

Analysis of Brazilian Spaces for the Development of Gifted Students

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Abstract

This article aims to present and analyze the space of three Brazilian Extracurricular Enrichment Programs and how they favor the use of the potential of students with Giftedness. The article had its methodology grounded in qualitative research, having been used as a research tool for semi-structured interviews conducted with 24 students who participate in these programs, and their responses were studied based on content analysis. The main results of the study are that the analyzed Extracurricular Enrichment Programs offer qualified conditions for the discovery, recognition and harnessing of the potential of students with Giftedness. Thus, it is concluded that these spaces are compelling for the development of students with Giftedness.

Keywords: Extracurricular Enrichment Programs, Giftedness, Potential Development

1. Introduction

A reflection on the theme of School Inclusion has been conducted on different biases. In this article, this was thought from the discussion on the organization of extracurricular educational spaces that serve students with Giftedness, which are the target audience of Special Education, being featured in the Special Education National Policy in the Perspective of Inclusive Education (Brasil, 2008):

Students with Giftedness demonstrate a high potential in any of the following areas, isolated or combined: intellectual, academic, leadership, psychomotor and arts, in addition to presenting great creativity, engagement in learning and performing tasks in areas of interest (Brasil, 2008, p.9).

The concern that arises is regarding how to meet their special educational needs, since due to the great demand of students that the school serves, among other factors, those with Giftedness sometimes do not have their potential fully contemplated in school activities, therefore, needing to engage in other educational activities that play the role of supplementing their education.

In this sense, this article aims to highlight and analyze the space of three Brazilian Extracurricular Enrichment Programs¹ and how they favor the use of the potential of students with Giftedness.

Meeting these educational needs of students with Giftedness constitutes a goal that has required actions beyond teaching and school activities.

¹ Extracurricular Enrichment Programs are educational spaces that offer educational activities for students with Giftedness, providing experiences that are usually not offered in regular schools, which include contents, information, materials and methodologies that address the specific educational needs of students, as well as requiring professionals specially trained to perform with them (Gerson & Carracedo, 2007; Sabatella & Cupertino, 2007).

This constitutes one of the factors that often characterize Extracurricular Enrichment Programs, including: the *Programa de Incentivo ao Talento (PIT)*, the *Centro de Educação e Difusão do Talento de Vitória (CT-VITÓRIA)* and the *Instituto para Otimização da Aprendizagem (INODAP)*, which, even having partnerships with schools, run their activities autonomously for the development of the potential of students with Giftedness.

The three programs above are the educational spaces that will be analyzed in this article. They develop their activities in three Brazilian states, respectively, Rio Grande do Sul, Paraná and Espírito Santo.

This study is part of a chapter of the dissertation entitled “Accessibility strategies for students with Giftedness”. The discussion had in this article was seen as important in the larger research conducted, because it is believed that, before focusing on researching Educational Accessibility strategies, it is essential to reflect on the opinions of students attending the Extracurricular Enrichment Programs to better understand the accessibility strategies promoted in these spaces.

2. Methodology

This article had its methodology grounded in qualitative research. For Oliveira (2008) and Gil (2010), qualitative research is a thorough, detailed and explanatory study of the object chosen for investigation, by seeking legitimate information which, from the point of view adopted for this study, can only be achieved by listening to those involved, whether researchers or research subjects.

Thus, the research was based and formed from the speeches of 24 students, aged between 10 and 15 years, of both sexes, who participated in the research by means of a semi-structured interview (Gil, 2010).

These students attended one of the three different Extracurricular Enrichment Programs already mentioned in the introduction, and participated in the survey which constituted a Master's dissertation, developed in the Graduate Program in Education of the Federal University of Santa Maria (UFSM) located in the city of Santa Maria, State of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil.

Those responsible for the students have signed the Free and Clarified Consent Term (TCLE) to participate in the research, and it is noteworthy that the research project was approved by the UFSM Research Ethics Committee.

A content analysis (Bardin, 2011) was used to investigate the speech of students, being that “Content analysis is a set of techniques for communication analysis” (Bardin, 2011, p. 37).

The interviews were addressed by synthetic cross-sectional analysis, which is divided into two levels: Structural deciphering and thematic transversality. Structural deciphering involves fetching the data for the research from the understanding of the respondent's speech. This requires the researcher to, with each new assessment, undo the impressions of previous analyses to have an almost completely neutral view on the content of the interview analyzed at the time (Bardin, 2011).

Secondly, an analysis is made of the content addressed in order to find the underlying themes of the respondent's speech that may appear explicitly or not. This second step of the assessment is called thematic transversality by Bardin (2011).

