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Gifted Education in the Czech Republic and the Role of the School Counselor for Gifted Students

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ABSTRACT



Ensuring quality care for gifted students requires a functional school-based conception of giftedness. The role of a school counselor for gifted students (SCGS) is to develop and reinforce this concept at each school. The theoretical background describes the school-based conceptions of giftedness with regard to activities of SCGS. The research examines whether an SCGS leads to the improvement of care for gifted students and secondly, whether it reinforces the school-based conception of giftedness. The research was conducted by means of a questionnaire and involved 352 general secondary schools, which is 98% of all these schools in the Czech Republic. The data were subjected to descriptive statistical analysis. The research has found that schools build their conceptions on proven and simple-to-organize activities, based on traditional concepts of giftedness. It was discovered that schools create a unified conception of giftedness, irrespective of the existence of an SCGS. The weakest part of conceptions was teacher training. The limitation of the study to be the collection of data by questionnaire, follow-up research should be qualitatively oriented. The study aims to describe the effects of legislative changes on the state of gifted education at general secondary schools in the Czech Republic, with a focus on identifying the functionality of SCGS.

KEYWORDS

general secondary schools; gifted student; questionnaire; school-based conception of giftedness; school counselor for gifted students

Introduction

According to Heward and Ford (2013), giftedness is defined as the heightened ability of an individual within a selected area valued by the sociocultural environment, which is targeted to be quantitatively and qualitatively more developed in comparison with their peers. Gifted individuals have typical characteristics (Cross, 2011; Johnsen, 2018; VanTassel-Baska & Baska, 2019), which include specificity in the cognitive area (e.g., high intelligence, intense curiosity, abstract thinking, ability to transfer knowledge, creativity, excellent memory) and also the social-emotional area (asynchronous personality development, perfectionism, emotional sensitivity, intensity and depth of experience, etc.).

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To meet the educational needs of gifted students, it is necessary to create and apply a comprehensive set of general and specific subjects and conditions that are synergistically interconnected and have a long-term effect (Dai, 2009). With respect to a specific school environment of gifted students, we talk about forms of school-based conceptions of giftedness (Cross & Coleman, 2014), the aims and tasks of which are supported by an expert appointed as the school counselor for gifted students (SCGS) (Mönks & Pflüger, 2005).

This article deals with SCGS in general secondary schools in the Czech Republic. The establishment of SCGS is supported by school legislation and by national school projects. However, some problems make counselors' proper activity in the development of gifted care in schools more difficult. It is about the lack of clearly defined goals for giftedness development and the absence of specific competencies and responsibilities of SCGS. The article aims to determine whether schools have such a post established, and if this is the case, whether and how it leads to the improvement of care of gifted students in general secondary schools and thus to the creation or improvement of school-based conceptions of giftedness. The study seeks to highlight issues that hamper the implementation of SCGS in practice and to offer a theoretical anchor for possible follow-up practical projects and other activities supporting the establishment of SCGS.

School-based conceptions of giftedness and the school counselor for gifted students (SCGS)

School-based conception is a system of sophisticated strategies of each school for working with giftedness and gifted students (Cross & Cross, 2021). From the theoretical point of view, school-based conceptions of giftedness build on (general) conceptions of giftedness (Cross & Coleman, 2014) and are further applied to particular requirements in each school. However, the individual conceptions of giftedness differ considerably, and their effectiveness depends on their particular use (Sternberg & Kaufman, 2018).

The following are examples of contradictions in concepts, indicating a move from a traditional to a modern approach (Dai, 2009; Lo et al., 2019; Sternberg & Kaufman, 2018).

- from being gifted to doing/becoming gifted: giftedness is innate or a subject for further change;
- from quantitative to qualitative differences: gifted individuals differ from their peers in the kind or only in the degree of giftedness;

- from conservative to liberal: giftedness is achieved by a maximum of 2% of the population or up to 20%;
- from cognitive to sociocultural: concepts focus on information processing while cognitive skills tests are used or models are based on individual and social factors;
- from demonstration to sociocultural orientation: giftedness is always externally manifested, or manifestations of giftedness depend on the environment;
- from segregation to inclusion: care of the gifted is focused only on a small group of gifted individuals, or all gifted students have the opportunity to develop their giftedness.

In practice, a preference for traditional conceptions is common. For example, teachers prefer “being gifted” conceptions and link giftedness with above-average performance in the cognitive area (Ferreira et al., 2019; Neber, 2004). Teachers also prefer traditional conceptions, where giftedness is a rare commodity (is exceptional) and IQ is a lifelong stable indicator of giftedness (Borland, 2009; Machů, 2019; Olthouse, 2014). Where exceptionally gifted students are concerned, teachers prefer segregation to inclusion (Akar, 2020; Kočvarová et al., 2018).

