



Exceptionally Able Students

Draft Guidelines for Teachers

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Myths & Realities

Myth

Exceptionally able learners will always do well whatever the circumstances.

Reality

Exceptionally able learners have problems like any other learner. They may have learning disabilities which they can hide while the work is easier. It becomes harder and harder for them to excel, which can lead to behavioural problems and depression.

Myth

Exceptionally able learners are so clever they do well with or without special education provision.

Reality

They may appear to do well on their own but without focused challenge they can become bored and disruptive. As time passes they may find it harder and harder as the work becomes more difficult, since they have never faced challenge before.

Myth

They need to go through school learning with their own age group.

Reality

While it's true that children need to play and interact socially with other children their age, they do not always need to learn with them, for example the case of an exceptionally able child who has a chronological age of six and a mental age of 11 and has been reading since two. To put that child in a reading class with other six year olds who are just learning to read can be demotivating for that child.

Myth

Exceptional ability is something of which to be jealous.

Reality

Exceptionally able children can feel isolated and misunderstood. They may have more adult tastes in music, clothing, reading material and food. These differences can cause them to be shunned and even abused verbally or physically by other students.

1

Introduction

The guidelines are a result of collaboration between the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), Republic of Ireland and the Council for Curriculum, Examination and Assessment (CCEA), Northern Ireland and as such, they aim to support the teaching and learning of students who are exceptionally able in both jurisdictions. Due to differences in the Education systems and in legislation related to special educational needs North and South, the guidelines for each jurisdiction are customised for use in that context. In order to draw upon the most recent research and good practice in this area, a comprehensive literature review was compiled, *Gifted and talented children in (and out of) the classroom* (2006), which is available at www.ncca.ie. The findings of this literature review are reflected in this introduction and are sometimes referred to throughout the other sections of these guidelines.



A Working Definition

There is no universally agreed term for students who generally would be described as 'exceptionally able'. Some descriptions include *genius*, *gifted*, *very bright*, *high flyer*, *very able* and *talented*. The term exceptionally able is used in the guidelines to describe students who require opportunities for enrichment and extension that go beyond those provided for the general cohort of students. It should be noted that good practice for exceptionally able students is also good practice for all students and can improve the quality of teaching and learning throughout the school.

The Aims of the Guidelines

The aims of the guidelines are to:

- raise awareness of the needs of exceptionally able students
- support management and teachers to:
 - audit and review school policy and practice
 - differentiate the curriculum
 - develop effective strategies
 - further develop an inclusive school ethos
- provide models of good practice which support and nurture the development of exceptionally able students.

Where the Guidelines will be used

The guidelines can be used in any educational setting. They are intended for use by all teachers and should also be accessible to a range of other personnel directly involved with the student's education. These include parents/guardians, special needs assistants (SNAs), therapists, management staff, guidance counsellors, carers, advisory support services and professionals from health, social services and the voluntary sector.

Identification

The identification of exceptionally able students is linked to context and in every school there will be a group of students who require extended educational opportunities, regardless of how they compare to exceptionally able students in other schools. With that in mind approximately 5-10% of the school population may be exceptionally able and will demonstrate very high levels of attainment in one or more of the following areas:

- general intellectual ability or talent
- specific academic aptitude or talent
- visual and performing arts and sports
- leadership ability
- creative and productive thinking
- mechanical ingenuity
- special abilities in empathy, understanding and negotiation.

Within this group we could expect to find a minority of students who are profoundly exceptionally able, possibly (0.5%), often several years ahead of what is normally expected of their age group. Although there is no single code that defines levels of exceptional intelligence one possible set of levels is as follows:

- able IQ range 120 to 129
- exceptionally able IQ range 130 to 169
- profoundly exceptionally able IQ range 170+.

As exceptional ability varies on a continuum of ability, the exceptionally able child, assessed at 3 standard deviations above the norm (145) has learning needs as unique as those of a child whose IQ is assessed at 3 standard deviations below the norm (55). Caution should be exercised with regard to relying solely on IQ measures as exceptional abilities in aspects such as creativity, leadership, art, social and physical skills may not be identified. Also an exceptionally able student who may present with a learning difficulty or a secondary exceptionality may have depressed scores which may not be indicative of the student's true potential in other areas.

A Diverse Group

The typical picture of the exceptionally able student is often one of a hard-working student who diligently completes work, and is perceived by peers as the best in the class. The student may achieve outstanding success, which is recognised by winning competitions or displaying his/her abilities in one or many arenas. However, in reality the picture is much more complex than that.

Students who are classified as exceptionally able belong on a continuum of students with specific educational requirements. Many have the skills to adjust to their educational and social environment with relative ease, while others may manifest a range of emotional problems and adjustment issues. For example an exceptionally able student may be chronologically aged seven, at the emotionally developmental age of two, and be working intellectually at a post-primary level without the life experiences to temper their thoughts.

Exceptional ability in a student may also be unnoticed because he/she may have a physical, intellectual, or learning disability. Within the cohort of exceptionally able students are those who despite their exceptionality may persistently underachieve due to boredom, lack of interest, or crippling perfectionism. There are also students whose exceptional ability may be masked by the fact that they are not being educated in their first language. Some students from minority backgrounds may not show 'traditional' signs of exceptionality, as different values and skills are prized in different cultures, and teachers may not be attuned to signs of exceptionality beyond the norm. Given such diversity, it is not uncommon for exceptionally able students to go unrecognised in school.

Overview of the Guidelines

The guidelines start by exploring the issues of identification in section 2. To facilitate schools and teachers in identifying exceptionally able students, a checklist for identification across the curriculum, subject-specific checklists and a whole school identification checklist are offered. Section 3 provides more detailed insights, through profiling, into the exceptionally able student's cognitive, emotional and social needs. In this instance, six 'types' of exceptionally able students are suggested as a framework for achieving greater understanding of the needs of such students.

Section 4 looks at how the needs of exceptionally able students can be addressed at the level of the whole school. Section 5 sets out different ways in which teaching and learning can be effectively differentiated for such students, in particular how learning skills can be embedded in increasingly complex content. The last section considers the issues around exceptionality through the eyes of teachers, parents and students providing a rich real-life context.

2

Identification

Ability is not always easy to spot!

Temple Grandin, PhD, was diagnosed with brain damage at age two and is now an associate professor at Colorado State University and arguably the most accomplished adult with 'high functioning' autism in the world. She is also a world renowned professional designer of humane livestock facilities.

Mary Leakey, eminent anthropologist, was repeatedly expelled from her Catholic Convent school.

F.W. Woolworth got a job in a dry goods store when he was 21. He would not serve customers as he lacked the confidence.

Leo Tolstoy failed the entrance exam for college.

The Kansas City Star editor fired Walt Disney because of lack of creativity.

Einstein was four years old before he could speak and seven before he could read.

Abraham Lincoln entered The Black Hawk War as a captain and came out a private.

John Lennon's school report read 'Hopeless. Certainly on the road to failure'.

William Butler Yeats' early school report described his performance as 'Only fair. Perhaps better in Latin than any other subject. Very poor in spelling'.

When Thomas Edison was a boy, his teachers told his mother that Edison's brain was 'addled'. The proof was his unusually large head!

Napoleon finished near the bottom of his class at military school, yet became one of the leading military men of all time.

Maria Callas was rejected by the prestigious Athens Conservatoire. At the audition her voice failed to impress.

Caruso's music teacher told him 'You can't sing, you have no voice at all'.

Assessment and Identification

Many exceptionally able students are happy, well adjusted and successful in their area(s) of ability. However, it is important that identification systems look beyond the obvious candidates and actively seek out those who are underachieving or who have a disability. Schools should also take into account that an exceptionalism may emerge later in a student's school career or that the student simply may not have been spotted earlier. For this reason schools might provide yearly opportunities for identification of students of all ages.

While there are many different approaches to the identification and assessment of exceptionally able students, it is important to note that the most holistic approach is one that uses a combination of methods. A multi-focus definition recognises the central importance of atypical development in the lives of exceptionally able students and implies the need to go beyond traditional, psychometrically-based findings to explore their educational, emotional and psychological needs.

Key methods in assessment and identification include:

Observation

Parent/Guardian referral

Peer referral

Self referral

Referral by other individuals or organisations

Identification by psychologists

Teacher referral

School-wide identification processes

Early identification of exceptionally able students is important to prevent later underachievement. However, assessment and identification procedures for exceptionally able students are not as clearly delineated as in other areas of special education. Given that exceptionally able students also come from all socio-economic backgrounds and different levels of ability, it is possible that some students with exceptional ability might be invisible and may not be seen as individuals with unique intellectual, social and emotional needs. Some exceptionally able students may have learning difficulties in one or more areas which results in failure in some academic tasks, and excellent achievement in others. This can lead to ineffective learning strategies, low self-esteem, and disruptive behaviour. Teachers and parents are often left confused as to what strategies to pursue (see Section 3 on Profiles).

Observation

The belief that a student may have exceptional ability can stem from a number of different sources and can occur at different stages of his/her development from childhood to adulthood, for example:

- parents may notice that their child develops skills more quickly in comparison to children of similar age
- rapid development in early childhood may be noted and recorded at developmental check-ups by health personnel
- friends may draw attention to the child's development of early speech, physical development and/or his/her use of a wide vocabulary
- teachers at playgroup/foundation level may find that the newly enrolled child is able to accomplish tasks far beyond the normal expectation for a similar age cohort
- teachers at other levels and in some specific subjects may note that challenging tasks are accomplished with ease coupled with a demand for further challenge, which if not satisfied, is rapidly replaced by boredom.

Teachers and others may find observation easier if aided by checklists. These assist in focusing on the abilities being observed. See checklists pages 20-37.

Parent/Guardian Referral

Parents/guardians are likely to have a detailed knowledge of their children's abilities, and can be a very useful source of information in identifying a student with exceptional ability. Parents/guardians can, however, feel vulnerable in claiming that their son/daughter is exceptionally able for fear of being regarded as a parent/guardian *who thinks they have a genius*. It is parents/guardians, through observation of their child from birth, who commonly spot the ability long before the child goes to school. Parents/guardians can provide valuable insights into the strengths and issues in their son's/daughter's learning and should be consulted. A parent/guardian may also have built up a portfolio of the student's out of school accomplishments. Schools may also find it useful to send out questionnaires to parents/guardians of students who are in the process of being identified as exceptionally able. When using questionnaires such as the following sample questionnaire (see Figure 2.1), it might be useful for teachers to read through the questionnaire with parents/guardians to avoid any misunderstandings.

NB. Schools should be aware that children in care may have no such advocate. Schools should give particular attention to other methods of identification to ensure that these students are not overlooked.

Figure 2.1: Parents'/Guardians' Questionnaire

Parents'/Carers' Questionnaire	
Name of student: <i>Bethan</i>	
Date of completion:	Class:
What does your child do really well?	
<i>Whatever Bethan sets her mind to, she does really well. If she is praised for her achievement then this spurs her on to do even better.</i>	
What single achievement do you think your child is proudest of?	
<i>Bethan has extremely high standards, but I think she's really satisfied when she makes other people happy, laugh or smile. She's also proud of her academic achievement.</i>	
What sort of people does your child most like to be with?	
<i>Bethan enjoys the company of most people - provided they are kind and do not ridicule others. She has friends of all ages, races and genders. She will listen to and share her views with most people.</i>	
What do your friends most admire in your child?	
<i>Bethan's ability to communicate and the way in which she can empathise with others, her sense of humour and her intelligence, and honesty and integrity.</i>	
What does your child most enjoy about school?	
<i>Bethan loves the social aspect of school - the fact that she has 'trustworthy' friends in her class. She enjoys most subjects but English, music and drama are her favourites. She likes to achieve and have a good and friendly relationship with teachers.</i>	
What aspect of schoolwork does your child most enjoy?	
<i>Participating in class - she's very verbal! She enjoys being actively involved e.g. science experiments, drama, music. She likes art but finds it difficult to draw from life.</i>	

What does your child most like doing at home?

Reading, reading and more reading! She loves to make up adventure stories, and to design different costumes and plays. She has a vivid imagination. At the moment she's developing ideas for a book called 'The Zizzies'. She likes playing piano and teaching her friend to play piano.

What seems most important to your child at this time in his or her life?

Her friends and her academic status (she wants to stay in the top band at school).

Is there anything else which might help us identify your child's particular gifts and talents?

If Bethan feels she may fail, then she is reluctant to try. She needs plenty of encouragement, people (including myself) sometimes expect the same 'high achievement standard' and forget to praise her. We're only human - but so is she and she's only eleven years old! If learning appears exciting to Bethan, then she loves to learn.

Like all children, if given an encouraging, relaxed and opportunity-rich environment, she will develop and expand her talents. I'm her mother and she leaves me dumbstruck a lot of the time, but I do try! If Bethan expresses a desire to learn about something in particular then I try to explore with her all the avenues to find out about what she is interested in. It's really important that she has new opportunities available to explore.

PS. I found the 'single achievement' question difficult because I couldn't think of one in particular.

After I had filled in the questionnaire I gave it to Bethan to read to see if she agreed or disagreed with anything I had written. She said 'It's cool, Mam, but you've spelled 'Zizzies' wrong - it should be 'Zizies'!!'

When I asked Bethan about the single achievement question she said 'I don't know of a particular one because I've had so many!' She wasn't boasting - she just said it so matter of fact!

(Taken from Hymer and Michel 2002)¹

1. Cited in ACCAC 2003

Peer Referral

One form of identification that is often overlooked is referral by peers. Students in the classroom are very good at identifying exceptionally able students. One example of a peer referral exercise takes the form of a game of make-believe. Students are asked to imagine that they are stranded on a desert island and must name the classmate who would be the best organiser (leader, persuader), best judge (settles arguments, fair), fixer (improves things), inventor (invents, discovers), entertainer, etc (Jenkins, 1978).

Self Referral

Older students who are more self-aware and know their capabilities can often self refer. Each self referral should be investigated as it is important to be aware that in some cases underachievement may mask a student's real ability.

Referral by Others

It is important to include as many people as possible in the identification process. This includes making contact through meetings and writing letters to organisations that work with groups from the school. For example scouting groups, local sporting, drama or music groups, after-school clubs, day-care facilities and youth clubs may all be able to provide valuable insights.



Identification by Psychologists

Exceptionally able students may be referred and identified by the educational psychological services. These services may also be useful in identifying dual exceptional or underachieving students. They are also useful in gaining a measure of intelligence and aptitude in different areas.

Teacher Referral

Teachers may become aware of an exceptionally able student in their classrooms through his/her performance on assessment tests or exams. They may become aware of a student's unusual approach to a problem or displaying aptitudes or behaviours beyond his/her years in any given subject. Careful recording and observation is recommended to determine the need for further investigation.

There are a number of recording methods to structure teacher observation. Samples are provided on the following pages. Teachers should be careful to pick one appropriate to the student's age and the circumstances of the observation.

Initial observations, particularly with young children, could be completed using the 'Nebraska Starry Night: Individual Record Sheet', (see Figure 2.2 page 18-19). The Nebraska Starry Night: Individual Record Sheet should be used over a designated period, e.g. a week or a month. The amount of time needed depends on the age of the student and the amount of time the teacher spends with the student. During the designated period as teachers spot an activity that fits on the map, an 'X' is marked in the relevant area. At the end of the designated time period, teachers use the map to decide whether further identification methods should be used.

This allows teachers to provide evidence when they suspect a child has exceptional ability. This could be the springboard for further testing. Alternatives are the 'General checklist for identifying exceptionally able students across the curriculum' (see pages 20-22) and the 'Subject-specific checklists' (see pages 24-37).

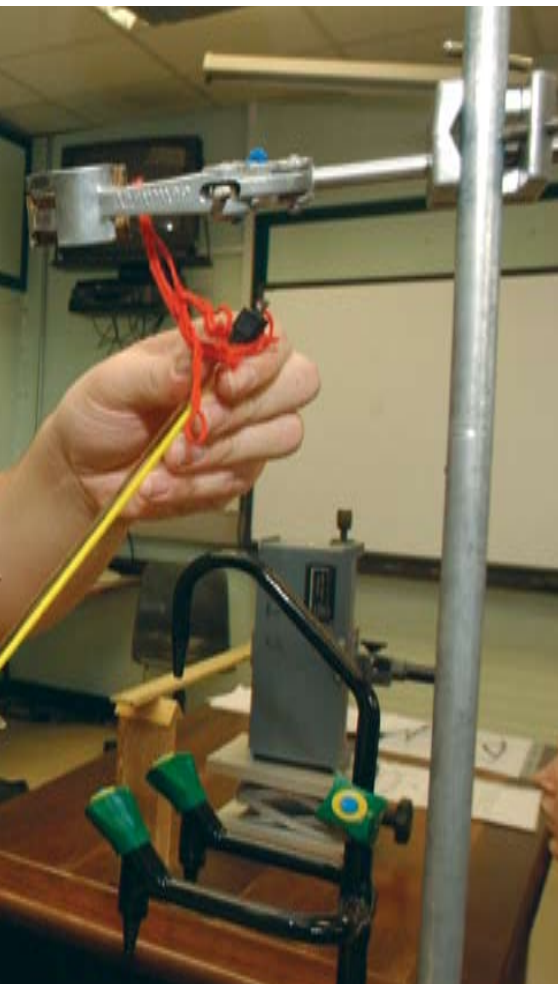
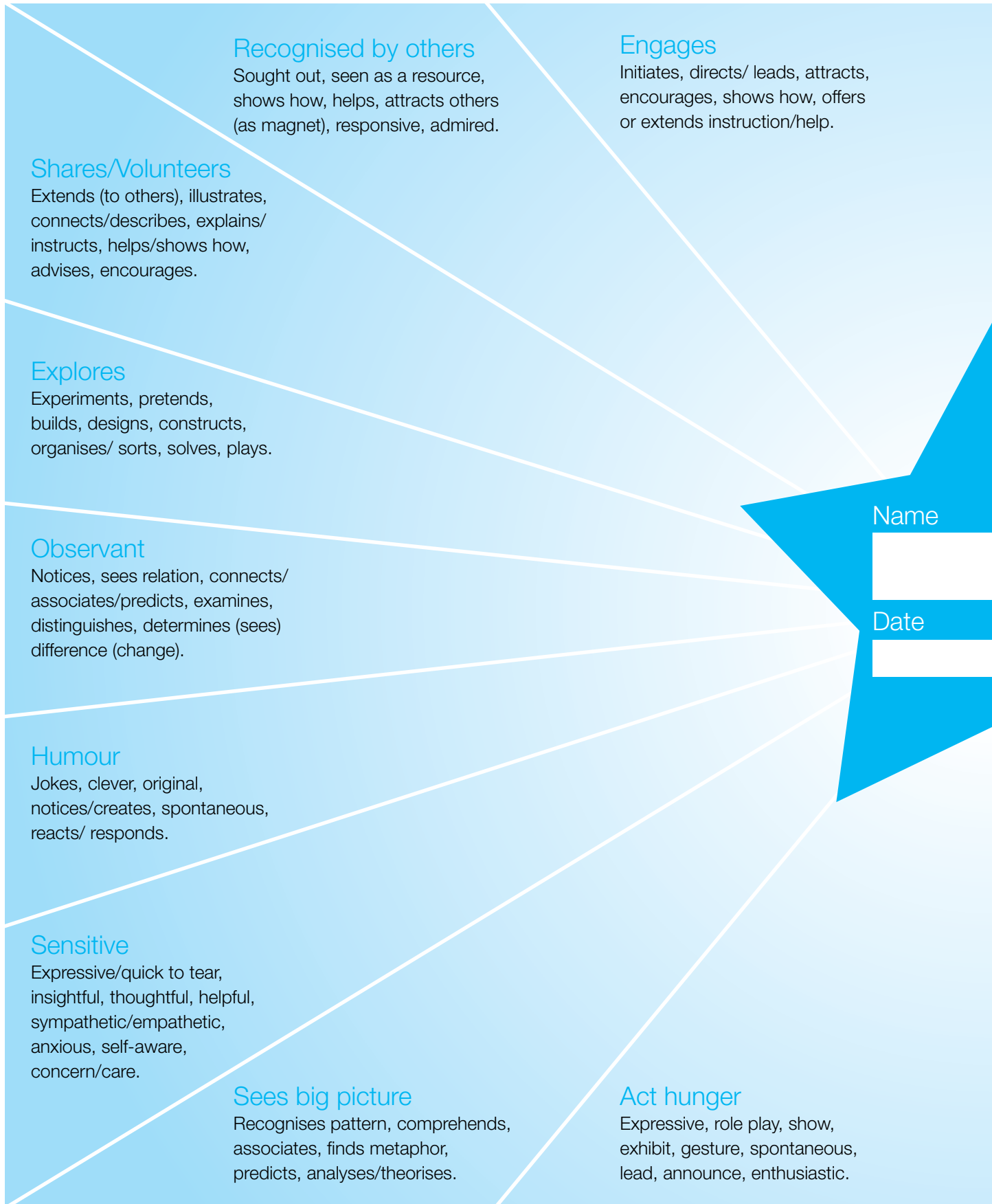


Figure 2.2: Nebraska Starry Night: Individual Record Sheet



Record X and date in the area for each behaviour event recorded.
Nebraska Starry Night: individual record sheet (Eyre 1997)

Moving & doing

Demonstrates, constructs, looks/reacts, shows how or what, exhibits, non-verbal expressive.