After the synthetic cross-sectional analysis, the analysis categories were elected from the meaning elements present in students' responses to the questions of the semi-structured interview. This was done respecting the goals proposed in the research; tables were prepared for the presentation of data and, at the end of the study, the data were organized into a summary table of the results obtained, which can be found in Results and Discussion section of this article.

Among the analysis categories that comprised the aforementioned dissertation, the category chosen for the preparation of this article was: Space of enrichment programs, targeting to draw a reflection on the opinions of students with Giftedness on the space of the Extracurricular Enrichment Programs they attend and how they have contributed to the students' development.

3. Results and Discussion

It is known that Extracurricular Enrichment Programs offer educational activities for students with Giftedness, providing experiences that are usually not offered in regular schools, which include contents, information, materials and methodologies that address the specific educational needs of students, as well as requiring professionals specially trained to perform with them (Gerson & Carracedo, 2007; Sabatella & Cupertino, 2007).

It is relevant to explain what is meant by Extracurricular Enrichment Program. “Extra” is placed as a reference to the space, time and/or organization and/or educational activities of the programs that differ from school. But, as for the knowledge developed in the approach/concept of enrichment, sometimes it may not differ from what is offered in school.

Still, it is noteworthy that enrichment concerns the “[...] educational approach that provides the child with learning experiences other than those usually present in the curriculum” (Sabatella & Cupertino, 2007, p. 74). The extracurricular enrichment proposal can follow different ways of systematization of its activities. In this paper, to initiate the discussion, one of these will be highlighted, considering that it is the one that has been most widely used and referenced in Brazil, which is the Enrichment Triad Model (Renzulli, Reis, 2012; Renzulli, 2004).

This model is divided into three types of activities, but all are related, so there is no hierarchy or order in the activities to be developed in the model's perspective. Authors such as Alencar and Fleith (2001), Renzulli and Reis (2012) and Renzulli (2004) characterized the enrichment proposals as Type I, Type II and Type III. Next is a description of each:

1. Type I: occupations, different professionals, hobbies, spaces, events that are normally not offered in school. The organization of these experiences can be, among others, through short courses, performances, content exhibitions, audiovisual materials, trips.
2. Type II: A deeper study in one or more of the students' areas of interest. This requires knowledge from the professional of the area(s) involved(s) in the activities, so that the stimulus is the most qualified possible.
3. Type III: In this type of enrichment, students should be willing to act as researchers in their area(s) of interest and thus commit themselves to their research and have the autonomy to develop it. The purposes of Type III include goals such as: 1) provide opportunities for the students to acquire an advanced level of understanding of the content and methodologies in the area(s) elected; 2) instill commitment to their work and formulate creative ideas; 3) encourage the development of authentic products, possibly causing an impact on a specific audience; 4) seek possibilities of expression through interdisciplinary studies; 5) stimulate the development of autonomy in learning abilities, planning, organization, use of resources, use of time, decision making; and 6) encourage self-evaluation and self-confidence.

There is an understanding of the non-linearity of the Enrichment Triad Model's proposal, therefore, the student can move forwards and backwards in the activities related to each type of enrichment according to their learning needs, research and engagement. This model values the uniqueness of the student's development.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that, exerting the enrichment in this flexible and suggestive way, it is easier to contemplate the diversities and peculiarities arising from the combination of Giftedness and different areas of knowledge and each person's individuality.

Next, there will be a brief description of each Extracurricular Enrichment Program studied, in order to provide a wide view of them, as the focus of this study is to detail the opinions of students with Giftedness regarding the spaces of these programs and how they provide the opportunity for the development of their potential.

The *Programa de Incentivo ao Talento* (PIT) is an extension Project linked to UFSM offering intra and extracurricular enrichment, with predominance of actions within the last enrichment configuration; has been developing its activities for 12 years with excellence and commitment to their qualification, relying primarily on professionals with initial training in Special Education.

Although PIT counts primarily on volunteer professionals, an offered space for carrying out activities and the need to annually compete for bids to have some type of financial resource, it still provides students with experiences in other educational spaces, materials and resources, so that their demands can be met.

The *Centro de Educação e Difusão do Talento de Vitória* (CT-VITÓRIA) is a educational space that develops programs within Special Education, aimed at gifted and talented students, with a primary focus on providing intra and extracurricular enrichment activities, with predominance of actions within the last enrichment configuration.

The center was established in 2006 and presents itself as an organized institution with the largest team of the three programs, as well as a greater range of “knowledge partnerships”, enabling to cover and include in activities a wider range of multiplicity of manifestations and interests that arise from the educational demands of the students with Giftedness.

