

Diversity and School Curriculum: the response of the Spanish educational system to the needs of academically highly able pupils

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In Spain, there is a growing awareness that diversity, and the special educational needs arising out of it, are not only reflected in the social sphere and the school system but also in legislation. Legal changes since 1990 have had many implications for the education of highly able pupils: the Resolución of 29 April 1996 extends the principles of integration and diversity to all pupils, not exclusively the handicapped. The present study overviews the possibilities under current Spanish legislation for responding and adapting to the educational needs of highly able pupils. It shows how the legislation and guiding principles of the Spanish educational system make it possible to give an effective response to educating highly able students. However, work is needed on the adaptation of diagnostic tests and curricular material, and the training of specialized professionals.

Introduction

In Spain, there is a growing awareness that diversity, and the special educational needs arising out of it, must not only be catered for in the social sphere and the school system, but also by legislation. Although this has long been recognized for children with physical or mental handicaps, it was not so for pupils whose differences lay in their high ability or talent in some area. Ample evidence of this change in attitude is provided by the parents' associations, organizations, measures and laws which have sprung up over the past few years. Additionally, for some years now, Spain has been witnessing a significant increase in research into this area, along with growing interest on the part of legislators and national and regional education authorities. Evidence of this is provided by studies such as those of Castelló Tarridas and Genovard (1990), Garcia Yagüe (1986), Genovard (1990), Perez Sanchez (1993) and others; like those which appeared in the special issue of the journal *Revista de Ciencias de la Educación* or in the journal *Faiscas* (published by the Asociación de Altas Capacidades, Santiago de Compostela) on gifted children; by the large number of books and papers published by the education authorities (see, among others, Apraiz de Elorza, 1996; Arocas Sanchez et al., 1994; Centro Nacional de Recursos para la Educación especial, 1991; Garcia & Abaurrea, 1997); or by the increasing number of doctoral theses in Spanish universities on this subject (see, for example, Garcia Artal, 1991; Gonzalez Roman, 1993; Izquierdo Martinez, 1993; Juidias Barroso, 1991; Lopez Andrada, 1991), together with the formation of permanent work groups on this subject in the universities of Santiago de Compostela, Murcia, Navarra, Barcelona, the Complutense, etc. Such widespread interest in this area augurs well for its future. However, it would also be true to say that a greater impetus is needed to put the latest legal developments into practice, to create organizations which consolidate what has been achieved, and to facilitate communication between researchers, practitioners and administrators. Not only does special attention for more able pupils require social interest, it also demands legal adjustments, notably by making the educational system more flexible. No country can afford not to provide resources and to legislate appropriately so that the social initiatives in this direction can develop easily. The latest instances of legislative sensitivity on this issue are to be found in Real Decreto 696/1995 of 28 April 1996, dealing with the education of pupils with special needs (BOE no. 131,2 June 1995; RD 13290, p. 16179), and in the Orden of 24 April 1996, on the conditions and procedure for making the normal period of compulsory schooling

more flexible (BOE no. 107, 3 May 1996, p. 15545). (Real Decreto and Orden are compulsory legal norms which develop and specify the principles established by laws, and are promulgated by national or autonomic authorities. The sequence is: Ley-Real Decreto-Orden Ministerial.) Fortunately, Spain seems to be on the way to establishing a framework within which it will be possible to make something that is pedagogically incontrovertible come true. It is our intention here to provide an overview of the possibilities afforded by the current Spanish legislation for catering for, and adapting to, the educational needs of highly able pupils. We should point out, however, that as many of these measures are very new, we cannot provide any information about their implementation. We shall, therefore, confine ourselves to analyzing how useful they could be in principle. The Reform of the Spanish School System Awareness of limitations in the legislation set out in the 1970 Education Act, and the problems of adapting this to the needs of a democratic society committed to European integration and faced with swift changes, led the Ministry of Education in June 1987 to draw up the Education Reform Bill (Proyecto para la Reforma de la Enseñanza). This aimed to improve the quality of education, and to restructure the curriculum coherently and uniformly throughout the various sectors to meet the needs of society, schools and the pupils themselves (Libro Blanco para la Reforma del Sistema Educativo, 1987). Spain is now (academic year 1997-1998) in the final year of implementing the system (outlined in the Ley de Ordenación General del Sistema Educativo, LOGSE, 1/1990, 3 October). This provides, firstly, an openmindedness to incorporating new proposals and, secondly, a suitable infrastructure of human and material resources, both for research and to meet the practical needs of special teaching for highly able pupils.