Vocabulary

Fluent, comprehends, express/ expressive, novel, associates/ connects, complex syntax, uses 'BIG' words.

Knows

Comprehends/reasons, connects/associates, finds/ applies/uses, answers/ announces, explains, calculates/solves.

Comet

Unexpected, extraordinary, extra-special, difficult to classify.

Focus

Absorbed, diligent, concentrates, organised/sorts, insight, completes details.

Independent

Works alone, self-directed, initiates, absorbed, diligent, concentrates, plans/pursues/ solves.

Curious/Questions

Notices, examines, observes, seeks/asks, requests, has insight/ connects.

Fantasy/Imagination

Invents, imitates, imagines, pretends, original construction, novel design.

Imagery

(Uses) metaphors, detects symbolism, illustrates, artistic, clever, novel, original, expressive.

Figure 2.3: General checklist for identifying exceptionally able students across the curriculum

Exceptionally able students may:

	possess extensive general knowledge, often know more than the teacher and find the usual reference books superficial		show good insight into cause-effect relationships
	easily grasp underlying principles and need the minimum of explanation		quickly make generalisations and extract the relevant points from complex material
	have mental speeds faster than physical capabilities and so are often reluctant to write at length		prefer to talk rather than write and often talk at speed with fluency and expression
	be reluctant to practise skills already mastered, finding such practice futile		have exceptional curiosity and constantly want to know why
	be inventive and original when interested		ask searching questions which tend to be unlike other students' questions
	often see the unusual rather than the conventional relationships		be able to pose problems and solve ingeniously
	display intellectual playfulness, fantasise and imagine and be quick to see connections and to manipulate ideas		read rapidly, retain what is read, and recall detail

	listen only to part of the explanation and appear to lack concentration or even interest but always know what is going on		jump stages in learning and often be frustrated by having to fill in the stages missed
	leap from concrete examples to abstract rules and general principles		have quick absorption and recall of information, seem to need no revision and be impatient with repetition
	be keen and alert observers, note detail and be quick to see similarities and differences		see greater significance in a story or film and continue the story
	see problems quickly and take the initiative		have advanced understanding and use of language but sometimes be hesitant as they search for and use the correct word
	become absorbed for long periods when interested and may be impatient with interference or abrupt change		persist in completing activities when motivated
	often set very high personal standards – be perfectionists		be more than usually interested in 'adult' problems such as important issues in current affairs (local and world), evolution, justice, the universe etc
	want to adapt and improve institutions, objects, systems, e.g. can be particularly critical of school		be philosophical about everyday problems and common sense issues
	be perceptive in discussion about people's motives, needs and frailties		daydream and seem lost in another world
	show sensitivity and react strongly to things causing distress or injustice		often take a leadership role

	empathise with others and be very understanding and sympathetic		be confident and competent
	express their own feelings		attribute ideas to others
	be self-effacing		reflect on their own performance
	give inventive responses to open-ended questions		have a keen sense of humour in the unusual and be quick to appreciate nuances and hidden meanings
	appreciate verbal puns, cartoons, jokes and often enjoy bizarre humour, satire and irony		criticise constructively, even if sometimes argumentatively
	be unwilling to accept authoritarian pronouncements without critical examination and want to debate and find reasons to justify the why and the wherefore		



Subject-Specific Checklists

While general checklists can be used to identify exceptionally able students across the curriculum, it is useful to identify students against subject-specific criteria, especially in post-primary. This enables the school to identify those students who may be manifesting ability within one or more subjects and can indicate students who have strengths in particular areas rather than across the curriculum. The following checklists are useful for refining teacher observation.

Mathematics

Exceptionally able students:

	grasp the formal structure of a problem: can generate ideas for action		are able to generalise from examples
	recognise pattern: can specialise and make conjectures		are able to generalise approaches to problem-solving
	reason logically: can verify, justify and prove		use mathematical symbols as part of the thinking process
	think flexibly, adopting problem-solving approaches		may work backwards and forwards when solving a problem
	may leap stages in logical reasoning and think in abbreviated mathematical forms		remember mathematical relationships, problem types, ways of approaching problems and patterns of reasoning

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Language – Mother Tongue

Exceptionally able students:

	show close reading skills and attention to detail		show attention to spelling and meanings of words
	are sensitive to nuance of language use, use language precisely		cope well in dual-language medium
	have a well developed, sophisticated sense and appreciation of humour		have fluency and breadth of reading
	contribute incisive, critical responses, can analyse own work		show pleasure and involvement in experimenting with language
	are able to read with more meaning, drawing on inference and deduction, can 'read between the lines'		analyse insights confidently and precisely when discussing their own and others' writing intentions
	approach writing tasks thoughtfully and with careful preparation		draw out relationships between different texts read
	are able to reflect on language and linguistic forms they encounter, having insight into their own abilities		are able to transfer skills across the curriculum
	are keen to communicate		

Modern Foreign Languages

Exceptionally able students:

	show an interest in and empathy with foreign cultures		are curious about how language 'works', its meaning and function
	recognise grammatical patterns and functions of words		are able to use technical vocabulary to discuss language
	use linguistic/non-linguistic clues to infer meaning		identify and memorise new sounds and 'chunks' of language
	are able to listen and to reproduce sound accurately		are flexible in thinking, showing flair, intuition and creativity
	extrapolate general rules from examples, can make connections		apply principles from a known language to the learning of new ones
	have effective communication strategies		



Music

(The following is a generic checklist. Specific musical activities require detailed and differentiated checklists.) Exceptionally able students:

<input type="checkbox"/>	hear music 'in their head'	<input type="checkbox"/>	have a strong musical memory
<input type="checkbox"/>	demonstrate power of expression and skill beyond basic competency	<input type="checkbox"/>	are particularly sensitive to melody, timbre, rhythms and patterns
<input type="checkbox"/>	respond emotionally to sounds	<input type="checkbox"/>	demonstrate coherence and individuality in developing musical ideas
<input type="checkbox"/>	show a commitment to achieving excellence	<input type="checkbox"/>	have the motivation and dedication to persevere and practise



The Technologies

Exceptionally able students:

	readily accept and discuss new ideas		link the familiar with the novel and see application in 2D or 3D
	conceptualise beyond the information given		transfer and adapt ideas from the familiar to a new problem
	identify the simple, elegant solution from complex, disorganised data		are able to represent ideas aesthetically in a variety of ways: visual, spatial, verbal, mathematical
	reflect and are constructively self-critical		independently research knowledge to solve problems
	demonstrate skilfulness and ingenuity in manufacturing skills and techniques		show awareness of social/ethical considerations (e.g. finite supplies of resources, sustainability)

History

Exceptionally able students:

BC:AD

	make confident use of conventions which describe historical periods and the passing of time		have a broad range of general and historical knowledge
	show a keen awareness of the characteristics of different historical periods and the diversity of experience within each one		are aware of the provisional nature of knowledge
	make imaginative links between the topics studied and with other subjects in the curriculum		use a range of historical sources, including complex and ambiguous ones, with confidence and perception
	ask searching historical questions, engaging in increasingly independent historical enquiry and problem-solving exercises		give increasingly sophisticated reasons for the selection of sources
	show a lively curiosity with regard to historical problems and debates		show determination and perseverance in investigating topics
	select and use historical information to illuminate a narrative, support an argument or challenge an interpretation		use subject-specific vocabulary and terminology with accuracy and confidence
	reach soundly-based evaluations and conclusions based on considered use of evidence and are prepared to support them with reasoned argument		make suggestions which reflect independent thought concerning the connections, causes and consequences of historical events, situations and changes

Religious Education

Exceptionally able students:

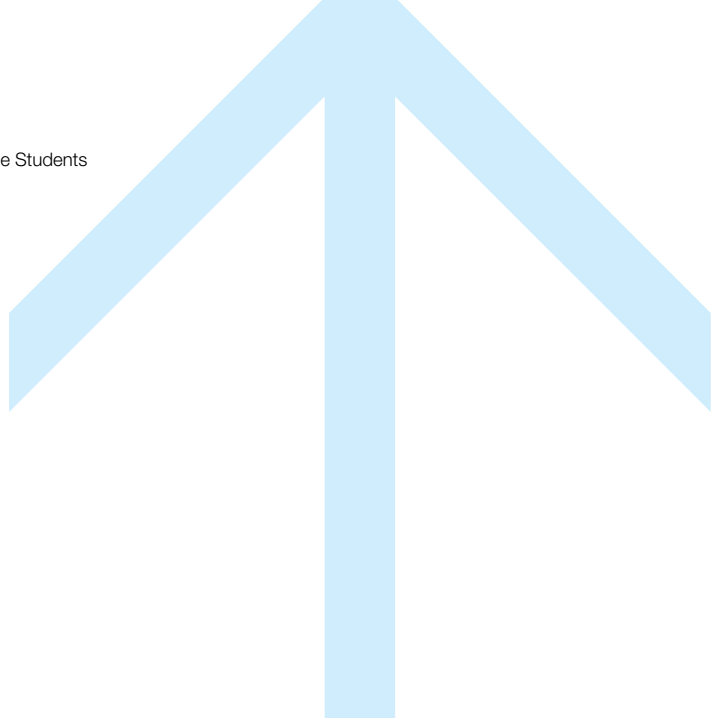
<input type="checkbox"/>	recognise and express personal feelings and empathise with others	<input type="checkbox"/>	are sensitive to social issues and concerned about equality
<input type="checkbox"/>	construct and sustain a complex argument, integrating ideas from a number of sources	<input type="checkbox"/>	are able to think independently, to intervene appropriately and continue an argument
<input type="checkbox"/>	raise questions and see relationships between questions	<input type="checkbox"/>	are able to reflect upon and integrate different kinds of knowledge
<input type="checkbox"/>	appreciate the value system of others and defer judgement or conclusion	<input type="checkbox"/>	can use intuition and personal experience as shared learning with others



Science

Exceptionally able students:

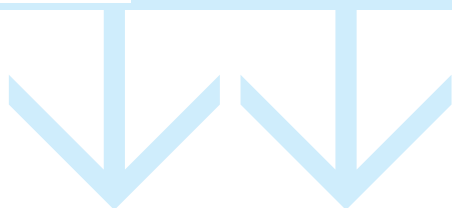
recognise patterns and relationships in science data: can hypothesise based on valid evidence and draw conclusions	use subject vocabulary effectively in construction of abstract ideas
are aware of how the context influences the interpretation of science content	think flexibly, generalise ideas and adapt problem-solving approaches
recognise and process reliable, valid and accurate data: can explain why data is unreliable, invalid or inaccurate	are able to evaluate findings and think critically
enjoy reasoning logically	



Geography

Exceptionally able students:

	possess wide-ranging general knowledge about the world		are enthusiastic observers of the world around them
	are intrigued by the workings of their own environments		enjoy identifying patterns and similarities in different contexts
	appreciate the relationships of different scales of environments		understand and begin to explain more complex inter-relationships
	analyse confidently and draw conclusions		draw meaningful generalisations from detailed information
	appreciate varying viewpoints and attitudes		formulate opinions and use evidence to support their own viewpoint
	creatively design and interpret spatial representations		enjoy and can confidently use a wide range of visual resources including maps and photographs
	have good information-processing skills		monitor and regulate personal work




Art

Exceptionally able students:

<input type="checkbox"/>	analyse and interpret their observations and present them creatively	<input type="checkbox"/>	draw on existing knowledge, make connections and draw on comparisons with others' work
<input type="checkbox"/>	are enthusiastic and interested in the visual world	<input type="checkbox"/>	enjoy experimenting with materials and are able to go beyond the conventional
<input type="checkbox"/>	can sustain concentration, constantly refining ideas	<input type="checkbox"/>	have confidence using a wide range of skills and techniques
<input type="checkbox"/>	are quick to learn and transfer skills		

Drama

Exceptionally able students:

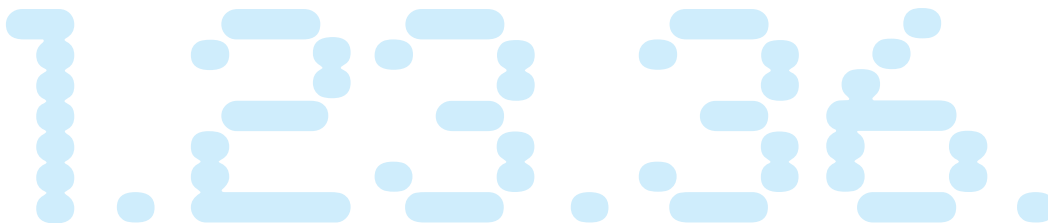


	have an ability to engage effectively with a role		demonstrate an expressive speech ability in the use of voice and accents
	can confidently move and use gestures appropriate to character		are able to invent and sustain a role
	confidently perform a scripted or improvised character to an audience		enjoy drama improvisation and/or mime and dance drama
	have the ability to engage effectively with an audience		engage meaningfully with others in the performance of a play text
	understand and enjoy the uses of the stage including design and technical effects		possess a wide range of knowledge about drama and theatre
	are able to discuss and have personal opinions about drama/theatre productions		reflect on the use of language in a play text
	have the ability and vision to realise a text from 'page to stage'		

Physical Education

Specific sports and physical activities require differentiated and detailed checklists. Exceptionally able students:

	use the body with confidence in differentiated, expressive and imaginative ways		are able to adapt, anticipate and make decisions
	have a good sense of shape, space, direction and timing		have a good control of gross and fine body movements and can handle objects skilfully
	produce a seamless fluency of movement with an intuitive feel for elegant movement		show high level of understanding of principles of health-related exercise and their application in a variety of activities
	are able to use technical terms effectively, accurately and fluently		are able to perform advanced skills and techniques and transfer skills between activities
	are able to analyse and evaluate their own and others' work using results to effect improvement		take the initiative, demonstrating leadership and independence of thought





Social, Personal and Health Education

Exceptionally able students:

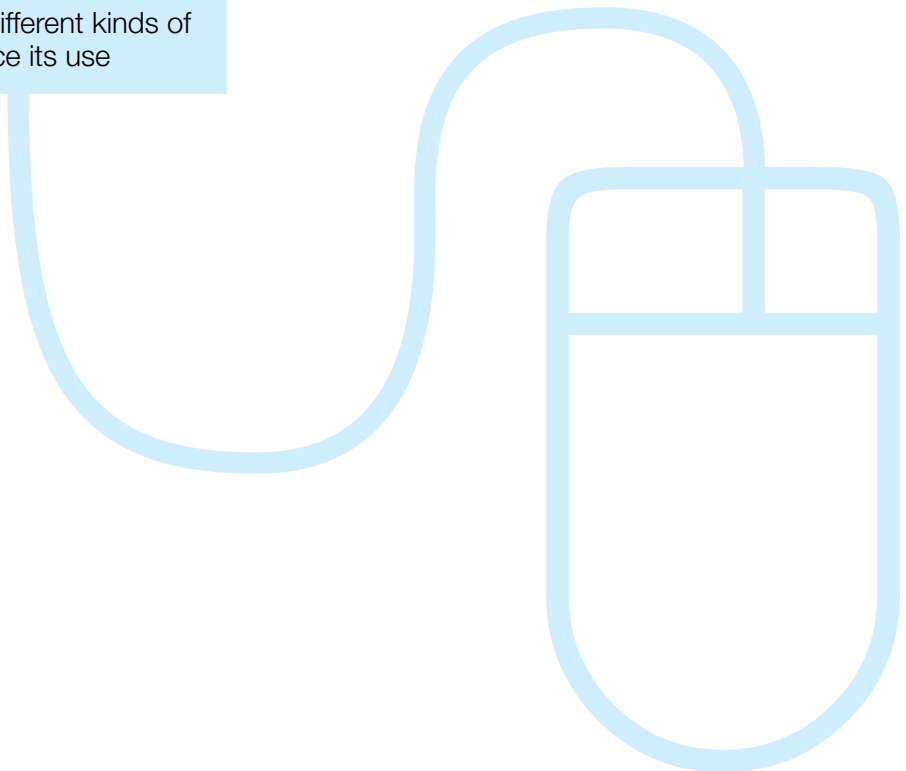
<input type="checkbox"/>	identify with the feelings of others	<input type="checkbox"/>	reflect on personal mistakes and rectify them
<input type="checkbox"/>	are self-confident	<input type="checkbox"/>	have self-control
<input type="checkbox"/>	are flexible and comfortable with change and novelty	<input type="checkbox"/>	use effective communication skills
<input type="checkbox"/>	build good relationships	<input type="checkbox"/>	are able to persuade and negotiate
<input type="checkbox"/>	work well collaboratively	<input type="checkbox"/>	lead and inspire others
<input type="checkbox"/>	are aware of social and environmental issues	<input type="checkbox"/>	enjoy community activities
<input type="checkbox"/>	are good in debate, discussion, role-play	<input type="checkbox"/>	display honesty and integrity
<input type="checkbox"/>	show initiative and persistence		



Information Technology

Exceptionally able students:

<input type="checkbox"/>	use ICT hardware and software independently	<input type="checkbox"/>	use ICT to support their studies in other subjects
<input type="checkbox"/>	use ICT to solve problems	<input type="checkbox"/>	use their skills and knowledge of ICT to design information systems and suggest improvements to existing systems
<input type="checkbox"/>	consider the limitations of ICT tools and information sources	<input type="checkbox"/>	consider some of the social, economic and ethical issues raised by the use of ICT
<input type="checkbox"/>	consider the purpose for which information is processed and communicated and how the characteristics of different kinds of information influence its use		



School-Wide Identification Processes

Identification should be an on-going process, feeding directly into the planning of provision for students. It will also, however, need to feed into review of policy and practice and be an integral part of the wider school improvement cycle. The flow chart shows how this might happen. See Appendix I for more information on drafting policies and records.

