The Curriculum and Individual Differences: The Case of the Lebanese English Curriculum

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Abstract

Possibly the best way of providing for significant individual differences is through curricular changes and considerations. This article shows skepticism concerning curricular modifications that have been for groups of students rather than for individuals. Real individualization must be through the goals of the students rather than through the changes in content directed at students regarded as deviations from norms and handled mechanically through the school. This article raises the fundamental question as to whether "the provision of differences is the only good to be sought in the curriculum". As an example, this article uses the qualitative design to study some of the aspects of individual differences in the Lebanese English curriculum.

Key words: individual differences, curriculum, Lebanese curriculum, rate of progress, content and progress, curriculum organization

ملخص

ربما تكون أفضل طريقة لتوفير الفروق الفردية الهامة هي من خلال التغييرات والاعتبارات المنهجية. تُظهر هذه المقالة الشكوك فيما يتعلق بتعديلات المناهج الدراسية التي جرت لمجموعات الطلاب بدلاً من الأفراد. يجب أن يكون التفرد الحقيقي من خلال أهداف الطلاب وليس من خلال التغييرات في المحتوى الموجه للطلاب الذين يعتبرون انحرافًا عن المعايير ويتم التعامل معهم ميكانيكيًا من خلال المدرسة. تثير هذه المقالة السؤال الأساسي حول ما إذا كان "توفير الاختلافات هو السبيل الوحيد الذي يجب البحث عنه في المنهج". على سبيل المثال ، تستخدم هذه المقالة التصميم النوعي لدراسة بعض جوانب الفروق الفردية في منهاج اللغة الإنجليزية في لبنان.

Abstrait

La meilleure façon de fournir des différences individuelles significatives est peut-être par des changements et des considérations curriculaires. Cet article montre le scepticisme concernant les modifications curriculaires qui ont été pour les groupes d'étudiants plutôt que pour les individus. L'individualisation réelle doit être à travers les objectifs des étudiants plutôt que par les changements dans le contenu destiné aux étudiants considérés comme des écarts par rapport aux normes et manipulés mécaniquement à travers l'école. Cet article soulève la question fondamentale de savoir si «la fourniture de différences est le seul bien à rechercher dans le programme scolaire». À titre d'exemple, cet article utilise la conception qualitative pour étudier certains aspects des différences individuelles dans le programme d'anglais libanais.

Introduction

"After all, her brother was brilliant in English," says a father after inquiring about the reasons for his daughter's failure in English language.

What is the issue behind his assertion? May we claim that spelling is inherited? Must we accept nature as suggested by Comenius? Does nature predispose us to certain jobs? Such questions are related to the nature-nurture controversy, about which we now find little direct writing, partly because it is difficult to get unequivocal evidence and partly because there likely is no simple answer. Our behavior is so complex and is affected by so many biological, environmental, and psychological conditions that we probably cannot unravel them.

This article deals with the aspects in which individual differences should be included in the curriculum and then investigates, as an example, the demonstration of these differences in the Lebanese English curriculum.

1- Conceptions of Human Variability

Plato is known to have recognized the existence of human variability, specified its social implications, and proposed tests to measure traits important to the military: "…for it comes into my mind when you say it, that we are not born all exactly alike but different in nature, for all sorts of different jobs" (Eaton & Funder, 2003, p.56).

Comenius, too, treated individual differences at length, admonishing teachers to consider their pupil's ages, intelligence, and knowledge. He besought teachers to accept nature, to adjust methods and materials accordingly, and to start instruction at the pupil's level. Children, he observed, excel in memory and curiosity, adolescents in reasoning and adults in the 'what and why' (Comrey, 1995).

Rousseau, recognizing variation both among and within individuals, almost advocates a tutorial system. Bouchard (1994), is led "to insist upon some version of the tutorial system,…to assure that the student and teacher are known to each other, and that the student may thus benefit by the fact that his individuality is known, recognized, and respected"(p.98).

Today, it seems that the idea of individual differences is accepted. Yet, one sometimes wonders. Theorists describe learning in terms of averages. However, the basic data reveal that the course of learning vary from one student to another. If we apply general rules, we may ignore the individual: One man's meat may be another's poison, even in an intellectual diet.

