**Building a nurturing environment for the gifted youth**

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*Vision of the new NEP is “An education system that contributes to an equitable and vibrant knowledge society, by providing high-quality education to all. (NEP, 2020).*

Equitable not equal education, this clearly illustrates that each individual has the right to seek education, that would fulfil the needs of their potential. The word “environment” depends upon the interaction between the student and the teacher, with particular emphasis placed on creativity and nurturing intelligence. What are the components that are required for building a nurturing environment especially for the gifted youth?

Environment as a nurturing tool plays a crucial role in the development of giftedness to become a distinguished talent. These results are consistent with Bloom (1985) and Carlson (1993), in which talent development is supported by several factors such as good teachers, potential support, sport clubs, socialization, playful activities with guidance, support from parents, and stimulation of interest. Environment gives the gifted opportunities to manifest gifted potentials and to support individuals’ aptitude to be nurtured through various interfaces.

Additionally, giftedness requires social context that allows individuals’ abilities to be flourished. The analytical abilities are affected by the environment factors, which is consistent with Tannenbaum (1991) that child’s environments such as family, peers, school, and community, beside the social, economical, and political institutions can help to determine the field of talent.

In an educational system, the universities, educational institutes of the country and the educators, teachers, professors and the facilities that bind this system contribute to the environment for nurturing. India has had rich resources in all three sections dating several 100 years. We have once again brought forth the richness in education through the NEP 2020. Gifted students have been promised several privileges that will cater to enrich their learning experiences.

**The nurturing environment:** If we ask the gifted what support they would like in their pursuits in life, the answers would be freedom of expression, flexibility in the system and compassion to understand when the situation seems beyond the others comprehension. Nevertheless, it has been seen that unless they are shown a star far away, a constrain that pushes all their engines to see beyond the boundaries they are able to set, gifted do tend to relax and not have task commitment. The environment has to give both the facilities and a constraint to work with. If they were able to explain and express themselves to the others, we would still not be able to comprehend the joys and conflicts in their lives. Therefore, what can we do to incorporate them in our lives and yet create a space that is cooperative!

**Educational Institutions:**

‘*Helping talent soar’* was the theme of the Johns Hopkins University Center for Talented Youth (CTY) as it celebrated its 25th Anniversary in 2004. It is almost 40 years and CTY has showcased its prominence in catering to researchers and students who work with the gifted population. We need to establish exclusive universities that will give a wholesome meal for the craving advanced learners of our country. Interdisciplinary subjects, flexible program modules, easy finance to meet higher studies, subsidized travel and access to the best resources in the country. Gifted youth crave in-depth, varied diverse content and freedom to explore the subjects with faculty of higher standards. The place that one visits regularly to learn and get stimulated needs to be an environment that is open and welcoming for the youth.

Students struggle to find a perfect subject match that they are interested, or may strive to select the most advanced subjects in their own neighbourhood for higher education. When we set up knowledge centres across India, with new age technology and access for learning that promotes high end research, brings solutions to current environmental issues, and brainstorms to create a platform for discussion and debates that leads us towards creating an environment that helps nurturing the gifted youth. We have premium educational institutes in India, if they were made easily available would gifted be productive, should we keep the competitiveness and ensure that they work towards the goal. The environment plays a major role in influencing the direction of each gifted youth.

**Campus with upgraded learning resources:**

Students look for university and educational institutes that offer hybrid, flexible courses. Along with it they seek libraries that have preferably access for longer hours, reading facilities and rooms for their project work with lounges that have access to good wifi, space for a peaceful discussion spots for their project work. Access to the campus at all hours with overnight reading and lab facilities. Learning styles of gifted are either owl type or the early morning bird types having to cater to the needs of both a 24-hour facilities for their learning makes it a joy. If the campus has canteen with facilities for beverages and a quick snack these facilities are more conducive for an enriching learning environment. If they can loan books and utilize serve providers with connections for material across the global makes their chances for joining such campus more lucrative. A gifted dream of campus that are friendly with support from educational staff and facilities that facilitate high end learning, delivery and lastly sets high standards for their course work is what most expect from an educational institution. Choice of electives should not be institute based rather student based. It is tough to choose electives with limited options and force fit oneself into something one does not have the heart to learn.