School-based conceptions of giftedness define various goals in relation to the development of giftedness. Wood and Peterson (2018) have analyzed several dozen conceptions and reached the conclusion that the goals tend to fit three categories: self-actualization (personal growth of a gifted individual), problem-solving (reduction of risk factors and improvement of developmental factors), and performance (applying the gift in practice). According to another typology (Chung, 2017), the goals are aimed at individual work with a gifted student (e.g., Ignat, 2011; Kerr, 2007) in a narrower social context of giftedness, such as family (Thomas et al., 2007; Ziegler & Stoeger, 2007) or peer environment (Brigman & Goodman, 2001), and in a wider social context of giftedness, such as the multicultural model of counseling the gifted (Yeo & Pfeiffer, 2018). Wood and Peterson (2018) draw attention to the need for a systematic concept where the individual areas of care for the gifted would be interlinked and continuous. This is the case of individual academic counseling, group (class) activities, school enrichment activities, and school to school or school to external institutions cooperation.

An SCGS is an expert whose role is to promote the development of giftedness in a particular school where they work (Ignat, 2011; Vialle, 2012). Their activities follow up from the school-based conceptions of giftedness, which they further reinforce (Mönks & Pflüger, 2005). There has been a strong call for establishing a post of an SCGS at schools (especially in

North America) since the late 1970s (Colangelo & Zaffrann, 1979; Griggs, 1984; Leroux, 1989; Perrone & Male, 1981; Reis et al., 1988). Since the 1990s, this topic has been one of the most discussed where giftedness is concerned, as it forms an integral part of the care for gifted students (Mönks & Pflüger, 2005).

Empirical studies, dealing with the evaluation of school-based conceptions of giftedness from the perspective of an SCGS, describe the following issues:

- While schools and SCGS appreciate flexibility in the choice of giftedness conceptions, there is no single clearly defined school conception of giftedness, and this makes their work more difficult (Kennedy & Farley, 2018). SCGS perceive the lack of clearly defined goals for giftedness development and their specific competencies and responsibilities at school as highly negative (Ersoy & Uysal, 2018; Ozcan & Uzunboylu, 2020; Yeo & Pfeiffer, 2018).
- SCGS and other teachers feel ill-prepared for working with gifted students because of the lack of adequate training where giftedness is concerned (Bakar & Brody, 2019; Carlson et al., 2017; Ozcan & Uzunboylu, 2020; Robinson, 2002; Vialle, 2012). For SCGS, the biggest barrier to the development of a school-based conception of giftedness lies in the poor awareness of teachers with respect to the identification of gifted students (Biber et al., 2021; Siegle et al., 2010) as well as in the insufficient use of suitable teaching strategies (El Sayed Ali El Samanoudy & Sami Abdelaziz, 2020; VanTassel-Baska et al., 2020).

School counselors for gifted students in the Czech Republic

Czech education policy seeks to anchor the conceptual support of gifted individuals, set out in the document Strategy for the Support of Giftedness Development and the Care of Gifted Children and Youth for the Years 2014–2020, also known as the “Giftedness Strategy” (NUV, 2014). This is the second version of the Giftedness Strategy; it was first drawn up in 2004 (IPPP, 2004). The main aim of this strategy is to create and coordinate a hierarchically structured system called the National Network of Giftedness Support that defines individual subjects and tasks on all levels, from the central body (ministerial and inter-ministerial working groups) to the regional (regional working groups for the care of giftedness) and school levels. The post of an SCGS and the creation of school-based conceptions of giftedness form the foundation of a formal system of care provided to gifted individuals (NUV, 2014).

The sporadic emergence of an SCGS post in schools began in 2004, as a result of the first version of the Giftedness Strategy. However, schools are under no obligation to establish one so far. When a school decides to do so, it usually assigns this role to one of their teachers. The selection of teachers for this role is again within the competence of the school and is highly individual. The SCGS thus becomes a member of the school counseling department (NUV, 2016) that each school must have.

Nevertheless, each school is obliged to include in their internal curricular documents (that is the School Education Programme, see NUV, 2015) procedures for working with gifted students, although a detailed description of such strategies is not stipulated in the legislation (in many cases schools dedicate just a single paragraph to this issue). If a school decides to draw up their own detailed school-based conception of giftedness, it should be based on key curricular documents and linked to the following areas of work with gifted students, defined in the Giftedness Strategy (NUV, 2014):

- Identifying giftedness: support individual identification of gifted students, create an internal system of giftedness identification, and link the identification of giftedness with the education counseling services.
- Developing giftedness: actively seek opportunities to develop giftedness, promote the use of a modified curriculum for the gifted, and offer extracurricular activities.
- Utilizing giftedness: offer study visits and parallel study programmes for the gifted, arrange for work experience with prospective future employers, and represent the school.
- Developing professional competencies of pedagogical personnel: further education in giftedness, sharing knowledge and skills with colleagues.
- Cooperation of persons involved in the development of giftedness: cooperate with colleagues, parents, outside organizations, future employers, and other individuals at the regional level.

