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## Postprint

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Gifted Education as an academic discipline as well as national education-political effort, does not yet function across Europe in the same way as it does in North America or in the AsiaPacific Region. Typically, European endeavors in the area of Gifted Education have concentrated on alerting policy-makers to the students' special needs and encouraging legislation for its implementation. Success varies greatly. A handful of researchers, all interestingly psychologists, are largely responsible for pioneering Gifted Education and related issues in all of Europe, namely Joan Freeman (United Kingdom), Pieter Span (The Netherlands), Franz J. Mönks (The Netherlands), Kurt A Heller (Germany) and Harald Wagner (Germany).

### **European examples**

#### ***The United Kingdom***

The leading country in Europe in Gifted Education is the United Kingdom, due to the current Labour government's strong emphasis on Education and forceful efforts to improve compulsory education overall. Giftedness is a notion actively promoted by UK authorities and effort is spent on training teachers, advising parents and making special provision for gifted students. Though the government initiates action, it is carried out by Local Education Authorities (LEAs), each of which has at least one staff member fully or partly focused on issues pertaining to gifted children. Every school is expected to have a policy for their gifted and talented pupils.

Teacher and parent organisations have been paramount in prompting the development of special provision in England and Wales. The parent organisation, the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC), was founded in 1966 to provide

understanding and practical help, and in 1984 teachers founded the National Association for Able Children in Education (NACE) to support and train teachers.

### ***Central and Southeastern Europe***

Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, and the Ukraine generally recognize high ability through legislation, which regulates how the issue of high ability is dealt with, though the remit is broad. Some prescribe provision for talents as obligatory for state organizations (e.g. ministries, public schools and so on). Others only mention it for calling the issue to attention. Such legislation has mainly developed in the 1990s, directly reflecting the political changes since Communism. With a new political and democratic agenda, a long-standing experience of nurturing talent facilitates the further development of Gifted Education in this Middle and Eastern part of Europe. Unfortunately, though money there is short, but this is already beginning to resolve. The legacy from the old regime is a very strong conviction of understanding Gifted Education. During the Communist Era there were already serious programmes for the gifted initiated: children's palaces, special language schools, science schools, circus schools, gymnastics and more.

### ***Western, Middle and, Southern Europe***

State ordinances and legislation guiding education in Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Portugal, Switzerland, Spain, and The Netherlands tend to be inclusive. This means they contain general formulations on the rights of all children to adequate education and describe how such education should support and meet their abilities and interests, implying special provision for the most able. Usually this emphasizes enrichment and acceleration through early admission to schools, grade

skipping or moving through grades at a faster rate than normal. Educational moves such as these, however, are not accepted practice in all Western, Middle, and Southern European countries. Enrichment is normally more attractive and is most frequently suggested different forms of expanding and deepening knowledge and skills, which is vital for Gifted Education.

### *Northern Europe*

While the ethos of egalitarianism is a potential problem to gifted individuals in much of Europe, Scandinavia, notably Denmark, Norway and Sweden—not Finland to the same extent—is exceptional in this respect. There, the strict notion of equality and social collectivism at all levels of society, is best understood as an inherent cultural characteristic in which certain political ideals have merged with indigenous traditions and sentiments, which draw on historical facts and events dating from early medieval times and possibly even earlier. There are no official policies or implementations of Gifted Education in any Scandinavian country.

Finland, however, not as egalitarian as her neighbors, is currently the leading Scandinavian country in the field of Gifted Education. There have been several recent individual research initiatives in this area in Finland. Interestingly, Finnish school outcomes, in spite of providing no actual extra resources, have been shown to be the top in the world in international competition (OECD, 1999).

### *Russia*

High ability is recognized politically by the Post-Communist Russian Government, but there are no stated priorities regarding which subjects or fields of pursuit in which

particular provision should be developed. Note that in providing training for gifted and talented individuals in Russia, the term 'gifted' is usually avoided. For example, in Moscow, where there are approximately 1250 federal and about 250 private schools, half of these host enrichment programs rather than 'programs for the gifted'. There are both special schools and special classes available ranging in focus from academic skills to Music, the Arts, Sports as well as vocational and practical skills. There are also special boarding schools for mathematically gifted children from the remote and rural areas of Russia. During the transition from Communism to Democracy a particular concern has been expressed that gifted individuals must not be wasted or overlooked in the course of societal change. Rather, they represent a necessary national investment, which eventually may help to solve societal problems.

### **Is there a specific European approach?**

Clearly, the conditions for developing provision for the highly able in Europe are unique in the sense that the complexity of the issue demands European-based research to find ways of implementation, and to develop strategies commensurate with the psychological nature of highly able individuals, compatible with the particularly wide variety of cultural legacies of Europe and agreeable to current political ideologies. Also, all European school systems tend to follow inclusion as a main principle in any kind of development. Gifted Education in Europe, therefore, is mainly education pursued in inclusive settings and is education signified by cultural variety.

## Suggested reading

OECD, (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) (1999). *Measuring Student Knowledge and Skills: A New Framework for Assessment*. OECD: Paris.

Persson, R. S., Balogh, L., & Joswig, H. (2000). Gifted education in Europe: programs, practices, and current research. In K. A. Heller, F. J. Mönks, R. A. Sternberg, & R. Subotnik (eds.), International handbook of giftedness and talent (pp. 703-734). Oxford, UK: Pergamon Press.

Urban, K. K., & Sekowski, A. (1993). Programs and practices for identifying and nurturing giftedness and talent in Europe. In K. A. Heller, F. J. Mönks & A. H. Passow (Eds.), International handbook of research and development of giftedness and talent (pp. 779-795). Oxford, UK: Pergamon Press.

## Useful Internet links

The European Council for High Ability (Pan-European)

<http://www.echa.ws>

Internationales Centrum für Begabungsforschung (Germany)

<http://www.icbf.de>

Centrum voor BegaafdheidsOnderzoek (The Netherlands)

<http://www.ru.nl/socialwetenschappen/cbo>

National Association for Gifted Children in Education (UK)

<http://www.nace.co.uk>

Centro Para Jovenes Con Talento (Spain)

<http://www.ctys.net>

Centrum nadání (The Czech Republic)

<http://www.centrumnadani.cz>