica Maksić (Srbia), Peter Merrotsy (Australia), Claudia Resch (Austria), Frank Worrel (United States) and many others.

Dear Colleagues of the European Council for High Ability, you are most welcome with your contributions which may discuss diverse issues in gifted education, reaching from clinical to educational, from high-level to more grass root oriented research but which highlight giftedness in the modern, digital age.

The conference will also be a place to interconnect the knowledge, experience and ideas of research and practice. The members of the centre manage a range of research, educational and consulting projects and aim to promote giftedness by enhancing the quality of life of the gifted and to follow the vision outlined in The Strategies of the Slovenian Development. See more at: www.pef.uni-lj.si/821.html

Mib d.o.o. is an international educational enterprise which is active in the education of soft skills. It also organises bigger educational events, such as conferences and seminars. It has also been active in sharing expertise in giftedness by organising two international conferences, “A Holistic View on Giftedness” in 2008 and “Social and Emotional Needs of the Gifted” in 2010. See more at: www.mib.si

The University of Ljubljana is the central and largest educational institution in Slovenia. It is also the central and largest research institute in Slovenia with 30 percent of all registered researchers (according to the data from the SICRIS...
The Republic of Slovenia lies at the centre of Europe, where the Alps and the Mediterranean meet the Pannonia plains and the mysterious Karst. Slovenia has a population of two million. This small green country measures 20,273 km² in area and it makes a great tourist destination (www.slovenia.info). Ljubljana is the capital of Slovenia and is the country’s political and cultural heart. It is an important European commercial, business, exhibition and congressional centre as well as the transport, science and education centre of Slovenia. See more at: http://www.ljubljana.si/en

The Educational System of Slovenia

In the Republic of Slovenia, the educational system is organised as a public service. There are very few private institutions which are mainly subsidised by the government.

The compulsory nine-year basic education is divided into 3 three-year cycles (the first six years as primary education, the final 3 years as lower secondary education). Primary schools provide a compulsory and extended curriculum. The compulsory curriculum must be provided by all the schools and studied by all the pupils. It consists of compulsory subjects, electives, home room periods and activity days (culture, science, sports, technology). Schools must provide the optional elementary school curriculum, but pupils are free to decide whether they will participate. It includes educational assistance for children with special needs, remedial classes, additional classes, after-school care and other forms of care for pupils, interest activities and out-of-school classes. Children aged six-and-a-half, or in exceptional cases six, enrol in year one. Successful completion of basic education enables students to proceed to education in their choice of secondary school that is not compulsory. Over the last few years, more than 98% of pupils who have completed their compulsory schooling pursued studies in secondary education. Secondary schools take 2 to 5 years and include vocational and technical schools preparing students predominantly for labour, and general secondary schools preparing students predominantly for further studies. Programmes in secondary education vary in content, duration and goals. Decisions concerning the founding and financing of secondary schools and the distribution of educational programmes are taken at the national level. Tertiary education includes short-cycle higher education and higher education study programmes. Higher vocational education is provided by higher vocational colleges that offer two-year vocational education. The traditional higher education study programmes are offered by public or private universities and single higher education institutions.

Education begins with preschool education in which children from 1 to 5 years of age are enrolled. It is optional. Public kindergartens are founded and co-financed by the municipalities. A broad national curriculum was introduced in the 1990s and should be followed by all pre-school educational institutions.
Life-long learning is also increasing. Adults attend open universities, educational and study centres, schools and higher education establishments, as well as courses organised by companies, administrative bodies, organisations and societies. Adult programmes are organised within schools and outside them, education can be formal or informal, and there is also organised self-learning.

The language of instruction in schools is Slovenian; the Italian and Hungarian ethnic minorities have the right to have an education in their own languages. The constitution also protects the status and gives special rights to members of the Roma community who live in Slovenia. Children of migrants have the right to compulsory basic education under the same conditions as other citizens of the Republic of Slovenia. Provision of special needs education in Slovenia follows a multi-track approach towards inclusion, which means that a variety of services between mainstream education and segregated settings are offered.

Gifted education in Slovenia

Slovenia has a well-developed system of basic music and ballet education, which enables children and youth to develop their musical talents alongside attending basic school. It also has a long history of offering scholarships to gifted secondary and tertiary students. However, a national strategy which would systematically define the position of the gifted in the country is still non-existent. In spite of this, gifted students at primary school have been identified and offered special more systematic basic education since 1999 when a document Concept: Identification of and Work with Gifted Students in a nine-year Primary School was issued. The students are identified as gifted and talented students to realize their potentials.

In 2007, a similar document for secondary schools was developed (Figure 3). The monitoring is provided by a group of experts run by The National Educational Institute. According to this system of identifying gifted students a quarter of the school population is identified as gifted.

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In the recent White Paper on Education in Republic of Slovenia (2011) a chapter was dedicated to the gifted education in primary and secondary school. The chapter considers the latest international and national research outcomes and gives clear guidelines for gifted education which the Slovenian education system should follow in the future.