Ackerman (1997) writes: " ….any human being, unless biologically defective or damaged, has the potential capacity to learn to a reasonably efficient degree any cultural tradition to which the individual concerned might be exposed" (p.190). Is Ackerman denying individual differences? Are failures to learn attributable simply to biological

defects and damage? Schaie (2005) states that "We begin with the hypothesis that any subject can be taught effectively in some intellectually honest form to any child at any stage of development….No evidence exists to contradict it" (p.56). Does Schaie mean we can teach the calculus in some honest form to two-year old child? Or has he provided himself with an escape hatch in the phrase 'in some intellectually honest form'? Are we now being encouraged to accept a concept of readiness at the opposite extreme of certain concepts proposed in the past?

Surely it must be admitted that pupils are variable − in readiness, in ability to learn, in any human attribute – recognizing, of course, that the things we, as human beings, do not have in common are as nothing to the things we do have in common.

2- The Curriculum and Individual Differences

But the definition is a philosophical abstraction rather than a portrayal of practice, and it is, in effect, an exhortation as to how curriculum ought to be thought about. Any definition drawn inductively from usage would recognize that what curriculum makers do is to lay out patterns of reaching-learning offerings designed to be most suitable to the abilities and needs of some group. To say, teachers, who ultimately determine what the curriculum really becomes, are often ingenious at fitting such a curriculum to the individual. Nor is it to ignore the fact that some styles of planning make such adaptation much easier than others do. But any discussion of curriculum with reference to individual differences will stand on a hollow foundation if it does not recognize that we start with a program having a group as its target (Comrey, 1995).

Very often the group aimed at will be some subdivision of the student body. This is true especially from the junior high school on, and particularly in large institutions. Such schools are likely to have organized whole program called 'college preparation,' 'commercial,' and so on; they may have some offerings sectioned on the basis of ability, perhaps with special remedial sections and, latterly, with doubly special section for the gifted; they may offer many elective courses; and among their activities they are almost sure to have choruses and bands and orchestras for the musical, organized sports for the athletic, opportunities in dramatics, publications, students government, and so on. All told, tremendous energy has been spent to assure that any child will find offerings into which he fits (Keck & Kinney, 2005).

It is not to derogate such efforts in the least to point out again that it is not individual differences that have been aimed at but types of group differences. If the group offerings are well conceived, they can enable a school to hit closer to the general characteristics of types of individuals. Nevertheless, if our goal is to 'tailor' the curriculum to fit the unique individual, the common grouping systems will tend to hold two kinds of danger (Keck & Kinney, 2005).

First, there is the danger of stereotyping. With reference especially to the sectioning of classes into ability groups, it is notorious that administrators and teachers fall into thinking of each section as 'homogeneous'. The teacher often speaks of his "slow" group

or his 'fast' as if all the members of each were the same. It is frequently obvious that his satisfaction with the system corresponds precisely with his relief at no longer having the bother of adapting his teaching to a range of differences. Anyone who has tried to show such teachers the wide ranges that still exist within their 'homogeneous' groups is likely to remember the indignation that met his assault upon their illusion (Agarwal, 2002). It is quite possible, then, though certainly not inevitable, that ability group stereotyping will reduce genuine not curricular attention to the individual.

Second, specialized courses designed for particular groups introduce another danger. Being designed to do one job especially well, such courses are often narrow in scope and offer few internal choices. They are like a narrow, on-way road that goes straight to a desired destination, yet offers a driver no choice but to do what every other a doing. Again, with an ingenious teacher, the result is not an inevitable sameness for all students. Moreover, one must remember that in a general way the course may be excellent for a given type of student. Nevertheless, one had better face the fact that narrow specialization is likely to subordinate the individual to the type (Walberg & Stariha, 1992).

The finely subdivided program of studies, then, has some tendency to center educational guidance upon getting each student in the 'right' courses or sections, and, once he is there, assuming that they fit him. This should not be exaggerated. Kindly and resourceful teachers, in daily contact with youngsters, have a way to sensing personal needs and doing at least a little something about them. But a curricular organization that depends upon a multiplicity of subdivision does not help these teachers very much; it may give more support to the sensitive, mechanistic teacher who leans to the tradition of procuresses.

