

Meeting the Needs of Gifted and Talented
Lecture for University of Bath PGCE Students

Marie Huxtable 6th February 2007

This lecture will provide an opportunity to consider current issues re: gifted and talented and to share and promote the latest thinking of effective and innovative practice. It will also look at how provision for gifted and talented pupils is 'mainstreamed' at national, local and school level.

On-line web share:

- What do you understand by gifted and talented?
- What is the difference between 'gifted' and 'talented'?
- How are you addressing the needs of gifted and talented pupils in your class?
- What is your view of the current thinking of a gifted and talented register?

School-Based Activities:

- How are 'gifted and talented pupils' identified? Look at policies and practice in place.
- How does the school raise the profile of 'gifted and talented education' and celebrate progress.

Why is the question being asked – what is your concern?

Every week, if not every day, there is something in the news or some new strategy, agenda, white, green or purple paper landing on a teacher's desk near you. Teachers feel pulled from pillar to post – unless they are clear about their own values, recognise their own embodied knowledge and living educational theories and are engaged in researching their practice; from that position they are able to look at what is coming through as a source of ideas and information which can inform rather than determine their work.

I believe it is in asking questions of ourselves and our practice, that we improve what we are doing. Whitehead (2006) describes this process as educators creating their own living theory research accounts and West Burnham (2006) describes it as deep and profound learning.

Table 2: Modes of learning (West-Burnham, 2006 p45)

Shallow	Deep	Profound
Replication	Understanding	Meaning
Application	Transfer	Creativity
Information	Knowledge	Wisdom
Experience	Reflection	Intuition
Extrinsic	Intrinsic	Moral
Acceptance	Interpretation	Challenge
Dependence	Independence	Interdependence

In the current thinking in education there is a move to consider adults and children as leading in their own learning, rather than as recipients of information. In his paper on Leading to Learn for the National College of School Leadership West-Burnham says:

Shallow learning results in the ability to apply a formulaic response to a problem if it is presented in the right way. Deep learning allows a range of responses to be formulated, tested and applied. Profound learning leads to the problem and solution being redefined. If leadership is about improvement, creating the future, vision and values, and enhancing the quality of personal relationships, then it can only be truly developed through profound learning. (West-Burham, 2003 p3)

There is increasing government focus on ‘gifted and talented education’ which is resulting in a plethora of ‘directives’ at the moment flowing from the DfES. You can find the detail on the DfES website <http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/giftedandtalented/> but in brief the DfES is making more explicit the expectations, with respect to ‘gifted and talented’ education, that it has of schools. Some expectations are mandatory, some are not. Schools:

- Will use the DFES Quality Standards
- Are required to indicate which of pupils are gifted and talented in their School Census return (however on page 28 of the DfES guidance on the census return - *Schools should include all pupils on their gifted and talented or able pupils register **if they have one***, which suggests the completion of the census is only a requirement if the school has a register)

and

- By September 2007 every secondary school is advised to have a leading teacher and primary schools to have one leading teacher per cluster. Ahead of the September 2007, Local Authorities will work with schools to help identify the leading teachers in preparation for the training.

Schools are expected to:

- Have an agreed process for identifying gifted and talented pupils
- Ensure that all staff understand this and use it
- Keep an accurate record of gifted and talented pupils
- Review the gifted and talented cohort regularly
- Self-evaluate and update the school's process as necessary

You also need to be aware of the other agendas and strategies running. For instance the personalised learning and study support agendas. You may detect a somewhat different understanding of 'gift and talent' coming through when you read them.

“Personalised learning is not something that can be ‘done’ by teachers to pupils. Rather it arises when pupils themselves take charge of their own goals and progress, together with a heightened awareness of their own learning styles and preferences. When young people enjoy a range of opportunities to test themselves, to explore their talents and cultivate new interests, they come to a deeper appreciation of how learning works, what can inhibit it and in what ways it can nourish self belief. When there are rich extended sites for learning, young people grasp that the purpose of school is not to provide an education but to stimulate a thirst for learning, and to give it life beyond the school gate.” by John MacBeath, Professor of Educational Leadership, p12 in Study Support: A national framework for extending learning opportunities. Retrieved 1st Feb 07 from http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/studysupport/816987/817959/study_support_framework.pdf

I would strongly advise you to read with care the numerous documents coming from the DfES at present with regard to 'gifted and talented education', Every Child Matters, inclusion, Excellence and Enjoyment, the 14-19 agenda, etc. The school you work in will have varying interpretations, and therefore varying expectations of you as a teacher.