The set priorities refer to:

1. The student has already been identified as gifted in primary school and has submitted the identification certificate.

2. Nomination of the gifted students according to the Concept.

3. Identification on the basis of an outstanding achievement at the national or international level.

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(1) to establish a national coordination which will ensure a cooperative and harmonised work among all stakeholders,

(2) to develop a national strategy which will promote the importance, nationally, of a holistic treatment of the gifted and a vision towards learning and work excellence, and

(3) to qualify teachers so that they will be able to create situations which will enable students to display their talents, and where teachers and other stakeholders will be able to notice, support and enhance gifted and talented students to realize their potentials.

Mojca Juriševič is an Associate Professor of Educational Psychology at the Faculty of Education University of Ljubljana. She is a head of the faculty at the Centre for Research and Promotion of Giftedness and a member of the National Group of Experts in Gifted Education. She is the author of a chapter on gifted education in the White Paper on Education in the Republic of Slovenia from 2011.

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25 years: Centre of Giftedness in the Netherlands
An international conference to celebrate!

AKKE TICK, BELGIUM

More than 300 people gathered in Nijmegen on the beautiful autumn day of 1 November 2013 for the international conference on ‘Potential Development and Gifted Education’. Scientists, teachers, educational professionals, representatives of the Ministry of Education and local government and many ECHA students came together to listen to a variety of presentations in the field of education and to network with each other.

After a welcome speech by Lianne Hoogeveen, Head of the Centre of Giftedness CBO in Nijmegen, the head of the Radboud University Nijmegen, Bas Kortmann, stressed the importance of talent development, quality and a focus on the future within Radboud University.

‘Talented students get extra challenges in this university by joining the Radboud Honours programmes; excellent programmes at the bachelor’s as well as the master’s level. Knowing that being gifted not always leads to good study results, the student guidance department and the department of Strategy and Development initiated a working group ‘Giftedness’, in which the Centre for the Study of Giftedness is involved, as well as the Gymnasium in Nijmegen.’

Keynote
Nicholas Colangelo, Interim Dean at the University of Iowa College of Education and Director Emeritus at the Belin-Blank Center, gave the keynote address. He is a well known name in the field of gifted education and to ECHA students. ‘Every ECHA student knows his ‘Handbook on Gifted Education’, as Hoogeveen mentioned. Colangelo focussed his keynote address around the area of acceleration.

‘Academic acceleration means moving students through a school system at a faster pace or letting it start at a younger age. It also means bringing more complex information into the school system.’

‘In all countries in any grade there is a difference in age between children of more or less one year,’ started Colangelo. In other words, January kids are older than December kids. This is normal. The amount of years in intellectual development in grades, however, can be between 8-10 years as measured by standardized tests. ‘This is a tremendous variation. There are kids with the chronological age of 10 but with the mental capacity of a 16 or 17 year old’, stressed the speaker.

‘It is therefore not so easy to take care that ‘Every child deserves to learn something new in school every day’.

According to Colangelo there are two broad categories of acceleration. ‘First of all there is content based acceleration. The materials move to the student and he stays with his peers. Students also receive advanced content, skills, or understanding before the expected age or grade level. Some examples of this are single-subject acceleration, curriculum compacting, dual enrolment, advanced placement / International Baccalaureate coursework and distance learning.’

The second broad category is grade based acceleration. Colangelo explained that ‘The student moves and does not remain with same age peers and it shortens the amount of time spent in K-12 schooling. Some examples are early entrance to school, whole-grade acceleration and early entrance to college. The social and emotional aspects need more consideration than with content-based acceleration.’

Is acceleration effective? With regards to this question Colangelo is clear. ‘Yes! Research on the academic effects on the short term indicates that the outcomes are positive.’ In the long term there are less data on the academic effects available. However ‘Accelerated children seem to do better, and seem to be happier in school’, according to Colangelo. ‘The social effects of acceleration are more difficult to measure. The effects are positive, meaning there is no harm. Negative outcomes hardly happen, it is either positive or neutral.’ Extending data are not available.

‘It is not always research that guides us in daily life,’ explains Colangelo. ‘Most of the time we let our hearts guide us.’ In practice the view of acceleration is rather negative. ‘There is a disconnection between research and practice. This disconnection can be found on an academic, social/emotional and political level.’

A condition for acceleration is of course that the child or adolescent is ready for it. There are several tools to objectively measure this readiness such as the IOWA Acceleration Scale, Colangelo explained and he referred participants to www.accelerationinstitute.org for more information. Finally he shared data on international research (April and May 2011) with 106 participants from 21 countries. ‘The reasons most mentioned not to accelerate were

- concerns about social-emotional development
- attitude of the school administrators
- concerns about gaps in knowledge

Without a policy, personal beliefs will continue to trump the evidence of research. So please let research be the basis for our work.’

