

### Talent – The National Context

OFSTED reported on providing for gifted and talented pupils in *Providing for Gifted and Talented Pupils: an Evaluation of Excellence in Cities and other grant-funded programmes* (OFSTED: 2001) and claimed that methods of identification of pupils of the highest ability have been rudimentary. Their most recent relevant report *Excellence in Cities and Education Action Zones: management and impact* (OFSTED: 2003) judged that few talented pupils were taught by specialist teachers and sessions for them were disconnected from the mainstream curriculum (para.89). In the secondary sector OFSTED judged that provision for talented pupils was not as well developed or coordinated as for gifted pupils. Why is this? For example, is provision for talent taking second place to provision for the gifted, because talent is associated with less important subjects in the curriculum? A case study (para 192), however, suggests that a pupil with talent in music who had been given extra individual music tuition had improved his behaviour and commitment in other areas of the curriculum.

The 2003 report is based on 2 visits over a period of up to 2 years to EiC schools including 30 primary schools. HMI also analysed inspection judgments from 84 EiC schools:

### The arts and the economy

The Creative Industries Mapping Document (2001) reveals that the creative industries in the UK generate revenues of around £112.5 billion and employ some 1.3 million people. Exports contribute around £10.3 billion to the balance of trade, and the industries account for over 5% of GDP. The importance of the arts to the economy may constitute a case for more emphasis on meeting the needs of talented pupils.

### Identifying potential talent

The work of Renzulli (1977) in developing the 'three-ring conception of giftedness' has had a seminal influence on the work of identifying talented pupils. Three interlocking clusters of traits – above average ability, task commitment and creativity and their interaction are shown to be the necessary ingredients of accomplishment. Since his early work Renzulli (2003) has acknowledged that personality and environmental factors also influence giftedness.

OFSTED (2003) judged that primary schools were far less adept at identifying talented pupils than gifted ones. In their previous survey of 10 pilot masterclasses, 31 summer schools, 18 LEAs and well over 100 secondary schools, OFSTED (2001) also reported that far fewer *talented* pupils were identified. One reason for this, identified by both OFSTED (2001) and Eyre and McClure (2001) is that some parents and teachers perceive the identification and support of talented pupils as divisive. Freeman (Freeman et al., 1995) echoes this by suggesting that, in Western countries, fear of elitism has inhibited specialist provision for such pupils. Such parents or teachers subscribe to the view that, by providing enrichment activities for the pupils of the highest ability, we are offering further advantage to pupils with innate natural advantage. A counter argument runs that equal opportunities does not mean the same provision for all, but the same *level* of provision to all, matched to individual need. Subscribers to this argument would therefore support special provision for the most able. Moreover, there are self evident reasons why pupils functioning at an unnaturally low level suffer stress (Freeman et al., 1995) they may become bored, disruptive, they may disguise their abilities in order to gain peer acceptance.

In identifying talented students, teachers are confronted with a key issue: how to ensure that the assessment process includes the possibility of identifying *potential* in the field as well as high level *performance*. OFSTED (2004), in a small sample of schools, report that criteria for identifying talented pupils are rarely helpful in pinpointing the underachiever (or, by implication, latent or potential talent para. 17) Subject teachers must first consider the characteristics and indicators of a talented pupil.

In a study of musical talent Haroutounian (2000) identified five categories of criteria for identification: perceptual awareness and discrimination; metaperception; creative interpretation; behaviour/performance; motivation. She proposes that identification takes place in the context of a musical situation by trained observers. This point concerning the environment for identification is similarly proposed by Gardner in Warburton (2002). He argues that assessments should take place in situations true to the nature of the talent field with pupils undertaking artistic activity. Gardner also states that intelligence–fair assessments are ongoing, not snapshot tests.

The importance of testing in the talent domain has diminished in favour of multiple measures of identification. Standardised tests as devised by Seashore (1938), Wing (1939 onwards), Gordon (1971) and Bentley (1966) have given way to observational models as indicated earlier. These tests are culturally and stylistically biased and can indicate previous learning rather than innate potential. One aspect of talent identification, which has attracted considerable interest, is the phenomenon of perseverance. Cox's study (Cropley, 1995) of geniuses such as Newton and Darwin showed that these people demonstrated remarkable tenacity and perseverance.

Students with gifts in the arts or sport may also be gifted academically. Winner and Martino (2000) point out that gifted and talented children can share identifiable characteristics, namely precocity in learning, an intense interest in the area of high ability and an often highly individual learning style.

The consideration of cultural bias is noted by Winner (2000). She describes a problematic area associated with the identification of talent in art: the early ability to represent objects realistically in terms of perspective and dimension is a generally accepted characteristic of exceptional talent in art. Realism in drawing is valued by western cultures. A gifted Chinese child shows equal precocity in the allusionistic style traditional to that culture.

