

Special Education for Gifted Children

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Experiments conducted in many countries have convincingly shown how difficult it is to rebuild the education system, change the teacher's attitude toward a gifted child, and remove barriers blocking his talents. Teacher training programs need to contain more material about giftedness, and new teachers must learn how to teach very talented students. Still, they often are not aware of possible learning disabilities they might have. Teachers and parents of gifted children should monitor their giftedness and teach them to keep their strength, work on their weaknesses, and overcome difficulties. In this way, they may succeed and even become recognized worldwide, like Mozart, Picasso, Einstein, and others. This research examines teaching methods and particular strategies deemed appropriate for gifted students and illustrates specific recommendations in the special education environment. It also deals with helping gifted children develop their personalities, create contacts with other people, and overcome learning difficulties, if any.

Keywords: giftedness, neurodiversity, learning difficulties, socialization, special education

Introduction

Albert Einstein claimed: "Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid". Therefore, teachers who have at least one gifted student in the classroom must be aware of how to teach and support his curiosity and motivation, develop his strength, and prevent him from feeling stupid, misunderstood, and not accepted (Branson, 2017). Giftedness is a sort of neurodiversity as well as learning disabilities (LD) and special education needs (SEN). Unlike neurotypical children, gifted ones are distinguished by very high cognitive activity. Therefore, gifted kids are twice exceptional, each needing an individual approach. Some researchers claim that they have gifted learning disabilities (GLD) (Beckmann & Minnaert, 2018). Therefore, such students need different nurture and approach in school, and their teachers must be trained to teach them.

Who and how should teach gifted kids? First, educators need appropriate professional development and "certifications in gifted education" (Vidergor, 2010, p. 37). Secondly, they must identify them and create an individual curriculum for each one. Early identification, monitoring, and appropriate teaching gifted children are crucial for improving the education system because they "... have exceptional abilities in any learning area" (Winebrenner, 2014, p. 1). Their curiosity and interest in something are the starting point in its development. Still, at the same time, other skills and abilities develop much slower than their peers, and they refuse to do some subjects "because it's too hard" (Winebrenner, 2014, p. 2). Thirdly, teachers must differentiate methods within the class depending on students' strengths and weaknesses.

How to Help Neurodivergent Children Develop Their Personalities

The research claims that neurodivergent children have an atypical neurological configuration. They may have a developmental disorder, such as autistic spectrum disorder (ASD), or a mental illness. Alternatively, they may have neither of these and may instead be gifted and have a high IQ (Tribe, 2021). Thus, parents can notice the first signs of giftedness in their kids at the age of two or three. For instance, some have an absolute musical ear and like singing or even try to play musical instruments if their parents have them at home. Some recite verses eloquently, which is not usual for their age, or even create poems at a very young age. Others can draw very well, make things out of plasticine, or build complicated castles of cubes. Gifted children are also characterized by an increased concentration of attention on something and perseverance in achieving results in specific spheres that interest them (Rosen, 2022).

On the one hand, their entrenched interests and inclinations developed since childhood are a sound basis for successful personal and professional self-determination. They can memorize large amounts of information and quickly assimilate educational material in a field of knowledge. As a rule, these are mathematics and subjects of the natural science cycle. Teachers and parents classify children as gifted and encourage them to do more and more to develop their talents (Cohen, 2011).

On the other hand, the school curriculum is composed following the level of average students. As a result, gifted ones "...are rarely allowed to demonstrate that they already know what is going to be taught" (Winebrenner, 2014, p. 2). Moreover, they may be mistaken for having an ASD. Like kids on the spectrum, gifted kids also have keen memories and a good grip on the language (Tribe, 2021). At the same time, they may have problems if their increased capabilities are not considered: Learning becomes too easy, or there are no conditions for developing their creative potential. As a result, they get lower grades and misbehave. They may be distinguished by motor disinhibition, inability to concentrate long, communication difficulties, and conflicts with their parents, teachers, and peers.

Educating gifted children requires hard work because they are challenging and conflicting (Kesner, 2005, p. 220). Teachers are afraid of them, parents are puzzled, and peers look at them unfriendly. Analyzing and identifying their needs and problems is necessary to work with gifted children more effectively. For instance, if neurotypical children have difficulties in learning, behavior, and communication, their teacher, psychologist, and parent seek well-known ways to help and correct them. They identify their causes successfully. But the situation is fundamentally different if you teach young prodigies. It supposes to define a global strategy for working with them only through the search for forms of organizing their education: separate classes, special schools, and individual programs (Dattel, 2018). Educators must understand that giftedness is not just the result of a child's high abilities but also the problem of his personality formation (Martirena, 2022).