Parallel Sessions
After the keynote address the participants could choose to attend four out of eight presentations from researchers from different countries on a variety of topics in the field of giftedness. This included (in alphabetical order):

- Dr. Stephanie van den Berg (University of Twente): Giftedness and genes: what twins can tell us about how nature and nurture interact.
- Prof. Dr. Sheyla Blumen (Pontifical Catholic University of Peru): Creativity, Technology and Talent Development towards Excellence in Education
- Prof. Dr. Carla van Bokxel, Thea Peetsma, Jaap Schuitema & Sonia Abrantes-Garcés Palha (University of Amsterdam): Enhancing the development of motivation, self-regulation and achievement for potentially excellent students through an integrated enriched learning arrangement in mathematics and history education
The important role that genetics play cannot be easily explained by variations in a particular gene. Most likely, numerous genes are involved. Their function in explaining high scores on school tests are likely highly dependent on environmental circumstances. Van den Berg says:

- 40% to 70% of the variation is due to genetic variation
- Influence of genes increases with age
- Influence of shared environment decreases with age
- Same genes in childhood as in adolescence and adulthood
- Many genes of small effect, which all seem to act non-specifically

After an overview of twin studies and molecular genetic studies of (high) intelligence and scholastic achievement Van den Berg stresses that talent for high scores on educational tests seems genetic in origin. ‘It is due to many, many genes with all very small effect sizes. Effects of genes depend however also on environment.’ Generally, the same genetic findings are found for the general population as for the high ability population.

Van den Berg ended with mentioning a current project that studies CITO scores (general knowledge test in primary education in the Netherlands) in identical and non-identical twins and that specifically tries to identify important gene-environment interactions.

Sheyla Blumen talked enthusiastically about fostering talent development in an ethnically diverse, geographical, multicultural country, with a heavy indigenous presence. ‘There is a centralized educational system in Peru. At the same time education is very much related to the socio-economic status. Nutrition and schooling are significant variables and resilience associated factors have to be considered in marginalized communities. Children can be called gifted at very different levels. Native gifted girls are underrepresented. There is also a low representation of gifted boys and girls in science and technology.’ There is a different view of giftedness between the western paradigm, Andean cosmovision and Amazon tribes vision. Blumen stressed that ‘the definition of giftedness and talent needs to be culturally relevant.’

In the past ten years many studies have been done in relation to giftedness in Peru. Recently the Inter-Disciplinary Research Group “Creativity, Technology and Talent” was set up in order to facilitate the emergence of talents along the different educational levels. ‘The group aims to promote quality and excellence from the development of educational competitiveness through students, promoting their creative abilities, and innovation applied to science and technology, as well as their educational, humanistic, and social development,’ reported Blumen who kept everybody’s attention although it was the last presentation of the day.

She presented three models of learning interventions with the support of the ICT that work in driving cognitive development among college students living in poverty. ‘The first study presents an exploratory research with immediate response disposals called “clickers” in the psychologist formation. Bringing information about the activities in the virtual world and video games applied to school learning is the theme of study two. Study three presents an intervention experience in training teachers from the Northern Andes using the ICT.’

This presentation really brought insights on how children outside Europe have other challenges to get the right education. And not only is it different for children, researchers in those areas have other challenges as well, for example, they need to ask the right questions in the right language. They experienced that children vary in their answers depending on the language in which they were interviewed. It might be interesting to look in Europe at the multicultural schools to see whether some of the experiences from Peru could be applied here as well. Let’s be honest, most participants in gifted programmes are still white and male.

Cooperation between countries within Europe is already going on. The Netherlands and Scotland (United Kingdom) both signed international legislation on education for all and Margaret Sutherland compared those areas under the theme of inclusion.

According to a report on inclusive education in the Netherlands, inclusion has resulted in a comprehensive support programme that stimulates teacher development...
In the Netherlands inclusive education also calls for
- a positive school climate in which social and cultural diversity is welcomed.
- promoting ‘belonging and connectedness’ as important values
- strengthening social cohesion and stimulating active citizenship, are important issues in current policy discussions.
- according to the policy laws, teaching must reflect the fact that pupils are growing up in a multicultural society.

In Scotland inclusion is about all learners and about taking action to remove barriers to participation and learning. Inclusion also involves eliminating discrimination and promoting equality.

‘If schools and teachers are to address these concerns and to do so taking into account international legislation then consideration has to be given to inclusive education and the place and role of gifted education within that,’ said Sutherland. She refers to Ainscow et al. (2006) who argue that there are five ways to think about inclusion:
1. inclusion concerned with disability and special educational needs;
2. inclusion as a response to disciplinary exclusions;
3. inclusion as being about all groups vulnerable to exclusion;
4. inclusion as the promotion of a school for all
5. inclusion as education for all.

Sutherland is clear. To unpack these ideas a move away from explanations of educational failure and success that concentrates on the characteristics of individual children and their families, and move towards an analysis of the barriers to participation, the pedagogical planning for success and the learning experienced by students within education systems will move us towards a more inclusive system for gifted learners.

What are the implications of this for gifted education and pedagogy? Sutherland argues that ‘What is particular to an inclusive pedagogy is the way teachers conceptualise notions of difference. This approach places teachers at the centre of the process of developing a more inclusive form of education. Key to this is their beliefs, attitudes and actions because it is these that create the contexts in which children and young people are required to learn.’

