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Why it is so Important to Address the Needs of More Able Students in English

What this chapter is about

- > **possible opposition to more able identification**
- > **why it is important to identify more able students**
- > **the eight 'P's of identification**
- > **ways of identifying more able students**
- > **problems of identification**



Undertaking to deal effectively with the more able students in school involves extra work, sustained energy and genuine long-term commitment. Yet teachers who have understood these implications and are still prepared to provide appropriately for that group will be instrumental in bringing about a changed student body with a refreshingly new approach to their studies, capable of achieving improved results, making any extra effort thoroughly worthwhile. Teachers should find their commitment and investment of extra time being rewarded with increased professional enjoyment and success.

Possible opposition to more able identification

As increasing attention has been paid to more able students in the past decade, there have been arguments in some quarters that they are not a deserving separate group. Attending to the needs and requirements of its more able, the argument continues, is an essential duty of any school staff, because schools exist to meet the needs of all their students. Good schools will, therefore, naturally subsume the needs of the more able within a properly formulated and scrupulously applied whole-school inclusive teaching and learning policy. Such a position would certainly be true of an ideal school situation, and ought to be the ultimate position to which all schools

Worth noticing is Professor Tomlinson's insistence on 'planned' matters and outcomes, rather than results that merely emerge, which used to be what happened quite often in an arrangement called 'differentiation by outcome'.

Recognising that students of different abilities can be successfully educated together in the same room, as long as the central shared learning is substantial, fully understood by all and approached from appropriate starting points, is the most effective structuring for all learners. What teachers can do, however, is to ensure that students, of whatever ability, take part in enterprises which establish the following pathways of learning:

- 1 **Concrete to abstract.** Learners advanced in a subject often benefit from tasks that involve more abstract materials, representations, ideas, or applications than less advanced peers.
- 2 **Simple to complex.** Learners advanced in a subject often benefit from tasks that are more complex in resources, research, issues, problems, skills, or goals than less advanced peers.
- 3 **Basic to transformational.** Learners advanced in a subject often benefit from tasks that require greater transformation or manipulation of information, ideas, materials, or applications than less advanced peers.
- 4 **Fewer facets to multi-facets.** Learners advanced in a subject often benefit from tasks that have more facets or parts in their directions, connections within or across subjects, or planning and execution than less advanced peers.
- 5 **Smaller leaps to greater leaps.** Learners advanced in a subject often benefit from tasks that require greater mental leaps in insight, application, or transfer than less advanced peers.
- 6 **More structured to more open.** Learners advanced in a subject often benefit from tasks that are more open in regard to solutions, decisions and approaches than less advanced peers.
- 7 **Less independence to greater independence.** Learners advanced in a subject often benefit from greater independence in planning, designing and self-monitoring than less advanced peers.
- 8 **Quicker to slower.** Learners advanced in a subject will sometimes benefit from rapid movement through prescribed materials and tasks. At other times, they may require a greater amount of time with a given study than less advanced peers so that they may explore the topic in greater depth and/or breadth.

In differentiating the curriculum, Tomlinson says, teachers are not dispensers of knowledge but organisers of learning opportunities. To provide optimal learning opportunities the classroom environment must be changed to accommodate the interests and abilities of the learner.

Qualities and characteristics of the reader

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| 1 | A reader knows that reading is a complex, intellectual endeavour, requiring the reader to draw on a range of active meaning-making skills | Mentally preparing for any sort of reading |
| 2 | A reader deploys previous knowledge of other texts to enable the effective meaning-making of the text being read. | Knowing all texts relate intertextually |
| 3 | A reader is aware that texts are constructed for particular purposes, for identifiable audiences and within recognisable text-types and/or genres. | Knowing what sort of text it is – and who for |
| 4 | A reader can predict the ways texts are likely to work, and uses reading to confirm or readjust those predictions, depending on how typically a text unfolds. | Predicting/knowing the way texts work |
| 5 | A reader is critically active before becoming involved in the substantial body of any text. | Preparing for a new text by using all available clues |
| 6 | A reader is increasingly able to activate a repertoire of critical questions in engagements with new and unfamiliar texts. | Getting better at asking more about texts |
| 7 | A reader knows how to interact appropriately with a variety of text-types and/or genres for particular purposes. | Knowing that we read differently for different purposes |
| 8 | A reader is aware that an important way of demonstrating reading progression is through raising more complex questions about the same text. | Getting better at asking questions on re-reading |
| 9 | A reader is aware that learning to read is a lifelong process. | Learning to read NEVER stops |
| 10 | A reader is aware that other readers do not always read and make meanings in the same ways. | Knowing we make our own unique meanings |
| 11 | A reader can explain why a text might not satisfy the task to which it has been put, or has been rejected, unfinished. | Knowing how to choose |
| 12 | A reader knows that reading improves through monitoring and reflection on own ability and progress. | Thinking about and reflecting on reading |



A framework for looking at texts

1 Who speaks this text?

Is there an 'I' or a 'we' in the text?

What kind of voice is this?

Does the writer address me directly, or through an adopted 'persona'?

2 Who is being spoken to?

Is there a 'you' in the text?

What kind of audience is being addressed, and how can we tell?

Am I prepared to include myself in this audience?

3 Where does this text come from?

What do we know about when, why and how it was produced?

Does the text itself disclose these things?

What status does it have?

What values does the text assume?

4 What kind of text is this?

What other texts does it remind me of?

What form does it take?

What recognisable conventions has the writer adopted?

5 What does the text want?

What do I deduce about the writer's intentions?

Are these intentions openly stated?

What kind of reading does this text invite?

6 What does this text mean to me?

What are my motives as a reader of this text?

How have I chosen to interpret it?

Do I share its values?

What thoughts has it prompted?

You might like to ask all these questions of the page you are holding.

The resources of written texts

In discussing these questions, it might be helpful to consider some detailed *rhetorical choices* which writers make:

- Presentational: e.g. choices of lay-out, type-face, illustration;
- Organisational: e.g. choices of narrative, logical, metrical or figurative pattern;
- Grammatical: e.g. choices of tense, mode, person, syntax, punctuation;
- Lexical: e.g. choices of vocabulary, idiom, metaphor.

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