To date, there have been no official research outputs reflecting the quality of schools with regard to the implementation of school-based conceptions of giftedness or the existence of an SCGS post. However, several reports provided by service organizations of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MSMT) draw attention to the state of care for gifted individuals in Czech schools. The Czech School Inspectorate (CSI, 2016) has stated that the level of support for the gifted at schools is in its initial stage. Generally, the giftedness concept is formally set, but in reality, is not applied. The key weaknesses of the system include insufficient training of pedagogical personnel and poor cooperation with outside organizations. The claim of insufficient training is supported by the fact that in 2019,

only 0.6% of Czech teachers attended one or more workshops dealing with giftedness, a percentage that has not changed over the last 4 years (NIDV, 2019). An intensive block of educational courses exclusively for SCGS was launched in 2016 but was not finalized due to low teacher participation (NIDV, 2019).

Starting points for creating a school-based conception of giftedness at general secondary schools

Upper secondary education (ISCED 3—according to the International Standard Classification of Education) in the Czech Republic is a differentiated system that includes secondary education completed with a final school leaving examination (ISCED 3A: general secondary schools, technical secondary schools and ISCED 3B: conservatories), as well as secondary education leading to an apprenticeship certificate, or general secondary education (ISCED 3C), see MSMT, 2016. These are mostly 4-year courses for students aged around 15–19.

Motivated academically gifted students often select education completed by a school leaving examination (i.e., ISCED 3A). Due to the examination, they can continue their studies at a university. Technical secondary schools offer education with a professional focus (science, technology, or humanities), and their graduates can then decide whether to go directly into practice, since they have already acquired professional qualifications or to continue their studies at the tertiary level within their field. General secondary schools expand the objectives of general education and aim to prepare a student for any type of tertiary education. Acceptance to a general secondary school (in contrast to a technical secondary school) is conditional on passing a unified admission exam, organized nationwide by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports.

The key curricular document for general secondary schools is the Framework Educational Program for General Secondary Education (VUP, 2007) which defines a gifted student as “a student who manifests an exceptionally high level of performance within a narrow area or across the entire spectrum of human activities. Exceptional talent is manifested by an accelerated development in activities in which the student demonstrates exceptional abilities, or by a high level of success in these activities. An individual can have one or several types of talents, on the other hand, it is possible that the performance of an exceptionally gifted student can be average or below average in other activities.” In essence, this concept of giftedness follows traditional interpretations. This means that students at general secondary schools are pre-selected through the admission procedure

and manifest exceptionality (cognitive, conservative, or demonstration-oriented conceptions).

When drawing up a school-based conception of giftedness at a general secondary school, the Giftedness Strategy (NUV, 2014) serves as the main legislative source, applied in line with the aforementioned Wood and Peterson (2018) model in order for the conception to be clearly defined. The model outlines four interlinked areas whereby each involves activities pursuing the identification, development, and application of giftedness (NUV, 2014).

- **Individual activities:** This area involves individual work with a gifted student. In contrast to other countries (Ignat, 2011; Kennedy & Farley, 2018; Vialle, 2012), the student almost exclusively works with a teacher (unless a school psychologist is available). Psychological counseling is then delegated to education counseling services (ECS), outside organizations working with schools. These are responsible for an official diagnosis of gifted students and any interventions (NUV, 2016). In the Czech Republic, the cooperation between schools and ECS where students with SENs are concerned has been common since the 1970s (Bartoňová et al., 2019).
- **Group activities:** This area deals with the development of a gifted student in a group of other students (in a class). Class activities largely fall within the particular teacher's remit, in direct collaboration with the SCGS. To modify a curriculum for a gifted student, teachers tend to use internal differentiation procedures. This is a typical pro-inclusive pedagogical strategy that should form the basis of all differentiated activities. Rogalla (2012) adds that these students usually work on the same topic and in the same classroom as other learners, but on a broader scale.
- **School enrichment activities:** This area focuses on the development of a gifted student with the participation of the entire school. The SCGS strives to intensify the cooperation of all involved, including the students' legal representatives (parents). Where the development of giftedness is concerned, the school counselor coordinates the activities in the form of external differentiation, extracurricular activities, or other curricular modifications. According to Tomlinson (2017), external differentiation means that the school creates different students that work in different topic areas, such as acceleration (e.g., skipping a grade or subject) or enrichment (a wider selection of optional subjects). The Czech school curriculum also offers several flexible extracurricular activities for all students (VUP, 2007), which are composed of extra lessons for individual students or whole classes. Within extracurricular activities, the school can decide what topics and problems to address, as opposed to

compulsory activities. Such activities include, for instance, whole school student projects, tutoring, and school clubs.

- School to school or school to external organizations cooperation: This area refers to collaboration with other schools and institutions. Activities are focused on the identification, development, and application of giftedness. In relation to psychological intervention, cooperation with the ECS is well-established in the Czech Republic. Regarding the development and application of giftedness, an example is the realization of joint extra-curricular activities in cooperation with universities, free time organizations, or future employers offering support to gifted students entering the job market. Another option is extracurricular activities for selected students that the school organizes with outside partners (e.g., competitions, summer schools, and correspondence courses).

