



## Talent support at Kaposvár University, Faculty of Pedagogy

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**Abstract:** *The shared aim of the professors working at the Faculty of Pedagogy is to help their students find the field, in which they are able to show extraordinary achievements. They help the students recognize what they are talented in and provide them the necessary support to act on this field. The talented students are most often helped by pedagogues; however, no one deals with the issue of pedagogues, who are talented and fulfill their jobs on the highest level. At Kaposvár University, Faculty of Pedagogy a three-step talent support program – based on the Czeizel-talent model – and mentorship for talented pedagogues have been introduced. During the sessions of Csokonai Student Talent Support Program each student is granted with the possibility to participate in research method lectures, rhetoric and personal development trainings and sessions how to create presentations. This new, three-step method has initiated cooperation in professional questions among not only students, but also pedagogues on our faculty.*

**Keywords:** higher education, future pedagogues, talent support, professional talents

### *Introduction*

The aim of the talent support program in Kaposvár is to provide all the students with the opportunity of being able to develop and find their places. The mutual aim of pedagogues taking the roles of a mentor is to help all the students entering our institution find the area, where they may show outstanding performance. They provide these students with support to find and achieve result in the area, which suits them the best. The concept of talent is diverse and colorful; yet, in our school system they keep on searching talents bound to school subjects. Talented young people are most often helped by their parents, enthusiastic relatives or pedagogues, but there is practically no one with this obligation. Most often

they do it on voluntary basis, out of pure enthusiasm – though it is also true that talent support cannot be successful when it is forced. However, nowadays, no one really deals with those talented professionals, who perform in their own fields outstanding and regard their daily tasks as a dedication, a mission. On our faculty people have the opportunity to show their talents and find themselves both in scientific research and practice.

In my study I am going to introduce the first talent support program of higher education based on the *Czeizel-method*, which was introduced at the Faculty of Pedagogy together with the mentoring system for outstanding talents in practical pedagogy. We pay special attention to those future teachers, kindergarten teachers and pedagogues for handicapped children, who show extraordinary performance during their professional practice. The best prospects may compare their skills on teaching competitions. The new talent support program of our Faculty has initiated not only the cooperation and professional discussions not only among students, but also between pedagogues and has confirmed the relationship with practicing institutions too.

## *Talent*

Earlier talent has been called talent, which was a coin used in the Near-East. Its figurative sense originates from the New Testament of the Holy Bible, Book of Matthew, where a discussion about talents may be read. A man leaves his fortune to his servants and divides it between them based on their abilities; everyone receiving a different sum. Returning from his journey he makes everyone report – praises those, who doubled the amount and condemned those, who only kept it. The man observed his servants with wise deliberation, realized their talents and let them make it flourish (Csíkszentmihályi, 2010).

Talent support dates back to a long history, but it has really evolved only in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. great leaders of our country have realized early enough: *‘only educated people may maintain this nation and make it a part of Europe’* (Sarka, 2010:1).

There are multiple definitions to describe talent; many models created by Hungarian and foreign scientists are well-known. Different definitions summarize different aspects and viewpoints, they emphasize various elements and approach the topic from many sides. A common feature of most of these definitions is to list inheritance and environment as important determining factors besides outstanding performance. The main participants of the process of talent support – besides talented students of course – are the mentors, who may be parents, pedagogues or other supporters. Talents supporters need to bear with special senses in order to be able to recognize the opportunities hidden in the children and bring them to the surface by supporting them actively.

In 1979 Renzulli determined three strongly bound factors determining talent: extraordinary talent, focus on the tasks, which means a high level of concentration and outstanding creativity (Harsányi, 1981). He regarded these factors equally important and talked about their integration. according to him the task obligation is made up of personal characteristics such as interest, endurance, confidence, strength and critical thinking. He

determined the outstanding abilities a little more dimly and divided the ordinary and special abilities (Tóth, 2006). Mönks has developed the three circles of the Renzulli model even further, emphasizing the supportive effect of the environment in evolving talent. In his works he regarded the effect of three social factors as the most influential: family, school and peers.