Scotland has developed a Framework for Inclusion. ‘It considers career long professional development (CLPD) and seeks to ensure that all students and teachers are appropriately guided and supported from the outset and throughout their career towards gaining the required knowledge and understanding of inclusive education. This approach has encouraged staff to think about pedagogy and learners. In relation to gifted education schools reported that support for highly able pupils needs to be built into the core processes of the school. Head teachers were clear that this meant placing children at the heart of learning but acknowledged that this could be a culture shift for staff. Picking up on the idea of teachers’ conceptualisation of difference, head teachers spoke about getting staff into the way of thinking about all learners and not just those who are struggling. They were clear that every pupil is entitled to the best possible educational experience so they can develop new skills. Similar to the shift in focus that is taking place within special education Sutherland argued that within gifted education we need to ask how we shift the focus of international rhetoric away from how the system can support the needs of gifted individuals to how it can create contexts in which pedagogy mitigates the emergence of these needs’

It would seem there are many parallels between the Netherlands and Scotland, Sutherland says. ‘While we can’t transplant one system into another, the coming together of those interested in inclusive pedagogy that will enhance the life chances of all will go some way to providing education for all where all means all and not just some.’

Conclusion
The conference was perfectly organised. It is more than clear that the theme of giftedness must not be discussed in a basement somewhere but must be out in the open in the middle of the university. Many things have happened at the CBO since its start 25 years ago. One thing for sure is that a lot of research has been done but has also still to be done. Multidisciplinary research and longitudinal research would be a big asset for supporting gifted children. More links to general (educational) research would raise the effectiveness of support to gifted children. May I ask the CBO team to celebrate its 35 years with another conference? Same organizing team please but perhaps another location? In ten years it should be possible to have moved from the middle of the university to the heart of society. 25 years is too far away!

Side text
New prize in the Netherlands
The founding father of the CBO Franz Mönks was named chairman of a new supporting prize (aanmoedigingsprijs) in the field of giftedness. Once a year a practitioner, scientist or student who does extending work in the field of giftedness will receive acknowledgement and a reward. For more information please contact CBO Nijmegen.

Note: Abstracts and slides from the presenters were used for writing this article.

Akke Tick is a Senior Consultant for IT Marketing and Communications at Across Technology. She supports communications and change projects in various fields. She is writing her final essay for the ECHA on the cooperation between schools and parents from gifted children in secondary schools.

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The Status Regarding the Education of Gifted Children in Hamburg, Germany

Do gifted children have a right to education, too?

JAANA RASMUSSEN, GERMANY

“All young people have the right to an education tailored to their abilities and aptitudes and the education system is required to provide it with the resources it has”. This passage is taken from article 1 of the Hamburg School Act.

This legal basis applies to all children, to those with high learning potential as well as to those with learning or language difficulties. But what is the true picture? In Germany, each Federal State has sovereignty over education. So each of the 16 federal states can define their own school structure. Hamburg is a federal state made up of one city. There are various curricular and extracurricular offers within reach. However, educating gifted children is often very challenging. The appropriate form of schooling is a matter of luck and not offered as a rule. The Parents’ Advisory Service of the Hamburg branch of the DGHK (Deutsche Gesellschaft für das hochbegabte Kind – German Association for the Gifted Child) conducts about 40 advisory sessions per month with parents whose gifted children in some cases encounter severe problems at school.

In Hamburg, just like in many other federal states in Germany, there is no regular monitoring or assessment of gifted children when they start school or during the school years. An IQ test will only take place when social or learning problems occur. There is no compulsory training concerning gifted children for teachers yet and it is not scheduled to take place until next term. The vast majority of teachers have no idea how to meet the needs of gifted children. Most head teachers and teachers imagine gifted children to be uncomplicated high achievers who are successful without the need of any special educational provisions. Giftedness is virtually always equated with high levels of achievement. And to make matters worse, there’s a stigma of elitism attached to supplying special educational provisions for gifted children in the minds of many teachers and people responsible for education policy. Many teachers are afraid of giving gifted children extra advantages by offering special educational programmes and therefore being unjust to other pupils. In the minds of the majority of head teachers and teachers, despite literature on underachievement, there are no problems in schools because gifted children are not given a special education.

The challenge of launching all-day schools and inclusion of children with disabilities

In the last two years, Hamburg’s schools have been exposed to massive changes. A big challenge for schools has been the introduction of all-day schooling without any additional resources for building canteens and the introduction of afternoon schooling. At state schools in Hamburg, the optional all-day school and supervision of pupils presently means that the children (in comparison to the compulsory all-day school) work in the afternoon with university students or assistant teachers on their homework and that they can also participate in programmes offered by organisations outside the school. Only in very few cases – namely the compulsory all-day school – does all-day in fact mean classes in the afternoon, too, with fixed times for sports or recreation all day long. Only a few schools have appropriate canteens.

