

# Assessing Data of a Public Policy on Giftedness in Brazil

***Renata Rodrigues Maia-Pinto<sup>1</sup>***

*University of Brasilia – Brazil*

*E-mail: [renatam@terra.com.br](mailto:renatam@terra.com.br)*

## **Abstract**

To respond to the country growing demand for specialized services to the gifted student the federal government invested on a pilot project regarding the implementation of twenty-seven Activity Nucleus for the Gifted and High Ability Student – the NAAH/S in each State of Brazil. The Nucleus must offer: curriculum enrichment and differentiation, professional education promotion, and provide family & parents, and school community assistance. For ensuring these goals achievement, the NAAH/S has three units: Teacher, Family, and Student's Support Unit. The monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of a public policy may contribute to decision making and procedures changing. This study intended to assess the process of implementation of NAAH/S. The 27 NAAH/S responded to a questionnaire and the responses frequency was analyzed. Data indicated that 308 teachers assist 2.170 gifted students in the 27 Nucleus; 3.345 professors received training on 98 courses concerning giftedness, and more 42 courses are planned to 2008.

**Keywords:** public policy, giftedness, teacher training, and curricular enrichment

## **Education in Brazil: Numbers**

The vastness of the Brazilian territory and the number of inhabitants in Brazil brings great challenges to the implementation of public policies to address diversity and demands of the various groups and regions in Brazil. The biggest country in Latin America, Brazil occupies 47% of South America, and is divided into 5 regions (North, Northeast, Central West, South and Southeast), 26 states and the Federal District. These states contain 5,564 districts. Brazil has around 182 million inhabitants, of whom 60 million (33%) are children and adolescents. Among these, about 22 million are aged between 0 to 6, more than 27 million are aged between 7 to 14, and almost 11 million students are between 15 and 17 years old. The 2005 census pointed out a rate of 97% kids in school, out of whom, 88% go to public school.

The last Educational Census (Brazil, 2007) shows the existence of 55,942,047 students registered in all grades, ages varying from 4 to 17, with the following geographical distribution: Northern region, 5,374,166 students; Northeast, 18,079,266; South, 7,184,746; Southeast, 21,389,348; and Central West, 3,914,521 students. Gender distribution is balanced, being 50.3% females and 49.7% males. Regarding race/color, the majority of the students claimed to be white (44.8%) or dark skinned (30.1%), while 8.8% claimed to be black, 0.76% yellow, 0.28% indigenous and 15.3% did not provide an answer. These students attend 203,973 educational establishments in federal (206), state (33,336), municipal (134,894) and private (35,537) schools. In terms of teachers in the classrooms, Brazil counts with 2,647,414 teachers, distributed geographically as it follows: North (205,045), Northeast (768,111), South (391,067), Southeast (1,104,534) and Central West (178,657).

Because of the significant number of children in schools and the extensive number of teachers, dealing with giftedness is very challenging in terms of teacher training and creating facilities/programs for students. Furthermore, there is dispersion with regards to identity (class, gender, ethnicity, race, and other factors) that should be considered in the pedagogic practices (Canen, 2000, p. 136).

The Ministry of Education is working towards reducing the effects of so much diversity, and the standard and inflexible curriculum, in order to take into account the multicultural characteristics

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<sup>1</sup> The actual research data was collected and analyzed with the collaboration of Daniela Rodrigues Ribas a technical consultant of the Secretariat of Special Education of the Ministry of Education.

of students. In this context, public policies take into account diversity and special needs when creating a curriculum for schools. However, available data indicates that there is lack of investment on evaluation, identification, and teacher training for the gifted.

The last Educational Census (Brazil, 2007) shows that, among the 52.969.456 students, 624.759 are officially students with special-needs. Among these, 2.902 (0,39% of the students with special-needs) are identified as gifted. However, if we consider the gifted child's potential (15-20% of the population according to the Three Ring Conception - Renzulli and Reis, 1997) and that we only have 0,005% of the student population identified as gifted, it is clear that the gifted programs fall short of desirable levels. Recognition of this situation led to the creation of several Activity Nucleus for the Gifted and High Ability Student – NAAH/S in the beginning of 2006 (Brazil, 2001).

