Understanding exceptionally able students in your classroom

Cambridge Assessment International Education Conference

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In this breakout session we will…

- Explore ways of thinking about exceptional ability
- Consider the complexity of learners’ experiences in the classroom
- Define dual exceptionality
- Share some strategies for good practice
Why are you here today?
How is exceptional ability defined in your school context?
Top 10%?

“Giftedness”?

IQ above 130?

Talent?

Current performance?

Academic subjects?

Creativity?

Special educational need?

Future potential?
How easy or difficult is it to identify highly able learners in your context?
“Innately gifted”? or “Skilled up”?  
Claxton & Meadows (2008)
Why might some able students be “hidden”? 

- Different cultural background
- Personality
- Motivation
- Additional learning needs
- Poverty/isolation
- Behaviour problems
- Gender
- Cultural & social capital

These factors are inter-linked…
Dual exceptionality

- Describes learners who are intellectually very able or talented and who also have additional learning needs e.g.
  - Dyslexia
  - Autistic Spectrum Disorders
  - Developmental Coordination Disorder
  - Developmental Language Disorder
  - Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties
  - Physical and sensory differences;

- High frequency of co-occurrence of handwriting difficulties
  - Perceived gap between potential and performance

Montgomery (2015); Silverman (2002)
Nebraska Starry Night: Individual Record Sheet

Name

Date

Vocabulary

Fluent, comprehends, expresses/expressive, novel, associates/associates, complex syntax, uses ‘BIG’ words

Knows

Comprehends/reasons, connects/associates, finds/appplies/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/connections

Imagery

Uses metaphors, detects symbolisms, illustrates, artistic, clever, novel, original, expressive

Fantasy/Imagination

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

Act hunger

Expressive, role play, show, exhibit, gesture, spontaneous, lead, announces, enthusiastic

Sees big picture

Recognises pattern, comprehends, associates, finds metaphor, predicts, analyses/theorises

Sensitive

Expressive, quick to tear, insightful, thoughtful, helpful, sympathetic/empathetic, anxious, self-aware, concern/care

Humour

Jokes, clever, original, notices/creates, spontaneous, reacts/responds

Observant

Notices, sees relation, connects/associates/predicts, examines, distinguishes, determines (sees) difference (change)

Explores

Experiments, pretends, builds, designs, constructs, organises/sorts, solves, plays

Shares/Volunteers

Extends to others, illustrates, connects/describes, explains/instructs, helps/shows how, advises, encourages

Recognised by others

Sought out, seen as a resource, shows how, helps, attracts others (as magnet), responsive, admired

Engages

Initiates, directs/leads, attracts, encourages, shows how, offers or extends instruction/help

Moving & doing

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

Record X and date in the area for each behaviour event recorded.
Nebraska Starry Night: individual record sheet (Eyre 1967, p32-33)

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Identifying learners as able and talented presents challenges that are

- Practical
- Pedagogical
- Moral (?)
What has been your experience of teaching a highly able student?

Challenges?
Rewards?
Three models of curriculum differentiation...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Differentiation by</th>
<th>The setting of common tasks…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inputs</td>
<td>…at different levels of difficulty suitable for different levels of achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outputs</td>
<td>…that can be responded to in a positive way by all students but assessed differently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development</td>
<td>…to which all students can contribute their own inputs, progressing from surface to deep learning and thus be enabled to achieve more advanced learning outcome</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Montgomery (1996)
Enrichment activities for able learners should...

- Be beneficial to the development and use of higher order thinking abilities
- Provide the possibility to explore new knowledge and information
- Encourage students to select and use varied sources of information
- Aim to promote complex, enriching and in-depth study of important ideas, problems and subjects, integrating knowledge between and within subject areas
- Offer opportunity be move to increasingly autonomous learning activities

But why restrict this only to learners identified as exceptionally able?
One quick example...

The power of good questions
Wait time 1 & Wait time 2

- Research indicates 2 key places where pauses greatly increase quality of responses:
  - WT1 – immediately after you ask a question
  - WT2 – immediately after pupil responds

- Pupils
  - Give longer & more complex answers
  - Support answers with evidence
  - Speculate more often
  - Ask more questions
  - Talk more to other pupils & “piggyback”.

- Teachers’ questions increase in complexity and require more critical analysis.
As teacher you can:

- Model questioning as a way to make active links between old and new information instead of a display of “weakness” for not knowing something.
- Get pupils to devise their own questions based on Bloom’s Taxonomy.
- Promote pair-problem solving conversations.
  - One learner works to solve the problem; the other tries to really understand their thinking and ask questions to help the solution process – acting as an external “self-regulator”.
- Skip to the end of the textbook chapter!
To support able students we must remember

- All learners have strengths to build on and improve
- The development of abilities and talents can be uneven and is changing constantly
- Great provision offers a broad range of experiences to encourage all learners
- Teachers are crucial in developing learners abilities and talents
We can coach everyone in the generic skills of learning…Everyone can be coached in how to persist more in the face of difficulty; how to make more use of their imagination and ideas; how to learn more productively alongside others…how to look at a situation through other people’s eyes; how to choose the right kind of challenge for them and move on positively from it.

Claxton & Meadows (2008)
While we challenge and excite the obvious high performers, we should also be mindful that there are others whom we have yet to intrigue, who might surprise us if we can engage them.

Belle Wallace (2000)
Any questions?
THANK YOU