Table 1. Main educational changes in Spain from the *Ley General de Educación* to the present day (from LGE to LOGSE)

	Situation prior to the reform LGE (1970), LISMI (1982)	Situation today LOGSE (1990)
<i>Compulsory education</i>	6–14 years	6–16 years
<i>Educational stages</i>	Educación Preescolar (4–6 years) Educación General Básica (6–14 years) Bachillerato Unificado Polivalente (15–17 years) Curso de Orientación Universitaria (18 years) Formación Profesional I and II (15–18 years)	Preschool, kinder (0–6 years) Primary school (6–12 years) Secondary school (12–16 years) High school (16 years onwards)
<i>Catering for diversity</i>	Special education and the resources on which it relies are provided only for children with some kind of disability. The concept of special educational needs applies to permanent difficulties which some children have.	Special education is a way of providing services for all children. There is diversity among children which is reflected in a continuum of educational needs, which are either temporary or permanent, and which have different origins connected with the social or educational context, or with personal circumstances associated with some disability or high intellectual ability.
<i>Curriculum proposal</i>	Two types of curriculum: ordinary curriculum and special curriculum.	A single kind of curriculum which is intended to keep the balance between comprehensiveness (the common curriculum) and diversity (curricular adjustments and modifications).

Table 1 shows some of the changes that have taken place since the Ley General de Education (LGE) of 1970, including the Ley de Integración Social de los Minusválidos (LISMI) 13/1982 of 7 April, and taking the situation up to the present day. However, in view of the limits of the concept of special needs even in the LOGSE, and the importance of regulating and making more specific articles 36 and 37 of the latter, the Ministry of Education has issued various legal measures to resolve this situation. In Article 3.2 of Real Decreto 696/1995, reference had already been made to the needs, be they temporary or permanent, of highly able pupils, notably that they must be educated within ordinary centres and programmes (in accord with the principle of integration). Nonetheless, it was envisaged that they might be able to attend specialized centres in certain cases or situations. In this same article, some general principles are outlined which should be adhered to while these children are attending school: they should have psychological and pedagogical assessment and continuous follow-up, and any decisions affecting them should be reviewed from time to time, and be reversed if necessary. Chapter II of the Real Decreto deals specifically with the special educational needs associated with academically talented children. Catering for these needs is to include "taking care to foster a balanced development of the various kinds of ability set out in the general objectives

of the different educational stages". The Ministry of Education and Science is to determine the assessment procedure to be followed and establish the range of educational measures to be adopted (Articles 10 and 11). The Orden of 24 April 1996 states the conditions and procedure for making the period of compulsory schooling more flexible for the academically talented. The Resolution passed by the Secretary of State for Education on 29 April of the same year stipulates the procedures that should be followed to guide the educational response to pupils with special educational needs associated with high ability. This Resolution is intended to establish:

- the procedure for requesting grade skipping or early entrance;
- an appropriate form of psychopedagogical assessment;
- the register of the special curricular measures used;
- ways of guiding the educational response to students with high academic ability. It is noteworthy that the above-mentioned Resolution makes the following points:
 - catering for these students must fit in with the ordinary measures for catering for diversity established by the school's Curricular Project;
 - the period of compulsory education can be made more flexible either by early entrance or by grade skipping;
 - the educational response is to include curricular and organizational measures such as adaptation of the curriculum, which in this case requires enrichment of objectives and contents, more flexible assessment criteria, the use of methods more in keeping with these students' learning style and their school context, and the use of flexible organizational formulae to enable pupils to join groups of a level other than that of their own age group.

Within the existing legal framework, then, and that of the complementary provisions which may be made on the basis of this Decreto and the ministerial Orden, we can state that a decisive step has been made which will further ease the implementation of strategies appropriate to these special, though far from uncommon, situations. We must bear in mind that this reform process raises to the status of law certain principles and guidelines which are designed to transform the educational system, which may give an idea of the possibilities which are being opened up for putting educational intentions into practice. This last aspect is precisely what differentiates processes of educational renewal which remain within the sphere of desirable intentions from a reform process which is both supported and driven by the law.

Psychopedagogical Bases of the Spanish Educational System

This section outlines the main psychopedagogical features of the present Spanish educational system.