### **Important Legal Events towards gifted education in Brazil**

Several legal events helped the developing public policies towards gifted education. Starting in the 30s, several events in special education contributed to the recognition of cultural plurality, thus indicating the necessity to abandon stereotypes and preconceptions against students with special-needs. Gifted education in Brazil happened on and off, due to the discontinuity of governmental and non-governmental programs. Here it will be focused the last years.

In 1994, the Secretariat of Special Education (a branch of the Ministry of Education) published the National Policy for students with special-needs, which introduced the most frequent used definition of “gifted” to the moment. According to this National Policy, gifted are the people who have one or more of the following characteristics: (a) general intellectual ability; (b) specific academic aptitudes; (c) creative or productive aptitudes; (d) leadership abilities; (e) special talents for arts, music, or science; and (f) motor skills (Brazil, 1994, p. 14).

In 2001, the National Guidelines and Bases to the Special Education (Brazil, 2001) ensure services and additional resources for students with special-needs, including student support and specialized services for the development of student-specific skills. These guidelines identify the gifted student as the one that *has* great ease in learning, leading to quick absorption of concepts, procedures and attitudes. Moreover, they state that the extra services for such students will be offered within the regular classroom or through special educational services.

We can see that the special laws mentioned above, ensure access to resources *in any schools* for the students with special-needs. Therefore, the Ministry of Education started focusing on public policies that would ensure the access to all the necessary tools for the development every student, in all dimensions and schooling stages. However, since the 26 states and the Federal District are autonomous entities, the role of the Ministry of Education was to suggest guidelines and guide the different states/the Federal District in effectively accomplishing these laws.

In order to widespread the policy of inclusion, the Secretariat of Special Education from the Ministry of Education (SEESP/MEC) created several action fronts. In particular, regarding giftedness, the SEESP/MEC funded the creation of Activity Nucleus for the Gifted and High Ability Student (NAAH/S) in 2006.

### **A Pilot Project for the Implementation of the Activity Nucleus for the Gifted and High Ability Student (NAAH/S)**

The Ministry started the Pilot Project for the implementation of NAAH/S with a technical cooperation agreement with UNESCO. This important partnership adds new skills and utilizes recognized expertise on gifted programs focused on planning and creating public educational policies. On October 2005, the Education Secretaries of all 26 states and the Federal District were officially invited to join the Pilot Project. All 27 responded positively within two months. It was agreed that the Secretaries would allot physical space for the NAAH/S, as well as appoint the appropriate personnel for the development of daily activities for the NAAH/S. Another important part of the agreement was the continued funding of human and other resources for the sustainability, continuity and expansion of the Project.

## **The Structure and Operation of NAAH/S**

The NAAH/S was planned with three units to address the needs of students, besides supporting teachers and families of gifted students. The NAAH/S goals are to promote the identification and development of gifted students from elementary public schools, the insertion of special programs into public schools daily activities, the dissemination of knowledge on giftedness throughout schools and families. The main idea was to offer special services with extra-curricular activities to: (i) enhance the school curricula towards raising students' curiosity, (ii) promote education and social inclusion, (iii) develop productive thinking, (iv) develop special skills, (v) enhance problem solving and hypothesis testing skills, and (vi) promote different adjustments in all developmental areas.

