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Introduction

This book aims to provide important information for teachers with limited knowledge or experience with gifted students.

In the first instance, it will be important to realise that there is – and historically always has been, different views concerning the nature of giftedness. It is for this reason that Chapter One explores our changing views about what it means to be gifted so that we can better understand the rationale for classroom practices of both past and present.

Teachers will need to know how to recognise gifted behaviour and, as a result, Chapter Two explores a range of observable behaviours and characteristics of gifted individuals in the school context.

Chapter Two also looks at ways in which teachers may generate some common understandings about what it means to be gifted in their specific context. This will assist in the construction, application and articulation of school policy, as well as promoting consistency of educational provisions for the gifted population at the school over time.

Once students have been identified, data that will determine specific learning needs of gifted individuals will need to be collected and interpreted. Chapter Three provides some guidance in how to determine and provide for the learning needs of gifted students.

Once the gifted population of a school has been identified, and the learning needs of those identified have been established, it is very likely that many gifted individuals will require some form of curriculum differentiation in order to meet the identified learning needs. Chapter Four suggests a wide range of differentiation options for gifted individuals at all levels of schooling.

The final chapter looks at issues for school administrators and school leaders as they advocate, support and manage the range of pathways and options provided for the gifted students in their schools. Finally, this section concludes with suggestions that will assist in formulating a dynamic, ongoing school policy for gifted students.

Introduction

In this section a range of different ways to view giftedness are presented.

It is important to understand that the way in which giftedness is defined in any specific context will subsequently guide decisions made about appropriate:

- ▶ learning environments
- ▶ curriculum provisions
- ▶ differentiation options
- ▶ progressive pathways
- ▶ school policies and the like.

Some schools will make provisions for gifted individuals based upon some very traditional definitions of giftedness, while others base decisions on more recent perceptions.

Some will base actions upon broad definitions, while others may take quite narrowly defined pathways.

What is ultimately important, however, is that schools come to an agreed definition – i.e. a shared statement about what it means to be gifted at your school.

Early Historical Perspectives

Early attempts to identify gifted individuals relied heavily upon the use of standardised testing. In the early 1900s, the top one per cent of children of general intellectual ability, as measured on standard tests such as the Stanford Binet, would be considered gifted.

Despite some obvious implications for relying upon such a narrow indicator of giftedness, not a lot happened to change things for nearly half a century.

Reliance upon standardised instruments tended to promote the view that intelligence was likely something that is quite fixed and unchanging – thus inferring that a person was either gifted or not gifted, depending on a single score on a single test on a given day.

Additionally, the reliance upon this single form of identification had the potential to work against some individuals and in favour of some others.

It also inferred that identification was a relatively easy process.

In the decades that followed, refinements to tests were made in an attempt to make them more inclusive, but the notional value of a single test to establish giftedness was left largely unchallenged until the 1970s.

Eventually, more liberal definitions gained favour, suggesting that the potential to achieve high levels of performance across the board or within discrete areas should also be noted.

Such definitions would more often consider factors beyond general intellectual ability and include factors such as:

- ▶ Specific intellectual ability
- ▶ Creative or productive thinking
- ▶ Visual and performing arts
- ▶ Psychomotor ability

Some definitions were even more liberal and included elements such as leadership ability.

This next generation of definitions had some real differences (and, many would suggest, strengths) over the traditional view. These approaches afforded a more flexible approach that recognised potential (not just observed achievement) as an important aspect of giftedness.

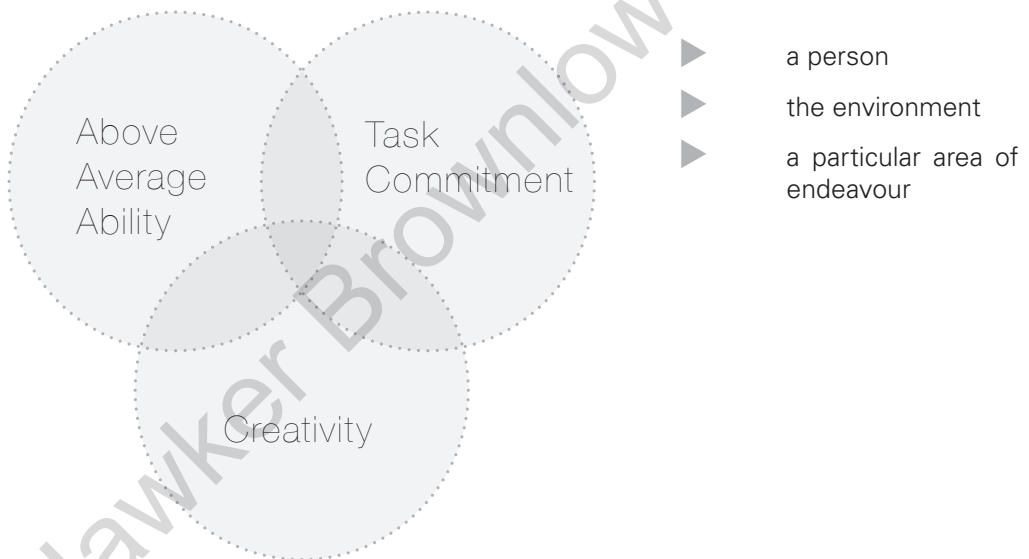
It also acknowledged that specific performances in restricted areas of interest or domains should be recognised.

