



## **RETHINKING GIFTED EDUCATION:- A PROPOSED DIRECTION ON THE BASIS OF CURRICULUM**

**Manisha Yadav**

Assistant Professor

Shyama Prasad Mukherji College for Women, Delhi University

### ***Abstract***

*In classroom, there is diversity of learners like different flowers in a garden. As different flowers have different requirements for their growth and development, similarly, Students of different potential has different needs in terms of their curriculum. In a classroom, you can find slow learners, mediocre students, and as well as gifted students. The hearts and minds of children and young adults are wide open to the wonders of learning and the fascinating complexities of life. The school has to provide for all these experiences and one way to give this experience is through curriculum. This paper discusses the need and as well as how should be the curriculum of gifted students. It will also discuss how it can be implemented in a full inclusive classroom. This paper will help the teachers and curriculum makers to think in a diverse direction to meet the needs of gifted students.*

**Key words:** Diversity, gifted, need, curriculum.

### **Introduction:**

This paper has been divided into 3 themes:-

**Theme 1:-** will deal about **diversity of learners in classroom** with the help of **Gardner's theory of multiple intelligence and Vygotsky socio-cultural theory.**

**Theme 2:-** On the basis of review, this section will deal about the **gifted students**, its **characteristics** and the importance **why to identify gifted students.**

**Theme 3:-** will let us know how should be the **curriculum for gifted students** and how it can be implemented in the inclusive classroom.

### **THEME 1:- DIVERSITY OF LEARNERS**

#### ***Diversity of Learners in Classroom:-***

**“When you plant lettuce, if it does not grow well, you don’t blame the lettuce. You look into the reasons it is not doing well. It may need fertilizer, or more water, or less sun. You never blame the lettuce”.**

Today's classrooms are filled with diverse learners who differ not only culturally and linguistically but also in their cognitive abilities, background knowledge, and learning preferences. Children are different from one another in a variety of ways. Classrooms are populated with a diverse group of students who have a broad range of learning needs. Every child has hidden treasure of abilities which need to be identified, and nourished for the well-being of humanity. All children have unique strengths and talents.

Educating twenty-five or more diverse students within one class period can be challenging. How should one approach this situation? Should one look at students as trees in a forest and care for the forest as a whole? Should one look at each student as an individual tree in the forest and tend to each trees’ needs? Should one group students as the trees in a forest are grouped and tend to diverse needs within the context of small groups? Actually, all the groupings are needed: whole group, individuals, and small groups. The trees and students should be understood based on needs and cared for in a manner that meets those needs.

Intelligence represents one of the aspects of student diversity. Students bring very different approaches, ways of thinking and cognitive styles to the classroom.

*Imagine that* the teacher has assigned the students to read a novel and then develop a project of their choice based on the book. One student immediately decides to draw a comic strip depiction of several different scenes from the novel. Another student in the class decides to compose a brief musical interpretation of the book, while yet another student opts to write a creative essay from the point of view of one of the characters in the story. The tendency to choose such widely varied projects based on the same novel can be understood by looking at each student's individual strengths. Students who are good with visual information often prefer to work with visual imagery, such as drawing a scene or image. Students who are strong with tone or rhythm might prefer to do a project that incorporates music, while students who are good with words might prefer to write about their thoughts and ideas. Psychologist Howard Gardner suggests that each of these preferences actually represents a different type of intelligence. **Howard Gardner (1999)** proposed that intelligence is not just a single intellectual capacity. This theory can help educators think about students in different ways. Instead, he suggested, there are 8 different kinds of intelligence that people can possess, each of which function independently of others:-

1) Linguistic

2) Logical-Mathematical

3) Spatial

4) Musical

5) Bodily Kinesthetic

- 6) Interpersonal
- 7) Intrapersonal
- 8) Naturalist

Pedagogically, multiple intelligence theory has inspired diverse practices, including balanced programming, matching instructions to learning style, and student specialization. **(Perry D. Klein, 1997). It also suggests the importance of diversifying instruction in order to respond to diversity in student's talents and abilities. In the end, as with cognitive and learning styles, it may not be important to label student's talents or intellectual strengths. It may be more important simply to provide important learning and knowledge in several modes or styles, ways that draw on more than one possible form of intelligence or skill. Thus it is quite important that the curriculum should be according to the learning style and intelligence of the student.**

**Vygotsky (1978)** proposed a theory of the development of higher cognitive functions in children. He also stresses the importance of looking at each child as an individual who learns distinctively. Another important contribution by him is the concept of "tools of the mind". He believed that just as physical tools extend our physical abilities, mental tools extend our mental abilities, enabling us to solve problems and create solutions in the modern world. As children are taught and practice an increasing number of mental tools, they transform not only their external behaviours, but also their minds, leading to the emergence of higher mental functions. He believed that psychological tools, such as language, support all higher-order mental processes. These tools are taught to the children by adults or more capable peers and used to aid higher cognitive development **(Woolfolk, 2007,p.41).**

