

**Nurturing Gifted and Talented Students in Botswana: Setting an Agenda for Policy  
Framework**

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# **Nurturing Gifted and Talented Students in Botswana: Setting an Agenda for Policy Framework.**

## **Abstract**

The issue of gifted and talent development has reached a central stage in many countries of the world. This paper briefly discusses why gifted and talent development is necessary and particularly in Botswana where there is no official policy on the gifted and the talented.

**Key words:** Gifted; talented; Botswana.

## **Introduction and Overview.**

There are many definitions for giftedness. Ford and Grantham (2003) state that “most definitions of giftedness are IQ based and test driven” (p.218). The national curriculum in the UK defines gifted learners as those who have abilities in one or more subjects on the statutory school curriculum other than art and design, music and PE while ‘talented’ learners are those who have abilities in art and design, music, PE. In contrast a ‘gifted and talented’ student is defined by the State of Texas as one who “shows the potential for performing or performs at a remarkably high level of accomplishment when compared to other children of the same age, experience, or environment, and who exhibits high performance capability in an intellectual, creative, or artistic area, possesses an unusual capacity for leadership, or excels in a specific academic field.” (Texas Education Agency, 1996, 29.121). In Egypt giftedness is defined as blessing from the creator to a few pupils

which enables them to excel and perform better than their peers in special academic fields (Elmemoufy, 2007).

Nevo (2008) discussed the role of *Definitions (axioms), Values, and Empirical Validation in the Education of Gifted Children*. He argued that issues in gifted education and in the study of giftedness (including mathematical talent) can be categorized into three classes or three orientations: Definitions (axioms); Values (beliefs); Empirical Validation (empirical verification). Nevo (2008) argued that practitioners and researchers quite often confuse between these three basic orientations and they should pay attention to the type of issue being discussed so that deliberations and controversies concerning giftedness will be relevant and productive. Nevo's orientations focus on five main planes in this field. These are:

- theories (definitions),
- educational policy
- implementation (ideas and projects),
- instructional design
- research (modeling and validation).

Gifted and talented children are those identified by professionally qualified persons, who by virtue of outstanding abilities are capable of high performance. These are children who require differentiated educational programmes and/or services beyond those normally provided by the regular school programme in order to realize their contribution to self and society. Children capable of high performance include those with demonstrated achievement and/or potential ability in any of the following areas, singly or in

combination: general intellectual ability, specific academic aptitude, creative or productive thinking, leadership ability, Visual and performing arts, psychomotor ability (Assouline, 2003)

Children and youth with outstanding talent perform or [who] show the potential for performing at remarkably high levels of accomplishment when compared with others of their age, experience, or environment.

Outstanding talents are present in children and youth from all cultural groups, across all economic strata, and in all areas of human endeavour and these talents need to be developed and the first stage of which is identification. Talent according to Milgram (2008) is an extraordinary achievement in a specific domain and talent loss is the failure of individuals to realize the potential talents that they demonstrated in their early years. To realize means to actualize potential talents by generating real world. Talented accomplishments may be seen in a wide variety of specific domains such as science and mathematics, aesthetic domains such as music, art, dance, and drama, and also social, political, business, military, and moral leadership.

Giftedness cuts across gender, ethnicity, social and economic background, and geographical location (Colangelo, Assouline, and Cross, 2004). To Colangelo, et al, (2004) the gifted children are the top scorers, the ones who break the curves, who read newspaper editorials at the age of five and are often the most frustrated students in the classroom.

### **Characteristics of Gifted Children.**

Gifted children have a range of characteristics, which can set them apart from their peers.

Common indicators include:

- Keen powers of observation.
- Learned or read very early, often before school age.
- Reads widely and rapidly.
- Well-developed vocabulary - takes delight in using unusual and new words.
- Has great intellectual curiosity.
- Absorbs information rapidly - often called sponges.
- Very good memory - can recall information in different circumstances.
- Is able to concentrate deeply for prolonged periods.
- Very good powers of reasoning and problem solving.
- Has intense interests.
- Possesses unusual imagination.
- Has a great interest in "big" questions, e.g. the nature of the universe, environmental issues.
- Very sensitive - perhaps getting upset easily.
- Very concerned about rights and wrongs.

Source: [www.giftedkids.ie](http://www.giftedkids.ie)

Despite the obvious importance of educating all children to their fullest potential, gifted students remain underserved and unchallenged in many educational settings. Gifted students spend much, if not all, of their time in the regular classroom, yet classroom teachers have usually received little or no pre-service or in-service training in gifted education. The implications are obvious: teachers who serve gifted students must receive appropriate training in techniques to meet the needs of these children, particularly in strategies and resources for differentiating the regular curriculum and instruction (Cohen, 1997).

For years, giftedness was considered to be a static category, with children either possessing the trait or not. But developmental theory has now led to more nuanced view of what makes some people gifted. Instead of being innate and immutable, giftedness can be nurtured and even taught—and if ignored, it can also be lost (Horowitz, Subotnik, & Matthews, 2008)

For years, academically gifted children were thought to fit neatly into a category. If they took a test and landed above a predetermined score, a menu of enrichment activities and accelerated classes would open up to them. But developmental psychologists are learning that people who are gifted are not categorized quite so neatly. Academic talents can wax and wane, the latest thinking goes, meaning that a child who clearly outpaces his or her peers academically at age 8 can end up solidly in the middle of the pack by the end of high school. Instead of being innate and immutable, giftedness can be nurtured and even taught—and if ignored, it...