 The educators who nurture such minds are the next most important person in the gifted youth life.

**Academic educators:**

Teachers also play an important role in the development of talent (Bloom, 1985; Csikzentmihalyi et al., 1993). Students are not motivated to participate and excel in their activities that are instruction based and lack freedom of thought and expression. Gifted require an environment that is conducive to explore, encourage and break the ceiling to discover and innovate. Educators who have passion for continued learning create a space for the younger youth to seek education that is satisfying and productive. Educators who share their insights and constantly share updated knowledge with their students are able to cater to the gifted. Those are accepting of the unique characteristics of the gifted and their weird sense of humor, their quirks of being emotionally either hot and cold in different times, either they pursue the teachers constantly or may visit only when required, they may bring different perspectives for discussions which may not be acceptable by the societal norms, it’s the duty of the educator to be accepting and positive. This encourages the gifted to continue to seek their interactions and mentoring from the educators.

Teachers who incorporate open questions, encourage self-discovery and do inquiry based learning are able to create the right mode for learning suitable for the gifted. Such efforts by the educators definitely ensure that the gifted are understood, they do require additional discussion to be heard for their bright wild ideas, need directions that lead to focussed outcome for their projects, research work.

Gifted youth enjoy a good group of focussed discussions about their favourite topic and subject. This makes them alive and look forward to come back with more material and points to add to the discussion. The university campus that share spaces for such live discussions regularly and sets opportunities that meet this demand ensures that the gifted have an elevating learning curve.

**Supporting the growth of the students:**

Teachers are a source of encouragement, who challenge and guide them are seen as powerful influencers. Challenge need not be always positive and pleasant, questioning whether they are happy with their submission or even slight criticisms like *‘I expected more from your presentations’, ‘I feel that your best is yet to be seen’* can all be actually a triggering fact to make them churn their best. A teacher who understands the students’ strength and potential would be able to easily nudge and motivate the student to deliver beyond his current performance.

Teachers to push the boundary for the gifted youth:

1. Their classes may be for regular students but they will definitely have components that would cater to the gifted students.
2. They should have time to encourage independent projects and discussions.
3. They enable a socio-emotional connect that gifted seek from their educators.
4. Those who don’t dismiss the gifted but give them credit for their unique thought process and believe in their ability.
5. Who have connections beyond college level with university and industry so that students can have more application oriented work.
6. Who encourages students to do interdisciplinary and intercollege activities.

Working with gifted students is not an easy task but definitely stimulating and satisfying. Since these students grasp concepts quickly, they need to be challenged with advanced concepts and curriculum to keep up with their accelerated learning.

 Gifted students responded better to teachers who listened carefully to them. This need was explained by one of the teachers when she stated that *"gifted students have special insight as problem solvers and algorithm makers; they have their own methods and sometimes have a hard time verbalizing them."*

 When given a choice, most gifted students either worked alone or gravitated to a group of students who were intellectually their peers at times the peers may be 2-3 years ahead of their own course. As one of the teachers described, "*Gifted students generally enjoy working with students who are near their own ability and display an ability to abstract ideas, inject a creative sense of humor, and revel in their ability to impress others with new found knowledge.*"

**Encouraging self-directed learners:** Since early 1980s self-directed learning has identified as been individualized education, autonomous learning, independent learning or self-teaching. Gifted are so engrossed and try out several ways to do the same topic, it is fun to introduce the autonomous learner or independent style to them (Betts & Neihart, 1986). Gifted prefer self-exploration than be given instructions, it opened several doors for learning, be it project methods, in-depth studies, seminars, or enrichment. Educators who can set topics that can be done using any of the methods the student enjoys being in charge of their own learning and this freedom will also remove dull complaints that educators are not doing much for them.

