

CY-ICER 2012

A new dimension in education of Turkish gifted children

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Abstract

The “NB Interest and Ability Domains Development Program” is the very first and unique program which is designed compatible with the socio-cultural and economic structure of Türkiye. The aim of the study is to present the NB Interest And Ability Domains Development Program, Weekend Special Groups (WSG), Summer Special Clusters (SSC) and Winter Special Clusters (WSC) as a globalized, K-12 applicable and resilient education for gifted-talented and normally developed children. On the base of “NB Interest and Ability Domains Development Program” three new enrichment programs are effectuated by the same foundation; Weekend Special Groups, Summer and Winter Special Clusters. These programs are developed to support the social and emotional developments of gifted and talented children as well as their mental skills by applying special programs designed according to the children’s interest and ability domains. Weekend special group studies started in January 2008, Winter Special Clusters are firstly started in February 2010 and lastly the Summer Special Clusters were effectuated in the summer of 2011.

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Keywords: gifted, enrichment, education, Weekend Special Groups, talented

1. Introduction: a Brief History of Gifted Education in Türkiye

The Enderun and Up-Bringing of Janissaries: Ottoman Empire innovated a special and unique institution of education, the Palace or Enderun (the “inner most”). Ottoman Empire seemed to have been fairly successful in this unique experiment. Many statesmen, who held the seal of authority and fate of the Empire in their hands, were products of this process. The education of gifted/talented children was begun at the Ottoman Empire period. Ottoman Empire’s military and administrative staff, educators and artists who were gifted/talented students were educated at Enderun.

After the establishment of Republic of Türkiye, many acts and foundations took place in the development of gifted education area. At 1929 - Student Exchange; at 1940 – Village Institutes; at 1948 – 1956 Student Exchange;

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at 1959- Talent Groups; at 1962 – Science High Schools; at 1964 - Special Classes; at 1970 - Anatolian High Schools; at 1989 - Anatolian Fine Arts High Schools; Anatolian Fine Arts High Schools; at 1994 - Science and Art Centers; at 1997 - Act 573 This act includes children with special needs, direct or indirect services for them and schools, institutes and programs that ensure these services; TUBITAK arranges different competitions at different education levels and gives awards. Scholarships and awards are seen as an encouragement for gifted/talented students.

Today in Turkiye, there are different schools and foundations serving for education of gifted and talented pupils. Science and Art Centers (BİLSEM), Education Programs for Talented Students (EPTS), **TEV İnanç Türkiye Private High School (TEVITOL)**, The Center for Gifted and Talented and Inonu Children's University, Ford Otosan Beyazıt Primary School, NB Interest And Ability Domains Development Program, Weekend Special ability groups (WSG), Summer and Winter Special Clusters (SWSC). Since the NB Interest and Ability Domains Development Program have its roots in BİLSEMs, it is required to give information about BİLSEMs initially.

2. Science And Art Centers (BİLSEM)

In order to ensure that highly intelligent or talented children at the age of primary or secondary education are aware of their individual skills and maximize their capacities, Science and Art Centers were established by Prof.Dr.Necate Baykoc Donmez at 1994 as independent special education institutions by Ministry of Education, General Directorate of Special Education Counseling and Guidance Services.

The gifted/talented students at the age of primary or secondary education are educated at these centers according to their interest and talents besides their formal education. The center's students are nominated by formal education's teachers according to the "observation form" criteria which has developed by Ministry of Education. The nominated students are evaluated by group tests and then individual tests. After the registration, students take these programmes:

- Orientation program
- Support Education Programmes for communication skills, foreign language, studying within group, social activities, awareness of individual abilities, scientific studies techniques, computer education, problem solving strategies, learning strategies, research techniques, development of special talents, project development.

Today there are 60 Science and Art Centers in Turkiye. Infrastructure works are in progress in other cities. In these centers, highly intelligent and talented children at the age of primary and secondary education receive individual or group training in their spare time outside public education.

Apart from these, it is a special education organization that aims to

- Solve the problems in practical and real life
- Think realistically about the function, processes and facts in daily life
- Create innovative suggestions, alternative processes and new solutions that can fully cope with the problems of daily life
- Be aware of the needs and problems in various business areas, and suggest and develop innovative ideas, techniques and tools,
- Solve the problems by preparing projects that include the phases of needs analysis, planning, budget preparation, implementation and evaluation.
- Develop the superior and special abilities to become individuals who can solve problems efficiently by integrating scientific thinking and behaviours with aesthetical values.

Generation and development of projects constitute the basic activities of these centers. In order to acquire students' information and skills on preparation and development of projects, teachers ensure pre-learning activities and present them sample projects with project instructions. At the determination, selection, assessment of project themes and development of projects, there is collaboration with work offices, universities and other institutions. Projects may be implemented at relevant work offices, sometimes projects may be supported by specialists.

3. Nb Interest And Ability Domains Development Program

The “NB Interest and Ability Domains Development Program” is the very first and unique program which is designed compatible with the socio-cultural and economic structure of Turkiye.

