**EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR STARTING AND DEVELOPING PROGRAMS FOR GIFTED MEXICAN CHILDREN**

At the Universidad de los Niños we apply specialized strategies to develop the programs needed to nurture gifted Mexican children. We initiated and developed programs that expose the students to experience not commonly found in regular schools. Specifically, we provide a learning and supportive environment in which Mexican gifted students share experiences with intellectual peers and stimulate each others thinking and creativity. This results from providing students with a broad vision of an area of interest. We have been guiding students through investigations and research processes, providing them with experiments in the latest up to date scientific advances. We apply and use a diversity of strategies for developing the students academic, communication, planning forecasting, creative and evaluation talents. We also work on diverse strategies and principles for developing the gifted child’s self esteem. We attain our goals by applying the principles of holistic education, and by producing a transfer effect of academic abilities to real life situations.

It is well known that starting and developing programs is a challenging experience. Developing programs specifically geared to enhance scientific abilities in gifted children is like going to “Hard Knocks University”. The need exists, but prevailing myths and cultural backgrounds prevent the public from reaching out and nurturing the gifted child’s talents.

At the Universidad de los Niños we develop students’ potential through “hands--on experience. The program is also designed to encourage the students to develop his/her individual potential while interacting with intellectual peers. A very important part of the program is based on the development of abilities through a self—appraisal and recognition of personal talents (Affective education).

We also focus on creating awareness and understanding concerning the behavioral characteristics of gifted children while nurturing their talents.

1. **Strategies Used to Implement the Program Specially Designed for Gifted Mexican Children**

The program starts as early as preschool through eighth grade. The students are placed in three different levels: beginners, intermediate and advanced. The children are placed in the workshops according to interest and ability, not according to age. The experiments are adapted to accommodate the level of each group according to age and specific ability.

We use **The Taylor Model** which has proved its effectiveness throughout the years. These planned activities for Mexican children, which are related to the world of work, give us the opportunity to increase the transfer of school learning to real life situations. Our workshops prove that our job is relevant and transcendental.

It is of the utmost importance to recognize and develop children’s talents and abilities necessary for success in the real world as early as possible. Under these circumstances exceptional talents are less likely to be lost.

Experience has taught us that these strategies do develop six different talent areas in Mexican children by adapting them to youngsters’ cultural background and personal experience. The end result is that growth of knowledge constantly occurs during the specialized science workshops. All the questioning, observation, experimentation, manipulation of materials and observation of results, lead to this growth. The curriculum for the workshops has been adapted to meet the needs and special interests of Mexican gifted children and youth.

We also supplement the program by modifying it in certain ways that adapt to our Mexican children; then we combine them with other models, and self—awareness activities.

**Self—awareness activities** are a vital part of the education for life situations for the gifted. Through these activities gifted children become aware of their attitudes and values and the frame of reference of others. One way to encourage self-awareness of other is through a sequence which helps to build confidence in the gifted student’s ability to discuss and to relate to others.

**The Boundary Breaker activities, Encounter Lessons, Guided fantasies and Simulation Games,** are some of the strategies incorporated into each lesson. These help stimulate creativity and develop positive feelings of worth. These activities form an essential part of each lesson where they are added to the open—ended science activities and hands—on experiments.

The combination of teaching strategies with the science experiments created during the classes, are effective ways of inducing high levels of thinking. Through the use of all these activities the children demonstrate critical thinking, creative thinking and logical thinking. Gifted students fulfill their need of profundity of thinking. They get involved in producing and understanding fun and scientific experiments at an advanced level.

The workshops provide numerous students with experience, knowledge, and appreciation for talent. Through the hands—on experiments on the latest scientific up-to-date technological advances students are able to define career opportunities when “tasting” real life opportunities during each workshop. Then they have many opportunities to plan their future accordingly.

**B) Taproot Supporting the Need for Specialized Workshops for Gifted Mexican Students**

A very important factor, supporting the need for gifted education in Mexico City, is that our students are many times mistakenly seen as “problem children” because of misunderstanding of their behavioral characteristics (characteristics which often fall into the behavioral pattern of the gifted personality).

