Thesis of Doctoral (PhD) Dissertation

THE STUDY OF THE SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE OF TALENTED AND DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS IN THE REFLECTION OF THEIR SOCIAL NETWORK

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1. The objectives and subject of the thesis

The years of secondary education are a vital period in the physical and mental development of adolescents and the most ideal one with respect to the development and support of talent. Adolescents spend a considerable amount of their time in the institution where not only knowledge in imparted and acquired. They gain versatile social experiences and their social competences and personalities are developed further in the school. Home and international studies have proven that the mental health and well-being of students are significantly influenced by the atmosphere of the school and its welcoming social environment. As a result, there is a smaller risk of developing addictions or mental disorders and there are less depressive and somatic symptoms (Currie, Zanotti, Morgan, Currie, De Looze, Roberts, Samdal, Smith Otto and Barnekow, 2012; Költő and Zsiros, 2013).

In In the case of certain groups, the age-specific characteristics - among others the problems originating from physical and mental changes, strains arising from the difficulty of becoming an adult and emotional instability - may be detected in these adolescents and these generate further difficulties and raise other, relevant issues in both the talented and the disadvantaged groups. The difficulties in talented children was described with the ‘light - and - shadow’ dichotomy in the personality in their study of adolescents by Emőke Bagdy and Co. (2014). They defined distinctive problem groups highlighting the fact that excellence may be described by these in different depths and degrees. These profiles are the following: the perfectionists, the searchers, the problematic and the reserved. The ones who did not experience problems belong to the fifth - the resilient - group. In their opinion, individual and group programmes are required that provides expert help and treatment for these emotional obstacles, blockages and constellations which function as a hinderances (Bagdy, Kövi and Mirnics, 2014).

Education officials and decision-makers have to put a particular emphasis on the support of talented students and providing competitive knowledge. Nevertheless, access to talent support services cannot be the privilege of only advantaged children. The question of fairness and the equality of opportunity are soundly manifested in the field of talent support. The difficulty lies in equal access to quality education while existing differences in performance may be detected between - in terms of different socioeconomic statuses - advantaged and disadvantaged students. (Gagne, 2011; Czeizel, Páskuné, 2015). According to empirical studies, those disadvantaged students who take the opportunity to participate in special programmes run particularly for them may have better prospects to compete with their more
advantaged peers. (Ceci and Williams, 2010). These results justify the programmes and special courses that were started especially for disadvantaged children.

Our research was aimed at answering the question whether the sociometric status, social and emotional intelligence, future plans and aspirations of disadvantaged students with low-socioeconomic status who were selected to participate in a five-year-long, complex talent management programme in secondary school indicate any deviations from those of students in a more advantaged position and if yes, in what. Although our study examines hypotheses related to features and personality development of disadvantaged students with low social-economic status, the results are also connected to the success or limitations of the Program that provides the necessary framework for this developmental work which is named János Arany Talent Support Programme for Disadvantaged Students. A well-established pedagogical and psychological measurement system is available in the Programme which provides a continuous support to the differentiated development of students and at the same time, the impact assessment of the programme will also be realized. The functionality of the Programme was assessed by Educatio in 2006 and by Expansion Ltd. in 2009 and 2015. However, such results and analyses that would indicate what level of differences - compared to a control group - may be experienced in the above-mentioned characteristics, are not available to us. We presume that our study will fill in a niche in this field.

Hypotheses of the study:

First Hypothesis (H1):
According to our hypothesis, in AJTP, life a students’ residence, joint programmes, participation in sport and art events and group experiences reduce loneliness and marginalization. Therefore it may be expected that rate of belonging to the centre is higher and the number of lonely, marginalized children is lower than that of those in the control group.

Second Hypothesis (H2):
AJTP classes are – based on sociometric indicators - predicted to possess the characteristics of a highly coherent, cooperative and task-oriented community at the end of the 13th grade. Our prediction is that in each of the structural factors (reciprocity index, density indicator, cohesion index and reciprocal choices indicator) a higher value will be found, and the control group will have a lower one.

Third Hypothesis (H3):
The children in AJTP are predicted to surpass their peers in the control group in the Societal competence factor of the social and emotional intelligence test. In other words, a lower value is predicted in the Social incompetence factor.