Where teachers are concerned, there are opportunities to participate in events organized by institutions for the further education of teachers. The SCGS provides contact with other outside experts with whom teachers can discuss a specific form of support for a gifted student (e.g., Regional Giftedness Support Coordinator, Regional Gifted Education Specialist, etc.).

The research focuses on the existence of the SCGS post at General Secondary School and on the identification of its activities regarding the development of the School-Based Conception of Giftedness. The quantitative research was conducted by means of a questionnaire and involved 98% of all general secondary schools in the Czech Republic.

The main objective of the research is to discover whether the existence of an SCGS post leads to the stated improvement in the quality of care for gifted students in general secondary schools, and if this is the case, to find out in which areas. With respect to the individual data analysis stages, the main objective has been subdivided into four aims:

- Aim N. 1: To discover how many general secondary schools claim the existence of an SCGS post.
- Aim N. 2: To discover which activities focused on the care for the gifted the general secondary schools are actively involved in if they state no SCGS post exists.
- Aim N. 3: To discover which activities focused on the care for the gifted the general secondary schools are actively involved in if they state an SCGS post exists.
- Aim N. 4: To discover whether the existence of an SCGS has any effect on the declared activities in the care of gifted students. When the existence of an SCGS does lead to support of activities for gifted students, discover in which areas and to what extent.

The study aims to describe the effects of legislative changes on the state of gifted education at general secondary schools in the Czech Republic, with a focus on identifying the functionality of SCGS. The results could serve as a theoretical anchor for possible follow-up practical projects and activities supporting the care of gifted students.

Materials and methods

Data collection tool

The “P-KAP II” questionnaire was used. It is based on the P-KAP project (see <http://www.nuv.cz/p-kap>), a venture launched in 2016, aimed at identifying of quality of upper secondary education in the Czech Republic (ISCED 3). A panel of experts from the P-KAP project created the content of the questionnaire at the expense of pre-research. P-KAP II” questionnaire is the only version of the questionnaire. The National Pedagogical Institute of the Czech Republic, an institution directly managed by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport of the Czech Republic, provided methodological support.

The P-KAP II questionnaire is a multi-item survey divided into 10 main thematic sub-areas, which correspond to the areas of support for secondary education in the Czech Republic.

Participants

One questionnaire per school was filled in by a competent person from the school management (headteacher or deputy headteacher). The target group of headteachers was chosen because the questionnaire contained, among other things, questions concerning the organization of the school, staffing, and visions, which these persons are supposedly competent to answer.

Three hundred and seventy-five general secondary schools participated in the questionnaire survey, that is 98% of all general secondary schools in the Czech Republic (according to <http://www.seznamskol.eu>, where 381 general secondary schools are listed).

The research was conducted in the Czech Republic, which is in Central Europe, where the white ethnic group’s predominance.

Data collection process

The questionnaire has an online form. The Ministry of Education to the mail addresses of all secondary schools of the Czech Republic distributed it. Completing the questionnaire was mandatory for schools. The data collection process took place in November 2018.

Data analysis

The first step was the initial content analysis of the questionnaire. We focused on one sub-areas of the questionnaire (part F6) which is focused on gifted education and contains 20 items. Because of the aim of the study, to find out the differences between schools that have or do not have a school counselor, five thematically inappropriate items were removed (N. 2, 5, 10, 19, and 20).

Next, the analysis used only 14 items, which can be seen in [Table 1](#). These were closed items with yes or no answer options. With respect to the development model of giftedness described above (Wood & Peterson, 2018), the items were divided into thematic 4 areas. The data were subjected to descriptive statistical analysis in IBM SPSS (version 25).

Through further descriptive statistical analysis in the context of demographical items, we found that general schools occur in four forms: exclusively general schools (291), general schools associated with technical secondary schools (61), with vocational schools (16), and with higher vocational schools (7). Because the associated schools differ significantly due to their specialization, the analysis was focused on exclusively general schools and general schools associated with technical secondary schools. These are the only forms where the students and the school conceptions are aimed at the tertiary level.

Ultimately, the study worked with 352 general secondary schools, namely 291 exclusively general schools and 61 general schools associated with technical secondary schools.

Findings

The first aim was to find out how many schools declare the existence of an SCGS position. The relevant question was N. 2 of the questionnaire, “A school counselor for gifted students is employed in the school.” Through descriptive analysis, it was discovered that 124 (35%) general secondary schools declare the existence of an SCGS post.

When processing the data within the second and third objectives, we chose the following scale of frequency of occurrence of the activities for gifted pupils in each school: the majority of schools (69% and more); more than a half of the schools (51–68%); less than half of the schools (34–50%) and a minimum of the schools (33% and less). The occurrence of activities in most schools and more than half of the schools are in bold in [Table 2](#) (columns b, c). The second aim was to discover which activities focused on the care for the gifted the general secondary schools are actively involved in if the SCGS post does not exist. We analyzed the answers of 228 schools, the number of schools that do not have an established post for an SCGS.

