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## TRAINING OF TEACHERS OF GIFTED AND TALENTED STUDENTS

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### ABSTRACT

This article discusses a research of training of teachers of gifted and talented student's. Training organisation, conduct and results are presented. The training is designed on the frame of an international project "Gifted and Talented Children Teacher's and Parent's Training – GATE". Its overall aim is to support teachers of GAT children to work with them. This research is presented as a part of wider research. A follow-up project for methodology for talents and strengths development is announced.

**Key words:** gifted and talented students, teachers, training

### INTRODUCTION

Gifted and talented children and students are an invaluable wealth for every country. Teachers and parents play an important role for their development. The research of effectiveness of the designed short-term training of teachers of gifted and talented (GAT) students is presented in this article. This research is a part of a wider research aimed to develop long-term pedagogical specialists training how to work with GAT-students and methodology for development of talents and strengths. Its tasks are connected with analysis of theories, policies and practices, course design and implementation, results dissemination. Research methods are theoretical analysis, experiment, observation, action research, interview, questioner, discussion, group work.

The focus of this report is to present the results of training of teachers of GAT-students (experiment) and the results from the evaluation questionnaire of training participants. The results connected with the problems and perspectives of working with GAT-students provide evidences about necessity to design trainings of teachers how to work with GAT-students.

### RESEARCH BACKGROUND

This research is preceded by another research made in June - December 2013, which was

devoted to a study of the need to develop forms of training for teachers and other educational professionals to develop the competences to work with gifted children and students. The study was conducted with participants in "The Training for Outstanding Teaching Professionals to Promote and Support their Professional Development." (1-3) The role of the training methodology was disclosed for the application of the research methods and for obtaining the system of results. The problems and perspectives in working with gifted children and students were outlined. Generalizations about the competences of pedagogical specialists were made and their significant personal characteristics were marked out (4).

The current study is connected with European partnership - Project GATE (2014/2015) – membership in international expert team in London (Sept. 2014) for course design and course implementation in Trakia University - DIITT. The Leonardo da Vinci partnership project "Gifted and Talented Children Teacher's and Parent's Training – GATE" (Project number 2013-1-TR1-LEO04-47702) is a "gate" provided to teachers, parents and all concerned actors in the educational community regarding the gifted and talented students, which special educational needs not always find an adequate answer and support. Through common joint work and mutual learning mobilities, the involved partners from Spain, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Italy, Lithuania and United Kingdom researched which the existing educational resources on this topic are and

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offered a new educational tool to support them in their individual pathways to guarantee the “jump” between the school and the labor market, implementing at the same time the support at home and within the surrounding educational community (5).

The realized tasks, activities and publications toward wider research goal (in the frame of these projects) are:

1. Theoretical literature research of the problem GAT-students.
2. Research of working with GAT-students in Bulgaria.
3. National report on GAT-students in Bulgaria.
4. Research of European policies and practices – designed training course; developed “Guidelines for training of teachers of GAT-students” and some brochures.
5. Implementation of the designed course.

The personal roles and experience in these activities are: a team member for the National report development, an expert for course design and a trainer.

#### **“GATE” TRAINING COURSE OF TEACHERS OF GIFTED AND TALENTED STUDENTS**

“GATE” course framework is based on a theoretical research on the field of gifted and talented children and modern constructivist teaching. It is described in the project guidelines (GATE, 2015). Some project partners have special contributions - the UK partner with the concepts about Participatory and Appreciative Action and Reflection Approach and six step Strength-based Development Framework (6-7), the Bulgarian partner with concepts about the gifted children development (8-10) and understanding strengths (11).

The designed “GATE” course is a one-day course for 15-20 participants. It is divided into three main parts with an action planning to conclude:

- Part 1: Presentation - developing knowledge.
- Part 2: Active learning - developing the skills of our teachers with the objective of learning how to “spot” GAT-children.
- Part 3. Discussion - developing a positive and open attitude to GAT children.
- Action planning.

*Implementation in Trakia University.* The designed “GATE” course was implemented in The Department for Information and In-service Teacher Training of Trakia University. The

course participants were school principles and teachers from different subjects, participating in one-year pedagogical specializations. The size of the group was 18.

