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### **EXPECTING THE UNEXPECTED**

**(Practical Experiences of Developing Courses for Able Pupils 10–18 years old)**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

This paper summarises some personal experiences of the author in the development of provision for able pupils 10–18 years old including courses held for GIFT (U.K.), BILDUNG und BEGABUNG (promoted by the German Federal Ministry of Education) and the EUROPEAN COUNCIL for HIGH ABILITY.

#### **RATIONALE**

1. Gifted individuals have through their imagination, creativity and inventiveness brought about the innovations and paradigm changes vital to any development of human civilization. I assume that human civilization still needs a lot of development.

2. It has been argued that there is more than one kind of human intelligence (Weinreich-Haste 1984).

3. General experience with gifted children repeatedly shows that they respond badly to routine tasks and that they prefer challenging open-ended problem solving approaches.

## SELECTION OF ABLE PUPILS

GIFTED CHILDREN: A TEACHER'S CHECKLIST (*Gifted Children...*)

Exceptionally able children are likely to show the following characteristics. A child showing most characteristics on the checklist, but not those starred, is likely to be a gifted child who is underachieving educationally.

1. Possess superior powers of reasoning, of dealing with abstractions, of generalizing from specific facts, of understanding meanings, and of seeing into relationships.
2. Have great intellectual curiosity.
3. Learn easily and readily\*.
4. Have a wide range of interests.
5. Have a broad attention span that enables them to concentrate on, and persevere in solving and pursuing interests.
6. Are superior in the quantity and quality of vocabulary as compared with children of their own age.
7. Have ability to do effective work independently.
8. Have learned to read early (often well before school age)\*.
9. Exhibit keen powers of observation.
10. Show initiative and originality in intellectual work.
11. Show alertness and quick response to new ideas.
12. Are able to memorize quickly.
13. Have great interest in the nature of man and the universe.
14. Possess unusual imagination.
15. Follow complex directions easily.
16. Are rapid readers\*.
17. Have several hobbies.
18. Have reading interests which cover a wide range of subjects\*.
19. Make frequent and effective use of the library\*.
20. Are superior in mathematics, particularly in problem solving\*.

„In discovering the nature and traits of the gifted, several general points should be kept in mind. The first is that these children differ as much amongst themselves as children of ordinary abilities. There is no such thing as a typical gifted child. No child would be a composite of all the traits and characteristics. A gifted child usually shows a range of abilities within his (her) own profile; he (she) may be outstanding in one trait and less distinguished in others, or his (her) abilities may be quite uniformly superior” (Hildreth et al. 1952).

„Performance on one or more tests of general intelligence has been the most widely used criterion of giftedness” (*Gifted Children...*).

„In recent years a dissatisfaction with criteria of ability implicit in the usual intelligence tests has led to many attempts to identify creativity as a factor which is relatively independent of intelligence” (*Gifted Children...*).

Because of the difficulties in identification a combination of techniques are used:

- a) Verbal and non verbal I.Q. scores.
- b) A teacher’s checklist based on the checklist above.
- c) Children’s comments about themselves and their abilities.
- d) Teaching staff recommendations based upon observed originality, inventiveness, creativity, and even bizarre imagination.
- e) The experiences of staff introducing pupils to Problem Solving Thinking and Philosophy.

Finally it is policy to accept, for a trial period, any pupil who may express a serious interest in taking part.

## PROVISION OF COURSES TO PROMOTE ABLE PUPILS

### Objectives

#### 1. Educational

- a) To facilitate the development of ability and confidence in problem solving.
- b) To facilitate the development of ability and confidence in academic and/or practical skills.
- c) To increase success in accessing and retrieving information.
- d) To increase ability in responsible criticism.
- e) To offer the freedom to range across and beyond the standard school curricula.
- f) To increase facility in communication.
- g) To stimulate development of imagination and creativity.
- h) To facilitate enjoyment in research, enquiry, debate and achievement.

#### 2. Social

- a) To provide contact with specialists, organisations etc. outside the immediate sphere of education.
- b) To experience the response of individuals, the media, interest groups etc. to the results of their own work.
- c) To develop respect for different points of view.
- d) To develop activities and responsibilities in society.
- e) To develop a caring attitude to others and the environment.

f) To develop the ability to work in groups or alone in responsible and constructive ways.

g) To increase their confidence in being able to contribute to society, as well as gain more from society in whatever field of endeavour they may find themselves.

h) To be happy and fulfilled.

Examples of courses carried out at Philip Morant school between 1992–1994.

Most pupils attend introductory courses in Problem Solving Thinking and Philosophy to encourage them in imaginative and creative processes.

The following courses were then developed **in negotiation** with the pupils as it was hoped that their interests would give some indication of their individual abilities.

1. Designing a guide for new pupils to the school.
2. Designing and developing an experimental school conservation area.
3. Planning and planting a wood of 1,800 trees in the Gosbecks Archaeological Park.
4. Gliding with lectures and training flights given by the Essex and Suffolk Gliding Club.
5. Organising a 'Lamb Saturday' allowing visitors to observe lambing on a farm and to raise money for animal charities.
6. Japanese lessons given by staff from the University of Essex.
7. Camping and Conservation work on a Suffolk Farm.
8. Holding 3-day programmes of Curriculum Extension Courses in conjunction with GIFT Ltd.
9. Producing an Anthology of Literature concerning Animal Welfare.
10. Setting up a system to recycle aluminium cans.
11. Oriental Studies including the Philosophy of Buddhism.
12. GEST funded courses in Science and Maths.
13. To take over and run an allotment for a year to grow vegetables.
14. Creative Writing Courses.
15. Word Processing Course.
16. Course funded by NEEBEP to promote primary school pupils e.g. Introductory Courses and then building their own model Utopia for infant pupils.
17. Writing, Rehearsing and performing a conservation comedy called 'Iggop and Rosie'.
18. Designing and carrying out a three day survival course.

