

Chapter 8

Empowering Teachers Through Self-Directed Learning: Rethinking Approaches for Gifted and Talented Primary Education in South Africa

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ABSTRACT

This chapter addresses the challenges South African primary school teachers face in facilitating the learning of gifted and talented learners. Despite acknowledging these learners' unique needs and potential contributions, numerous challenges exist, such as limited teacher training in gifted education, insufficient preparedness, systemic constraints, and a lack of resources. The primary concern is teachers' ability to meet these learners' needs while managing diverse classroom demands. The chapter advocates for a revamped teacher training approach, emphasizing the importance of promoting self-directed learning (SDL) to equip teachers effectively. Recommendations include among others advocating for curriculum flexibility, reducing class sizes, incorporating gifted education in teacher programs, and fostering SDL throughout prospective teachers' education. These measures aim to enhance

DOI: 10.4018/979-8-3693-1806-5.ch008

teacher effectiveness in addressing the diverse needs of gifted and talented learners in resource-limited environments.

INTRODUCTION, BACKGROUND AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

Gifted and talented learners present unique challenges within the educational sphere. While learners vary in pace and style, gifted individuals often require specialized opportunities beyond their peers, making it challenging for teachers to keep them stimulated while catering to less advanced learners (Tomlinson, 2014). Furthermore, these learners possess heightened metacognitive needs, showcasing deeper awareness of their intellectual capacities (Vidergor & Harris, 2015). Their potential societal contributions are vast, but realizing this potential necessitates nuanced teaching-learning strategies. One crucial approach is promoting self-directed learning (SDL), where learners actively participate and teachers facilitate. This chapter comprehensively explores the challenges, preparedness, and systemic issues surrounding teaching gifted and talented learners in South African primary schools. Moreover, the chapter seeks to advocate for an evolved approach to teacher training offered by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), emphasizing the significance of SDL to ensure teachers are effectively equipped to cater to the needs of such learners. The objectives of this intended chapter are: (i) To explore the challenges primary school teachers in South Africa face in facilitating gifted and talented learners because of their teacher training; (ii) to ascertain their preparedness to facilitate gifted and talented learners; (iii) to discover what tools they have at their disposal; (iv) explore broader systemic challenges they face in facilitating gifted and talented learners and (v) to emphasize the importance of prioritizing SDL in training teachers, enhancing their ability to promote the learning of gifted and talented learners effectively and self-directedly.

Despite the recognized potential and unique needs of gifted and talented learners in South Africa, primary school teachers face considerable challenges in effectively facilitating their learning. These challenges arise from limited teacher training focused on gifted education, inadequate preparedness among teachers, systemic constraints, and a lack of essential tools and resources. The overarching concern lies in the teachers' capacity to cater to these learners while managing diverse classroom needs simultaneously. There is an emergent need to understand these challenges deeply and advocate for emphasizing SDL in teacher training to equip teachers better and maximize the potential of gifted and talented learners.

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