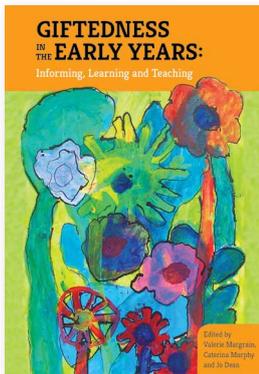


Differentiating Curriculum for Giftedness in the Early Years

Early years education with gifted children - Quality practices series



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Curriculum Connections

"The early childhood curriculum recognises that there can be wide variations in the rate and timing of children's growth and development and in their capacity to learn new things in new places. Each child learns in his or her own way. The curriculum builds on a child's current needs, strengths, and interests by allowing children choices and by encouraging them to take responsibility for their learning" (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 20).

"Effective teachers stimulate the curiosity of their students, require them to search for relevant information and ideas, and challenge them to use or apply what they discover in new contexts or in new ways" (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 34).

"Curriculum design and practice should . . . recognise that, as all students are individuals, their learning may call for different approaches, different resourcing, and different goals" (see the *inclusion* principle) (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 39).

References

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- Van Tassel-Baska, J. (1994). *Comprehensive curriculum for gifted learners* (2nd ed.). Boston, USA: Allyn and Bacon.

Case Study

Child: Caterina, did you know that there was this thing on the radio and Granddad will have to move his lettuces?

Teacher: What was it on the radio that you heard?

Child: Well I heard that all the ground where we live has this stuff in it which could be poisonous.

Teacher: I wasn't listening to my radio this morning, can you tell me about it?

Child: Well, there is this stuff called 'oxydoxydiny' which someone has found and I don't know what Granddad is going to do because I don't want him to eat his lettuces from his garden.

Teacher: Did you tell Granddad about what you heard on the radio?

Child: No I didn't see him this morning because he doesn't live at my house.

Teacher: Are you feeling a bit worried about granddad this morning?

Child: Yes, because I don't want my granddad to die.

Teacher: Would it make you feel better if you rang granddad up today and told him all about it?

Child: Yes, and I want to ring those other people up because they need to bring all their big diggers in and move all the soil and take it away somewhere; but they can't put it in the sea, they have to put it somewhere where no one will ever be able to find it again, coz it's bad stuff ('bad' was dramatically emphasised).

Teacher: I wonder where they could put it all? I'm trying to think of lots of ideas as to what the people with the diggers could do . . .

What is differentiation?

Differentiation concerns young children experiencing a flexible, challenging and adaptable curriculum which is responsive to individual learning interests, needs and aspirations (Riley, Bevan-Brown, Bicknell, Carroll-Lind & Kearney, 2004). It is a positive response so that young children who are gifted are fully engaged in learning, that is, stimulating, interesting, challenging and not boring. So, differentiation is all about *personalising* education. It is not about more of the same thing.

Qualitative differentiation involves a number of key elements according to Van Tassel-Baska (1994) and Patterson (2000). These include:

- Complexity
- Novelty
- Challenge
- Acceleration
- Enrichment
- Evaluation
- Self-understanding
- Choice
- Depth
- Breadth
- Independence
- Diversity
- Advanced content relating to conceptual themes
- Comprehensive, related and reinforcing learning experiences

Reflective Questions

- What did the child learn?
- How did I facilitate and support their learning?
- How can I help the child to find the right level of challenge?
- In what ways does the learning environment need adapting in order to maximise learning opportunity?
- Were the experiences I planned for and provided, of quality and at varying levels?
- Were the learning outcomes planned for, realised? If not, why not?
- How challenged and supported am I feeling?
- Have I encouraged growth in all developmental domains?

From Morelock and Morrison (1996)

- Is the topic conceptually complex enough to be meaningful to gifted children?
- Is the content based on the children's interests?
- Does the content meet the social and emotional needs of the children?
- Does the content begin with the children's direct experiences and then extend to proximal experiences, thereby enabling the children to explore the topic in greater depth?

Review question:

Have I considered **content, process, product** and **learning environment**?

Iti noa ana, he pito mata.

"With care, a small kumara will produce a harvest."

Acknowledgements:



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