In Botswana there is actually no policy prescription as regards the education of the gifted (Biakolo & Afemikhe, 2002). The nearest thing is a statement in the special education section of the revised national policy that “Government is committed to the education of all children including the disabled ones and therefore will intensify efforts to increase access to education for all disabled children: Government will also expand support for non-governmental organizations which have considerable experience and expertise in this field to enable them to provide free education to disabled children” p 11. Nothing was mentioned about gifted and talented children. The inference is that such provision as is made in the regular curriculum should suffice for the learning needs of all children. This

may not necessarily materialize as we know that the field of special education has evolved to take care of unusual situations in education (Biakolo & Afemikhe, 2002).

Giftedness among children is one such rare ability and it is imperative that it be appropriately guided towards full manifestation in children. According to Clark (1992), giftedness results from an interactive process that involved challenges from the environment. Bloom (1985) contends that individuals will not actualize their gifts in their respective fields unless there is an interactive process of encouragement, nurturance, adequate education and training. The potentials inherent in giftedness require an enabling environment (Biakolo & Afemikhe, 2002; Halsted, 1988). Gifted students – who will be the creators and the leaders of the next generation – are the hope of Egypt in its advancement in keeping pace with civilization and progress (Elmenoufy, 2007)

For gifted education to be entrenched in a community, four important areas must be looked into. These are (i) identification procedures for the selection of gifted children, (ii) specialized teachers of the gifted and their training (iii) programme designed for the gifted, and (iv) curriculum for the education of the gifted. Critical examinations of these four important areas have proved that Botswana has not introduced gifted education.

### **Identification Procedures for the Selection of the Gifted in Botswana.**

Identifying gifted students is just the first step towards helping them achieve their full potential and early identification is essential for them. Smulny (2000) refers to the most effective way to recognize them and identifies giftedness as the use of a variety of approaches over an extended period of time. Schwartz (1997) suggests that schools can use the following methods in concert to ensure that all students receive a fair consideration: standardized tests such as intelligence, creativity and mathematics

achievement and aptitude tests; observation and/or recommendations from teachers, parents and/or classmates; self identification, e.g. biographical inventories; portfolios as repositories of students' potential or achievements. To avoid bias in the selection process, identification procedures should include a wide variety of measures to identify the broadest number of both females and males from diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. Sheffield (1999) suggests that measures might include any or all of the following: self-selection, observation of students during the problem solving process; teacher, parent or peer recommendation; standardized tests; measures of creativity and/or problem solving; grades in mathematics classes; performance in mathematics contests; tests of abstract reasoning and measures of special reasoning.

Authorities like Richert (1986) have recommended that nominations for a talent pool in the selection of beneficiaries of programme should be based on varied areas to ensure that those who are gifted in various areas are selected show that no talents are left out. In Botswana the situation on ground is that there are no identification/ selection procedure on ground.

### **Teachers of the Gifted and their Training**

The quality of teachers determining the developmental striving of any nation and no nation can rise above the quality of its teachers. This applies to all type of educational provision including that of the gifted. The quality of teachers to a large extent determines the success of any educational programme. Gallagher (1975), explains that what gifted children need most are teachers who are not as exceptional as they themselves, rather what they need are teachers who understand them and their needs and interest. Teachers need be informed about the special challenges of teaching highly capable students, and of

the various kinds of acceleration that may help these students. In the life of any child a teacher is crucial, but for the gifted child, one teacher can open the door to an entirely new educational pathway by making sure that the child is set on an appropriately challenging course (Colangelo et al, 2004). As noted by Colangelo et al (2004), the reality for gifted children is that their needs have not been a priority for teachers. These needs faded to the background as teachers are confronted with increasing greater demands of their time. So there is need for specialized teachers for the gifted and the talented children. This is not presently obtainable in Botswana.

### **Curriculum and Programme Designed for the Education of the Gifted**

According to Richert (1986), the adequacy of curriculum offerings in a gifted programme should be determined by the extent to which the programme that is designed meets more than half of the objectives set out. A cursory look at the teacher education curriculum of the Colleges of Education and Faculty of Education, University of Botswana indicates lack of courses that will help teachers in identify and assist the gifted students in the classroom.

### **Conclusion**

From the foregoing it is clear that the issue of Gifted and Talent development has not reached a central stage in Botswana educational landscape. It is hope that this exploratory work will serve as a foundation for initiative and effective implementation of policy on issue of gifted and talent development in Botswana in the near future which is now. The government of Botswana has not recognized that gifted and talented children have special educational needs. Botswana population has its own gifted and talented children and it is the duty of the State, the teacher and educational practitioners not only to identify these

students but also to nurture them to their fullest potential by providing appropriate curriculum to match their precociousness.

It is hope that the Ministry of Education will urgently set in motion policy initiatives concerning identification, teacher training and curriculum packages for gifted students in the country.

I'll like to conclude with a remark by Dona J. Matthews (Nov 17, 2008):

*...I think the future of each and all global societies depend on how good a job we do in educating all our children, certainly including those who are advanced relative to their age peers. We cannot afford NOT to educate them commensurate with their ability!*

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