



## First Forum on Gifted Education in Lebanon

في لبنان الملتقى الأول للتعريف بالموهبة والإبداع

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## The LWIS-CiS, DT Experience

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**Abstract:** Current research on gifted and talented defines giftedness based on Gardner's (1993) and Gangne's (1985) and Sternberg and Davidson's (1986) multiple qualities, since IQ scores are no longer seen as the sole measurement of gifted qualities. Moreover, this research has revealed that gifted and talented children are very diverse. There are some who have an ability in just one domain while others in more than one. There are those who have advanced leadership skills while others are at a more psychological risk than their peers and might suffer from social isolation. No matter what their abilities are, these learners require special needs at schools, such as "instructional curriculum and teacher behaviors" (Reis & Renzulli, 2004, p 119). A learner is considered gifted when s/he "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 as cited by TAGT, 2016). There have been some attempts of catering for gifted learners in Lebanon by some private schools; yet, there are no official records of these programs nor have these programs been evaluated for their efficiency. One of the major causes for this lack of efficient education for the gifted population in Lebanon is that most of the educational body lacks the basic understanding of what gifted is. Furthermore, the procedures for identifying, referring and assessing gifted learners are not well-known nor easily available. How can teachers cater for their gifted learners when these teachers might not know that their learners are gifted?

The aim of this paper is three-fold- it is to share:

1. LWIS-City International School-DT (LWIS-CiS) experience in training and preparing teachers to accommodate their classes for gifted learners.
  - Characteristics of gifted children
  - Differentiated Instruction
  - Individualized Plans
2. The program for the gifted and talented that was developed during the scholastic year 2015-2016. The program was based on theoretical grounds stemmed from the literature. Through this program, teachers are more able to identify gifted learners and refer them for formal assessment.
3. The assessment procedure and tools



**keywords:** gifted and talented, identifying gifted learners, assessing gifted learners, gifted curriculum, gifted programs

## 1. Introduction

Founded in 2003, LWIS-City International School (LWIS-CiS) is a private school that accommodates mixed gender from different nationalities-local and international. English is the academic medium of instruction through which two curricula are followed: The Lebanese Official Program and the International High School System that includes the Advanced Program (AP) international standardized tests for the high ability learners. In applying these programs, LWIS-CiS utilizes a multinational curriculum and teaching methods.

In abiding with its mission statement articulated as "...is to create a nurturing environment where students, faculty and families work together to develop academic excellence, ethical behavior, and personal responsibility. Guided by our values: Respect, Responsibility and Relationship, and the promotion of lifelong learning, LWIS-CiS will honor the **special gifts** in *every* child and support *all* learners. ...", LWIS-CiS established the Integration and Support Department (ISD) in 2003. Since its establishment, the ISD has been offering support to its learners such as "integration with a support teacher in the class, support in English, support in Math and Science for ESL learners, self-contained classes, one-on-one setting (when needed), IEP(s), speech therapy, occupational therapy, counseling and differentiated instruction" (Integration and Support, 2016). In the year 2015-2016, LWIS-CiS launched the Gifted and talented program (G&T) to complement what the ISD is doing by catering for the rest of the population under the term of special education. The G&T program is the natural result of LWIS-CiS's mission of promoting



21<sup>st</sup> Century critical thinkers who are problem solvers, responsible individuals, ethical beings, team workers and good communicators.

Special education is a young discipline in the field of education. Until 1975, schools had the right to exclude learners who exhibited either cognitive or physical disabilities (Esteves & Rao, 2008). Due to parents' involvement, learners with disabilities started gaining their right for proper education in mainstream classrooms (Esteves & Rao, 2008; Wright, 2008; Martin, Martin & Terman, 1996). The *Meriam Webster On-line Dictionary* defines special education for students as "classes or instruction designed for students with special educational needs" (2016). To the *American Heritage Dictionary* of the English language special education is "classroom or private instruction involving techniques, exercises, and subject matter designed for students whose learning needs cannot be met by a standard school curriculum" (2013). The *Webster's New World College Dictionary* (2010) similarly defines special education as "special education is the educational programs and practices designed for students, as handicapped or gifted students, whose mental ability, physical ability, emotional functioning, etc. requires special teaching approaches, equipment, or care within or outside a regular classroom." All three definitions include all types of special education- those with learning difficulties and disabilities and the gifted and talented. However, when educators talk of special education in Lebanon or inclusive education, they discuss just one aspect of it that of learning difficulties and disabilities (LD). The other population included in special education is always neglected- those who are gifted. A learner is considered gifted when s/he "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 as cited by TAGT, 2016).