- LOGSE: Epistemologically, LOGSE takes the 'constructivist' paradigm to be the most appropriate when seeking a basis for the teaching-learning process. This paradigm is an alternative to the quantitative/empiricist paradigm as it focuses on the subjective role of the acquisition of knowledge, instead of the objective worth of the world which must be learnt about. From this point of view, human development and learning are basically the result of a process of construction in which both the innate aspects of the person and the different experiences provided by the environment play a part. Educational action is viewed as an interactive process in which the pupil constructs his or her learning on the basis of previous knowledge and experience through a process of human mediation (teacher-pupil). In this

context, the school has a particular role to change society. In fact, attending to pupils, which in the 1970s was seen within an individualized focus and had clinical-therapeutic overtones, LOGSE takes on a broader perspective, and the socio-educational context is the new basic point of reference for all educational action.

- As basic components, it gathers together the contributions of the various cognitive strands of inter-war European psychology. This is why 'significant' learning is emphasized, as a form of learning which is established through relationships and modifications between integrated concepts and new ones. Another feature that bears witness to this background is the functional quality of learning: it is not only learning of a conceptual kind, but it turns into 'a procedure by which one can learn to learn' (LOGSE, Article 2.1). In fact, the reform emphasizes the 'functionality of intellectual, emotional and social skills', rather than the accumulation of knowledge.

- Handling individual differences is another pillar of LOGSE. The Spanish educational system starts from the premise that everyone has the right to specific education and attention. All pupils need help, not only those who are poorly suited to study. As has been shown, it is not a case of trying to make everyone normal, or imposing the democratic principle of egalitarianism, but rather of catering for the specific needs which each pupil has (LOGSE, Article 2.3). In the light of these new principles which underlie the reform of the education system, we believe that in Spain a suitable moment has come to develop a curriculum plan that can respond to each and every subject with special educational needs. The technological, empirical, positive paradigm which inspired the curriculum in the 1970s has changed over the 1980s and 1990s into an integrating, understanding, holistic paradigm (see Benedito, 1987a,b; Escudero, 1984; Gimeno, 1982, 1988; Pla, 1989; Torre, 1993a,b). The reform of the Spanish educational system which we are in the midst of today sees the curriculum as the link and line of communication between educational theory and pedagogical practice. It guarantees the integration of theory and practice in the concrete context of each school, involving teachers in the responsibility for adapting what has been prescribed by law to the possibilities in each centre (Ministerio de Educacion y Ciencia, 1993). This constant adjustment process makes it necessary to assess systematically the educational needs of each centre, and to plan around a specific curriculum, the Educational Project or set of intentions which are to be pursued in each school. This proposal, which is innovative on an ideological, academic, cultural and social level, implicitly bears within itself a process of personal, institutional and community growth which calls for approaches that are flexible, constructive and understanding. We shall go on to look at these aspects in more detail with a view to deciding which of the various curricular and organizational options designed to cater for diversity can best be adjusted to the characteristics of highly able students. Characteristics of the Curriculum in the Spanish Educational System Flexible Curriculum To guarantee the coherence and continuity of education in Spain, the Ministry of Education drew up a Diseño Curricular Base (Base Curricular Design, DCB) which offers a common curricular framework for the various stages of pre-school and compulsory education. Nonetheless, this basic design represents a maximum degree of openness and flexibility, as it allows each school to adapt the curriculum and put it into practice differently, thus avoiding homogeneity throughout the country. The DCB contains the following elements:

- defining the general objectives of the stage, expressed in terms of abilities which the pupil will have acquired at the end of that stage;

- defining the areas into which the various spheres of knowledge are to be organized;
- defining the major subject blocks containing the facts, concepts, procedures, values and attitudes which are considered particularly suitable for developing the abilities set out in the objectives for that area;
- describing the didactic and assessment guidelines, in which a set of principles are suggested for designing teaching-learning activities and assessment methods which are in line with the psychopedagogical thinking that underlies the rest of the DCB (Marchesi & Martin, 1989; Ministerio de Educacion y Ciencia, 1989, 1993).

Thus, the educational proposal in each centre, known as the Proyecto Curricular (Curricular Project), is decided on with reference to the DCB and the laws which set the curriculum at any educational level or, in some cases, the laws and standards set by the education authorities of the autonomous community to which the school belongs.