*Fourth Hypothesis (H4):*
The children in AJTP are not predicted – in spite of sociocultural disadvantages (the education of parents, number of dependents) to be disadvantaged in the factors of social and emotional intelligence when compared to the control group.

*Fifth Hypothesis (H5):*
The children in AJTP are predicted to - in the order of importance of life goals – prioritize intrinsic life goals (competent interpersonal relationships, self-growth, social responsibility) (without the health factor) which are followed by the extrinsic ones (material goods, fame, image).

*Sixth Hypothesis (H6):*
The children in AJTP are predicted to have a higher average in the importance of intrinsic motives (competent interpersonal relationships, self-growth, social responsibility) than their peers in the control group and the Hungarian standard. (V. Komlósi and Co., 2006).

*Seventh Hypothesis (H7):*
Extrinsic life goals (material goods, fame, image) are assumed to have a lower average importance in the AJTP sample compared to that of the control group and to even the Hungarian standard as well. (V. Komlósi and Co., 2006).

*Eighth Hypothesis (H8):*
According to our hypothesis, the average of intrinsic life goals (competent interpersonal relationships, self-growth, social responsibility) of the AJTP adolescents is significantly higher in the dimensions of probability and realization than that of the adolescents in the control group.

*Ninth Hypothesis (H9)*
Extrinsic motives (material goods, fame, image) are assumed to have a significantly lower average in the dimensions of probability and realization than that of the control group.

2. **Applied methodology**

*Study sample:*
Our study in the Janos Arany Talent Support Programme for disadvantaged Students was conducted with students in their 13th grade in seven schools (Debrecen, Eger, Kisvárda, Mezőberény, Nyíregyháza, Pápa, Sárospatak) between 2009 and 2012. The recording of data was carried out in person, the subjects filled in a paper questionnaire. Prior to the completion of the test package, the subjects were given detailed instructions in which they were assured of the anonymity of the study and that the questionnaire data would only be used in the course of present study.

The impact assessments of AJTP are also amended by this study. Contrary to previous assessments (Fehérvári and Liskó, 2006a; Fehérvári, 2015), it worked with the inclusion of a control group. The introduction of the results in comparison with a control group fill in a niche in the history of AJTP.

The adolescents in the study participated in a social and emotional skills development training (János Arany- section) - which was built in their syllabus - for 5 years. Control groups were selected from the 13th grade of the language-specialized classes of the same schools. Their syllabus did not include a programme element comparable to the aforementioned AJTP section.

Taking their school performance into consideration, the students in language-specialized classes are also exceptionally talented ones. Furthermore, three-quarters of their teachers also teach in AJTP. That is, considering their abilities, the organisational culture of the school and staff members instrumental in teaching, the study and the control groups were a suitable match.

559 AJTP students (male: 165, female: 394) were included in the study. 581 students (male: 212, female: 369) from the language-specialized classes were included in the control group.

Methodology:

Sociometry:

In our study, Mérei’s multi-aspect sociometry was applied to explore interpersonal relationships, which – beyond the determination of the individual’s position within the group – provides an overview about the community itself, the relationships within the group and the channels of communication. Information may also be acquired about the group’s ability to cooperate either when completing tasks or making major decisions (Mérei, 1989, 2006; Forgács, 1989; N. Kollár, 2004; Szabó, 2005).

SEMIQ

To measure social and emotional intelligence, a SEMIQ (Oláh, 2005b) test was applied. SEMIQ is a visual semi-projective test which includes 35 pictures. The subject needs to
decide - in case of each illustration – what they think is taking place in the picture. The choice of the subject from the statements belonging to the pictures is much rather the projection of their own social-emotional interpretation than a feature of the illustration.

*Aspiration questionnaire*

The long-term aspirations of students in the study were examined by the Aspiration Index questionnaire which was developed on the basis of self-determination theory. The questionnaire was developed by Kasser and Ryan (Kasser, 2005), its home version by Annamária Komlosi and Co. in 2006.

3. Thesis enumeration of the results

*H1 results:*

The first hypothesis was confirmed. In AJTP, the degree of belonging to the centre is high and the number of lonely, marginalized students is low.