Although there have been some very successful attempts of inclusive education by some private schools in Lebanon, there has not yet been official records of programs that serve gifted learners nor learners with LD. There are some attempts to accommodate for the gifted in various private schools that cater for learners from high socio-economic status. These schools offer some enrichment programs to high-achieving learners whose total grade average is above 85/100 (Sarouphim, 2009); however, the programs are yet to be evaluated for their efficiency in nurturing the needs of gifted learners (and those with learning difficulties!). The major cause for this lack of proper education for the Gifted and Talented (GT) in Lebanon is that the educational body lacks the basic understanding of what GT is. Moreover, the procedures for identifying, referring and assessing GT learners are not well-known nor easily available. Hence, it becomes imperative to investigate the availability of such tools and creating educational body that can provide for these learners. When the needs of the special education population are not met, particularly those of gifted learners, then the educational system has not fully met its requirements. Gifted learners cannot thrive on their own. Just like those with LD, GT learners need assistance from specialists to actualize their potentials. How can teachers cater for their gifted learners when these teachers might not know that their learners are gifted?

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## **2. Gifted Learners and Education**

Gifted learners face enormous challenges, particularly in traditional schooling system. They have unique needs that require attention and addressing, just as it is necessary to address the needs of learners with any type of learning disability. These gifted learners have different needs, each of which depends on their personality (Alcott, 2006). For instance, there are some gifted learners who have a preference to learn on their own and discover the world around them by themselves; while others opt for a well-structured system with constant guidance least they become bored. Hence, teaching the gifted learners requires knowledge of their abilities as they display themselves.

Gifted learners are passionate individuals who reveal forceful emotions and feeling which puts them at psychological risk (Webb, 2000). They are extremely active and in regular classes might demonstrate inappropriate behavior due to boredom. Moreover, assimilating knowledge and skills faster than the average learner, gifted learners become restless in class, refuse drilling and traditional methods of teaching.

Kearney (1996) uses the definition given by the Columbus Group to define what gifted is. Accordingly, gifted learners are those whose

Giftedness is asynchronous development in which advanced cognitive abilities and heightened intensity combine to create inner experiences and awareness that are qualitatively different from the norm. This asynchrony increases with higher intellectual capacity. The uniqueness of the gifted renders them particularly vulnerable and requires



modifications in parenting, teaching, and counselling in order for them to develop optimally” (parag. 3).

Classical definition of giftedness had been related to the level of the learner’s IQ. Every child whose IQ above 136 is considered gifted. Since the 1970s, a shift has occurred. Giftedness is no longer associated merely with IQ. New definitions have been established by educators and psychologists such as Renzulli and Gardener that no longer use IQ as the mere criteria for determining the gifted.

Per Renzulli (1978), a gifted child is one whose behavior is an interaction among three basic clusters of human traits: above-average general and/or specific abilities, high levels of task commitment (motivation), and high levels of creativity. Gifted and talented children are those who possess or can develop this composite of traits and applying them to any potentially valuable area of human performance. As noted in the Schoolwide Enrichment Model, gifted behaviors can be found "in certain people (not all people), at certain times (not all the time), and under certain circumstances (not all circumstances). Howard Gardner defines a gifted learner as one with the ability to “resolve genuine problems or difficulties and, when appropriate, to create an effective product—and must also entail the potential for finding or creating problems—thereby laying the groundwork for the acquisition of new knowledge” (Gardner, 1993, p 60). Moreover, Schiever and June Maker (2003, p 163) define giftedness as “the ability (as well as interest and willingness) to solve complex problems.” Furthermore, Strendberg (1985 as cited in 2004) associates intelligence with three different kinds: analytic, synthetic and practical. These types can also be seen in Gardner’s MI, which means that intelligence is expressed not only through high scores of standard tests, but also in many ways. Hence, new definitions of giftedness are no longer solely associated with IQ; they rather revolve around the learners’ ability to solve problems.



The major objective of schools is to help their learners grow and learn. In principle, schools should know how to work with special populations of learners. Thus, they need professional staff that should be able to adequately identify and serve learners who are high achievers and those who have the capacity to achieve at high levels (NAGC, 2010). In this way, teachers can cater for the gifted learners. Therefore, these learners will not be bored in regular classes. Boredom must be avoided because it usually leads to low grades. When gifted learners do not feel challenged enough, they might stop doing the work. Learners usually learn best when their learning is maximized through more than one perceptual channel. Recent studies revealed that learners learn best when the teaching method corresponds to their preferred learning style. This matching is crucial for learning particularly in the early grades (King, 1996). Gifted learners are visual-spatial learners who think in pictures, learn all-at-once, where the learning becomes permanent and don't learn from repetition and drill (Silverman, 2002) and when their special needs are met, their learning is maximized (Fakolade & Adeniyi, 2010).