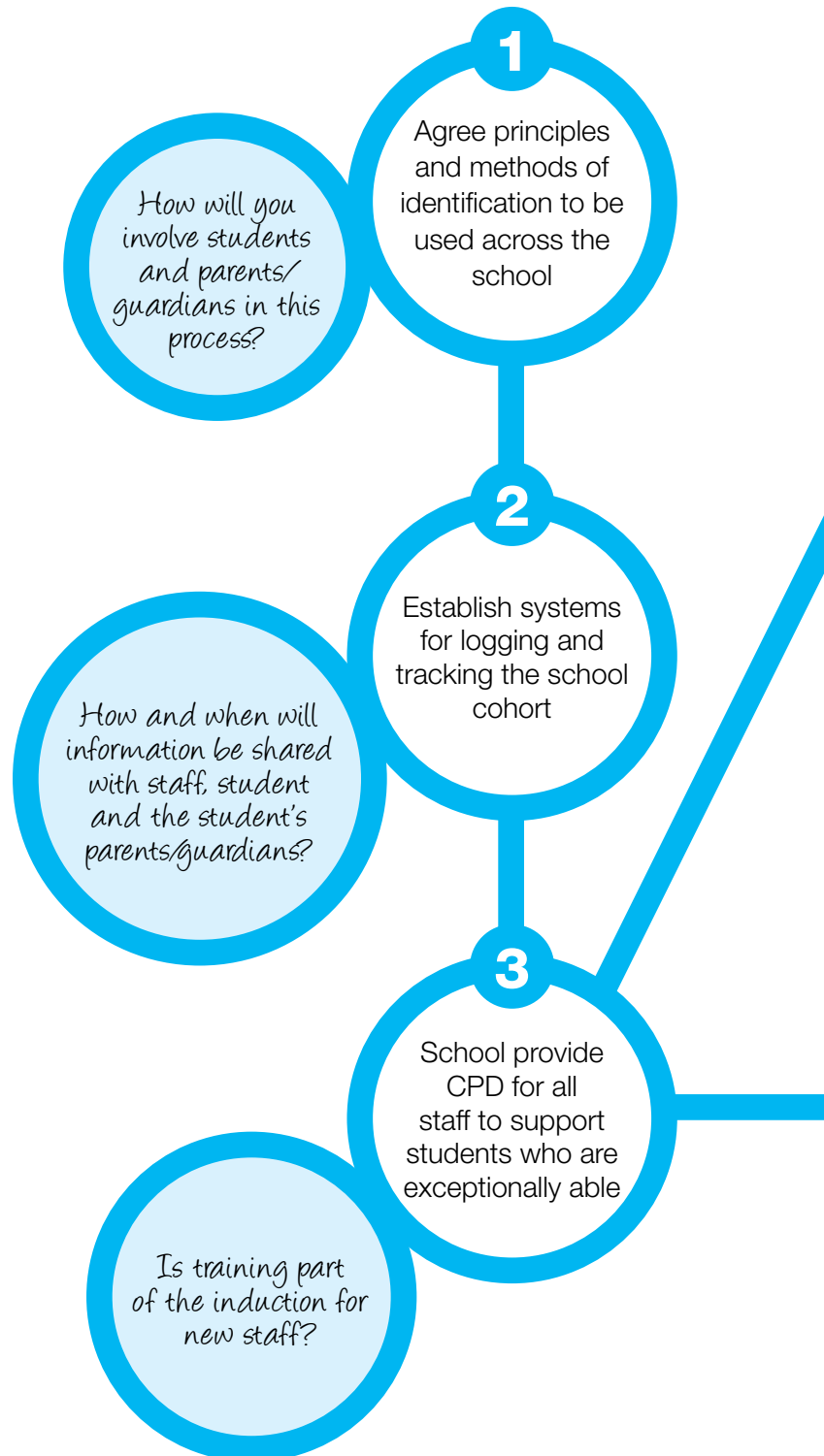
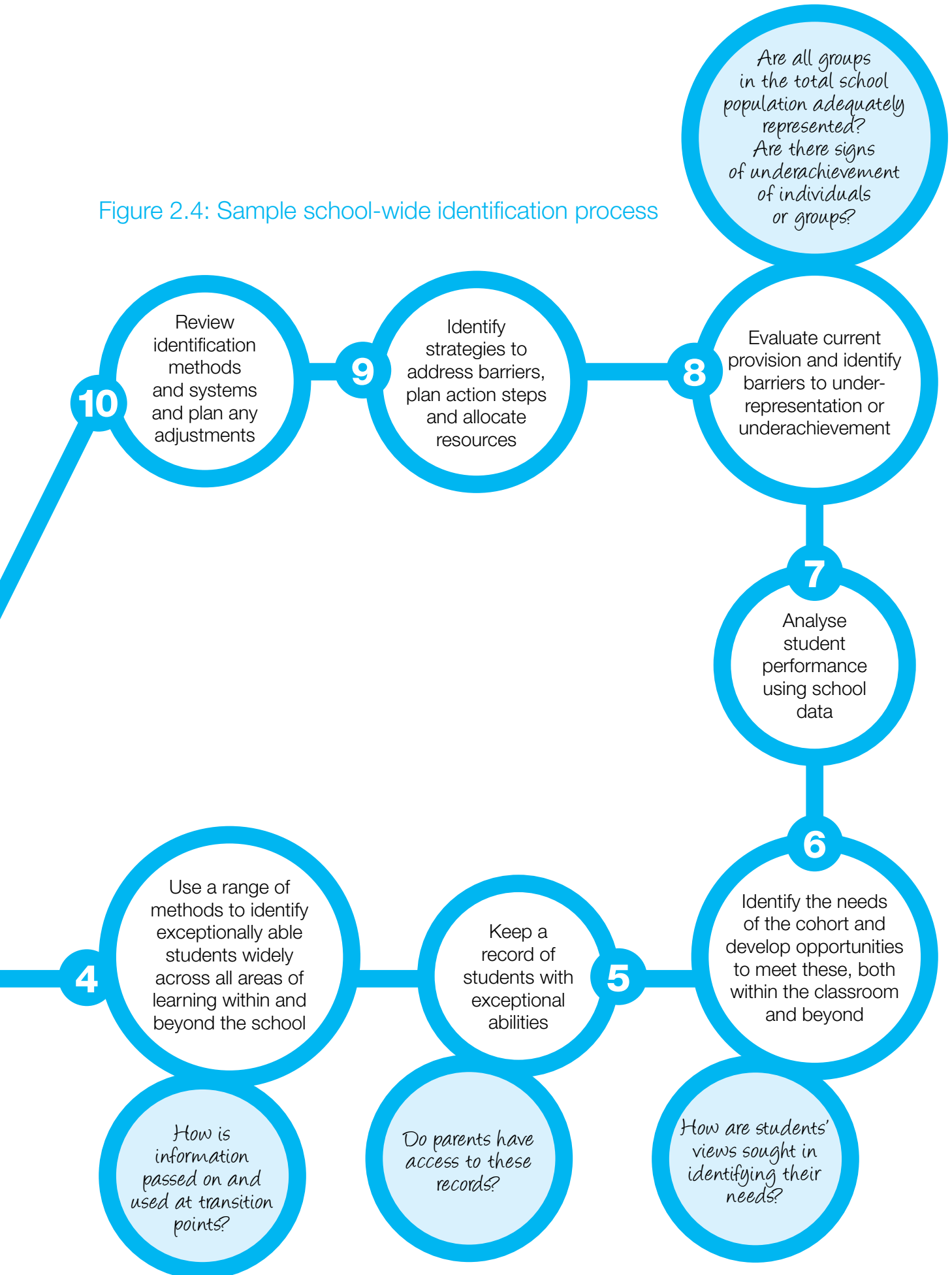


Figure 2.4: Sample school-wide identification process



3

Profiles of exceptionally able students

At times there can be the perception that students who have been identified as exceptionally able are blessed with special qualities and advantages that will help them to succeed and make life easier for them. There is growing recognition that for some students exceptionalism can bring with it challenges in social and emotional development, and students with exceptional ability are just as much in need of support as their peers in dealing with emotions, self-perception, behaviour and in looking to the future. The idea of the exceptionally able individual as a 'mad genius' is still prevalent, which is both unfair and inaccurate, and can lead to reluctance from parents to classify their children as exceptionally able.



Social and Emotional Issues in the Development of Exceptionally Able Students

Exceptionally able students are not a homogeneous, easily-classifiable group and therefore not all exceptionally able students will develop emotionally in the same way. While the need for consideration of the emotional well-being of exceptionally able students is important, emotional difficulties should not be viewed as inevitable for exceptionally able students as many of these students are well-adjusted. Gender differences can also be observed. For example, exceptionally able girls are often less vocal than boys and draw less attention to

themselves in an attempt to fit in with their peers.

High intelligence, ability for self-analysis, perfectionism and creativity possessed by many exceptionally able students may lead them to evaluate themselves critically. Some exceptionally able students may be more concerned than their peers with their purpose in life and in the world, and may display signs of extreme sensitivity and emotional intensity.

Teachers and parents need to understand the cognitive,

emotional, and social needs of exceptionally able students. The use of profiles is one way of getting a better understanding of exceptionally able students, by looking closely at their feelings, behaviour, and needs. Betts, G. & Neimark, M (1988) highlight the importance of viewing the profiles as a theoretical model, not as a diagnostic model. Educators should also be aware that as students develop their needs and behaviours change. As they approach adulthood they may settle into one or more categories.

'The Successfuls'

A significant number of identified exceptionally able students are 'the successfuls': students who demonstrate the behaviour, feelings and needs classified as 'the successfuls' have learned the system. After discovering what 'sells' at home and at school, they begin to display appropriate behaviour. They learn well and are able to score highly on exams and tests of intelligence. As a result, they are usually identified as exceptionally able. Rarely do they exhibit behaviour problems because they are eager for approval from teachers, parents and other adults. These are the students many believe will 'make it on their own.'

However, 'the successfuls' often become bored with school and learn to use the system in order to get by with as little effort as possible. Rather than pursue their own interests and goals in school, they tend to go through the motions of schooling, seeking structure and direction from instructors. They are dependent upon parents and teachers. They fail to learn needed skills and attitudes for autonomy, but they do achieve.

Overall, these students may appear to have positive self-concept because they have been affirmed for their achievements. They are liked by peers and are included in social

groups. They are dependent on the system but are not aware that they have deficiencies because of the reinforcement they receive from adults who are pleased with them and their achievement.

It seems that these students have lost both their creativity and autonomy. Exceptionally able young adults who may underachieve in college and later adulthood come from this group. They do not possess the skills, concepts, and attitudes necessary for life-long learning. They are well adjusted to society but are not well prepared for the ever-changing challenges of life.



Figure 3.1: 'The Successful'

<p>Feelings & Attitudes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - boredom - dependent - positive self-concept - anxious - guilty about failure - extrinsic motivation - responsible for others - diminish feelings of self and rights to their emotions - self critical 	<p>Behaviours</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - high achiever - seeks teacher approval - non-risk taker - does well academically - accepts & conforms - dependent 	<p>Needs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to see deficiencies - to be challenged - assertiveness skills - autonomy - help with boredom - appropriate curriculum
<p>Adults' & Peers' Perceptions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - loved by teachers - admired by peers - loved and accepted by parents 	<p>Identification</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - very high marks in academic tests, achievement test and IQ tests - referral by teacher 	
<p>Home Support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - independence - ownership - freedom to make choices - time for personal interests - risk taking experiences 	<p>School Support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - enriched curriculum - time for personal interests - compacted learning experiences - development of independent learning skills - in-depth studies - mentorships - college & career counselling 	

'The Challengings'

Many school systems fail to identify 'the challengings' for extra support. 'The challengings' typically possess a high degree of creativity and may appear to be obstinate, tactless, or sarcastic. They often question authority and may challenge the teacher in front of the class. They do not conform to the system, and they have not learned to use it to their advantage. They receive little recognition and few rewards. Their interactions at school and at home often involve conflict.

These students feel frustrated because the school system

has not affirmed their talents and abilities. They are struggling with their self-esteem. They may or may not feel included in the social group. Some 'challengings' also challenge their peers, and therefore are often not included or welcomed in activities or group projects; on the other hand, some 'challengings' have a sense of humour and creativity that is very appealing to peers. Nevertheless their spontaneity may be disruptive in the classroom. In spite of their creativity, 'the challengings' often possess negative self-concepts.

'The challengings' may be 'at risk' as eventual dropouts for drug addiction or delinquent behaviour if appropriate interventions are not made by early post-primary. Parents of exceptionally able post-primary students who drop out of school ('the dropouts') frequently note that their child exhibited 'the challengings' behaviours in late primary school or early post-primary. Although this relationship has not been validated empirically, it carries significant implications that merit serious consideration.

Figure 3.2: 'The Challengings'

<p>Feelings & Attitudes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - boredom - frustration - low self-esteem - impatient - defensive - heightened sensitivity - uncertain about social roles 	<p>Behaviours</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - corrects teacher - questions rules, policies - is honest, direct - mood swings - inconsistent work habits - poor self control - creative - prefers highly active, engaging, questioning approach - stands up for convictions - is competitive 	<p>Needs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to be connected with others - to learn tact, flexibility, self-awareness, self control, self-acceptance - support for creativity - contractual systems
<p>Adults' & Peers' Perceptions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - find them irritating - rebellious - engaged in power struggles - see them as creative - discipline problem - peers see them as entertaining - adults want to change them - adults don't view them as having exceptional ability 	<p>Identification</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - referral by peers - referral by parent/guardian - interviews - performance - recommendation from a significant, non-related adult - creativity testing - referral by teacher 	
<p>Home Support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - acceptance and understanding - allow them to pursue interest - advocate for them at school - modelling appropriate behaviour - family projects 	<p>School Support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - tolerance - placement with appropriate teacher - cognitive & social skill development - direct and clear communication with student - give permission for feelings - studies in-depth - mentorships build self-esteem - behavioural contracting 	

'The Undergrounds'

Generally, these are females going through puberty, although males may also want to hide their ability or talent. If an exceptionally able boy goes underground, it tends to happen later in post-primary, and typically in response to the pressure to participate in sports.

In general, 'the undergrounds' are exceptionally able girls whose belonging needs rise dramatically in late primary and early post-primary (Kerr, 1985)². They begin to deny their talent in order to feel more included with a non-gifted peer group. Students who are highly motivated and intensely interested in academic or creative pursuits may undergo an apparently sudden radical transformation, losing all interest in previous passions. 'The undergrounds' frequently

feel insecure and anxious. Their changing needs are often in conflict with the expectations of teachers and parents. All too often, adults react to them in ways that only increase their resistance and denial. There is a tendency to push these children, to insist that they continue with their educational programme no matter how they feel. 'The undergrounds' often seem to benefit from being accepted as they are at the time.

Although 'the undergrounds' should not be permitted to abandon all projects, alternatives should be explored for meeting their academic needs while they are undergoing this transition. Challenging resistant adolescents may alienate them from those who can help meet their needs and long-term goals.



Figure 3.3: 'The Undergrounds'

<p>Feelings & Attitudes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - unsure - pressured - confused - guilty - insecure - diminished feelings of self and right to their emotions 	<p>Behaviours</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - denies ability - drops out of support group - resists challenges - wants to belong socially - changes friends 	<p>Needs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - freedom to make choices - to be aware of conflicts - awareness of feelings - support for abilities - involvement with peers who are exceptionally able - career/college info - self-acceptance
<p>Adults' & Peers' Perceptions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - viewed as leaders or unrecognised - seen as average and successful - perceived to be compliant - seen as quiet/shy - adults see them as unwilling to take risks - viewed as resistive 	<p>Identification</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - referral by peers who are exceptionally able - referral by home - referral by community - achievement testing - IQ tests - performance - referral by teacher 	
<p>Home Support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - acceptance of underground - provide college & career planning experiences - time to be with same age peers - provide role models who are exceptionally able - model lifelong learning - give freedom to make choice 	<p>School Support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - recognise & properly place - give permission to take time out from extra support classes - provide same-sex role models - continue to give college & career information 	

'The Dropouts'

'The dropouts' are angry. They are angry with adults and with themselves because the system has not met their needs for many years and they feel rejected. They may express this anger by acting depressed and withdrawn or by acting out and responding defensively. Frequently, 'the dropouts' have interests that lie outside the realm of the regular school curriculum and they fail to receive support and affirmation for their talent and interest in these unusual areas. School seems irrelevant and perhaps hostile to them. For the most part, 'the dropouts' are post-primary students, although occasionally there may be a primary student who attends school sporadically or only on certain days and has in essence 'dropped out' emotionally and mentally if not physically.

'The dropouts' are frequently exceptionally able students who were identified very late, perhaps not until late post-primary. They are bitter and resentful as a result of feeling rejected and neglected. Their self-esteem is very low, and they require a close working relationship with an adult they can trust. Family counselling is strongly recommended, and 'the dropout' youth should also be given individual counselling. Diagnostic testing is also necessary to identify possible areas for learning support.

Figure 3.4: 'The Dropouts'

<p>Feelings & Attitudes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - resentment - angry - depressed - explosive - poor self-concept - defensive - burn-out 	<p>Behaviours</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - poor attendance - doesn't complete tasks - pursues outside interests - dreams in class - is self-abusive - isolates self - is creative - criticises self and others - does inconsistent work - is disruptive - seems average or below - is defensive 	<p>Needs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - an individual programme - intense support - alternatives (separate, new opportunities) - counselling (individual, group, and family) - learning support help with skills
<p>Adults' & Peers' Perceptions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - adults are angry with them - peers are judgmental - seen as loners or dropouts - reject them and ridicule - seen as dangerous and rebellious 	<p>Identification</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - interview earlier - discrepancy between IQ and demonstrated achievement - incongruities and inconsistencies in performance - creativity testing - referral by peers who are exceptionally able - demonstrated performance in non-school areas 	
<p>Home Support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - seek counselling for family 	<p>School Support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - diagnostic testing - group counselling for young students - non-traditional study skills - in-depth studies - mentorships - alternative out-of-classroom learning experiences 	

'The Double-Labelled'

'The double-labelled' refers to exceptionally able children who have a physical, an emotional or a learning disability. They are usually not identified as exceptionally able, nor are they offered differentiated programming that addresses and integrates their special needs. Fortunately, research on the effective identification of these children has been promising, and suggestions do exist for ways to provide differentiated programming (Daniels, 1983; Fox, Brody, & Tobin, 1983; Gunderson, Maesch, & Rees, 1988; Maker, 1977; and Whitmore & Maker, 1985)³.

'The double-labelled' students often do not exhibit behaviours that schools look for in the exceptionally able student. They may have sloppy handwriting or disruptive behaviours that make it difficult for them to complete work, and they often seem confused about their inability to perform school tasks. They show symptoms of stress; they may feel discouraged, frustrated, rejected, helpless, or isolated.

These children may deny that they are having difficulty by claiming that activities or assignments are 'boring' or 'stupid.' They may use their humour to demean others in order to bolster their own lagging self-esteem. They urgently want to avoid failures and are unhappy about not living up to their own expectations. They may be very skilled at intellectualisation as a means of coping with their feelings of inadequacy. They are often impatient and critical and react stubbornly to criticism.

Traditionally, these students are either ignored because they are perceived as average or referred for learning support. Schools tend to focus on their weaknesses and fail to nurture their strengths or talents.

Figure 3.5: 'The Double-Labelled'

<p>Feelings & Attitudes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - powerless - frustrated - low self-esteem - unaware of his/her potential - angry 	<p>Behaviours</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - demonstrates inconsistent work - seems average or below - may be disruptive or acts out 	<p>Needs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - emphasis on strengths - coping skills - access to a support group - counselling - skill development
<p>Adults' & Peers' Perceptions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - seen as 'weird' - seen as 'stupid' - viewed as helpless - avoided by peers - seen as average or below in ability - perceived to require a great deal of imposed structure - seen only for the disability 	<p>Identification</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - scatter of 11 points or more on WISC or WAIS - recommendation of significant others - recommendation from informed special education teacher - interview - performance - referral by teacher 	
<p>Home Support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - recognise exceptional abilities - provide challenges - provide risk-taking opportunities - advocate for child at school - do family projects - seek counselling for family 	<p>School Support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - provide needed resources - provide alternative learning experiences - give time to be with peers - give individual counselling 	

'The Autonomous Learner'

Few exceptionally able students demonstrate this style at a very early age, although parents may see evidence of the style at home. Like 'the successfals', these students have learned to work effectively in the school system. However, unlike 'the successfals' who strive to do as little as possible, 'the autonomous learners' have learned to use the system to create new opportunities for themselves. They do not work for the system; they make the system work for them. 'The autonomous learners' have strong, positive self-concepts because their needs are being met; they are successful, and they receive positive attention and support for their accomplishments as well as for who they are.

They are well respected by adults and peers and frequently serve in some leadership capacity within their school or community.