We live in a world of diversity and you should also be aware that the current position taken on 'gifted and talented education' is not a universal truth but one emanating predominately from northern Europe and the USA.

The major cultural dichotomy affecting educational provision for the gifted and talented is between the largely Eastern perception - 'all children have gifted potential' - and the largely Western one - 'only some children have gifted potential'. (Freeman, 2002 p9)

With this in mind you may be interested to look at pedagogical thinking coming out of North America which is more closely aligned to 'Eastern' perceptions of 'gifted and talented'.

Table 10.2.1 Comparison of assimilationist teaching and culturally relevant teaching (Baldwin, 2006 p 272)

<i>Conditions</i>	<i>Assimilationist teaching</i>	<i>Culturally relevant teaching</i>
Others	Ethnic groups should change & adopt the values, beliefs and behaviours of the dominant culture & not preserve their own cultural groups	Attend to the needs, values, beliefs and behaviours of all students
Self	Failure is inevitable for some	All students can succeed
Social relations	Encourage competitive achievement	Encourage community building
Knowledge	Knowledge	Viewed critically

My understanding of why I should be concerned with trying to formulate and reformulate my own answer to ‘what do I mean by ‘gift and talent’ is that it is at the core of my educational values, theories and practices and it is from that place I can respond ethically to the national strategies and agendas. You will have your own reasons which you need to consider.

What do you understand by gift and talent?

Why you are asking the question is connected with how you understand ‘gift and talent’. Some see ‘gifted and talented’ as a discrete cohort to be identified. For instance, Deborah Eyre, who heads NAGTY (National Academy of Gifted and Talented Youth), said in 2004:

Today’s gifted pupils are tomorrow’s social, intellectual, economic and cultural leaders and their development cannot be left to chance.

And she quotes Tony Blair

“We believe that people should be able to rise by their talents, not by their birth or advantages of privilege. We understand that people are not all born into equal circumstances, so one role of state education is to open up opportunities for all, regardless of their background. This means we need to provide high standards of basics for all, but also recognise the different abilities of different children, and tailor education to meet their needs and develop their potential.” (Tony Blair, 1996)

retrieved on 1sr Feb 07 from http://www.nagty.ac.uk/about/english_model_full.aspx

The DfES is strongly encouraging schools to identify the 'top 10%' of its population as gifted and talented using the following definition.

Gifted and talented children are those who have one or more abilities developed to a level significantly ahead of their year group (or with the potential to develop these abilities).

In England the term 'gifted' refers to those pupils who are capable of excelling in academic subjects such as English or History. 'Talented' refers to those pupils who may excel in areas requiring visio-spatial skills or practical abilities, such as in games and PE, drama, or art. Retrieved from DfES website 1st Feb 07

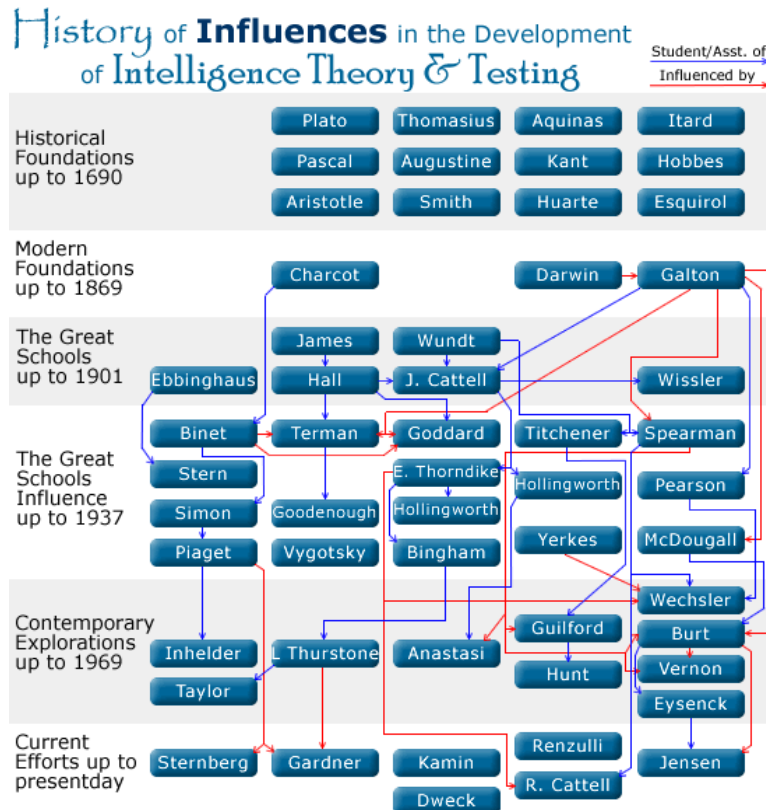
<http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/giftedandtalented/identification/gandt/>