**Zone of proximal development:-** The difference between what a child can produce unaided and what the child can produce with aid is called the zone of proximal development. **According to Vygotsky, for the curriculum to be developmentally appropriate, the teacher must plan activities that encompass not only what children are capable of doing on their own but what they can learn with the help of others.**

I argue that Vygotsky's ideas should be viewed through the prism of Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences. The combination of these concepts can shed new light on education—on teaching and learning. By doing so, we would enable the students to reach a higher level of cognitive development. **(NinahBeliaevsky, 2006)**

Through the above studies, we get to know that the students have different needs according to their cognitive level and students can hold different conceptions regarding their respective interest area. In the class, we can find students of diverse natures like slow learners, average students, gifted students etc. So, our teaching methodology and curriculum should be according to the needs of the students.

## **THEME 2:- GIFTED STUDENTS**

### ***Meaning of Gifted student's:-***

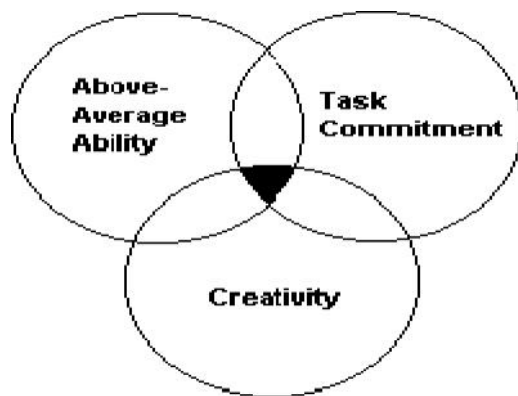
Till now, many definitions have emerged for gifted students. Out of which, I want to emphasize on the meaning given by NAGC and Renzulli model.

**National Association For Gifted Children (NAGC):-** *Gifted individuals are those who demonstrate outstanding levels of aptitude (defined as an exceptional ability to reason and learn) or competence (documented performance or achievement in top 10% or rarer) in one or more domains. Domains include any structured area of activity with its own symbol*

system (e.g., mathematics, music, language) and/or set of sensorimotor skills (e.g., painting, dance, sports).

Gifted and Talented children are those persons, who by virtues of outstanding abilities, are capable of high performance. These are children who require differentiated educational programs and/or services beyond those normally provided by the regular school program in order to realize their contribution to self and society.

***Renzulli's Model of gifted students:***



If the child has high ability, then whether we can call him GIFTED...No, we can't call him gifted. But, along with high ability, if the child has high task commitment and high creativity, then we will call that child 'GIFTED'.

Giftedness consists of an interaction among three basic clusters of human traits; these clusters being above average general ability, high levels of task commitment, and high levels of creativity. Gifted and talented children are those possessing or capable of developing this composite set of traits and applying them to any potentially valuable area of human performance. Children who manifest or are capable of developing an interaction among the

three clusters require a wide variety of educational opportunities and services that are not ordinarily provided through regular instructional programs.

***Characteristics of Gifted Students:-***

Gifted students potentially differ from their classmates on three key dimensions (Maker, 1982):

- (1) the pace at which they learn;**
- (2) the depth of their understanding; and**
- (3) the interests that they hold.**

In order to develop instructional programs that will meet the needs of gifted students in regular classroom settings, it is necessary to address and accommodate these defining characteristics.

Gur, Cagla(2011) had observed 3 gifted students along with 3 non-gifted students. The result shown that there are certain traits related to giftedness; but every gifted individual does not exhibit all of these behaviour. ***Gifted children do not mean a single type of children with similar characteristics.***

***Identification:-***

There is no single technique which teachers can use that will identify with certainty that all gifted and talented students are selected for special programming. A combination of techniques is necessary from an assortment of sources. Careful teacher and parent

observations and objective assessments will help in building a detail description of any students being nominated.

Gail R Ryser as mentioned in the book “Identifying Gifted students: A Practical Guide” said that there are two ways for identifying gifted students:-

- Qualitative assessment
- Quantitative assessment

In Qualitative assessment, she has mentioned to use 3 techniques for identification of gifted students i.e. portfolios, interview and Observation.

In Quantitative assessment, she emphasized to use norm-referencing test for the achievement test, aptitude test, and intelligence test.

