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Development of Sustainable Educational Framework for Talented Children in Early Childhood

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Abstract:

Research has indicated that to enhance children’s experience in early child care entails that families, staff management and policy makers should work together to address challenges (Bennett, 2005) such as low quality service and unclearly defined curriculum. Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) should be addressed and its services assessed since it has become the norm for many families to send their children to nurseries. Most youngsters between 0-5 years attend a form of regulated early education centers. These centers play a crucial role in child development at the level of cognitive, social, behavioral and emotional (Bennett, 2005; Bennett, 2011). These experiences can be improved through the quality of ECEC services offered to all children 0-5 and especially to gifted and talented ones. According to the US Department of Education (1993), talented children are those with outstanding talent who show the potential for performing at remarkably high levels of accomplishment as compared with other children of the same age, experience, or environment. As Jackson, 1992; Rogers & Silverman, 1997; Gross, 1993 say that talented children exhibit early and clear differences in development compared to their peers. Hence, ECEC services and the program these services should follow play a crucial role in educational development.

This paper is based on grounded theory to establish a functional program and framework to foster children’s talents. It will propose the development of program content, instructional methods and practices that have to be implemented by care givers enabling talented children (1-5) to develop their cognitive, social, behavioral and emotional abilities to the utmost.

Key Words: talented children, child care, framework, education, ECEC program

Introduction

Early childhood education (ECE) has become a necessity for children between the age of three and Five (Encyclopedia of Early Childhood Development, 2011). It plays an important role in the development of the child. During that phase, students benefit from the chance to participate in various learning and societal activities. Parents and legal guardians are enrolling their children in child care programs due to the excess number of studies that showed the positive effect of such centers on children (Ahnert & Lamb, 2011).

Early childhood education and care are associated with advantages as well as limitations on children's development (Ahnert& Lamb, 2011). Some studies showed the positive impact on children's academic achievement, cognitive improvement, and increase of social values (Bennett, 2011). It is of great advantage to children who have experienced insensitive care at home since school would create a close bond between the child and teachers. On the other hand, if the ECE is inadequately planned, poor quality and long hours, it will represent double stress and negative outcomes on the child. The National Institute of Child Health and Human development in the early 1990s recruited 1,300 kids from ten different areas to assess the effect of child care on children. They observed children who were six months old as well as 15, 24, 36, and 54 months old to identify their cognitive and socio-emotional development. Seven results were indicated. First, children who were below 15 months developed insecurity toward their mothers if they stayed for more than ten hours in the center. Second, there was less pleasant communication between the mom and the child between six and 36 months if the child was to spend long hours in the child care as well as the child expressed higher levels of aggression. In addition, those who spend more time in the center were more spontaneous and risk takers at the age of 15. High level of cognitive -linguistic abilities was identified for children between the age of two and five. Finally, children who experienced high quality of child care scored higher on tested educational accomplishment at the age 15.

It is during preschool that identification of exceptional children could take place. Exceptional students can be easily observed in their very early stages for they clearly exhibit characteristics that are above the norm when compared to their peers (Aljughaiman & Ibrahim, 2009); however, are usually referred for assessment between the age of 4 and 9 years old (Tannenbaum, 1998). Giftedness which is also known as talent is one type of exceptionality. It is defined as "a child or youth who performs at or shows the potential for performing at a remarkably high level of accomplishment when compared to others of the same age, experience, or environment" (The Texas Education Code, 1997, p. 10). Identifying gifted students requires great deal of attentiveness and skill (Tannenbaum, 1998). However, if they are not properly identified, there is the risk of them failing in school since they are not being challenged nor required to meet their potentials; thus, they do not try. They need to be provided with the chance as well as motivation to reach their highest potential (Grace, 2010). In its rudimentary purpose, the objective of teaching is to provide the setting where students' needs are met (Chalfant& Van DusenPysh, 1993). This is not applicable for gifted children. Hence comes the need for a special curriculum.