3- Individual through Rate of Progress

Early in this century a small group of education in Washington University made a determined effort. Their solution was individualization of those parts of the curriculum which least needed group contact. They developed elaborate instructional materials in such fields as arithmetic, so that each child could move through them by himself, proceeding speedily or slowly. The work eventuated in a number of well-known 'laboratory' plans (Snow, 2002).

Considerably later, another group in the same university, concerned with the meagerness of curricular choice in small high schools, developed the idea of supervised correspondence study. This development has resulted in the production of a wide range of offerings by which individual students can enrich and adapt their curriculums under the supervision of their school. In many ways correspondence education is, by its very nature, the epitome of individualization. Its range of offerings can be very great and one student is taught at a time (Meyer & Rose, 2000).

Palincsar and Brown (2005) were closely associated with the supervised correspondence education movement concerning individual differences; they have seen

convincing evidence that it offers an effective resource for the enrichment of curricular choices; they believe without question that the resource should be used far more widely than it has been. And yet, analysis of this system, as of the 'laboratory' plans, reveals a disappointing amount of true individualization. In both schemes, there has been far too much tendency to individualize with respect to little more than rate of progress. There are exceptions, but by and large all students moving through a particular course do the same things in about the same way. The uniformity may actually be greater than is prevalent within group instruction done by a reasonably sensitive teacher. And one must have a meager conception of individualization to settle for students merely being able to do these same things at a different pace. Such individualization" largely fails to come to grips with the fundamental differences among students–differences in their interests and purposes, their personal needs, and their whole modes of thinking and learning–all the differences so well portrayed elsewhere in this volume.

The issue might be little worth debating except that we now have coming into prominence a new form of quest for individual instruction; namely, that administered through the use of various forms of programmed instruction. The trap is open again. Shall we once more be persuaded to equate freedom to move at one's own pace (which be it conceded, is not without value) for the whole of individualization? Is a system that has every student following through the same routine steps, with only minor variations, to be considered superior to systems that allow the use of sensitive personal perceptions? Obviously no one ought to pass judgment at this time, when the machines are still in an early stage of development. For instance, it is already clear that the 'branching' types of programmed instruction can take into account considerable differences in cognitive learning, and it may be that as programming becomes more sophisticated it will be able to meet deeper-lying differences of personal style and need. Still, it is worth using the perspective gained from past experience to assess the possible pitfalls (Meyer & Rose, 2000).

The argument thus far can be summed up briefly: As a generality, curriculums are planned for groups, not for individuals. To move closer to fitting individuals, the total group has been subdivided in various ways, on the basis of general intelligence special aptitude or interest, vocational goal, and so on. But the curriculums for these subgroups have, in turn, been planned for the group, not for the individual. And while some gains have thus been made, the assumption of 'homogeneity' and the narrowness of specialized courses have introduced some added risk of subordinating the individual to the type. In curricular plans based upon individual instruction, the individualization has been largely illusory. A considerable mechanistic quality has limited such schemes, and the fact that the individual students have come through the successive turnstiles at their own pace has been made to signify more than it actually means.

These kinds of efforts to fit curriculum to all students have produced disappointingly little genuine accommodation to the more fundamental differences of the individual. Despite this fact, sensitive and solicitous teachers have found many ways to adapt program to child, but the system itself has given them little aid, and, all too often, it has put obstacles in their way.

The realistic question must then be raised: Is this the best we can do? Must curriculum-planning be always for the group, and is its furthest extension the provision of varied plans for known subtypes? Must concern for fundamental individual differences be assigned to the realms of methodology and counseling? Must one leave it to counselor and teacher to squirm around in the group plan and somehow take care of the unique individual?

In some sense and in some degree, the answer probably has to be *yes*. Inevitably, planning the layout for group instruction has to take the group heavily into account. But at the very least the planning can be so done as to make adaptation very much easier for teacher and counselor. And we shall see that, if we can shake off certain preconceptions, curriculum-planning itself can move toward the unique individual.

