

Teaching Able, Gifted and Talented Children

Strategies, Activities and Resources

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How to use this book

Researching this book made it abundantly clear that there is now a wealth of material freely available on the internet to anyone seeking to improve or update their knowledge and understanding of able, gifted and talented education. So much so, that one way to use this book is to turn immediately to the final section and use the bibliographical material provided to compile a personal – indeed a personalised – library of bookmarked special interest sites, electronic articles, government-sponsored downloads and e-learning modules sufficient to acquire either a working knowledge of the entire field or else an authoritative take on a particular area of current professional concern.

As always, however, the problem for working teachers and other professionals is one of time. From this perspective alone the material gathered here seeks to offer a clear and relatively concise summary of an increasingly important area of educational provision for busy managers, project leaders, classroom practitioners and learning support staff. In a context in which significant emphasis is being placed on the need for schools to develop personalised pathways for all learners, there is still a clear need for an up-to-date overview of good practice and organisational opportunity in relation to able, gifted and talented (AG&T) learners.

While the book is therefore unashamedly written to provide accessible guidelines for readers requiring a short-cut through current educational debates and national developments for the AG&T, its main purpose is not so much didactic as developmental. To this end, each chapter contains a range of prompts for professional development activities intended to be used by:

- *Individual readers* as a way of embedding the advice provided into their own professional practice
- *AG&T coordinators, lead practitioners and professional development providers* as a readily available source of material to engage colleagues in discussion about provision for more able learners in their own schools
- *School leaders* as part of a structured programme of audit, self-review and organisational improvement focused on meeting the needs of all learners through raised challenge, differentiated learning and personalised provision.

In this sense, the way to use this book is as a compendium of generic exemplar material and stimuli for promoting organisational reflection on the individualised needs of target schools, curriculum areas and teachers. Although the examples and activities provided aim to be of direct relevance to particular teaching and support contexts (i.e. they may be freely adopted and adapted for use in the classroom), they are primarily models of provision which must

themselves be personalised to meet specialised subject and age-specific requirements. In this they provide models of approaches to teaching and learning which require the active professional understanding of teachers to make them applicable to their own situations.

Chapter 1 considers the development of whole-school policy and the need to align policy development to the wider ethos of the school/setting and its identified (audited) areas for improvement.

Chapter 2 goes on to examine how AG&T learners are perceived and defined within the school and its teaching and learning policy. It offers a range of activities to support schools in arriving at a consensus agreement with regard to terminology and the categorisation of able learners.

Chapter 3 considers a wide range of identification procedures for AG&T youngsters. Again professional development activities are included to assist schools in arriving at identification mechanisms that match their own ethos and cohort profile.







Chapter 4 focuses on the whole-school aspects of provision, including learning environment, cross-curricular planning and organisational support for the development of personalised learning.

Chapter 5 explores aspects of classroom provision including the role of higher order thinking, differentiated planning, creative learning and personalisation. Models of suggested approaches are provided for individual guidance and to support professional development activity generally.

Chapter 6 extends the concept of personalisation into the extra-curricular support provided for the more able learner and his/her parents. A range of audit strategies are suggested and opportunities provided to establish a developmental agenda for this area of the school's work.

Appendix a number of the planning models and activities used throughout this book draw on a generic version of *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* specifically adapted for this purpose. The version used is set out in the Appendix.

Throughout the chapters you will encounter the following icons:

Chapter objectives	
Activity	
Case study	
To think about	
Summary	
Photocopiable pages	

1

Developing school policy

Institutions developing effective policy for AG&T recognise that:

- Policy is the key to establishing and safeguarding effective practice
- There is no 'one-size-fits-all' solution to policy development and discrete AG&T policies can either stand alone or be linked to more generic teaching and learning and/or inclusion policies
- Policies need to be as unique as the institutions in which they are formulated.



All schools have a policy for their able learners, even if the policy is not to have a formal policy. Such an approach is not necessarily an indication of institutional inertia or complacency but can derive from the sincerely held educational philosophy that the most educationally advantaged youngsters will automatically gain most from the provision on offer and that diverting attention, effort and resources from the more needy is both unnecessary and, to the degree that it is socially unjust and elitist, potentially wrong.

The expectation that cream will automatically rise to the top, however, is not endorsed by experience. As with all learners, the more able, the highly able, those with marked aptitude(s) for particular area(s) of study, the gifted, the talented (to use only some of the more common designations for youngsters with high potential and/or attainment), vary significantly in their progress, self-awareness and overall performance in school.

Some of the reasons underlying the phenomenon of gifted underachievement will be examined in Chapters 2 and 3 of this book but the trend for able, gifted and talented (AG&T) youngsters generally to feature as an underperforming pupil group in our schools and colleges is well recognised. At the time of writing, for example, a controversy has arisen in England regarding the reported one in seven (11,500+) GCSE students on central government AG&T programmes nationally who failed in 2007 to achieve five subjects, including English and mathematics at grade C or above – a level of attainment generally associated not with high ability but with performance at expected levels.

To enshrine the view that young people of all abilities are entitled to equal consideration as learners, the 1988 Education Act in England decreed that an acceptable curriculum must be 'broad, balanced, relevant and *differentiated*' (emphasis added). This emphasis on individual entitlement prompted schools to consider the different learning needs of pupils across the whole ability range when drawing up policies to ensure the effective delivery of the curriculum. In common with many other countries, this drive to give pupils access to an education that matches individual requirements and guarantees continuity and progression in learning for all has since been at the heart of many schools' development of policy and practice in relation to their AG&T youngsters. In 2004, for English schools, the Children's Act and Every Child Matters legislation consolidated this principle by adding the concept of *personalisation* to that of differentiation as a guarantor of a child's right to an education that takes account of his or her strengths and weaknesses as a learner.

