

The Gifted Voice

Newsletter from the Educators of the Gifted Organization

Spring Issue 2007

President's Update

Welcome to EdGO!

Educators of the Gifted Organization www.edgo.ca

EDGOTAGO no longer exists but the people who built it still do. Our executive has been enlarged to be more responsive to needs. We are becoming a valuable base for all teachers who work with gifted children. Direct involvement in most areas of gifted education will help us in the struggle to keep it strong, healthy and available for "bright lights".

Key issues and challenges facing gifted education:

1. Ontario Ministry of Education documents such as "Education for All" (see our website www.edgotago.com for the full text) are causing people to believe that the needs of gifted students can be fully met in regular classrooms. This is leading to reductions in identifying gifted students and the further decline and dismantling of existing programs.

2. There is a need to develop a standard process of identifying all gifted children. Identification tools control program enrollment, number of classes, and number of facilitators/ teachers of the gifted. A standardized

process ensures ALL gifted children have fair access to programs.

3. Every school board should have a gifted program facilitator. There is a need for more advocates for gifted education.

4. Qualified people are needed to teach gifted children. Existing courses are a half credit course at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education in Toronto and at the University of Calgary. Experienced teachers are retiring and new teachers are not able to prepare adequately.

5. Ontario school boards internet sites must clearly exhibit and define their gifted programs. This shows accountability and effort to parents and other visitors to the sites.

6. Legally allocated ministry monies must continue to go directly to gifted programs.

7. It is vital to our province and nation that brilliant minds in the education systems be valued, respected and nurtured. We need to recognize and nurture abilities and assist highly intelligent young people to reach their potential.

Otto Schmidt

I'M BORED WHAT DOES THIS REALLY MEAN?

By Bernard Beales

Nothing can raise the blood pressure of a seasoned teacher as much as the parent of a student who reports that their child is "bored". The parents continue with the request for a more challenging program, all sorts of curriculum adjustments and accommodations. The teacher just shakes her head. She can't understand how this child needs enrichment when he is not showing mastery of the basic curriculum.

If we look a little closer, what we might find is "a failure to communicate". The phrase "I'm bored" may not translate

directly into "I need a more challenging curriculum". There are many other translations – some easier to program for than others.

Translation 1: "This work is too hard." Sometimes, the exact opposite is true. I would be bored if I was asked to sit through a lecture on astrophysics. It would not be that I found the concepts too simple or the topic uninteresting. I just don't possess the prerequisite knowledge to make this experience profitable at this time.

Translation 2: "I'm being told to sit still and listen all day." We are dealing with children. They have a limited capacity for absorbing information and remaining passive (some more than others!). Think back to your last course or staff meeting – did your mind begin to wander as the second

Gifted Education: Issues and Directions for Sharing Best Practice

by
Joanne Foster, Ed.D.

The purpose of this article is to crystallize educators' thinking around key points related to gifted education. The following items have been culled from experience and, in part, from *Being Smart about Gifted Children: A Guidebook for Parents and Educators* (2005), which I co-authored with Dona Matthews. Here are "a few of my favourite things"—presented in an eight point framework designed to generate reflection, as well as collaborative and proactive efforts on the part of practitioners. Ideally, it will also have the effect of helping to instill and further the love of learning in students.

Joanne Foster, Ed.D. 2007

ONE major conceptualization question:

How do you define giftedness?

Consider this workable definition: "*Giftedness is exceptionally advanced subject-specific ability at a particular point in time such that a student's learning needs cannot be well met without significant adaptations to the curriculum.*"

This definition is consistent with what is often referred to as "adaptive instruction," and it aligns with the research findings noted in #3 below. This "mastery" model approach to thinking about giftedness removes some of the "mystery" that has so often been associated with the term. The mastery model reflects what we know about high-level cognitive development and individual differences; incorporates the domain-specific nature of intelligence; respects the dynamic and context-specific nature of intelligence; leads logically and directly to identification practices and to educational programming implications; and minimizes the categorical dichotomy between gifted and nongifted.

