



**TEACHING AND EVALUATION  
IN REGULAR AND  
SPECIAL SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

Edited by

**M. A. Araromi**

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**TEACHING AND EVALUATION IN  
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SECONDARY SCHOOLS  
(An Effective and Creative Approach)**

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# Effective and Creative Teaching of Gifted and Talented Students in Secondary Schools

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## Introduction

Giftedness means different things to different people. Hence Styphers (1972) affirms that 'gifted' as a word has no absolute meaning as it is interchangeably used with such words as superior, bright, talented and able. Giftedness and talented are natural endowment that manifest in various forms in different cultures and groups. Gallagher (1985), taking similar stance observed that giftedness as found in different cultures and ethnic groups have 'reflected the value and the types of attainment each group prized most.' Even in local government and in communities, teachers who serve them have different opinions, values and attitudes about who to label as being gifted.

Individuals with special gifts and talents may be extraordinary in intellectual ability, specialized academic areas, music, or the arts (Clark, 2002). Various definitions of gifted, creative, and talented exist in literatures, and there is little agreement on the best definition. Earlier definitions relied heavily on the use of Intelligence Quotient (IQ) scores for identifying gifted individuals. The Gifted and Talented Act, passed in 1978, included creative capabilities or high performance in the performing arts. In 1993, the United States Department of Education proposed a new definition:

The gifted could be defined as children and youth with outstanding talent who perform or show the potential for performing at remarkably high levels of accomplishment when compared with others of their age, experience, or environment.

These children and youth exhibit high performance capability in intellectual, creative, and/or artistic areas, possess an unusual leadership capacity, or excel in specific academic fields. They require services or activities not ordinarily provided in the schools. Outstanding talents are present in children and youth from all cultural groups, across all economic strata, and in all areas of human endeavour (U.S. Department of Education, 1993, p.3).

These federal definitions highlight the areas of giftedness, talent and creativity, and are more representative of recent trends in gifted education. Other conceptualizations of giftedness continue to broaden the single intelligence notion (Maker, 2008). The following are examples of broadened definitions for gifted, creative, and talented youth: (1) three-trait definition, including above-average ability, task commitment, and creativity (Renzulli, 1981); (2) especially high aptitude, potential, or ability (Feldhusen and Moon, 2005); (3) synthetic, analytic, and practical intelligence (Sternberg, 2006); and (4) multiple intelligences (Gardner, 2009). All proposed models include more than a single intelligence quotient as criteria, most include talents as critical components, and many recommend advice on counselling gifted and talented youth.

While general intelligence is the most widely accepted consideration by state department definitions of giftedness and talent, specific academic ability, creative thinking, talent in the visual or performing arts, and leadership are also considered by many states (Stephens and Karnes, 2000).

Given the variety of definitions, it is not surprising that little consensus exists on the actual number of gifted and talented youth. Many reports indicate that 3% to 5% of the population is gifted and talented (Hallahan and Kauffman, 2003); others believe the figures are much higher. Great variability also exists in how individual states identify students with gifts and talents, with some states identifying fewer than 3%, while other states identify more than 10% (Heward, 2006).



## **Creative Teaching**

Psychologists and researchers have been known to use the word 'creativity' synonymously with such terms as originality, imagination, innovation, novelty, intuition, exploration, invention, divergent thinking, ingenuity, newness, discovery and uniqueness. In addition, creativity has been contrasted with conformity in thinking. Creativity has been seen by researchers and psychologists as a necessary requirement for progress. Creativity is required in all sphere of human interaction, including the teaching profession. In government for instance, the life of the ordinary man would improve substantially if the leadership is creative. Creative societies are likely to enjoy improved living conditions because relevant inventions would abound and modern equipment that would minimize the hardships and stresses experienced by people would be available. People suffer unduly in depressed times such as the one we are going through because of their inability to evolve creative coping strategies (Nwazuoke, 1989).

Undoubtedly, one needs to teach creatively; that is, it will take a great deal of creative effort for a teacher to bring out the most creative thinking in his class. Creative instructors must know their fields and know how to create an appropriate learning environment. A creative teacher is likely to adopt a questioning stance and will link ideas together, finding different ways of drawing pupils into the subject. This seems to be a two-way process as pupils are encouraged to be active participants, asking questions and stretching the teacher too.