To accomplish such objectives, the NAAH/S was organized into three main units:

a) Teacher Support Unit: This unit's goals are: (1) to enable teacher's and other education professional's continuous education including the following themes: the identification of student behavior, the enhancement of curricular activities, criteria for student acceleration, the development of students potentials in all areas of interest; (2) to offer support to teachers and other education professionals, giving them access to materials pertaining to teacher training and pedagogic resources to the development of students (through research and studies). The NAAH/S professional staff must offer itinerant service in schools and support the pedagogic process through regular teacher orientation.

b) Student Support Unit: This unit's goals are: (1) the identification of students with special-needs; (2) to provide extra-curricular activities for students to explore their own interests, enhance their own skills, and the development of creativity, problem solving, logic reasoning, and socio-economic skills (3) to allow the acquisition of knowledge, regarding research and project development methodology. Higher education collaborations should be established aiming at wider educational opportunities for the gifted students.

c) Family Support Unit: This unit's goals are to support and guide the family towards understanding the behavior of their children, enhancing interpersonal relationships, and creating new opportunities to the development of students' potentials. Towards that, groups of parents will be created with the guidance of a psychologist, to present talks on and promote discussions on giftedness.

After the identification of students, several types of activities should be developed, under the guidance of a teacher or counselor. Such activities must be in tune with the students' skill level and interests, for example: guided reading, followed by group discussions; additional homework; exploratory field trips to museums, libraries and theaters, scientific and artistic activities, followed by the teacher's evaluation. Furthermore, the NAAH/S should include teaching of research methodologies and techniques.

To ensure the establishment of NAAH/S, there must be financial and political support to the state and district for the creation of projects, offering extra services, and teaching the inclusion policy. Again, higher education collaborations should be established, aiming at expanding educational opportunities for gifted students.

### *Collaborations and Teacher Training*

Collaborative projects among universities specialized Nucleus, non-governmental organizations, institutions and councils created a set of links that enable communication channels with the different states, and with the NAAH/S. This network also increases the availability of professionals to work at NAAH/S, contributing to the quick spread of teacher training programs, the development of research programs, and the dissemination of information.

A partnership was established on February 2007 with the University of Brasilia to offer teacher training and literature on giftedness. This partnership also resulted in the publication of four books series "Building Educational Practices for Gifted Students" with best practices and theory in the area, which will be used for further teacher training.

One of the main activities planned is Teacher Training. In this sense, the Project organized four events for the teachers: (1) the I National Symposium in Brasilia, the capital of Brazil, on November 2005, geared towards high-echelon managers and state coordinators (two from each NAAH/S). The Symposium's main goal was to set a group of teachers responsible to disseminate and propagate knowledge in their own states/regions (the policy of training the trainers, or teaching the teachers); (2) By the end of 2006 the same 54 teachers were gathered in the II Brazilian Giftedness Council Meeting; (3) Over 160 teachers from public schools participated at a teacher-training course in the North and Northeast regions of Brazil and; (4) A 60-hour course was taught with the help of the author's books to 81 (the 54 teachers mentioned above, plus one psychologist from each NAAH/S) teachers course based on the books "Building Educational Practices for Gifted Students".

### *Actions*

Although the needed skills and responsibilities for the adequate implementation of NAAH/S were suggested, the city and the state governments are allowed to adapt them to regional administration and local culture. The implementation is evaluated by SEESP/MEC as well as the states secretariats, so that feedback and reorganization can be done, ensuring the effective use of resources for the project. To jumpstart the process, each NAAH/S has received computers, printers, TV sets, DVD players, scanners, web cameras, furniture and teaching/pedagogic materials such as dictionaries, story and grammar books, encyclopedias, maps, CD-ROMs, educational games, etc.

### *Procedures*

A formal evaluation started on October 2007, aiming at designing directions for investment of resources. The following procedures was included: (1) a questionnaire was sent to the Nucleus with closed and opened questions requesting information about the physical environment, management, teacher training, the identification and teaching of gifted students, partnerships, etc; (2) teachers and managers filled out the questionnaires and sent back by e-mail; (3) data was transcribed and analyzed in terms of frequency. The questionnaire was developed by the author and tested on in a prior-pilot procedure with 2 Nucleus.

### **Results**

The first category investigated was the physical environment and the operating structure of the Nucleus. Regarding the physical environment, it was asked where the Nucleus were installed. Eight NAAH/S answered that they were installed in administrative buildings of the Education State Secretary, nine in schools belonging to the public network and four were organized in their own selected space. Five NAAH/S were at places conceded by groups such as foundations and support centers or a rented space. One NAAH/S did not inform the place of operation. Five affirmed not having warranties from the Education Secretary as for being allowed to stay in the same address.