The course overall aim was to support teachers of GAT students through the existing educational resources and innovative methodologies to work with such kinds of students. Expected results were: knowledge and skills of teachers how to ‘spot’ GAT children and positive open-minded attitude to GAT children.

The course content included: who are the gifted and talented (GAT) - definitions; GAT-characteristics; teacher’s personality; the situation of GAT in the country – problems; perspectives; personal future plans how to work with GAT children.

The used methods and techniques (technology) were: a presentation, active learning activities, brainstorming, discussion, reflection, moderation cards, SWAT-analyses, thinking with six hats (Eduard de Bono), basket “Food for thoughts”, pair and group work, handouts. The needed materials were computer, projector, whiteboard, flipchart, posters, sheets, markers, corkboards.

The learning activities for teachers address the three dimensions of support in different ways: 1) “Learning by”- learning by what is said to G&T learners; what teachers do with G&T learners; how teachers relate to G&T learners. 2) “Learning through” - learning through meaningful conversation and communication; opportunities for creativity and expression; positive real and virtual relationships. 3) “Learning that” - learning that improves self-expression; enhances a feeling of self-efficacy; empowers and strengthens teachers. The activities are to support teachers in their role/s with G&T learners. The activities are designed not to ‘tell’ teachers what they ought to know and do, but to enable them to use their own experiences and skills to be the best they can be, with the young G&T learner/s in their ‘care’ (GATE, 2015).

One of activities aims to induce the teachers to think in terms of strengths and potential; to get them thinking about the language involved with strength based discussions. This involves questions around “what is strength”, “can weakness be a strength and vice versa”, and the issues associated with identifying strength. At the end of the exercise, the trainer has to know whether the participants changed their understanding of strengths or whether they modified their attitudes to it.

Another activity is “Identifying my own strengths”. This aims to engage teachers in an activity associated with positive self-reflection and to demonstrate the potential of positive self-reflection.

The results at the end of the activities are evaluated by written questionnaire at the end of the course. The facilitator asks for free opinions at the end.

The action planning includes discussion surrounding three key questions “What are you going to start doing now?”, “What are you going to do more?”, “What kind of support do you need?”

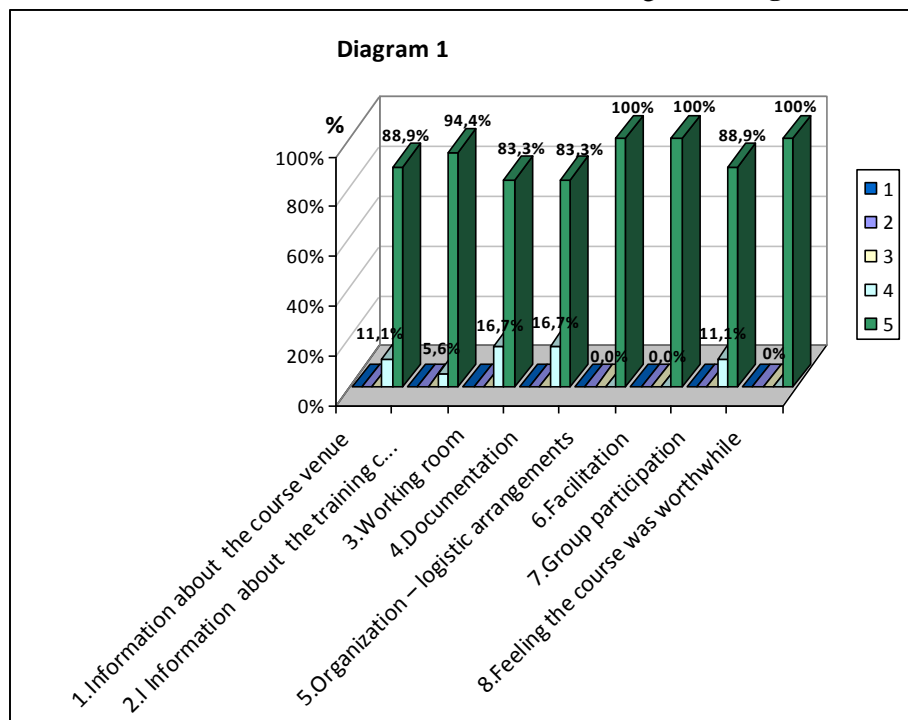
## RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

The reached results of the designed course implementation are:

1. Knowledge of modern concepts on which children are gifted. A comparative analysis of definitions was made.
2. Knowledge of the problem status of the working with gifted children in different European countries.
3. Knowledge of the nature and application of the strengths-based approach rather than deficits-based approach.