Our program was developed by educating parents and making the public aware of the importance of nurturing the needs of gifted students. Because little or no programs exist in either private or public schools for the talented, creative and gifted children of Mexico City, the need for implementing special programs was essential. Awareness of the situation in many Mexican schools, where children are placed into inflexible academic grade levels according to age, encouraged the creation of opportunities for the gifted and talented Mexican children.

We create a proper environment for children, who are held back in their learning or need further stimulating programs because they become easily bored in the regular classroom. By applying specific strategies for enriching and developing their potential our program guides students who otherwise could turn into individuals who misbehave. Therefore they are often seen as students with emotional problems. They are many times encouraged to search for psychological help, which can help in many respects, but does not fix their quench for learning.

Through the use of the Taylor Model we prove to be very effective. A positive outcome is obtained from each lesson. These planned activities for Mexican children, which are related to the world of work, give us the opportunity to increase the transfer of school learning to real life situations. By teaching these workshops we do a job that is relevant and transcendental. It is of the utmost importance to recognize and develop children’s talents and abilities necessary for success in the real world as early as possible. Under these circumstances exceptional talents are less likely to be lost.

1. **We Focus Specifically on Developing the Entire Individual; This Includes Developing the Students’ Talents Together With Their Emotional Growth.**

We develop six different talent areas in Mexican children by adapting them to youngsters’ cultural background and experience. When planning the lessons we chose activities that develop the following talents:

1. Academic Talent

This talent is used to provide the students with the new knowledge.

1. Creative Talent

The creative talent is defined as the ability to go beyond and come up with new solutions or new ways of expression. We use strategies that also help the children increase their fluency (ability to generate many different types of ideas or solutions) as well as their flexibility (ability to consider a problem from many points of view) and their originality (ability to generate unique ideas and solutions).

1. Communication Talent

These strategies effectively help students in understanding the complexity of human interaction.

D) Forecasting Talent

Children exercise and develop their forecasting talent. They evaluate cause and effect sequences, and decide what is most likely to happen based on this evaluation. We use learning strategies that encourage Mexican children to explore many of the possible conditions affecting each issue, before making their predictions.

1. Planning Talent

Gifted Mexican students develop their planning abilities, which involve skills in the following three areas:

1. Elaboration
2. Sensitivity to problems
3. Organizing

Students get involved in different types of planning activities. They are the following: Diversified planning, un-planning, and flexible planning.

1. Decision Making Talent.

This ability involves experimental evaluation, logical evaluation, and judgment. Since the children have constantly worked as if they were young adults in the real world (because our workshops turn into experimental laboratories) they have many opportunities to develop experimental evaluation. This involves considering the possible solutions from a variety of viewpoints. The students get ample opportunity to use their judgment in decision making abilities.

We also supplement the program by modifying it in certain ways that adapt to Mexican children, by combining them with other models, and self—awareness activities as I mentioned earlier.

The boundary breaker activities, Encounter Lessons, Guided fantasies and Simulation Games, are some of the strategies incorporated into each lesson. These help stimulate creativity and develop positive feelings of worth. These activities form an essential part of each lesson where they are added to the open—ended science activities and hands—on experiments. These combined activities are effective ways of inducing high levels of thinking. Through the use of all these activities the children demonstrate critical thinking, creative thinking and logical thinking. Gifted students fulfill their need for profundity and acuteness of thinking. They get involved in producing and understanding fun and scientific experiments at an advanced level.

Through these hands—on experiments on the latest scientific up-to-date technological advances, students are also able to define career opportunities when “tasting” real life opportunities during each workshop. They constantly get opportunities to plan their future accordingly.

It is a fact that the Universidad de los Niños has imparted over 110 different courses to approximately 250 students. Our specialized programs have helped at least 80% of our students in bettering their student—teacher relationships at school and elsewhere. The program has also helped students improve their grades and increase their decision making abilities the workshops provide.

A proof of our success is the parent’s constant supervision and the children’s eagerness in learning. Another proof of success is students’ eagerness to return each trimester to participate and study in the next workshop and specifically our students’ life and career accomplishments are obviously our successes too.