All these aspects are of outstanding importance with regard to the matter at hand, as every school in Spain is obliged to reflect on, analyze, discuss and compare its educational aims with reference to the general objectives of each stage. Schools must also assess their material and human resources in view of the objectives they have in mind. This evaluation of the infrastructure and educational needs implies that the pupils' main features have to be defined, along with their needs, their cognitive and motor potential, their balanced personal development, interpersonal relationships and social activity. It is the comparison of these data with the contents of the official curriculum that enables each school to define its Proyecto Curricular, and to reconsider the relevance of changes to the objectives in each stage and area (Coll et al., 1988, 1992; Puigdemívol, 1993). In this, it is possible for schools to modify the objectives of the official curriculum, and also specify other aims that might be directly related to a particular need or problem in the school. Constructive and Comprehensive Curriculum As can be deduced from the above, by drawing up the curriculum plans for the school and its programmes of activities and tasks, the teachers not only decide on the practical details of the curriculum, but also take part in forming it within a constructivist psychopedagogical framework. This constructivist framework has double implications for the curriculum. Firstly, the DCB does not prescribe any particular didactic methodology, as it takes there to be many ways of helping pupils to construct knowledge—the teacher can do whatever he or she feels necessary to stimulate, maintain and extend the pupil's constructive, dynamic learning process. Secondly, the present concept of the curriculum does not only focus on cognitive aspects, as meaningful learning does not only entail the construction of the meaning of what is being learnt, but also implies that it is imbued with a personal meaning. Bearing this in mind, the most effective way of helping a pupil in his or her learning process will depend on his or her capacity to adapt to the situation, and on the teacher's psychopedagogical abilities to provide types of help to match all the different needs, characteristics and rhythms of each one (see Coll, 1991). In short, LOGSE's view of the curriculum definitely excludes methodological approaches based on uniformity. In the name of a truly comprehensive outlook, it aspires to embrace diversity in an integrated manner, by setting a minimum core of common content which is accompanied by procedures and models for the adaptation of the curriculum to the individual to guarantee that all pupils have access to educational experiences. This ensures a balance between comprehensiveness and diversity.

Global Curriculum

A further characteristic which goes some way towards explaining the nature of the present curriculum in Spain is that it is an integrated, global curriculum. Several reasons underlie this choice in the context of the present reform (cf. Torres, 1994):

- It is child centred, which means that when deciding on the priorities for meeting pupils' needs, it takes the view that the inner law of development for each person must be respected.
- Action and experience are a determining factor in the generation of meaningful learning. An education system divorced from reality or presented to the pupil in a fragmented form would be impossible for the pupil to recognize, would awaken no interest and would not provide constructive experience.
- It emphasizes the development of skills and processes. Along the lines that quality education has to include the ability to deal with and apply knowledge, the global curriculum counteracts a type of teaching that concentrates excessively on memorizing facts.
- It reflects an interdisciplinary approach. The contents are not devised in isolation from each other, and both pupils and teachers have the power to take the initiative and make decisions regarding curriculum planning, development and assessment.

Curriculum to Cater for Diversity

Another feature of the curriculum proposed by the reform concerns the desire to cater for individual differences and promote teaching that can adapt (LOGSE, Articles 20.4, 36 and 37, 63 and 64). As Miras (1991) shows, the way of handling diversity which is most compatible with a constructivist concept of school learning and teaching is the adaptative model of education. Adaptative teaching (see Corno & Snow, 1986; Cronbach & Snow, 1977; Glasser, 1977) aims to confront diversity by applying different educational methods designed to suit the individual characteristics of the learners; each learns better in different ways, and individualization does not consist of teaching in the same way one-to-one, but of teaching each pupil according to his or her characteristics.

Measures for Catering for Diversity

The adoption of an open and flexible view of curriculum design is an essential stage on the way to ensuring that learning is meaningful and that diversity can be catered for. In the following, we set out a brief description of the main curricular measures which guarantee that the principles outlined previously find expression, and explain the organizational measures which are a necessary concomitant of the former (see Figure 1).