**Joys of Library and books:** This section is the most joyful for any avid advanced learner. Even simple joys like the facility to issue multiple books with more weeks and renewal procedures rather than a limited period and book loan. Huge buildings having rows of latest reference books and audio material with pleasing and quiet ambience for reflecting and writing notes in a library. These are the privileges that they seek and to have rules extended, accommodate the new views like to be able to take multiple course simultaneously. To work with an industry and apply for grants even in undergraduate level and assist in research projects whenever the student feels they have acquired knowledge to move ahead. Instead of looking at the changes as favouring only the selected few and the ambience should be the joy of discovering and being supportive in the journey of that student who is also showcasing new possibilities of learning. To have the list for latest books, new software and course materials which are beyond the course realm and ensuring this is regularly updated is anyone’s dream.

**Educational Loans and Travel concessions:**

Learning need not be necessary localized to one geographical place. Youth and travel is synonyms; students can widen their spectrum if they can move around for few semesters and learn from different states or cities. Educational loans are already available through several governmental schemes and charitable trusts. Exploration for new perspective in any subject, working on a patent, or anthropological projections and look for environmental solutions or modifying an instrument for house hold purposes.

**Nurturing Talent development:**

So much has been covered about academic advanced learning and the cognitive aspects of being gifted which mostly takes precedence in most cultures. In India like most old cultural civilizations the focus on art, talent in music, dance, and linguistic pursuits have been rooted in our country. We have encouraged and continued to sustain several art forms in the traditional formats and likewise encouraged modern expression of art as well.

Youth is a time when the explosion of talent is exhibited, students visit other colleges within the city and outside to showcase their talent in front of other aspiring youth. This exchange helps sustain the interest and continue the form of expression and cross cultural learning.

Academic institutions need to encourage basic academic performances and encourage and support those who demonstrate talents like drawing, painting, singing even in University levels. This would imply that if a child demonstrated a talent in school years we need to encourage and appreciate the child at that stage so that they can continue without biases, negativity into their college years.

Society, family systems need to embrace a child who demonstrates talent at a young age and as they grow up as young adults to continue their education of seeking opportunities to showcase talent needs to be made available. Gifted youth are very dynamic they have been two possibilities the traditional practices with the mentors guiding talented artists which has been a practice for centuries. Secondly seeking fusion and creating new pathways in the area of talent is something a few explore. Parents, maestros and all concern should be open and accepting of the individual growth and progress. Youth prefer adapting, modifying and setting new trends in their expression of art, if they are criticised to try different versions and ridiculed they may give up or rebel more loudly and maybe destructive. Mentors need to give enough opportunities for their expressions.

Create venues for their exhibits, concerts, programs for them to express their talent and seek audience and the feedback to help them to grow in their own path. They also require support in finance and travel to make several of their dreams possible. They need to attend several senior artists and learn from observing their performances similarly they need to also perform for groups towards their progress. Making opportunities to hone their skills and wide coverage and reach with artists across the state, country helps them to have a wider reach. Easily scholarships and opportunities to meet artists and work along with them would be a treat to build their skills and learn directly how to conduct, express and showcase their talent.

**Coaching socio-emotional skills in the gifted youth:** Asynchronous is a mismatch of the cognitive and socioemotional development. Gifted struggle with emotional regulation, they may come across being totally blunt and speak cognitively without emotions making it tough for social interactions with their peers. This may also lead to feeling isolated, a few may get bullied as well, as they are smarter academically but so vulnerable that they are targeted. To make the environment conducive, we need to sensitize the peers how to include and work with such gifted students has to be done intermittently. Secondly coaching gifted students to be able to regulate their emotions in front of educator and peers so they know how to share their views in a manner that is socially acceptable. Lastly building compassion amongst staff and peers in the college campus to be accepting of individual differences and embrace students of higher ability without setting them apart from the main classmates. The university campus which has students sensitized to embrace students of all abilities creates a friendly ambience for higher ability students. Counseling cells that caters to gifted counseling and career counseling are also lucrative in a university campus.

In conclusion, we can definitely state that freedom of speech, flexibility in curriculum and electives along with space to work out their ideas helps a gifted youth. Constraints challenges gifted to think other ways and stretch their minds, while support from educators, mentors enable them to come out with best performances.

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