Table 1. The P-KAP II questionnaire, questionnaire items.

Area	Questionnaire item, number of item	Abbreviation
Group (class) activities	13. Teachers use various forms of work in the education of gifted and exceptionally gifted students (specific tasks, individual assignments, etc.)	Internal differentiation
School enrichment activities	3. The school develops an internal system of identification and support of gifted and exceptionally gifted students.	Internal identification
	6. Teachers mutually discuss concrete forms of support for individual gifted and exceptionally gifted students.	Communication between teachers
	9. Where the care of gifted and exceptionally gifted students is concerned, the school cooperates with the students' legal representatives.	School-parents' cooperation
	11. The school offers extracurricular and free time activities for gifted and exceptionally gifted students.	School extracurricular activities
Schools and externals cooperation (active)	14. In the care of gifted and exceptionally gifted students, the school uses various modifications, such as supplementing lessons, extending the offer of optional subjects, opportunity to skip a year, offering lessons in years above.	External differentiation
	4. The school implements a systematic training schedule for teachers with regard to the care of gifted and exceptionally gifted students.	Teacher training
	1. The school cooperates with the education counseling services in the identification of gifted and exceptionally gifted students.	Cooperation with ECS
	8. There are various materials on the education of gifted and exceptionally gifted students available to teachers.	Materials for GS
	7. Teachers discuss concrete forms of support for individual gifted and exceptionally gifted students with other professionals.	Teachers–professionals communication
	12. Within the improvement in the offer of extracurricular and free time activities for gifted and exceptionally gifted students, the school cooperates with outside organizations (e.g., the Regional Network for the Support of the Gifted).	Cooperation with outside organizations
	15. The school participates in activities and student visits intended for gifted and exceptionally gifted students (such as the Open Science project of the Czech Academy of Sciences, cooperation with various universities or Czech Mensa).	Extracurriculars with outside organizations (externals)
	16. Students participate in projects designed for gifted and exceptionally gifted students at elementary and secondary schools.	Projects for GS with outside organizations
	17. The school cooperates with employers to offer support to gifted and exceptionally gifted students when entering the job market.	Cooperation with employers
	Schools and externals cooperation (received)	18. Students participate in competitions for gifted and exceptionally gifted students.

See Table 2 (column b) for the results. Our findings show that the majority of these schools (around 70%) primarily develop the abilities of gifted students through extracurricular activities, offered by external organizations (Item 18). More than half of the schools (53–59%) declare activities aimed at the development of the gifted at the level of cooperation between school

Table 2. Comparison of areas of care provided to gifted students by schools with and without a SCGS.

(a) Abbreviation of the questionnaire item	(b) Without SCGS (Aim N.2)		(c) With SCGS (Aim N.3)		(d) Difference (Aim N.4)
	Count	%	Count	%	%
1. Cooperation with ECS	97	42.53%	93	77.42%	+ 34.89%
3. Internal identification	34	14.91%	66	53.23%	+ 38.32%
4. Teacher training	14	6.14%	19	15.32%	+9.18%
6. Communication amongst teachers	130	57.02%	97	78.23%	+21.21%
7. Teachers-professionals communication	47	20.61%	58	46.77%	+ 26.16%
8. Materials for GS	35	15.35%	42	33.87%	+18.55%
9. School-parent cooperation	135	59.21%	100	80.65%	+21.44%
11. School extracurricular activities	110	48.26%	89	71.77%	+23.51%
12. Cooperation with outside organizations	37	16.23%	48	38.71%	+22.48%
13. Internal differentiation	120	52.63%	96	77.42%	+24.79%
14. External differentiation	62	27.19%	66	53.23%	+ 26.04%
15. Extracurriculars with outside organizations (externals)	113	49.56%	98	79.03%	+ 29.47%
16. Projects for GS with outside organizations	65	28.51%	59	47.58%	+19.07%
17. Cooperation with employers	13	5.70%	14	11.29%	+5.59%
18. Extracurriculars from outside organizations (externals)	160	70.18%	103	83.06%	+12.88%
∅		34.27%		55.91%	+21.64%

Note. The areas of care for the gifted declared by more than 50% of schools (columns b, c) and an improvement (column d) higher than 26% are in bold.

and parents (I.9), communication among teachers (I.6), and internal differentiation (I.13). Less than half of the schools (43–50%) declare activities related to extracurricular activities with outside organizations (I.15) or within the school itself (I.11), and cooperation with ECS (I.1). A minority of the schools (15–21%) develop the abilities of the gifted at the level of teachers and other professionals through communication (I.7), cooperation with outside organizations (I.12), materials for GS (I.8) and internal identification (I.3). Schools without an SCGS completely marginalize the areas of care for the gifted connected to teacher training (I.4) and cooperation with employers (17). Their importance is declared by <6% of these schools.