It was asked if the NAAH/S had implemented the operational structure in three assistance units as suggested by the Ministry guidelines. Fourteen NAAH/S could count with the three operation units: the student's, the teacher's and the family's. Seven could just counted with the student's service unit; two maintained the student's and the family units; two Nucleus did not constitute assistance units for being still in a structuring phase; one NAAH informed that it could count with the student's and teacher's units and one informed that it would work exclusively with teachers' formation.

In addition to these environments, the NAAH/S informed that they could count with other such spaces as: secretary (n=6), coordination (n=14), meeting room (n=8), library (n=5), restrooms (n=14), computer science laboratories (n=2), and environments with accessibility (n = 5). Five NAAH/S pointed out they use spaces from the school or institutions where they are set in.

The second category investigated the organization of furniture, equipment and materials in the Nucleus. Regarding the pieces of furniture, equipment and didactic materials sent by the Project, the Nucleus informed that they were distributed among the assistance units, in environments such as computer science laboratories, coordination and other spaces such as secretary, reception,

auditorium and entrance hall.

As for the set of paradidactic books, maps and pedagogic games, a total number of 135 items were sent, which were subdivided in maps and posters, book collections: Master of Arts and the Guide for curious ones, paradidactic books, dictionaries and grammar books. Most NAAH/S (n = 21) said to have organized the collections of books, maps and dictionaries in the student's assistance unit. Three NAAH/S replied that they distributed those materials between the student's and the teacher's assistance units. One Nucleus made the whole material available for the family assistance unit, and another one kept it in the teacher's assistance unit. Two NAAH/S informed that all the material is being kept in the NAAH/S headquarters, since the student's assistance unit is out of operation.

As for the 100 sets of 4 books each from the series "Building Educational Practices for Gifted Students" sent by the Project to the 27 NAAH/S, to help in the teachers' development, most NAAH/S (n=14) informed that the books were distributed in teachers' formation courses. Other NAAH/S distributed those books in lectures (n=5), for teachers of schools that assist gifted students (n=8), according to the public request (n=3), according to the indication of the State Education Secretary (n=3) and in agreement with the indication of the NAAH/S coordination (n=7). Some NAAH/S informed to have done more than one type of distribution. Eight NAAH/S informed not having done the distribution yet.

The third category investigated was the in relation to personnel management. According to the NAAH/S, there are 302 professionals acting in their units, out of whom, 209 possess job contracts with the Education Secretary and six NAAH/S concentrate a larger number of professionals (between 11 and 28). From the total number of teachers informed, 80,8% are female and 19,1% are male. Teacher's ages ranging from 18 to 25 years of age corresponded 9,5% of the total indicated, between 26 and 35 years of age (17,8%), between 36 and 45 (46,2%), between 46 and 55 years (22,91%) and those above 56 represented 4,1%. As for educational level, 91,7% possesses higher educational degrees. Out of these, 60,51% attended some kind of specialization course, 8,1% had a master's degree and 2,5% a doctorate degree. The percentage of teachers with a high school diploma represented 8,2% and from the total number of professionals, 52,3% had a formation course in the area of giftedness. The areas of university degree most indicated were Pedagogy (n=75), followed by Psychology (n=28), Portuguese (n=13), Arts (n=9) and Mathematics (n=8). The others were Biology (n=6), Social Welfare (n=6), History (n=4), Geography (n=4), Physics (n=4), Physical Education (n=3), Philosophy (n=2), and Music (n=2).