Others are less confident that it is possible to agree and use a definition educationally:

"The identification of the target group proved the most complex aspect of our inquiry." It also said: *'Some evidence suggested that the search for a precise definition might distract schools from finding ways to meet the needs of their most able children.'* **(House of Commons Select Committee 1999)**

Theories about intelligence abound. I would suggest a visit to

<http://www.indiana.edu/%7Eintell/map.shtml>



Intelligence and gift and talent are not always taken to be synonymous but you will get a good over view of the major current American influences.

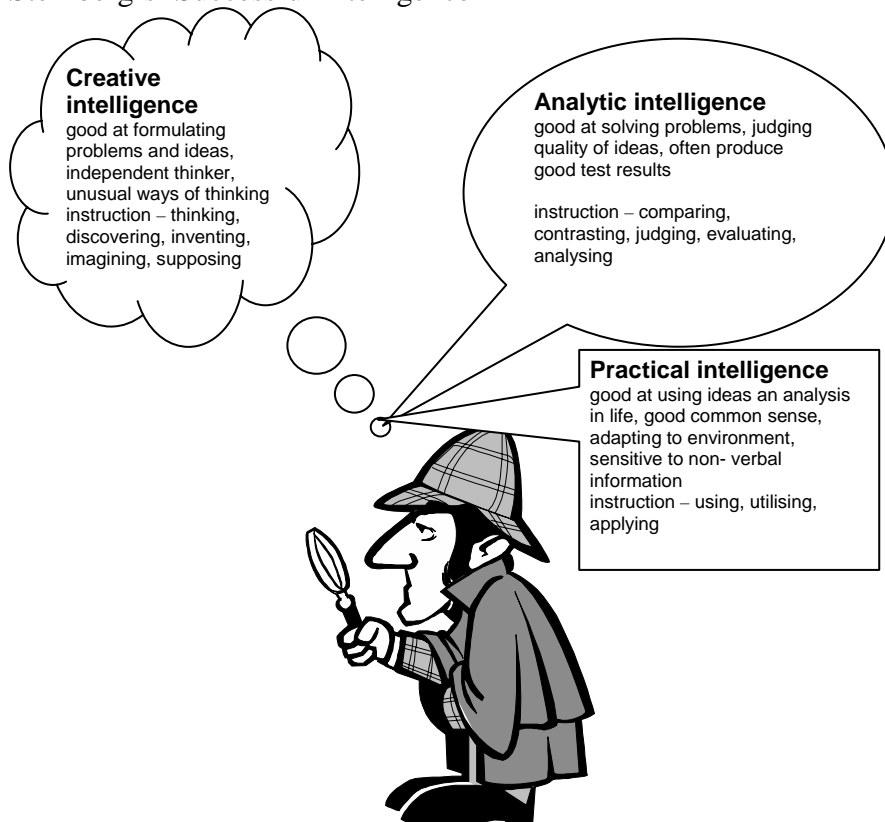
I have been particularly interested in Sternberg, Gardner and Renzulli.