CT-VITÓRIA, as well as the *Instituto para Otimização da Aprendizagem* (INODAP), provides opportunities for students with Giftedness with socio-economic disadvantage, particularly through financial aid, contributing significantly to avoid the non-recognition and utilization of potential sometimes undermined and/or unappreciated in their reality.

INODAP is a private institution characterized in its legal constitution as a non-governmental organization - NGO. It focuses on the identification, evaluation and educational and/or psychological and/or psycho-pedagogical support of students with Giftedness, also developing intra and extracurricular enrichment actions, with predominant actions within the last enrichment configuration.

The institution mentioned above is distinguished by the diversity of the services offered, since, in addition to enrichment activities, it brings the possibility of consulting with psychologists and psycho-pedagogues, to meet possible aspects of pedagogical and/or socio-emotional difficulty of the students linked the institution. Moreover, it is the only one of the three institutions has its own headquarters, which provides students with a greater proximity and identification with this space.

Still, regarding the three Extracurricular Enrichment Programs covered in this article, we highlight the concern with the training of professionals who work either directly or as eventual employees, all of which have minimal training on Giftedness. Also, the involvement is noteworthy with other aspects and contexts beyond educational issues, involving students who participate in their activities, thinking about their overall development. Among other actions, the programs allow teachers, parents and/or guardians to know more about Giftedness, possibly assisting in the understanding of the issues surrounding this behavior of their students/children.

The table 1 endorses the discussion on the configuration of Extracurricular Enrichment Programs, presenting the Category: Space of Extracurricular Enrichment Programs. This Table 1 addresses the constitution of program spaces, enabling to reflect on the differentiation of the school space and the space of the Extracurricular Enrichment Programs, also indicating a difficulty that can sometimes be called a barrier against accessibility of the educational programs studied: storage of the productions made by students.

To start the discussion, it is important to emphasize the physical space of the Extracurricular Enrichment Programs because, based on Renzulli (2004) and Renzulli and Reis (2012), the importance of the environment in the manifestation of Giftedness behaviors/indicators is known. This is reminiscent of the studies by Vygotsky (2007, 2006) with his notion of influence of the organization in the development of learning contexts. Therefore, in this category of analysis, we sought to identify the physical and “nonphysical”/interactional characteristics of these spaces and how they assist in the establishment of educational accessibility. Since this configuration is also an important strategy for accessibility.

It should be reminded that when the reference to the Extracurricular Enrichment Program's space appears, there is indication of both the space called “headquarters” of the programs and environments of partner institutions, where the actions of programs are also performed.

The characteristics of spaces within the programs encourage Giftedness behaviors/indicators in the activities developed. They are especially organized for students with Giftedness and are quiet, facilitating their concentration and intensifying their involvement with the task.

The organization of space into the interests of the students is also highlighted, as they know, upon arriving at the Extracurricular Enrichment Programs, that they will find environments prepared to meet their educational demands. Noteworthy is the favoring of interactions and interpersonal relationships through the work in smaller groups and circles. The circle enables the spread of proximity in interaction, so that “face to face” contact increases the affinity among the participants, in addition, the groups usually have few members and everyone has an opportunity to speak when needed.

Students feel part of the program's space, as well as at ease to be and do whatever they find relevant, mainly due to the privileged interlocutors or ideals, classmates and teachers, that they find in the programs.

Student N refers to space, relating only to the knowledge that is provided there, which is what is most relevant in the environment of the Extracurricular Enrichment Program, he said. Now student Q refers to the space with an idea of discovery environment, which enabled her to find and awaken interests related to her more developed musical intelligence, which could hardly have happened had she not had the opportunity to participate in an Extracurricular Enrichment Program.

These surveys and analyzes about the spaces of Extracurricular Enrichment Programs lead to reflection on the importance of organizing the space for the establishment of educational accessibility to students with Giftedness. The speeches of the students demonstrated that the context has an influence with regard to the favouring the use, application and development of their potentials, qualifying them positively most of the time.

Student B states that she would like to see all that was done over the years of her participation in the Extracurricular Enrichment Program. Two of the programs studied did not have their own headquarters. This is also referenced by most students, who take their productions home, since they develop activities in temporary spaces (schools and/or the spaces of partner institutions).

This is a difficulty/barrier found in the Extracurricular Enrichment Programs studied here, i.e., it is difficult to store the productions of students with Giftedness, which would be a form of observable history and, over time, the record of their trajectories, being a stimulating factor for the new generations of students participating in the programs. This difficulty is more pronounced when there are “physical productions”, for example, prototypes of robots. The videos and writings are easier to take home or be stored in the programs.

Student P refers the attempt of organizing a blog that contains the whole production of the program. This is an interesting possibility, especially for programs that do not have their own headquarters. The blog could be updated by students, since all three programs studied have a blog or similar media instrument, but are still only updated by the teachers working in the programs.