4. Main problems in working with gifted children at home were identified. The necessity of unity of theories, policies and practices was reasoned.
5. Results related to the personality of the teacher.
  - The qualities and skills of teachers working with gifted children were ranked in order of importance.
  - The role of the teacher as motivational mentor was described.
  - The role of the teacher as role model was described.
6. Results related to the perspectives for development.
  - Certain prerequisites for the successful development of work with gifted children were determined.
  - The vision of perspectives was presented.
7. Participants’ self-knowledge was improved. Teachers and principles have learned more about their strengths, talents and achievements.
8. Personal Action Plan – participants have presented ideas for future work with gifted children.

Two questionnaires were used for the results evaluation. Diagram 1 (**Figure 1**) and Diagram 2 (**Figure 2**) visualize results.



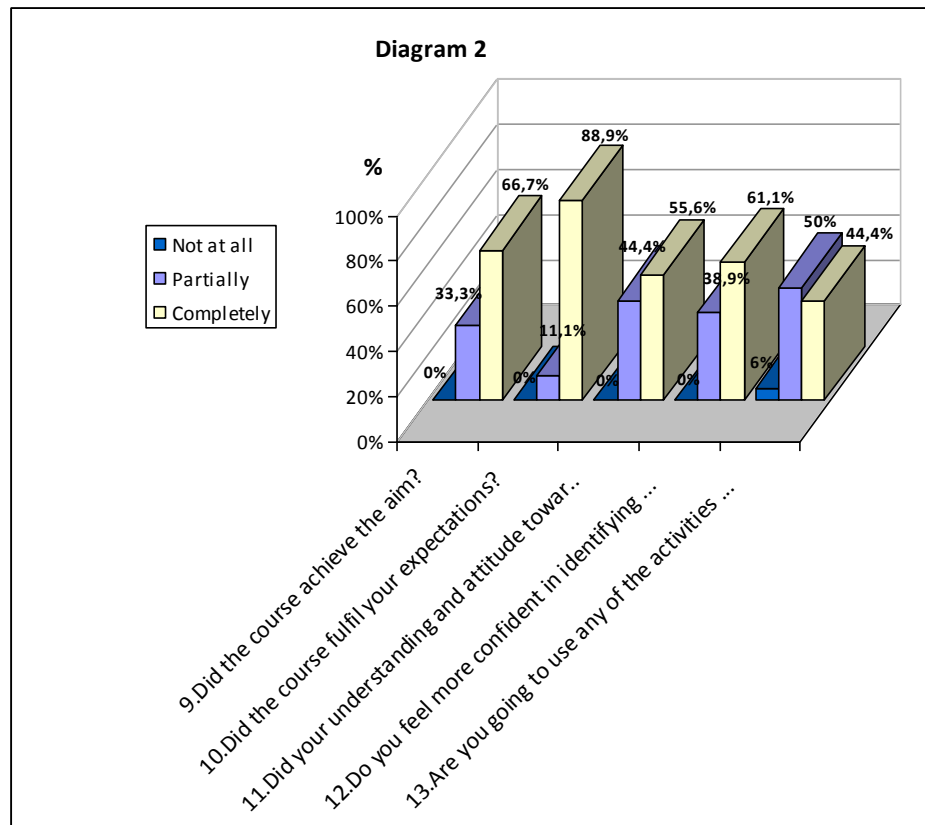
**Figure 1.** Evaluation questionnaire results 1.

The Bulgarian GATE-project team analyzed the training results, the results of partners’ project meetings, visits in schools with gifted children and the meeting with teachers with high achievements in working with gifted and talented children. The team decided to

continue to work on the same area. A new research project in Trakia University was developed - “Methodology for Talents and Strengths Development” (April 2015 – April 2016). The new project’s aim is to develop methods to detect and develop talents and

strengths of educators, students, teachers, children and students. It is expected that the application of the methodology for the development of talents and strengths will lead

to the development of competencies to identify and develop the talents and strengths of current and future teachers and students with whom they work.



**Figure 2.** Evaluation questionnaire results 2.

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