

Table of Contents

Chapter	Page
1 Introduction	5
2 Normal Development According to the Theorists: Tyler's Dilemma	9
3 Introducing Tyler: Gifted Development in Early Childhood..	19
4 Identifying Talent Potential in Early Childhood: The Project Spectrum Approach	37
5 Discovering and Developing Talent Potential in Young Gifted Children	65
6 Assessing Giftedness and Talent in Early Childhood	83
7 Designing Developmentally Appropriate Programs for Children Showing Gifted Development	107
8 Working Together Towards the Best Interest of the Child ...	115
9 The Nuts and Bolts of Curriculum Making	119
10 Using Multidimensional Curricula in Mixed-Ability Classrooms	133
11 Making the Transition for Preschool to School	147
12 Educating the Gifted in Early Childhood: Questions Frequently Asked	155
13 Bibliography	161

1

Introduction

If you initially found the title of this book a bit confusing, that is a good sign. For it is meant to capture, highlight, and bring to consciousness the current widespread confusion throughout the general public as well as the field of education as to what the terms “gifted” and “talented” actually mean. When we talk of meeting the needs of “gifted” and “talented” children, to which children are we referring? Are the terms mutually exclusive? Certainly one could imagine that they are, since most frequently they are expressed separately—as if one must be either “gifted” or “talented”, but not both at the same time!

Based on the cumulative research on giftedness and talent, one of us (Morelock, 1993; Morelock, in press) has delineated the differences between the concepts of giftedness and talent, while maintaining that both concepts are required in order to understand and cater for the needs of the children discussed in this book. It is worthwhile to explore these differences now.

Giftedness is used here to refer to a distinctive and atypical pattern of development in childhood in which a child’s intellectual or cognitive abilities are developing at a faster rate than would be expected for his or her age (Columbus Group, 1991; Morelock, 1992) This “asynchronous development” creates disparities between attained levels of intellectual, physical, social, emotional, and skill development in the gifted child. The result is that the child is out of sync with other same-aged children and does not fit the age-related expectations of the culture (Silverman, 1993; Terrassier, 1985). This, in turn, generates special needs within educational settings constructed to accommodate more normally developing children—much in the same way that children with developmental delays (another form of “asynchronous development”) are recognised to have special needs in such settings.

In addition, the advanced cognitive abilities that are a part of giftedness are generally accompanied by heightened emotional intensity. These combine to create inner experiences and awareness that are qualitatively different from those of more normally developing children. Consequently, modifications in parenting, teaching and counselling are required in order for these children to develop optimally.

Talent, on the other hand, refers to a potential for notable performance in a particular area of achievement. In children, this “notable performance” can be gauged either in comparison with normally expected levels of achievement for age-mates or with reference solely to a child’s own profile of abilities where a particular strength is noted compared with less remarkable areas of performance. Some extraordinary children demonstrate such an extreme level of talent in a particular area that their performance rivals even that of adult professionals in the same field.

These children are called prodigies (Feldman, 1991; Morelock & Feldman, 1991). No matter what the level of talent, however, part of our roles as educators is to seek out and nurture that potential in all children.

Adhering to these definitions, it is clear that a child can be both gifted and talented. As a matter of fact, in gifted children, the two usually do coincide. Gifted children generally present with a number of talent potentials. There is even a name for this delightful but difficult condition. It is called “multipotentiality.” Envidable as it would seem to be, it is also a dilemma for the children who, because of constraints of time, energy, and material resources may have to eventually choose a talent to develop out of several equally appealing and potentially fruitful alternatives.

Below is an outline the fundamental purpose of this book and the concepts on which it is based.

1. First and foremost, this is a user-friendly (but not superficial) guidebook for fashioning programs for the gifted in early childhood classrooms. It presents the psychological and educational theoretical frameworks as well as the practical strategies required for planning and implementing curricula and programs meeting the psychological, social and educational needs of young gifted children.
2. In the context of this guidebook, we offer a new concept for classroom practice or home education with young gifted children – Multidimensional programming. The concept of “Multidimensional programming” simply means that in constructing programs for young gifted children, we advocate the consideration of three constituent dimensions: (a) constructing programs designed to meet the intellectual, emotional, and social needs of young gifted children, (b) constructing programs to facilitate the identification and development of talents in young gifted children, and (c) constructing programs that are developmentally appropriate for children manifesting gifted development . Each of these concepts will be explored more thoroughly later.

It is our hope that early childhood educators, counsellors and parents will emerge from reading this book with clearer understandings of the nature of giftedness and talent. Additionally, we hope that they will emerge equipped with the practical skills and conceptual understandings necessary for providing stimulating and developmentally appropriate programs for the young gifted children in their care.

Roedell (1989) provides an excellent discussion of the long-recognised lack of adequate programming for young gifted children (e.g. see Gallagher, 1986; Karnes, 1983; Roedell, Jackson, & Robinson, 1980). Roedell (1989) drew attention to urgent needs in several areas:

- (1) Early childhood educators must be made aware of the special capabilities of gifted young children. Children whose academic and intellectual skills are developing at a faster than average rate need to be identified as early as possible.
- (2) Early childhood programs need to be developed to serve young children who have already mastered much of the standard preschool and early primary curriculum.
- (3) There needs to be planned continuity in educational programming from preschool through to tertiary education, to nurture the special talents of intellectually and academically advanced students.

The aim of this guidebook is to assist teachers in beginning to address these needs in their own classrooms and schools. It is also a helpful resource for parents wanting to devise stimulating activities for their gifted children at home. In addition, it is an informative guide for psychologists and educational consultants providing assessment and counselling services for families and schools.

Finally, this book should be useful to anyone who is sincerely interested in understanding and nurturing the youngest among us. It is a window into the psychological and educational needs and realities of young gifted children. Although it is admittedly a small beginning, it is an important one. Hopefully, it will be one small candle to light the way for teachers, counsellors, parents and most importantly, for the children.

Martha Morelock

Karin Morrison

2

Normal Development According to the Theorists: Tyler's Dilemma

Three-year-old Tyler was having trouble joining in the play of other children in his kinder class. One day after school, he reported to his mother that during a free play period outside, he had stood on the sidelines watching the other children pursue one another in a hearty game of "Cops and Robbers." Thinking that she would encourage Tyler to be more sociable, his mum replied "But you could have played too. Why didn't you just join in the game?" Wide-eyed, Tyler responded "I couldn't because I didn't know who were the good guys and who were the bad guys."

How should Tyler's actions and comments be interpreted? It could be concluded that his explanatory reasons were really an excuse to justify an unhealthy degree of shyness. Perhaps his lack of engagement signified that he was less confident and socially mature than were the other children. Or perhaps he was intellectually deficient in some way so that he could not understand the game that all his classmates were playing.

Although Tyler conforms to classroom expectations as well as he can, his mother reports that at home he enjoys the company of older children and is especially passionate about playing complex board games usually enjoyed by children several years older. He has also begun to read and prefers books that are generally read by children who are eight or nine years old.

With this additional information, it is clear that Tyler most likely is not intellectually deficient. In fact, he is quite advanced. But what about his interpersonal skills? The fact that he enjoys playing with older children indicates that at least he gets along with some children, although the fact still remains that he has problems fitting in with his age-mates. Perhaps the older children are just tolerating Tyler's presence and are being kind by letting him participate in their play.

Probing beyond surface behaviours to underlying developmental realities can provide a clearer picture of Tyler's internal experiences and views of the world. The following is a discussion about normal expectations for child development which may help clarify Tyler's dilemma.