

COUNSELING PARENTS WITH GIFTED CHILDREN

1. Giftedness. Exogenous and endogenous challenges

In recent years, field studies on giftedness, talent attracted the attention of researchers, however there is a lesser emphasis on certain aspects such as happiness, wellbeing, life satisfaction in the life of gifted persons, things which can be alleviated or resolved by counseling . Also, emphasis is notified on the way the training curriculum is organized in the classes where gifted children study. However, universities, professional associations which prepare counselors, psychologists, are recommended to be concerned with the development of modules and training programs for people who work with the gifted and their families (Peterson, 2007, 2008).

The experience of gifted people has similarities and differences from people that develop normally. Typical developmental changes are associated with maturity, for example, gifted children, like other children, learn gradually to walk, talk, socialize. At the same time, gifted people may experience these aspects of typical development at different time periods, resulting in atypical development. The ways in which the gifted people develop can be accelerated or delayed. At a young age, acceleration is more common, in adolescence delaying is more common. For example, preschoolers may show more undesirable behaviors at 18 months, than children at 30 months because they have more developed cognitive characteristics and thus they begin to be assertive and much more independent, more earlier. Also, children with higher intelligence, progress more quickly through the stages of friendship and may have difficulties to initiate friendships with children their age because they do not meet their expectations (Gross, 2000, 2004). Parents' financial problems may affect the development of gifted children who spend more time in schools for their upfront education (Peterson & Ray,2006a,2006b; Moon &Thomas,2003).

Challenges associated with developmental pathways that differ from their peers, bring different experiences and can create serious problems. Some problems can be solved by gifted children themselves, others require professional help and intervention through psychoeducation, group counseling with parents, with teachers.

Developmental challenges associated with gifted individuals are divided into two types: endogenous challenges (occurring due to individual characteristics) and exogenous challenges (occurring due to the environment in which the gifted children live).

a. Endogenous challenges. Almost all gifted individuals experienced asynchrony at different levels, for example, the gifted experience in a different and unbearable way

the social construction of instruments for a normal socialization and the exceptional gifted have internal asynchrony that follows from the external one (deficits in social communication tools, evidence of behavior through which they are frequently rejected socially). Both categories of gifted are prone to mental disorders, depression. Other endogenous features that can create changes in the development of gifted are: types of giftedness that are not recognized by society, sex, ethnicity and maladaptive motivational characteristics.

b. Exogenous challenges. Such exogenous challenges include:

- selecting schools unsuitable for the cognitive developmental pace of the gifted (curriculum and instruction are too simple, entails challenges for school counselors that work with such students and with their families);
- culture influences especially the development of the gifted young people. High sensitivity of the gifted generates particular changes in sexual orientation for some gifted (gay, lesbian, bisexual);
- the functioning of the family, it was found that the best functioning of the gifted is when families are more authoritarian than they are liberal;
- relationships with peers influence the development of the gifted, are ascertained problems with peers of the same age. Gifted girls are more sociable than gifted boys. Also, problems arise when the culture is more hostile to the academic completion of the gifted, psychological counseling helps gifted students to resolve conflicts in a positive manner and to fully develop their potential through the interpersonal relations established with group mates.

2. Personality characteristics of gifted

Some studies have shown that, in general, there are no significant differences between the personality characteristics of the intellectually gifted young people and less gifted intellectually. Schneider et al. (2002) showed that there are no significant differences between different levels of intellectual giftedness in students and regular students. However differences were noted for two dimensions, namely educational and emotional dimension. Gifted students reported that they feel different from other students, have emotional difficulties, dilemmas (Sepideh, Pakdaman, Fathabadi, 2011). Regular students characterize themselves through fewer tensions generated by educational changes. Gifted students require appropriate training of teachers, curriculum changes, appropriate books and teaching materials. Other studies have found high rates of neuroticism for gifted students, especially in women. Other differences indicated higher rates of the intellectually gifted students for anxiety, internal conflicts, helplessness, some of these were seen as consequences of unresolved internal conflicts.

3. Counseling gifted children

The role of the counselor, in his work with gifted children, is found in different models of counseling, which approach counseling from different perspectives (Ignat,2011).

The counseling model of Sal Mendaglio (Mendaglio,2007) is based on the concept that the role of the counselor is to focus on cognitive and affective dimension; the counselor combines the role of facilitator, educator or person-centered problem solving. The counselor can provide empathy, congruence, unconditional acceptance, qualities necessary for a good counseling of the interpersonal relationships.

The counseling model of V. Thomas, K. Ray, S. Moon (2007) includes various other models, the emphasis is on counseling the relationships between the gifted and other persons. The counselor is a connection point between the subject and other persons, between gifted and other groups of interaction.

The counseling model of Jean Sunde Peterson (2007) promotes a *developmental model for gifted counseling*. The counselor role is a complex one and begins with self reflection, in order to offer extreme attitude, a strong or a weak commitment to the client's problem. Self reflection allows the counselor to break into the client's world, to understand problems from the inside. Counseling process calls for the involvement of the counselor personality characteristics, thereby the counselor (Ignat,2011,p. 593):

- is for all people,
- listens carefully in order to find, to discover how they feel and what people think;
- can help people feel better and live better;
- can help people solve their problems;
- can help people discover their strengths;
- can help people solve their own problems rather than giving advice;
- helps people by giving a meaning to complicated situations;
- believes that if people receive a little help they can find solutions to overcome difficult situations and will move forward.