The third objective was to determine which activities focused on the care for the gifted the general secondary schools are actively involved in when an SCGS post exists. Here, the research has analyzed the answers of 124 schools (see Table 2, column c). In this case, the majority of the schools (69–83%) participate in many activities relating to the development of the

gifted, namely in extracurricular activities offered by outside organizations (I.18) or through cooperating with them (I.15), or activities carried out at the school itself (I.11). Furthermore, the schools are involved in school-parent cooperation (I.9), communication between teachers (I.6) and cooperation with ECS (I.1). At the class level, they develop the internal differentiation of the curriculum (I.13). More than a half of the schools (53%) declare activities connected to internal identification (I.3) and external differentiation (I.14). Less than half of the schools (34–48%) pursue projects designed for the gifted in cooperation with outside experts (I.16), cooperate with other outside entities (I.12), promote communication between teachers and outside experts (I.7), and obtain materials for GS (I.8). Only a small minority of schools (11–15%) are involved in teacher training (I.4) and cooperation with employers (I.17).

The fourth objective was to discover whether the SCGS has any effect on the existence of activities for gifted students at each school. We have discovered that the establishment of the SCGS position leads to the highlighting of all monitored activities for gifted students (see [Table 2](#), column d). The biggest difference (by 35–38%) is seen in items of internal identification (I.3) and cooperation with ECS. This state is bold in [Table 2](#) (column d). The smallest difference (by just 6–13%) has been identified in items cooperation with employers (I.17), teacher training (I.4), and extracurriculars from outside organizations (I.18). The remaining items indicated a difference between 19 and 29%.

Discussion

The study found that 35% of general secondary schools declare the existence of SCGS (see aim N.1). Because these schools are the most suitable institution for the education of academically gifted students (MSMT, 2016) and the intention of Czech school legislation (NUV, 2014) is to support the existence of SCGS positions in all schools, the number of SCGS in schools is relatively low. However, given the problems that make it difficult to implement SCGS in school practice (i.e. the absence of a school-based conception of the giftedness and competencies of SCGS and the lack of adequate teachers' training), the number is satisfactory. As SCGS numbers are not available in schools from other countries, this number cannot be evaluated objectively.

Another aim (N. 2 and N. 3) of the study was to discover which activities focused on giftedness is actively involved at schools and if the SCGS post exists or not. In connection with the declared school activities aimed at the development of gifted students, it is possible to define a model that

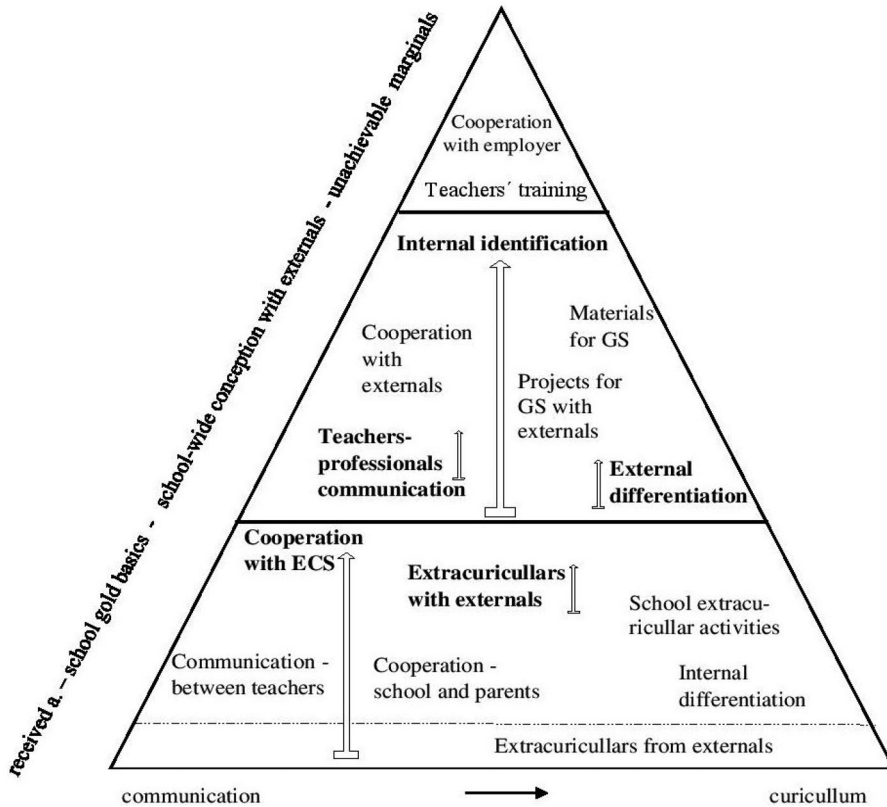


Figure 1. Model of school-based conceptions of giftedness at general secondary schools.

is applied in general secondary schools in the Czech Republic (see Figure 1).