Studies showed the earlier children are assessed and suitable measures are taken, the higher the achievements of these students are and the lower the chances of psychological and educational issues (Harrison, 2004; Sankar–DeLeeuw, 2002; Silverman, 1997). However, most gifted students between the ages of zero and eight are going unnoticed and no intervention is being done (Chamberlin, Buchanan, & Vercimak, 2007). In addition, most of the preschool programs are not constructed to meet the needs of the intellectually talented children. This could be due to either deficiency in financial support, myth of no need for exceptional services, or lack of teacher training (Grace, 2010). To begin with, public funding for talented programs are very rare (Bainbridge, 2008). Second, talented kids may suffer from the layperson misconception that gifted children do not need a special program since as the common Lebanese saying “the smart child will excel in any school”. Moreover, it is very rare to find teachers who have received enough training and are well equipped to identify and prepare programs for talented students (Jackson, 2003).

Problem

Early child care plays an important part in the development of well-rounded healthy individuals. Recent research has indicated that to enhance infants’ experience in day care center, the entire community should collaborate to overcome challenges such as low quality service and vaguely defined service curriculum (Bennette, 2005). It is vital that the education sector evaluates the services that Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) provides since many families send their youngsters to nurseries. In Lebanon, many infants between 0-5 years attend day care centers or nursery schools. These centers play a vital role in a child’s development and shapes her/his cognitive, social, behavioral and emotional abilities (Bennette, 2005; Bennette, 2011). To improve toddlers’ (0-5) experience, educators should improve the quality of ECEC services. In Lebanon, ECEC is not monitored by the Ministry of Education. Most of the sector is run by private institutions. Each institution has its own program and is allowed to hire what it deems fit as long as the institution passes the basic requirements set by the Ministry. Hence, there is no quality assurance to those centers and institutions. Infants in general, and gifted/talented infants in particular, are not guaranteed a quality care that will maximize their abilities and development.

This paper carefully designs an ECEC framework catered for infants 0-5 years, particularly for gifted and talented children. It is based on theory and aims at maximizing gifted/talented children’s experience so that they can develop their cognitive, social, behavioral and emotional abilities to the utmost.

Literature Review

Daycare Center

Daycare centers and child care institutions are now part of the daily routines of most western countries and even Lebanon. Many children, particularly those of working parents, usually spend a part of their day in some form of child care (McCartney, 2007). Child care, whether formal or informal, is the “care for young children, provided by adults who are not their parents” (McCartney, 2007, p 1)

Childcare is becoming an important topic in education given the fact that more and more children spend much of their infant years in day-care centers. This fact has given rise to concerns regarding the quality of these services and what they offer the infants since even small effects whether positive or negative, can have lasting consequences on children and thus leave great impact on society (Belsky et al.,2007; Belsky, 2011). Moreover, recent studies showed the advantages of child care centers in providing social interaction and emotional support as well as educational opportunities without ignoring the impact of parents on their children (Ahner & Lamb, 2011). However, the child care center needs to hire high quality of teachers who use various teaching strategies and to ensure the low ratio of adult-child.

To provide adequate care for toddlers, educators have to ensure high quality daycare centers, where “care environments are developmentally appropriate... (and) adult–child ratios in child care kept low. Group size and composition also need to be considered as mediators of the quality of individual care provider-child relationships” (Bennette, 2011, p 4). Furthermore, some research has also revealed that spending long hours in child care centers can help develop behavior problems in children, including aggression. Some researchers blame inadequate infant child care for such development of aggressive behavior (Maccartny, 2007). Hence, the importance of quality daycare surfaces. This care system requires government supervision, for recent studies in Europe and Brazil have revealed that if daycare centers and policies that govern them are under one supervision, then results are positive and children in these centers are better taken care of (Bennette, 2011; Belsky, 2011).

Gifted Children

Gifted learners are at mental danger due to their inside attributes and situational elements (Webb, 2000). Talented learners are extremely exceptional people (Webb 1993 as referred to by Webb, 2000). Subsequently, when present in a general class, where they have beaten the current educational module, the skilled learners are determined by serious weariness which may bring about negative conduct. They are people with basic understanding with an affection for acquiring new complex data; they are solid visual learners.

