

# **A DIFFERENTIATED PROGRAM : SIGNIFICANT CURRICULUM ADAPTATIONS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Curricular adaptations mean what, how and when to teach as well as what and how to be evaluated. Adaptations, therefore, have an effect on curricular aims, contents, method and evaluation. Even though functioning autonomously, the curricular adaptation of one of all these factors necessarily mean modifying the others.

The model to be presented takes into account that any decision having an effect on one factor will influence all of them.

It's really possible to carry out some structural and more less constant adaptations at different levels in order to adapt the curriculum to a faster rate of learning. Obviously, the faster the learning is, the deeper the adaptation must be. However, when the learning rate is more standardized and superficial, the appropriate modifications can be perfectly introduced by any teacher capable of noticing diversity among his/her students, and they are called non-significant adaptations.

Significant curricular adaptations are those which involve very deep changes concerning aims and contents, and they also imply to modify evaluation criteria.

## INTRODUCTION

*The significant curriculum adaptation* is an educational strategy that means the design of an individualized educational program of regular curriculum goals, content and evaluation achieved during the regular scholar time which consists of a larger subject extent and a greater level of depth. Any curriculum adaptation needs not only preparing material with a balanced depth (horizontal enrichment) but also material with a deeper complexity (vertical enrichment). Individual's motivation is obviously expected to increase, since he/she is the one who beats his/her own rate of work.

Every curriculum adaptation has to be made after having developed a complete evaluation of each pupil's educational needs and an individualized curriculum proposal. Therefore, curriculum adaptations involve an "adaptation" of general educational goals, deleting or including certain contents, deciding the method to be followed and, consequently, modifying evaluation criteria. This educational strategy is designed to let each student achieve general capacities at every grade challenging his/her potential in accordance with his/her potential.

Curriculum adaptation implies a process of taking decisions about the curriculum elements to be included in order to provide solutions for students' educational needs. Such decisions must be taken under the following conceptions :

- **conception of normalization and significance** : regular curriculum is the starting and reference point.
- **conception of adapting to context** (contextualization) : knowing, as far as possible, student's school center and environment.
- **conception of reality** : that means providing them with the resources and elements needed to achieve all realistic and specific goals suggested.
- **conception of participation and involvement** : the complete teaching staff, that is, each student's teacher, tutor, support teachers, and any professional or specialist who could be required, is concerned in any curriculum adaptation.

Adaptations involve what, how and when teaching must be made; as well as what and how specific educational proposals must be evaluated. So, the matter deals with adapting the basic factors : curriculum goals, contents, method and evaluation. Even though functioning autonomously, the curriculum adaptation of any of these four factors necessarily implies modifying the others. Such is the way the model to be presented works, since any decision taken on one factor will influence all of them.

It's really possible to perform gradual adaptations which can serve for a faster rate of constant and structural learning. Obviously, the faster the learning is, the deeper the adaptation must be. However, when being the learning rate more standardized and superficial, the appropriate modifications can be perfectly implemented by any teacher capable of noticing diversity among his/her students.

*Non-significant curriculum adaptations* consist of the steps of educational implementation taken daily by students' regular teacher. But curriculum adaptations are also a product, that is, the final outcome of a research process, since they result from a larger or smaller modified planning with regard to regular curriculum.

*Significant curriculum adaptations* are those which involve very deep changes concerning aims and contents, and they also imply modifying evaluation criteria. They try to turn regular curriculum into a challenging instrument, removing from it "superficial" contents and goals.

Because of its exceptional condition, the above mentioned general strategy must be as severe, controlled and participative as possible. Firstly, **severe**, specially during the identification step : realizing a set of tests is not enough, any professional involved must know his/her pupil's situation and origin in order to consider which educational goals and contents are basic; moreover, all factors which can explain this pupil's present problems, learning rate or social and familiar context must be evaluated.

As with any educational strategy, the student's teacher has to share responsibility and information with all members of the orientation team and families, that way, this process turns out to be much more participative.

**\* Basic elements to implement significant curriculum adaptations for gifted students**  
(Alonso & Benito, 1992, p. 231) :

a) What and why to teach :

If individual aims must be adapted with reference to general objectives of each student's grade and area, content adaptation implies exactly the same. Curriculum conception means, per se, a general adaptation : from general curriculum to the curriculum project of a given school center, and from this one to the classroom program. When referring to these classroom programs, we consider those adaptations which involve a more individualized condition, and those whose contents are selected, under the following factors :

- educational need required.
- student's motivation and interests.
- how the learning style to be developed will work.
- student's evolutionary phase.
- material and resources available for the classroom.

Bearing all these **factors** in mind, adaptation can be taken with a view to the following **process** :

- Making contents sequential : Content presentation and development are arranged taking into account students' abilities and previous knowledge.
- Modification of timing : in order to follow each student's rate of learning :
  - giving priority to certain contents
  - including new contents
- Eliminating redundant contents, but always under the developmental basis of each grade or grade general aims.