### **Age weighting**

Holt (Holt, 2002) conducted a small scale study of football talent development systems in both England and Canada and concluded that 'relative age effect' was operating in both countries, i.e. players born in the early months of the selection year, which in the UK begins in September, were more likely to be identified as talented. This observation is supported by several studies he also cites. The inference to be drawn from this is that people who spot talent may be inclined to base their judgement on what the young person can do now – and the older children in the year group may well be taller, stronger or more mature – rather than on potential. Clearly this is a key conundrum for talent identification.

Pupils who display high levels of interest and motivation in the talent field should not be overlooked by teachers. Csikszentmihalyi (1996) found that significant work undertaken outside school is a key indicator of the creative adolescent. He noted that passion and commitment are common characteristics and contribute to the development of intrinsic motivation. Ericsson in Van Tassel-Baska (2001) emphasises that these characteristics may be vital for the development of the necessary practice and rehearsal skills needed to achieve high levels of performance. Gagne's (1993) model of giftedness and talent acknowledges that curiosity, self-confidence, initiative and motivation are driving factors in talent development.

A useful starting point for identifying talented pupils is nomination by teachers and parents. Rostan et al (2002) noted that different criteria are used for identification by parents, teachers and experts. Lee (1999) explored teachers' conceptions of gifted and talented youngsters. Among the seven conceptions outlined she noted rarity, noticeability and comparison as aspects for further exploration.

### **Stages of Development**

Eyre (2001:8) draws attention to Bloom's work in identifying 3 general phases in the childhood development of gifted children.

The *playful* phase is characterised by the pupil's obvious enjoyment in the activity – so some of our most enthusiastic pupils may, in time, also be identified as of the highest ability.

The *precision* phase involves the pupil doggedly persevering and striving for perfection – so he or she will be absorbed, focused and sometimes obsessive in trying to improve performance in the subject.

In the *personal style* phase the high ability pupil exploits his or her talent and understanding of the rules, or genre to produce something which is striking for its invention or distinctiveness – sometimes referred to as metaperception (Haroutounian: 2000)

Van Rossum (2001) questioned 129 dance students at the Amsterdam School of the Arts about their backgrounds and education in preparation for a dance career. His findings suggest that their dance classes became more focused, serious and demanding at about the age of 14. From the 'cosy' and 'playful' period before this age, his sample tended to characterise their classes at age 14 with words like 'disciplined', 'inspiring' 'geared towards improvement.' This suggests that we, as teachers, might usefully exert a particular level of challenge on those who are identified as talented at this age.

### **Talent – The role of others**

OFSTED support the involvement of parents and pupils in identifying strengths and interests in activities at school and elsewhere. There are potential pitfalls in this: for example, how can you easily identify latent highest ability among very young pupils or those at an early stage of mastering English as an additional language?

The development of talent is also dependent upon other significant supporting factors. The teacher needs to consider the role of significant adults as well as appropriate environment. OFSTED's (2004) report on provision for gifted and talented pupils in PE provides examples of mentoring schemes for talented pupils. Mentors can help talented pupils to plan their time to balance the competing demands of school work and sports training, whilst also maintaining a social life. Moreover, the report advocates the maintenance of a regular dialogue between out of school coaches and clubs with the co-ordinator for talented pupils.

Crocker (2000) states that talented pupils often have the support of family members and teachers who have themselves demonstrated high levels of ability in this area. Enerson (1996) noted that eminent and successful people often comment upon the impact made by a particular adult on their early lives, making them want to be part of the field. For this reason teachers who demonstrate profound enthusiasm and expertise in their work should be selected to lead programmes for the gifted and talented. Enerson further comments upon providing an appropriate environment for talent to develop which includes acknowledging the importance of the talented working with like-minded peers.

In a survey of musical excellence in a Scottish context, Stollery and McPhee (2002) also found that an early opportunity to experience intense positive and emotional feelings in response to music contributes to a person's commitment to developing high levels of musical ability. These authors further identify 'crystallising' and 'paralysing' factors for success. Crystallising factors include the development of motivation through praise and the enhancement of self-esteem, parental encouragement and support and inspiration from a gifted teacher or role model. Paralysing factors include experiencing teaching based on a deficit model, teaching which is poor and inadequate and negative attitudes from parents, teachers and peers. Van Rossum (2001) also notes the positive effect of a pupil being identified as 'special' in a talent field.

### **Provision**

Freeman (1998: 47) draws attention to the work of Torrance, whose research into 142 American creativity courses concluded that there was ample evidence to show that creativity could be taught through different kinds of enriched teaching, although precise methods have yet to be defined reliably.

