

Gifted and Talented

When a special programme is introduced for children who are gifted and talented, there is often concern that the potential and ability of pupils learning EAL may be overlooked. There is some evidence that such concerns may be justified. For example, an evaluation of the Excellence in Cities initiative found that disparities in the representation of ethnic backgrounds within the gifted and talented cohort that were identified as part during the first year of that project: "Although Asian respondents comprised some 13% of all Year 11 survey respondents, only six per cent of the cohort designated as gifted and talented was Asian. By contrast, 78% of the gifted and talented cohort was from a white UK background, even though this group made up only 70% of the young people in the model." (Morris et al, 2004, pp. 14 - 15)

Under-representation of minority students in programmes for gifted education has been reported in other countries besides England. For example, national figures for the recruitment of Hispanic American students on such programmes in the USA in the early 90's indicated a 42% shortfall between the number actually recruited and the number that might have been expected on the basis of their overall presence in schools (Grantham, 2003).

The challenge is now more widely recognized than it used to be. For example, in the London Borough of Hounslow where there are many new arrivals from overseas it has been appreciated for some years that:

- new arrivals from overseas are often highly educated and able, but speak no English
- newly arrived families may have different cultural values and beliefs about education that need to be understood by schools
- newly arrived pupils may have exceptional gifts and talents that go unnoticed
- gifted and talented newly arrived pupils with EAL needs are less likely to make best progress in bottom sets, even if that is where most of the support is concentrated
- exceptional achievement is possible for newly arrived students.

The introduction of a series of national initiatives to improve the education and support of pupils who show gifts and talents has led to increased efforts to ensure that additional resources are made available on an equitable basis. Local authority and school staff have reviewed the checklists that they use and the way they are used in order to improve the accuracy of identification of gifted and talented pupils from linguistic minority backgrounds.

For a lively, brief presentation on how and why giftedness may be hidden and not identified by teachers go to: http://ygt.dcsf.gov.uk/Nutshells/NAGTY251_03_04/sco.htm#

To tackle the problem of under-identification useful resources are being developed by the REAL Project which was launched in 2006. REAL stands for Realising Equality and Achievement for Learners. It is organised by London Gifted and Talented with DCFS funding. It describes itself as "the first national project to systematically consider how to improve the quality of gifted and talented education for pupils from black and ethnic minority (BME) backgrounds and to respond to the particular and urgent needs of gifted and talented learners with English as an additional language (EAL)." It will aim to provide "tools that enable schools to assess any new arrival as potentially gifted and talented, or strategies and resources to develop capacity to personalise provision for gifted and talented BME learners and advanced learners with EAL." You may register on their website to be kept up to date with the tools and resources they develop at <http://www.realproject.org.uk>

An example of the work in which REAL is engaged is the development of a REAL Initial Assessment framework for the primary phase in partnership with Hounslow Language Service. "This will enable schools to assess all international new arrivals as potentially gifted and talented from Early Years through to Key Stage 2. The materials have been trialled in Hounslow schools and will be available in the REAL Toolkit shortly."

Provision for children who are identified as gifted and talented: differentiation in the classroom, enrichment and acceleration

The Local Government Association commissioned from the National Foundation of Educational research a review of research on "what works for gifted and talented pupils". White et al (2003) summarized their findings as follows:

Differentiation

The literature emphasises the need for curriculum differentiation in order to meet the needs of gifted and talented pupils in mixed-ability contexts. However, there is minimal research on coherent approaches to differentiation for these pupils - as opposed to 'shopping lists' of ideas. There is also little research on the opportunities afforded by different types of differentiation in relation to enrichment and acceleration. While acceleration in a particular subject can be a form of differentiation, there may yet be a need for differentiation within an accelerated group, if all individual needs are to be met.

Enrichment

The literature highlights the importance of enrichment in allowing gifted and talented pupils to respond creatively and with imagination. Enrichment appears to be one of the optimal means of providing

opportunities for potential to be released. While the literature is clear that enrichment activities should be embedded within the curriculum, rather than being 'bolt-on extras', so that skills are transferable to other work, there is little evidence of the long-term benefits of enrichment. There are also few criteria for evaluating the coherence of enrichment activities in relation to the whole curriculum.

Acceleration

The literature gave evidence that perceptions of the success of acceleration of gifted and talented pupils are influenced by the structure of any national curriculum in place and the possibilities afforded by the particular educational system. Therefore, in the UK, which has a National Curriculum with in-built flexibility so that it can be appropriate for a range of abilities, acceleration in terms of advancing a pupil a chronological year is rarer than in countries where there are more fixed 'end of year/grade' tests which are necessary for advancement. There is evidence that subject-based acceleration is more common in some subjects than others, notably, mathematics and modern foreign languages. There is little attention to the rationale for this and little discussion of the relative appropriateness of acceleration in such subjects or in subjects where greater maturity of response may be a goal for gifted pupils

It is usually argued that the main challenge in relation to gifted and talented children who are learning EAL is to ensure that their abilities and potential are identified. Once that has been achieved, the strategies to be employed will be the same as those for all gifted and talented children, taking account of their particular interests, additional cultural knowledge and linguistic skills. But survey evidence of under-identification has led some to argue for special groups/provision for young people who are "gifted but black". For an example of this approach see a journalist's account of an initiative in Birmingham: . ['Gifted, but Black'](#).

There is some evidence from the Excellence in Cities initiative that supporting black pupils through the provision of a Learning Mentor may be an effective way of overcoming disadvantage. The same report (which may be found on the DCSF website at <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/RR675a.pdf>) reported that the initiative made a significant difference to pupils identified as gifted and talented (Kendall et al, 2005). In some schools specific efforts are made to support pupils learning EAL who may be gifted through a Learning Mentor from the same communal background.

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Last updated

3rd April 2009

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