As one of the first federal states, Hamburg introduced inclusion of children with disabilities in all Hamburg schools. The launch of inclusion comprises a gradual reduction of special schools for disabled children, and all children have the right to go to a mainstream state school. Many parents of handicapped children decide to send their children to a state primary school, hoping to give them a better chance of a higher educational qualification. From year 5 onwards, there are only two types of secondary education schools to choose from (in general, there are more in the other federal states): a type of grammar school (offering A-level after eight years, known in Germany as the “Gymnasium”) and what is known as the Stadtteilschule (offering A-level after 9 years with all other levels possible). More than 50% of the children go to a grammar school in year 5 and 6, from year 7 on more than 50% of the young people go to a Stadtteilschule. More than half of the young people complete school with A-level qualifications. Due to the inclusion of children with special needs and the abolition of streaming in the classrooms, the Stadtteilschulen have their hands full, but also have more personnel resources than the grammar schools. Since 2012, children with special needs have been attending schools with mainstream children without extra teaching staff and without the teachers being properly trained for classes with extremely different groups.

In a class of 25 children, today you can find children with AD(H)D, Asperger’s syndrome, children with social-emotional problems, with dyscalculia or dyslexia, gifted children as well as children without any special educational needs. All in one classroom and often with only one teacher. In terms of learning, speech, emotional and social development, individual resources for diagnostics and special teaching of individual children has given way to a systemic resource which is spread thinly among the schools. The teacher is assisted by a social education worker or special needs teacher for just a few hours a day. Diagnosis of any learning disabilities is no longer performed by skilled psychologists or special needs teachers, but by observation by the class teacher who has no special training and can only apply for a detailed diagnosis on a needs basis. These sorts of economies neither meet the needs of children with disabilities nor of children with a high learning potential. This form of schooling meanwhile engenders criticism from teachers of some schools, from the Hamburg parents’ council (called Elternkammer) and even the disabled

1 Three of the 16 German states consist of just a city: Berlin, Bremen and Hamburg
2 In Germany, school traditionally ends more or less at midday, this is slowly changing
3 Stadtteilschule = ‘school in the urban quarter’
rights organisations are raising the alarm. As a sad consequence of this development of failed inclusion in Hamburg, misdiagnoses of gifted children with school problems have increased considerably. The DGHK regularly advises parents by phone whose children's schools ask them to have their gifted children diagnosed with ADHD or Asperger's syndrome in order to gain more resources to support the whole class, such as by an assistant. As teachers often aren't in a position to provide gifted children with the challenge of learning they require, the children are increasingly prescribed and given Methylphenidate (Ritalin) in order to make them calmer and able to attend school.

In schools where inclusion is practised, teachers are placed under huge strain due to the different abilities of the children and the lack of training. Currently the focus is even less on the special needs of highly gifted children than it was before inclusion was introduced.

School programmes for gifted pupils in detail

There is no state school in Hamburg that meets the needs of gifted children adequately and comprehensively. This is a damning indictment of one of the richest cities in Germany which strives for excellence in research and science. A city already suffering from a lack of engineers and other specialized personnel can ill afford to properly educate gifted talents.

Education of gifted children and young people

In Hamburg this takes place sporadically in primary and secondary schools, there is no state school with an integrated programme for gifted pupils.

The situation at primary schools

As regards primary schools, there are what are known as "Schmetterlingsschulen" (literally butterfly schools) which, due to the Landesinstitut für Lehrerbildung und Schulentwicklung (teachers' professional education institute in Hamburg) are supposed to have a structure that educates gifted children. These butterfly schools are not primarily geared to gifted children, but to high achieving pupils who are to be given special classes here. The profile varies from school to school and ranges from learning an additional foreign language to additional research courses for six to nine year olds. They often also offer expert workshops where the children prepare presentations to show to their classmates later on.

Teacher training on educating gifted children in these butterfly schools is often very superficial. The teachers usually have no knowledge of the specific needs and characteristics of gifted children. As a general rule, children's behavioural problems are not linked with boredom but with psychological problems or a lack of parenting skills. Material to speed up the process is not available on a widespread basis and it depends on the dedication of individual teachers whether and to whom they give the extra material. From the point of view of students, parents and advisors, the concept of those butterfly schools is considered to be insufficient in terms of quality and the way they are implemented. It remains to be seen if the Hamburg school senator's announcement of an education drive will bring any improvements.

Programmes from the university and school authority

The university provides maths screening (as part of the PRIMA project) for children in third grade where only 50 pupils from the whole of Hamburg are selected. Those not selected can participate in a maths group in year 3 and 4. PROBEX courses (based on a try and experiment principle) are available to children in year 4 where pupils recommended by the school can conduct scientific experiments at grammar schools for six successive weeks.

Children in years three and four can participate as part of a project called Kinderforscher (child scientists) organised by the Technical University of Hamburg-Harburg – if their butterfly school has applied for that project. On a rotating basis, they either conduct experiments in school or visit faculties at the Technical University of Harburg. Many schools have pupils in year three taking part in the kangaroo competition (a maths contest) or the Matheolympiade (Maths Olympics).

The following aspects are particularly difficult for gifted children at primary school:

- Measures to provide special educational provisions for gifted children like skipping a year or speeding up the learning process are not statutory and depend on the personal commitment of the teacher;
- Each school decides for itself which student it deems gifted and who deserves special education provision – as a rule, these are high achievers who are easy to deal with;
- When a change of head teacher occurs, the expertise and structure for creating educational provision for gifted children are often lost;
- Due to the lack of other programmes, many gifted children go to a butterfly school far from their home – and still receive poor or no special education;
- Teachers do not get any financial or other incentives, so that many of them are not interested in creating special educational provisions for gifted children;
- Skipping a year is the most efficient tool schools can offer; however, after skipping the year there are no accompanying measures for pupils and teachers, so often after a few months, problems arise again – as soon as the child has caught up with the others and starts getting bored again.