Talented learners are portrayed as individuals who: 1) learn rapidly, 2) are gifted, 3) use sensible and dynamic thinking, 4) utilize a mixture of methodologies to tackle issues, 5) are interested about how things work, 6) have numerous premiums, 7) like to investigate and find new learning about the world, 8) have limitless general information (Tannenbaum, 2003) and 9) exhibit over excitability in their behavior (Lind, 2002). Because of their talented capacities, these learners confront conceivable issues (Webb, 2000).

Teaching gifted learners varies depending on the culture, gender, subject, age and even the learning style which the learner prefers (Tomlinson, 1997). Learning style, to Felder and Henriques (1995) is "the courses in which an individual typically obtains, holds, and recovers data" (p 21). Learning style measurements can be characterized into three significant gatherings: the visual and verbal channel, the sound-related channel and the spatial channel (Felder & Henriques, 1995). With regards to favoring a learning style, most learners lean toward the visual channel (King, 1996). Leaning toward a learning style is not a cognizant decision, but instead the learner is "wired" in a manner which makes her/his cerebrum favor this strategy. The second most utilized learning style is the sound-related style.

Learners typically learn best when their learning is augmented through more than one perceptual channel. Recent studies uncovered that learners learn best when the teaching method relates to their favored learning style. This matching is vital for adapting especially in the early evaluations (King, 1996). To suit the diverse learners' learning styles, educators ought to: investigate new material to spur learning; and assist their learners in enjoying their studies while turning them into dynamic individuals (Felder & Henriques, 1995). Talented children are visual-spatial learners who understand through the use of visuals rather than the use of drills (Silverman, 2002). When their extraordinary needs are met, their learning is boosted (Fakolade & Adeniyi, 2010).

Tomlinson (1997) states that gifted learners, like learners in general, require good instruction guided by good curriculum. Necessitating experiences that are rich, the gifted learners need the use of adequate and rapid pace instructional strategies that meet their high level. They also need learning that occurs at a higher 'degree of difficulty' meaning that the material to be learned should be more complex, abstract, open-minded and multifaceted. Their learning should not also be structured around 'filling time'- that is, asking them to do various meaningless activities.

One technique for amplifying the gifted learners' needs is exhibited by the Project Spectrum (Vonkarolyi, Rames-Ford & Gardner, 2003). As indicated by the Project, to include all the learners' inclination, their classrooms ought to incorporate a wide variety of materials, amusements and riddles with frequently planned exercises that address the gifted's different learning 'channels'. In this way, with each one subject or expertise, the learners can have packs loaded with materials and exercises going for bringing out and practicing all the learners' intelligences and learning inclination. Additionally, these topic based materials hit a scope of intelligences, thus providing both learning and opportunities to assess understanding. New projects are constantly created in the West, especially the US, to help talented learners develop their creative potentials according to the learners' needs and based on the local resources the learners exist in. It is an online instrument that asses every learner to find her/his advantage and qualities to give her/him with improved exercises that test the learner's and make learning agreeable. In the SEM, educational program is constantly altered to help, furnishing them with testing exercises and top to bottom learning encounters. The Discover Curricula applies a

"constructivist" approach which is known to permit its learners to expand on their insight and procure higher-request speculation and critical thinking abilities (Discover.Arizona, 2012).

Giftedness is found in many schools and daycare centers in Lebanon and is exhibited through the children's various actions (Baldwin, 1995 cited by Sarouphim 2009). Gifted children in these regular daycare centers and pre-schools spend most of their time waiting for their peers to reach their level, thus face social difficulties in getting along with their classmates. Moreover, many might end up with behavioral problems because of boredom. Due to these facts, a curriculum designed for this group of children is imperative.

Framework

The little available studies on models to deal with giftedness in the Arab World, necessitate the need of creating a framework that advocates the importance of a curriculum designated for gifted learners.

Research has revealed that due to the current curriculum, many gifted learners are not progressing as they should, and at times they are even regressing, since they are not being appropriately challenged (Lewis, Cruzeiro & Hall, 2007) and are given academic work few years below their intellectual level (Kearney, 1996). The needs of these gifted learners, furthermore, have constantly challenged personnel in the available disconnected system which has made it difficult for the gifted to succeed (Pereles, Omdal, Baldwin, 2009). The curriculum as is, has increasingly been finding it difficult to meet the needs of the diverse group of gifted learners.