## **Characteristics of Effective Teachers of the Gifted**

Gifted children have special educational, social, and emotional needs that differ from those of other children. To meet those needs, a special type of "good" teacher is required. What are the characteristics of this teacher? What makes an effective teacher of gifted children? The literature on teachers of the gifted is abundant and varied; lists of recommended and necessary characteristics abound. Reviewing such lists,



however, makes you realize that as much as one would like every child to have a teacher who has superhuman qualities, a single person cannot possibly be all things to all students. The ideal teacher of the gifted would resemble some type of super hero – totally infallible and undeniably a saint!

Distilling the suggested qualities into a more realistic profile, one finds that many of the characteristics of effective teachers of gifted children – a thorough understanding of subject matter, self-confidence, a good sense of humour, organizational skills are characteristics of all effective teachers. However, there are other characteristics, some of which overlap, that are of special significance of teachers of gifted children, and which are as vital as advanced degrees and years of experience. They include:

- i. *Openness*: Openness refers to a teacher's ability to be sensitive and accepting. It is characterized by a concern for people rather than things. Openness applies to new ideas, methods, and materials for teaching and it applies to students' thinking and opinions as well. Effective teachers must be opened emotionally – sensitive and responsive to gifted children's feelings, vulnerabilities and uniqueness. Openness in relationships with other professionals, parents and other community members is an important area that should not be overlooked either.
- ii. *Flexibility*: Effective teachers of gifted children must be flexible in their approaches toward curriculum and learning. They recognize learning differences in children and accommodate those differences. Flexible teachers use a variety of curriculum materials as well as instructional groups, which they will modify to meet the unique and changing needs of their students. Teachers should possess a wide range of teaching styles and methods. They must be able to change these depending on the nature of the subject being taught, the learning situation, and the child. Questioning methods must be flexible, going beyond the recall level and encouraging children to think, analyze, relate and evaluate information.



Flexibility regarding use of classroom, time and space is important also. Student input and direction should be allowed and encouraged as much as possible so that children realize they have a part and responsibility in directing their own learning.

iii. *Positive Sense of Self:* A positive sense of self is imperative for teachers of gifted students. Effective teachers of gifted children exhibit self-confidence and enthusiasm. Teachers must be secure in their knowledge of who they are and what they believe. This positive sense of self frees teachers to enjoy and delight in the intelligence and uniqueness of the children around them, rather than feel threatened by them and the challenges they present.

Teachers of gifted children need to be able to withstand the stress associated with working in a controversial area of education that is subject to social and political fluctuation. A secure sense of self, coupled with a commitment to children with special needs, enables teachers to deal effectively with misconceptions and resistance to gifted children and their education.

iv. *Strong Communication Skills:* Communication skills are essential for teachers of the gifted. The social and political nature of gifted children's education necessitates that those working in the field communicate accurately and sensitively with others, keeping in mind and responding positively to common objections and misconceptions. The role of the gifted teacher is often one of social and political advocacy as well as teaching. The teacher who understands giftedness and its implications for children, and who can communicate this knowledge effectively to others, aids those he or she teaches plus the gifted child's education in general.

In communicating with gifted children, the effective teacher develops and shows an understanding of each child's social and emotional needs along with the child's academic needs. The vulnerability of gifted children to emotional stress and social conflict, for example, is recognized and understood

by the effective teacher. His or her interaction with each child should reflect that understanding.

*Intelligence:* Teachers of gifted students must be similar in many respects to those they teach: inquisitive, skilled in analytical reasoning and problem solving, creative, alert, and knowledgeable. With the emphasis in a gifted child's education on teaching higher-level thinking skills, like critical and creative thinking, teachers must be comfortable enough with such skills to use them in their own learning. Finally, teachers of gifted students should be role models of what we want for and from the students themselves – that they become curious, lifelong learners, who value intelligence, learning, and excellence.

### **Strategies for Teaching Gifted and Talented Students**

Instruction in a heterogeneous classroom must be adapted to help gifted learners achieve their full potential. Fortunately, many of the instructional strategies that are effective for students with special needs are also appropriate for gifted and talented students. Some effective instructional strategies for gifted and talented students include:

- i. *Questioning:* Gifted and talented students may benefit from more opportunities to explore essential questions. Complex concepts that demand cognitive effort build positive attitudes towards learning and increase intrinsic motivation. Open-ended questions that call for thinking skills such as analysis, synthesis and evaluation can help gifted and talented students apply new knowledge to other situations.
- ii. *Explicit Modelling:* Because gifted and talented students often employ higher-order thinking skills, teachers must devise ways to help students describe their thinking strategies. By asking pertinent questions and listening to student interactions, teachers can observe the kinds of thinking students are using as they work on projects and provide appropriate instruction and support.