We believe it would be productive to establish reliable evaluation and certification of the butterfly schools in conjunction with external experts like the ICBF (International Centre for the Study of Giftedness) in Münster (Germany) and the DGHK Hamburg (Germany).

Apart from the butterfly schools, there are some isolated primary schools where the development of gifted children is promoted by offering additional programmes in class. These schools should be supported with resources and other measures.

In collaboration with the William Stern Society, there are various programmes for certain gifted children related to a specific field of talent.
The situation in the grammar schools: Some grammar schools offer special measures for the advancement of gifted pupils, some even provide programmes for gifted children. However, when looked at in more depth the programmes for gifted children often turn out to be for high-achievers, where the teachers select the best students of a year to take part in additional advancement programmes. In this case, the gifted children that are not high achievers are often ignored and passed over.

There is in fact only one grammar school offering an express class from year 5 on in which specially skilled pupils are brought together in order to sit A-level exams one year early. As the period spent at grammar schools was cut from 9 to 8 years some time ago anyway, this express class is not as popular as it was a few years ago.

In terms of educational structures, the advancement of gifted children tends not to have a solid basis – with the exception of the first grammar school mentioned above. It is up to the parents and pupils to ask in detail what programmes for gifted children are available and what these entail. As a result, children from less educated families who don’t realise themselves that their child is gifted hardly have any opportunities to obtain special educational provisions. The same goes to an even greater extent for immigrants and disabled people. Twice exceptional children programmes usually take place outside regular classes, e.g. in study groups. There are special classes for maths at the University of Hamburg from year 7 onwards. The William Stern Society offers a programme for advancing young maths talents from year 6 onwards.

From year 11 onwards, studying at university part time (maths) is possible. If the need is very great, students in year 8 may also study at university level already. But this has to be approved by the head of school and is basically only possible if grades are consistently good.

At the moment, the opportunities for gifted children in difficult social circumstances at schools in Hamburg are poor. Any special educational provisions depend on whether the teacher recognizes a gifted pupil and offers appropriate programmes.

Private schools

Brecht School
The private and state-approved Brecht School leads in making provisions for gifted children in the Hamburg area, be it at primary or secondary level. The school has been providing advancement for gifted children for 10 years and uses the following methods: individual advancement provisions, excellence classes, participation in competitions, special measures for underachievers, junior academies and junior studies at university level. All measures stated are organised centrally by the coordinator for individual advancement. The Brecht School Hamburg is known nationwide in the media for its educational provisions for gifted children. The proportion of gifted children in the grammar school is currently just under 40% and the waiting list is long due to huge demand. Only every fifth applicant gets a place.

The OKO Talent School
The OKO private talent school Hamburg is an educational programme for gifted underachievers. The programme includes all particularly talented and gifted pupils learning together until A-level exams, supervisory and school provisions for special and gifted underachievers with special educational needs, there are small learning groups with pupils of different ages, systematic implementation of the “School-wide Enrichment Model – SEM” – bilingualism by immersive learning in all-day classes. Since 2012, OKO Talent School is has been permitted to teach pupils from year 5 until A-level exams. The primary school section was not approved by the school authority.

Denominational schools

Due to their higher performance requirements, the Catholic schools in Hamburg have a higher rate of gifted children, although the schools do not provide special programmes for gifted children. Due to their exceptional position, the Catholic schools have more freedom regarding sending children to school earlier or skipping a year. Some schools establish one high-performing class per grade to provide provisions for gifted pupils.

We do not have any information about other denominational schools.

The Advisory Board for Special Talents (Beratungsstelle besondere Begabungen BbB)
The board aims to identify and advance special talents in school. BbB is part of the school authority and its purpose is to advise parents, teachers and older pupils. They only provide assessment for children when the school is contacted, too, and the teachers agree to the process. Intervals between round tables are quite long. In our experience, advice to parents is so far limited to what parents should tell teachers. BbB only contacts schools if they are requested to do so.

From our point of view, it is a problem that BbB’s recommendations are not compulsory for schools and therefore often have no effect. Furthermore, it is still very difficult for parents with a gifted child to see BbB as a support facility, as it is the schools that have to ask them for assistance.

Deutsche Gesellschaft für das hochbegabte Kind (DGHK – German Association for the Gifted Child)
This is a voluntarily non-profit association whose objective is to advise and support gifted children and their parents. Parents are given the opportunity to talk and children can find friends and take part in interesting programmes.

The society offers a versatile programme for gifted children and their parents. This includes events for children and parents, parents’ meetings in Hamburg and the surrounding area, counselling by phone for parents, teachers and pre-school teachers as well as training for schools and teachers, kindergartens and pre-school teachers.

Conclusion
Overall, with the exception of the private schools, we have to conclude that no school in Hamburg provides adequate provision for gifted children. The need for appropriate classes and teachers is vast, the existing provisions at schools are occasional and not in any way linked.