The Nucleus were requested to register information regarding the criteria for teachers' entrance in the assistance service. Eighteen Nucleus informed to be allowed to indicate the professional to work in the team. Nine remaining NAAH/S informed they could not indicate their teachers. Among the pointed criteria for teachers' entrance in NAAH/S there are: formation in giftedness (n = 20), formation in Pedagogy or related areas (n=18), time of performance as a teacher (n=18), knowledge on special education (n = 21), previous experience with gifted students (n=13). Other criteria was also emphasized, such as: having participated in courses for specific formation given by the State, being a teacher from the state public network. Twenty-one NAAH/S informed to offer some type of initial formation for teachers joining the NAAH/S. Among the types of formation, there are: study groups, formation courses, conducted studies, meetings with the whole team, and initial formation the courses offered by the Project.

When asked about which activities are developed in the assistance unit regarding the teacher, 22 NAAH/S informed having already conducted formation course and/or lectures in the area of giftedness. Twenty-four informed to have courses and/or lectures for the year of 2008 and one NAAH/S did not indicate having accomplished any formation or having planned them.

It was questioned whether the teachers participate actively on the organization of the activities and materials which the students will work with, and positive reply was obtained from 15 Nucleus. When asked if the teachers participate in the organization of other NAAH/S activities, such as events, exhibitions, meetings and contests, 14 positive replies were obtained.

In addition, we tried to know the types of material already produced by the Teacher Assistance Units. NAAH/S pointed out informative handouts on NAAH/S (n=17), informative handouts on giftedness (n=11), booklets/books (n=4), articles for magazines (n=2), articles for scientific journals (n = 1), academic research (n=2), didactic material for the teacher (n = 12), didactic material for the student (n=12). The number of non-informers as for this issue was four.

The fourth category tried to describe the student's assistance unit by describing initially the students' profiles and linking them to the demographic data, the areas of students' abilities and the main developed activities. To explain the assistance given, the NAAH/S explained that the student, when entering in the Nucleus, stays in an observation period that varies from one to three months. From this period on, the student goes through a diagnosis process and he/she may continue. He/she may also quit the program if he/she considers that he/she is not part of the assistance or if his/her interest does not relate to the work developed at that time.

In relation to the profile of students that attended the student's assistance units, with a diagnosis or in observation, 22 Nucleus registered a total of 2,177 students. Four Nucleus did not register any students. One Nucleus is atypical and it is just formed by the teacher's assistance unit. Some Nucleus did not fill out information related to the demographic data. For instance, only 19 NAAH/S indicated the gender and age of the 800 students assisted by them, of whom, 40,5% were female and 59,5% were male. In relation to age, 4% are between 3 to 5 years of age; 21% are between 6 to 9 years of age; 48% are between 10 to 13 years of age; 24% are between 14 and 17 years old and 3% are above 18. Most students (82,26%) attended primary school, followed by high school (13,38%) and pre-school education (4,34%). 85,28% attended public schools and 14,71% private schools.

The NAAH/S were requested to inform which areas of ability the students were assisted in. 15 respondent Nucleus indicated the following areas: Chemistry (n=4), Mathematics (n = 13), Sciences (n = 8), Portuguese (n=10), History (n=10), Geography (n=6), Physics (n=5), Music (n=10), Leadership (n = 5), Physical Education (n=3), Computer Science (n = 10), Biology (n = 7), Public Speaking (n=3), Literature (n=11), Plastic Arts (n = 15), Drama (n = 9), Composition (n=6), Poetry (n = 10), Sports (n=6), Electrics (n = 3), Electronics (n = 3), Mechanics (n=3), Veterinary (n=3), Dance (n=2), and Photography (n=2). Other suitable ability areas indicated in the option "other" were English, Singing, Drawing, Gastronomy, Environmental Education, Robotics and Chess.

In other items, the NAAH/S were questioned which types of activities were developed by the students. The categories indicated were: individual projects (n=10), projects in group (n=10), social projects (n=5), projects with the school community (n=3), projects under supervision of a monitor or mentor (n= 3), research in partnership with universities (n=1), research in partnership with other institutions (n=1), participation in Congresses, scientific events and/or seminars (n=4), mini courses (n=3), participation in university laboratories (n=1), participation in internships at universities, companies or others (n=2), participation in contests, Olympics and others (n=12), participation in prize competitions (n=1). Eleven NAAH/S did not answer this question and some marked more than an option.