4. Counseling parents with gifted children

Applicative approach. At one point in time, I was contacted by phone to be asked if I organize personal development groups for parents of gifted children. Thus, I organized a personal development group for mothers with children that excel at various school disciplines, being national olympians or having special musical skills, who have won national and international awards in various competitions.

At the first meeting, after all participants of the group signed the confidentiality agreements and after signing the contract for providing psychological services with all the group participants, the actual work has commenced with the presentation of the psychologist. After the presentation, exercises followed, such as: "ice breaking" and specification of the objectives for each participant. The first meeting focused primarily on gestalt – exercises. Also, at the first meeting an agreement was obtained for possible publication on condition of anonymity of some aspects of group activity.

The following sessions the objectives of each participant were taken into consideration, but the psychologist suggested exercises for "awareness and respect for each other's reality". Decentralization permitted such awareness, the goal was to see, imagine, feel and act from the perspective of your own reality and from the reality of others. Thus, mothers were aware that they and their children have different realities and have made progress in accepting the interlocutors' reality, therefore the willingness to be open to the realities of other family members, husband, children increased. As a homework assignment it was proposed to pay attention to the language and avoid questions like "what are you doing?", "why?", in general avoidance of asking questions and realizing a communication based on statements and affective communication.

At the appointments that were made, mothers began to express affective transfers to other mothers with similar problems in raising and educating gifted children but expressed some countertransferences, managed and explained by the psychologist. The relationships between mothers and their children were also analyzed, between mothers and their husbands (differences of opinion about parenting the gifted child). Relationships between mothers and their husbands were the theme for an entire session of a meeting. The fact that mothers have noticed similar problems in other families has helped to reduce anxiety in the families and to reduce social anxiety. Mothers have become more empowered to become the best confidant for their gifted children, to become more authentic in communicating with their children and more understanding. It was ascertained the fact that the majority of mothers in the group had the tendency to be over-protective towards their children, a tendency of "choking" the children and therefore to "steal" their children from learning life lessons, expressed by the phrase "I know him so well and, thus, I could prevent what might happen". It was observed that mothers are proud to have such children, but also worried that they do not know how to react in certain situations. Gestalt exercises, role play, metaphors used by the psychologist was helpful. Mothers described their children as learning many hours into the night, allocating many hours to training, with a "stolen" childhood, with varied interests, quickly bored by repetitive activities and sometimes venturing into activities without knowing the risks they are exposing themselves to. Mothers said children tend to be isolated, with few friends, girls desire to engage in long term relationships but fail due to their misunderstanding of the partners. A difficult moment for mothers was to manage their own cognitions to not invade the reality of the children, some of them teenagers. Awareness of dysfunctional cognitions by mothers signified a major step forward in acquiring and practicing the welfare of mothers, who felt more released, with greater enjoyment of life and with the problems in their relationship being solved. Every mother noticed those cognitions which they inherited from their family of origin and how they were passed on to their children, obviously from that point on cognitions began to be eliminated. A major impact on the mothers had the analysis of injunctions that marked their lives: "do not exist, do not think, do not feel, do not act etc" injunctions analyzed from the perspective of transactional analysis. Analysis of drivers: "To be strong, To be perfect, Try hard, Please others, Hurry up" represented moments of awareness for many actions made by mothers over time and

an opportunity to identify drivers for their gifted children. Also, analysis of scenarios of life, winning scenarios and losing scenarios, have signified a step forward in self-discovery of mothers and of their children.

The 10 sessions of meetings, lasting three hours each session, were occasions for self-discovery and knowledge, the analysis of the past and present behaviors and especially the adoption of new functional behaviors in the future. Better self-acceptance mothers led to a better relationship with their gifted children.

Even after the cessation of the personal development group, mothers still keep in touch with each other. Their family relations have become much better and more meaningful. Through the approach developed, with the action on the mothers, better conditions were created and premises for the development of the gifted childrens' potential.

Conclusions

Personal development practice of mothers may extend for working with groups of families with gifted children. The counselor, therapist carrying out such activities need to be competent in a form of counseling and psychotherapy training, the years of college are necessary but not sufficient. An integrative training in counseling and psychotherapy is recommended and can be helpful in further training and other therapeutic guidelines.

In schools, there are educational psychologists engaged in counseling but working with gifted children requires appropriate training of the educational psychologists. With a gifted child it is necessary to work in a multidisciplinary team, the appropriate curriculum is required, otherwise chances are, unfortunately, that the potential of the child will not update.

Sometimes, society is not properly prepared to receive, respect and value the gifted children in different areas and only the family or school are not enough to update a potential above average. If the society had the availability to invest money, time, resources for children with special educational needs, it will certainly be able to invest resources in gifted children.

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