The program has been developed for gifted and talented children in 2005, by the founder of BİLSEMS, Prof. Dr. Necate Baykoç Dönmez, using the education model applied during the establishment of BİLSEMS. The mentioned program has many advantages:

- Applicability / Feasibility to Pre-school and Primary School Curriculum
- Applicable to Turkish System of Education
- Can be integrated into other countries' curriculum easily
- No need for any extra cost, special materials or extra equipment for the application of the program

“NB Interest and Ability Domains Development Program” is developed for gifted and talented children but can be applied for improving the interest and ability domains of all children. The program has been applied in 4 different private pre-schools and primary schools in the last six years.

3.1. Identification of the Children

Identification of a child as gifted is a process which is conducted by the professionals by applying some resources and using appropriate materials. Parents apply to our foundation in order to get information about development of their child. Parents or primary care givers and the teachers of the children are the main resources that we refer for collecting data about their developmental properties, interests, abilities and needs. The data is gathered by our team in cooperation with the resources mentioned. Developmental Tests, Cognitive Ability Tests, NB Interest and Ability Domains Questionnaire, Child Information Questionnaire are used as materials for collecting the data from the resource people. During the identification process our aim is to determine the development, interests, abilities and needs of the children rather than labelling the child as “gifted”.

3.2. Educational Environment

The environment, in which the curriculum is applied, becomes an inviting and calm learning environment. The materials, the techniques used, the teacher's attitudes facilitates the learning of the children.

3.3. Educational Methods and Techniques

The educational process is child centred. The teacher leads and encourages children to use the following techniques during learning process to: gain new information in the related topic, search, produce new information and ideas, explore new methods, investigate, solve problems fast and optionally, create materials, do projects related to topic, translate the current knowledge, use the current knowledge optimally, work and produce cooperatively.

3.4. Assessment and Evaluation

The assessment and evaluation process includes the evaluation of the program, the child's progress, and materials by teachers and by parents. The detailed questionnaires include two sub-questionnaires for parents and for teachers. The studies of assessment and evaluation process of the program are in progress of completion.

3.5. Educational Attainments

The attainment of the process for children are; to use time effectively, to cooperate and share with the group members, to extend the ability of acceptance the criticism, to learn the academic content joyfully, to search individually or by group, to acquire the ability of planning, preparation and presentation of projects, to comprehend the importance of science and scientific studies.

Moreover teachers have some attainments which differentiate them from the regular education teachers. They get used to work, produce cooperatively and explore new methods in a natural climate and process. The application of the program is enjoyable for teachers and allows them to prepare a unique archive. Furthermore the education of the program is easily understood and takes short time.

3.6. More About Program

NB Interest and Ability Domains Development Program is a globalized, K-12 applicable and resilient education for gifted-talented and normally developed children. On the base of "NB Interest and Ability Domains Development Program" three new enrichment programs are effectuated by the same foundation; Weekend Special ability groups, Summer and Winter Special Clusters. Weekend special group studies started in January 2008, Winter Special Clusters are firstly started in February 2010 and lastly the Summer Special Clusters were effectuated in the summer of 2011.

4. Weekend Special Ability Groups, Summer Special Ability Clusters, Winter Special Ability Clusters

This is the first weekend program carried out for gifted and talented children in Turkey. These programs are developed to support the social and emotional developments of gifted and talented children as well as their mental skills by applying special programs planned/designed according to the children's interest and ability domains. The program has been carried out for three years by grouping the children aged 3-11 according to their certain characteristics.

4.1. Objective

- To support language, mental, social and emotional developments of gifted and talented children whose interest and ability domains are determined;
- To improve the production, sharing and communication skills of the children having fun together in a natural environment.

4.2. Forming a Cluster/Group

The groups and clusters are formed by our team considering the children's cognitive properties, interest and ability domains, social-emotional, behavioral properties.

4.3. Curriculum Content

Topics are determined by choosing advanced and special subjects determined according to the interest and ability domains of gifted and talented children.

4.4. Implication Process

This process usually begins with an activity which aims to teach the comprehensive prerequisite knowledge about the topic. The first step includes visuals, drama, play, reading and searching techniques and methods. The second step is discussion and sharing of the knowledge acquired. This step is a preparation for the project production.

During the project production step, children produce unique, creative and imaginative products. They choose to prepare the products by self or by group.

After all they share their original project and product by the other members of the group. They present their project's properties and usage etc.

4.5. Assessment and Evaluation

The assessment and evaluation process is similar to NB Interest and Ability Domains Development Program with some unique additional techniques. For example, running records, anecdotal records etc are often used during the process.

5. Conclusion

From the beginning to the end all of the processes of our study approach to children in terms of development, education, personality. We consider a child entirely, during the identification and selection of children; determination of topics and aims; application of the program and lastly the process of assessment and evaluation. The developmental, behavioral, emotional profile and educational, communicational properties of the child is crucial in whole process. The parents of children give feedbacks about how their child is glad being here in the group study. Also children state that they feel themselves comfortable, free and happy during the studies.

To sum up; we catch the opportunity to observe the child in a peer group to determine developmental, learning, personality, interaction properties, interests, abilities and needs. Then we use the knowledge we gained by observation in order to facilitate children's learning and social interaction, to encourage their creative thinking and problem solving.

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