This did not mean taking a more liberal view did not give rise to a new set of issues to be resolved. Problematic in taking a more open view of giftedness, for example, is how one assesses or recognises some of the elements. e.g. How do you measure something as obscure or subjective as 'potential' or 'leadership'?

The early 1980s saw much discussion around giftedness as behaviour.

Joseph Renzulli, for example, talked of giftedness as an interaction between above-average ability, commitment to task and creative endeavour.

Seen in this way, giftedness is the behaviour that can be developed in people if a synergetic interaction takes place between:



Significantly, this view of giftedness valued gifted behaviour as:

- ▶ dynamic – i.e. something to be nurtured
- ▶ variable – i.e. in degree and in different areas
- ▶ contextual – i.e. varying in different areas

Unfortunately this perspective did not satisfactorily take account of those with unrealised potential – i.e. the gifted underachievers.

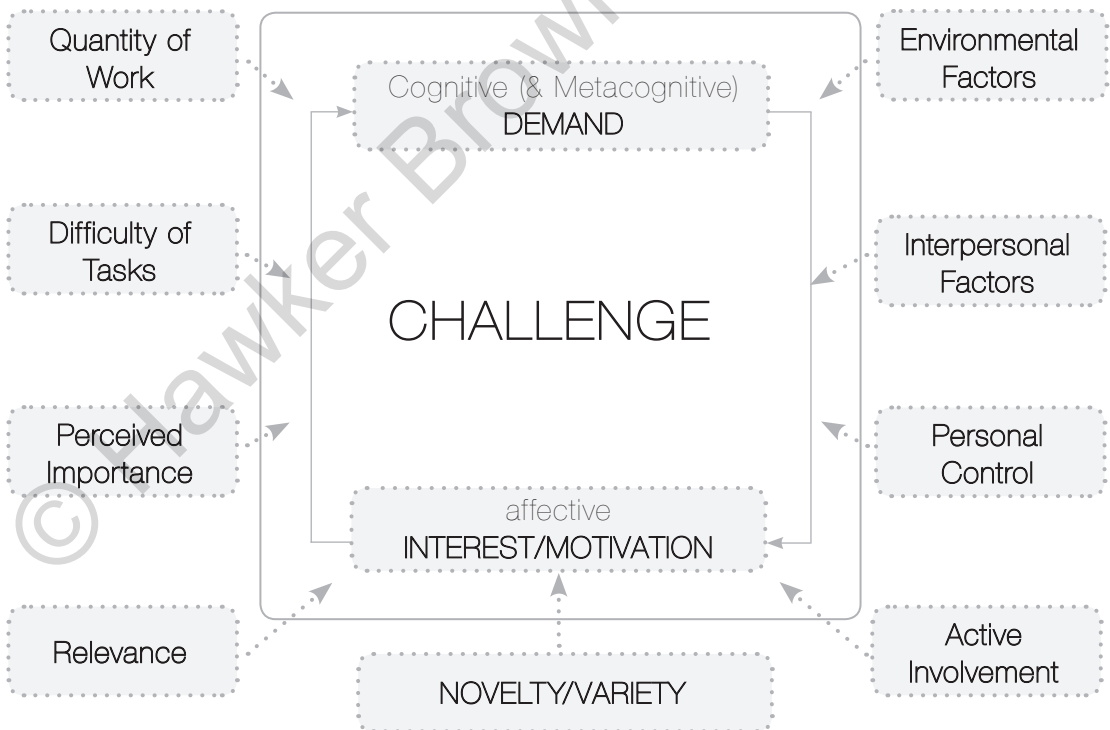
Introduction

Based upon the expressed view that it is the depth and complexity of thinking that most sets gifted students apart from their age peers, then it follows that providing appropriate challenges will be a paramount consideration in meeting their learning needs. Challenge has two core components. If one accepts the premise that thinking, feeling and learning are inseparable, then for a task to be truly challenging it must be both:

- ▶ cognitively demanding (i.e. will stretch thinking)
- ▶ affectively motivational (i.e. has intrinsic desire)

Clearly there will be many factors that will impinge upon both components and these include those in the diagram below.

Challenging the Gifted Student



Identifying Individual Needs

Based on the work of Kanevsky, Maker, Nielsen & Rogers (1994), this section aims to answer the essential question for teachers confronted with a gifted individual in their classroom.

'Exactly what needs to be different for this student?'

