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ABSTRACT

This paper outlines major contributing factors in the manifestation of successful gifted education programs. The first factor, teacher training, involves the right of gifted children to be educated by specially qualified teachers. A teacher training model leading to certification for teachers of the gifted is described. The second factor, gifted identification, requires that giftedness and characteristics of the gifted be clearly defined. Delivery models are another contributing factor. As an alternative to the regular classroom, program prototypes for the gifted are listed, including acceleration programs, enrichment programs, and guidance programs. The use of community resources is also a factor, and a mentor program can be used to fill the gap of needs unmet in the classroom. The final factor is the importance of evaluating the gifted program. Throughout the paper, it is emphasized that the regular education teacher must undertake responsibility to ensure that the needs of gifted students are met. (Author)

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GIFTED EDUCATION: A GENERAL PERSPECTIVE
WHAT EVERY TEACHER SHOULD KNOW
ABOUT GIFTED EDUCATION

by

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What Every Teacher Should Know About Gifted Education

Kobus Neethling

Introductory Remarks

It is of the utmost importance that you realize that this title does not refer to specialist teachers of the gifted, but to every classroom teacher. If our definition of effective teaching is that every teacher should be able to meet the needs of every pupil in his or her class, then every teacher must be able to meet the needs of the gifted children in that class.

You may not want to teach a class of gifted children or any class of specially grouped pupils--that is your choice and your prerogative. But, as an educationist, you have no right to say that you have no interest in gifted children and that you do not care.

- Do you ignore the gifted children in your class?
- Do you treat all children in exactly the same way?
- How do you explain the child's behavior to his or her parents?

Or, are you merely the passer of the buck?

Two Contrasting Pictures

In 1948 George Orwell painted a miserable picture of the future. "If you want a picture of the future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face--forever" (Gappert, 1983, p. 51). Orwell may have erred in detail, but his many supporters believe that he did accurately forecast the world of today and the world which lies beyond 1984.

Gifted children have probably experienced the stamping boot to a greater degree than anyone else (vide numerous research projects by Gallagher, Tannenbaum, Torrance, Witty). It is true that Mitchell in his two major surveys (in 1979 and 1983 in the United States) has found gifted education to be strong and still growing. His conclusions are "that the state of the arts is still healthy and vigorous" (1980, p. 10) and "that the gifted and talented movement is alive and well" (1984, p. 163). It is also true that 14 countries are represented in the Torrances' International Network of Gifted Children and their Teachers (Network Newsletter, 1984, p. 2) indicating some form of commitment towards gifted education on a larger scale than ever before.

But I have no illusions about the present "alive and well" situation which seems to exist in the United States and numerous other countries. Having done extensive research in the area of comparative gifted education and in the history of gifted education (Neethling, 1984) it has become apparent that there will be a swing back to the "boot in the face" era if certain criteria are not met during this high period.

It does not fall within the scope of this paper to discuss the reasons for the rises and falls of gifted education in the past or to speculate about the fickle and unreliable role which had been played by society within this context. It is, however, important to determine the major contributing factors in the manifestation of successful programs and to effectively utilize these factors in establishing parameters for gifted education beyond 1984. Data obtained from a number of surveys (Wilson, 1949; Ackerman, 1966; Mitchell, 1980, 1984) provide only partial answers to the problem because of the generally

accepted pragmatic limitations pertaining to teachers' unwillingness to respond to lengthy questionnaires, the cost factors in processing long questionnaires and the emphasis on convergent responses because they can be more immediately measured and evaluated. I have thus combined theoretical research with practical investigation and have done on-site investigations in six American states (1981, 1983/84); South Africa (1980-1983); England (1981), and Bophuthatswana (1982).

Stemming from the results of this comparative research, I will give you a brief outline of the cardinal premises, functioning within the various facets of gifted education, which need to be emphasized and accepted unless we are fatalistically inclined and ready to accept the "boot-in-the-face" era as inevitable.