'The autonomous learners' are independent and self-directed. They feel secure designing their own educational and personal goals. They accept themselves and are able to take risks. An important aspect of 'the autonomous learners' is their strong sense of personal power. They realise they can create change in their own lives, and they do not wait for others to facilitate change for them. They are able to express their feelings, goals, and needs freely and appropriately.

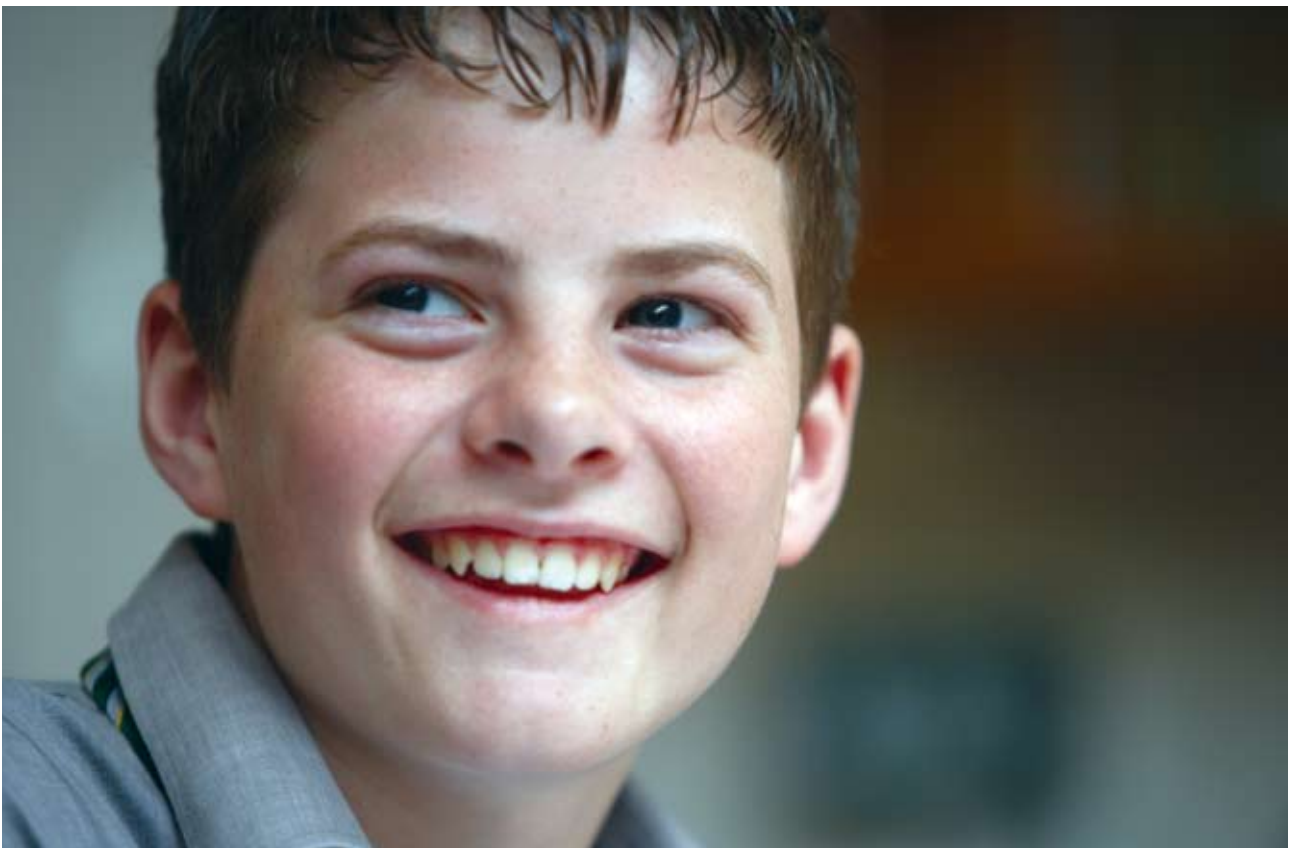


Figure 3.6: 'The Autonomous Learner'

<p>Feelings & Attitudes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - self confident - self accepting - enthusiastic - accepted by others - supported - desire to know & learn - accepts failure - intrinsic motivation - personal power - accepts others 	<p>Behaviours</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - has appropriate social skills - works independently - develops own goals - follows through - works without approval - follows strong areas of passion - is creative - stands up for convictions - takes risks 	<p>Needs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - advocacy - feedback - facilitation - support for risks - appropriate opportunities
<p>Adults' & Peers' Perceptions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - accepted by peers and adults - admired for abilities - seen as capable and responsible by parents - positive influences - successful - psychologically healthy 	<p>Identification</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - demonstrated performance - very high marks in academic tests - products - achievement testing - interviews - referral by teacher/peer/parent/self - IQ tests - creativity testing 	
<p>Home Support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - advocate for child at school and in community - provide opportunities related to passions - allow friends of all ages - remove time and space restrictions - do family projects - include student in parent's passion 	<p>School Support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - allow development of long-term integrated plan of study - enriched curriculum - remove time and space restrictions - compacted learning experiences with pre-testing - in-depth studies - mentorships - college & career counselling and opportunities - waive traditional school policy and regulations 	

4

Whole school strategies

This section summarises the main points about various organisational strategies which may be used by primary and post-primary schools. The key to effective organisation is to maintain sufficient flexibility to allow adjustments to be made in the light of students' specific needs.



School Leadership Responsibilities

The principal and senior management (in small schools, the whole school team) have a key role to play in raising the profile of exceptionally able students in the school. The needs of exceptionally able students should be considered as an integral part of all whole school and subject policies and development plans.

The co-ordination of practice and provision for exceptionally able students will be strengthened by having a nominated member of staff, perhaps the Special Needs

Co-ordinator, who will require support from the senior management to meet his/her responsibilities effectively. Such responsibilities may include:

- leading the implementation of whole school policy
- liaising with subject colleagues to raise awareness of the needs of exceptionally able students and to plan for enrichment and extension
- identifying exceptionally able students and sharing information with colleagues
- linking with partner schools

- to ensure effective transition of exceptionally able students
- liaising with parents and outside agencies
- overseeing resources
- monitoring and reporting regularly to school management.

The school management needs to consider the effectiveness of school policy and practice for exceptionally able students. This will include areas such as staff development and the involvement of parents/guardians.

Auditing Current Practice

A school audit (see Figure 4.1) is an excellent first tool that the school can employ to record the current methods used to support the work of exceptionally able students.

Figure 4.1: Sample audit of current school practice

Audit	Yes	Sometimes	No
The school has identified a teacher who is the staff lead on exceptionally able students			
The policy is written and shared with all staff and board of management members			
All staff, including Special Needs Assistants, are aware of the school policy and practice for exceptionally able students			
Teachers know who the exceptionally able students are in their class or classes and are aware of the range of their abilities			
Subject policies or departmental handbooks include guidelines for staff working with exceptionally able students			
Lesson content is differentiated to take account of the needs of the exceptionally able student			
Teachers use a variety of forms of differentiation in their teaching			
High expectations are set for the exceptionally able students			
Exceptionally able students are grouped together for specific subjects (e.g. maths) or activities as appropriate			
Lesson pace is geared to take account of the rapid progress of some exceptionally able students			
Exceptionally able students are given extra time to extend or complete work when required			
The teacher liaises with the subject co-ordinator or head of department in instances where the student is providing a curriculum challenge			
Exceptionally able students are moved into another class (of older students) for some work, if their needs cannot be met in their normal class			
Homework is challenging for exceptionally able students			
Specific homework is set for exceptionally able students			
Exceptionally able students' progress is monitored and recorded by staff			
CPD includes a focus on the needs of the exceptionally able students			
Additional extra-curricular opportunities are provided after school or during lunch-times in academic, creative and sporting activities			
The school or departmental exceptionally able policy, practice and routines are kept up-to-date			

Policies

It is good practice to have a whole-school policy for the education of exceptionally able students. This will help to guide staff towards a consistent and effective approach. It will also ensure that parents, allied professionals and new and temporary staff all have a clear idea of the service the school hopes to provide. See Appendix I pages 82-87 for a sample policy for the education of exceptionally able students.

Record Keeping

Having received all relevant information about who the exceptionally able students are in the school, it will be useful to record it. This information may be kept centrally, possibly electronically, so that all who need access to it are able to do so. Relevant information can then be transferred by class teachers to their class records.

The three exemplars of recording templates in Appendix I pages 85-87 show different methods of recording the names and abilities of students. Schools should choose or adapt an appropriate form to suit their needs.





School Organisational Strategies

Mixed ability classes and settings are the arrangements generally used to cater for the different needs of all students. However, whatever organisational method is used, carefully planned differentiation is needed (see Section 5 on Classroom strategies).

Mixed Ability Classes or Groups

Students need to learn how to work together, how to appreciate each others' strengths and support each others' needs. Exceptionally able students can contribute ideas to stimulate debate and discussion, but they can also learn that other students have valuable ideas to contribute. However, if learning is not differentiated, the exceptionally able students may coast, feel frustrated and repeat work they have already mastered.

Exceptionally able students need the challenge of working with others of similar interests and abilities. Setting students for some subjects may make it easier for the teachers to develop a faster pace, or to work in greater depth and breadth, with opportunities for reflection and independent thought. However, sets tend to remain fixed and it is difficult to retain the flexibility that enables learners to move between groups when they demonstrate progress.

The forms of organisation below may be used specifically to meet the needs of exceptionally able students. However, these

also require consideration of individual differences, particularly in terms of learning styles and motivation.

Working With Older Students for Some Subjects

Some exceptionally able students are so advanced in a particular subject (often mathematics) that they need the intellectual challenge of older students for some of the time. A school ethos that celebrates every student's abilities can accommodate this level of flexibility without making such an arrangement seem 'unusual'. However, younger students need the emotional maturity to cope in an older group, and the older students need the maturity to accept this arrangement.

Compacting

Compacting describes a strategy whereby students can move faster through the programmes of study, including core work, in order to move into more advanced work earlier. There are benefits to this practice if a student then uses the acquired skills to work in greater depth and breadth on problem-solving activities. However, there is little merit if the student merely skates through narrow content in

order to take a public examination early.

Target Grouping

Target grouping means that in each topic of work to be covered, teachers audit what students already know. They then allow certain students to skip core work and move straight into extension tasks. From time to time, these students can share their research and new knowledge with the rest of the class.

Summary

There is no one right way to group students in order to maximise their learning opportunities; each organisational strategy has its merits and pitfalls. However, if the ethos of the school demonstrates in action that all students are valued and a wide variety of achievements celebrated, then it becomes educationally and socially equitable to group students in different ways for different purposes. Schools need to monitor the effectiveness of various student groupings and ensure that there is sufficient flexibility to move students if and when necessary.

5

Classroom strategies

For exceptionally able students to make the maximum progress in their normal classroom, the school will need to implement the policies, practices and strategies outlined in previous sections.



In addition, the subject or class teacher may find it useful as part of their differentiations strategy to:

- be aware of the school policy and practice for exceptionally able students
 - refer to subject policy guidance on working with exceptionally able students
 - liaise with subject co-ordinators where necessary
 - use a variety of forms of differentiation in their teaching
 - plan for the use of higher order learning skills in their teaching
 - consider and plan for different learning styles
 - set high expectations for the exceptionally able students
- consider early examination entry
 - group the exceptionally able students together for specific subjects or activities
 - pace lessons to take account of the rapid progress of some the exceptionally able students
 - give time for the exceptionally able students to extend or complete work if they need it
 - set homework which is challenging for the exceptionally able student.

This information may also be used as a checklist, which the school and teachers can also use as an audit of current practice.

Differentiation

In most cases, the needs of exceptionally able students are best delivered as part of the normal differentiated classroom provision. There are a number of ways that work can be differentiated and this should normally be included at the planning stage. Differentiation can be planned for and organised in the classroom in many ways:

By Task

A variety of tasks are set which relate to the same activity. Exceptionally able students can begin at a higher level, miss the first activities or move through the work at an increased rate. This may also mean missing out some of the work.

By Outcome

The same content, material, stimulus or task is used for all the students in the class. This works at its best when the outcome of the work is not prescribed or the task is open-ended.

Benefits

Exceptionally able students can make rapid progress and work can be better matched to their abilities while less able students can also make appropriate progress. The tasks can be phased so those exceptionally able students move on to increasingly more difficult work.

Benefits

Different outcomes can be sought so that exceptionally able students can extend their thinking. The class can work as individuals or in groups.

By Resource

Different types of materials are provided to different members of the class. All the class might be answering the same questions or researching the same information, but the resources used will be matched to ability. Less demanding work may have less dense text with more illustrations. More demanding resources may have more dense text and a richer, more complex structure. Exceptionally able students can use more demanding word banks, data files or image banks.

Benefits

Exceptionally able students can research the ideas in greater depth and their thinking skills will be extended. Less able students will be able to achieve at a similar level, as they have less complex resources.

By Support

All students need an equal amount of support from the teacher. For exceptionally able students, it is the nature of the support that should be varied. The support time available to exceptionally able students may well be used to question the student, to encourage them to explore ideas more deeply, to introduce alternative ways of approaching the work or to explore extension into ICT systems.

Benefits

The work of teachers is better targeted to individual needs and will increase the level of interaction.

By Dialogue

The most regularly used form of differentiation is by dialogue. Exceptionally able students often only need to have a basic outline of the work explained to them. This can be a quite sophisticated explanation which sets high expectations and assumes high levels of understanding. Less able students will need a full explanation with more detailed examples and perhaps even further illustration of the ideas and expectations. The use of targeted questioning to elicit a range of different responses, including high-level responses from exceptionally able students and small group discussions, can also increase the challenge.

Benefits

Exceptionally able students can make more progress by being encouraged to develop a higher level of understanding and moving on to more demanding tasks as soon as they are ready. Differentiated language is used by the teacher to challenge the thinking of the exceptionally able and to increase the level of thinking and discussion.

By Pace

Some exceptionally able students thrive when asked to work at a fast pace, as they do not need all the small steps to be explained. They can deduce for themselves the next step in a process. They are often able to achieve complex tasks quickly and like to move rapidly through the early stages. In contrast, there are occasions when exceptionally able students actually work more slowly and painstakingly produce work of greater length, detail or complexity. This is often the case in creative or imaginative work.

Benefits

When asked to work at pace, some exceptionally able students move onto high-level work quickly which stretches their abilities. In contrast, by allowing more time, they may achieve increased levels of attainment and more highly 'finished' or inventive outcomes.

By Choice

Given the opportunity to select work for themselves, students can choose activities that they find more interesting and that match their abilities. Students can be given an opportunity to select from a range of starting points, materials, subjects or processes. They may also choose to extend or adapt the set work themselves.

Benefits

Exceptionally able students can make choices and work with ideas that are well matched to their interests, enthusiasms and abilities.





Other Ways of Thinking About Teaching and Learning

In order for teachers to meet the diversity of learning needs of exceptionally able students, a flexible approach to thinking about teaching and learning is desirable. The following section explores two other frameworks for thinking about teaching and learning in the context of exceptionally able students, Bloom's Revised Taxonomy of Educational Objectives (2001) and Howard Gardner's (1999) model of Multiple Intelligences.

Bloom's Revised Taxonomy of Educational Objectives is outlined in the following examples

to suggest ways in which learning skills can be embedded into increasingly complex content for exceptionally able students. Howard Gardner's model of Multiple Intelligences can be used to suggest ways teachers can observe students in a wide range of activities, using different aspects of intelligence across the curriculum.

Bloom's Taxonomy

Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives⁴ is made up of the following:

4. Benjamin S Bloom Et Al *Taxonomy Of Educational Objectives Book 1/ Cognitive Domain*, 1/e Published by Allyn and Bacon, Boston, MA. Copyright © 1984 by Pearson Education.



Remembering

Remembering

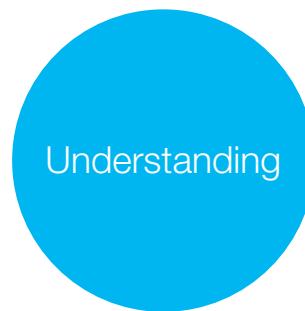
Students need to know, recall and research certain things as a basis for action. No one can think in a vacuum; there is a core of relevant factual knowledge and theories that students need in order to begin thinking. To do this efficiently, they need to acquire and use a range of research skills and basic subject skills such as procedures in mathematics and science and technical skills in literacy, art and ICT.

Given practice of asking the right questions, students will learn the criteria for good questions and be able to select relevant facts.

Students need to present ideas using a diverse range of efficient recording and communication skills. To support their learning, they need demonstration and examples, practice and opportunities to share with others.

Remembering is involved in activities which ask:

- What happened when...?
- Make a list...
- Write an account...
- Make a summary...



Understanding

Understanding

Students need to demonstrate understanding. The lower order understanding tasks include: paraphrasing, explaining and selecting relevant information to answer a question.

However, exceptionally able students need to use higher order understanding skills. They need to learn how to interpret knowledge by presenting a new perspective, comparing and contrasting data and viewpoints, re-ordering information and examining consequences.

Higher order understanding is shown through activities such as:

- Write a summary of the main points...
- Explain why that happened...
- Discuss this from the point of view of...
- What are the similarities between...?
- Explain the differences between...
- What would have happened if...?
- How would this affect...?
- Why did... react in this way...?
- What were the results of this...?



Applying

Applying

Students need to use knowledge to solve problems and to see what is problematic in what had previously been taken for granted.

Students need to manipulate or construct something using their new knowledge, to reproduce in a different format, to apply to a similar situation, to build a model, to illustrate, or to apply to an example.

Applying knowledge involves the following activities:

- How would you use this to...?
- How does this rule apply...?
- How can you use what you have learned to solve this...?
- Does the same principle apply in this...?
- What else do you know that would apply...?
- Is this the same kind of...?
- Construct a diagram to show...
- Conduct an experiment to prove...
- Paint a picture to show...



Analysing

Analysing

Students need to understand overall relationships and patterns.

Students need to fit the pieces of the 'jigsaw' into a whole; they need to identify connections, patterns, sequences and themes. They need to see the 'big picture' and to be aware of how 'the bits' they are learning are contributing to a coherent plan.

Analysis can be shown through activities such as:

- In what ways are they the same/different/better/worse...?
- What was the overall plan...?
- How do the elements combine...?
- Discuss why the causes had inevitable consequences...
- What is the general rule...?
- Explore the possible future consequences...



Evaluating

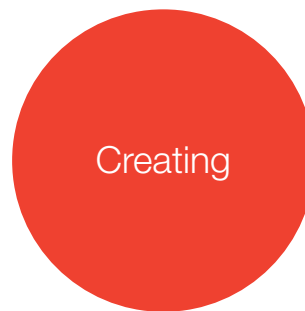
Evaluating

Students need to make decisions and judgements. Impulsive decisions and actions which cannot be justified usually result from bias, prejudice and woolly thinking. Students can be taught how to balance decisions against reason and evidence.

Evaluation can be developed by asking students:

- How do you know...?
- On what grounds can you justify...?
- What is the evidence...?
- Why would you make that decision...?
- What are the arguments for and against...?
- Why do you believe...?
- Did... have a valid case...?
- Draw a conclusion giving reasons...

Although the range of higher order learning skills increases in complexity as students develop greater knowledge and maturity, even younger students can use the full range of higher order learning skills.



Creating

Creating

Students need to create something new with the knowledge and skills they learn. Knowledge lies in a stagnant pool unless it is used for thinking and action. If all learning is merely the acquisition of other people's knowledge, then nothing new is created.

Students need to design, invent, imagine, change and improve.

Synthesis is shown in activities which ask:

- Do you agree with...?
- How would you change...?
- What would happen if...?
- Is there another way...?
- Is there another conclusion...?
- In how many ways can you...?

Figure 5.1: This example uses the story of *The Three Bears* to develop such skills.



Figure 5.2: This example shows the use of Bloom's taxonomy when studying 3D shapes.