Gardner (1993) is more concerned with end states (adult roles) ‘ability to solve problems or fashion products that are of consequence in a particular cultural setting or community’ than explaining and presenting patterns of scores. The end-states draw on combinations of several intelligences, for instance

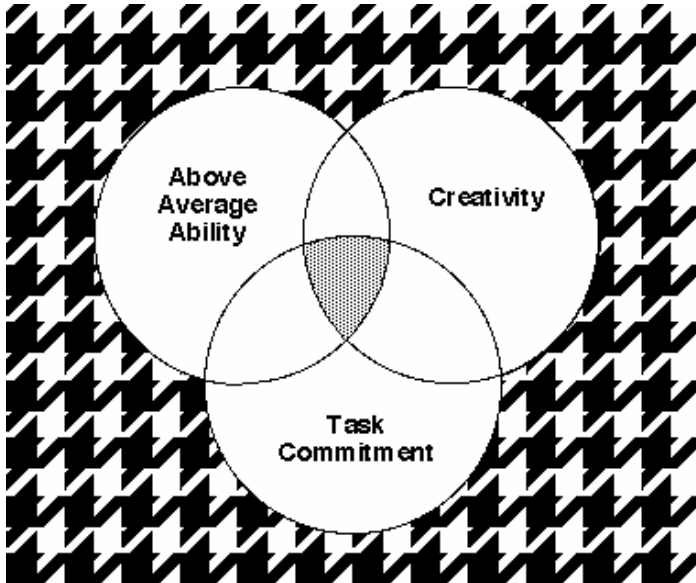
- Linguistic
- Musical
- Logical-mathematical
- Spatial
- Bodily-kinesthetic
- Intrapersonal
- Interpersonal

Sternberg(2000), in his work on ‘Successful Intelligence’ emphasises that it is not so much about amount but balance; it is more important to know when and how to use the creative, analytic and practical intelligences than to just have them

Sternberg’s ‘Successful Intelligence’



Renzulli also offers three types of intelligence and again sees achievement blossoming where the three come together. Retrieved 2nd Feb 07 from <http://www.sp.uconn.edu/~nrcgt/sem/semart04.html>



If anyone is looking for an eloquent repudiation of the theories of biologically determined limits to learning, and the classification and ranking of people according to their supposed genetic gifts I would suggest they read Gould's (1986) *The Mismeasure of Man*. In the introduction he clearly identifies his own prejudices and reasons for writing. If you are not aware of the range of thinking in the area of 'intelligence' then I would suggest Gardner's (1996) book *Intelligence: Multiple Perspectives* gives a palatable overview. His introduction starts by inviting you to

... sit back and think about what intelligence means to you. In doing so, you might ask yourself: What do I think intelligence is? Is it one ability? Many abilities? Is it a property of the individual's brain? Can intelligence be changed? If so, how? Who is intelligent? Why do I think this is? In what ways might my ideas about intelligence be similar to, and different from, those of other people?(p. 1)

He should also have invited you to reflect further on your cultural context. Barry Hymer in the draft of his doctoral thesis points out:

In Japan, western preoccupations with concepts such as intelligence can cause bewilderment. In a recent (27 April 2006) conversation with Prof Lauren Resnick of Pittsburgh University, she described to me at a mealtime encounter with a group of Japanese academics, in which they struggled to provide an equivalent term for the

concept of intelligence within their own culture. In the end, they suggested the term niceness as the closest approximation!

The possibility of living a satisfying and productive life seems to me to be influenced by a person finding the point of passion for what they can bring into the world that is of worth, for themselves and others; there is an act of creation over time with more than just self in mind. The worth is something to do with the investment of something very personal; time, energy, resources, consideration, love, effort, a willingness to endure... When I talk of gifts I think of something I have created, crafted, developed with another in mind; the investment of something of me and an attempt to go beyond the shell of the other person, to think about the person inside; what would be meaningful, of worth, to them that I would like to offer. This connection with the other person is woven into the bringing forth and manner of giving of that gift and in the anticipation of the valuing of the other... I feel pleasure when I give a gift that is valued and disappointment when it is not. The magnitude of the feeling both negative and positive seems to be related to the effort I have put in, invested of myself, even though I would like to be able to offer without expectation; to offer freely. The valuing of the other is something to do with what they do with it, the use they make of it emotionally, intellectually, physically... What worth is a gift that is not created or given or valued by yourself or anyone else?



This is something I see in this picture taken by Belle Wallace. This child's gift is not an abstraction; it is the crafting of the artefact, her intention, the connection between herself and Belle that you can see in her eyes, her smile, the way she is, and in the pleasure flowing between the child and Belle at that moment when the gift is valued.