Probably the most common image of a curriculum is that of a common body of subject matter arranged in a sequence, to be mastered sequentially by everyone who pursues that curriculum. If this is the true – or the only true – image, then the area for maneuver in curricular provision for individual differences must be extremely limited. If everybody eventually has to master the same content anyway, then such room as there is for maneuver will be confined almost entirely to adaptations in methodology and administration. Students may be permitted to come through the inevitable stages somewhat earlier or later, as in the laboratory plans. Content may be 'watered down' for the less able, so that they take less of what is really desirable at each step. A clever teacher can find ways of appealing to children of differing learning styles. But in the final analysis, it will be seen that the effort was to 'communize' the content as much as possible, rather than to 'individualize' it as much as possible (Mullins, 2005).

This conception of a curriculum as a set of body of content is not altogether false. There are specifics of knowledge which in every culture need to be learned by everyone, and some of them must be acquired in a sequence that builds brick upon brick. The hundred basic combinations in addition and subtraction may serve as an example. They are necessary, and they are necessary early in the game. All power to knowledgeable teachers who find a host of ways of getting them across!

Such examples may well remind each person, in the midst of the volume on individual differences, that provision for differences is not the only 'good' to be sought in a curriculum. It must also guarantee the knowledge and skill which is a common necessity.

It is an open question how large a body there is of such information and proficiency which must be everybody's standard equipment in identical form. Two or three generations ago, the list would have included the ability to identify a couple of dozen kinds of 'figures of speech'– including figures most educated persons of our generation have never heard of. Even a generation ago, the list of 'essential' events and dates for all to know in history was a long one. The general trend has been toward a shortening of the lists, but that does not mean there are no common essential of content (Clifford, 2008).

Yet, it is a shame that the existence of such common components, however short or long the list, should have gulled so many into acting as if a whole curriculum considered of knowledge and proficiency which everyone in that curriculum must acquire in roughly identical shape. Such a conceptualization is the major bar to curricular provision for the individual. We shall get nowhere if we do not start from a more creative idea.

4- Individualization through Content and Purpose

The essential common element in a curriculum is purposes. The moment we so conceive it, we are freed to reach toward the individual.

It matters tremendously that every man and woman shall have truly recreative resources for recreation. It does not much matter whether they choose to wander by a stream with or without fishing rod in hand, 'just read,' cultivate roses, or fill canvas with color on every weekend. The goal is essential; the particular means are optional. Similarly, to every important human goal there are many roads and, if not all of them are royal, neither are all of us kings. The fundamental errors in–thinking has been to equate content with goals; or worse, to redouble our zeal as to content just because we have forgotten the goal (Mullins, 2005).

The literature teacher who pompously announces, 'In my courses there is not time for any but the great works,' probably sees himself as the one uncompromising standard-bearer in a world of weak compromisers. In cold fact, he is surrendering to the weakest compromise of the all: declaring the hopelessness of even trying to make literature a functioning resource in the lives of the many who cannot immediately leap to the heights. Yet, in every field of general education precisely this sort of surrender is inevitable the moment one ties success exclusively to the mastery of one set body of content. For it demands the rejection of all who, for whatever reason, cannot master that content. And that rejection leads naturally to the all-too-common thought of condemning the less intellectual to a sole diet of the 'practice' in shop and craft, while the able confine themselves wholly to the intellectual discipline (Tomlinson, 2009).

By contrast, the literature teacher who lives by human goals has a host of media at his command. He wishes, let us say, to use literature to deepen the youngsters' understanding to themselves and others, of the subtle motives that drive man kink, of the human condition itself. His materials range at least from the insightful masterpieces of Shakespeare and Dostoevsky to those 'westerns' that combine true characteristics and motivation with an exciting story. If he is reasonably facile, they can all be brought to bear within the sacred precincts the rhinoceros-nosed critic may sniff about "letting down standards." But if measurement is based upon long progress toward deep-rooted love of good reading and toward the human insights for which literature exists in the first place, then this is the teacher who holds the banner high (Lubart, 1999).

Parallels come readily to mind in every field. We need not despair of building a scientific approach to problem-solving because some youngsters cannot weather the

rigors of modern physics. Thoroughly sensible citizen, who will assess civic problems realistically and draw sound conclusion, can be made out of students who will never really understand economics. It is not so simple a matter as "watering down" standard content or lowering standards. It is driving so zealously for fundamental objectives that we are willing to search endlessly for media that work. That depends, at bottom, on seeing content as means to an end, not as the end itself (Clifford, 2008).