*H2 results:*

The analysed structural factors, such as reciprocity index, density indicator, cohesion index and reciprocal choices indicator all confirm our second hypothesis namely that AJTP classes feature the characteristics of a highly coherent, cooperative and task-oriented community. All these provide the necessary background for the students for good performance. They have formed a stable system of customs and traditions in which a stable common opinion is formed without any difficulties and the group is easily mobilizable.

*H3 results:*

The confirmation of our third hypothesis may be regarded as a significant result. The value in the Societal competence factor in the case of the children in AJTP – particularly females - indicate a significant increase. According to the results - in comparison with the control group - they are more successful in establishing relationships, they possess better cooperative skills and initiative and they more easily fit in a new community. In a stress or conflict situations they prefer referring to the community where they are able to exchange views or reduce tension by a form of exercise or activity. All these are in accordance with the results of our first and second hypotheses, namely that these adolescents are surrounded by a wide social network.

*H4 results:*

According to our results, there is no significant difference in social and emotional intelligence – in spite of sociocultural disadvantages - between children in AJTP and those of the control group. The fact that children with low socioeconomic status possess a lower social and emotional intelligence than those of a higher socioeconomic one has been verified in several

**H5 results:**
The children in AJTP - in the order of importance of life goals – prioritized intrinsic motives (competent interpersonal relationships, self- growth, social responsibility) (without the health factor over the extrinsic ones (material goods, fame, image). All these confirmed our fifth hypothesis.

**H6 results:**
According to our hypothesis, the average in the importance of intrinsic motives (competent interpersonal relationships, self- growth, social responsibility) is higher than that of their peers in the control group and the Hungarian standard. (V. Komlósi and Co., 2006).

**H7 results:**
Our seventh hypothesis, according to which extrinsic life goals (material goods, fame, image) are assumed to have a lower average importance in the AJTP sample compared to those of the control group but it is also lower than that of the Hungarian standard. (V. Komlósi and Co., 2006) was not confirmed. We did not find a significant difference between the two groups, a higher value was detected that the average of the Hungarian standard.

**H8 results:**
Our eighth hypothesis was confirmed as the average of intrinsic life goals (competent interpersonal relationships, self- growth, social responsibility) of the AJTP adolescents is significantly higher in the dimensions of probability and realization than that of the adolescents in the control group.

**H9 results:**
Our ninth hypothesis was not confirmed as extrinsic motives (material goods, fame, image) did not have a significantly lower average in all factors in the dimensions of probability and realization than that of the control group.

**Summary**
Our research was aimed at answering the question whether the sociometric status, social and emotional intelligence, future plans and aspirations of disadvantaged students with low-socioeconomic status who were selected to participate in a five-year-long, complex talent
management programme in secondary school indicate any deviations from those of students in a more advantaged position and if yes, in what.

The fundamental aim of the AJTP for Disadvantaged Children is to support the integration, the compensation of the disadvantages and the higher education of children of low socioeconomic status. It offers such knowledge and competence to its participants which they might never be able to acquire on their own due to their disadvantages. The five-year-long training provides an opportunity for admission to university or college, to prepare for their chosen career, for a quality, intellectual life. These children are provided with an opportunity to be a part of such an inspirational environment where a positive attitude towards learning and knowledge is valuable and future aspirations are in harmony with the talent of adolescents.