Armed with a sound understanding of the individual's traits, attributes and behaviours, and knowledge of the range of content, process and product modifications that could be considered, teachers can be well placed to answer that essential question using the Curriculum Differentiation Grid provided.

In terms on content, teachers may consider modifying:	In terms on process, teachers may consider modifying the nature of:	In terms of products, teachers may consider:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Abstractness. ▶ Complexity. ▶ Variety. ▶ Organisation. ▶ Instruction to include study of people and methods. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Levels and variety of thought processes required. ▶ Questioning – with a focus on those with no pre-determined answer. ▶ Learning activities – so the learner is required to make connections, discover patterns and principles. ▶ Problems posed, requiring the student to engage in a variety of problem solving techniques, inductive reasoning and discovery learning. ▶ Ways of providing evidence of reasoning or proof. ▶ Choice of options available to students. ▶ Pace of content delivery. ▶ Variety. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Working with real world problems. ▶ Allow students choice within guidelines. ▶ The introduction of complex problems with a range of solutions. ▶ Using authentic audiences. ▶ Transformations of one form of information to another e.g. data to graph, text to mind map. ▶ Self-selected formats.

Introduction

Some gifted students are observed to do things ...

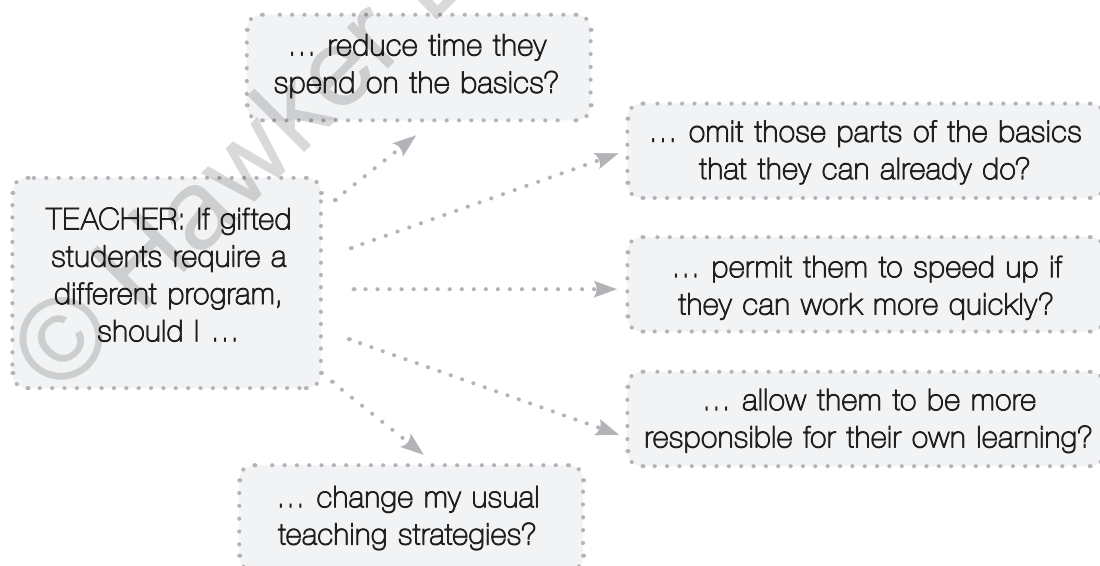
- ... a little earlier
- ... a little faster
- ... a little better
- ... a little differently.

While others may be observed doing things ...

- ... much earlier
- ... a good deal faster
- ... much better
- ... very differently.

Hence the need to tailor the curriculum to meet the wide and varied learning needs of gifted students.

Typical of the questions teachers ask themselves when confronted with a student who requires something different in order to achieve potential would be ...



Taylor’s Multiple Talent Model, best suited when activities with a strong critical thinking component is required, also makes it suitable in the middle years – see the sample unit below.

INFUSING HIGHER-ORDER THINKING INTO CONTENT USING TAYLOR’S MODEL

TOPIC: Healthy Living, Healthy Eating

DECISION MAKING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> consider alternatives evaluate possibilities justify decisions 	<p>Using a PMI or concept layer map, outline the pros and cons of either</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> going on a vegan diet genetically modified food
PLANNING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> detail path to a specific outcome 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Design a weekly health diet. Develop a time-lined action plan outlining how a school canteen may influence the healthy eating habits of students. Collect examples of different advertising techniques aimed at influencing what we eat.
FORECASTING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> predict events that may occur looking at causes and effects of situations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are some possible outcomes should food prices double or triple in the next twelve months? Based on evidence of climatic change, how sustainable is the current level of world food production? Support your claim with evidence from at least two different sources.
CREATIVITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> create new meanings create new relationships create new products or ideas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve the existing packaging of an everyday food item such that the amount of packaging is reduced without compromising freshness, etc. The packaging should be cheaper, attractive and recyclable. Design a poster encouraging students at your school to follow a healthy eating regime. Include a catchy slogan or jingle.