In 1997 Endre Czeizel created his model of  $2 \times 4 + 1$  factors by completing the models of Renzulli and Mönks. Besides determining the components of talent he evolved the much-debated question of the effect of born abilities and the environment. Talent is made up of two elements, containing four factors each: genetic and environmental elements. Czeizel regards the first four groups of factors – mental abilities, general cognitive skills, specific mental skills, creativity and motivation – as given. All these are influenced by the other group of elements including environmental factors: family, school, peers and general social environment. In this talent model an approach completely different from the others may be recognized in form of an extra factor: destiny. This factor is also considered as life-health factor, as born abilities need time to evolve, people need to reach a certain age to be able to apply their talent (Tóth, 2006).

### *Talent development strategy*

Talent support needs to be started as early as possible, as the unrecognized opportunities hidden in children may fade away during primary school education. It is highly important for the pedagogues to recognize the real talents and do not confuse them with the outstanding performance of children bearing with ordinary abilities, but arriving from a rich family background (N. Kollár & Szabó, 2004).

However, no standard scheme of talent development may be established; no similar methods may be applied in different cases as every individual is a different personality with different skills and inherited characteristics (Gábrity-Molnár, 2011). In higher education talent support slightly differs from the usual methodology. Its aim is to prepare students for scientific research, to refresh the profession and develop the methodological toolbar. Besides the mentorship the success of the program is highly determined by the conditions and opportunities provided for self-development, and for the evaluation of personal skills and creativity in the scientific and methodological areas.

In this phase of life talent support is not an easy task, as students and lecturers have less and less personal contact. It is possible that a student meets the lecturer only in the time of the lectures and during the studies there is only one opportunity for professional verbal communication: the exam. The introduction of the Bologna system has changed the structure of higher education, which has had an important effect on finding and supporting talents. The new system has made student scientific researches more complicated to evolve, as the selection of the topic, finding a consulting teacher, carrying out the research and the documentation and participating in the competition all have to happen in a three-year-long period. In the Master's this process is expected to happen in only two years, which is almost impossible in case the students continue their

studies in an institution different from that of their Bachelor studies (Bencéné-Fekete, 2011).

### *Platforms of talent support*

There are more and more opportunities opening up for talent support in the higher education. The support of students carrying out scientific researches happens primarily via the Scientific Students' Association, but the system of colleges for advanced studies also provides a perfect platform for that. The scientific evenings, which are organized on a monthly basis widens the scientific perspective of the members; and they also receive help in the materialization of their own ideas.

The Csokonai Student Talent Support Workshop highly contributes to the successful talent supporting. During the sessions all students are provided with the opportunity to acquire extra knowledge of research methodology and rhetoric studies, participate in self-development trainings, presentation preparation workshops. This is the place where the first abstracts, lectures, publications are prepared. Demonstrators are active participants of the creative, revolutionary activities of the methodological groups and the ongoing researches at the Faculty; and they are introduced into the world of scientific research with the help of the best professionals.

After the first steps the path of the most talented researchers is supported by the doctorate schools. Post doctorate schools, national and international scholarships for lecturers and researchers help these people flourish their talents worldwide in the future.

### *Talent identification*

The new development strategy of Kaposvár University, Faculty of Pedagogy is based on the Czeizel talent model. The early recognition of young research talents is crucial, as the mentor-student relationship has to be established as early as possible. The relationship of lecturers and students may become successful only if besides mutual scientific interests a good personal relationship is also developed. The selection of the students happens via observation; professors search for students with special mental and ordinary cognitive skills, who are creative and motivated enough to dive deeper into scientific studies of their chosen area.

Finding these students is a long process with several steps. When they first enter our institution, we make a lecture to them about the activities of the Scientific Students' Association on our faculty. The SSA activity is not compulsory; it is not like a mandatory thesis, but rather a cooperative research of lecturers and students. It is really important to raise the interest of students, who are just starting their studies, as the only way to finish a complete research during a three-year-long BA course is to start it at the beginning. In the brainstorming session the students get acquainted with the topics, research areas offered by the lecturers on the very first day. In the first semester the searching phase begins: our aim is to help those

students and lecturers meet, who have not only common interests, but also get on with each other pretty well.

