

A study of gifted education evaluation in Yilan County

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INTRODUCTION

Under Article 47 of Taiwan's Special Education Act, the Competent Authority should evaluate the results of special education (include disabilities and giftedness/talents) carried out by schools at the senior secondary level and below at least once every 3 years in order to understand the enforcement of special education at schools. If any difficulty is faced with, the authorities can offer suggestions and improvement strategies. Not only do the officials establish merit system, but they also conduct follow-ups as well as provide observation and learning activities for each school so as to advance the overall quality of special education services.

Chen Hui-Chu (2005) brought up some findings and advice in terms of the common problems found in the gifted education evaluation among cities in Taiwan after she probed into that in Taoyuan. At that time, Taoyuan's gifted education is focused on artistic talents (music, fine art, and dance) and giftedness in academic areas (English). On the other hand, Wu Ling-Chin (2006) looked into the gifted education evaluation of intellectual giftedness done in Taipei's elementary schools and features of those Honorable Mention schools as well as the reasons why those schools were widely acclaimed. However, most of the cities in Taiwan hadn't switched their focus from artistic giftedness to intellectual giftedness (elementary school) and giftedness in academic areas (junior high school) until 2009. The late development resulted in those cities receiving less resources than Taipei and New Taipei City. Taipei City, as known as "Taipei Empire," ranked top consecutively in the results of gifted education evaluation. Occupying the first place makes it unable for other cities to make reference to its success.

PURPOSE

This study aims to understand the enforcement of Yilan County's gifted program through gifted education evaluation from the aspects of: integration and application of administrative resources, student identification and placement, curriculum and counseling, teachers and professional growth, school counseling effectiveness, school characteristics, and so on. Through looking into Yilan County's evaluation and understanding its difficulties, it is hoped that the results can be offered as references for remote cities or counties in Taiwan.

METHODS

Research Methods

There are two stages of evaluation—self-evaluation and on-site one. In the self-evaluation stage, each elementary school convenes an in-school evaluation team of people concerned, first conducting self-evaluation and then filling out evaluation forms. Later on, the group has to copy the forms, personal information form and required relevant information into a disc and send it to Yilan County Government Education Department, Special and Pre-school Education Section. When it comes to on-site evaluation, evaluation committee members will go to each school to conduct evaluations in person.

The requirements are evaluated on a pass/fail basis. A pass is for scoring above 80, while scores below 80 signifies a fail. If a school fails, gifted education counselors will provide in-school guidance.

Procedures

Special Education Center of University of Taipei is entrusted by Yilan County Government to hold the gifted education evaluation. The researcher, also known as the director of Special Education Center, is responsible for the evaluation. Yilan County Government had held an illustration meeting concerning the evaluation in November, 2016, elucidating how the evaluation would be carried out. In February 2017, Special Education Center of UT was officially entrusted with the task of holding evaluations. The Executing Process Group was then organized to hold illustration meetings in April, implement on-site evaluation plans in May, and carry

out post-evaluation meetings.

Participants

Target Participants: There are 4 elementary school in total providing intellectual giftedness program in North Riverside Districts and South Riverside Districts of Yilan County, including Yilan, Jhu-Lin, Nan-ping, and Bei-cheng Elementary school. All of them were involved in the evaluation.

Evaluation Committee: Special Education Center of UT forwarded a list of professionals equipped with gifted education expertise, senior good teaching faculties, parent representatives, and administrative representatives to Yilan County Government. And Yilan Government had the authority to approve and authorize the personnel recommendations.

Instrument

The gifted education evaluation of elementary schools in Yilan County in 2016 academic year—Gifted Program Self-assessment (Appendix 1). Assessment Dimension: 1. Integration and Application of Administrative Resources. (25%) 2. Student Identification, Placement and Counseling. (25%) 3. Curriculum, Teaching and Assessment. (30%) 4. Teachers and Professional Growth. (10%) 5. The outcome of student counselling. (10%) 6. School Characteristics (extra 5%) 7. Difficulties and Suggestions.

RESULTS

The 4 schools all scored above 80, which referred to 4 passes. The evaluation results are as follows:

1. Integration and Application of Administrative Resources

There are 4 elementary school in Yilan County providing intellectual giftedness program, each with Special Education Implementation Committee holding implementation meetings and gifted education conferences on a regular basis.

In Yilan County, Section Chief of Special Education is almost enlisted in school administration personnel, responsible for work related to special education, according to the law, except for one school where this task is attributed to its Registrar Section Chief, who has gifted education expertise.

Each principal cares about the development of gifted education and the division of labor of different administrative offices. Academic Affairs Office can help arrange class schedule for disabilities students and gifted ones in advance to cater to their needs, while teacher-counselors lecture to general teachers about giftedness so as to promote their embrace of gifted students and support for gifted education.

Each school has legal compilation and administration of education expenditure. Within limited budget, schools come up with work proposals to open all kinds of gifted courses and strive for budget supplement that can be used to purchase teaching equipment and resources.

2. Student Identification, Placement and Counseling

Qualified gifted education teachers in each school are all quipped with professional competencies in psychological assessment and participate in the local psychological tests to help giftedness identification. Only a few gifted education teachers are not licensed with the Certificate in Gifted Education and lack professional competencies in psychological assessment.

Each school has qualified giftedness identification and placement, and registers students' personal information onto Special Education Transmit Net by regulation.