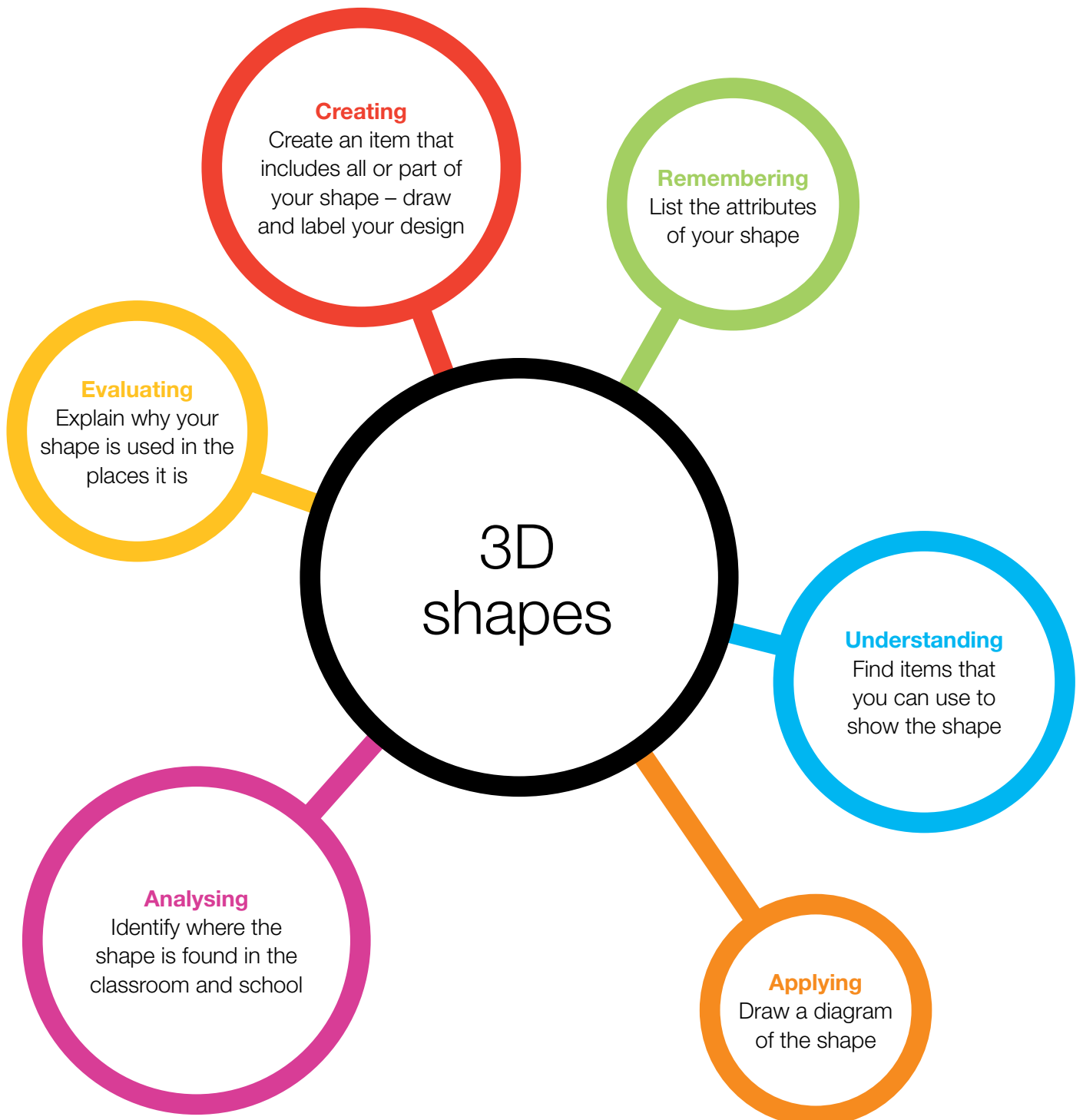


Figure 5.3: This example shows the use of Bloom's taxonomy when studying science.

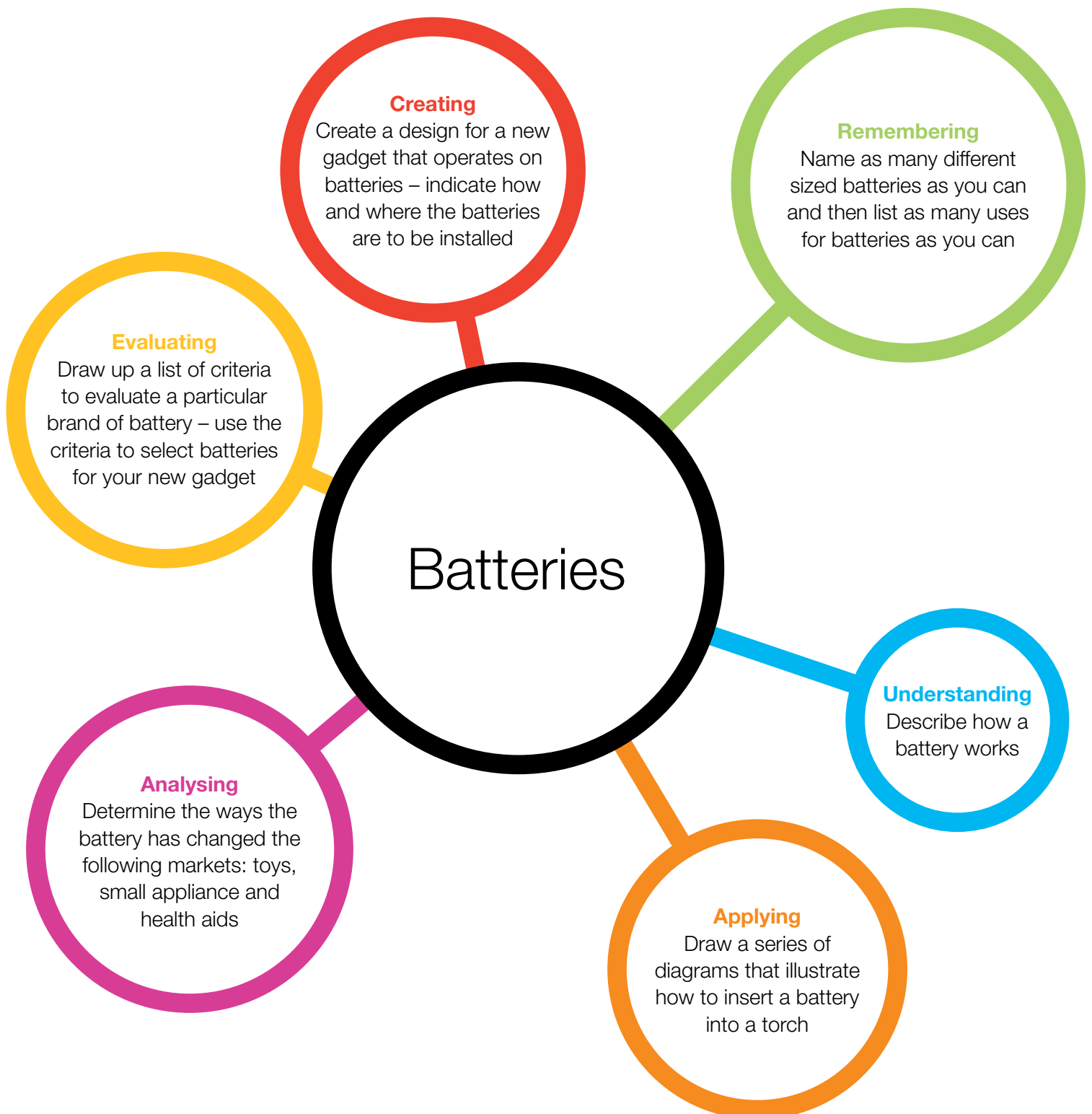
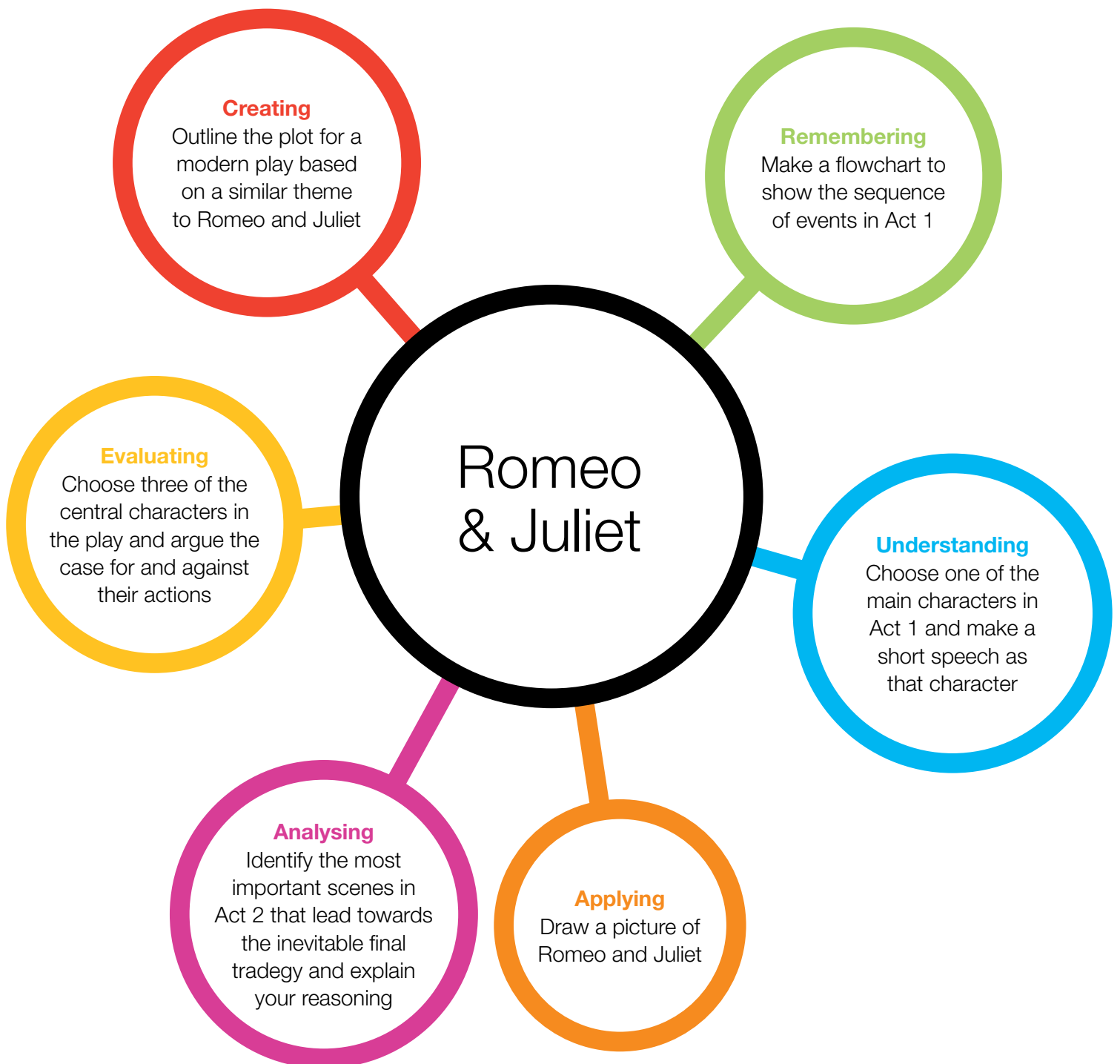


Figure 5.4: The example below illustrates how activities based on *Romeo and Juliet* can develop higher order learning skills for older students.





Multiple Intelligences (Gardner)

The strategy for each of the 'intelligences' suggested by Gardner is a starting point for teachers. Suitable ideas should be developed appropriate to the learner's age and the subject being taught.

Linguistic intelligence

- has an extensive vocabulary
- uses words creatively and intuitively
- is sensitive to shades of meaning
- is sensitive to the sounds and musicality of words
- has mastery of and can play with structure
- has awareness of the different purposes of language
- can use language to persuade, to process information, to explain
- can reflect on personal use of language

Re-write an episode from history as a drama



Natural intelligence

- is interested in flora and fauna
- notes fine detail and can classify precisely
- shows keen awareness of the natural environment
- can distinguish between and understand relationships

Investigate where the 'Golden Ratio' and the Fibonacci series appear in nature

Musical intelligence

- can hear music 'in their head'
- is sensitive to melody, tones, rhythms and patterns
- is intuitively aware of forms and movements
- can respond emotionally to sounds
- has a strong musical memory
- can play with musical patterns

Learn facts and formulae by putting them to a tune



Logical-mathematical (scientific) intelligence

- can group and construct complex sets easily
- internalises and manipulates mathematical or scientific concepts
- can hypothesise and infer consequences
- can manipulate symbols
- grasps the steps in reasoning
- appreciates and creates patterns
- can see the solution intuitively

Analyse the construction of language in a poem.

Visual/spatial intelligence

- has accurate visual memory of form and shape
- can manipulate and transform visual information
- can produce creative visual imagery
- is intuitively aware of spatial display
- can think in spatial patterns
- has a good memory for 3D shapes

Use mind-maps to sum up the information in a topic

Bodily-kinaesthetic intelligence

- can use their body in differentiated, expressive and skilled ways
- has good control of gross and fine body movements
- can handle objects skilfully
- has an accurate sense of timing and direction
- produces a seamless fluency of movement
- has an intuitive feel for movement

Learn directions by being a 'human compass' on a giant map in the playground



Intra-personal intelligence

- has a positive sense of self-worth
- can reflect on and modify personal feelings, thoughts and values
- has a deep awareness of, and insight into, their own personal inner world
- has a strong intuitive capacity in decision-making
- is autonomous, integrated and self-actualised

Individual research, followed by a presentation to the class on an aspect of a current topic

Inter-personal intelligence

- has understanding of and empathy with others
- is aware of and concerned with universal social issues
- can influence, inspire and persuade others
- is accepting, understanding and forgiving of human frailties
- understands human motivation

Leader's role in group work

Further Suggestions

Often exceptionally able students will complete their class work before their peers, and may experience boredom. Teachers can use the following ideas to further challenge exceptionally able students and alleviate the potential boredom. Teachers can choose an exercise that is stage and age-appropriate. It is particularly important for exceptionally able students that there is a good match between their ability and the level of challenge.

Teachers can involve students in selecting the exercises and this in turn will give students a clearer understanding of the task specification. Teachers can encourage students to self-evaluate their work by getting them to check back on the task specification. It might be useful for students to keep this additional work in a student folder, so that they have a record of all their achievements and can discuss these with the teacher at an appropriate time.



- Write a joke that has twenty seven words and does not include the letter 'a'.
- Draw a design of a football stadium that can cater for families, groups of teenagers, and people in wheelchairs, is safe for players and spectators and can also be used for a new sport which they must invent. The design must be labelled and have a fifty word description.
- Plan a new computer game. It must not be violent or have weapons in it. It must have an option for use by one or two players. It must not be a copy of any current game. Draw a storyboard showing the screens that will be used.
- Plan a blog on your favourite television programme. Someone who has never seen the programme should be able to understand what it is about. All main characters should be named and a short description given. The blog must have at least six entries and must include a picture. (Hint. You can find pictures on the Internet.)
- A boy from another planet is coming to stay in your home for a week. You have €500 and the use of the Internet. Plan the necessities you will need to make their visit comfortable and fun. Don't forget that you will need to provide the boy with somewhere to sleep, food to eat, as well as entertainment. As he is not from Earth his needs may be different to ours. Explain these needs (perhaps you have to buy him different air to breathe) and describe how you will meet the needs. Don't forget to keep within your budget!
- Write a slogan for a new toy. The slogan must have between eight and twelve words. You can only use these letters: f, e, i, u, h, q, w, r, t, s, p, b, l, v, x, j, c.
- You must design a new animal. You must use four triangles, two squares, one rectangle and three circles. Write a short description that explains what this animal does, where it lives and what it likes to eat.
- Write a newsletter for your family. Tell them about this week in school.
- Plan a podcast on healthy eating. Someone who does not know what healthy eating is must be able to understand how to change their diet. The podcast should last five minutes.
- A new student who does not speak English has joined your class. Draw a map that will help them find their way from your classroom to the playground, the dinner hall, the front door, etc. Use clear symbols to mark important places.

6

Conclusion

There is no one formula that any school should adopt to develop provision for exceptionally able students. Any strategies that are developed will emanate from the strengths of the staff, the needs of the students and the opportunities that arise from the community activities and personnel involved.

In a school climate that celebrates individual differences, the school ethos will promote and support individual differentiation. The key processes that allow for individual development depend on the flexibility of the school organisation and the careful attention that is given to lesson planning, which systematically builds in appropriate challenges for all students.

A system of education that caters for the diversity of students' needs is founded on the belief that students first need enriching opportunities to discover their strengths and interests. Once identified, those strengths and interests can be nurtured and supported and potential can be developed into performance.



Appendices

7

Appendix I

A Sample Policy for the Education of Exceptionally
Able Students

Aims

We are committed to providing an environment which encourages all students to maximise their potential and this clearly includes students who display some form of exceptional ability.

Definitions

An exceptionally able student is one who is in the top range of 5-10% of the student population. An exceptionally able student is one who has the capacity for or demonstrates high levels of performance in an academic area or within a domain-specific ability in a non-academic area, including:

- Visual and performing arts and sports
- Leadership ability
- Creative and productive thinking
- Mechanical ingenuity
- Special abilities in empathy, understanding and negotiation.

Identification of the Exceptionally Able Students

Before identifying any student as exceptionally able in a particular area, we aim to ensure that all students have had the opportunity to learn and succeed in this area. This makes the process of identification fair. An exceptionally able student should be identified using a variety of methods. The specific procedure will vary according to subject area but will include elements of the following:

- Teacher referral
- Assessment results
- Peer referral
- Parental/guardian referral
- Identification by a previous teacher, previous school, external agency or organisation
- Self referral.

It is worth remembering that exceptionally able students can be:

- good all-rounders
- high achievers in one area
- of high ability but with low motivation
- of good verbal ability but poor writing skills
- exceptionally able but with a short attention span
- exceptionally able but with a learning difficulty or disability which masks their achievements
- exceptionally able with poor social skills
- keen to disguise their abilities. (Eyre, 1993)

Everyone in school has a responsibility to recognise and value students' abilities. We are aware that:

- unnecessary repetition of work is de-motivating and de-motivated students will not always demonstrate potential
- there is sometimes peer pressure to underachieve
- exceptionally able students are not always easier to reach than other students.

Record Keeping

A record is kept of all students who have been identified as exceptionally able which is available to staff in paper or electronic form. The area of ability is recorded with reference to which aspect(s) the student has exceptional abilities in. As with all school records pertaining to their children, parents/guardians are consulted and have access to such a record. These records are reviewed twice a year at a meeting of the staff concerned. If a student is not reaching his or her full potential, or has achieved the set targets, new arrangements and where necessary new targets will be set.

Provision for Exceptionally Able

Opportunities for extension and enrichment are built into all our schemes of work. During policy review in *month/year* we shall ensure that every curriculum area will have a reference to exceptionally able. This should state what the identification procedure will be and what provision is in place. We aim to:

- maintain an ethos where it is acceptable to be bright
- encourage all students to be independent learners
- recognise achievement
- be aware of the effects of ethnicity, bilingualism, gender, religion and social circumstances on learning and high achievement
- provide a wide range of extra-curricular activities and clubs
- always provide work at an appropriate level
- provide opportunities for all students to work with like minded peers.

Types of Provision

Classroom differentiation

- Teachers have high expectations.
- Tasks are designed to take account of levels of existing knowledge, skills and understanding.
- There are planned extension opportunities or open-ended tasks.
- There is access to higher tier exam entries.

School based provision

This varies according to subject area and is covered using a variety of methods like:

- school based clubs
- school societies/councils
- enrichment opportunities
- opportunities for performance
- artists in residence
- specialist teaching

The school endeavours to link with other providers of opportunities for students with exceptional abilities - local, national and international organisations, competitions, festivals, partnerships with secondary schools further education institutions, and, businesses. Students will be encouraged to fulfil their potential in those areas in which they are exceptionally able without reducing the breadth of their curriculum and personal experience.