Such children are more sensitive to assessing their activities, behavior, and thinking than their neurotypical peers. They are more receptive to sensory stimuli and better understand relationships and connections. They are prone to a critical attitude not only toward themselves but also to other people. Therefore, teachers working with very talented children should be ready and sufficiently tolerant of criticism. Anyway, "a positive child-teacher relationship enhances children's academic progress" (Kesner, 2005, p. 119).

Gifted children often perceive non-verbal cues as a manifestation of self-acceptance by others. As a result, such a child may give the impression of being distracted, restless, and constantly reacting to everything. For them, there are no standard requirements (everything is like everyone else), and it is difficult for them to be conformists,

especially if the existing norms and rules run counter to their interests and seem meaningless (Oak Crest Academy, 2022). The statement that it is accepted for a gifted child is not an argument. It is crucial for him to know and understand who adopted this rule, when, and why.

Being too curious and restless might cause further problems in school—for instance, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), difficulties with mathematics, reading comprehension, spelling, handwriting, etc. (Beckmann & Minnaert, 2018). Such challenges might come in elementary or junior high school, especially if gifted kids are focused only on their hobbies and do not develop other skills. For instance, some GLD children write excellent poems and have dyslexia accompanied by unreadable handwriting simultaneously. Therefore, parents and teachers must help them overcome such challenges and develop skills expected in neurotypical children of their age.

Peers and educators feel constant pressure from talented children. The latter, in turn, feel hostility and distrust from others. In such cases, many parents desire to see their children like everyone else and often criticize them. Criticism from parents and teachers and bullying from classmates undoubtedly hurt their self-esteem. As a result, gifted children suffer and get depressed, which might have severe consequences in the future—for instance, getting addicted to alcohol and drugs, ending up in prison, or even committing suicide (Fleith, 2001). Parents must try to understand their children, and educators must identify them as early as possible and provide an individual approach to prevent such troubles.

Identification and Monitoring Gifted Children

In most countries, there are no classes for gifted students, and local schools mainly focus on teaching vocational subjects rather than preparing students for final exams. As a result, they are not interested in such activities and often give up school despite their academic knowledge of some subjects, such as English, Math, Science, and others. But in Israel, the USA, and some other countries, there are enrichment programs for them. Thus, the Israeli Ministry of Education works on expanding such programs outside schools, mainly afternoon ones (Dattel, 2018).

Identifying gifted students begins at kindergarten, although they are tested lately. Hanna David (2014) claims that the Ministry of Education offers special exams to determine kids' giftedness. Usually, they are taken in the second or third grade. Nevertheless, the child's parents might think it is too early for him to take such an exam because he may become stressed. In that case, they have the right to contact the Department of Gifted Students of the Ministry of Education and reschedule the exam for another year. Students can be tested in the fourth and fifth grades or even later.

Many psychologists claim that children with outstanding skills and talents should be diagnosed as gifted (Tribe, 2021). Since they are very different from their peers, they need particular support, a suitable curriculum, and accommodation if they have LD (Kemp, Smith, & Segal, 2022). And indeed, all of them need appropriate mentoring. It is highly recommended that homeroom teachers and school psychologists keep a log of each gifted child and put all their ups and downs down there. So that the following specialists will have a clear idea of how to teach and treat them: Either it is a contribution to "students' future career" or just the "development of personal talents" (Vidergor, 2010, p. 16).

When young prodigies are enrolled in gifted classes, schools, or enrichment programs, their relationships with their teachers are crucial for their personal development and academic success. "Questions related to academic achievement and teacher-child attachment relationships should be addressed concerning gifted students"

(Kesner, 2005, p. 222). Since gifted children are perfectionists, they often feel they must meet unrealistic expectations of their teachers and get depressed when they fail. So, a successful teacher of gifted children is an excellent subject teacher who profoundly knows and loves his subject. In addition, he must possess essential qualities in dealing with any gifted student. Finding an individual approach to each child is crucial. Besides, such kids might have giftedness and other sorts of neurodiversity, for instance, SEN and LD.