Seeley (Seeley, 1996) suggests two talent development strategies which are derived from the idea that mentors and role models are important to talent development. First local artists in the community, even if amateurs, should be identified as mentors for students. Secondly that schools should seek to link their own arts based programmes with students' private instructors so that the instructors' individual attention can enhance the effect of the school's programme on the student.

OFSTED (2004) place importance on auditing pupils' sporting involvement within and beyond the curriculum. Stollery and McPhee (2002) questioned able pupils about their 'crystallising' experiences at school. The greatest frequency of response cited inspiring teachers, parental encouragement, and motivation through praise. Among the de-motivating factors respondents cited being embarrassed about their talent in front of peers, and tutors adopting a deficit model of their talent, i.e. dismissing musical talent. This points to the importance of putting talented pupils in distinctive groups of peers who share their talents. It is reassuring and motivating for talented pupils to join like-minded pupils in teams, youth theatres, bands and orchestras.

OFSTED (2001:27) points out that stretching the most able can involve increasing pace, depth, and breadth. This suggests that provision for pupils of the highest ability might involve, for example:

increasing the *pace* of learning by asking a group of high ability dance pupils to create 2 contrasting pieces, based on a stimulus, rather than 1.

increasing the *depth* of learning – by asking pupils studying a Shakespeare play to research common Elizabethan ideas such as the idea of order or the 'music of the spheres.'

increasing the *breadth* of learning – by asking pupils looking at the work of Dali, to compare and contrast his striking and unusual work with earlier artists such as Bosch of Breughel.

What are the specific natures of pace, breadth and depth in each arts subject?

In *Effective Teaching for Able and Talented Children* (Network Educational Press: 1997:62) Barry Teare lists further teaching strategies, which we have adapted below.

1. allow pupils to miss out activities when they clearly have the ability to jump steps (acceleration);
2. create regular open-ended tasks to allow pupils of the highest ability to demonstrate their originality;
3. keep stimuli resources for pupils who finish a task satisfactorily before the majority of the class;
4. introduce and use an extended subject-specialist conceptual vocabulary for the most able;
5. produce fewer instructions and less guidance in order to challenge the most able pupils to work out responses to tasks for themselves;
6. ask able pupils to plan and conduct the next stages in the extension of the scheme of work;
7. ask able pupils to do the same task as the others but in some way to disguise their response – for example ask pupils to hide an item in a still-life as a visual joke.
8. ask able pupils to employ technically more difficult processes – more complex chords, more physically demanding dance moves, for example.
9. ask high ability pupils to multi-task or take several factors into account when designing tasks;
10. provide several different sources of information for high ability pupils to access – in so doing create puzzles and riddles to solve through information retrieval and manipulation;

OFSTED (2001:25) identify several features of effective teaching from their survey. These include:

- a high degree of subject knowledge;
- the capacity to envisage and organise unusual projects and approaches, which catch pupils' attention and make them want to explore the topic;
- the use of tasks which help pupils to develop perseverance and independence in learning through their own research or investigation, while ensuring that they have the necessary knowledge and skills to tackle the work effectively on their own;
- the use of demanding resources which help pupils to engage in difficult or complex ideas;
- the use of ICT to extend and enhance pupils' work and the opportunity to present the outcomes to others.

Enrichment activities provide a deepening and broadening link with curriculum based talent work. Schools are unlikely to be able to satisfy all the needs of the talented and therefore should look to existing outside agencies and organisations for extending pupil experience. Providing for excellence outside curriculum time can have positive results in terms of the

affective domain, in raising pupils' self-esteem and in fostering positive attitudes and participation. OFSTED (2003) comment that

'Arts teachers in secondary schools develop strong working relationships with pupils; these are often perceived by them as more supportive than in some other subjects. The arts can provide more opportunities for pupils to receive positive feedback about their contributions from both teachers and their peers. This has a strong motivating influence on their subsequent work.'

The report continues by linking improved self-esteem and personal and social development to the task of tackling disaffection and social exclusion amongst young people.

Contact with arts professionals enables high level progression to take place and provides a link with work undertaken in the classroom. Enrichment activities for the talented should provide these opportunities where appropriate. Many professional clubs and teams offer this type of expertise to pupils identified early as having prospective careers. However care needs to be taken if pupils' expectations are raised and are then not fulfilled in later teen years. Schools need to support the development of other associated skills and abilities so that pupils do not suffer a disintegration of self-esteem.

Creative Partnerships are another route towards enrichment. An evaluation of many of the schemes by the NFER (2001) highlighted that successful partnerships contributed towards

'increasing pupils' engagement in learning (overcoming disaffection), preventing or reducing drop-out from educational settings, rejoining pupils with their educational 'careers' (overcoming 'fractures' in pupil progress) and altering aspirational trajectories (providing pupils with new opportunities) '.