Personal development

Class work and work outside the classroom includes a number of opportunities for students to work in small and large groups, which will help develop their personal and social skills. We recognise the way that students work in teams and support each other when discussing ideas or collecting resources and materials supports their social, personal and emotional development. Some exceptionally able students find working in teams easy; others show excellent social and leadership skills but others find 'team work' more difficult.

The school aims to develop all the abilities of students, including their personal and social skills, especially if these are not strengths. We aim to create a climate in which students are taught to relate well to each other and where differences of all kinds, including ability, are accepted.

Leadership and management roles

The principal and senior management are responsible overall for the implementation of the exceptionally able policy.

Process for review and development

This policy will be reviewed annually. Next review: *month/year*.

Useful publications in the school library

The school will endeavour to provide library resources to enable particular areas of interest, identified by students, staff members and other relevant personnel.

Exemplars of Recording Templates

Exemplar 1: Exceptionally Able Individual Student Record

School name: Student name:		Date: Review dates: Date of birth:		
Name of person(s) referring the student:				
Recent assessments and results (please date)				
Ma:	En:	Other	Other	Other
Area of ability (please highlight): A: general intellectual ability or talent B: specific academic aptitude or talent C: visual and performing arts and sports D: leadership ability E: creative and productive thinking F: mechanical ingenuity G: special abilities in empathy, understanding and negotiation				
Details of specific abilities:				
Action to be taken:		Outcomes with date:		
Monitoring arrangements:				
Provision:				
Additional support: Grouping:		Extension work:		Out of school enrichment activity:
Copy to (please tick): Class teacher Co-ordinator Parent/guardian Principal Next school		Signed: Parent/guardian Teacher Date		

Exemplar 2: Exceptionally Able:
School or Year Group Record

School Name:					Date:				
Name	Class	Yr	DoB	Date	Person identifying	Area of ability	Review date	Parent/ Guardian	Ass.
Monitoring Arrangements:	Out of school enrichment activities:				Area of ability (<i>please highlight</i>): A. general intellectual ability or talent B. specific academic aptitude or talent C. visual and performing arts and sports D. leadership ability E. creative and productive thinking F. mechanical ingenuity G. special abilities in empathy, understanding and negotiation				
Assessments					Parents/Guardians informed (<i>please tick</i>) <input type="checkbox"/>				

Appendix II

Case Studies from Northern Ireland

Case Study 1 A Teacher's Perspective

Background

Rebecca is the eldest in a family of three girls. Her parents have fostered an academic background but are not at all 'pushy'. In fact they have given Rebecca an excellent sense of balance. Rebecca is currently studying five Advanced Subsidiary (AS) subjects and when this was first suggested, her parents were uncomfortable as they wanted her to 'have a life'. This supportive background has undoubtedly benefited Rebecca throughout her school career.

Details of Ability

Rebecca is an 'all-rounder'; a strongly academically able student. She attained nine A* grades at General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE), yet is involved in a wide range of extra-curricular activities. When discussing this with her she commented (honestly not boastfully) that she didn't find GCSEs difficult. She never appeared under stress in the way that other high achievers often do. Moreover at GCSE, she was in the top three within school in almost every subject. She selected five AS subjects simply because the selection process proved very difficult and many teachers wanted her to study their subject. She has said, however, that if she finds this too stressful, she will drop one as she sees no point in doing this needlessly. So far, she has coped admirably.

As well as Rebecca's English/English Literature teacher for the last number of years, I have worked with Rebecca in Public Speaking as an extra-curricular activity. Once again she is an able student in this area. Last year, she won the local area heat for the Soroptimist Public Speaking Competition and for the Business and Professional Women's competition; on both occasions the judges commented on her outstanding ability. She proceeded to be placed

She selected 5 AS subjects simply because the selection process proved very difficult and many teachers wanted her to study their subject.

third (out of 17 competitors) at the Soroptimist Northern Ireland final and won a trip to Brussels to the European Parliament. The judges noted that she was the only competitor below Sixth Form and commented on her particular skill in the improvised speech. This year she has won the first round of the Rotary Leadership competition in our area. She will be taking part in the Soroptimist competition and Mock Bar Trials over the next few months. Last year she was also successfully selected for a Spirit of Enniskillen bursary and travelled to Canada as part of this. The centre the team were staying with were so impressed by her that they offered her a job for next summer.

Rebecca is also a talented violin player and was leader of the North Eastern Board Orchestra. Last year she auditioned and was selected for the City of Belfast Youth Orchestra.

Impact on Teaching

Rebecca's ability had both positive and negative impacts on teaching at GCSE.

Problems/actions taken

Core problem - The greatest difficulty is finding the time to differentiate substantially enough to stretch Rebecca. At GCSE, in big classes, I would suggest this wasn't particularly successful.

English/English literature

My experience in the English/ English Literature classroom was that I taught to a level below Rebecca's ability. I took a number of actions to try and remedy this situation.

I tried to give her opportunities to stretch herself through verbal questioning but this could not be aimed solely at Rebecca without the rest of the class losing interest and there was only one other student who worked at this level.

Differentiation was largely through outcome; in open discussion and in written work, Rebecca was able to develop her own ideas and opinions. Informally, I encouraged Rebecca's individual reading outside the course and took opportunities to discuss this with her.

The extra-curricular element of Public Speaking was also another method of 'stretching' Rebecca. This directly fed into her skills in drafting cogent and persuasive essays, particularly developing her ability to integrate stylistic devices. I would suggest that carefully selected extra-curricular activities are an excellent way to develop the skills of an able student and allow for a more personal relationship which can push the student further.

These actions were ongoing, however I did feel frustrated as a teacher and felt that at times I did not challenge or develop Rebecca's skills as much as I could have. The difficulty of catering for every student's individual needs in a class of 28 at GCSE is immense.

Double award science

This was particularly interesting and is an example of where the system, to a certain degree, did not cater for Rebecca. She is within a grammar school system yet the school's intake ranges from grades A - C2 and thus there is still a wide range of ability. The students are not streamed in science. Interestingly, they are in Mathematics and this is a subject in which Rebecca felt adequately challenged throughout her two years. However it must be noted that while streaming works for students at the top end, it doesn't always for those at the bottom.

Within science, due to the quirks of the timetable, Rebecca was not in a particularly able class set. The result of this was that the rest of the class could not work at her pace. The teacher quickly realised this and Rebecca was simply put to one side and allowed to work through topic booklets herself while the teacher concentrated on the rest of the class. She was given the guidance material from the teacher but beyond this, she was effectively self-taught. The teacher found this frustrating but decided it was the 'best fix' solution. Rebecca also found this frustrating as she felt that this time could have been 'freed up' and she could have worked on with booklets in her own time. School timetables, however, are not this flexible at GCSE and she would also have been required to be there for certain practicals and assessments anyway. Rebecca was not, however, allowed to move a topic ahead from the rest of the class. As the class had moved at a

...she won the local area heat for the Soroptimist Public Speaking Competition and for the Business and Professional Women's competition; on both occasions the judges commented on her outstanding ability.

Core problem - The greatest difficulty is finding the time to differentiate substantially enough to stretch Rebecca.

slower pace, the course was not finished on time, and Rebecca was given four booklets to look at over the Easter holidays preceding the GCSE examinations that had not been covered. Once again this was frustrating as she was effectively held behind by the rest of the class. However she was exceptionally gracious about this and did not complain at any point. It ultimately did not affect her result.

French

From discussions with both the class teacher and Rebecca, I would suggest that French had the most successful approach to the problem of differentiation in order to stretch Rebecca. The class size was small and to a certain extent streamed, and therefore Rebecca had more attention than in other subjects. In oral discussion, the class teacher did not simply allow for the rote answers that can gain a GCSE but kept pushing and stretching Rebecca until she found her uppermost level. She suggests that she had Rebecca working at Advanced (A) Level standard in the target language.

Another way of stretching Rebecca was to provide her with extra reading material in the target language. This was easily supplied and allowed Rebecca to develop her knowledge of the language and French culture independently of the class.

The teacher also used the French language assistant at GCSE and through group work with him, Rebecca's French was progressed. I know through discussion with Rebecca that these challenges at French GCSE were one of the most enjoyable elements of her study.

Advantages

There were a number of advantages to teaching which were common across all subjects.

Question and answer - Rebecca was a reliable student in classroom Q&A and could develop key ideas suggested by the class.

Group work – Rebecca was excellent in a group situation and would ably lead and guide a group. I felt in English /English Literature she could move a discussion on through probing contributions, taking the discussion beyond the mere superficial. In sciences she ably led and directed groups in practical work.

Modelling work – I regularly used Rebecca's work as a model. This could take the form of photocopied answers which I would have worked through and annotated with the rest of the class, highlighting good practice. I also have an interactive whiteboard and could save Rebecca's typed essays onto my computer and thus put them on my board. Students could then interactively annotate and note good practice. I now have these as a resource for future year groups moving through the course. We also used her public speaking speeches for this. She also modelled good practice in French discussion groups, and her French teacher comments she was the first to really try and develop discussion with the French assistant, as other students were intimidated. Her attempts in this, and the fact that she wasn't afraid to get it wrong, encouraged other students to become involved.

However it must be noted that while streaming works for students at the top end, it doesn't always for those at the bottom.

Mentor – In an attempt to recognise the vast resource we have in able students, some subjects within the school have started to use capable Sixth Form students in a mentor role with junior classes. English, French and Mathematics have all utilised this. Rebecca currently helps out one period a week with a fourth form French class, where she is able to work with students, providing an extra level of support.

Impact on student

Rebecca's ability brings with it problems as well as advantages.

Problems

Expectations of staff

One of the biggest difficulties facing Rebecca is the expectation that she can do everything. When trying to arrange a time to meet with her earlier on this year to discuss public speaking, she had no study periods available and was having a working lunch every day that week due to the variety of committees she had been asked to sit on and tasks she had been asked to carry out. It made me stop and question whether it was fair to place so much pressure on a 17-year-old. Staff members are probably not aware of the range of demands placed upon Rebecca. At the time I expressed my concern to Rebecca regarding

this. She felt it would be impossible for the school to monitor all requests given to her and that she was confident enough to say 'no' if she felt she couldn't cope. She also suggested to me that she would be happy to talk to her class tutor or year tutor if she felt demands were unrealistic or too high. She did acknowledge that there could be a temptation to overwork but assured me that a sense of balance was always at the forefront of her mind.

Rebecca is an extremely well-adjusted and mature student, I am unsure that every able student would remain so calm under such demands. The only way around this is to ensure the school has a strong pastoral support system in place, with class tutors checking on the demands placed on able students. Topics such as stress, prioritising and the 'ability to say no' should also be explored in *Learning for Life and Work*.

Personality/integration

I selected this as an area largely to demonstrate that this is not always as much of a problem as we think it is for able students. Rebecca is respected and well-liked within her year group. She has a secure group of friends around her, and with her particular interest in music and public speaking, she also has a wide range of friends from schools across Northern Ireland.

There are a number of reasons for this. Rebecca is a very humble student; she is not boastful and is very quick to help others. Her year group have accepted her extremely well. Indeed my class at GCSE always wanted her to be placed 1st in the year group to beat other classes; they were also quick to applaud her successes. She also possesses a realistic sense of balance and does not believe that academia is everything and I think that this has fostered good relationships with others.

I must add two caveats to this. It would be wrong to suggest that there wasn't a certain amount of resentment, at times, towards Rebecca, particularly from girls. This would be noticeable when she consistently gained the highest marks. I am quite sure that some girls in the year would not associate with her either. However there was very little action taken over this as Rebecca was so secure in herself and her group of friends that she never let this affect her. If I detected this within my classroom, I would have talked with the class about positively celebrating success but actions went no further than this.

The second caveat is that I have worked with a number of able students in the past who faced much bigger problems in this area. As a general rule, it appears to be more difficult to be an able student and female, than male. Able male students are often accepted and respected by their peers; female students are more likely to face resentment. In the past, I have had two academically able female students break down in tears due to such pressures. The assigning of Head Girl every year seems to be particularly fraught in this manner. At times, this can be partly due to the attitude of the able student in that they can be boastful, arrogant and ruthlessly competitive, which alienates their peers and even teaching staff. However at other times, these social pressures are through no fault of the able student. This is managed on a pastoral level through discussions with classes, carefully chosen students, year groups and advice to

One of the biggest difficulties facing Rebecca is the expectation that she can do everything.

able students. These tactics are not always as successful as one would wish.

Advantages

Rebecca has also gained many advantages from being an able student.

Examination success

Rebecca grasps new concepts across subjects instinctively and thus does not need to labour in her work to the same degree as other students. She also has an impressive ability to absorb detail and then apply this selectively when required. She is lucid, logical and articulate in both the oral and written modality. Moreover she possesses a logical mind with refined skills of analysis. This makes her a high achiever and the examination process is thus very rewarding for her. To work and achieve A*s in all subjects at GCSE gave her fantastic satisfaction. Her ability to win public speaking competitions is an extension of this, giving her a tangible sense of achievement for her hard work that is not available to all students.

Opportunities presented

Rebecca's ability opens up a wide range of opportunities that would not be available to all students. For example she has a much wider range of universities to choose from, and will at least consider an Oxbridge application which could, in turn, provide further opportunities in the future. Good grades also open doors in terms of course choice, allowing her to pick her chosen area, depending on her subject limitations.

However her ability opens more doors than just the academic. Her trip last year to Brussels (through Soroptimist Public Speaking) is an example of this. Through this she was able to meet and form friendships with girls throughout Northern Ireland, as well as getting an insider's view of the European Parliament. This has, in

turn, benefited her study of French. The Spirit of Enniskillen award last year is a further example of this. As an articulate student, Rebecca interviews well and this undoubtedly opens doors. Through this she was able to travel to Canada, forming friendships with students from across Northern Ireland and international friendships with those in Canada. As an able musician, she has also toured Italy with her Youth Orchestra. I have no doubt that through her participation in the Mock Bar Trials, the Rotary Leadership competition and a variety of Public Speaking Competitions this year, that Rebecca will be given further opportunities.

Working with others / satisfaction

Rebecca loves her mentor role in French. Her ability in this subject has given her the opportunity to work with younger students. She suggests that this allows her to pass on her enthusiasm which gives her a real sense of satisfaction.

Impact on classmates: Problems

Expectations of classmates

At times, particularly in a group situation there was the expectation that Rebecca would do all the work. This meant students had a tendency to sit back and not develop their own abilities. Rebecca also at times experienced some resentment in this area, in that she faced the attitude that they knew she could do it and if she

didn't, then she was letting them all down. She would also regularly be nominated for the leading roles in groups, thereby not allowing others to develop these skills.

This was dealt with in a variety of ways. In my class, roles of chairperson and spokesperson had to rotate; I would not allow one person to dominate in this area. Moreover I taught group dynamics and made my expectations of all students clear. Indeed we videoed some group work and students assessed their role within the group. Moreover Rebecca could be used constructively to pull people into group discussion, directing points or questions towards them. There could also be a temptation to rely on Rebecca in class Q&A sessions, as you knew that she often had a good answer which would be thought-provoking! However I did not target Rebecca very much in these sessions and she also had a sensitive awareness of this, and would only answer when she was aware that the class was really struggling to get there. I am sure that the vast majority of teachers are skilled enough in classroom management to ensure that one student does not dominate and have their own strategies to deal with this.

Reaction from other students

Rebecca's level of ability, could, at times be discouraging to other students who were persevering with real determination and yet were constantly faced with her success.

At times, particularly in a group situation there was the expectation that Rebecca would do all the work. This meant students had a tendency to sit back and not develop their own abilities.

Rebecca's experience suggests that extra-curricular activities have been excellent in developing her opportunities.

A number of actions were taken on this. Firstly Rebecca's success was often praised in a very quiet fashion, with a comment as she left the classroom, or a written comment on her work. This was just as satisfying to her.

Secondly I tried very hard to celebrate other students' successes. If another student had done an excellent piece of work I made sure I photocopied their piece and gave them verbal praise. I also verbally rewarded individual achievements and progression. I tried to take an interest in students' extra-curricular achievements and discussed successes in this. By fostering an atmosphere of success and achievement, I hoped to negate a sense of resentment towards Rebecca.

Another way of dealing with this was the school-led target setting system. Individual target grades and targets were set with Year 12 and Year 14 students. Through this, we tried to emphasise the concept that students were not competing against each other but were rather aiming to achieve their own personal targets.

Ideas for the Future

Extra-curricular activities

Rebecca's experience suggests that extra-curricular activities have been excellent in developing her opportunities. Schools need to ensure that a wide range of such activities /opportunities are offered to develop the skills of the most able further.

Mentor system

The use of a mentor system is probably one that is currently present in schools across Northern Ireland and is an idea that could be developed further.

Positive reward systems

Positive reward systems in schools are also vital for creating an atmosphere where achievement is valued. These systems should celebrate individual achievements and progressions, rather than just that of the able. This may help ameliorate some of the resentment that has traditionally surrounded such students.

Appendix II

Case Studies from Northern Ireland

Case Study 2 A Classroom Assistant's Perspective

Background

Peter is a 10-year-old boy who is able and who has also been diagnosed as having Asperger's syndrome. I became Peter's classroom assistant initially in June of his P4 year funded by the school and then funded by the board for 15 hours per week once his diagnosis was made. This post was awarded solely due to Peter having Asperger's syndrome. The school did employ a different classroom assistant in P2/P3 but she left for personal reasons.

When I started working with him, his previous teachers gave me some information on extension work he had covered in their classes.

Details of Ability

Peter has always been ahead of his peers. Reports from educational psychologists show him to be in the top 99.9 percentile in most areas of ability.

Impact on Classroom Strategies

Problems

In P5 the disparity between Peter and his peers in play situations increased. The students were moving on with their play and he found it very difficult to know what to do in play situations and also how to formulate any friendships. This was possibly wholly to do with his Asperger's diagnosis but it could also be because of his high levels of intelligence and his dependence on adults for company.

A main problem in the class situation is the range of work that needs to be given. In our class we have a few students who are between two and four years behind the class in their ability. Then there is Peter who is working at least two years

A main problem in the class situation is the range of work that needs to be given.

above the class. Any additional work depends on the extra input that a teacher is able to give (teachers may not have access to the higher levels of subject specific knowledge required). Although there is help for those students who are lagging behind, there is nothing in place for students like Peter who are able.

The classroom assistant can give the teacher and the gifted student a lot of help and support. I see my role as being there for the student especially at times of transition. I know what work he has done in the past and I know the difficulties he has and I can offer all these insights to the teacher to help them when setting work. I can motivate and stimulate Peter as often as required without constantly interrupting the smooth running of the classroom. I can be an extra adult to accompany Peter on outings that help expand his knowledge and social skills, e.g. I have arranged for him to go to the local library when different year groups are attending to gain access to a wider selection of books and also to use the library's computer thus freeing up the classrooms. This would not be possible if he did not have a classroom assistant. I also help prepare his work whether this is photocopying, downloading or even trying to find material that he has yet to use. I also have the time and the ability to help improve his interpersonal skills during group work. I can take some students out of class for smaller circle time groups to deal with any issues as they arrive. I help to maintain his timetable and try to get him to do all the work set.

Advantages

Peter offers a great range of knowledge in the class situation. His fellow students always expect him to offer interesting facts to the lessons and Peter is willing and enjoys doing this. For example last week the whole class were doing a comprehension on endangered animals and the dodo was mentioned. The teacher was asked when the bird became extinct and Peter was able to offer the date the last bird died, why it happened and where they lived!

During Science week last year he took great pride in helping prepare all the resources for all the year groups. He also went into the various classrooms to demonstrate what the students needed to do to make the experiments work. In some classes he worked as a team leader to achieve the end result. Occasionally, he had to be reminded not to take over but on a whole he worked successfully with the various students.