Returning, then, to our basic theme to serving individual differences through curriculum development, our fundamental line of solution must be to look to purpose as the common group element while deliberately exploring an enormous range of ways of helping unique individuals toward those purposes.

5- Individualization through Curriculum Organization

A final question concerns the sort of organization of curriculum which will facilitate development along the line just indicated. Here, general education should be chiefly thought of. For the specialized course, vocational typing, for instance, more properly devotes itself to a set body of knowledge and skill. Even here, the good teacher will seize upon available opportunities for broader learning, and he will intuitively make adjustments in his teaching to aid students of differing styles. But if the students have been properly guided into the course in the first place, minor adjustments will generally suffice (Willis & Mann, 2000).

According to Amabile (1996), it is general education which demands truly radical, built-in possibilities of guided choice. The basic principle may be that the 'roomier' the course or the unit of instruction, the easier it will be to provide internal choices. For example, if a teacher organizes a course into day-to-day lessons, he cannot generally afford very much time to make each new day's assignment. He can, perhaps, sketch two or three minor variations as to how an assignment might be done. But he cannot go very far without taking too much time from other aspects of instruction. Thus, the probable upshot will be that day after day all the students will be doing about the same things in about the same way. During class discussion periods or during supervised study, the teacher may still do a good bit to accommodate individual needs and interests; nevertheless, his planned curriculum is basically the same for the whole group, and such individualization as occurs is more a matter of methodology.

Let this teacher now organize the same course into 'units' running through a month or more and he will suddenly find himself much freer to think of the individual child. To put the differences in its simplest terms, he can now afford to spend several hours in co-operative planning with the children. He can help them develop a sense of purpose and of direction; then, he and they together can lay out a variety of approaches. By judicious combination of individual and committee projects with whole-group assignments and discussions, the unit can be built up as a kind of mosaic, each pupil making the distinctive contribution he can make, and all learning from one another. All will be working toward common basic goals, but each will be approaching them in his own way. To put it

directly, the actual, planned curriculum of each youngster, within the overarching unit, can be in considerable degree unique to him.

During the development period of a unit, the teacher will have chances to work with individuals and get the 'feel' of them as whole persons, which is something more than recognizing their relative intelligence or manual ability or any specific set of differences. Even in a committee of three or four, the individual child can become highly visible. Thus, the teacher will become progressively more able to plan a distinctive curriculum for each, simply because he knows each one better.

Fasko (2002) suggests that if the teacher is in a well-organized school district, he will likely be able to develop his teaching unit out of a resource previously built by a group of teachers and the supervisory staff. Even as they were committing it to paper, they can have been checking to see how many ways to succeed they were building into it. For here is the nub of caring for individual differences. It is idle to talk about individual differences so long as there is only one way to get to the common goal.

This much can be accomplished within the confines of a standard course, by simple reorganization into 'roomier' units of instruction. If the school chooses, the roominess can be still further extended. In the elementary grades, it is common to integrate much of the work in arithmetic, speech, writing, and the like, around the common core of a comprehensive social-studies unit. Such an arrangement provides for a great deal of adaptation to individuals. The significant thing to note is that the very breadth or roominess of the comprehensive unit, the style of curriculum organization, makes it relatively easy to build possibilities for individual accommodations right into the curriculum. If, in the same elementary classroom, the school day consists wholly of separate assignments, set daily, in each of the subjects, it is all too likely that every child will be reading the same pages, writing themes on the same subjects, and so on (Willis & Mann, 2000).

In the more segmented program of the secondary school, some part of the same gain can be captured by the use of block-scheduling, or even more, by the use of a genuine core program. For, even if he has distinct responsibility for two separate coursed (say, English and social studies), a teacher who has the same group for two hours or more can find more ways utilizing various personal resources, if only because he can know the persons so much better. The comprehensive units of a true core program permit a tremendous reach of creativity in pooling distinctive contributions toward a common end (Fasko, 2002).