More about the definition, as well as detailed information about the mastery approach, a comparison chart, and educational implications can be found in *Being Smart about Gifted Children*.

TWO extremely relevant matters:

Two important points that emerge from theory and research:

For optimal engagement in learning, tasks need to be simultaneously challenging and manageable.

Learning opportunities should be as authentic and meaningful as possible to the individuals engaged in the learning process.

Two important agendas in gifted education:

- 1) *Match curriculum to ability.* Adapt curriculum for those who are advanced relative to their age or grade.
- 2) *Support giftedness in those who have not yet demonstrated it*

THREE current findings (that align with mastery model thinking):

- 1) There is tremendous diversity in the developmental pathways leading to giftedness, and in the ways of being gifted.
- 2) Gifted definition, identification, and programming should form a coherent, internally consistent whole, such that each component informs and is informed by the others.
- 3) As with other educational exceptionalities, giftedness is better conceptualized as a current need for special education, rather than as an innate attribute of a person.

FOUR differentiation-related inquiries (that teachers should consider):

1. How do I support children's asynchronous development and subject-specific strengths and weaknesses?
2. What do I do to ensure that I have reasonable expectations for each of my students?
3. How do I make the learning choices within my program sufficiently stimulating?
4. In what ways does my work reflect flexibility, ingenuity, collaboration, and compromise?

FIVE metacognitive questions classroom teachers should ask of themselves (and one another):

1. What drives my program? (What are its strengths?)
2. What are my constraints? (What slows it down?)
3. How do I encourage and support high-ability learners in my classroom? (Actual strategies that I use.)
4. Who and what would best support my needs? (My wish list—for myself and for my colleagues at school.)
5. What kinds of forums can educators create in order to continue to address teachers' concerns, interests, questions and desires for professional growth in the area of gifted education? (Be specific...)

SIX areas for differentiation:

1. modifying content, process, product
2. altering the pace of instruction
3. creating a flexible classroom environment
4. using specific instructional strategies
5. altering assessment procedures
6. employing a wide range of resource materials and technological options

SEVEN keys to optimal instruction:

1. Match instruction to learning need(s)
2. Avoid labels where possible
3. Offer choice; provide lots of flexible options that tap into interests
4. Provide creative opportunities
5. Demand high standards
6. Are assessed fairly

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7. Connect classroom to school, community, and beyond (e.g., mentorships, contests, museums, collaboration with industry and social service groups).

8. Facilitate the serious study of social/emotional issues (e.g., peer pressure, identity, appreciation and respect of diversity, leadership, bullying).

9. Encourage critical habits of mind—in context of engagement with authentic problems—in depth and over time, with teachers, parents, and peers.

10. Strengthen home and school linkages, and use extracurricular resources (e.g., classes, clubs, special interest programs).

EIGHT programming ideas to help students *self-direct* their learning:

1. Teach them how to make new and interesting linkages and liaisons, and to look for new patterns across subject areas.

2. Help them find ways to change the degree of challenge by showing them how to build from what they already know.

3. Explain how they might change or enhance the design of an inquiry or problem-solving approach.

4. Encourage them to share ideas (and to value the ideas of others).

5. Teach them to be anticipatory and to respond flexibly to unexpected events.

6. Help them to understand and to appreciate their own readiness levels, interests, and individual learning styles.

7. Encourage them to take sensible risks and to stretch themselves creatively (and provide them with the necessary supports as they do so).

8. Build students' confidence in areas where they are not as strong, being sure to take into consideration past circumstances and experiential factors.

Conclusion

There has been a notable paradigm shift in perspectives of giftedness over the past few decades. For further reading on the topic of "refinements, bridges, and themes" as they pertain to understandings of giftedness, teachers may wish to refer to articles (including one by Matthews and Foster, 2006) in three recent issues of *Roepers Review*, devoted to Conceptual Foundations (Vol 27 [1]; Vol 28 [1]; and Vol 28 [11]).