In addition constant pastoral care is provided on an individual basis as and when appropriate.

ALL COURSES ARE VOLUNTARY AND TAKE PLACE IN SCHOOL BUT IN THE PUPIL'S OWN TIME. However, there are now concerted

efforts to introduce differentiated materials into the classroom during the normal school timetable for pupils of proven ability in Britain.

In the introductory courses great emphasis is laid upon encouraging pupils to feel confident in saying anything they like as long as it is honestly meant. They learn that they are not going to be laughed at for what might appear to be 'odd', 'weird', or 'bizarre' but rather that they can have fun and laugh with each other at amusing and/or unexpected contributions.

For example we use a Problem Solving Course called IMPACT by S. Baines M. A. Impacts is an easily remembered acronym for the essential stages in successful problem solving, namely:

**I Interpret**  
**M More information**  
**P Possibilities**  
**A Assess**  
**C Change**  
**T Test**  
**S Strategy**

Some examples of the statements the pupils enjoy interpreting are:

1. The king played chess with commoners.
2. List all your employees broken down by sex.
3. Don't ruin your bath with your scratchy cleaning powder, use ours instead.
4. This tombstone was erected in loving memory of William Johnson who was drowned on November 22nd by members of his family.

Another introductory course developed out of an exercise to encourage the pupils to debate their ideas where it soon became apparent that the twelve year old pupils were philosophising about ethics. The author, remembering that one should never underestimate their abilities, read out summaries of the ethical philosophies of major schools of Greek pre-Christian philosophy i.e. Socrates/Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, The Cynics, The Stoics etc. Within 10–15 minutes in each case these pupils had used a large number of the major philosophical criticism applied by other philosophers to the original schools of thought!

Some examples of general comments made by the original pupils were:

1. „You are not like a normal teacher. You don't tell us what to think”.
2. „Can we suggest some topics next?”
3. „Do you mind if we carry on by ourselves after you have left?”
4. „Are we going to be able to do this next year as well?”
5. „No I have not discussed this sort of thing with anybody else but I often think about things like this”.
6. „X will not listen to us”.
7. „I think ideas are more important than people”.

Having their ideas taken seriously, and contributing to the negotiated decision(s) of what to do and in which direction(s) to expand, allows pupils to identify strongly with their extension activities. This activity hopefully competes with other less useful attractions e.g. too much pop music or too many television soap operas.

#### **RESIDENTIAL COURSES FOR ABLE PUPILS**

Residential Courses, for example those run by GIFT (U.K.) and BILDUNG und BEGABUNG (GERMANY), have significant advantages in that the pupils are free from distractions, meet new individuals like themselves (sometimes for the first time), and students can really investigate a topic in depth (in the case of the German Courses over a two to three week period). For example one course we developed considered the development of Utopia from Plato to the present and then allowed the students time to develop their own ideas on aspects of Utopia. As this course was residential we were then able to develop ideas for a debating evening for the whole academy which was subsequently held. On another occasion a group of pupils was introduced to philosophy and then encouraged to investigate a field of philosophy of their own choosing. In the evenings they rehearsed and performed plays in French, English and on in Russian written by one of the participants. However, these courses usually have to be developed without detailed knowledge of the participants and it is then difficult to follow and promote the participants once the particular course has finished. Ideally this would be done in conjunction with provision for very able individuals in schools and universities. GIFT Ltd. in England has now a collection of several hundred descriptions of one day extension courses for very able pupils both in primary and secondary schools which have been repeatedly tried out and tested and found to be successful.

#### **SUMMARY OF SOME GENERAL PRINCIPLES FOUND USEFUL FOR MAKING PROVISION FOR ABLE PUPILS IN SCHOOLS**

1. Provide a happy, relaxed and informal atmosphere.
2. Encourage and promote imaginative flights of fancy (no matter how odd or bizarre).
3. Promote practical and theoretical creativity.
4. Encourage humour (seeing the funny side of things themselves).
5. Offer a wide menu of open ended activities.

6. Negotiate with the pupils when suitable.
7. Join in the learning experience with the pupils when possible.
8. Ideas originating with the pupils should be taken seriously if meant honestly.
9. Encourage, where appropriate, input and co-operation with experts outside the formal education establishment. Examples could be authors, scientists, charity groups, industrialists, the media etc.
10. Expect unexpected abilities or unexpected scope within an identified ability. In fact one should try to make provision for these pupils a vehicle for unearthing unexpected abilities.

#### REFERENCES

- Weinreich-Haste H. (1984), *A Multiplicity of Intelligences*, „New Scientist”, 1413, 19–22  
*Gifted Children and Their Education*, (1977), ADES Publication. U.K.  
Hildreth G. H. et. al. (1952), *Educating Gifted Children at Hunter College Elementary School*, Harper Ron., New York

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#### OCZEKUJĄCY NIEOCZEKIWANEGO

Treścią artykułu jest podsumowanie doświadczeń wyniesionych z pracy z uczniami wybitnie uzdolnionymi w Anglii i Niemczech oraz porównanie ich z doświadczeniami poczynionymi przez Europejską Radę ds. Dzieci Wybitnie Zdolnych. W tym celu przygotowano i przedłożono badanym listy twierdzeń zawierających różne wartości i dążenia życiowe, które badani mogli przyjąć za własne lub je odrzucić.