If the teacher will not be able to identify gifted students or potentially gifted students (Students who has the potential to become gifted in the long run), then it won't be able to develop their potential. The identification process is a first but critical step in the process of ensuring that students who need gifted education are recognized and matched with appropriate services so that they can thrive in school. The identification process itself should be periodically reviewed to make sure that it is valid for the population being served and the types of services being provided

### **THEME 3:- CURRICULUM OF GIFTED STUDENTS**

Gifted students have a high level of curiosity evinced by many ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions, they have tendency to become easily bore with routine tasks , and they have preference for new and challenging experience.(Maitra, 1993, p22). Thus, their learning style and learning



needs would also be different. Gifted children *have special learning needs*, which if not met, can lead to frustration, a loss of self-esteem, boredom, laziness and underachievement (Crocker, 2004).

Gifted students have advanced understanding of concepts, methods and terminology of specialized field (Maitra,1993, p22). Thus, if we give them the same material which we are giving to rest of the class, then they become easily bore and start diverting from the classroom activities. So, differentiated curriculum for gifted students is the need of the hour. During schooling years, the gifted child is frequently undertakes '*unnecessary practice*' of content, as they achieve mastery sooner than their 'non-gifted' peers do. (Diezmann& Watters, 2006)

### **HOW SHOULD BE THE CURRICULUM FOR GIFTED STUDENTS???**

Cox, Daniel & Boston (1985) Research tells us that a large majority of gifted and talented students spend most of their day in regular classroom settings (Cox, Daniel, & Boston, 1985). Unfortunately, instruction in the regular classroom setting is generally not tailored to meet their unique needs (Cox, Daniel, & Boston, 1985). This situation is putting gifted students at risk of failing to achieve their potential.

Altintas,E and Ozdemir, A (2012) had done a research in Turkey to take the views of primary school teachers about the gifted students. The majority of the teachers think that the classes and books are not suitable for gifted students and these students should be taken a different education. Also, majority of the teachers think that the gifted students should not be in the same classes that normal student educating. **Although, I agree that curriculum should be different from the normal one but it should be implemented in the same class. It can happen if we make a curriculum with more problem solving skills.**

For gifted students, the following are the curriculum examples of differentiated instructional strategies for gifted and talented learners:-

- Curriculum Compacting
- Differentiated curriculum
- Learning Contracts
- Independent study
- Tiered assignments
- Web Quests.

These all above stated strategies means to modify curriculum according the need, level and interest of the child.

As Kesner notes: “Children are dependent upon their teacher for... *provision of appropriate academic challenges* [in the classroom]. Gifted students, by virtue of their advanced intellectual capabilities may be even more dependent upon the teacher to provide for their specific academic needs.” (Kesner, 2005). And, if teacher doesn’t have proper curriculum which cater to the needs of the gifted child, then how will the potential develop in gifted child?? Providing gifted students with the opportunity to explore further study may help give them a ‘sense of direction’ (Berger, 1989). It is an unfortunate paradox that the gifted child is often considered at a disadvantage to their non-gifted peers, and it is a failing of the educational system to identify, educate and support these students in a suitable fashion. The gifted student must be given the appropriate resources and opportunities to provide equal opportunities in.

In India, however, gifted education has largely been ignored by educationists, researchers, and policy makers, leaving few educational options for children demonstrating specific needs

arising from their accelerated cognitive development (**NIAS, Gifted Education Project, 2013**). Thus, it becomes very important to think in this aspect and develop the proper resources for the gifted child.

***Modifications of curriculum for gifted students:-***

Here, I am dealing with science curriculum and as the science curriculum require content, process, product and learning environment so modifications should be done in all these four areas according to the needs of the students.

Curriculum modifications for gifted students can be encompassed in four areas:

**Content modifications for gifted students should:**

- be abstract, complex, varied.
- involve issues of organization, study of people, methods of inquiry.

**Process modifications for gifted students should:**

- involve higher order thinking processes
- promote creative and critical thinking
- require problem solving
- involve group interaction
- have variable levels of pacing
- allow for debriefing of the process
- involve open-endedness

- allow for freedom of choice.

**Product modifications for gifted students should:**

- involve real world problems
- be for real world audiences
- require real deadlines

- require transformation of learning
- involve appropriate assessment and evaluation
- involve extended or accelerated outcomes.

**Learning environment modifications for gifted students should:**

- be flexible and open
- encourage independent and intrinsic learning
- be accepting and non-judgmental
- encourage complex and abstract thought.

**Thus, with the help of above stated curriculum modifications, curriculum should be made which should not only stimulate and interest young talented children but also expand their critical and creative thinking to a new level.**

In India, there is **full inclusive classroom** i.e. to educate students with special educational needs. According to **Right to Education Act (2010)**, the teacher student ratio should be 1:30, but the question arises how we can teach different students in a single classroom with their

different individuality needs?? Can we?? The answer is yes and which I like to explain from my experience of visit to **DIGANTAR (AN ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL JUST OUTSIDE OF JAIPUR, INDIA)**. There teacher has given different task to different groups of students according to their needs. *For example*, if some students were at the level of basic of plants, those students were doing activity on the basic structure of plants. Other group of, say 5 students, have cleared understanding of the concept of plants, they were doing an activity based on root and shoot system. Other group of, say 7 students, were doing an activity or worksheet on photosynthesis. It means we have to give students chance to explore the knowledge and world according to their potential, otherwise they start feeling bore.