For instance, if a core group is working at the consumer problem of becoming better buyers, an enormous range of possibilities is opened up. For one thing, every child can do his laboratory work in terms of a commodity or service of special interest or concern to him and then serve as teacher to the others, learning much about communication in the process. One student may emphasize existing or needed legislation for the protection of buyers; a second may turn philosopher and concern himself as to what is most worth his

hard-earned money; the more pedestrian may stick to an analysis of prices and brands, contributing much specific data to the class.

Still others may interest themselves chiefly in the human angles the values and choices of different individuals, or social groups; the maintenance of effective relations with sellers. All these and other approaches can be mingled into a common unit. For what is important is certain learning which can be acquired in a host of ways.

Administratively, the opening up of accommodations for the individual can be achieved in a variety of ways. For example, recent developments in the individualization of reading differ strikingly from the older methodological differentiation which tended to concentrate wholly on skills. The differentiations goes back to the subject matter itself, relying heavily on pupil's interest and intuitively expressed needs to determine what reading matter shall be utilized. This puts the individual adaptation back at the level of content and takes into account far more fundamental differences than those in speed or in the ability to attach new words. It gets back to the person (Good, 2006).

Similarly, Curwood (2014) may be opening up new ways of going directly to the individual, with their emphases on independent study, small-group discussion, and school plants oriented to individual work. Moreover, Walberg and Stariha (1992) describe the high school containing cubicles for individual work, planned to use about 40 percent of the student's time, some of it for purely individual projects. There is also access to a variety of resources centers and to such equipment as foreign-language laboratories and automated teaching of specific bits of content. Large-group instruction takes care of certain common mattes, freeing staff time for seminar groups of about twelve students. In such a setting, it should be easier to evolve highly differentiated curriculum content and to develop individual study projects attuned to the student as a whole person, not merely to his level of intelligence or special ability.

Manipulation of scheduling also appears to hold some possibilities for opening the way to individualization. Some schools are finding that when students take fewer classes per day, using longer periods or blocks of periods, it is possible to pay some attention to internal differentiation. It also appears to be possible to come closer to the heart of the individual if electives, especially, are opened to students from several grades. A high school can afford to offer more special interest offerings on a rotating basis if it admits the highly interested from three or four grades. The nongraded elementary school may be able to achieve somewhat similar gains by ignoring age-grouping for certain purposes (Fisher, Frey, & Hite, 2016). It is reported by some administrators that teachers in such situations, simply because they know their student group to be widely heterogeneous , try harder to adapt offerings to individuals than they do when they think they have a homogeneous group.

Thus, Fisher et al. (2016) see the manner in which a curriculum is planned and organized can make a signal difference in the accommodation of individuals. But the line of logic has got to a conclusion directly opposite to the conclusion one tends at first to take for granted. For, at first, one tends to equate curricular provision for differences with

extreme segmentation. One visualizes separate courses for a multiplicity of academic and vocational goals and separate section by levels of intelligence or prior achievement. These have their real values, but they are focused upon type differences, not individual differences. And often the associated narrowness and stereotype make genuine attention to the individual more difficult rather than more likely.

6- Teachers and Administrators on Individual Differences

An educational psychology teacher in a public high school observes:

As I contemplate individual differences in the classroom, I am amazed that pupils learn as much in school as they do. Fantastic enough are the myriad differences in backgrounds, goals, aspirations, motivations, abilities, and limitations to which we are all subjected. For a teacher to be able to integrate individual differences in his classroom and to impart knowledge and understanding of his subject matter to all his pupils is indeed challenging. Today, the teacher's problem is making the best of individual differences, but what will the teachers' job be tomorrow when man learns to use more than one-seventh of his ability? Can a teacher bring out the best in each of his pupils, and if so, how? (Covington, 2003, p.98)

In addition, Cohen (2008) writes about a secondary school teacher:

As a teacher develops an increasing awareness of the multifaceted aspects of individual differences, she is confronted by a correspondingly increasing dilemma produced by the problems inherent in her attempts to provide for these differences. In an effort to incorporate her knowledge about adolescents into her teaching, the high school teacher is confronted by at least three areas of frustration.