Teacher Training

"Gifted children have a right to be educated by teachers who are specially qualified to teach them" (Tannenbaum, 1983, p. 464).

This quote does not imply that the gifted child should have some kind of exclusive treatment. What Tannenbaum is stating is that every child has the right to be taught by teachers who are specially qualified to teach them--the retarded child, the learning disabled child, the average child, and the gifted child. The gifted child is not asking for privileged treatment--he is only asking for what every child should and must have.

But, what does it mean to be qualified to teach the gifted; qualified as a specialist teacher and qualified as a regular classroom teacher? I do not think that there is a clear-cut answer to this question, not only with regard to the courses and the content, but also because of the varying approaches and emphases inherent in different cultures and societies.

To be classified and to operate as a gifted education specialist (as would be the case with any other education specialist) postgraduate level of education cannot but be a requirement. If the premise is that gifted education falls within the realms of special education, then there should not be any discrimination as to the amount of training required.

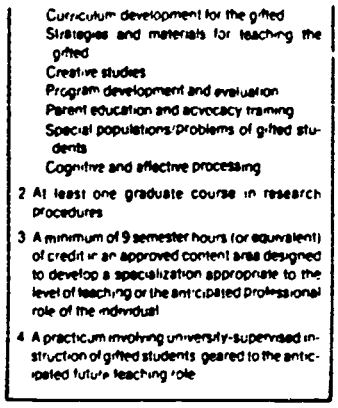
Karnes and Parker (1983, p. 19) propose a Teacher Training Model which will lead to certification for teachers of the gifted. I believe that an introduction to Section 1 of this model should form the basis of the training model for every teacher, and that Sections 2, 3, and 4, as well as an advanced Section 1 should be the nucleus of the specialized program. Two components which are not included in the Karnes-Parker Model or in other already established models (vide University of Georgia, Columbia University, University of Washington, U.C.L.A., University of Connecticut) and which, according to indepth research (Neethling, 1984) are areas important for a total understanding and insight into gifted education, are:

Comparative studies: to know and understand how other systems operate and how giftedness is manifested in other cultures. Management, organization and administration: to theoretically and practically become acquainted with the managing of programs at micro, meso, and macro levels.

MODEL A Certification for Teachers of the Gifted

Complete an approved program in gifted education culminating in (or at a level beyond) the master's degree and including at least the following components

1 A minimum of 12 semester hours of credit involving the following course contents
- Nature and needs psychology of the gifted
- Assessment of gifted students
- Counseling of the gifted



Curriculum development for the gifted
Strategies and materials for teaching the gifted
Creative studies
Program development and evaluation
Parent education and acvocacy training
Special populations/Problems of gifted students
Cognitive and affective processing

2 At least one graduate course in research procedures

3 A minimum of 9 semester hours (or equivalent) of credit in an approved content area designed to develop a specialization appropriate to the level of teaching or the anticipated professional role of the individual

4 A practicum involving university-supervised instruction of gifted students geared to the anticipated future teaching role

Identification

The nature and needs of the gifted, issues in defining giftedness and assessment of gifted pupils are areas which interlink very closely and will, for the purpose of this paper, be grouped under the above title.

Probably the most widely recognized definition of giftedness, is the 1971 (and modified in 1978) definition proposed by the U.S. Commissioner of Education. To quote this definition has become nearly standard procedure in any general discussion of gifted education.

> Gifted and talented children are those identified by professionally qualified persons who, by virtue of outstanding abilities, are capable of high performance. These are children who require differentiated educational programs and/or services beyond those normally provided y the regular school program in order to realize their contribution to self and society.

Children capable of high performance include those with demonstrated achievement and/or potential ability in any of the following areas, singly or in combination:

1. General intellectual ability;
2. Specific academic aptitude;
3. Creative or productive thinking;
4. Leadership ability;
5. Visual and performing arts;
6. Psychomotor ability (Marland, 1971, p. ix).