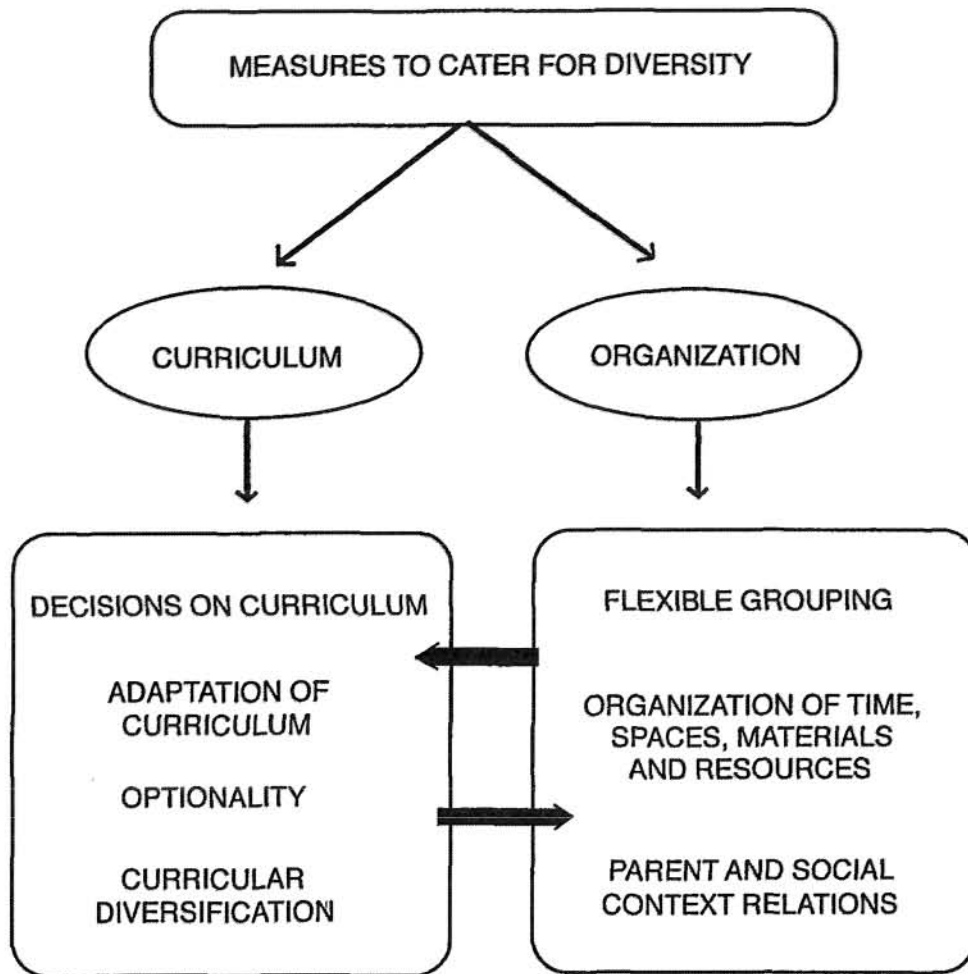


Figure 1. Measures concerning curriculum and organization envisaged by the present Spanish educational system to cater for diversity.

Measures Concerning Curriculum

Decision-making. Decision-making about the curriculum (LOGSE, Article 4) is compatible with a flexible, open conception of the curriculum. This measure enables the teachers to respond to their pupils' educational needs, as there is plenty of room for deciding on the way objectives should be programmed, for dealing with subjects in varying depth, and for allowing more flexibility in assessment criteria and pedagogical methods.

Adaptations. Adaptation of the curriculum is one of the ways of exploiting its flexible nature. This means that the teachers should analyze the situation of an individual or group of pupils exhaustively, taking into account any advantages or disadvantages in each case, and then prepare a curriculum which could contain anything from a straightforward change in the time-scale for reaching a common objective, to the adaptation of assessment and the priority given to certain objectives or areas of the curriculum, to the omission or introduction of some curricular activity (Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia, 1992a,b, 1993).

There are various ways of adapting the curriculum:

Table 2. Comparison of present proposal of curriculum adjustment and modifications to cater for the talented

	Present proposal for catering for SEN	Proposal for catering for talented student
<i>Non-significant adaptation of curriculum</i>	This comes into play when the pupil cannot keep up with the pace of the class, but can remain within the parameters set for the programme followed by all the pupils in the year to which he/she belongs, even though the contents of the syllabus may have to be more limited or selected.	This comes into play when the pupil outstrips the pace of learning in the class. The pupil can remain within the parameters set for the programme being followed by all the pupils in the year to which he/she belongs, but the course contents in his/her case may be broader and selected according to different criteria.
<i>Significant adaptation of curriculum</i>	This means programming the acquisition of objectives and contents from previous years, which entails a drastic break with the curriculum and programme of the cycle or year to which the pupil belongs; it implies the modification and adaptation of the assessment criteria.	This means programming the acquisition of objectives and contents from subsequent years, which entails a drastic break with the curriculum and programme of the cycle or year to which the pupil belongs; it implies the modification and adaptation of the assessment criteria.