When asked about the students' participation in the organization of activities and of materials they will work with, 13 NAAH/S informed that "yes", the students participate in the organization, and four answered "no", that the students do not participate in that phase of work. When asked if the students participate in the organization of other activities developed by NAAH/S such as events, exhibitions, meetings, and Congress, 11 Nucleus answered "yes" and six answered "no", they do not participate. Nine did not answer this question.

Another issue investigated by the instrument referred to the amount of time the students' stayed in the assisted activities. Seventeen Nucleus answered this item. As for the weekly service workload, the NAAH/S answered that they assisted their students for 1 hour (n=1), for 2 hours (n=4), for 3 hours (n=2), for 4 hours (n=5), for 6 hours (n=1), for 8 hours (n=3), for 12 hours (n=1). The frequency of this service was once a week (n=3), twice a week (n=10) and, three times a week (n=1).

## *Discussion*

The results indicated that few Nucleus counted with a fixed and their own place of operation. Great part of them assist in schools or places conceded by the Education Secretary and it is preoccupying when some of them report that they have no permanence and operation guarantee in the space where they are allocated. This scenery constitutes a barrier because it may provoke the discontinuity of the accomplished work, team insecurity and discomfort for the students, teachers and assisted families. Temporary places impede that the Nucleus may create a work systematic and present a stimulating and favorable space to the development of creativity. "The physical environment constitutes an important factor in the development of the creative processes, once it may facilitate or block this process." (Maia-Pinto, 2002, p.102). When having to move to another place, the Nucleus will need one more time to get organized, and a lot of its workflow will need to be restructured.

In relation to the formation of the Nucleus into assistance units, it was verified that out of the 27 Nucleus, 14 are structured into three units, according to the orientations of SEESP/MEC. Thus, this is an indicator that the assistance Nucleus are moving towards a systemic service organization, but on the other hand, it is necessary to recognize that this path must be undergone by everyone. The structure, organized into three service units, poses an important reason, which is to allow work that will promote in a more promising way, the education of the gifted student. It involves activities that contemplate the system: the student, the teacher, the student and his family, in which the student is placed in the center. The development of the pupil results from the offer of varied actions and the cooperation of all individuals involved in this process. They may interact in such a way as to form an "action wave", which will potentialize this development and promote its sustainability.

It was verified that 14 NAAH/S did not activate the family assistance unit. As for the importance of the family participation in the child's life, Fleith and Alencar (2007) explains that the search for the understanding such interconnections among the different contexts the student is inserted, in this case the school and the family, enables the educator to set goals that may favor an individual to reach evolutionary stages more quickly and in a more complex way. Maintaining a net of open relationships between the family and the school becomes essential because the parents usually possess little or no information on the needs and characteristics of the child, and based on stereotyped ideas on giftedness, they end up by inhibiting abilities or encouraging them in an inappropriate way, which may result in negative impact in the children's social-emotional characteristics.

Part of the SEESP/MEC competences was to make equipment and furniture available to impel the organization of Nucleus service units to seek teachers' formation, pedagogic use by students, and activities for the family. The research category that verified the allocation of furniture and equipment showed that great part of the Nucleus distributed them for the student's assistance units. However, it was verified that some Nucleus use those resources in environments as the secretary, the reception, the coordination and entrance hall, places where this material is being used for administrative ends.

The pedagogic and didactic resources sent to the Nucleus were destined to the students' use. It was evidenced that great part of the NAAH/S organized those materials in the space where the students were assisted. There are, however, other five cases in which the materials were only put in the teacher's or in the family's units, in the coordination and two claimed that the materials were kept in the headquarters of the Nucleus, which can indicate that the service to students was not being offered.