Richert (1982) maintains that this federal definition can, with some clarification, provide a sound rationale for gifted education:

·Giftedness is defined in terms of educational need, not privilege.

·Exceptionality is a major criterion.

·Potential, as well as actual performance in school, is included.

·The term is expanded to include other than intellectually gifted.

·Contribution and benefits to society, as well as students, are offered as major rationales. (p. 8)

Renzulli (1978) has reservations about the nonparallel nature of the definition and Gallagher (1979) argues that one should not try to define anything before you have acquired sufficient knowledge about it and that the continuous chopping and changing of definitions is a clear indication of the uncertainty of what we are dealing with. Tannenbaum's (1983) premise is that "there are some defensible generalizations about the nature of giftedness that help us begin to understand what we are talking about" (p. 89).

Because of the obvious degree of incompatibility which exist among leading scholars in the field of gifted education with regard to definitions (and then it is also clear that little thought was given to the cross-cultural exclusiveness of most of these definitions which specify

definite categories), it would be a more universally accepted policy to define giftedness in a general way without area specifications. A slight modification of the DeHaan and Havighurst definition (1961) and without the kinds of human performance indicated by them, could very well be the answer to the definition problems we are still encountering in 1984:

> We shall consider any child gifted who is remarkably superior in some ability that can make him an outstanding contributor to the welfare of, and quality of living in, society.

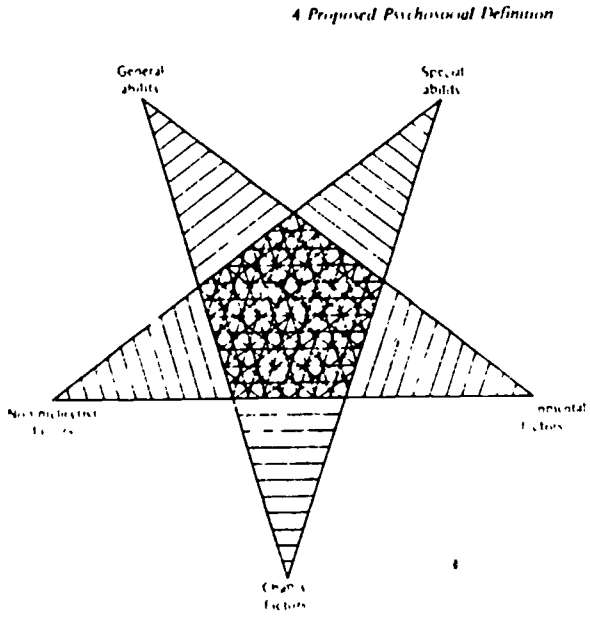
I deliberately elaborated on discussing these definitions because teachers in the regular classroom, as well as specialist teachers, have over a long period of time been confused by this bombardment of dissimilar and conflicting definitions. It is thus recommended that this very general definition form the premise, until clearer parameters have been established.

The key concept in this definition is "remarkably superior." And to understand what remarkably superior means, the teacher needs to understand gifted behavior and how to identify that behavior. The National Report on Identification (Richert et al., 1982) comprises 451 pages and for me to ever try to delineate this in any way in the time I have to my disposal, would be rather presumptious.

Tannenbaum (1983, p. 87) proposed a psycho-social definition (illustrated at the end of this section) incorporating five factors which mesh into excellence. I believe that this is an approach which educators need to become aware of and need to experiment with.

At this stage it is sufficient to say that the teacher in the regular classroom must understand that it is not only the high IQ child

or high achiever who could be the gifted child in the classroom, but that giftedness is manifested in a great variety of behavior patterns. And if he recognizes these patterns and refers the child to the specialist, he has in reality made a major contribution which could mean the difference between meaningful and meaningless education for that child.



Delivery Models

Jones (1983) states that "in most programs, gifted children spend between 80 and 90 percent of their time in a regular classroom" (p. 26). It is, therefore, clear that the regular classroom teacher has no right to say that the gifted child is no concern of his. If he is spending so much time in your class and you refuse to acknowledge that he needs some special kind of provision, you are instrumental in stifling the needs and aspirations of the gifted child.