Gifted Children, Their Special Education Needs, and Learning Disabilities

“In schools, the expression ‘special educational needs and disability are used concerning students’ learning” (Wearmouth, 2016, p. 2). People often confuse SEN and LD, which are synonyms. Nevertheless, there are some differences between these terms. According to the research, students with SEN have such problems:

- Intellectual giftedness;
- Communication difficulties;
- Emotional or mental disorders;
- Behavioral disorders;
- Learning challenges.

“Learning disabilities or learning disorders are umbrella terms for a wide variety of learning problems” (Kemp et al., 2022). So, students diagnosed with LD have a significant gap between their actual academic achievements and their peers’ expected achievements, according to their age the class level. They have one or more following disorders:

- Dyslexia;
- Dysgraphia;
- Dyscalculia;
- Visual processing disorder;
- Auditory processing disorder;
- Aphasia or dysphasia.

Thus, twice-exceptional students might have a high IQ, severe dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia, and sometimes even all the forenamed disorders. Otherwise, not all have GLD, but they all have SEN: mainly ADHD, challenging interpersonal relationships, and emotional problems. Besides, since they are perfectionists, they have unrealistic self-expectations and lose motivation if they fail. As a result, they get low self-esteem (Beckmann & Minnaert, 2018). So, they need personal support and special educational support. Moreover, socialization is essential for them so they will learn to communicate with their neurotypical peers, accept them, and get accepted (Kanojia, 2021).

According to the research, twice-exceptional students use their exceptional abilities differently. Some of them score high grades on tests but may be labeled as bored and lazy in class and hope their giftedness will compensate for their weaknesses (Fielder & Nauta, 2020). Nevertheless, while their diligent peers do in class following the school program, the gifted kids often fall behind as they age. On the other hand, they get bored because they are not challenged enough. Due to emotional problems, they may be offered special education programs for gifted children (Rosen, 2022).

Teaching Strategies and Methods in Gifted Classes

For the last decades, gifted education has been improving, and teacher innovators permanently develop strategies and methods to enhance their way of teaching and to find an individual approach for each gifted child.

While in the past, most of the lessons were teacher-centered, nowadays, they have become student-centered. Although teachers attend numerous in-service courses, conferences, and symposia to provide new ideas, they still feel they need a lot of training. In many countries, including Israel, the main goals of enrichment programs are “creativity, use of computers, research, and love of learning” (Vidergor, 2010, p. 22). Teachers of gifted students are permanent students themselves, and they permanently develop ways of supporting self-esteem and developing social skills in each gifted student.

One of the leading teaching strategies in gifted classes is developing critical thinking and creativity. As mentioned above, they think much more than their neurotypical peers. Thus, for instance, in literature lessons, one of the after-reading tasks may be writing a letter to the main character or imagining a meeting with him and creating a possible dialogue. Students like doing drama in such lessons, and they can practice such conversations. Moreover, they can research the historical period when the main character lives and give a presentation in front of the class. I sometimes offer them such tasks in English Literature lessons.

The researchers of Arkansas State University (2018) claim that together with storytelling, including writing plays or novels in their language classes, gifted students are also provided such activities as virtual research. They can explore space or archaeology with the help of Google Earth. Moreover, they learn to code and decode computer games, websites, and apps. “Teacher’s goal is to make technology transparent so that the learner can concentrate on the academic task at hand” (Tirri, 2008, p. 318).

The teaching technique of specially trained teachers for the gifted is “to apply cognitive abilities suitable for the gifted” (Vidergor, 2010, p. 26) and to provide as many opportunities for self-expression as possible. Thus, teachers who work with the gifted are more facilitators than educators (Peterson, 2012). It means they talk less, give less information, stage demonstrations, and solve problems for students less often. Instead of answering the questions themselves, they leave it to the students. They ask more and explain less.

Student-Centered Lessons

The research claims that teachers should focus on students’ talents, strengths, and interests in gifted classes. Since gifted children are perfectionists and always want to be winners. There are many programs for the research, education, and upbringing of gifted and talented students with the highest creative potential (Cohen, 2011). On the one hand, the preservation and development of giftedness is a problem of the progress of society, the realization of its creative potential, and individual destinies.