### CONCLUSION

Nurturing the potential giftedness is important so as to develop the **dichotomy of equality and excellence**. Designing of curriculum for gifted learners which indicates the quality should be **according to the students need and interest**. Curriculum **should be output driven, flexible for individual differences and challenging**, which is the need of the hour for the gifted learners. Gifted education exists to foster development of high-end excellence. It therefore stresses practices that are most likely to promote "expertise" in learners with advanced performance and/or potential and that expertise can develop if we provide them suitable curriculum according to their level.

One of the important point to remember is the joy of process, rather than the product. What matter is whether we are giving gifted students that **challenging role along with the joy of learning?** As if the curriculum or material is too easy for them, then they become bore and become distracted from their goal. So, gifted students should get indulge in more problem-solving skills, provide a high-quality experience that readies them to successfully transverse

the next level of educational challenge as well as ground them in self-learning and social learning. Such a curriculum must first be envisioned, then developed and then implemented.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

- Altintas,E and Ozdemir, A (2012). *The determination of the ideas of the teachers in Turkey about the gifted students*. *Procedia-social and behavioral sciences*. 46 (2012) 2188-2192.
- Beliaevsky, N. (2006). *Revisiting Vygotsky and Gardner:- Realizing human potential*. *Journal of Aesthetic Education*. Volume 40, No. 2, pp 1-11.
- Berger, S.L. (1989) *College Planning for Gifted Students*. [Online.] Council for Exceptional Children, Available from:<http://ceep.crc.uiuc.edu/eeearchive/books/fte/except/berger.pdf>(Accessed: 5Jan., 2014)
- Cox, J., Daniel, N., & Boston, B. (1985). *"Educating able learners: Programs and promising practices."* Austin, TX: University of Texas Press. ED 266 567.
- Crocker, T. (2004) *"Underachievement: Is our vision too narrowed and blinkered?"**TalentEd*, 20(3), 1-9.
- Diezmann, C.M and Watters, J.J. (2006) *"Balancing Opportunities for Learning and Practicing for Gifted Students"* in *Curriculum Matters* 5(1):3-5.
- Gardner, Howard. (1999) *"Intelligence Reframed: Multiple Intelligences for the 21st Century."* New York: Basic Books.

- Gur, C (2011). *Do gifted children have similar characteristics?: Observation of three gifted children*. Procedia-social and behavioral sciences. 12(2011) 493-500.
- Johnsen, S.K.(Ed.) (2011) *Identifying Gifted students: A Practical Guide*. (Chapter 2 Qualitative and Quantitative approaches to assessment by Gail R. Ryser) .
- Kesner, J.E. (2005) “*Gifted children’s relationships with teachers*” in International Education Journal, 6(2):218-223.
- Klein, P (1997). *Multiplying the problems of intelligence by eight: A critique of Gardner’s theory*. Canadian Journal of Education. 22, 4: 377-394.
- Maitra, K.(1993) *Gifted and Talented – A developmental perspective*. New Delhi: Discovery publishing house.
- Maker, J. (1982). "Curriculum development for the gifted." Rockville, MD: Aspen Systems Corporation.
- Renzulli, J.S. (2005). The three ring conception of giftedness: A developmental model for promoting creative productivity. In R.J. Sternberg & J. Davidson (Eds.), *conceptions of giftedness (2<sup>nd</sup>ed.)* Boston , MA: Cambridge University Press, pp. 217-245.
- Report of NIAS, Gifted Education Project, 2013.
- Right to Education Act, 2010, India.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Woolfolk, A. (2013). *Educational psychology*. Pearson Education.

**Additional Readings:-**

- Baska,J.V.T. & little,C. (Ed.s) (2011) *Content-based curriculum for high-ability learners: An introduction*. United States: Prufrock press (pg 1-23).
- Cheek, Dennis W. (Ed.) (1992) *Science Curriculum resource handbook, A practical guide for k-12 science curriculum*. New York: Kraus International Publications. (Chapter1 and 2).
- Mallick, M.K.(2003) *Talented children. Identification and Education*. New Delhi:discovery publishing house. (Chapter1).
- Renzulli, J.S. Resi, S.M. (2008) *Enriching curriculum for all students*. United States:Corwin Press (Chapter5).
- Smutny,J.F. (2003). *Designing and developing programs for gifted students*. United States: Corwin Press (Chapter 2).