During the sociometric analysis it was confirmed that sympathy choices are predominantly controlled by subjective motives whereas propositions to fulfil functions are aligned with the norms of the community. All the above are features of a community in harmony. In AJTP, the number of children belonging to the centre or an intermediary position is significantly high. On average, 60% of AJTP students belong to the centre as opposed to the 44% of the control group so there is a significant difference. The results are presumed to be due to the favourable impressions (differentiated organisation of learning, motivating assessment, self-awareness and personality development trainings, learning methodology, development of communication and conflict management, etc.) which affect them in the course of the education process. Besides the above, extra-curricular experiences (art and sport activities, subject-oriented camps, freshers’ balls, competitions, performances, outings, summer and winter camps, school balls, etc.) play a crucial role in in forming a group atmosphere and the strengthening of group cohesion. The rate of lonely, marginalized students is low (15%) which indicate a favourable community atmosphere, empathy and tolerance. All the above are the features of task-, as well as performance – oriented and interest—driven communities. However, in the control group there are a lot (nearly 35%) of lonely adolescents. In case of tasks which require large-scale cooperation and activity, the members of the group are more difficult to mobilise and they are able to rely on each other less when completing these tasks. High cohesion is an attribute of classes in AJTP. This indicates a lot of social experiences, shared customs, an active social life and traditions within the group. The control groups may be characterized by low cohesion which indicates few common experiences and customs, the members of the group are more passive and more indifferent towards joint activities. The social network is not stable, the group might easily disintegrate.
Hardly any differences were found in the social and emotional intelligence of the AJTP group for Disadvantaged Students and that of the control group. AJTP children are dominantly friendly individuals who adapt easily to new and changing environments, they possess an extensive circle of friends and social contacts. 

*It is mainly the females*, who prefer new situations, are open to new ideas and initiatives. Furthermore, it is characteristic of them that they attempt to conquer hinderances or obstacles and they are less quick-tempered. When compared to the control group and the males in the AJTP group, they are careful and well-balanced and that is exactly why their presence has got a calming effect on others.

The *males* in both groups may be characterized by increased optimism, they are less worried than females and have a higher self-esteem. The *males* are more inclined to keep their problem-oriented and constructive attitude in difficult situations and intend to focus on solving them. They are ready to face obstacles and do not give up easily.

Adolescents in AJTP are characterized by – as far as their future aspirations are concerned - a health-conscious attitude and the need for health-preservation. They regard profound, direct and dedicated human relationships as inevitable in which there is a high degree of social acceptance and emotional support. They care about each other, are tolerant and cooperative and able to express and understand emotions. Another significant achievement may be that the children regard self-growth, self-acceptance and sovereignty as essential as this will determine their future success and achievements. Among the extrinsic life goals, there may be no significant difference between the AJTP and the control group regarding how the importance of wealth is viewed. All these might be interpreted as a future-oriented aspiration of conscious and ambitious adolescents. At the same time, another explanation might be that in case of AJTP children, the appreciation of this value may be attributed to its deficit. It may be less connected to their personal experiences rather than to wishes and desires. This dilemma may be answered in the course of further studies. There is also no significant difference between the AJTP and the control group regarding how the importance of image is viewed. Adolescents – if not above all – consider looks and appearance important. The importance of appearance is highlighted by the media, the internet and the tabloids. However, according to the study, these do not have the level of influence on children to affect their values. In both groups (AJTP/control) the dimension of fame was placed last.
Children in AJTP regard *their own self-growth as more likely* than the ones in the control group. This is a significant achievement in the Programme since it is proof of determination and self-esteem.

According to the analyses, AJTP adolescents regard their future relationships and their likelihood more favourable than their peers in the control group. The interpersonal relationships in the class and the school have a positive effect on the subjective well-being of the children (Van Ryzin, Gravely és Roseth, 2009; Hamvai and Pikó, 2008, 2009).

We were able to observe that the Programme - that has been continuing for 17 years – has become an organic part of the life of the participating institutions and their system of extensive relationships. Talented adolescents have the opportunity to compensate and alleviate sociocultural disadvantages and to establish an intellectual life during the five-year-long training.

It has been observed that several talented students who can successfully be developed are selected in the programme. Their development of personality and the discovery of their inner potential is a significant pedagogical sense of achievement for the teachers as well. Under the care of teachers and dormitory teachers and in the course of joint experiences, programmes, outings, competitions the children have the opportunity to become a real, supportive community.

In the programme, the equality of opportunity and education based on ensurance of the principle of fairness are luckily matched with education-centred pedagogical concepts. In this respect, it might serve as a model to the creators of future programmes for the compensation of disadvantages as it carries such values and principles which must be reflected in the inventory of shared functions of all modern education systems.

**Bibliography:**


List of publications related to the dissertation

**Hungarian scientific articles in Hungarian journals (2)**


**Foreign language scientific articles in Hungarian journals (1)**

**Foreign language scientific articles in international journals (1)**

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