### **Monitoring and Evaluation**

OFSTED (2004) recommends that more should be done to evaluate the effects of provision on the specific achievements and aspirations of talented pupils.

### **Further research**

Cropley (Cropley, 1995) suggests that we need further to investigate what it feels like to possess a special talent. How does this affect identity and self-image and how does an individual cope with his or her talent? He also suggests that we need to research the role of parents in talent development.

Ivanov and Geake's (2003) study of the so-called 'Mozart effect' revealed some significant data suggesting that listening to certain pieces by Mozart and, in this case, Bach could enhance the spatial reasoning abilities of upper primary age pupils. This study is, therefore, an interesting contribution to largely inconclusive literature about whether the arts can make a contribution to raising achievement in other subjects.

### *References :*

- Abbott, A. & Collins, D. (2002) A theoretical and empirical analysis of a 'State of the Art' talent identification model. In High Ability Studies, Vol. 13 No. 2. Taylor & Francis.*
- Bentley, A. (1966) Musical Ability in children.*
- Crocker, T. (2000) Highly able children in art and music. In TalentEd Vol. 18 Nos. 1 and 2.*
- Cropley, A. (1995) Actualising Talent: A lifelong Challenge (Ed Wagner, H.) London: Cassell*
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1996) Creativity: flow and the psychology of discovery and invention. New York: Harper Collins.*
- Doherty, P. & Harland, J. (2001) Partnerships for creativity: an evaluation of implementation. NFER.*
- Enerson, D. (1996) Developing talent in Saturday and summer programmes. In Gifted Education International Vol. 11 No. 3.*
- Freeman, J., Span, P. and Wagner, H. (Eds.) (1995) Actualizing Talent: A Lifelong Challenge, Cassell, London*
- Gagne, F. (1991) Toward a differentiated model of giftedness and talent. In N. Colangelo and G.A. Davis (Eds.) Handbook of gifted education (pp. 65-80). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.*

- Gagne, F. (1993) *Constructs and models pertaining to exceptional human abilities*. In K.A. Heller, F.J. Monks & A.H. Passow (Eds.) *International Handbook of research and development of giftedness and talent*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.
- Gordon, E. (1971) *The psychology of music teaching*. Prentice Hall.
- Haroutounian, J. (2000) *Perspectives of musical talent: a study of identification criteria and procedures*. In *High Ability Studies*, Vol.11 No.2. Taylor & Francis.
- Holt, N. (2002) *European Physical Education Review*, 8, 270-285.
- Ivanov, K. and Geake, J. (2003) *The mozart Effect and Primary School Children*, In *Psychology of Music Vol 31 No 4*
- Lee, L. (1999) *Teachers' conceptions of gifted and talented young children*. In *High Ability Studies Vol.10 No.2*. Taylor & Francis.
- OFSTED (2001) London.
- OFSTED (2003) HMSO, London.
- OFSTED (2003) *Improving city schools: how the arts can help*. DfES.
- Renzulli, J. (1977) *The enrichment triad model: a guide for developing defensible programs for the gifted and talented*. Mansfield Centre, Conn.: Creative Learning Press
- Renzulli, J. (2003) *What makes giftedness and how can we develop high levels of talent in young people*. In *Gifted and Talented Vol 7 No 2*.
- Rostan, S. Pariser, D. & Gruber, H. (2002) *A cross-cultural study of the development of artistic talent, creativity and giftedness*. In *High Ability Studies Vol.13 No.2*. Taylor & Francis.
- Seashore, C. (1938) *Psychology of Music*. New York: McGraw Hill
- Seeley, K. (1996) *Gifted Education International*, 11, 136-138.
- Stollery, P. & McPhee, A. (2002) *Some perspectives on musical gift and musical intelligence*. In *British Journal of Music Education Vol.19 No.1*. Cambridge University Press.
- Teare, B. (1997) *Effective Teaching for Able and Talented Children*, Network Educational Press:
- Van Rossum, J. (2001) *Talented in dance: the Bloom Stage Model revisited in the personal histories of dance students*. In *High Ability Studies Vol.12 No. 2*. Taylor & Francis.
- VanTassel-Baska, J. (2001) *The talent development process: what we know and what we don't know*. In *Gifted Education International Vol.16 pp.20-28*. A B Academic Publishers.
- Warburton, E. (2002) *From talent identification to multidimensional assessment: toward new models of evaluation in dance education*. In *Research in Dance Education, Vol.3 No.2*. Taylor & Francis Ltd.
- Wing, H. (193) *Manual for standardised tests of musical intelligence*.
- Winner, E. & Martino, G. (2000) *Giftedness in non-academic domains: The case for the visual arts and music – International Handbook of giftedness and talent*. Oxford: Elsevier