To arrange content presentation and development requires :

1 - To prepare contents with an ample and multidisciplinary basis on different issues, matters and problem solving. Gifted pupils' advanced abilities justify the required modifications made on regular curriculum, as well as the ones made concerning the activities to be developed in regular classrooms (Renzulli & Reis, 1992, p. 261-269).

2 - To present comprehensive and connected experiences which manage to strengthen each other in a determine area of study.

3 - After having shown great interest in a topic, personally chosen, providing the gifted with the opportunity of going deeply into it, which will encourage his/her self-concept development; and that way, the gifted will be able to recognize and use his/her abilities in an appropriate and independent manner.

4 - To generate productive and complex techniques of thinking which can foster the development of creative "outcomes".

For this purpose, the following strategies can be used :

- creative solving of problems
- brainstorming
- synecdoche, etc.

5 - To develop the emotional domain : It is generally thought that gifted children must only develop a set of cognitive and thinking abilities; but it must not be forgotten that emotional development is necessary and a very important point from childhood. Gifted children are usually very sensitive to moral problems, generally identified with adults; so, it is essential for them to be personally and socially supported to clasify their values and attitudes and that way, they will be able to take decisions properly.

It is very useful to implement strategies aimed at the emotional domain, as : educational games, simulation, moral dilemmas, role-playing, discussions and debates, brainstorming, and so on. All these activities are designed to foster gifted students' self-concept and self-esteem development.

**b) where and when they must be taught :**

Their educational needs must be suitably served at every grade, level and phase.

**c) who and how to teach :**

There is no perfect method to solve all procedure problems that arise from serving gifted students' diversity, and since the proper strategy is required for each individual case, the method to be taken depends on the student's exhaustive evaluation made to know his/her features, interests and needs.

Obviously, the idea is to facilitate the learning process by applying the most useful method. Guide-teachers, and all professionals concerned, can use the following strategies that are based on the participative conception :

- a) to provide the student with the basic conceptual or procedure information to get him/her introduced into a sequence of learning. Nobody can forget that the gifted learn working nor by infusion.
- b) To support specifically the development of classroom group-shared activities after having been adapted.
- c) To enrich the students' curriculum with optional activities developed at the scheduled time.

- **Who** is the right person to teach must be decided by the staff, choosing the teachers trained.

- **How** to teach depends on the students' grade : but, generally speaking, the method should be active, flexible, socializing, etc; to turn it into independent study and also to encourage teamwork.

- Instructional resources : at this point, it must be stated that "a differentiated program requires abundant material". Not only regular textbook but also alternative books and work material must be used.

**Curriculum compacting is specifically designed to :**

- 1 - to create the appropriate learning atmosphere to challenge the student.
- 2 - to guarantee that basic curriculum is mastered.
- 3 - to save time and skip work in the interest of more challenging activities of enrichment and/or acceleration (Renzulli & Reis, 1992, p. 276).

**d) What, how and when to evaluate :**

Evaluation is another curriculum element which can be modified to serve gifted children's educational needs.

Evaluation is considered as follows :

\* **Progressive** : an initial evaluation is made with the beginning of teaching-learning process; another all the process long, and the last one at the end. As a conclusion of this, it must be pointed that the progression followed is very important, apart from its result, because this way, other improving strategies can be proposed.

\* **Instructive** : capable of detecting pupils' difficulties in the learning process to make their excellence possible by using the proper strategies.

\* **Criterial** : the referential is to connect each pupil with his/her initial situation, evolution and final condition.

All parts mentioned and persons concerned are required to contribute to make evaluation an useful instrument for the teaching-learning process.

- Even though depending on grade and phase, the notion for a student's right evaluation of results should be based on specific criteria as self-evaluation, a global and continual evaluation and to program an objective, standardized instrument.

The gifted student should be thought neither to finish all tasks specially assigned to him/her in addition to regular classroom work, nor to master each activity perfectly and in a short fraction of time.

Practise is required to develop their capacity for critical thinking and to be instructed in self-evaluation. Their opinions must be listened to create a guide of critical items to follow.

At the time of evaluating a student, guide-teachers must think over all tasks made apart from asking parents and other teachers for any information related with his/her progress; and finally, differentiated tasks are evaluated to prepare enrichment activities suitable for their abilities.

### **Summary**

As it has been explained through this article, adaptations involve a change of *what, how and when* teaching should be organized, as well as *what and how* evaluation should be implemented. At this moment we can say that curriculum aims and contents have been adapted with an obvious effect on method and evaluation.

With regard to non-significant curriculum adaptations, it can be stated that they imply superficial modifications of regular aims and contents. It usually happens that the mentioned aim and content adaptations become simultaneous because of the close relation existing between both elements. In other cases, it is enough to adapt method, and, it can finally be possible that the evaluation procedure has to be adapted.

However significant curriculum adaptations imply a larger removal of programmed aims and contents with a subsequent modification of evaluation criteria.

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