

The Gifted Voice

Newsletter from the Educators for the Gifted Organization Spring Summer Issue /2008

President's Update

Welcome to EdGO!

The Educators for the Gifted Organization is proudly announcing several new and exciting happenings of interest to all teachers:

New OCT course related to giftedness. The College of Teachers has responded to a request for a new course related to giftedness. The Special Education - Schedule C course guidelines are the basis upon which providers and university faculties are developing the courses and receive accreditation. The new course on teaching gifted children will be one of seven courses on exceptionalities that are being developed as stand alone courses for all teachers (no prerequisites except teaching certificate).

Marketing EdGO. The executive hired Denise Vassel-Phelps of Full Circle Marketing for a series of meetings that focused on how to make EdGO more valuable to teachers. We have a clearer vision and directions for the future that will be of benefit to all those involved with us in meeting the needs of gifted and other high achieving learners. We

anticipate going provincial and then national at some future point.

Next EdGO Conference, Friday, Nov. 21, 2008. We were very pleased that you found the last conference of value. We increased to 150 delegates! We are in the process of preparing our next conference with exceptional speakers and topics. Visit our website for details.

Resources and Speakers Panel. The EdGO executive has many experts from the GTA. Along with them we will be creating a list of speakers that will be available to speak at any Board conferences, in-services, etc. on various aspects of gifted education. If interested, please register your interest with us and also let us know in what areas of giftedness you might like to see speakers.

Your Insights & Suggestions. Please offer suggestions and ideas to make EdGO more responsive to your needs.

Visit www.edgo.ca for valuable resources on how to work with high achievers.

Otto Schmidt

Myths & Mindsets: How Everything You Used to Think about Giftedness Is Bad for Children

By
Dona Matthews, Ph.D.

donamathews@gmail.com

On November 30, 2007, I had the honour of giving the keynote address to the Educators of the Gifted Ontario conference. I spoke on "Myths & Mindsets: How Everything You Used to Think about Giftedness Is Bad for Children", and attempted to illustrate how recent research in developmental psychology applies to understanding giftedness, and to educational practice with gifted children. After discussing the mastery approach that Joanne Foster and I have been writing about, I introduced Carol Dweck's work with mindsets (see attached). I then asked participants these questions:

- Do you see a movement toward the mastery model in your own school and board settings?
- Do you have experiences of a mystery or mastery model or a fixed or growth mindset that illustrates these principles?

I was delighted by the response from members of the audience, and learned that many of them had already been working with these concepts.

I very much enjoyed my interaction with this lively and well-informed group of educators and parents.

Carol Dweck has done important research on child development, and has pulled together findings in neuropsychology, developmental psychology, and education. In her book *Mindset*, she reviews how three decades of re-

FIXED MINDSET: Some children are categorized as inherently smart and some are not. The fixed mindset is associated with lower achievement and self-esteem.

GROWTH MINDSET: Intelligence is seen as developing over time with appropriately scaffolded opportunities to learn. The growth mindset is associated with greater confidence, risk-taking, and higher academic and career success over time.

search show these differences in outcomes:

Dweck's conclusions apply to gifted development in many important ways, and highlight some of the widely-held myths and misconceptions about Giftedness::

1. Some People are Born Smart vs. Intelligence Develops Over Time

"The great teachers believe in the growth of the intellect and talent, and they are fascinated with the process of learning." (p. 188)

From a fixed mindset perspective, some people are inherently smart, and some aren't, and there are ways to measure this (e.g., IQ). From the growth mindset perspective, intelligence develops over time with appropriately scaffolded opportunities to learn.

2. Praising Children's Intelligence is Good vs. Praising Children's Intelligence is Bad

"Praising children's intelligence harms their motivation and it harms their performance." (p. 170)

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Rather than praising children for personality or innate fixed attributes like being smart, praise them for what they accomplish through practice, study, persistence, and good strategies. Ask them about their work in ways that appreciate their effort, and encourage them to think about their options and choices.

3. Smart Kids Learn Quickly and Easily vs Working Hard Makes You Smart

"You aren't a failure until you start to blame." (p. 37)

From a fixed mindset perspective, if you have to work hard at something, or you learn it slowly, you aren't good at it, and are not very smart. From a growth perspective, however, high achievement comes from hard work over time, and thoughtfulness (which can be slow) is a good thing.

4. Failure = Lack of Ability vs. Failure Can Be Seen as an Opportunity for Learning

"People in a growth mindset don't just seek challenge, they thrive on it." (p. 21)

People with a fixed mindset feel judged and evaluated all the time. If they spill something, they feel like klutzes; if they don't do well on a test, they conclude they aren't smart. From a growth mindset, failures are learning opportunities, a chance to see what we don't know or need to work on. The growth mindset is associated with much higher academic and career achievement levels.