After 2 years of intensive lobbying by the DGHK Hamburg, the school committee at the Hamburg Parliament (Hamburgische Bürgerschaft) convoked an expert hearing regarding educational provisions for gifted
children on 9 January 2014. Among the experts were Professor Christian Fischer from the ICBF in Münster (Germany) and Jaana Rasmussen as representative of the DGhK in Hamburg (Germany). All experts demanded that the issue of educational provisions for gifted children should be part of teacher training and that schools focusing on gifted children and youngsters should be defined. After the expert hearing, there was a public hearing of parents, teachers and youngsters on 4 February. Some of the feedback was very emotional and dozens of parents described their children failing at school, as well as a complete lack of understanding on the part of the teachers. Two young boys reported that they had had to change school several times because of bullying and there was a threat they might become underachievers. Teachers complained that they could indeed recognize gifted children in their classes, but were unable to receive any support for appropriate methods or teaching material.

The final decision about more measures for gifted students in Hamburg will be taken during the next session at the end of March. Our hope as representatives of parents and children is that educational provisions for gifted children in Hamburg will finally be understood as a need and no longer as a luxury we can do without.

Translation: Catherine Stumpp

Jaana Rasmussen has been chairperson of the DGhK Hamburg since 2011. She is an ECHA “Specialist in Coaching the Gifted” and teaches Implementation of Methods in gifted Education at the ICBF in Münster. Jaana Rasmussen lives in Hamburg and has two sons.

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**Footnote**

**On 11th March 2014 the school board of the Hamburg Senate decided the following:**

1. At every secondary school one teacher will be responsible for the ‘promotion’ of children with high abilities; who will be obliged to do teacher training for the promotion of pupils with high abilities. The teacher will be the contact person for teachers and parents and will be responsible for developing and implementing concepts within the school for the promotion of pupils with high abilities.

2. Concepts to promote the bright pupils shall be developed at every secondary school which will encompass instruments for the promotion of pupils with high abilities that have stood the test of time (whole classes that skip a grade, revolving door model, competitions, etc)

3. A compulsory module “high abilities and giftedness” will be introduced into teacher training

4. The competencies of teachers are to be extended in in-service training concerning the theme ‘children with high abilities’

5. All schools are to be informed concerning options inside and outside school for the promotion of children with high abilities.

6. Recommendations of the Advisory Board for Special Talents (BbB) are to be binding for schools

This resolution was accepted by all the parties without a dissentient vote, and in May will be passed by the Senate. The DGhK Hamburg will accompany and support the administration when implementing the measures.

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1. promotion / to promote: The German words are Förderung / fördern; they cannot be easily translated. ‘promotion’ means all educational activities that have the intention of supporting the development of the talents as well as the learning development of each child.

2. The German word is ‘begabt’, again not easy to translate. ‘Begabt’ encompasses more than the gifted, but it does not say where ‘begabt’ starts or ends.
Obituary

James J. Gallagher

SHELAGH GALLAGHER, USA

Dr. James J. Gallagher, one of the world’s foremost experts in both special education and gifted education, died on Friday, January 17 at the age of 87 in Chapel Hill, NC. Dr. Gallagher made numerous vital contributions to educational policy on state, national, and international levels. From 1967-1970, he served as the U.S. Associate Commissioner for Education and was the first Chief of the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped in the U.S. Office of Education. In that capacity he outlined the components of the first Handicapped Children’s Early Education Assistance Act, beginning a national program of model projects that essentially changed the nature of special education for young children with disabilities. He subsequently served as the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Planning, Research, and Evaluation for the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW). He introduced the concept of the Individualized Education Plan (IEP), used in public schools throughout the United States to ensure appropriate education of children with special needs. During his federal career, Dr. Gallagher approved the initial federal funding for Sesame Street, as well as the initial development of closed captioning technology.

He contributed to groundbreaking efforts to establish federal policy for gifted and talented students, including The Marland Report and National Excellence: A Case for Developing America’s Talent. He was an integral member of the National/State Leadership Training Institute which established programs for gifted students across the country. During his career, Dr. Gallagher served as president of the Council for Exceptional Children, the National Association for Gifted Children, the World Council for Gifted and Talented Children, and the North Carolina Association for Gifted and Talented.

Dr. Gallagher worked closely with then North Carolina Governor James B. Hunt on several initiatives to improve education in North Carolina. He was on the steering committee for the North Carolina School for Science and Mathematics, the first public residential high school for academically gifted students, a prototype for similar schools across the nation. He also was appointed chair of the North Carolina State Competency Test Commission. He co-founded STAGE, the Statewide Technical Assistance in Gifted Education network, which redesigned gifted education programs in North Carolina.

From 1970 – 1987, Dr. Gallagher served as the Director of the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, one of the leading institutes dedicated to research in early childhood education. He was a researcher on the Abecedarian Project, one of the first scientific studies to demonstrate important long-lasting benefits in academic performance in a cohort of children from lower socio-economic circumstances. During his tenure, he served as Director of the Carolina Institute for Child and Family Policy, and was director of UNC’s Bush Institute for Child and Family Policy. Until his death, he served as Senior Scientist Emeritus at the Frank Porter Graham Institute, and also served a term as president of UNC’s Retired Faculty Association.