- ii. *Feedback:* When gifted and talented students work on projects that challenge them to take risks and stretch their thinking, feedback helps them attack problems and monitor their progress in more professional and expert ways.
- iv. *Cooperative Learning:* Gifted and talented students sometimes feel exploited by working in groups where they may have to take on additional responsibility to ensure success. In fact, they may find it more difficult to collaborate successfully than other students. Providing instruction in collaboration strategies and setting ground rules for group interaction can minimize problems and increase group productivity. Grouping students flexibly for different purposes can address their concerns while maintaining the benefits of collaborative learning.
- v. *Alternative Assessments:* Differentiating instruction for gifted and talented students depends on accurate and ongoing assessment. Reed (2004), a Mathematics teacher who works with advanced students in a regular geometry classroom, explains, "A teacher should pre-assess understandings central to a unit and then purposefully modify activities to eliminate repetition and drill for those who already demonstrate mastery."

### Some Tactics to be used in Teaching Gifted, Creative and Talented Students

Teaching gifted, creative and talented students can be done through a variety of tactics, depending on the student's learning abilities, the school's policies, how classes are structured and the educator's amount of time to devote to that student. In many cases, educators modify the individual student's curriculum while keeping them in the classroom with their peers. Some classrooms are structured to allow each student to learn at his or her own pace, and in these environments, gifted students can thrive alongside peers who are also succeeding according to their own abilities. Below find some

of the successful tactics which educators have used while teaching gifted students:

*Acceleration:* Educators utilize this approach to reaching gifted learners by either advancing them to upper grade levels or allowing them to complete their class work at a more rapid pace than their peers.

*Enrichment:* Some teachers have success in providing additional assignments to enrich the education of gifted students and challenge them in new ways on top of the regular assignments which they must complete for their traditional class work.

*Pull-Out:* In some schools, teaching gifted and creative students is accomplished by placing them in a separate class with other gifted peers. These often work in conjunction with their regular curriculum by giving students more creative exercises and critical thinking drills that modify how they approach and enjoy regular assignments.

*Self-Pacing:* A more inclusive way to reach gifted students is by promoting self-pacing for all learners, regardless of ability. Through this method, teachers can create individualized education plans that benefit gifted learners alongside their normal peers.

### Some Important Hints for Teachers of Gifted Students

It is estimated that students who are gifted and highly talented encompass 5 to 15% of the school age population. These advanced students can have increased capabilities in academics, creativity, music, dance, art and/or leadership. The following are recommended for teachers of the gifted students:

- i. *Compact the curriculum and provide enrichment activities:* Provide environments that are stimulating, and address cognitive, physical, emotional, and social needs of gifted children in the curriculum. Let the students move quickly through the required curriculum content and on to more advanced material. Allow for academic rigour.



- ii. *Implement a multi-level and multi-dimensional curriculum:* Differentiate the curriculum in order to address differences in the rate, depth, and pace of learning. This will enable all students in the class to learn about a specific area by creating projects at their own ability level. For example, if other students are learning about the state of Delaware, students of different ability levels can be assigned to different types of tasks. At the conclusion of the class, all of the students can present what they have learned to the entire group.
- iii. *Be flexible with the curriculum:* Take advantage of real-life experiences that can be translated into problem-solving academics for all students. For example, an impending snowstorm can be used to instruct students. Students of different ability levels can be given different tasks, such as figuring out what snow is made of, predicting the amount of snowfall, or determining how many snow plows will be needed if 8 inches fall.
- iv. *Make the curriculum student-centered:* Engage gifted students in the curriculum decision-making process, giving them an opportunity to learn how to take responsibility for their own learning. Draw the curriculum from the students' interests and educational needs.
- v. *Allow students to pursue independent projects based on their own individual interests:* Independent projects can be assigned on the basis of ability level. Encourage creativity and original thinking among gifted students. Allow them to explore ways of connecting unrelated issues in creative ways.
- vi. *Allow gifted children to assume ownership of their own learning through curriculum acceleration:* Instruct them to work ahead to problems of skills that they do not know. To help children learn the value of attaining knowledge in their lives, encourage learning for its own sake, rather than emphasizing the end results or accomplishments. Teach research skills for accessing