5. Some Children are Destined for Success vs. Potential Cannot Be Measured

"An assessment at one point in time has little value for understanding someone's ability, let alone their potential to succeed in future." (p. 29)

From the growth perspective, potential is invisible and unmeasurable because there is too much open to development over time and to variables like motivation and effort.

Toward an Evidence-Based Approach to Gifted Education: Mystery vs. Mastery Models of Giftedness

Current findings suggest

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.
3. As with other educational exceptionalities, giftedness can be conceptualized most usefully as a current need for special education.

A Comparison of the Mystery and Mastery Models of Giftedness¹

Factor	Mystery model	Mastery model
Origin	Nature focus (i.e., genetic, innate), with nurture/environmental influences	Nurture focus (i.e., appropriate opportunities to learn) accepting genetic predispositions
Duration	Static; "once gifted, always gifted"	Dynamic, changing over time
Competence Domains	Most or all intellectual areas	Domain-specific (e.g., mathematical or musical or spatial giftedness)
Identification Timing	Once, as early as possible	Ongoing, as needed
Identification Measures	Intelligence tests; checklists; creativity tests	High-ceiling academic reasoning and ongoing dynamic classroom assessment
Identification Implications	Categorical (gifted or not-gifted)	Flexible; special education needs at a specific time in a specific area of functioning
Curriculum/Placement	Enrichment; segregated gifted class	Range of options; regular class if possible
Coherence	Definition, identification, and programming disconnected	Definition leads naturally to identification and programming, forming a coherent whole
Political Implications	Charges of elitism, funding concerns	Much more easily defensible
Evaluation	User satisfaction measures	Academic and cognitive measures of learning

Adapted from *Being Smart about Gifted Children: A Guidebook for Parents and Educators* by Dona Matthews and Joanne Foster (2005); www.beingsmart.ca.

A Teacher Candidate's First Foray into Gifted Education

by
Alison McCabe

I attended my first educational conference on a brisk day in November at Martin Grove C.I. in Toronto. Little did I know that I would learn to drum-in-the-dark, get a peek into the many complexities of being gifted, and be faced with an onslaught of childhood memories.

EDGO's annual conference took place on November 30, 2007, the end of a hectic term for me at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto (OISE/UT) where I am currently completing my Bachelor of Education degree. I decided to attend the conference along with a fellow teacher-candidate who was volunteering there; her first placement was at Martin Grove and she was returning to assist her Associate Teacher with the preparations. I was also encouraged to attend by Dr. Joanne Foster, my Educational Psychology instructor at OISE/UT. Moreover, some long-forgotten memories of being labelled "gifted" when I was in grade school were surfacing. I seemed destined to attend this conference and so, at the last minute – after some furious emailing with instructors at OISE whose classes I'd be missing – I showed up, cold, tired, but excited.

The morning was great! Dr. Dona Matthews was the keynote speaker. She is an award-winning author, experienced educator, and highly respected expert in the field of gifted education. I listened to her speak about different perceptions of intelligence, and how these can affect learning. I learned more about the gifted community – indeed, that there WAS a gifted community! – and I realized that a lot of what I was hearing could be applied to all students.

Several workshops were offered over the course of the morning with topics pertaining to curriculum applications for advanced learners, questions and answers about high-level ability, and program-specific approaches to learning and teaching. I enjoyed the presentation on... because I discovered...

Just as I was settling into a pleasant lunch, the lights blinked, and went off. Then it got chilly. There was no electricity in the building. We found out that there was a power outage across a large segment of the city. However, no one panicked. I think what impressed me the most was how the situation was handled – the presenters and participants put on their sweaters and took it all in stride. The feeling that this situation

didn't have to be endured but could actually be enjoyed hit home when, despite a lack of light and heat, over a hundred people gathered in the gym and enthusiastically learned how to play drums and dance to our own beats! Rodrigo Chavez and the Cassava Latin Rhythms inspired us with tales about the history of drums, and then hands-on opportunities to feel the power of drumming and movement as catalysts for team building efforts. The lights came back on, but by that time it didn't really matter. We were already having so much fun!

A number of interesting workshops were offered by various professionals throughout the afternoon. I attended a workshop on creativity.. As a grade school student, I spent three years in a gifted class once a week, and we spent most of our time working on self-selected projects and did them in the way that we wanted, as long as the teacher agreed to it. (Which s/he invariably did!) Memories came flooding back to me: long bus rides to faraway schools, missing out on regular classes, feeling different and isolated, but also, memories of the joy of learning – Shakespeare, advanced math, and history. Despite all the discomfort my "gifted" experience had brought, I never would have traded the opportunity to pursue my love of learning freely. This was confirmed during the final afternoon session during which a panel of speakers spoke about their experiences as both gifted students and educators. From them, I learned that gifted learners have many options available to them, but none of them is perfect. These individuals have very special needs, and it is not just a matter of expanding the curriculum. After the panel, I spoke to a couple of students from Martin Grove, both "gifted" and "non-gifted," and we discussed the issue of belonging. Sometimes kids who are perceived as "blessed" or "gifted" by others don't always see themselves that way. I suddenly appreciated that I had come full circle in better understanding what Dona Matthews had said about perceptions of giftedness earlier that day.