Of primary concern to many teachers is the sheer obstacle of numbers. Each day, she probably meets five classes which average at least thirty pupils, in addition to those in the homeroom and in extracurricular activities. How is she to assimilate enough information to provide the clues to the uniqueness of each of these individuals?

A second area of frustration is in the structure of the curriculum, which is often too limited and inflexible to provide for the varied needs and abilities of the pupils. Especially are these limitations apparent on many small high schools and in schools where the sole emphasis is the college-preparatory program. The recent pressure to produce scientists and mathematicians has increased the problem. Often the teacher is caught between an administration which demands results irrespective of methods and her own concern about the means to be employed.

Finally, an additional frustration probably arises as a teacher recognizes her own limitations. As she grows in awareness of the enormity of the task of providing for the varied individuals in her class, the schism between "what she knows" and "what she does" seems to be beyond closure. Moreover, unless she is fortunate enough to be among peers who understand and are sympathetic with her efforts, she may find that she must

bear the brunt of criticism from her fellow teachers for not conforming to their concepts of acceptable methods.

In spite of these frustrations, or perhaps because of them, a teacher who has realized the success of reaching even a few students through her understanding of some of the factors that contribute to their uniqueness is obligated to the understanding approach. Thus, frustrations can be minimized as the rewards of each new success produce a cumulative effect.

A principle of a junior high school in another private school notes:

The administrator, faced with the problem of meeting individual differences in the student body, must organize an educational program in which the student becomes aware of his individual capabilities and is encouraged to develop them to their fullest. Every attempt should be made to help the student become aware that he has a responsibility to learn. The school should be organized so that teachers, counselors and parents are able to cooperate in this endeavor.

Flexible ability grouping in academic subjects, special attention to study habits, and assigning teachers so that their individual differences may be utilized are important functions of the administrator. For certain subjects, such as physical education, music, and shop, grouping is not used so that students enrolled in these subjects may work with all groups of students.

Teachers must have time to select and develop instructional materials and explore all possible methods of reaching and encouraging the individual. Opportunities for these activities must be provided by the administrator. (Dornyei, 2000, p.530)

In conclusion, the writers, Dornyei and Cohen, of the preceding paragraphs are especially concerned with the matter of instructional difficulties associated with individual differences.

On the other hand, curriculums are planned for groups rather than for individuals and that fact may as well as be recognized at the outset. To be sure, the student of education, asked to define curriculum, is likely to respond in some such terms as, 'all the experiences a child has under the guidance of the school.' In all truth, this is that any curriculum inevitably becomes to the individual child who 'takes' it. And, by extension, it is perfectly valid to argue that, since each person's experiences are always unique, subjectively speaking, then each child's curriculum is unique (Bringle, Phillips, & Hudson, 2004).

7- Purpose of the Study

This paper is written with the aim of encouraging curriculum designers to focus on individual differences as one of the most crucial elements.

8- Methodology

This paper describes the disparity between the principles and guidelines outlined in the Lebanese English language curriculum adopted by the Lebanese government in 1997 and the aspects of individual differences in any curriculum suggested in this article.

9- The Research Question

Are the aspects of individual differences included in the English curriculum adopted by the Lebanese government in 1997?

10- Materials

This article offers an evaluation of the current Lebanese English language curriculum, which has been in place since 1998, and the aspects of individual differences suggested by the writer of this article. In 1996 "a working curriculum that espouses modern theories of foreign language acquisition and recent trends in curriculum design and teaching methodologies" (Shaaban & Ghaith, 1997, p. 200) was produced. The English language curriculum introduces "a thematic, content-based curriculum that stresses skill integration, cooperative learning, autonomy in learning, cultural awareness, and study habits" (Shaaban, 2005, p. 118). The guidelines for the curriculum are provided by the following pedagogical principles:

> Learning language is learning to communicate; language use varies according to context, academic and other purposes, and medium; learning language gives exposure to a new culture allowing for understanding, appreciation, and respect for cultural diversity; effective language learning occurs when students engage in meaningful, purposeful, and relevant tasks; and integrated language skills make for better learning. (NCERD, 1998, p. 5)

Social interpersonal communication, academic achievement, and social-cultural interaction are the three main goals for the curriculum. These goals are interpreted into seven objectives: interpersonal communication; academic communication; preparation for college; critical thinking; intercultural understanding and appreciation; positive attitudes towards target language and culture; and working with others. These objectives are then transformed into measurable learning outcomes and considered performance tasks (NCERD, 1998).

