

ACLE Flipped Presentation

Understanding the Misunderstood: Accelerating Gifted Students

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This presentation outlines how the Gifted Education policy at Luther College has been actualised via acceleration, to cater for the complex needs of twice exceptional students.

The Enhanced Learning Centre at Luther College is committed to providing a sustainable foundation for lifelong learning for students through a whole-school approach which acknowledges diversity. The complexity of personal pathways into learning is supported by a network of care, developing a differentiated approach to the delivery of the curriculum and offering multiple pathways emanating from subject selection. "Gifted and talented students learn faster and with greater depth than other students." [Piirto (1999)]. *In order to provide appropriate curriculum to gifted and talent students we need to integrate Vygotsky's 'Zone of Proximal Development' into our teaching methodologies. Vygotsky (1978) defines his theory as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers". This notion validates the teacher's role as an explicit facilitator of the gifted learning process and invalidates the notion that gifted children will reach their potential regardless of adult intervention. Teachers, mentors and parents are vital agents in developing 'cognitive self-regulation' in gifted learners. "Cognitive self-instruction is aimed at teaching students to heed their metacognitive signals and to translate them into self-directed learning techniques." [Manning (1991)]. Metacognition is thinking about thinking. Metacognitive strategies need to be incorporated into all curriculum programs directed at gifted learners. The Gifted and Talented Policy of Luther College sits in the context of the Christian ethos of the school. "There is a variety of gifts, but always the same Spirit" [St Paul's 1 Cor. 12: 4-7]. The "gifts of the head" should not be separated from "the gifts of the heart." [Jung]. It is our responsibility as a Christian school to 'hone the wiser healer' rather than arm 'the gift' with destructive intent. Wisdom should not be sacrificed for cleverness. Both need to work together as parallel entities to allow the gifted learner to explore possibilities. "The whole purpose of wisdom is to lay out the inner world and outer world in such a way that you can make choices" and "Wisdom is about awareness. If you know the road, life is easier. If you can discover new roads, life is richer." [de Bono (1996)]. Pastoral care, counselling and a flexible curriculum model is necessary to cater for the learning needs of Gifted and Talented students and including (2e) Twice Exceptional students.*

The affective and spiritual domain of the child's growth should be synchronous with the child's intellectual enrichment "Research suggests . . . that intellectually gifted students differ from their age-peers in their emotional and social development as much as in their intellectual and academic characteristics." [Gross (1994)] This can lead to frustration and negative feedback from age-peers for the gifted learner as "Gifted children may become concerned with moral and ethical questions at unusually early ages and have a highly developed sense of justice and fairness." [Gross (1994)]. The psychosocial understanding of the gifted and talented learner needs to become an integral component of any individualised gifted program.

Gagne's definition is appropriate for Luther College, given the Christian ethos of the school, and our commitment to developing the whole child in an emotionally rich environment. He also provides a clear distinction between gifts and talents. Gross explains Gagne's definition: "He defines giftedness as the ability to perform at a very high level, significantly beyond what might be expected from one's age-peers in any domain of human ability. A child might be gifted in any one of the cognitive, creative, socio-affective or sensory-motor domains, or in several, or in all. Gagne makes the distinction between 'outstanding potential' (gifts) and 'outstanding performance' (talents). He defines talent as "achievement at a level significantly beyond what might be expected from one's age-peers." "A child may be talented in one or many fields of performance. The key to Gagne's view of talent is that it defines outstanding achievement or performance." [Gross (1994)].

Gagne's definition of gifts and talents provides us with a positive, proactive model for future curriculum programs for our high achieving students. "The community's responsibility is to seek out the child who is gifted but not yet talented and assist her to bring her gifts to fruition, as well as recognising and further assisting those talented students who are already performing at high levels" [Gross (1994)].

This policy recognises that there are different degrees and kinds of "giftedness" and talent; however, students who will best benefit from specific programs catering to higher abilities will commonly show "a complex set of behaviours" [Renzulli, 1996] which include:

- ◆ *Above average academic ability*
- ◆ *Above average intellectual potential*
- ◆ *Leadership potential*
- ◆ *Creativity*
- ◆ *Higher order thinking skills*
- ◆ *Exceptional talents*
- ◆ *Higher levels of sensitivity for themselves and others [AHISA 2002].*

This policy also recognises Twice Exceptional students as outlined by Linda Silverman in 2016

"I define giftedness as asynchronous development. Asynchrony is imbedded in uniqueness. As it is not based on the child's achievement, or even his or her potential for achievement, within this view of giftedness it is possible to be both gifted and learning disabled. Gifted individuals typically have noticeable discrepancies between their strengths and their weaknesses, which is a function of their asynchrony. Asynchrony comprises several inter-related components: advanced cognitive abilities, heightened intensity and complexity, uneven development, unusual awareness, feeling out-of-sync with societal norms, and vulnerability (Columbus Group, 1991; Neville, Piechowski & Tolan, 2013). These are all 2e characteristics, as well as gifted characteristics. They are just more pronounced in 2e children. Uneven development is a universal manifestation of giftedness (Silverman, 1995). All gifted children develop at a faster rate mentally than physically. Therefore, the higher the IQ, the more asynchronous the child or adult."