The research topics and areas offered by the professors are available on the website of the university as well. At the end of the first semester a competition of the best assignments is organized; each lecturer can enter those seminar papers, which they consider to be the best ones. The best essays on Faculty level are introduced in small presentations. On the competition the best works are awarded – and just like in a ‘fair’, consulting teachers, students and topics may find each other on this occasion.

Teachers and kindergarten teachers help the faculty leaders choose those students, whose performance and methodological knowledge is outstanding and show a good sense for the job on the practice classes.

### *Effects of the four environmental factors*

We intend to enhance and use the positive effects of the two times four influencing factors of talent support. By the time students enter the university the direct role of the family declines, but we try to emphasize the former value-adding effect of it.

We also aim to enhance the supportive role of our institution via scientific programs, where students do not participate as audience, but as fully qualified researchers.

The supportive role of peers appears in the students acting as SSA representatives. Each department has a representative; a student, who searches for and collects the others, who are interested. The experience and stories of those students, who have already participated in the National Finals has a huge motivating effect on the newcomers.

The effect of society appears in the form of appreciation – in case the ‘outer world’ of the person regards scientific research as a positive thing. In this area many challenges appear, but we try to maintain a strong connection with the local media in order to make the ‘validity’ of our researches visible for everyone.

After the topics, researchers and consultants have found each other, intensive work is starting. The work of the researchers on a faculty is helped and coordinated by the faculty SSA representative teacher, and the decisions about sending student researches further in the process are made together with the faculty director. In case the evaluation of a student’s work is positive on this small committee, they may enter the three-step student research system of the faculty.

In the first round the students introduce their research plan in presentations, which are listened by a committee of five lecturers. This is followed by brainstorming. Brainstorming is a process of organizing thoughts, where a small group of people calls a huge number of ideas forth in a short period of time. This method uses imagination and creativity to solve a certain problem (Tóth, 2006:185). The group is made up of the jury members and the audience, consisting of students and lecturers, who can tell their opinions, ideas or advices. The scientific debate is led by the SSA director of the Faculty, applying cooperative techniques.

After the conference the students and consultant teachers meet their colleagues personally and keep consulting on a regular basis. On our Faculty we support research work helped by consultant teachers, as this way interdisciplinary aspect may be applied, as two heads are better than one. This is the best way to examine a research from multiple aspects.

For the second round students can be qualified only with complete researches, which are in written format and match the requirements of the National SSA competition. The papers are evaluated by two independent professionals of the topic. After this an oral round takes place, where students have the opportunity to present their work. The best presentations are qualified for the National Finals of the Student Scientific Association.

The last trial before the finals is the third step, the SSA Conference of the University, one month before the National Finals. Here the finalists of all four faculties of Kaposvár University may show and compare their performance. The participants of the National Artistic Students' Association's Conference organize an exhibition to show their works for the public. The task of the teachers evaluating the works is to create such an atmosphere as it was already the final competition. In the oral presentations they pay special attention to the quality of the presentation, understandability, presenting skills and professional terminology; supporting the final phase of preparation for the finals (Bencéné-Fekete, 2011).

### *Associations helping talent support*

During the past decades an exemplary talent support system has been developed in our country, which is made up of Talent Points and Talent Support Councils. The Talent Support Council is a local or regional organization, which supports the recognition and development of talents on professional and social level. In my presentation I am introducing the example of Somogy county; the first ever mentoring network of the country, which provides support for talented people on all levels of education, including opportunities within and outside the walls of the schools. It provides equal opportunities, as regardless of the social and financial status of the family, every single person bearing with outstanding abilities is receiving support.

In 2011 18 founding members made the decision to build up the Talent Support Council of Somogy county. The common feature of these members is the dedication for talent support; but generally a huge variability of the participating parties may be observed: educational institutions, regional governments, civil organizations, economic entities, enterprises and private individuals all support the same activity, binding all members together. Their aim is to support, develop and help the outstanding talents both professionally and financially. However, one of the most important aims is also to provide equal chances, to provide an opportunity for all the children, regardless of social background to apply the talents and opportunities hidden in them.