- Non-significant curriculum adaptation: This occurs when a child has temporary difficulties and cannot keep up with the rest of the class, but can remain within the coordinates of the programme set for all in that year, even though the contents of his or her individual programme are reduced.
- Significant curriculum adaptation: This requires the programming of objectives and contents from earlier years, which moves drastically away from the curriculum and programme of the year to which the pupil should belong. It implies that the assessment criteria should also be modified and adapted. Although these measures were established by law (LOGSE, 1990) to cater for children with learning difficulties or disorders, recent legal rulings have enabled us to understand them in a different light, as we can see from Table 2.
- Adaptation of access to the curriculum: This refers to the material, physical or communicative modifications which enable pupils with special educational needs to have access to the ordinary or adapted curriculum, so that they can participate in teaching and learning experiences.

We should bear in mind that a misunderstanding of this measure could lead us to believe that the expectations, aims and contents are being lowered to fit the habits, interests or abilities of those with difficulties, which would allow them to reduce the tension between what they can achieve and what has to be demanded of them. Far from forming an 'impoverished' curriculum, this measure should create tension by involving the child, because what is required

is consonant with what it is possible to achieve. Nor does this constitute a 'special' curriculum for special pupils, but rather a response which links the ordinary curriculum with the individual needs. Optional subjects. This is another of the possibilities envisaged for the handling of diversity. However, this measure is only applicable in the case of children aged 12 and over, at the stage of compulsory secondary education (Ministerio de Educacion y Ciencia, 1993).

Broadly speaking, as Muñoz and Maruny (1993) state, introducing options to the curriculum has the following advantages:

- It alleviates the traditional rigidity of the education system, generates changes, initiatives and innovations, and increases teachers' professional autonomy.
- It increases motivation and brings together small groups of people with the same basic interests. It caters for the diversity among pupils as far as interests, motivation and abilities are concerned.
- It helps to guide pupils towards the choice of future professional/academic/ cultural interests, thus enabling them to share the responsibility for their own education, providing valuable experience in taking decisions and taking on risks.
- It encourages the change from a selective system to one which promotes the individual. This is only possible if there is a change in attitude towards the structure of the teaching staff, the school's material resources, the teachers' behaviour towards the curriculum, and the cultural and academic context of the school.
- It makes it possible for a comprehensive school to cater for diversity, and is a tool which should enable schools to respond to their pupils' specific needs and interests.

Curricular diversification. This constitutes another measure that is available in exceptional circumstances for some pupils in the last year of secondary education (age 16), who, if so advised, are permitted not to study some of the areas making up the basic curriculum when their interests, motivation and, in some cases, abilities are already heavily defined (Ministerio de Educacion y Ciencia, 1993).

Organizational Measures for Catering for Diversity (Ministerio de Educacion y Ciencia, 1992, 1993)

Groups. The criteria used for grouping pupils should be flexible, and should take into account the objective and kind of activity intended. This favours the individualization of education, but may sometimes detract from the unity of the group. Such temporary groupings make it possible for some individuals to spend 65% of their time in the normal classroom and 35% in a special group with individual attention (Gobierno de Navarra, 1995).

Organization of space. This is intended to create a stimulating, welcoming and comfortable atmosphere to promote educational activity in a climate of companionship and work, which allows for the individual and social development.

Organization of time. This is decided on the basis of the didactic decisions taken, with a view to making the best use of the centres material and human resources.

Organization of materials and didactic resources. These should be selected using criteria which take into account the educational context and the pupils' characteristics. The teaching staff should put these criteria into practice.

Relations with parents and the social context. There should be collaboration between the different bodies involved in education. This favours joint educational interest and action: home and school should work hand in hand. At the same time, catering for diversity means openness to the social surroundings in the form of contact with local institutions, social groups, etc., which can provide resources to help the school to educate the citizens of the future.