It may be very well true that there is no gifted child specialist in the school where you teach. Who will then be the advisor? Without appropriate training in the selection and application of the most feasible models for particular situations, enthusiasm and interest alone will not be able to carry the day for anyone.

The following program prototype should not be meaningless concepts to you but you must be able to make a sound evaluation as to which of the prototypes are most appropriate for your unique circumstances.

PROGRAM PROTOTYPES

Acceleration	Enrichment	Guidance
Students are placed and provided instruction in a given area or subject at a more advanced level.	Students are provided experiences which replace, supplement or extend learnings vertically or horizontally.	Students are provided experiences which help to promote better understanding of self and others.
Grade skipping	Cluster grouping within regular class	Individual conferences and counseling
Subject advancement	Special classes	Group meetings
Credit by exam	Pull-out classes	Career and vocational counseling
Advanced placement	Part-time groups before, during, after school or Saturdays	Educational counseling
Early admissions	Seminars	Peer counseling
Correspondence courses	Mini-courses	Community programs and sponsorship
Internships	Team teaching	Scholarships
Honors classes	Resource center	Study groups
Independent study	Itinerant or Culture events	Tutoring
	Special electives	
	Special summer	
	Independent study	
	Direct d research	
	Community mentors	
	Field study	

(Hawaii Department of Education, 1982, p. 123)

You must realize that if you teach at a small rural school with small numbers and where resources may be very limited, the options you have with regard to program prototypes will differ markedly from the options your colleague teaching in a large urban school may have. But teaching at a small remote school with limited resources, does not imply that no provision should be made for the gifted child. What it does imply is that you, and everyone involved in the education of the child, should realize what the scope and limitations of a gifted child program in that particular school and area are.

But, without the necessary insight into the essence and particularity of delivery models, program prototypes and counseling, it would not be possible to effectively evaluate the situation to:

- Make valid judgments with regard to implementation.
- Be able to counsel parents to better understand, guide and make defensible decisions regarding their gifted children.

Because most parents regard the regular classroom teacher as the one they should discuss their child's education with, it would seem rather strange and illogical if he is willing to counsel and advise parents of all the children in his class with the exception of the parents of gifted children. I do not think any parent of a gifted child, in any culture or social structure will and should accept a situation like this. Treffinger and Fine (1979) discuss the situation where parents often anticipate that their concerns will be discounted. I think that an informed teacher, informed not only in regard to the what and how of his teaching but also informed regarding the role and function of the parent in the educational process, is the one who will truly be able to bridge

the parent/school gap. "Only when this interaction occurs will parents and schools achieve the maximum effectiveness they both desire in understanding and educating gifted children" (Kaufman & Sexton, 1983, p. 51).

Beyond the School

The regular classroom teacher must realize that learning/teaching does not only take place in the classroom, or the home for that matter, and this is especially true for the gifted child. No teacher can provide the optimum the child needs, and it would be to the child's detriment (and to the detriment of everyone concerned) if you were to ignore the role community sources and resources could play.

You should not regard a mentor involvement as another burden upon your already loaded shoulders, but a mentor program must be viewed as assisting you and as filling the gaps you are otherwise unable to fill.

Cellerino (1983, p. 45) developed the following mentor guide to concisely delineate the roles of the mentor, student and resource teacher. I have added a section to explain the role of the regular classroom teacher, because to ignore this component in the total mentor program, is not only going to be detrimental to the pupils in the regular classroom, but may also create problems regarding the essential working together as partners. (How will the teacher be able to gear his teaching if he is not informed about certain learning involvements of some of his pupils?)

THE MENTOR

The mentor is a wise and trusted counselor.

When working with a student the mentor will...