Can Quality Standards provide a starting point?

For English schools, National Quality Standards have been released which may have a wider currency elsewhere. These are broad benchmarks against which schools can audit and assess their current level of provision for AG&T. In essence these standards provide a range of performance indicators and descriptors against which to measure institutional development. The school policy standard outlines three levels of acceptable performance:

- *Entry level.* The gifted and talented policy is integral to the school/college's inclusion agenda and approach to personalised learning, feeds into and from the school/college improvement plan and is consistent with other policies.
- *Developing level.* The policy directs and reflects best practice in the school/college, is regularly reviewed and is clearly linked to other policy documentation.
- *Exemplary level.* The policy includes input from the whole-school/college community and is regularly refreshed in the light of innovative national and international practice.

For settings seeking more detailed progression lines for policy development the National Association for Able Children in Education (NACE) has a comprehensive Challenge Award package (see www.nace.co.uk for details).

What factors should be taken into account in developing policy?

Clearly, any whole-school policy needs to be informed by the school's own profile with regard to pupil ability and performance as well as by its wider approach to learning, teaching and school improvement. There is no 'one-size-fits-all' policy document that can be bolted on to a unique organisation to ensure that the specific needs of its more able cohort will be appropriately met. There are, however, a

3

Identifying the able, gifted and talented

Schools developing identifying procedures should consider:

- The relative weight to be given to quantitative measurements of ability against more qualitative professional judgements relating to performance and potential
- How to combine multiple criteria and sources of evidence into a coherent whole-school procedure that fits the context of the school and the needs of its learning community
- The nature of any professional development programme designed to provide staff with the necessary understanding and consensus of purpose to identify AG&T pupils effectively.



In England the current expectation is that all 11–19 settings should identify individuals meeting one or more of the national criteria for the top 5% of gifted and talented learners. The criteria include:

- A combined score in the national assessment tests (SATS) at age 11 in English and mathematics that is in the top 5% nationally
- A SAT level 8 or above in assessments taken at 14
- A merit or distinction pass in the UK World Class Tests for mathematics and problem-solving (age 8–11 or 12–14)
- Scores of 129 or above in any recognised standardised test for cognitive ability and reasoning (or above the 95th percentile on an IQ test)
- A score of 58 or above on examinations taken at 16 (i.e. 8 GCSEs at A/A*).

In addition, non-qualifying learners can be included among the top 5% through teacher nomination (and criterion-based reference); evidence of outstanding achievement outside of school (e.g. in debating, music or dance) or through the independent assessment of an educational psychologist.

(Continued)

(B) Flexibility:

- Tendency to experiment freely with ideas and subjects, media, materials and techniques
- Facility for solving problems using non-traditional or innovative methods
- Aptitude for viewing/approaching work from a different perspective
- Tolerance of ambiguity and conflict
- Ability to adapt from one situation or medium to another.

(C) Originality:

- High degree of imagination; ability to image clearly
- Freedom to adapt away from given stimuli
- Tendency to experiment as opposed to adopting preconceived solutions.

(D) Elaboration:

- Use of many elements
- Facility for 'piggybacking'/'hitchhiking' on from (as opposed to copying) the ideas of others; to develop them further.

5. Characteristics of AG&T underachievers

- Bored and restless
- Low self-esteem
- Fluent orally but poor in written work
- Friendly with older children and adults
- Confused about their learning, behaviour and future development
- Absorbed in a private world
- Excessively self-critical, anxious and may feel rejected by family
- Find failure in others, materials, systems, etc. to excuse/justify their behaviour
- Possibly emotionally unstable
- Hostile towards authority
- Quick thinking
- Don't know how to learn academically
- Aspirations too low for aptitudes
- Don't set own goals, relying on teacher for decisions
- Don't think ahead
- Poor performance in tests but asking creative, searching questions
- Thinking in abstract terms

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Supporting AG&T outside the classroom

This chapter considers provision for AG&T learners outside the classroom, which can involve:

- A wide range of academic clubs and/or interest groups made available within an extended school day
- Taking advantage of external providers, agencies, learning partnerships and the wider community to extend learning opportunities
- The possibility of personalised provision for individual learners
- Support for parents and carers in encouraging their AG&T youngsters
- Bringing external learning opportunities into the classroom using ICT.



This chapter examines a range of opportunities for schools to support AG&T learners outside the taught curriculum. In this, the aim is to set out options for consideration when developing extra-curricular activities to enhance personalised learning programmes. In addition, attention is also given to the endeavour to assist parents of AG&T pupils in their role as partners in the learning process. The hope is to establish some principles of good practice in the selection, development, delivery and coordination of initiatives to expand and enrich the provision made for pupils in addition to that planned to deliver the common curriculum.

Out of class enrichment activities

As part of a curriculum of opportunity a school needs to consider its extra-curricular activities. In some areas the chance to develop significant skills is only possible on an extra-curricular level. Sport, drama and musical events are good examples of this approach whereby AG&T pupils get opportunities to excel in the school's sporting teams, theatrical productions or orchestras.