- information; higher level thinking skills for processing it; creative thinking and problem-solving skills for flexibility in approach and generation of information; and communication skills for sharing it.
- vii. *Try to maximize your students' potential by expecting them to do their best:* Encourage them to advance as quickly as they can. Assist in developing projects that allow them to achieve success one step at a time.
- viii. *Teach interactively:* Have students work together, teach one another, and actively participate in their own and their classmates' education. Note: This does not advocate gifted children being peer tutors in the classroom; the gifted student should be challenged as well. Emphasis should be on working together in the classroom. Cluster gifted children together as a table within the regular classroom and utilize advance materials, as well as other suggested resources and modification, to meet their exceptional needs.
- ix. *Explore many points of view about contemporary topics and allow opportunity to analyze and evaluate material:* Allow open forums and debates in the classroom about controversial issues. As a teacher of gifted children, take an active stance. Be an advocate for gifted students. Utilize specialized training to ensure the ability to meet the needs of gifted students. Share personal interests with all students, to enrich and expand their world.
- x. *Consider team teaching, collaboration, and consultation with other teachers:* Use the knowledge, skills, and support of other educators or professionals in the schools.
- xi. Provide opportunities for gifted children to interact with other gifted children across grade levels and schools through competitions or collaborative projects.
- xii. *Encourage gifted students to participate in extracurricular activities that involve academic skills:*



Examples include Mathematics and debate teams. Because gifted children are often natural leaders, it is important to invite them to use their talents and abilities in beneficial, rather than disruptive manners. For example, encourage the gifted student to run for office in student council, or another extracurricular activity in which he or she is involved.

- xiii. *Involve students in academic contests:* Gifted students tend to be competitive by nature. Therefore, participating in regional and national competitions such as spelling bees, science fairs, and essay competitions will be fun challenges.
- xiv. *Allow gifted children to create and publish a class newspaper to distribute:* This consists of assisting students in understanding their special capabilities and the training necessary for them to reach their full potential.
- xv. *Set individual goals:* Help guide students in creating their own goals and set goals that are specific, measurable, aggressive, realistic and within a reasonable time frame. Be sure not to place expectations that are too high or too low.
- xvi. *Consider parental input about the education of their gifted children.*
- xvii. *Always remember that gifted children are similar in many ways to the average child in the classroom:* Do not place unrealistic expectations and pressures on gifted children.
- xviii. *Address the counselling needs of each student to support emotional growth, as needed:* Some gifted students have issues regarding anger, boredom, bullying, delinquency, isolation, depression, peer relations, perfectionism, dropping out of school, stress, frustration and underachievement. About 20 – 25% of gifted students have emotional difficulties.

- xix. *Remember that gifted children may not excel in all areas:* They may be ahead of other students in some areas and behind in some areas. Become aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the children in your class.
- xx. *Do not assign extra work to gifted children who finish assignments early:* This is unfair and frustrating to them. Simply offering more of the same only restricts further learning. Instead, allow those children to work on independent projects or other unfinished work when they finish an assignment early.
- xxi. *If a child attends resource rooms, communicate with the specialist for suggestions on how to enrich daily class work:* Avoid penalizing the child for special class attendance. Have another child in the regular classroom take notes and assignments for him or her.
- xxii. *Provide plenty of opportunities for gifted children and average children to engage in social activities.* Some gifted children may need help in developing social skills.
- xxiii. *Try to find the joy and uniqueness in each child:* Children may exhibit their gifts on non-typical levels, rather than in general intellectual aptitude of specific academic abilities. Keep in mind that every child will have different needs.
- xxiv. *Organize resources in order to free yourself to work with individual children and give the children greater control of the learning situation:* Supplementary books and learning tools, community resources, and the use of community members with specific skills as mentors can be helpful.
- xxv. *Establish and maintain a warm, accepting classroom:* Teach your classroom community to embrace diversity and honour differences. Provide an environment in which the child can demonstrate his or her potential or aptitude to learn and perform. Teachers should strive to establish a noncompetitive, individualized, and open classroom,



which allows all students to advance at their own rate of learning.

- xxvi. Finally, remember that implementing some of these strategies will benefit all of the children in the classroom, not just the gifted ones.

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