Dr. Gallagher published over 200 journal articles and 39 books, including two seminal books - Teaching the Gifted Child and Educating Exceptional Children. He has been the recipient of numerous national and international awards, including the Gold Medal of the American Psychological Association for Psychology in the Public Interest, the John Fogarty Award for Distinguished Government Service, and the Old North State Award (the premier award for public service bestowed by the state of North Carolina). Other awards include the A. Harry Passow International Award for Leadership in Gifted Education from the World Council on Gifted and Talented Children, the Distinguished Scholar and Distinguished Service Awards from the National Association for Gifted Children, the J.E. Wallace Wallin Award for Contributions to Special Education from the Council on Exceptional Children, the North Carolina Department of Education Lifetime Award for Exceptional Service, and the Peabody Award from the University of North Carolina School of Education.

He was the son of Anna Mae Gallagher of Pittsburgh, PA and a WW II Navy veteran. He was a loving and devoted husband to Rani (his wife of 64 years), and a loving father and mentor to his children and grandchildren. He loved playing games with his family (which earned him the nickname, “Swamp Fox”). He was a fan of the Pittsburgh Steelers, the Pittsburgh Pirates, and the UNC Tar Heels. He also loved travel, good stories, bad puns, and a lively intellectual debate. Dr. Gallagher is survived by his wife Rani; his four children, Kevin (Peggy) from Atlanta, GA, Sean (Nancie) from Auburn, AL, Shelagh from Charlotte, NC, and Brian (Lisa) from Cincinnati, OH; and grandchildren James, Mary Grace, Andrew, Brendon and Colin (who lovingly called him “Grumps”).

The obituary was written by Dr. Shelagh Gallagher, his daughter.

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ECHA Conference 2016:
Benefits and challenges of migration, multiculturalism and intercultural exchange in gifted education
2-5 March (!) 2016 in Vienna, Austria

The topical focus of the 2016 ECHA conference will be on intercultural and multicultural awareness in gifted education. Given the long tradition of education and migration in many European countries, the topics of multiculturalism and intercultural exchange are key priorities on the educational agenda, as well as being obvious requirements for peaceful co-existence in the 21st century. The conference both highlights intellectual abilities and also addresses the diversity of intelligences that may contribute to a thriving society.

The Institute TIBI (Thomasianum, Institut für Begabungsentwicklung und Innovation) at the KPH Wien/Krems (Kirchliche Pädagogische Hochschule, Christian University College for Teacher Education), the largest Pedagogical University College in Austria, takes pride in hosting the conference in a joint effort with the European Council for High Ability and its Austrian partners. Due to its historical relevance and its geographical position in the heart of Europe, Vienna is an ideal place for conducting the conference. As befits the event, all conference venues are located in the historic city centre and are within easy reach by public transport. It is therefore possible to combine a high caliber event with a pleasant stay in one of Europe’s most beautiful cities.

The conference will be held from March 2nd to 5th 2016 in order to avoid overlapping schedules with other related summits. More detailed information will be available in autumn 2014 (s. also www.institut-tibi.at).

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News from Denmark

OLE KYED, DENMARK

Denmark is in the process of preparing a new school reform - from August 2014. The political intention behind the reform is – among other reasons – the results from the world wide PISA reports where Denmark is not living up to the expectations.

For some years the educational system has been working on inclusion of children with special needs in the normal classes. Less children are referred to special classes and special schools. So far there are different opinions whether it has been a success or not, seen from parents’, teachers’ or politicians’ point of view.

Teachers claim they need more training in order to include the many specific handicaps and dysfunctions into the normal teaching environment.

The law also stresses the importance of differentiating the teaching for the more able students. The children are expected to have a longer day in school, to have at least 45 minutes of physical exercise every day, to be involved in educating activities like sport and music, and to be supported in doing their home work at school. So far the law indicates that planning for the more able should be taken seriously, which means that doors are open for experimenting with alternative ways of teaching.

Among teachers and other professionals we see a growing interest in identifying and knowing more about how to provide properly for the highly able.

Funds are giving attention to and are supporting financially the research among gifted children with social emotional problems.

Students and teachers may also be supported and inspired at the Mærsk McKinney Science Center in Søro, where the students can be challenged by exciting activities and experiments. Recently the science center has established an education for talent supervisors for schools and municipalities.

For inspiration for teachers a new book by Kirsten Baltzer, Ole Kyed and Poul Nissen has been published. This book is built on various research projects in schools. The title is “Clever, more clever, most clever – talent development through differentiated teaching” and is a follow up on the book “Talent in school” by the same authors.

Many small initiatives are taking place in the Danish educational system, and we are now looking forward to hosting the 21st World Conference in Odense, Denmark, August 2015. We will tell you more about it when we meet in Slovenia in September.

Ole Kyed is a school psychologist and in the 1990s he started the debate and work for gifted children and their situation in the Danish school system. He is also the National Correspondent of ECHA for Denmark.

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