Competence-based class grouping with required number (no more than 3) of gifted students within each class can be found in those schools. What's more, the schools all set up implementation plan for shortening the length of schooling as well as placement program for unadaptable students.

As for counseling, 4 schools collect and compact multiple data of students, and use the data to identify students' strengths and weaknesses and furthermore draft IGP for gifted students, with the help of general teachers and parents as well to implement student-focused teaching and counseling.

The merits are listed as follows: gifted education teachers cooperate with general teachers to adjust students' class schedule. Parent-teacher contact books and transcripts can fully present students' learning and life performance to students, teachers, parents and even administrative officers, and thus students can receive in-time feedback and guidance. Gifted education teachers also use co-journals and online blogs or platforms

to monitor each student's class performance in order to provide assistance.

3. Curriculum, Teaching and Assessment

Open multiple enrichment programs to broaden students' visions and heave learning motivation: The 4 schools work together to open inter-school courses to boost the cooperation among teachers and the interaction between students. Multi-grade family activities are arranged to promote students' leadership and interactive skills. Some schools plan courses for future leaders, combining the experience and presentation of affective counseling and leaderships, while the others make use of Cloud, providing students with platforms to finish homework or projects online.

Use human and community resources to deepen students' learning: Some schools connect community resources to deepen students' understanding and identity of local culture. Other schools have teachers teach specialized courses based on their expertise, while the others replace general teachers who teach certain specialized subjects with gifted education teachers, and vice versa, to deepen students' learning. Design Service Learning Program to guide students to care for the underprivileged and dedicate themselves.

Arrange flexible class schedule for students to learn automatically and have choices: Most schools adopt multi-grade classes, with courses including elective and required ones so as to encourage learning autonomy.

Adopt multiple assessments: Most schools give students in-time feedback after class through teacher-parent contact books.

At the end of the semester, schools present students' learning performance through quantitative and qualitative methods. Multiple assessments also include self-evaluation, peer critique, and parents' feedback.

However, the system of gifted courses should be reinforced: Each school lacks an overall curriculum structure. Vertical alignment of each grade's curriculum and the lateral communication of each course should be reinforced so that students' learning can be systemized and contextualized.

4. Teachers and Professional Growth

Each of the schools is installed with one gifted class, with 2 gifted education

teachers employed. 2 of the schools employ qualified gifted education teachers, while the rest schools fail to do so. Overall, the rate of hiring qualified gifted education teachers in schools of Yilan County achieves 75%, comparatively higher than that of other cities and countries.

Teachers of the 4 school are strongly dedicated to their job. Gifted education teachers work well and communicate well with general teachers in both teaching and counseling. General teachers are keen on consulting about how to teach gifted students, while gifted education teachers are willing to offer professional advice.

Teachers of each school actively participate in inter-school gifted education workshops and learning communities, stimulating their professional growth and exchange of experiences with their colleagues. They also pay visits to the gifted class in other counties to have teacher-student interactions. Part of the teachers have master's or PhD degree and are able to undertake research and publish papers.

5. The outcome of student counselling

Multiple ways to present students' learning results: teachers of the 4 co-plan a joint presentation of sixth graders' independent research projects to provide a stage and increase inter-school interactions and emulations. Some schools guide students to target at an unit and make a presentation at the end of a semester, thus offering opportunities for students to reflect on their self-learning. Parents and teachers are invited to the event and will give feedback to students. Other schools play the videotapes of students' individual research projects to the whole school or upload them to class websites and blogs. And still others record students' growth process by publishing gifted students' learning results and research projects in the form of journals and data discs.

Students are highly encouraged to fulfill and take part in all kinds of on-campus and off-campus activities or competitions: For example, some schools instruct students to attend DFC (Design for Change Taiwan) held at Taipei, or Creative Invention Exhibition. Other schools guide students to attend national/international science-or-humanity-related competitions or those held by Yilan Government. Still other schools guide students to take part in the shooting of the film "Little Director

with Big Dreams,” which won many international awards, including Special Awards issued by Chicago International Children’s Film Festival, the First Prize issued by the Seoul Guro International Kids Film Festival, and also another First Prize issued by Children KinoFest (Ukrainian international film festival for children and teenagers). Students gained confidence and sense of achievement because of this.

6. School Characteristics of Gifted Education Program

The gifted education teachers of the 4 schools cooperate well to share the courses they design, and even make the sharing an inter-school event, which not only provide opportunities for gifted students to interact with students from other schools, but also boost the development of gifted education.

Teachers and gifted students independently organized exchange events with gifted students from other cities (ex. Taipei and Hsinchu) and counties (Singapore), exhibiting their event planning and leadership abilities. Moreover, they participated in international exchange events to expand their horizons and develop international perspectives.

CONCLUSION

The 4 schools all passed the evaluation, each with their own characteristics. With good inter-school cooperation, professional learning communities help upgrade the quality of gifted education services. However, in the face of decreasing birth rate, the number of students identified as gifted doesn’t meet the expectation. Each school is faced with the dilemma of not having enough gifted students. Most schools can actively plan for giftedness experience programs for second graders, which allow students to explore earlier and join giftedness identification. Or they offer chances for potentially-gifted students, who pass the primary identification, to study with gifted students. Besides, they put Regional Education Programs for the Gifted into practice so that gifted education curriculum can reach and benefit more students. It is suggested that the administration supervisors take the prevalence of giftedness and placement situation within Yilan County into account and then come up with the gifted education operation methods with local characteristics.