Gifts for me have something to do with the contribution to the lives of others which carry a pleasure of connection. It feels like something that is inherent in being human. One of the first things we do in life is to enjoy the pleasure of giving something that is received with pleasure. I have been invited to play the 'ta (thank-you)' game' so often with toddlers, as you must have been; they pass you something which you receive with overt delight and you are expected to offer it back with pleasure. Or the 'peep o' game where you hide your eyes and see their delight when you surprise one another with eye contact; the gift is in the moment, co-created in the receptive, responsive (thank you Alan Rayner) flow of connection between you both.



This pleasure in the flow of connection in the mutual valuing of the gifts, is something I feel in this picture taken by Joy Mounter. It is not just in the obvious connection being expressed in the foreground but within the educational context that Joy has created, and is part of in taking this photo.

How does your understanding influence your practice?

The words ‘gifted’ and ‘talented’, and ‘gifts’ and ‘talents’, are often used interchangeably. I would like to explore how I distinguish between the words with an educational intent which can help me to improve my educational practice.

In an email conversation about gifts and talents with Jack Whitehead he said:

You have a talent and you use it daily in the gifts you give. 3rd Dec 2006 9.26

This really rang a bell with me. It was the first time I had seen the word used in a way that made sense to me educationally. It suggested to me an understanding of a talent as being related to how I offer my gifts. It also suggests to me an engagement in which I demonstrate a ‘fluency’, an ‘elegance’, an ‘aesthetic’ in its execution. When I talked with my friends they spoke of a talented mathematicians/tennis player/artist... and they elaborated to say ‘talent’ had to do with how a gift is developed. To say ‘I have a talent’ is meaningless unless I go on to say how that is expressed, a talent for: applied mathematics, classical ballet, astrophysics, golf, goat herding. So, for me, a talent is connected with the gifts I am generating, revealing and developing.

I am still struggling with an educational understanding of ‘talent’. Jack Whitehead (Whitehead, 2006c) has got the closest to it in the following:

Here is Moira with her students at Guyuan Teachers College (Now Ningxia Teachers University) flowing past her at the end of a lesson. As I watch Moira's non-verbal communications I believe she is giving her students a gift of recognition. I mean this in Fukuyama's sense of recognition:

Human beings seek recognition of their own worth, or of the people, things, or principles that they invest with worth. The desire for recognition, and the accompanying emotions of anger, shame and pride, are parts of the human personality critical to political life. According to Hegel, they are what drives the whole historical process. (Fukuyama, 1992, p. xvii) Fukuyama, F. (1992) The End of History and the Last Man, London; Penguin.

I think Moira expresses a world leading standard of judgment through her talent for recognising and communicating the value of the other. I think Moira loves what she does in education and is expressing this love in her recognition of the value of her students as they flow past her.

(Clicking on the picture will take you to a video clip in which, like Jack, I see Moira's talent expressed or if you are reading this in a pdf <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z1jEOhxDGno>.)



As I have said the words 'gift' and 'talent' are often used interchangeably but even when they are distinguished between, they often both imply that there is something that comes without effort. 'A talent/gift for...' seems to suggest that it is something I find easy to learn, a facility, a disposition, a 'flair', learning has occurred with little instruction. I think there is often confusion between what we find easy to learn, and a prediction of how far we can, and will, take our skill, ability, gifts, talents... however you would like to term it. You can see this in the demand by the government for 'early identification', monitoring, 'added value indicators', identifying under achievement, identifying potential.

I think successful adults have often identified where they find learning easy and capitalise on it, but not invariably. Dweck (2000) points out that hard work can take a person further than an aptitude and Renzulli (1997) includes 'task commitment' in his 3 rings concept of giftedness. Freeman (1998) points out one of the best predictor of future achievement is what a child does out of school; it is more often there you will find what it is a person has a passion for. It is the passion which provides the motivation for the dedication of the time and effort needed to develop to a high standard.

As we grow older we continue to create gifts; those that are to connect and influence beyond the immediate personal circle to society, require determination with the passionate commitment to their creation and offering and valuing. Some gifts are eventually grown over time by some people to the point where they are recognised and valued nationally and internationally; 'valued' not treasured, treasure is hoarded, valued requires a generative engagement as well as an appreciation. This seems to me to be a core worth of education; to enable children to create, offer and value the gifts they want to bring into the world throughout their lives.