This model contains areas of activities for gifted students found in the questionnaire and is laid out in a pyramid, which outlines the extent of school activities and their stages. The base of the pyramid is formed by activities we call “received activities,” followed by “school golden basics,” “school-wide conception with outside organizations,” and “unachievable marginals.” The left part includes activities based on communication (or cooperation), while activities on the right are focused on curricular modifications. The activities in which we see the biggest changes (higher than 26%) influenced by the existence of SCGS are highlighted and provided with an arrow.

The foundation of a school-based conception of giftedness is built on extracurricular activities provided by other organizations (“received activities”). First, they are competitions for exceptionally gifted students funded by grants offered by the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports to schools every year. Schools tend to accept (passively) these activities, and usually, no significant changes need to be made in schools to organize

them (apart from the potential need to prepare a student for the competition in question).

The post of an SCGS increases the need for students to participate in such competitions. Nevertheless, the basic work with gifted students also involves another form of received activities, namely cooperation with the education counseling services (ECS). In the Czech Republic, the cooperation between schools and ECS where students with SENs are concerned has a long tradition and is common (Bartoňová et al., 2019), and there is a tendency to follow this practice with gifted students as well. Nonetheless, with respect to gifted students, research shows the cooperation of both subjects to be rather formal (not working) (Havlíková, 2018; Pipeková, 2010), while the lack of understanding of the psychologist's recommendations is considered being the key problem, as too many teachers, it seems too unrealistic to apply in teaching (Smékal et al., 2006). Because of this, we classify this activity as one of the received activities. The results further show that the existence of an SCGS leads to more extensive cooperation with ECS (by 35%).

The next area of care concerning gifted students, called “school golden basics,” is placed at the second tier of the pyramid. The “school golden basics” are activities given by school legislation and must be compulsory in each (inclusive) school, for example, internal differentiation within the school curriculum or cooperation between teachers, parents, and counseling services. It should form the basis of activities with (not only gifted) students. With respect to communication and cooperation, schools find their own sources. They promote communication among teachers as well as communication with students' parents. The higher in the pyramid we look at, the more signs of cooperation with outside organizations are presented. The same applies to the curriculum for gifted students. The basic element for working with gifted students is, as expected, internal differentiation (Rogalla, 2012). The higher tiers of the pyramid illustrate that schools make use of school extracurricular activities for gifted students, which are mandatory under education legislation (VUP, 2007). At the highest level of the “school golden basics,” we see isolated attempts of schools to organize extracurricular activities with outside organizations, such as internships or projects where the schools are expected to take part. Activities characterized by more intense cooperation between schools and their outside subjects are much more plentiful when the school has an established SCGS post.

The third tier of the pyramid, called “school-wide conception with outside organizations,” is reached by only a limited number of schools (14–20%) without an SCGS. Schools that have SCGS show differences; to be precise, 33–48% of them declare they use such activities. This phase may be reached on the condition that the school has implemented a

detailed conception for the development of giftedness, including a plan for systematic cooperation with outside subjects. Regarding cooperation, there is also cooperation with outside organizations. First, there is active cooperation with external professionals where we see, besides other things, a distinct improvement when the school has a counselor for GS. Schools strive to cooperate with outside organizations at the regional level whereby they develop the regional educational policy (item cooperation with outside entities). At the level of the curriculum, there is a clear indication of whole-school systematized care for gifted students. The school offers external differentiation (see Tomlinson, 2017) and projects with outside organizations that require close cooperation between teachers and outside experts. Schools can work with a sufficient number of appropriate materials and aids for GS, which they usually obtain through participation in regional or national projects. This phase culminates in the creation of an internal system of identification of exceptionally gifted students. Here, the research has found the highest difference in schools that have an SCGS (by 38%).

The top tier of the pyramid is called “unachievable marginals.” These should epitomize the standard activities in every school, although there are certain external barriers that impede their usage. Teacher training with respect to gifted individuals is a crucial and long-term weakness not only in the Czech Republic (CSI, 2016; NIDV, 2019) but also in other countries (e.g., Bakar & Brody, 2019; Carlson et al., 2017; Ozcan & Uzunboylu, 2020; Vialle, 2012). Classifying “teacher training” as marginal is just a practical consequence (or cause) of this fact. For the criterion “cooperation with future employer” to be completely sidelined is a result of the general secondary schools’ specialization, the students of which are, in the first place, expected to continue their studies at the tertiary level. It is therefore a system error that does not deal with the possibility of a graduate finding work. However, it is once again essential to emphasize the importance of the post of a school counselor for GS, which leads to the implementation of these marginals, even if only to a moderate extent.