There are many teachers, kindergarten teachers, pedagogues for students with special needs, teachers of arts and university professors

among the members, which makes it possible on all levels of education to apply the scientifically approved and most up-to-date methods for supporting talents. An opportunity for professional forums is open for both the parents and pedagogues on this level.

The activity of the Talent Support Council of Somogy county is organized by the directory, which supervises the activities professionally, but also provides financial support for the departments. Besides its active directing role, the directory actively participates in organizing the communities helping talented individuals. The departments coordinate the talent support activity of a given professional field; therefore, the leaders of these departments are outstanding theoretical and practical experts of the topic. The departments organize and coordinate those competitions of the professional field, where students may meet each other and compete with other talented individuals from all over the region.

### *Development of professional talents*

Talent supporters need to be individuals with special senses, who may recognize the talent in children and are dedicated enough to support their development. The aim of the 24-hour long talent competition called 'Talented pedagogues wanted' is to find the best practical experts of the profession, to choose the best future pedagogues. The motto of the talent program is: 'Live your talent!' – as this is the only way to support the children we are responsible for full-hearted.

This program sequence has been initiated by students, thanks to the efforts of many young pedagogues for children with special needs. Their aim – besides comparing their abilities – was to help recognizing handicapped children and provide them with an opportunity to show their talents, improve and experience the feeling of success. This idea of the students was supported and developed by the professors, who aimed to provide an opportunity for other pedagogues as well to prove their professional creativity, empathy, helpfulness and readiness for this profession.

This program lasts a day and a night long, but the teams are already created weeks before and they solve a set of exercises prior to the competition. The bachelor grades – pedagogues for children with special needs, kindergarten teachers, teachers and infant-nursing specialists – all entered one team of 15 people also including enthusiastic lecturers, who were also ready to compete actively. The competition program was enriched by the performance of guest performers; the audience could see many performances, which were realized thanks to the school and kindergarten practices of the students of the university. The teams had to solve tasks, which are closely related to their professions and required creative thinking and quick and accurate problem solving. The tasks of the creative section were grouped around four main areas: creative day, flash mob, regional peer club and public creative activity.

The groups also had to perform an introductory show matching their profession and a movie, which was selected by a draw before. Later headquarter of each team was built; also matching these movies and their professions. They could only use the tools provided on the spot to create

the team headquarter, which has also shown the creativity of the participants. Parallel with this, the rest of the team-members took part in tasks, which helped them recognize and improve their skills in the areas of music, movement, arts and visual activities; and they could also try themselves in professional communication challenges. In this part they had to solve situations taken from real life, considering a set of given criteria. Many of the tasks given could only be solved by cooperative techniques, using the synergy of the group instead of barely individual abilities. A crucial aim of this event was increasing the tolerance towards handicapped people. To support this, talented people living with handicaps could also participate in the competition; and each team could try the circumstances of handicapped people as well with the help of situations and tasks increasing sensitivity.

In the movie time the participants could watch short films about lessons, free-time activities, celebrations, social games, development and talent support programs, which were shot in several educational institutions. These impressions initiated a professional talk and debate among students and lecturers. The free talk and debate was followed by situational exercises, in which the students could prove their problem solving skills, competences as a pedagogue and their readiness for the profession.

The whole event happened in the spirit of multiculturalism – not only handicapped groups were in focus, but also the recognition of minorities and other nationalities.

## *Conclusion*

The new three-step system of Scientific Students' Association has initiated the professional communication of both students and lecturers on Kaposvár University, Faculty of Pedagogy. It has been proved that teamwork is more effective and makes preparation much more efficient – as our students have shown outstanding results in the National Finals.

Many talented individuals are born in our country – this has been proved by history. All over the world we may hear the names of scientists born in Hungary, whom we can really be proud of. We have to be careful not to let these extraordinary individuals get lost in the crowd. We need to help them find the perfect mentor to help in evolving their skills: a person whom they can follow as an idol, who realizes when the talented individual needs to be left alone to let the creativity flourish; and when he needs to stand behind the talent and provide mental or professional support. These professors are needed in the higher education to help and coordinate the talents of our country.



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