Tomlinson (1997) states that gifted learners, like learners in general, require good instruction guided by good curriculum. It is very difficult to develop the gifted's talents with inappropriate de- curriculum (Grantham 2002 cited by Fakolade & Adeniyi, 2010). Requiring experiences that motivated are rich, gifted children need learning practices that follow concepts and principles of a discipline and not facts. Moreover, they require tolerant classrooms that provide structure and choice, helping them achieve more than they believe they could. These learners require a more rapid instructional pace than do non-gifted learners. Thus, these gifted learners need learning that is paced in response to their needs. They also need learning happening at a higher 'degree of difficulty' meaning that the material to be learned should be more complex, abstract, open-minded and multifaceted. In other words, gifted learners' teaching should not be 'do more of the same



stuff faster'; nor should it be structured around 'filling time' - that is, asking them to do various meaningless activities merely to fill up the time.

### **3. G&T at LWIS-CiS**

#### *3.1. G&T Program-Scholastic year 2015-2016*

Programs for gifted learners do not exist officially in Lebanon. Some private schools in Beirut, which provide services to those from high socio-economic status, offer some programs for gifted learners. These programs, however, are very limited and don't cover all the required scope of the learner; they are limited in content and use pull-out system (Sarouphim, 2010). The pull-out system has yielded various controversial research on the effects it has on the emotional well-being of the learner (Neihart, 1999) by increasing social isolation among the gifted learners and the learners remaining in class (Carpenter, 2001). Moreover, these programs are not well-grounded, but are rather ones that try to foster the learners' talents and abilities through a selection of enhancement activities (Sarouphim, 2009). No studies have been conducted to determine the effectiveness of these programs or the quality it assumes to offer.

Among the Arab countries, Lebanon has the highest literacy rates (Ayyash-Abdo, 2009 cited in Sarouphim, 2010). Yet, the educational system still does not accommodate the gifted population. It is time for Lebanon to embark into establishing a program for the gifted. Educators have to start afresh, building on the empirical evidence found in research available in the West instead of trying to correct flaws in programs that already exist (Sarouphim, 2009). It is critical for Lebanon to establish now a curriculum that is effective and unique to the country and that will establish equality among all fractions of learners because then all learners would be catered for.

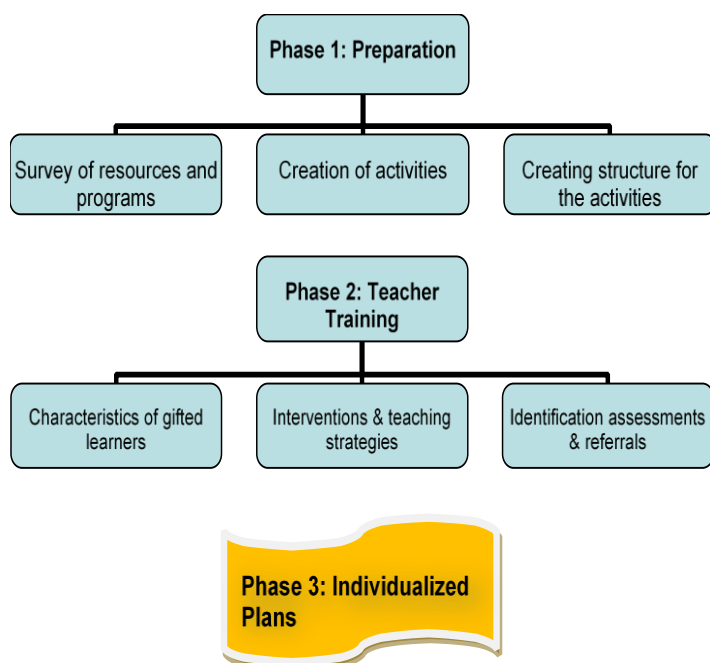
Programs for gifted around the world have been developed because educators have exerted much effort to show how important fostering the abilities of gifted learners is.