11- Data collection and analysis

Considering the content of the Lebanese English curriculum, "integrating and organizing instruction around meaningful themes would be effective in achieving the communicative, social, and academic goals set for teaching English in the country" (Shaaban & Ghaith, 1997, pp. 200-201) is the basic idea. Considering the themes for the Lebanese English curriculum, there is the choice of socially and developmentally suitable themes taken from the learners' (individual's) immediate learning context, such as the self and the other, family and friends and his/her expanding awareness of the world

(Zakharia, 2010). Consequently, the Lebanese English curriculum indirectly targets all individuals of different interests.

The methodology in the English curriculum can be described as follows:

> The curriculum aimed at involving learners in their own learning by engaging them in meaningful and interactive performance tasks as they acquire a wide range of language forms, structures, and functions needed for immediate success in an all-English curriculum at all levels of instruction. (Shaaban & Ghaith, 1997, p. 201)

Integration is the focal point that helps students build strong background knowledge about a certain topic, perceive it from different perspectives and in different genres, and develop important linguistic and academic knowledge and skills (Orr, 2011). From this perspective, the curriculum can possibly meet the needs of different individual needs.

The Lebanese English curriculum suggested the use of cooperative learning of mixed abilities to perform learning activities to foster classroom interaction:

> Essentially, cooperative learning constitutes a series of pro-social learning structures, which involve learners' working together in order to achieve some common goals according to the principles of simultaneous interaction, positive interdependence, individual accountability, and team reward. (Shaaban & Ghaith, 1997, p. 202)

In terms of the teaching methodology, the communicative goals of the curriculum can be achieved through the cooperative "Learning Together" model of the Johnsons and the Structural model of Kagan (Shaaban & Ghaith, 2005). Accordingly, the pro-social structures described in the above section can, in an indirect way, satisfy some of the needs of the individual differences among the learners.

The instructional materials recommended by the Lebanese English curriculum have to be appropriate to learners' age, interest, and culture (NCERD, 1995). In one way or another, these materials may cater, in a roundabout way, for individual differences in the English classroom.

With respect to assessment, the instructors can implement different methods especially the ones that are related to alternative assessment, traditional assessment techniques and performance testing. Moreover, instructional objectives and performance tasks as described in the curriculum for each grade should be taken into consideration (Shaaban, 2000, 2005). Thus, the concept of individual differences is circuitously well thought-out while testing and evaluating the performance of students.

12-Discussion of the results

The Lebanese English language curriculum has been developed by language experts and classroom practitioners in line with international standards (Shaaban & Ghaith,

2005). In the above section, certain aspects of individual differences have been highlighted. However, the Lebanese English curriculum does not include individual differences as a separate section. On the basis of the points raised above, content, methodology, assessment and materials, it can be concluded that the Lebanese English curriculum include in an indirect way some of the features of individual differences.

Conclusion

If genuine attention to the individual is the purpose, the obvious should be neglected and room for radical differences in mode of approach should be provided. In general education, especially, it is assumed that only goals are universal, that content and method must be infinitely varied. It is impossible and undesirable to plan all the necessary variations in advance. What can be planned is a structure and organization which make it easier to see individual needs, and, through the use of large blocks of one sort or another, to make provision for them (Agarwal, 2002).

Perhaps the key to the whole problem lies in a better understanding of what individual differences mean. The kind of curriculum planning which stresses segmentation has implicitly assumed that all "normal" children are pretty much alike, except that they vary in certain specifics such as intelligence or vocational goal. If, however, one adds up all that is said, he comes out with another image: not that of specific variations form a norm but that of unique persons, whose uniqueness is only illustrated here and there by comparison with averages on certain specifics. Curricular planning will always be over mechanical if it tries for ready – made adaptations to a few kinds of differences. It must try, instead, to furnish room within which the unique person can function as himself, as he works his way under guidance toward goals which are in a deep sense universal.

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