

# Are we talking about the same thing??

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While relatively few teachers have yet had formal training in giftedness, the numbers who have had some exposure as a result of various initiatives in recent years is increasing, bringing with it some new challenges. While the familiarity of educators with words like differentiation, extension, enrichment and even 'gifted' might seem reassuring initially, parents and professionals advocating for gifted children may find that while we are all using the same words, we may actually be talking about different things. The challenge then is to ensure consistency as we are all (hopefully) working towards the same goal.

Drawing on my experience as a consultant to over 80 families and a number of schools in the last 2 years, this session will look at some of the interpretations teachers and advocates may have for the same terms and the confusion and frustration that can result if we aren't actually talking about the same thing. Some suggestions as to how we can avoid the pitfalls will also be offered. This session will be of interest to both parents and educators – after all we have the same goal in mind – working towards the best possible environment for gifted children.

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- DEST Gifted and Talented Professional Development Package Core Modules were sent to all schools in 2005 and the Extension and Specialisation Modules were distributed in late 2006.



- Parents had high hopes that teachers would now have some knowledge of how to meet the needs of our gifted students, things should surely get easier.....



- Some unanticipated 'problems' have arisen
- In-service varied state to state and system to system, some teachers somehow still remain unaware of the resource that is in every school around Australia and available on the internet.....
- Judging the impact of the package by the number of copies delivered perhaps doesn't give the whole picture.

**Hopefully with time some of these 'problems' will resolve, but in the meantime, it is worthwhile being aware that even though we may all be using the same words, we may not all be meaning the same thing.**

## • Gifted

While on the whole we have moved away from the view that 'every child is gifted', there are still parents who ring me in distress after a meeting where this was the position taken by the school.

At the opposite extreme is the view that persists despite PD that to be gifted you have to be 'good at everything'. If you aren't, you aren't really gifted. Our footballers are a good example of how quickly this falls down.....

It is helpful (even essential at times) to outline what you mean when you use the term 'gifted'

- Giftedness is a lifelong quality, not high performance.
- Gifted means "better *at* not better *than*"

**Gifted vs Talented.** Gagne's model is well known but some schools operate on the premise that talented students are less able than gifted.

## How gifted?

'We have lots of gifted children at this school'

Some schools treat the gifted as a homogenous group. They plan programs for 'the gifted' but wonder why some don't really get excited (the language strong child in a science pull out program). Schools may have some programs or opportunities available so believe the needs of the gifted are met. But are they available to all students? Are there barriers on the grounds of year level or age? Are they appropriate opportunities for this child (degree of giftedness, or learning strengths etc).

Where this falls down most often is in understanding **degrees of giftedness**.

## Percentiles and Percentages

Scores on IQ tests vary, schools are more familiar with some than others, most teachers are unaware that the ceilings are low enough that we may not get a clear indication of the degree of giftedness for our most able students.

Percentiles give a more consistent picture across tests.

90<sup>th</sup> percentile is a 1 in 10 score (approx 2 or 3 in each class)

99<sup>th</sup> percentile is a 1 in 100 score (one in the class every 3 years or so)

99.9<sup>th</sup> percentile is a 1 in 1000 score. (one in a career..... one every 30 years)

A score at the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile does not mean 'the child got 90% of the test correct'.

The percentile ranking gives you an indication of the frequency of a score of this level, an indication of how common (or uncommon) they might be.

## • Differentiation

Key element is 'different' but there is more to it than that.....

When you talk to teachers about differentiation, it is common for them to tell you they already do it. Most common interpretation is ability grouping is differentiation activity rotations is differentiation, open ended tasks are differentiation.....

Differentiation needs to encompass more than just changing an activity or a lesson or an assignment. It is a commitment to matching and individual student with educational options that make sense for him or her throughout the school years.

In theory it means different forms of **instruction and curricula** for different students, depending on ability and levels of achievement. And recognising a different pace is required for students of different ability. The moderately gifted learn at 3 – 4 times as fast as the average student. What are the implications? More time in enrichment or more time learning?

Curriculum alteration for highly able students is a good beginning, but not the whole picture.

The one size fits all (gifted) children in differentiation is false assumption. Degrees of giftedness = different degrees and types of differentiation.

"Differentiation for all" idea suggests that a differentiated **curriculum** will meet the needs of the gifted (often in the regular classroom). Differentiation seldom acknowledges the non academic differences between children which form a very important part of the gifted package – the social and emotion or 'heart' of being gifted.

- The danger is over use (or misuse): "Everyone benefits somewhat but the gifted benefit somewhat less"..... (Delisle "Barefoot Irreverence" p 242). He draws the parallel with co-operative learning which became over applied and, he believes, led to the demise of ability grouping in many cases.

Differentiated is work that is **different not 'as well as'**. Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) not More Of The Same (MOTS). Rotations don't provide something different if the same work is just presented on different days.

**Extension or enrichment?** The terms are often used interchangeably.

Extend = reach (as in extend your arm)

Enrich = rich = indulge = same level, just more of it

You need to be specific not just using the word but with a description as well.

**Enrichment parading as extension**..... Maths problem solving rather than content at a higher level, knitting, pull out groups that are not related to the classroom content, excursions with no follow up.....

**Parents:** ask for specific examples from school

**Schools:** apply Passow's Would? Could? Should? to check that the opportunities are (really) suitable for gifted children (and then be aware of differentiating differently for the HG and the MG amongst the group)

## • Peers vs Age Mates

Peer is a term widely used but sometimes without any conscious thought about who these peers are. For the gifted, intellectual peers are not likely to be age mates.

"A gifted child may think like a 12 year old, look like a 10 year old, play like a 6 year old and argue like a high priced lawyer." (from the NAGC conference 2007) *Who are his peers?*

MG child IQ 120 (at least 1 in 10) @10 yrs = intellectual peers of around 12yrs

HG child IQ 135 (~1 in 100) @ 10n yrs = intellectual peers of around 13.5

PG child IQ 150 (~1 in 1000) @10 yrs = intellectual peers of around 15 yrs

We group children by age, some worry about what might happen if a child was amongst older children (despite what the research tells us), but we rarely worry about what might happen to a gifted child who is left with chronological age mates.....

## • Educating the whole child

Not strictly the result of PD but another challenge that arises from a little awareness.

What constitutes educating the 'whole child'? Intellectual? Social? Emotional/Spiritual? Creative?

Social opportunities needed. Emotional development every bit as important as intellectual development and that is rarely accommodated either, particularly in the inclusion setting.

Anne Marie Roeper in her book "The I of the Beholder", commented on her perception that parents are now expecting schools to be more responsive to their child's needs rather than expecting their child to fit with what is offered.

This change isn't a result of the PD available in recent times in Australia, but I see the same change reflected here. Parents are becoming aware of their child's giftedness earlier (down from 7 yr olds to 4 and 5;s and one parent of 15 month old twin boys). Very many are concerned primarily that their child is happy and has other kids they can relate to, then that they are able to achieve towards their potential. The focus on just fitting in and getting on is slipping.....

## Conclusions:

- Exposure to gifted PD is a good thing but only a starting point. A little knowledge is a dangerous thing.....
- There needs to be follow up, more conversations, and openness between parents and teachers (parents can significantly shorten a teachers search for relevant information – they have a lot invested and usually read extensively)
- Needs to be consistency of terminology.
- You cant master 'gifted' in a couple of days. There is a strong need for a community of support (state associations, education systems, discussion boards), a place to pose questions and continue the conversation.

Challenge as parents

- to advocate in such a way that the relationship with the school or teacher remains positive
- to clarify what we mean when we posed options rather than assume we are all talking about the same things.....