I believe everyone has these possibilities within them; I don't know that it is possible to predict how any individual will grow their gifts.

The influence in practice of developing practice and theories engaging with the terms 'gifts and talents', rather than 'gifted and talented', is expressed for me by Joy Mounter (2006) in her master's enquiry retrieved 8th Dec 2006

<http://www.jackwhitehead.com/tuesdayma/joymounteree.htm>

...the awareness that we don't know exactly where the path will lead us or who will inspire us, but the openness to recognise it and explore it when it comes....

'I have learnt to never underestimate my skills of craft and learning, because nothing is impossible to a child with imagination.'
(Learning evaluation by R. aged 10)

I read this and felt very touched and tearful. I wanted to show everyone how far we have travelled as learners, how exciting the journey is and the self- realisation that comes with it. The process of this action research has been an enlightening and thought provoking process for myself, the learners in my class and staff in my school.

If you believe that 'gifts and talents' are understood as they are generated, revealed, developed, and shared then you will need to consider what opportunities you provide for your pupils to create, offer and value their gifts and develop their talents in your class.

How does your understanding affect children and young people?

That teachers' expectation affect their pupils performance has been recognized for many years (Rosenthal et al ,1968). Dweck (2000) has demonstrated that the theory of learning an educator holds is communicated to their pupils. Dweck talks of two mindsets that a person can hold, one a fixed, mindset, an entity theory of ability, and the other, a growth mindset, or incremental theory. Put simply, the former is where you believe you are smart (or not), the latter is where you believe you can learn to be smart. The affect, as she puts, of the embodied communication of a fixed mindset can be most damaging:

When I think of a person's life ruled by an entity theory and performance goals, I think of a life in which there is proof after proof of one's ability. What does it add up to? Thousands of proofs of ability, but, of course, never enough...

Or I think of a life in which time upon time there is a flight from risk, so as to protect an image of oneself. This adds up to an armed fortress containing all the things one could have been or done. (p154)

What are your embodied educational theories, and how are they communicated to your pupils?

The hallmark of successful individuals is that they love learning, they seek challenges, they value effort, and they persist in the face of obstacles, (Dweck, 2000, p.1)

How are you going to provide for successful individuals during your career as an educator?

References

- Baldwin A.(2006) Diversity: perceptions of pre-service teachers – a cause for concern for gifted minorities, p272 – p282 in Wallace B. and Erickson G. (2006) Ed Diversity in Gifted Education: International Persepective on Global Issues: Abingdon; Routledge
- Dweck C (2000) Self-Theories: Their Role in Motivation, Personality, and Development; Florence: Psychology Press
- Freedman J (1998) Educating the Very Able: Current International Research Ofsted Reviews of Research London: The Stationary Office
- Freeman J (2002) Out-of-school Educational Provision for the Gifted and Talented Around the World: A report to the DfES retrieved 1st Feb 07 from <http://www.joanfreeman.com/mainpages/freepapers.htm>
- Gardner H (1993) Multiple Intelligences: The Theory in Practice; New York: Basic Books
- Gardner H, Kornhaber M, Wake W (1996) Intelligence : Multiple Perspectives: Orlando; Harcourt Brace & Co
- Gould S. J (1981) The Mismeasurement of Man; New York: Norton and Co
- Rosenthal R, Jacobson L (1968) Pygmalion in the classroom : teacher expectation and pupils' intellectual development; New York: Holt Rinehart & Winston
- Renzulli J, Reis S (1997) The Schoolwide Enrichment Model: A How to Guide for Educational Excellence; Connecticut: Creative Learning Press
- Sternberg R, Grigorenko E (2000) Teaching for Successful Intelligence: To Increase Student Learning and Achievement; ArlingtonHeights, Illinois, SkyLight Training and Publishing
- West-Burhham J. (2003) Learning to Lead retrieved 2nd Feb 07 from <http://www.ncsl.org/media/F7B/52/kpool-evidence-west-burnham.pdf>
- West-Burnham J. (2006) Understanding learning: creating a shared vocabulary , p45-p55, in Wallace B. and Erickson G. (2006) Ed Diversity in Gifted Education: International Persepective on Global Issues: Abingdon; Routledge
- Whitehead J. and McNiff (2006) Action Research Living Theory: London; Sage