After reflecting on the speeches of students with Giftedness participating in Extracurricular Enrichment Programs, it is pertinent to discuss the Specialized Educational Service (AEE)² held at the Multifunction Resources Room³, in schools.

The educational enrichment can be carried out in the AEE. It is known that the multifunctional resources room where AEE is held is generally shared by different students with special educational needs. Therefore, in most cases, it is not a space designed and structured especially for students with Giftedness, as occurs in Extracurricular Enrichment Programs. However, if the Resource Room is used for serving students with Giftedness, there is no impediment to their participation in other spaces. It is believed that these activities complement each other.

Thus, Gerson and Carracedo (2007) and Sabatella (2005) emphasize that, for a better use of the potential of students with Giftedness, they should participate in educational spaces, groups or courses developed/planned/targeted specifically for them.

The organization of the three Extracurricular Enrichment Programs allowed to verify that their configuration and Educational Accessibility strategies that are developed in these spaces, facilitate meeting the specific educational needs of students with Giftedness, as well as the development of their potential.

It is clearly, in these three programs, that students with Giftedness tend to be benefited participating in many spaces where they feel included and benefited.

Many children participate in enrichment activities such as dance lessons, a foreign language course, a space for learning a musical instrument, among others. Although they have a differentiated structure than these specialized environments, the Extracurricular Enrichment Programs are places that add to the common and specialized education. Such finding came from the speeches of students (Table 1).

In this sense, Renzulli and Reis (2012) argue that students with Giftedness require a variety of educational opportunities and services that are not generally provided for in the organization of the school.

These diverse activities can be interpreted by the bias of the Theory of Multiple Intelligences, which describes eight kinds of intelligences: Verbal-linguistic, Logical-mathematical, Spatial, Bodily-kinesthetic, Musical, Interpersonal, Intrapersonal and Naturalistic (Gardner, 2010).

² The AEE corresponds to “[...] the set of activities, accessibility and pedagogical resources, organized institutionally and continuously, provided in the following ways: I - complementary to the training for students with disabilities, pervasive developmental disorders, such as ongoing and time-limited support and in the frequency of students to multifunctional resource rooms; or II - additional to the training for students with exceptional abilities or giftedness” (Decree 7.611, 2011, p. 2).

³ Multifunctional Resources Rooms: “[...] are environments with equipment, furniture and learning and teaching materials for the provision of specialized educational service” (Decree 7.611, 2011, p. 3).

Different authors (Armstrong, 2001; Cheung, 2010; Gardner, 2010; Gerson & Carracedo, 2007; Rendo & Vega, 2009) refer to the Theory of Multiple Intelligences as a relevant knowledge and pertinent to think about the value of diversity in educational spaces, including in the activities the most developed intelligence(s) for each student. Thus, it was understood that Extracurricular Enrichment Programs offer qualified conditions for the discovery, recognition and use of Multiple Intelligences, since such actions are complex and demand environments that facilitate this through its activities:

Teaching for MI is related to the format and use of environments favorable to the intelligences. In such environments, children have equal opportunities to access a range of fields intellectually stimulating and challenging, rather than being limited to school learning areas narrowly defined (Cheung, 2010, p. 87-88).

Finally, flexibility is pointed as one of the guiding principles of enrichment that stimulates students with Giftedness in their autonomy and respect to the rate of use of their potential, i.e., the importance of Extracurricular Enrichment Programs was verified.

This importance relates especially to a special attention to the educational needs of students with Giftedness, being an additional action to ordinary education, which tends to add and contribute significantly to these students.

4. Conclusion

This article sought to know the spaces of three different Brazilian Extracurricular Enrichment Programs, highlighting how each one operates and, using as a subsidy, the speeches of students with Giftedness attending these spaces, in order to demonstrate their opinion on them and, from this point, reflect on the most significant contributions of these programs to these students.

Therefore, by presenting this study how Extracurricular Enrichment Programs are constituted, from the theoretical discussion and presentation of the organization of three differentiated spaces, as well as the opinions of students that engage in them, it is believed that one can characterize these spaces and especially emphasize the importance of these areas for the development of students with Giftedness.

In this sense, it is stated that the main issue to be considered in the study of the service to students with Giftedness is to understand educational activities that remain faithful to these subjects, considering and contemplating in their actions the demands arising from their special educational needs.

Thus being, to know and recognize privileged educational spaces that service students with Giftedness, such as Extracurricular Enrichment Programs, from how they are perceived, helps the different educational spaces frequented by these students to better understand their needs, thereby aiming for the qualification of their educational and even socio-emotional opportunities, appreciating the uniqueness of each one.

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