In relation to the management of people, most professionals who were designated to work in the Nucleus possess a job contract with the Education Secretary. The link to the NAAH/S is important because it allows a smaller rotation of professionals, which brings more favorable conditions of action continuity. The teachers are, in general, female, which historically corroborates to what has been demonstrated by studies on the history of teaching, that the exercise of this profession, since XIX, has been seen from a feminine point of view. At that time, school education represented a continuation of maternal functions and to instruct and educate children was considered acceptable

for women (Almeida, 1996).

The results of the present study enabled observe that more than 90% of the professionals of the Nucleus present a higher educational level and more than half of them claim to possess specialization and courses in giftedness, which is a positive factor. It was equally evidenced that the most indicated degree area was Pedagogy, followed by Psychology, which corroborates to the professional profile suggested by the Guiding Document from the project that explicit the need for NAAH/S to have, besides teachers for the development of abilities regarding the several areas of knowledge, according to the students' identification, educators and psychologists or psycho pedagogues with experience in the educational area and assistance to families.

Most NAAH/S informed to be able to indicate the professional to work in the team. And in this in case the indication follows criteria that were explicit for most as knowledge on special education, formation in giftedness, formation in pedagogy and related areas. That possibility of organization may be considered satisfactory, since it allows the opportunity to set up a team with professionals committed to the area and to the work. Of 27 NAAH/S, 22 claimed to have run formation courses for professionals, who had joined the Nucleus and 24 informed that they possess courses and lectures planned for 2008. This is a relevant factor since one of the objectives of the teacher's assistance unit should be to offer continuous formation to teachers and education professionals, guaranteeing "the formation of those who form" on themes that involve the identification of gifted students, deepening and supplementing the curriculum, the development of students' potentialities in different areas of interest that may be present. It is necessary to emphasize that the Nucleus offered a higher number of lectures if compared to formation courses. The knowledge obtained in lectures, due to the limited workload, provides much more a sensitization on the theme and an incentive to the debate, than a proper internalization of this knowledge, which will become an innovative practice. Maia-Pinto (2006), when analyzing a service program to gifted students explains that:

This partial knowledge concerning the basic concepts of giftedness and the model of school enrichment leaves the teacher in a vulnerable position, without feeling safe to develop a strong planning, thus leaving the student without appropriate service. "In this sense, trainings in form of lectures and expository classes, to which teachers have been submitted in the last years, do not seem to be the most promising alternative." (p 103)

It is necessary to excel for the quality and depth of formation activities proposed, because the frequently, the teacher already possesses a theoretical, conceptual and legislative foundation on the area, but the teacher have difficulties putting them into practice. Therefore, workshops on teaching strategies and planning of actions may be a good alternative to subsidize the educational practice.

Besides the objective of offering formation courses, the teacher's assistance unit has the responsibility of planning actions in relation to giftedness, the production of informative materials on the theme and research. The results evidenced that about half the NAAH/S have already produced informative materials, didactic materials for students and for teachers. However, the amount of research and scientific studies is very small. This indication of scientific work consists of the NAAH/S guiding document, as part of the activities for the teacher's assistance unit.

Regarding the students that attend the Nucleus, the identified total number in twenty-one NAAH/S is 2,170 students. That number seems small if we take into account that the last School Census (Brazil, 2007) registered 52,969,456 million students in Elementary Education. The students with special education needs were considered to be 624,759 thousand. Of these, 2,902 are registered as gifted. There was a considerable progression of that number in the 2007 Census (2,902 students) if compared with the 2005 Census, which pointed out 1,928 as gifted students. Those numbers pointed out a larger indication of gifted students to assistance programs. But if we consider the giftedness potential of a population of students (in Renzulli's perspective) that may be stimulated at schools, it is observed that the necessary identification of students must be conducted in the school setting. Low motivation, lack of preparation and absence of teachers' formation are pointed out as the probable causes of the low identification rate and lack of recommendation of talented, creative and/or gifted students for special programs.

