Education & Training | Derek Cavilla

Taxonomy of affective curriculum for gifted learners

A framework for providing social–emotional learning to gifted children

In recent years, social–emotional learning has emerged as an important component of school education. Indeed, research indicates that affective development may be as critical as intellectual growth to students’ education. However, there is a lack of practical guidance for teachers on how best to deliver social–emotional learning, despite evidence that its integration into school curricula can improve academic performance. The need for an affective curriculum that encompasses social–emotional learning is even more acute for gifted learners. Gifted learners tend to have high emotional intensity and moral awareness, but they may also experience frustration at the repetition and rigidity of their school curriculum. This may have a counter-effective outcome in terms of the student’s overall performance, causing them to lack motivation and focus.

The taxonomy developed by Derek Cavilla aims not only to address this problem of underachievement of gifted learners, but goes much further than that and strives to enable them to maximise their opportunities while being able to make moral and ethical judgements.

As the demand for adequate social–emotional learning grows globally, in the United States there has been an emphasis on the power of affective education. Dr Derek Cavilla, from the University of Central Florida, has developed a framework called Cavilla’s Taxonomy of Affective Curriculum for Gifted Learners, which aims to help gifted learners achieve their potential through the power of social–emotional learning. Through this method, gifted children learn a willingness to view failure as opportunity and the ability to set meaningful goals.

The need for an affective curriculum that encompasses social–emotional learning is even more acute for gifted learners. At level 2 (grades 2 to 4), students move on from the acceptance of their role as a learner to managing their behaviour, impulse control and time management and to begin learning self-regulation. They will also begin to develop a sense of self-esteem, realising that their giftedness is a positive aspect of their personality and sense of self. The construct of empathy also begins to develop, encompassing the skills of cooperation and respect learned earlier. Gifted learners may already have a well-developed sense of empathy and this will help them in making decision-making skills, by enabling them to consider others.

At level 3 (grades 5 to 8), aspects such as grit, intrinsic motivation, curiosity, divergent thinking and self-efficacy become important. As students learn that perseverance and passion can help them...
At the final level, which encompasses US grades 9 to 12, attributes such as growth from failure, goal attainment, acceptance of ambiguity and passion become most important. As a result of frustration and confusion at the advanced academic expectations put on them, gifted learners often feel different from their peers as well as how children better understand the critical need to help gifted learners develop social and emotional skills.

Educators should help gifted learners become leaders, not only for themselves but for society and humanity as a whole. By exhibiting ‘qualities of personal leadership, empathy, respect, and an appreciation of the impact of his or her passion to his or her knowledge, resources, and potential for both humanity and the world that we share.’ Educators should help gifted learners to reach their potential to become leaders with these qualities, not only for themselves but for society and humanity as a whole. To have such an impact on the world means that we must remove the barriers that currently exist in education that prevent gifted learners from reaching their full potential.

**References**


**About Dr. Cavilla**

Dr. Derek Cavilla is an associate professor and director of the Interdisciplinary Gifted Studies Program at the University of Massachusetts Boston. He is an expert in the field of social and emotional learning for gifted students and has written extensively on the topic. His research focuses on how to maximise students’ success through social-emotional learning (SEL) and how to better identify and support underachieving and twice-exceptional students. He has held various roles, including: fifth grade teacher, high school English teacher, university professor as well as school-based administrator in both California and Florida.