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## *Myth: There Is a Single Curriculum for the Gifted!*

Response by Sandra N. Kaplan

**P**resent day myths are often a consequence of lack, misinterpretation, or fear of knowledge. A lack of understanding about the purposes for developing curriculum, a misinterpretation of the elements for and uses of curriculum, and a fear of the expectations placed on teachers and students once it is developed and disseminated are factors that need to be addressed in order to disprove the myth that there could or should be a single curriculum for all gifted students.

### **DEVELOPING CURRICULUM**

Sometimes a belief in a single curriculum for the gifted is perceived to be synonymous with the concept of developing curriculum for these students.

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Proponents arguing against the formalized construction of curriculum for the gifted envision developed curriculum as means of regimenting and inhibiting the teacher and ignoring the individuality of learners. The intent of predetermined, designed or developed curriculum is confused with the implementation of such curriculum once it is constructed.

The need to develop curriculum is analogous to the need to use a map to explore a given environment. Just as a map provides the traveler with the possible and alternative routes to select in order to arrive at a given destination, a predetermined, designed, or developed curriculum provides the teacher and the learner with clearly expressed goals and objectives that can be individually experienced and attained. The purpose of a developed curriculum is not to confine the teacher or learner; it is to define the expectations of the teaching/learning process.

Absence of a developed curriculum for the gifted assumes that:

1. every teacher is able to or interested in being a curriculum writer or developer;
2. there are no common experiences that underscore appropriately differentiated curriculum for the gifted;
3. if a general curriculum is developed, all learners will have to experience it in the same way.

These assumptions are faulty and can be negated by answers to these questions. Why aren't teachers asked to write their own textbooks or courses of study? Why aren't individuals who desire to be credentialed as teachers allowed to take *any* course offering at the university rather than the required courses with options within defined areas of study?

The need and major purpose for developing curriculum for the gifted is predicated on knowledge that there is a set of common and required learning experiences for all gifted students and that teachers are responsible and accountable to provide these for the gifted. An understanding that a predetermined or developed curriculum must be *modified* to meet the needs, interests, and abilities of individual gifted learners is essential. In addition, it is important to recognize that effective teaching and learning are best affected by design and not by happenstance. The issue may not be whether or not curriculum for the gifted should be developed; the issue may be how developed curriculum should be used.

## A SINGLE CURRICULUM

Support for the concept of a single curriculum for the gifted would not be difficult to comprehend. A single curriculum would certainly make the teaching task easier, eradicate the ambiguity that exists among educators of the

gifted as to the definition and principles governing appropriately differentiated curriculum, settle the debate among researchers and theorists concerning the selection and application of curricular models, stimulate the sales of commercially produced curriculum for the gifted, and support the belief that gifted students represent a homogeneous population. However, the concept that a single curriculum could be developed to accommodate the gifted is as fallacious as the idea that a developed curriculum is all that is necessary to adequately provide for these learners.

An analysis of the possible reasons for the emergence of the myth that a single curriculum is appropriate for the gifted could, in fact, be the best means to dispell this myth. As researchers and theoreticians advocate the use of particular models for the construction of curriculum, confusion reigns between the purpose of a model for curriculum and a model curriculum. Allegiance to a given model can trap more than enhance the curriculum. While a model can provide directionality, it is often noted that adherence to a given model can force all learners into the same curricular experiences without regard for individual differences in prerequisite learnings, needs, and interests.

Another reason that the single curriculum is viewed as the answer to educating the gifted is the unequal balance between the demand that teachers attend to the gifted and the attention given to teacher training systems to prepare them for this demand. Confronted with the expectations to differentiate curricular experiences for the gifted, teachers seek the single, best, or right way to fulfill these expectations. Vulnerability to one's own concept of a successful professional, to one's class or group of gifted learners, and to the parents of these children, teachers look for a single curriculum to solve their dilemma.

In many cases, identification and evaluative issues lead teachers to believe that a single curriculum will satisfy the needs of all the gifted. An identification process that emphasizes the differences between the gifted and the nongifted without also stressing the differences among the gifted justifies the concept of a single curriculum. It encourages teachers to respond to the uniqueness of the group of gifted learners rather than to the individual learners that comprise the group. Lack of evaluative data describing the impact of differentiated curricula on the education of the gifted has caused many teachers to look for the single proven curriculum. If a particular curriculum is thought "to work," this criterion becomes the basis for selecting and using a particular single curriculum.

Still another reason for believing that there could be a single curriculum for the gifted is the proliferation of commercially prepared curriculum currently available. While all publishers profess to have "the" answer to how to educate the gifted, such curriculum is usually presented without being field tested and without data to validate the worth and appropriateness of the curriculum for the gifted. Too often, the need for curriculum outweighs concerns for the selection procedures for and uses of this curriculum. Even though commercially prepared curriculum facilitates the teaching/learning process, it should be used as an adjunct to, rather than the curriculum for the gifted.

## SUMMARY

Curriculum means the cumulative and comprehensive set of learning experiences related to the attainment of cognitive and affective personal, societal, and institutional goals. These goals are responsive to the characteristics that define the nature of giftedness. There are common elements that underscore curriculum for all gifted learners. Although the gifted share common characteristics, they also differ from each other in needs, abilities, and interests. Therefore, any curriculum must be modified to accommodate the individual gifted learner while still responding to the general nature and needs of all gifted learners. There cannot be a single curriculum for the gifted since there is not a single prototype of a gifted learner.