Data from the present study highlights that the number of male students identified and assisted by the Nucleus is larger than the female. The Nucleus presents a small difference of 9% more boys being assisted. The result may indicate an evolution in terms of opportunity equality for both sexes. Studies showed a larger number of boy students recommended to the programs for the gifted if compared to girl students. For instance, Maia-Pinto evidenced that 68,8% of the participants of a program for the gifted were males and 31,2% were females. Alencar (2007) stated to be common for female students to be less noticed and valued in relation to their abilities, and that is because there is a cultural tradition of higher expectations and success regarding masculine accomplishment, who are more motivated to show leadership and superior performance.

In relation to the activities developed by the students, the most suitable types were e individual work; work in groups and the participation in contests, or games. Other activities such as research in partnership with universities, research in partnership with other institutions, participation in university laboratories, were just mentioned once. The partnerships constitute a valuable resource, which is inserted in the Project Guiding Document:

The Nucleus should establish partnerships considering technical cooperation actions with companies, associations, institutes and institutions with notorious knowledge and work developed in giftedness, and who are interested in developing research work, activities, projects and courses with students, teachers and parents. It is interesting that such partnerships are set through formal contracts with established rules by the Educational Secretaries, according to their internal procedures. (Brazil, 2005, p.16)

It is a way of enabling the expansion of educational opportunities for gifted students. These opportunities should be better explored by the Nucleus. To keep only a room for the assistance of a student in the State, won't guarantee opportunity for students that present several types of abilities and interests. In this sense, partnerships with schools, special clusters, academic laboratories, museums, libraries, planetariums, industries, companies, specialized professionals, etc., would compose a great set of actions to support the service to students.

It was evidenced, still, that half of NAAH/S allow the students participate in the organization of activities and materials that they will work with. That is a relevant point, because the student's commitment and participation in planning the work, increases the productivity level. As stood out in the Three Rings Model (Renzulli & Reis, 1997), the involvement with the task and creativity are factors that compose giftedness and they allow the student to build his/her knowledge. This interaction among above average abilities, creativity and the involvement with the task, should be encouraged in schools and in spaces such as NAAH/S. Thus, the students may be encouraged to develop techniques for the creative resolution of problems, to explore new themes of interest and to develop ideas that may be applied to a great diversity of problems faced in the every day life.

## **Conclusion**

After the Program has been established, there are still challenges to be solved. For example, the need to identify and register gifted students in the Census. In Brazil, there are still few educational programs for students with higher educational skills. Before NAAH/S, some states had public and private programs, and some states and cities had only private programs. Recent research shows that there are a significant number of students participating in these programs (Aspesi, 2003; Chagas, 2003; Fleith & Alencar, 2007; Guenther & Freeman, 2000; Maia-Pinto, 2006), but this is not consistent with the Census.

The Ministry of Education recognizes these actions as the first step towards the development of a public policy for giftedness and also recognizes that there are several challenges, in particular, concerning the wide adoption of such policies, especially in the rural areas. The figures suggest that there is a large potential in the Brazilian school population, and it is important to note that the NAAH/S is an important element in the innovative and large-scope initiative, which includes state and federal governments. The SEESP intends to increase its actions to reach the largest number of students possible, along the plans of the Ministry of Education.

Brazil has currently a solid set of educational laws that allows the advancement of educational systems in the different regions of the country. These laws promote “inclusive education” that encompasses gifted students. Because of the presented scenario, the SEESP/MEC has implemented the Pilot Project of the creation of the NAAH/S in the 26 states and the Federal District. The main objective is to go against the exclusion of a specific group from the educational system, and to create a basis for the effective schooling of this special group.

When we take into account the human development potential and the countless societal benefits that come from gifted programs, it is easy to see the importance of investing on such programs. Thus, such investment encompasses Federal efforts to identify and cater local talents that exist in the public schools, and to create tools for the effective participation of such youth in the development of the entire country. Therefore, the gifted programs aims mainly at raising the quality of the educational system, promoting equality of opportunities and the chance for each student to reach his/her full potential, overcoming challenges and increasing his/her own ability to understand and influence the world.

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