•Act as a guide

To become a guide and a facilitator of the child's learning, allowing independence and self-direction

·Share knowledge

To know the subject well and freely share information with the student

·Demonstrate Method of Inquirty

To provide guidance in the method of inquiry appropriate to the specific area of study

·Give direction

To give the child some direction in locating relevant sources

·Provide continued support

To be committed to the student and provide guidance as long as needed

THE STUDENT

When pursuing an Independent Study the student will be expected to...

·Establish goals and objectives

To narrow the topic and focus on a specific problem

·Determine direction

To decide how to begin the investigation

·Locate related resources

To find library and community resources relating to the topic

·Find a time line

To specifically state the length of time of the investigation

·Create a final product

To determine the form of the final product

THE RESOURCE ROOM TEACHER

The Resource Room Teacher will...

·Acquaint mentor with program

To acquaint the mentor with program goals and objectives and the nature of an Independent Study

·Know student's topic

To be familiar with the student's study and to give assistance when needed

·Coordinator efforts

To act as a liaison between the mentor and the student

·Guide student in planning study

To help the student develop a management plan

·Plan schedule

To arrange the student-mentor schedule

THE REGULAR CLASSROOM TEACHER

The Regular Classroom Teacher will...

·Be informed regarding independent projects

·Be able to make recommendations if and when necessary

·Have the opportunity to discuss the pupil with the resource room teacher and mentor

·Be regarded as an important component of the mentor program.

Evaluation

"Every program for the gifted has its own scope and objectives, which vary from the one setting to the next. It is impossible to suggest guidelines that will fit them all" (Tannenbaum, 1983, p. 443).

The main purpose of evaluation is to determine the extent to which program goals and objectives are being achieved, and the impact of learning activities on student progress. It is not possible to discuss the various aspects of evaluation such as formative and summative evaluation, evaluating student progress, program effectiveness and monitoring and reporting. If one accepts that the regular classroom teacher should have a basic understanding of identification provisions and counseling,

then it follows naturally that evaluation cannot but be regarded as an integral part of any gifted program.

Some of the vital questions the regular classroom teacher needs to have the answers for can briefly be summarized as follows:

- Does the gifted child write the same tests and examinations as the rest of the class?
- Does he write those tests and examinations at the same time as the rest of the class?
- How is his work graded? (or, how is enriched and accelerated work graded?)
- What kind of objectives are set for the gifted child? (is he a co-planner of these objectives?)

Final Comments

The gifted pendulum has for many years been moving between the "boot in the face" and the "alive and well" positions. I do believe that the many surveys of the past five years give a fairly accurate indication of the state of the arts--a state of the arts which in 1984 is quite alive and well.

But I repeat what I have said before--if certain conditions are not met, there can be no guarantees that any "alive and well" period will remain so for any great length of time.

Many may argue that it is the administrators who make the final decisions and that it is the politicians and the economic climate which, to a major degree, influence those decisions. And, of course, this is true. But, does that really change the fundamental issue; should that really force us to throw our hands up in despair or make us want to pass the buck?

That, I will never believe. And that brings me back to the essence of the matter. If we train our regular classroom teachers in the basics of gifted education, then, when the "seven lean" years of inadequate funds are upon us and we have to do without specialist teachers and coordinators, I am convinced that the informed regular classroom teacher will be able to effectively carry the day.

And universities and colleges which do not offer courses in gifted education because of the pragmatic premise that they only comply with the specific requirements of the school system they serve, and if that school system does not specify gifted specialists, they will not offer courses in gifted education, are totally misguided. The universities and colleges are either not informed or are negating the impact which the regular classroom teacher trained in gifted education, has made universally in uplifting education in general (vide research findings in Venezuela, Taiwan, Israel, and South Africa).

We should not give Big Brother another opportunity to boot us in the face but let us rather work together to achieve what that rustic prophet Thoreau had in mind for us: "We may come from dust, but our destiny is in the stars. That day is yet to dawn, for the sun is only a morning star" (Gowan, 1981, p. 226).

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