Personal Philosophy of Gifted Education

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I. Definition of Gifted Education.

Gifted individuals possess a great talent above the norm in one or more areas, including but not limited to: academic, personal/emotional, and/or athletic. Gifted students learn quickly, think critically, have profound insights into phenomena that their peers do not, and need specialized education services. Giftedness exists on a spectrum from gifted to profoundly gifted and can vary in its expression between individuals. Gifted students have unique educational needs; gifted students can quickly become bored and frustrated by the traditional educational method and instead need a teacher that challenges them, teaches them how to learn not what to learn, and acts more as a facilitator than an instructor. Gifted children also need additional support; just because they are academically advanced, does not mean that they are necessarily emotionally or socially advanced or even on grade level. Many gifted children struggle with relationships and following classroom rules and behavioral norms.

There is no one universally accepted measure of giftedness. Many schools use IQ (intelligence quotient tests) and set an arbitrary IQ value as the gifted cut off point. Most institutions defined giftedness as an IQ of 130 or greater; however, research has shown IQ tests to be unreliable and limited (Davis, 2006, pp.73-78). Other institutions choose to use standardized testing scores, and define any child who scores at or above the 95th percentile as gifted. Sometimes it may be difficult to differentiate between gifted and bright students. In general, bright students are procedural thinkers, study and work hard, are good at school, and achieve well while gifted students may think creatively or unconventionally, do not need to work hard to gain academic success, and are highly curious and motivated and may or may not achieve well in school.

Students can be referred for gifted education services in a variety of ways that varies from district to district but generally comprise of review of test scores, parent/guardian recommendation, teacher/school staff recommendation, peer recommendation, student request, or the recommendation of any other qualified and concerned adult. Once a child is referred, they are then tested according to state and district standards. If the child meets the district’s criteria for giftedness, that child will then begin receiving gifted services which may include: accelerated course work, pull-out classes, gifted intervention specialist services, skipping grades or specific subjects, or other services the teachers see appropriate for the needs of the child.
In Ohio, gifted students have WEPs, written education plans, which are similar to IEPs, individualized education plans, which outline the services, curriculum modifications, and appropriate evaluation tools best suited to meeting the student’s learning needs.

II. Cognitive and Affective Characteristics of Identified Gifted Students.

Cognitive characteristics of identified gifted students include, but are not limited to: highly creative and unconventional ways to thinking, an ability to see higher order connections or causality that others lack, an innate curiosity, the ability to integrate multiple and diverse thoughts into a cohesive schema, very quick and long lasting processing and recall abilities, and the ability to process multiple tasks at the same time (Winebrenner, 2012, p. 12). Some gifted children may also display strong interpersonal skills and relate well with others while other may display strong intrapersonal skills and be highly self-reflective and self-aware beyond their years. Gifted children also usually developed earlier than their peers, were unusually alert in infancy, are good with numbers and puzzles, have high motivation and concentration, enjoy learning, and are reflective (Davis, 2006, pp. 28-29). However, gifted children can also be plagued by asynchronous mental development, interpersonal difficulties, perfectionism, and depression (Davis, 2006, p. 30).

Affective characteristics of identified gifted students vary widely between individuals. Gifted individuals can be emotionally gifted with high degrees of self-awareness, deep emotions, excellent interpersonal skills, and a thirst for social justice and a well-defined morality. Gifted individuals can also have deficits in affective emotional characteristics such as inability to relate with peers, a belief that the rules do not apply to them, chronic interruption of others, and underachievement. In the classroom, gifted children may also have a hard time conforming to class norms and rules, questioning the rules, blurt out, and staying seated as their advanced cognitive abilities outstrip their physical and emotional development.

III. Attributes a Teacher of the Gifted Should Possess.

Davis (2006) asserts that “good teachers of gifted students should be gifted themselves” (p. 43). However, Delise and Galbraith (2002) assert that teachers of the gifted do not need to be gifted themselves but rather should be supportive and have a good sense of humor and an understanding of how children
think and learn (pp. 82-101). I think it is most important that teachers of the gifted have a thorough understanding of the unique strengths and needs of their gifted children. Certainly, this will occur if the teacher is gifted in pedagogy herself, but also can be gained through experience with gifted children and training and research. Most importantly above all, the teachers of gifted students must realize that they are not an instructor but a facilitator whose main goal should be to help the student explore and realize the full extent of their giftedness. That is not to say that teachers of the gifted should take a hands off approach but rather recognize that the needs of a gifted child are more how to learn and how to think rather than what to learn and what to think. Teachers should also focus on helping gifted children to confront their weaknesses, whether they be in specific academic subject areas or more generalized emotional or social interaction issues.

There are several approaches that teachers of the gifted can take in transforming their pedagogy. Focus on differentiation of the curriculum in a meaningful way while lessening grade level work, increasing the pace of lessons, and extending content beyond the curriculum (Tomlinson, 2003, pp. 2-3; Winebrenner, 2012, pp.3-5). Gifted students also require future career guidance, referral to counseling services, and inspiration of underachieving gifted students must be top priorities of the instructor (Delise & Galbraith, 2002, pp. 100-101). Furthermore, teachers should strive to create community relevance and social justice projects so that gifted students can see how their school work directly benefits the greater community (Davis, 2006, pp. 116-122). Teachers of the gifted must also be able to recognize signs of depression in their students. Studies have indicated that gifted children are more prone to existential depression, especially during adolescence, than their peers. Being able to recognize symptoms and refer students to services is an integral part of a gifted teacher’s job.

IV. The Impact of Multiple Exceptionalities on Giftedness.

Multiple exceptionalities, or multipotentiality, means that an individual is gifted in multiple areas and has broad interests and hobbies. This can provide a great challenge to gifted children, especially when they leave the secondary school and pick a career or post-secondary education path. Being gifted in multiple areas can make it extremely difficult for the child to pick one singular focus or concentration and
can cause stress and anxiety, especially for gifted students struggling with perfectionism (Davis, 2006, p. 269). This can cause some students to lose their focus and feel hopeless. It is important at these crossroads that the teacher assumes the role of mentor and helps gifted students to explore their future needs, wants, and lifestyle desires (Davis, 2006, p. 269).

V. Organizations & Professional Activities to Enhance Professional Development.

In order to enhance one’s pedagogy, teachers of the gifted must be involved in ongoing professional development and other professional activities. As society changes, so do the needs of students growing up within that society. As technology changes, teachers must also adapt and help their students become technologically literate. Resources for continued professional development, including technology integration and pedagogical practices, include each academic discipline’s national professional institutions, including: the National Science Teachers Association (NSTA), the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM), the National Council of English Teachers (NCET), the National Council for History Education (NCHE), and the Association of American Educators (AAE). Active involvement in these nation institutions provides educators with state of the art resources and tools to differentiate their classrooms. Educators should attend these associations’ workshops and meetings and then present their learnings to their colleagues.

Gifted specific professional development programs include university gifted education certification programs, the National Association for Gifted Children (NACG) and their online training programs, the National Society for the Gifted and Talented (NSGT) and their workshops, and local state organizations such as the Ohio Association for Gifted Children (OAGC). These associations provide online and in person training, web resources and links, scholarships, parent/guardian resources, lesson ideas, and a plethora of other giftedness related resources. From these resources, educators of gifted children should present and conduct their own workshops to help educate other staff members and administrators on the unique needs and challenges in gifted education as well as available resources for students, parents/guardians, and teachers.
VI. References Cited.


Delisle, J., & Galbraith, J. (2002). *When gifted kids don't have all the answers: How to meet their social and emotional needs*. Minneapolis: Free Spirits Pub.