Since the conference, I have had the chance to learn more about giftedness and how it fits into special education. Without my experience at the EDGO conference, I don't think I would have been as open to accepting that gifted learners belong in that category. I recognize that they have exceptional learning needs. I have also had the opportunity to use my new and increasingly growing awareness to help me with the students I tutor, and to be better attuned to those I have taught in my placements. I am glad I had the opportunity to attend the EDGO conference, to reflect on my own experiences, and to use what I have learned to be, and to continue to become, a better educator.

Contests, Competitions and Challenges

By Bernard Beales, Special Education Facilitator: Gifted – D.D.S.B.

Gifted students, by the very nature of their identification, require differentiated learning experiences beyond those normally provided in the school program to reach their potential. One way to enrich and extend the learning experience is by encouraging students to take part in contests, competitions and challenges. In a recent survey done by the Durham District School Board, over one-third of the parents of gifted students, when asked to identify the most important parts of the gifted experience, responded with "To participate in enriching activities and competitions at the school and board levels".

In the Durham District School Board, our gifted students have the opportunity to participate in a wide range of board-sponsored competitions including: Junior and Intermediate Think Bowl Tournaments, Theatre Sports Olympics, Junior Math & Science Olympics, Junior and Intermediate Debating Competitions, and new this year, The Academic Pentathlon. But even if your school or district school board does not host such events, there are still many rewarding enrichment opportunities available. Below is just a fraction of the great events waiting for you to join in.

Contest	Description	Sponsored By	Dates
Math			
American Mathematics Competition (AMA)	Grade 8, 10, 12 Math Register by October. Practice Contests on website www.unl.edu/amc/	Math Assoc. of America	November

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Contest	Description	Sponsored By	Dates
Math			
Gauss Contest (7 & 8)	Grades 7 & 8	University of Wa-	May
Pascal (9) Fryer (9)	www.cemc.uwaterloo.ca		
Byron-Germaine (4)	Register by Dec.,	Mathematics Con-	April
Fibonacci (5)	www.mathematica.ca		
CNML 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and H.S.	Canadian National	The Math League	Apr. & Feb.
	www.mathleague.com		
ASMA 7 & 8	A series of six con-	American Scholastic	Oct. Nov. Dec. Jan. Feb. Mar.
	www.asan.com/asa/asmal.htm		
Ontario Math Olympics	Winners of the	OAME	May
	Contact your local District Math Association		

More suggestions about other subjects will appear in the next Gifted Voice.

Schools Failing to Nurture Gifted Children

By Julie Henry, Education Consultant

The following is a summary of an article that was published in the Telegraph.co.uk. Does any of the following sound familiar?

Bright children are being failed by teachers who do not stretch them enough or give them the individual attention they need, Government research has found.

Gifted pupils are routinely put in the wrong ability groups and are set targets that are too low, a study by the Department for Children, Schools and Families discovered. In many schools, young people who show early promise are left to fall behind.

One of the key problems uncovered by researchers was the failure to put children into ability sets or groups. Even when children were put in classes with children of similar abilities, clever children were still grouped with other "lower ability" pupils when carrying out work.

"They often perceived themselves as additional support to less able pupils. But the majority of children said they would have liked more opportunities to work in ability groups or independently."

School advisers also found that some of the pupils, particularly girls, were "invisible children" because they were quiet and undemanding. As a result they received less of the teachers' time.

"Many children said they rarely received help from the teacher when working on their maths," the report said.

"Some expressed the view that their teachers always work with the pupils in the 'lower groups', while others said a few able children monopolized the teacher's time. Some children talked about wanting to do the more challenging work that these pupils were given."

Less than half of the schools had good systems to track and monitor children's progress. Reviews of how children were doing were infrequent and it was not uncommon for targets to remain unchanged for more than a term.

Stephen Tommis, the former director of the National Association for Gifted Children charity, said many pupils were still being failed by schools. "There is greater awareness than there has ever been, and gifted and talented children are on the political agenda," he said. "But it seems to be taking an awful long time for the idea to permeate through to the schools."

MEMBERSHIP REGISTRATION FORM

Membership is valid for one year beginning on the date of our conference.

Please fill in and mail this form:

Name _____

Address _____

City/Prov. _____ Postal Code _____

Phone # _____ Cell Phone # _____

E-mail _____

School/Board Affiliation (if applicable) _____

School Address/Contact Information (if applicable)

Position You Hold _____

Interested in (please circle one or more)

Elementary / secondary / parent / advocacy group

Name of group _____

Suggested Conference Topics:

Please make out a cheque for \$30 payable to EDGO and send it to

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