Impact on Student

Peter can easily become bored during some classroom activities, especially those in Maths and English where he is much further ahead of his peers. The problem is always finding the right level of work. It needs to be challenging but not too challenging. Motivation on tasks deemed too boring or beneath him is very difficult to achieve. We always have to balance making sure he maintains his basic core skills whilst keeping him interested in learning.

As Peter has progressed through the school he has usually been given work one or two years ahead. This means that only limited teaching material is available. My role in this is to help improve motivation in class activities. Specialised teaching is generally not available for gifted and talented students.

A further way of motivating Peter and extending his abilities is to allow him to surf the Internet and this can be beneficial as long as he is directed in a way to further his knowledge.

Advantages

Peter does feel good about himself and does recognise that he is clever. It is rewarding for him to gain 15 to 20 marks more than the other students in the class in the transfer practice papers even though he is not required to sit the test. He would also treat these more as a speed test rather than one of ability. Students do look up to him and would ask him questions about things they do not know; they appear to see him as a walking encyclopaedia.

Peter often can offer valuable knowledge from which the whole class can learn. He often participates in class discussions in an ad hoc way. Whilst doing something else if something interesting is being discussed he will join in.

Action Taken

At start

Motivation in the early days was often through timers of varying sorts. Firstly, large egg timers and then we used a traffic light digital timer although this sometimes proved too distracting, as he would be more interested in its mechanisms rather than the work he was doing!

On going

Now we tend to work more on a reward system. I would generally timetable his day by talking to the teacher about the work the class were doing that day and then working out what parts Peter was to take part in and what other work he was doing. This would then be timetabled out for him with a variety of other things for him to do when his work was finished on time.

Peter can easily become bored during some classroom activities, especially those in Maths and English where he is much further ahead of his peers. The problem is always finding the right level of work. It needs to be challenging but not too challenging.

I also provide Peter with a range of additional tools to help keep him interested and motivated. I work with him on improving his range of computing skills. I help monitor this and extend the range of activities to increase his knowledge in 'the world around us', geography and science. We provide a large range of reading materials, both novels and factual books, to help extend his knowledge further. This year I am also trying to encourage him to touch type properly through the use of specialised computer programmes.

Group work is still a difficulty for Peter, small groups are fine but he can easily intimidate some students. Those less confident, quieter or generally less clever will be railroaded by Peter's opinions. Peter can get things wrong and often this can be silly little mistakes. He used to argue that what he said or wrote was right and we were wrong. Now however he seems to accept more easily that he can make mistakes and it is not such a big issue. I think a lot of this is due to maturity. Some work is still required to improve his communication skills.

I make sure that all his work is available and set out for him. I also am a sounding board for unrelated questions. If I feel that the question is to do with the lesson and the teacher needs to be involved I will direct him to ask the teacher. If however it is more general I will listen and offer an opinion if required.

Having a classroom assistant has enabled Peter's abilities to be developed more fully than a teacher faced with a large class could have done alone.

Students do look up to him and would ask him questions about things they do not know; they appear to see him as a walking encyclopaedia.

Appendix II

Case Studies from Northern Ireland

Case Study 3 A Teacher's Perspective

Background

Fergal is currently in Year 7 in a class of thirty-six students. I have been his class teacher for one and a half years. Fergal is the second child in a family of three. Both parents have a musical background and are very keen for their children to carry on this tradition. They are extremely supportive with all homework and school activities. This has been extremely beneficial to Fergal throughout his time at our school.

Details of Ability

Fergal has excellent all round ability in every area of the curriculum. He is very strong academically and is a very able student. He recently achieved an A grade in his Transfer Test. He works in the top group in both Literacy and Numeracy. He is able to complete Level 5 ICT tasks competently.

Literacy

He found the 'transfer style' comprehensions challenging at the start but said that once he got use to the style of questioning he was able to work through them with confidence. He finds most of our comprehension work at the moment easy with only a few challenging questions. He enjoys the Thinking Skills & Personal Capabilities lessons that help his to 'use his brain more'. He achieved a Level 5 for a piece of creative writing that was moderated at a recent staff development session. He was found to have a very high level of ability in most areas of English with the Richmond Assessment achieving an average of 127 out of 130.

Numeracy

Fergal finds only some work in Year 7 challenging and admits that at times he finds most work quite easy. He likes the extension work he is given and enjoys the challenge of problem solving in Numeracy. Fergal was selected as one of five students out of one hundred and seven in our Year 7 group to advance on to the second stage

Fergal has excellent all round ability in every area of the curriculum...he is also an outstanding musician.

of the National Primary Maths Challenge. We are currently awaiting results for this. In a recent Numeracy check-up on number he achieved a high Level 5 and there are clear examples of Level 5 mathematics throughout his workbook. When tested under the Richmond assessment scheme he had a very high ability in Maths Concepts and an above average ability in Problem-Solving.

Extra-curricular

Fergal is involved in a wide range of extra curricular activities. He also is an outstanding musician and is now at Grade 4 Flute, having skipped a grade in Year 5 due to his exceptional ability. He has excellent stage presence and was chosen for a leading part in the Year 5 Christmas performance. He was also one of the few children chosen to perform a special assembly for former Education Minister Angela Smith. Fergal is a competent member of our Choir having sung for UTV Choir of the Year. He has a wide vocabulary due to the broad range of books he is able to read. Due to his extensive general knowledge he was picked to lead our Credit Union Quiz Team for two years running. Fergal is a keen sportsman and has a good all round ability in all games covered in P.E. He was selected for the panel for the school Soccer and Gaelic Football teams.

Impact on Teaching

Issue	Problems	Actions Taken
Planning	Finding the appropriate time to differentiate work to stretch and push Fergal.	I found that when I designed Thinking Skills & Personal Capabilities lessons he enjoyed the challenge and the opportunity to work in pairs and groups of four as well as individually.
	I also found that Fergal would be a constant early finisher and would spend a greater amount of time on task activities than the other students.	I had to plan task activities that would challenge his involving computer based work, homophones games, handwriting tasks, 24 games in maths, thinking challenge cards.
	I completed a VAK questionnaire with the students and found that Fergal learned through all 3 learning styles.	I had to adapt my teaching to include aspects for Visual, Auditory and Kinaesthetic learning styles.
Resources	Not enough resources available to help with extension activities.	The addition of new extension textbooks to our Numeracy resources was extremely beneficial.
		I allowed Fergal to use the interactive whiteboard and ICT equipment to help further enhance these skills.
Classroom Organisation	Students sit in mixed ability groups at the start of the day, these groups were not the most suitable for Numeracy and Literacy activities.	Streaming Numeracy and Literacy groups helped with the amount of work Fergal was able to do. Sitting in same ability groups helped to focus him on more challenging work.
		For special tasks asking him to act as a buddy worked well on helping to secure his understanding and helping him to further develop the understanding of his peers.

Issue	Problems	Actions Taken
Class Size	As there are 36 in the class it is hard to find time to devote to all students.	This impacted upon the planning that needed to be done. I would spend time working with various groups allowing equal time for teacher support and independent work.
		The Thinking Skills and Collaborative Learning that takes place helps to empower the students and were easier to manage than the larger groups.

After reading Robert Fisher's approach to questioning (see <http://www.teachingthinking.net/> for more information) I carefully selected the types of questions that I would ask Fergal giving him more room to think. In discussion with him, he appreciated the fact that the questions he is given in class are more challenging and prefers these. Fergal has a particular interest in Science and Technology and enjoys the challenge of designing, creating and making. When I introduced a Thinking Skills & Personal Capabilities (TSPC) element to these lessons he became more enthused and said that he enjoyed them more. One highlight was when he created a PowerPoint for a history presentation and gave each member of his team different slides to comment on. A student like Fergal enjoys hearing a plan of action at the start of the day. He likes the sharing of the learning intention as this helps him to understand what he is going to learn. He also enjoyed homework where I gave him a choice of four different activities and he was asked to choose one of them to do.

Advantages

Fergal is a natural contributor during class discussions and brings an added dimension to question and answer sessions. During our 'Show and Tell' sessions he is able to ask excellent open-ended questions and enjoys the challenge of being on the receiving end of these questions when doing his own show and tell. This helps to further develop the knowledge and understanding in my lessons. He is an excellent group leader and can be counted upon to keep everyone on task. He has the ability to move discussions up a level during TSPC lessons. He is keen to read his stories out to the class and likes when his work is used as a model for others. His ability to lead is great as I feel that I can put full trust in him to help enhance the lessons I teach. He is an extremely valuable resource to have in the room.

Fergal is also useful to have as a buddy to other students who are stuck with their work, and this became a useful item on our task board to replace the activities that he preferred not to do.

Fergal believes that because he has such a good all round ability that he should be able to do everything. He finds Spanish challenging and gets a bit annoyed that other students are able to retain more of the words than he can.

He told me that he enjoys being able to help others and that it gives him a small idea of what being a teacher would be like.

I am the Drama co-ordinator in the school and am called upon to do special assemblies, co-ordinate performances and assist the development of Drama as a whole. When looking for creative students I need look no further than Fergal. He works tirelessly in Drama workshop sessions bringing his own ideas and talents to the performances we do. Fergal is being continually challenged to do his best and to further develop his own creative skills.

Impact on Student

Problems

Fergal believes that because he has such a good all round ability that he should be able to do everything. He finds Spanish challenging and gets a bit annoyed that other students are able to retain more of the words than he can. While he accepts that they are better than him at this he still feels that if he were given the words phonetically or if they were written down more he would be able to learn them better. As Fergal has a good understanding of the rules of football and has great skill in the sport he gets frustrated at times with other students who have a lesser ability. He gets into a temper with them at times yet upon reflection is able to regulate his emotions and stop himself 'losing

it'. He also gets worked up when he feels that someone is pushing ahead of him in an area where he is very good. Another child in the class was recently given the opportunity to re-sit a music exam which would bring that child up to Fergal's present level. He became quite worried and wanted to sit his next exam three months earlier so as he would still be ahead. After he thought about it and realised that this would not happen he calmly accepted the situation and was very happy. This over-competitive nature has decreased since we have been working on Emotional Intelligence.

Advantages

Fergal has achieved many advantages from being a gifted and talented student. His results in check-ups and throughout Transfer practice papers would always have been among the highest in the class which has raised his confidence. He gets great satisfaction from being able to solve the more challenging problem-solving activities that we do. He is a very articulate and mature young boy who is called upon to represent our school on many occasions. He is a keen sportsman and has developed a perfect balance between academic success, creative talents and sporting participation.

His ability will no doubt give him a wide range of post primary schools to choose from. He enjoys being able to help other students and likes the way that he is given trust from his teacher and

other members of staff in our school. He says that this trust makes him feel good. He realises that he has gifts and talents yet is not boastful about them and is able to empathise with the feelings of others.

Impact on Classmates

Fergal is very well accepted by his classmates and is a very popular member of his year group. He is well liked and everyone celebrates his success. As we share the responsibilities in our school there is rarely a problem of a child complaining that Fergal has been given too many 'jobs' to do. Moreover, his peers are challenged, too, by the intellectual discussions Fergal initiates. His input in terms of helping others is great. Fergal enjoys the buddy system approach of mentoring fellow students and enjoys the challenge of working with them. There are high expectations placed on Fergal by the rest of the class yet he is ready to rise to such a challenge.

Ideas for the Future

Thinking skills & personal capabilities

I have been really impressed with how the TSPC lessons that we teach have helped to challenge Fergal and suitably stretch the opportunities he is given in class. More activities like these built into my daily teaching would be extremely beneficial.

Links

Visits to specialist post-primary schools on a regular basis would enhance the curriculum for the gifted and talented primary school student. It would be useful to have an allocation of off-timetable opportunities to support the learning of such students, with specialist visitors from the world of business, arts, science, technology and so on. In an ideal world it would be really

beneficial to have increased Peripatetic Support to further enhance the skills that such students possess.

ICT programme

With so much emphasis being placed on ICT it would be great to have access to software programmes that would help extend knowledge, thinking skills and personal capabilities for use either on the interactive whiteboard or on the Learning NI network. Laptops would be very beneficial for gifted and talented students to use in class. I could see great scope in such students being able to use a web cam to conference with other students of similar ability in another school. This could lead to group work that could be extended with physical visits also.

Community support

Another excellent idea would be a programme aimed at building social capital that would involve bringing in elderly members of the community to impart knowledge and life skills on to our gifted students.

It would be useful to have an allocation of off-timetable opportunities to support the learning of such students, with specialist visitors from the world of business, arts, science, technology and so on.

Appendix II

Case Studies from Northern Ireland

Case Study 4 A School's Perspective

regular viewing of videos of top performers to inspire students to learn improved techniques in dance and other sports

Enrichment Activities for PE

This case study shows how a school has extended its range of enrichment opportunities for students who are talented in PE and sport.

Background

The school is a mixed-sex, comprehensive school. It is in an urban part of Northern Ireland, with some deprivation in the area because of unemployment. It has a strong PE department, as well as a number of other staff who are interested in supporting a particular sport.

The PE department uses advanced units based on the QCA schemes of work in its general Key Stage 4 curriculum for all students. Two groups usually opt for the GCSE PE course, and students are also able to work towards other awards.

Implementation

In the past year, the school has worked to offer a new range of enrichment activities and initiatives, including:

- aerobics classes for Key Stage 4 and Sixth Form students in the lunch hour and early evening. The school has unearthed some hidden talent and a high-level group has emerged, many of whom are now training for aerobics demonstrator qualifications
- a personal fitness module as part of Level 2 and 3 Application of Number activities
- greater use of dance and gymnastic specialists to promote high-level skills

- closer links with two local dance schools and a gymnastics club
- greater use of specialist sports coaches for lunchtime and after-hours activities (part-funded by an Awards for All grant)
- regular viewing of videos of top performers to inspire students to learn improved techniques in dance and other sports
- occasional highly-publicised visits to the school by famous local sportsmen and women, to encourage and inspire students
- a doubling of the number of sports teams representing the school, leading to triumphs at county and regional level
- ongoing sports ladder competitions in individual sports like tennis, squash and badminton, with monthly internal awards for the most progress up the ladder
- the introduction of the Junior Sports Leader Award, made available to coaching volunteers from Year 10 upwards
- more support for outdoor pursuits challenges, leading to the Duke of Edinburgh and the President's Awards
- Involvement from parents and carers in the new programme, responding to requests from the school to help with transport for the many team and individual trips to sporting venues.

greater use of dance and gymnastic specialists to promote high-level skills

Impact

As a result of the new enrichment activities for PE and sport:

- more students are passing GCSE PE with high grades
- three teams won county titles and seven students reached national finals in four different sports
- 13 students have gained Junior Sports Leader Awards and 10 have gained other coaching or demonstrator qualifications
- many students with hidden or unfulfilled talents have blossomed in this positive culture of physical endeavour, showing unexpected levels of skill, tactical awareness, imagination, determination and confidence
- attendance figures have improved linked to better health across the school. Staff involved in support activities have also said that they have an increased vigour in their day-to-day lives
- for the first time, a group of school leavers has formed a Former Students' Sports Association- a network that will keep the young people in sport and will feed enthusiasm and developing expertise back into the school
- five students were awarded A grades in A Level PE and gained their first choice university place
- 14 other students were able to mention a significant sport award or trophy in their UCAS personal statements.

more support for outdoor pursuits challenges, leading to the Duke of Edinburgh and the President's Awards

Appendix II

Case Studies from Northern Ireland

Case Study 5 A School's Perspective

This case study shows how a school identifies gifted and talented students who are not fulfilling their potential. It also looks at how the school motivates them and meets their needs.

As a result, the gifted and talented cohort includes a number of students whose academic attainment is quite low and who come from traditionally underachieving groups, but who show exceptional abilities in other ways.

Background

The school is a mixed post-primary for 11-to 16-year-olds, with 700 students on roll. It is in a densely-populated area of Belfast. Over half the students are eligible for free school meals.

The school has introduced a gifted and talented policy which aims to ensure that it identifies gifted and talented students with unfulfilled potential (in particular, underachieving groups), as well as high attainers. The work is managed by members of the school's Special Abilities Working Party (one representative/member per department) and by the special abilities coordinator. The working party monitors the process.

Implementation

The school's procedures for identifying gifted and talented students involves using a mixture of quantitative and subjective data, including recommendations from teachers, other adults, parents and students themselves. If anyone thinks that a student should be on the register based on observation of qualities not easily measured, they can submit a case.

All departments submit their own lists of gifted and talented students. They are expected to include underachievers and to look for evidence in non-quantitative ways (for example conceptual

or oral skills). As a result, the gifted and talented cohort includes a number of students whose academic attainment is quite low and who come from traditionally underachieving groups, but who show exceptional abilities in other ways.

The register is regularly monitored by gender and eligibility for free school meals to see whether the students identified are representative of the overall school population. Where there is a mismatch, staff investigate possible reasons for the discrepancy and draw up an action plan.

Derbhla is a good example of a student who has benefited from the school's gifted and talented policy. She arrived in Year 10 after fostering, adoption, difficulties at school, and emotional and behavioural difficulties. At first she attended part time, with her main educational base being in an emotional and behavioural difficulty off-site unit. Here teachers recognised and reported on her outstanding social skills and conceptual abilities in class discussions. Derbhla showed the traits of an exceptionally gifted student (easy empathy with contrasting viewpoints, strong sense of values, enthusiastic absorption of current events and ideas, the ability to refine and develop thinking off the cuff). However, she seldom wrote a word and never did homework. She scored low marks in tests, examinations and assessments, including national curriculum tests, and showed no interest in whether she did 'well' or not.

Derbhla is on the school's gifted and talented register thanks to evidence submitted by a few observant teachers. As a result, she has been a voracious consumer of enrichment opportunities and was selected to be a representative on NICCY youth panel. The opportunities offered by inclusion on the register undoubtedly kept her in school and enthusiastic. She had many learning experiences that she loved and left school in Year 12 optimistic about herself.

Self-Esteem Project

The special abilities coordinator and heads of Years 10 to 12 are working with on a project, funded by the Peace and Reconciliation Fund, to raise the self-esteem of gifted and talented students from both communities within the school, including underachievers.

The head of year and tutors for Year 10 identified 15 students from both communities who were above-average ability but were under-performing, lacked self-confidence and had emotional or behavioural difficulties. They gave priority to students whose needs hadn't been focused on in the past.

These students became part of a programme, run by a youth worker. The students attended 13 one-hour sessions in school time, focusing on social skills, self-esteem, planning and organisation, revision skills, using accelerated learning techniques, problem solving and discussion.

The programme was then customised for Years 11 and 12, with 25 students selected by application form and interview. Successful members of the programme were invited to attend:

- ten five-hour Saturday sessions at school in Year 11 – focusing on self-esteem, group identity and motivation for learning;
- ten sessions in Year 12 – focusing on academic support (in English, maths, science and French), study and revision skills, and career goals.

In both programmes, the students looked at religion and gender issues and met and exchanged experiences with professional adults from both communities.

The students selected from Year 11 were invited to make a presentation to the education board's special education committee. One of the students involved, Craig, had always lacked self-confidence and avoided public speaking. However, he told the committee about the gifted and talented programme with clarity and passion. Afterwards, excited by his newly discovered love of speaking and listening, he decided he wanted to become a teacher.

Schemes of Work

To ensure that activities in the departmental schemes of work meet the needs of the most able students, the English department piloted a tick-box scheme. As a result, all schemes of work include tick-box sections where departments can show:

- which of the multiple intelligences or learning styles each unit or group of lessons covers
- whether there are opportunities to use higher-order thinking skills.

The tick boxes help ensure the full range of learning styles and thinking skills are covered within a unit of work.

Impact

As a result of the school's procedures for identifying gifted and talented students, staff have a subtler understanding of the meaning of gifted and talented and are able to identify students' qualities increasingly accurately. The school's gifted and talented cohort now includes a number of students whose academic attainment is low, but who show exceptional abilities in other ways. Many of these students are from traditionally underachieving groups.