The last aim (N. 4) was to discover whether the existence of an SCGS has any effect on the declared activities in the care of gifted students. We could claim that SCGS leads to improvement in activities for gifted students. The SCGS has the biggest effect on improvement in activities, such as internal identification, and cooperation with ECS. It changes cooperation with employers, teacher training, and extracurriculars from outside organizations marginally. Moreover, our findings indicate that regardless of whether schools have an SCGS, they create almost identical conceptions of giftedness. The only positive fact is that an SCGS leads to an enhanced improvement in the quality of care of gifted students in all the items

observed, while their work can lead to some signs of creating a functional model of a school-based conception of giftedness. Although according to theoretical findings (Cross & Coleman, 2014; Mönks & Pflüger, 2005; NUV, 2014), the post of an SCGS should form the foundation of a school-based conception of giftedness. It more often becomes its active part, adapting to the established routine at school.

Limitations

The most distinctive limitation of the study to be the collection of data by means of a questionnaire. Validation of the complete P-KAP II questionnaire occurred only based on an assessment by a panel of experts from the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport. The validity of the fourteen items we selected for the research was evaluated based on the theoretical basis of the study and the professional competence of the author of the study. The questionnaire, therefore, meets the content validity (Taherdoost, 2016). In terms of reliability, the complete questionnaire was evaluated, and the items were selected because of the basic descriptive statistical analysis. Subsequently, the research worked with only fourteen items. Therefore, the reliability computation was not relevant (Eltaybani et al., 2021).

Regarding the contents, available to us were only selected and predefined criteria relating to the care of the gifted. The research examined criteria that most definitely did not cover all competencies of an SCGS and parts of school-based conceptions of giftedness. The questionnaire was only distributed to school headteachers, which considerably narrowed the perspective of reality and the content of the individual statements. On the one hand, we believe that the comprehensive questionnaire was filled out responsibly, also because it was conducted under the patronage of the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport. Despite the questionnaire being anonymous, it is highly probable that respondents have given an unrealistically positive account of their own schools. Such were the findings of the Czech School Inspectorate, which discovered no issues with school-based conceptions of giftedness. Yet, when monitoring actual work with gifted students, the authority had to admit that the level of supporting giftedness was at its initial stage (CSI, 2016). We, therefore, claim that the evaluation of the statements is highly exaggerated, and the realistic state of caring for the gifted is in a state much worse than declared. Still, the biggest value of the study is the large number of schools that participated in the questionnaire survey. The results of the study within the above context and methodology can thus easily be extrapolated to all general secondary schools in the Czech Republic.

Follow-up research should be qualitatively oriented, taking place directly in schools, through direct observation of teaching and interviews with teachers, and students. In this way, we would get a more realistic state of this issue, but of course, for the research dimension.

Conclusion

Assuming that a school-based conception of giftedness is a well-thought-out, internally consistent strategy for working with gifted individuals based on modern paradigms dealing with educating the gifted (Cross & Cross, 2021; Dai, 2009; Lo et al., 2019), we claim that, in the schools involved in the study, a functional model of a school-based conception of giftedness is rather lacking. The schools are not well informed about the existence of various conceptions of giftedness and base their responses on known, proven, and simple to organize activities. However, with respect to theoretical aspects, the absence of a sophisticated school conception of giftedness is currently a common occurrence (Ersoy & Uysal, 2018; Kennedy & Farley, 2018; Ozcan & Uzunboylu, 2020; Yeo & Pfeiffer, 2018).

School-based conceptions of giftedness at general secondary schools are formed in reverse somehow. At the core are activities based on traditional conceptions of giftedness, offered solely to high-performing gifted students. These activities are sought from outside organizations and applied within extracurricular activities. What should be the proverbial “icing on the cake” forms the base of the work with the gifted at a majority of schools. In the next stage of promoting giftedness, its modern conceptions begin to be enforced. The support of gifted students is gradually reflected in ordinary lessons and other activities, classified as “school golden basics.” For schools, these can be either traditional (without being primarily aimed at educating the gifted) or mandatory. The most noticeable act of an SCGS at this stage is the start of creating an internal system of identifying giftedness, which in turn provides an opportunity for other students to develop their giftedness.

Only a limited number of schools reach the following stage, which begins to resemble a professional school-based conception of giftedness. Activities reflect modern concepts of giftedness. They become more professional due to cooperation with outside experts and institutions. At the imaginary tip of the iceberg lies teacher training, which should be the entry point for working with gifted students.

The research also found that the existence of a role of SCGS leads to at least a minimal improvement in the care of gifted students in all monitored activities. However, schools with and without SCGS are developing an almost identical gifted care strategy, which rather negates the above-described

proposal for functional school-based conceptions of giftedness based on the modern definition of giftedness.

The article tried to describe the state of the care of a gifted student at the general secondary schools in the Czech Republic. The research pointed to the absence of a functional school-based conception of giftedness, which is subsequently limited to the definition of competence and the role of a school counselor for gifted students. The results of the research aim to draw attention to this problem and serve as a theoretical anchor for possible follow-up practical projects and activities supporting the care of gifted students, not only in the Czech Republic.

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