On the other hand, preschool and school education are still focused on the average student. Therefore, the correct construction of the relationship of a gifted child with the outside world will allow him to demonstrate his abilities fully. It is crucial to create an excellent psychological environment for gifted child to develop their talents and other knowledge and skills expected from kids of their age and be accepted by their classmates. It will help to bridge the gap between intellectual and personal development (Kanojia, 2021).

“Unless kids are consistently engaged in challenging work, they will lose their motivation to work hard” (Winebrenner, 2014, p. 3). As for my personal experience at SEN school, I had had some kids who had C1 or even C2 levels of English. Even so, nobody spoke English at home. Perhaps, they learned it via films, songs, and computer games, and at the age of 13-15, they had an excellent command of English and found the material proposed by the National Curriculum too easy and boring. As a result, some gave up their lessons and were not allowed to take the final exams. Otherwise, they were present in the classroom but refused to participate in the classes, and finally, they failed the matriculation exams due to a lack of exam skills. Some of their complaints

were being burnt out in the regular classroom, losing motivation to do too easy and tedious tasks, and preferring “challenging academic experiences” (Vidergor, 2010, p. 17).

As an EFL teacher, I asked permission from the school psychologist, the principal, and the homeroom teachers to give them different materials, even if the Ministry of Education did not approve them. Therefore, I offered them the materials for IELTS, TOEFL, and other international exams. It was challenging, and it took them all 45 minutes of the lesson to do only one text for reading comprehension or two or three vocabulary and grammar exercises.

Other colleagues, such as Math, Art, Music, Science, and other subject teachers, say they have had gifted students, too. Therefore, they also create individual programs for them, and during a regular lesson, when most students do the tasks offered by the teachers, the gifted ones do something different. Those who play musical instruments and sing or paint very well are given opportunities to participate in school concerts and organize the exhibition of their works respectively. This way, they feel self-respect and appreciation from their peers and teachers. And, of course, they can be accepted in their classes. It is possible if they cooperate and each one has his own role within the group (Cohen, 2011).

Nevertheless, those gifted kids in Math, Science, and English might get frustrated if they still make many mistakes in the university tasks. So, as remedial teachers, we aim to prevent them from getting depressed and meet their needs as much as possible. At the same time, we must prevent them from getting exhausted and burnout (Kanojia, 2021). Besides, we must make the lessons student-centered and create learning autonomy. In SEN schools like ours, where there are up to eight challenging students in each class, it is possible because we practice an individual approach to each of them. Sometimes it is impossible to teach a frontal lesson that each student is different.

Conclusion

Since giftedness is a variety of neurodiversity, requiring special training for teachers. Their main aim is to teach gifted students to develop critical thinking, support their creativity, and teach social skills. Their main objective is to teach gifted students to develop critical thinking, support their creativity, and teach social skills. To be able to teach in gifted classes, they need to be “leaders and facilitators” (Peterson, 2012, p. 160). During the lessons, they must “show managerial and organizational skills by managing the classroom activities smoothly” (Tirri, 2008, p. 318). It means that they need to create a pleasant atmosphere in the classroom as well as to be flexible and stimulating.

Talented kids must be identified at a very young age and monitored throughout kindergarten and school. Moreover, it can come with such SEN as thinking differences, ADHD, ASD, and social and emotional challenges. In addition, many gifted kids have dyslexia, dysgraphia, and other GLDs. Therefore, they are often called twice-exceptional learners (Beckmann & Minnaert, 2018). The nature of advanced early development can be spontaneous and artificially provoked. Besides, intellectual giftedness might start problems with behavior and socialization. As a result, it causes difficulties with communication and frustration, which often causes academic failure in school. Due to emotional problems, they “can’t take criticism or suggestions for improvement without being defensive, angry, or tearful” (Winebrenner, 2014, p. 17). As a result, they often end up in conflicts.

Due to their giftedness, such kids become perfectionists and get frustrated if they do poorly at school. Since the curriculum is composed following the needs, interests, and cognitive development of neurotypical students, they consider it boring. So, they often refuse to participate in the lessons and do “boring” exercises (Fielder &

Nauta, 2020). But when they get low grades, they criticize their teachers and argue with them. Moreover, they often quarrel with their peers who do not accept them. So, parents and teachers must be aware that giftedness often comes together with cognitive disorders and consult with psychologists. Without help, they find themselves misunderstood, isolated, and unhappy, which might have destructive consequences.

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