The Spanish Reform and the highly able: summing up

Traditionally, the different strategies used in educating the highly able have fallen into three categories: acceleration, enrichment and grouping. The last of these is of a different kind from the first two, as it has an organizational character, and can be applied to put either of the other two into practice. It would seem unnecessary here to describe each of these strategies, as they are a commonplace in the literature. Let us say only that we understand acceleration to mean the set of strategies which make it possible to increase the pace at which a pupil proceeds through the curriculum (Mackay, 1994); this means that learners must be taught in a way, and at a speed, which is suitable to their abilities (Feldhusen et al., 1989). Pupils, therefore, have the opportunity to go through the academic contents more quickly, which means that they can study the standard curriculum at an earlier age, or in an earlier form, than is usual. On the many strategies for accelerating the curriculum, see Southern and Jones (1991), Center for Talented Youth (1995) or Davis and Rimm (1994).

But although it is true that acceleration has real potential for some, and that it always implies speeding up the curriculum, it is also true that there are other ways of promoting intellectual and academic development which do not entail changes in the pace of the established curriculum. On occasions, it is appropriate to offer a different curriculum which fits characteristics and needs, but which is not a speeded up version of the standard curriculum.

As Van Tassel-Baska (1993) shows, the best way of catering for the needs of highly able pupils is a combination of acceleration and enrichment. Enrichment means the provision of rich and varied learning experiences which go beyond the ordinary curriculum (see Renzulli, 1994; Southern et al., 1993). There are many enrichment procedures (see Davis & Rimm, 1994) ranging from independent study to the use of mentors and pull-out programmes. Any of the strategies adopted at a given moment require a legal framework which makes them viable, and a flexible education system which makes them possible. In a country in which the education system was formerly characterized by rigidity and control, some of these measures would have been unthinkable only a few years ago. The set of measures for catering for diversity which we have analyzed open up a wealth of possibilities for making the curriculum more flexible. The recent legislative proposals discussed in this study show that acceleration (in the form of early entry or grade skipping) is a real possibility. At the same time, enrichment can be made a reality in the form of curricular adaptation (which makes it possible to give priority to some areas, introduce new ones, select more complex activities, etc.). On the other hand, measures which allow organizational flexibility (groups, organization of time and space, etc.) mean that both acceleration and enrichment are more than merely legal or theoretical

possibilities. It remains to be seen how teachers will be trained to put these measures into practice and make the principle of 'catering for diversity' a reality for highly able pupils.

Conclusions

The present situation in Spain is promising for talented pupils. As Feldhusen (1986) points out, "the development of a multi-talented, multi-service model clearly requires a new approach to teaching, as well as energetic, flexible teachers to implement it". Both these aspects are outlined clearly in the present education system as far as the following characteristics are concerned:

- In Spain, there is legislative back-up for the handling of both special educational needs and the academically highly able.
- Since the 1970s, there has been a growing awareness of the need to cater for diversity and for personalized educational attention, which is the same thing.
- Reflection on the reality of education and the concrete needs that arise in each school is well established among teachers in Spain today. Our teachers are increasingly aware of the need to make the teaching-learning process more flexible, and to adjust teaching to the pace and needs of the individual.
- Professionals in psychopedagogy and teaching have an open mind regarding methodological diversity, and the adjustment and modification of the organizational nature in schools.
- There is perceived to be a widespread interest in grappling with issues that have arisen out of research and educational experience (research-action), and in developing and spreading these ideas. The evaluation of pedagogical innovations and educational needs, and the adaptation of material resources to meet these, illustrate the effort which is being made in Spain to develop high-quality education.
- The challenge of putting all these ideas into practice has been recognized, as can be seen from the plan to provide indispensable on-going training for the teachers involved in designing and giving tuition.
- Now that this is the case, it seems to be a good moment to carry out, systematically and in depth, the reforms and developments which are appropriate to the needs of the talented and are permitted under the present legislation.

It is necessary to make people aware that talented pupils exist, who have to be detected in time so that they can be offered the help and specific services they require. To ease this process, it is vitally important to promote research and support the groups which already exist in Spain. In our view, this research should focus on two issues: the development of specific diagnostic or identification instruments, and the planning and development of suitable programmes of action. Equally, training courses should be launched for teachers who want to specialize in teaching the highly able. We are certain that, whatever is done to meet the special educational needs of these pupils, it will be of benefit not only to the pupils themselves, but also to the education system as a whole.

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