The Year 11 self-esteem project has been very successful, with high student attendance. The fact that students have voluntarily spent so much weekend time in school (up to 100 hours for some) has changed their feeling about the place and increased their sense of belonging. The group has a strong sense of unity and loyalty without being a clique. The programme has had a marked impact on the students' self-confidence, self-esteem, presentation and social skills. It has also developed their leadership qualities – they spontaneously organised the whole school in a collaborative playground game at lunchtime and specifically said that the programme had given them the idea and the confidence.

The schemes of work initiative has helped teachers to focus more closely on the needs of gifted and talented students and to think about how to make sure that each lesson challenges thinking and motivates students.

As a result of the school's procedures for identifying gifted and talented students, staff have a subtler understanding of the meaning of gifted and talented and are able to identify students' qualities increasingly accurately.

Appendix III

'Voices' from the Republic of Ireland

'Voices' 1
A Teacher's
Voice: *Angela*

Angela is a teaching principal in a rural, two-teacher school, and has over 40 years teaching experience. She has a particular interest in special educational needs and has worked with a wide range of students with specific learning disabilities and difficulties. She recounts her experience of working with two students, formally identified with IQ's in the exceptional range, which came to light through school intervention to secure assessment for both.

In a regular classroom Angela finds that exceptionally able children are strikingly conspicuous. *I just saw that they were perhaps mentally, or perhaps I should say intelligently maybe five steps ahead of all the other children and if I asked a question to the class their answer would probably be different to what the majority would give me.*

To Angela academically exceptionally able children come across as very logical thinkers, posing questions that at times seemed simple, but to her were always marvelously well reasoned and considered. She saw how age peers were confused by their above average musings, and struggled to understand their perspective. Angela recalls how simple things would bother these highly able students, and supposes that it was maybe too simple for them.

Angela also saw clearly the definition between bright students and exceptionally able students. Although scoring highly in standardised tests, they differed in terms of intellect and potential. Exceptionally able children operate on a different wavelength. She noticed a remarkable capacity for detail, as one student Dermot at the age of five or six, would recount information from nature documentaries he had watched on television, impressing fellow students and teachers.

Rory, however, was exceptionally able but was also an underachiever..

Dermot was found to be dually exceptional - his exceptionality burdened down by dyslexia.

Rory, however, was exceptionally able but was also an underachiever. Although his IQ placed him in the exceptional range and his oral work was far superior to that of his classmates, he would come out at the bottom in school achievement tests. She admits she was completely shocked when she discovered from his formal assessment the extent of Rory's potential. She doesn't readily observe his ability in the regular classroom.

I see that he is weak at spelling and weak at reading, even though Rory, at 10 years of age, has a reading age equivalent to that of a 16 year old teenager. He would hesitate over words, his spellings would be weak. He has no Irish fluency whatsoever. Rory has trouble transferring his ideas onto paper, and when he does it is usually untidy and lacking in logical, sequential thought. Orally he expresses himself seamlessly, but it would appear as though Rory is thinking faster than his pen will allow.

Angela was confused by this seeming disparity between ability and work produced.

Angela admits to being somewhat confused by this contradictory behaviour. *If you have an exceptionally able child in your class you expect them to perform at a high level and I would say I didn't get the typical child in my school, but then what is typical?*

Angela found that Dermot too was at variance with expectation. Sharing a similar IQ, Dermot was found to be dually exceptional - his exceptionality burdened down by dyslexia. Like with Rory, Angela was confused by this seeming disparity between ability and work produced. With perhaps idealistic expectations of exceptionality Angela felt that Dermot too produced work that would never have been the work of an exceptionally able child - so untidy. And while untidiness and disorganisation are very often endemic with high ability children, in Dermot's case, Angela correctly sensed a learning difficulty. *It certainly held him back every turn of the way, which was so unfortunate because it was all in his head but getting it back down to paper was very difficult for him.*

Once identified, the school responded by providing Dermot with appropriately challenging curriculum and assistive resources. *We'd give him a lot of computer work to do and he would do great work on the computer, but he wouldn't put in full stops and capital letters... but he would have a wonderful vocabulary, choice of phrases and all of that.* Learning to read was a considerable hurdle for Dermot, but

with determination and resolute support from school and home he succeeded. Angela saw how this quickly opened up another dimension of knowledge for Dermot and he soon became a zealous bookworm.

Supporting Exceptionally Able Children

Another challenge for Angela is to know how best to support their self esteem. To make them realise that even though they may be different, it's alright to be that different. *I don't know how he (Dermot) saw it himself. We used to tell him he was very bright, try to make him feel a bit better about himself, because sometimes he would be frustrated with his spellings or ...he would be disappointed.* She feels that it is important that exceptionally able students have access to structured learning opportunities with their age peers in order to help them to better understand the nature of their own ability and that of others. She recalls that while neither Dermot nor Rory were isolated from their peer group, Dermot would frequently opt to mix with younger children. Perhaps this had something to do with his poor co-ordination; as he often opted out of football matches at lunchtime with his classmates.

By nature both Dermot and Rory are intensely kind and sensitive to other students. With a strong sense of social justice and deep-seated beliefs about fairness, Dermot would be very quick to point out that something happened in

They can sometimes struggle with simple tasks, while they excel with complex ones.

the playground to another child, very quick to mention it to us.

Comment

For Angela exceptionally able children do not come in similar packages. *Carrying a myriad of capabilities, motivational differences and sometimes specific learning difficulties they are by no means identical. Exceptionally able children do stand head and shoulders above even bright children and differ mainly in their outlook or point of view. They can sometimes struggle with simple tasks, while they excel with complex ones. Their achievements are sometimes contradictory to what one might expect, but at all times they are different and we must remember that.*

Appendix III

'Voices' from the Republic of Ireland

'Voices' 2
A Students
Voice: *Anne*

Anne is the eldest in her family and has recently moved back to Ireland from abroad. While she presents as a timid and gentle girl, it soon becomes apparent that beneath this calm exterior lies an opinionated and fiery young woman who quickly opens up to share her world with us.

She's a fervent reader and can't remember a time when books weren't a part of her life. Not surprisingly her favourite subject is English. She admits, with a little reticence, that writing is one of her strengths. With a preference for imaginative writing, Anne enjoys tinkering with new techniques, developing her own individual style of prose. Anne found much solace in books when she endured bullying at the hands of jealous peers in primary school. Books allowed her to retreat to another world and forget about the difficulties that surrounded her.

Although school was not always a happy place for her to be she is naturally resilient and seems to have found her feet thanks to a very supportive school and circle of friends. Well known as a hard worker, she has a healthy attitude toward school and study. Anne honestly doesn't consider herself exceptionally able, protesting that there are far smarter students than her in her year. She confesses that she's never made to feel different because of her grades. Far from being labelled by her peers, Anne divulges their rather ruthless approach, *I'm always told I wouldn't understand the easiest thing, but I'd understand the hard things. I'm not allowed to get a big head!* Clearly comfortable in herself and having experienced bitterly negative comments in primary school, Anne is unperturbed by what she perceived as merely good-humoured rivalry.

Anne admits that her ability can sometimes be an issue for students of less ability, but feels *there's always people brighter than you and there's always people less bright than you, so*

A very balanced and well-adjusted student, she is self-assured and motivated and is set to take the world by storm.

it's the same for everyone, but yeah, I do kind of downplay it. I wouldn't be so Oh God, I'm so brainy, but then who would.

Anne was not always such a devoted student. In primary school she did the bare minimum. Now a very focussed and determined student, if she sets her mind to do something she will exhaust as much energy as is necessary to do the best she can. While she wouldn't go as far as to say she's a perfectionist, she sometimes does work a little too hard, but this she feels is no bad thing.

Now looking toward college, Anne hopes to study History at Trinity, where she looks forward to studying with equally enthusiastic students. She is exasperated by students who do not share her fascination with history, and who in class, interrupt the flow of learning.

Anne seems to have endured all of the highs and lows that exceptional ability brings with it and come out unscathed, to become the modest, warm, unassuming, friendly and energetic young woman she is today. A very balanced and well-adjusted student, she is self-assured and motivated and is set to take the world by storm.

Appendix III

'Voices' from the Republic of Ireland

'Voices' 3
A Parent's
Voice: *Dympna*

The youngest of three brothers, with two older brothers also assessed with exceptional ability, at age 12 years. Brian is in 5th class in his local primary school and has an IQ assessment of 132. However, as he suffers from Cerebral Palsy his movement is laboured and consequently he has to exercise daily to minimise the affects of the condition.

His interests range from reading novels, playing chess, listening to audio-books, to watching films – he claims to be a self professed James Bond buff!!! Brian also shares with his brothers a fascination with computers, to such an extent, that his mother jokes that she often considered calling them for dinner on MSN Messenger!!

He is a lively, happy, well-adjusted, calm, and easy-going boy. Brian is popular with his peers, but he is also very content to be alone. He's very self-sufficient ... doesn't seem to have a huge requirement for big crowds around him, having conquered all of the huge impediments he faced, he is now more than capable of coping with any of the difficulties that life might throw at him in the future.

Brian's academic strengths lie principally in the verbal area of English and the Arts. He enjoys drama and he has quite a good singing voice, however he is holding off until Transition Year (Transition Year is a one-year programme that typically forms the first year of a three-year senior cycle; in many schools it is optional) to immerse himself in the area!

Dual Exceptionality

The shock of Brian's diagnosis could never really be pin-pointed to one moment in time. I suppose the only big time was when they put a label on it, but you know you still had the same child ...

it was a gradual dawning. I never really dwelt on the condition but rather regarded its physical manifestations as being part of his personality. He walked slowly - that was the way he walked ... its part of what we know about him. Brian is very much accepted for who he is and not for what he has by everyone.

According to Brian's mother, coping with his disability has been a huge source of achievement for him in that he is both recognised in a positive way for his disability and in a positive way for his exceptionality.

Parenting a Dually Exceptional Child

There isn't really a hard part! Dympna confesses that she never really saw her children as being anything different. Exceptionality is only ordinariness...it's nothing. It's only others that might consider it an odd thing or extraordinary in some way, I never do.

She immersed herself in research to properly understand what Cerebral Palsy would mean to her son. *You've been given a huge opportunity to help the child, but you need an awful lot of background knowledge and I went back to basics and studied it ... read the research, so I really brought myself up to speed on the condition.*

Brian comes from a very supportive and infectious positive family, and grew up with the philosophy that if something goes wrong you just get on and do something about it...you know affect change. It's something that sometimes has to be got around ... and you take the scenic route to some things and no more than that.

She has instilled in Brian the realisation that his exceptionality has given him opportunities and ease in life not accessible to others. School and

Exceptionality is only ordinariness...it's nothing. It's only others that might consider it an odd thing or extraordinary in some way, I never do.

learning are a source of enjoyment to him, and as parents they have invested a lot of time managing their sons' abilities, thus ensuring that they ended up in situations that suit, in other words finding a school that could meet their needs was of critical importance, as was building strong partnerships between home and school.

Leading Rather than Following

Dympna always found that Brian, like her two other sons, lead rather than follow in relation to dealing with their exceptional ability. They seek out the avenues of interest while she and her husband endeavour to make it happen. Dympna believes that exceptionally able children require greater management than the average

child, in that often their unconventional interests provided a further challenge for parents. She confesses that over the years she has spent a lot of time ruminating on whether her children had appropriate stimulation.

I don't limit computers. It's like pen and paper to them. And they don't do silly things. I feel if I limit computer time, it's almost limiting pen and paper.

One of the most difficult aspects of raising three exceptionally able sons is ensuring that each receives equal credit. Her middle son is highly ambitious and determined, and has enjoyed much success nationally over the years. Balancing his achievements with the less well-known and sometimes unconventional accomplishments of her other sons is a constant exertion.

Appendix III

'Voices' from the Republic of Ireland

'Voices' 4
A Parent's
Voice: *Helen*

As a parent, it is sad to see how such exceptional ability can be regularly over-shadowed by the emotional stress caused by his heightened sensitivity,

The eldest of three siblings, Matthew at age 10 years is academically exceptionally able and falls somewhere in the top 2% of the population in his age group. He has many interests; swimming, music, horse riding and reading and he is quite accomplished in all of these areas. His mother describes him...

Matthew does things differently, in that he makes complex associations between situations and ideas in a way that is very advanced for a child of his age, he is very much someone who thinks outside the box. He is remarkably articulate in conversation, and with a very endearing nature, in fact you couldn't ask for a better child.

The picture would seem perfect, except that Matthew has perennially struggled on a social and emotional level. His behaviour was challenging right from the start. As an infant Matthew never seemed to need much sleep and at the age of two he seemed to be permanently on time-out.

Accused of not disciplining him enough, Helen soon realised that Matthew was no ordinary little boy. *He went through his milestones so quickly as*

a baby we knew that he was bright. In pre-school he would stir up chaos – he would get them all lined up against a wall ... so they could clear the room and he'd say 'right guys go,' and everyone would take off!!!!"

The disruptive behaviour evidenced in playschool was soon replaced by serious social problems, as he began to show signs of increasing stress if he had to cope with more than one person at a time. In school this led him to push children away and at times he became physically aggressive with them. Consequently, he always struggled to fit in with the other children in his class and they in turn remained distant to him. Helen knows that Matthew is lonely and yearns to be part of the gang. She admits that he does annoy other children, but he is slowly learning skills to help him integrate better. *Matthew is not like the other boys, he is sensitive and interested in things that are unusual for a boy of his years. They can be unsympathetic - 'Matthew you're terrible at football or you're not cool enough to play with us.'*

Puzzled about this behaviour, Helen had him assessed by an Occupational Therapist who uncovered a tactile processing problem or what is formally known as a sensory integration disorder. Synonymous with the disorder Matthew is hyper-sensitive to touch and this explained too why as a small child, he never liked to be hugged. *He would select, very carefully select, the sort of T-shirts – the ones that are comfortable next to his skin. He has to have soft sheets, and yeah, the labels used to bother him on the back of clothes...that's a classic.* Matthew's heightened sensitivity resulting from his sensory disorder has had major impact on his social and emotional development. *He's over-sensitive to everything. Like criticism – he actually can't take criticism at all... (he's) sensitive in every single way, therefore when you're over-sensitive like that you automatically become defensive. He is also easily*

distracted by his heightened sensitivity to sound so when he's working no one is allowed to make noise, or cause a distraction!

Helen and her husband have been exhaustive in their efforts to assist Matthew learn the life skills that come naturally to most. And while she can't make friends for him, she feels that by supporting him while he learns these skills and involving him in different activities that he will in time be able to find individuals who share his interests and understand him for the individual he is. *He goes to about five different things at the moment, to give him that broad base to call on as he gets older...it's getting strings to his bow to give something for him to fall back on. And I've tried to channel it socially. If he gets good with the music he could start or be in a band or maybe just go for a jam session with friends ...that should build his self-esteem as well.*

Matthew has recently met up with a boy who is very much like himself, and they have forged a strong bond. In what he perceives as a non-threatening environment, he is like any other 10-year-old, but faced with an unfriendly atmosphere in school he quickly lapses into defensive mode. Helen is relieved he has found a true friend and remarks, *When he's here with Jack they're having these races with the water, they were just messing around doing really nice childlike things and I think that it is nice to see him just being himself and being comfortable in himself.*

Academically Helen reveals that Matthew is quietly proud of his exceptional academic ability. However, she believes he is often bored in school, but doesn't believe Matthew equates his boredom with being of a higher ability that his peers as much of the time Matthew doesn't actually know he's learning new material!

'Mum I feel dumb in school, so, so dumb.' I said 'what do you mean you feel dumb in school?' 'Well I just don't know geography!' And that will give you an idea. He just knows maths and because he has to work at geography ... he just figured that it just sort of happened to you!

Matthew biggest problem academically is his inability to manage his ideas, projects and homework can take hours to complete, as he struggles to stay on task. However, with the help of his resource teacher he is learning how to organise his ideas. *I've seen him going through a whole page of maths in five minutes, but other times he's sat here for three hours doing his homework.*

Although verbally very proficient, he finds it difficult to verbalise text into his own words. He is a quick thinker, but such speed is often too hasty as he frequently misses out on parts of his work. He cleverly approaches maths problems, usually devising his own method to work out the sum. His handwriting is dreadful, but Helen believes this is to do with his motor abilities being out of sync with his thinking capabilities. He's learning to touch type to help overcome this deficit in future years.

As a parent, it is sad to see how such exceptional ability can be regularly over-shadowed by the emotional stress caused by his heightened sensitivity, consequently I feel that his self-esteem is quite low. We have to teach him life skills that most people take for granted.

Appendix III

'Voices' from the Republic of Ireland

'Voices' 5
A Student's
Voice: *Siobhán*

Siobhán is a very cheerful, friendly, and vivacious teenager who is studying hard to secure five A's to secure her offer of a place in Oxford University to study English. The first thing that strikes you about her is her energy. Eagerly awaiting the launch of her first novel, which she wrote two years ago, and with an established acting career in television behind her, Siobhán is nothing if not full of life. She takes it all in her stride and is quite unaffected by her many successes to date. Siobhán is very much an all-rounder and when not in school enjoys piano, reading and sports as well as an active social life!

Siobhán's time in primary school was in stark contrast to her post-primary experience. She remembers vividly the frustration of not being challenged.

I was constantly asking for more work or constantly asking questions. Some teachers would throw you a sixth class maths book and ... tell you to go off and do that and tell you, you were great. However, other teachers accused me of showing off, of being inconsiderate to other children, or of being ridiculous, when I wanted to move ahead. I remember thinking I just want to learn. It sounds so uncool, but I just want to learn!

Siobhán felt a sea change when she moved on to post-primary, reflecting that in *primary school, because you only have one teacher, you constantly felt like they were teaching to the lowest common denominator. I believe that the teacher plays almost certainly the most significant role in the education of exceptionally able students.*

Siobhán has very happy memories of her time at post-primary level. There she built up very good relationships with her teachers, her abilities were quickly recognised and she was encouraged and supported to strive for higher grades. She credits her English teacher as being the one who persuaded her to start writing her novel, helping her along the way by editing and being a constant source of support.

Siobhán lists English and Maths amongst her favourite subjects, and it's hardly surprising that she lists these teachers amongst the best she's ever had. Siobhán finds that teachers who actually want to teach and are passionate about their subject catalyse a curiosity and a love of the subject in all, but this is particularly so with exceptionally able students like herself. She despairs of the over-reliance on photocopies

Siobhán is very much an all-rounder and when not in school enjoys piano, reading and sports as well as an active social life!

and curriculum-driven classes that teach purely the syllabus and not the subject. She delights in learning more than just the prescribed material.

False Perceptions

One of the most infuriating aspects of being a high ability student for Siobhán is dealing with the spurious perceptions of exceptional ability. *People automatically assume that I roll out of bed and get ten A's in my Junior Cert.* She was shocked to find that some teachers too share in this belief - *they literally thought that it just came like supernaturally to me and it really doesn't.*

Students with exceptional ability expect high grades of themselves and often find discussing exam disappointment with their peers quite problematic. Sharing with her friends her dissatisfaction at getting an A2 in a recent exam, Siobhán didn't feel consoled in the same way others would – *your friends are like 'okay shut-up, you said that went really badly' and I was like 'yeah, but I was hoping for an A1. If I don't get into Oxford, I doubt if I will be able to share my disappointment with any of my friends. I don't think that I could honestly say to anyone - 570 points and I'm really disappointed.*

Her peers become desperately jealous of her ability when faced with the prospect of their looming exams.

Labelling

Siobhán acknowledges that she does get labelled by her peers, being an exceptionally able student. Although she was teased about it, she never detected any malice in their comments. *I think the reason I got labelled with that is because of my group of friends. Because we still go out every weekend ... and we're not a big group of nerds!* Siobhán believes she stands apart from other students because she achieves highly, while also enjoying a good social life. She enjoys the attention and takes it as a compliment. Her peers become desperately jealous of her ability when faced with the prospect of their looming exams.

Comments

Siobhán is candid yet quite unpretentious in summing up her abilities. She admits that *English is what I do and that maths kind of comes naturally.* She's easily one of the brightest in her school, but she is quietly confident in herself and in her abilities.

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