When developing a curriculum compatible with gifted learners, educators need to take into consideration the following (Silverman, 2009):

1. Gifted learners can better adjust socially when they are in classes with learners having the same abilities. Their social self-concept can only improve when they are placed with their 'true' peers (Hanninen, 1994) where they can work with "more capable peers" (Kearney, 1996) to actualize their potentials.
2. Almost 60% of gifted learners are introvert. However, this introversion is most likely to be misunderstood by adults as 'antisocial behavior', leading the adult to try to 'correct' the behavior.
3. Gifted learners require instructional consistency and rigorous curriculum because they are successful when their curriculum has clear expectations and provides them with opportunities to problem solving.

To develop an adequate curriculum, educators need to ensure that the principals and teachers are well trained in dealing with gifted learners. Principals should establish the schools' direction, build capacity in both faculty and learners and develop a school culture that promotes the reasons for the school's existence- that is, teaching and learning (Instruction Leadership by Principals, 2006). In short, unless the teachers comprehend the gifteds' needs and are equipped to educate them (Gifted and Talented Education, n.d.), gifted learners will lose a large amount of learning time. When "professional training ... allow people to learn how to be more effective teachers"

(Joyce & Showers, 2003, p1), these teachers will be able to work with the gifted learners effectively, maximizing their skills. To achieve these objectives, gifted learners need to be taught in a receptive and nonjudgmental environment which supports inquiry and sovereignty (Berger, 1991). In the words of the curriculum committee of the Leadership Training Institute (Passaw 1982 cited in Berger, 1991, parag. 12):

1. The content of curricula for gifted students should focus on and be organized to include more elaborate, complex, and in-depth study of major ideas, problems and themes that integrate knowledge within and across systems of thought.
2. Curricula for gifted should promote self-initiated and self-directed learning and growth.
3. Curricula for gifted students should provide for the development of self-understanding and the understanding of one's relationship to persons, societal institutions, nature, and culture.
4. Evaluations of curricula for gifted students should be conducted in accordance with the previously stated principles, stressing higher level thinking skills, creativity, and excellence in performance and products.

Furthermore, content should involve major key terms that need to be present in the curriculum for gifted students. First term is abstraction. Students need to understand the overall picture and between the line concepts instead of only focusing on remembering information. Second, complexity of information is essential by integrating concepts of various subjects together. Third, students need to be provided with choices when it comes to content. Fourth, organization would help gifted students link information, retrieve data, as well as implement what they study outside the classroom. Economy could be accomplished by minimizing redundant learning that could be forgotten or unused. Gifted students need to be exposed to all content expressed in academic areas of study such as conclusion and significance of studies. Finally, all content should be relevant to the future such as problem solving skills.

In other words, a curriculum for the gifted toddlers needs to include the following: (discover.arizona, 2012)

- Active hands-on activities that would stimulate the senses and body movements which are necessary in various learning experiences, especially for those with kinesthetic intelligence.
- Cooperative Learning: authentic activities that include observation, decision making and interaction are essential in every activity or session. This will help children decide which learning style they enjoy best.
- Corners with Multiple Intelligence Equipment: the focus of these centers is exploration; therefore each center should be organized based on a specific type of intelligence. For instance, an art center should have clay, brushes and paint, allowing each student to explore.
- Technology Integration: technology should be used as a tool to support the lessons taught and be allowed for children to utilize as means for expressing and sharing their knowledge. For example, software programs and designs can be offered to the talented that will target their specific cognitive skill.

- Academic acceleration is also recommended for these talented children, particularly those with high cognitive abilities (Batterjee, 2010).

Conclusion

The literature review indicates the positive linkage between childcare quality and the psychological, cognitive and social development of children. In order to have a higher quality childcare centers, curriculum should be designed to meet the individual needs of each child in the center, particularly those gifted. Since there are only few models available for children in the Arab world, more funding should be available for research that designs, creates and implements well-formulated curriculum. Moreover, some funding should also be designated to training teachers on assessing gifted and talented children in infant stages. These workshops should also train teachers to handle gifted children and implement these models properly in their classrooms.

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