Educators have worked hard to ensure that ministries of education establish policies and programs to guarantee that all gifted learners receive an education that suits and caters for their needs. At LWIS-CiS-DT, Lebanon, management realized the importance of creating such a program that caters for the gifted, thus the creation of the program *Gifted & Talented Club* (previously known as *Friday's Activities*). The *G&T Clubs* are the product of LWIS-CiS concern for learners. *G&T Club* took place every Friday during the last 2 periods and currently is taking place every Wednesdays during the last two periods. During scholastic year 2015-2016, there were 12 different activities that accommodated the elementary learners. Through them, learners enjoyed **Drama**, where they enacted history scenes and behavioral patterns of different cultures, and interviewed people to finally share their new experiences in a learner-led ethnography fair. They were also educated into sports in general and athletics , to promote a balanced and healthy lifestyle through participating in the **Kids' Athletics**. Moreover, they were scientists in **Let's Experiment** where they investigated and observed the world around them by engaging in scientific research. They also developed and used different thinking skills while gathering clues to solve the riddles in **Brain Puzzles** and challenging problems in **Math Wiz**. **I am an Engineer** was the activity for learners interested in designing and building projects. In this activity, they built awesome vertical structures and built and replicate different models in order to enhance their spatial visualization skills. Later, the little engineers programed their own interactive stories, games, and animations and can shared their creations in **Design Computer Games**. They could construct their very own jumbo-sized robot, too, and customize its programming in **Robotics**. Finally, the artistic side of our learners wasn't neglected. In **Art Effect** learners created artefacts, such as home decorations while being environmentally conscious, and played classical oriental musical

instruments in **Oriental Music**. In **Safari**, learners solved logic problems that led them to a new destination, and in **We Are Detectives**, solved mysteries and investigated crimes. Following the model presented by Sarouhim (2010), three phases were established which were accustomed to meet LWIS-CiS's needs: preparation and creation, teacher training and assessment, and finally creation of individualized action plans for the identified gifted learners.



### *Phase 1: Preparation*

Phase one consisted of introductory action steps to guarantee that our system is functional. In this phase, extensive research was conducted to acquaint the program's developer and coordinator with programs that exist in Lebanon (if any) and the world. Survey of publishers for gifted material was carried out as well. Publishing companies such as Prufrock ([www.prufrock.com](http://www.prufrock.com)) and Critical Thinking ([www.criticalthinking.com](http://www.criticalthinking.com))



) were contacted and various resources orders from them. Manipulatives such as Lego Community Set (<http://goo.gl/P8zOKp> ), Teifoc 5 Plan Brick Construction Set ( <http://goo.gl/tdjFSh> ) and Kapla 200 Blocks (<http://goo.gl/YOi1g4> ) and many others were ordered online. Once resources and manipulatives became available, the ten different 'clubs' were designed and assigned material and resources. Apart from Robotics, Computer Games and Art Effect, the Activities were divided into two levels: L1 for grades 1-3 aged groups 6-8 years; and L2 for grades 4-5 aged groups 9-10 years. Finally, in this stage, structure for these activities was created. Teachers were assigned activities, introduced to the program, and were guided into using the resources and trained on how to conduct a session for the activity.

#### *Phase 2: Teacher Training*

In phase two, teacher training program was launched. Research indicates that unless teachers are trained to identify gifted learners, then these learners become at risk of not being well catered for. Teachers need to be trained in understanding the characteristics of gifted learners and what constitutes gifted education and learning. They need to understand the capabilities of gifted learners so as not to feel threatened by these gifted learners when they encounter a situation where they feel they know less than these learners (Sarouphim, 2010). An inclusive training program, one in the essentials of gifted education and teaching and the methods of referring gifted learners and teaching strategies, was administered. Thirty elementary teachers from the six different departments: Arabic, English, French, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies, attended the training sessions. After completing the training program, the teachers became knowledgeable about the characteristics of gifted learners, their preferences and became able to differentiate between gifted learners and high achievers. The program also endowed the teachers with the skills that would make them better prepared to deal with



gifted learners in class; now they are able to come up with intervention plans and strategies in how to deal with their gifted learners. Differentiated instruction strategies were followed in preparing and delivering lessons so that high ability learners would be challenged. Workshops on how to implement differentiation were given and teachers had ample training in preparing lessons using differentiated strategies. Finally, the teachers were given tools to help them identify and refer learners whom they suspect to be gifted. In this manner, teachers become involved in the assessment process, which in turn can personalize their relationship with the gifted learners.