There is no limit to what teachers can and should be *thinking about* and *doing* in support of gifted/high-ability learners. The ideas and suggestions described here are meant to be springboards for reflection and action by educators. A flexibly responsive approach to individual learner needs will

translate into happier and more productive students, and to classrooms that embrace diversity and work toward nurturing high-level development in all children.

Wise Words

Helen MacInness

Nothing is interesting if you're not interested.

Eric Hoffer

The difficult and risky task of meeting and mastering the new . . . is not undertaken by the vanguard of society but by its rear. It is the misfits, failures, fugitives, outcasts and their like who are among the first to grapple with the new.

Dwight Morrow

The world is divided into people who do things and people who get the credit. Try, if you can, to belong to the first class. There's far less competition.

H. Jackson Brown, Jr.

Don't waste time learning the "tricks of the trade." Instead learn the trade.

Thomas Jefferson

He who knows best knows how little he knows.

Laurence J. Peter

If at first you don't succeed, you may be at your level of incompetence already.

B. Peters

You have to be original. If you're like everyone else, what do they need you for?

Unknown wise person

The difference between genius and stupidity is that genius has its limits.

Richard Bach

You are never given a wish without also the power to make it true. You may have to work for it, however.

June S. Cook

You can run away, but you have to take yourself with you.

(Continued from page 1)

hour of listening approached? Get the students moving – start with the class on the floor for input, then into groups for discussion and finally back to their seats for a written assignment.

Translation 3: "I'm not interested in this topic." I'm not a fan of politics. I know it's important and I should be involved but I'm not. When conversations move to the political arena, I excuse myself to find a washroom or to get a drink – the same coping behaviours our students use when they are not interested. True, we have little control over the content of the curriculum, but we could try a little more to make it relevant. Use force fit or synectics to tie the content into students' interests.

Translation 4: "This is not my preferred learning style." Some students need the big picture – the underlying theory and principles. Others want a chance to work in teams and discuss. Some students the opportunity to improvise and perform while others prefer to do tests and quizzes. There are so many different methods to disseminate information that no one's learning style should be ignored during the course of a day.

Translation 5: "It's always the same old thing." When it first hit the airwaves, *Survivor* was "must see t.v." After many years, the format stays the same but viewers are getting bored. They want new twists and fresh ideas. The same goes for teaching. You may have the most innovative way to present content, but if you use the same method day after day, year after year, it loses its appeal. Mix it up – try a different approach.

Translation 6: "This is so monotonous." Practice makes perfect but page after page of math questions all practicing the same concept might be considered overkill. Use pre-testing, try "most difficult first", create a game, have a "bee" – anything to avoid "overkill".

Translation 7: "The teacher is dull." Face it, not every teacher is a born stand-up comedian, but we have all had our share of listening to monotonous speakers. Again, variety is the key. Shake things up – try talking less and give the students the chance to be the presenters. Bring in videos and speakers. Try a period without speaking at all – just mime!

Translation 8: "This is too easy. I need a challenge." Sometimes, this is the correct translation. Fortunately, this is perhaps the easiest one to deal with. Differentiate your program. Set up individualized learning contracts. Have students select their own reading materials. Use higher level thinking skills. Make the work more open-ended. The list goes on.

Note from the Editor

The Gifted Voice is planned to be the Voice of those who believe that Special Programming for the Gifted is not a frill but a necessity. The byline Newsletter from The Educators of the Gifted of Ontario means exactly what it says. This newsletter belongs to you, teachers, University professors, parents, and guardians of children who are gifted. Consequently, your letters, articles and comments are most welcome and a page will be henceforth dedicated to our readers.

Carmen Galea

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The following article was adapted for this publication by Otto Schmidt.

Acceleration Options for Gifted Children

Southern, W. T., Jones, E.D., & Stanley, J. C. (1993). "Acceleration and enrichment: The context and development of program options." In K. A. Heller, F. J. Monks, & A. H. Passow (Eds.), *International Handbook of Research and Development of Giftedness and Talent* (pp. 387-409). New York: Pergamon)

Early entrance to kindergarten: The student is admitted to school prior to the age customarily specified by the district for entry into first grade.

Grade skipping: The student moves ahead of normal grade placement. This may be done during an academic year (e.g., a third grader goes directly into fourth grade; skips the last two years of high school to enter college), or at year end (e.g., a third grader is promoted to fifth grade).

Continuous progress: The student is given material deemed appropriate for current achievement as the student becomes ready. **Self-paced instruction:** The student is presented with materials that allow him or her to proceed at a self-selected pace.

Subject-matter acceleration: Without being assigned to a higher grade, the student is placed for part of the day with students at more advanced grade levels for one or more subjects (e.g., a fifth grader goes to sixth grade for science instruction).

Combined classes: The student is placed in classes where two or more grade levels are combined (e.g., third and fourth grades split rooms). The arrangement can be used to allow younger children to interact with older ones academically and socially.

Curriculum compacting: The student is given reduced amounts of introductory activities, drill, and review. The time saved may be used to move more quickly through the curriculum.

Telescoping curriculum: The student spends less time than usual in a course of study (e.g., completes a one-year course in one semester or finishes junior high school in two years rather than three).

Mentorships: The student is exposed to a mentor who provides advanced training, experiences, and pacing in a content area.

Extracurricular programs: The student is enrolled in

course work or summer programs that confer advanced instruction and/or credit for study (e.g., fast-paced language or math courses offered by universities).

Concurrent enrollment: The student takes a course at one level and receives credit for successful completion of a parallel course at a higher level (e.g., takes algebra when in junior high and receives credit for both high school algebra and junior high math, or takes a college physics course in lieu of high school physics).

Early graduation: The student graduates from high school or college in 3-1/2 years or less.

Advanced Placement: The student takes a course in high school in preparation for an examination that may confer college credit for satisfactory performance.

Credit by examination: The student receives credit (at high school or college level) upon successful completion of an examination.

Correspondence courses: The student takes high school or college courses by mail, video, or audio course presentation.

Early entrance into high school or college: The student is admitted with full standing to an advanced level of instruction at least one year early.

Acceleration in college: The student completes two or more majors in a total of four years and/or earns a master's degree along with the bachelor's.

(Extra. Not related to the list above)

Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR): PLAR is the formal evaluation process whereby secondary school students may obtain Grade 10-12 credits for prior learning. Prior learning includes the knowledge and skills that students have acquired, in both formal and informal ways, outside secondary school. Students may have their knowledge and skills evaluated against the expectations outlined in curriculum policy documents.

Otto Schmidt

The Top Ten Programming Strategies For The Gifted
compiled by Bernard Beales

1	Be the "Guide on the Side", not the "Sage on the Stage"	Talk less - give the students the opportunity to figure it out themselves. They will ask for help if it is needed
2	Never underestimate what students can do	Don't think - "What can my students do" when planning; ask "What CAN'T my students do" - then teach it!
3	Two words: Why? Elaborate	Use metacognition techniques - ask students to think about thinking; have them explain their reasoning & intuition
4	What is the next step?	Ask yourself - "Why"? What is the purpose of this skill? Where does it lead logically? How can I extend this?
5	Open-ended questions	Activities that state "Give 3 examples of..." limit thinking and creativity. Instead use: "How many different ways.."
6	Opportunities to work with other gifted students	Working with other gifted students allows opportunities for piggy-backing, friendly competition & challenge
7	Don't expect perfection	Never throw "giftedness" back in their faces; all students need to be taught at an appropriate level
8	Use the Ministry Curriculum Documents	Don't make it easy to get an "A"; does it truly "Exceed Expectations"? Has it merged Information with Imagination?
9	Incorporate more Higher Level Thinking tasks	You must provide opportunities for students to stretch their thinking; use evaluation, synthesis and analysis more
10	Just say "Yes!"	Add a "Your Own Choice - Subject to Teacher Approval" option for projects - students create their own enrichment

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