#### *Phase 3: Individualized Plans*

In phase three, which is taking place now, individualized plans are being devised for the learners who have been identified as gifted as supported by Crosland & Dunlap, 2012. It is important to develop plans that cater for the learner's needs to help him/her develop into the well-rounded 21st century citizen. The plan does not aim at simply providing enrichment in the areas that the learner is gifted in; it is to assist the learner in evolving and improving his/her weak areas, improve his/her leadership qualities and social skills (when needed).

In the scholastic year 2016-2017, the number of clubs has been reduced to nine clubs.

*Safari*, *Brain Puzzles* and *Math Wiz* have been combined into one club under the name of *Brain Puzzles* and the intended outcomes of the three clubs have been incorporated.

Logical deduction and problem-solving skills were combined to better cater for the learners. Each club, except for *Robotics*, *Kids Athletics*, *Computer GamesDesign* and *Oriental Music*, has two levels with *Art Effect* having three.

Having noticed a need to improve Grade 1 and 2 learners' psychomotor skills, a new level in *Art Effect* has been introduced. In this level, learners work on creating designs that would improve their psychomotor skills and at the same time allow them to be creative



while using material from nature. In this way, learners will develop a sense of responsibility towards nature while nourishing their creativity. For levels 2 and 3, major projects that follow the 3Rs (reduce, reuse and recycle) concept are planned.

In *Let's Experiment*, both levels, more emphasis on the scientific method is applied.

Learners will be working more on understanding the world they live in and the natural laws that govern it. With *I am an Engineer*, the physical laws that govern architectural and engineering designs are being emphasized.

In the cholasitic years 2016-2017 and 2017-2018, individualized plans are being applied (Crosland & Dunlap, 2012). Learners who have been identified already as gifted are given supplementary projects. Projects such as 'Energy Projects', 'Planet Earth Projects' (McGee & Keiser, 2013) and 'Math, Science & Social Studies Units' (Brigham, Fell, Simons, Strunk & Yodice, 2006) are provided. Moreover, the coordinator of the program has become certified in three assessments: Scales for Identifying Gifted Students (SIGS), Gifted and Talented Evaluation Scales-2 (GATES-2) and Scales for rating the Behavioral Characteristics of Superior Students (Renzulli Scales).

### 3.2 Assessment Procedure and Tools

There are two terms for the G&T Clubs; each term covers 14 sessions. During these sessions, the teachers observe the participating learners and assess their interactions and performance of the activities. When teachers observe that there is a learner who exhibits above average abilities or who show creativity and motivation, which are in line of Renzulli's definition of giftedness, in performing their activity, the teachers fill out the "GATE Referral Form" (Appendix A). The referral form has been adapted from Renzulli et. Al. (1976). *Scales for rating the behavioral characteristics of superior students* by the Gifted and Talented Coordinator. The form covers several sections: general intellectual abilities, social studies, language arts, mathematics, leadership, science, creativity, music,



visual art, dance and drama. The teachers choose from the selection that represents the behavior of the learner. The choices are “Never, Seldom, Sometimes, Frequently”.

Behavior receiving ‘Seldom’ scores 1 point, ‘Sometimes’ scores 2 points and ‘Frequently’ scores 3. When a learner scores above 55 points, then the teacher nominates the learner for formal assessment.

A letter of notification and reasons for referral is then sent to the parents (Appendix B), seeking permission to assess the learner using one of the three following tools: SIGS, GATES-2 or Renzulli Scales. ‘SIGS’ assesses seven scales: general intellectual ability, language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, creativity and leadership. GATES-2 assesses five domains: general intellectual ability, academic skills, creativity, leadership and artistic talent. The Renzulli Scales comprises of 15 characteristics: learning, creativity, motivation, leadership, artistic, musical, dramatics, precise communication, expressive communication, planning, mathematics, reading, technology and science. Step two in assessing the learner for gifted ability is administering a more formal assessment. Tools such as *Wescher Intelligence Scale for Children*, 5th edition, *Woodcock Johnson*, 4th edition, *Comprehensive Test of Nonverbal Intelligence* (CTONI II), and *Naglieri Nonverbal Ability Test* are administered to the learners. When the procedure is completed, and the learner is determined as gifted, individualized plan is developed, one that caters for the learner’s specific needs.

The Gifted and Talented Program at LWIS-CiS is still in its juvenile phase. New plans are continuously being developed and changes implemented to meet the needs of the learners and the program. So far, the experience encountered has revealed that the program is on ‘the right track’. Hopefully, the program can be implemented across Lebanon so as all gifted learners could benefit from its advantages.



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