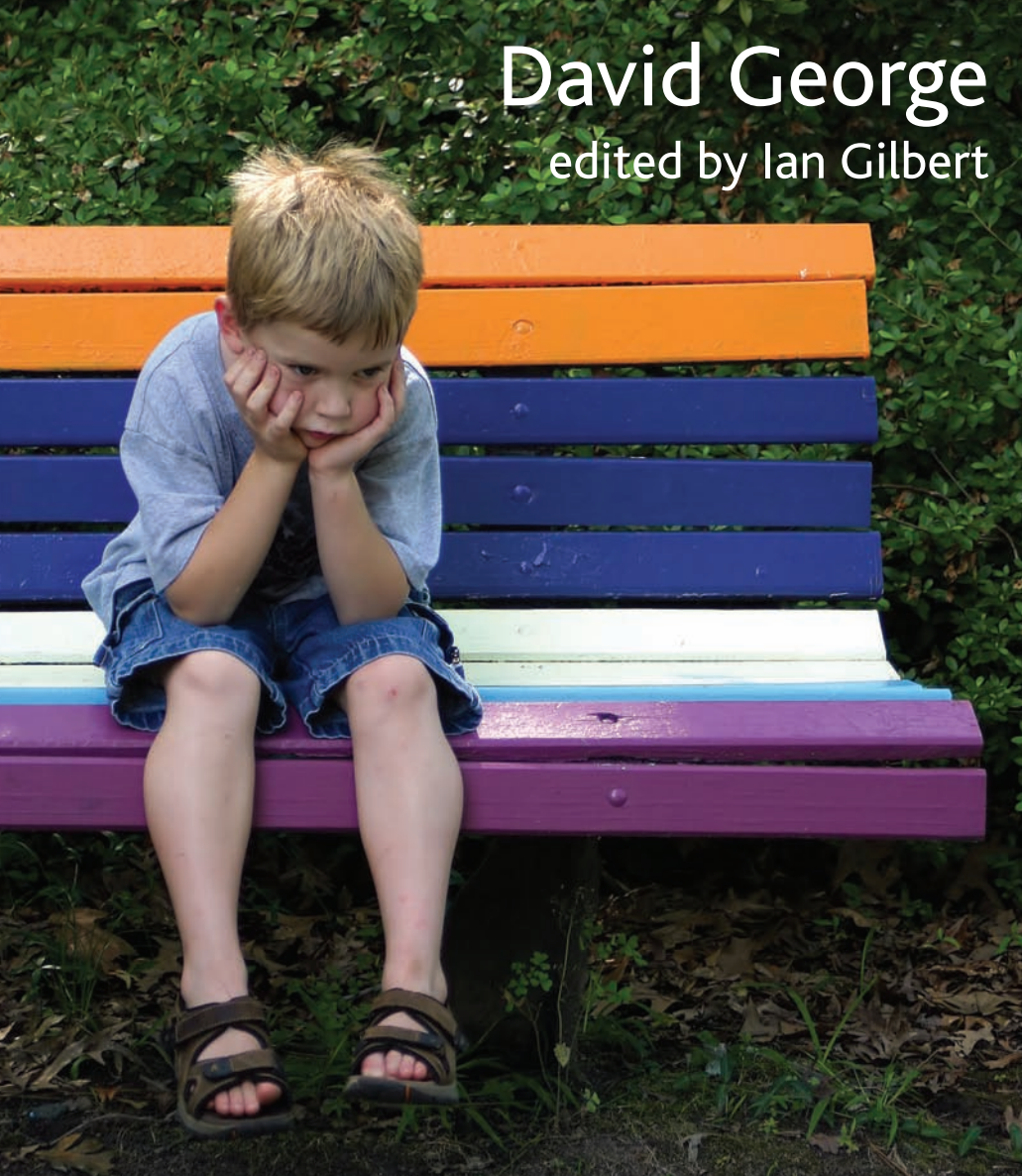


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edited by Ian Gilbert



Young Gifted and Bored



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Introduction

The principal aim of education in schools should be to create young people who are capable of being creative thinkers – who can do things to make the world a better place, not merely repeating what others have done before them.

Meeting the needs of gifted and talented children has become a topic of widespread debate. A great deal of time, energy and money has been spent on children with other special needs whereas the requirements of children of high ability have been relatively neglected. However, during the last ten years the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF – but now the Department for Education) have begun to put substantial sums of money into gifted and talented education. Alongside the more vigorous and frequent monitoring of schools that has come about through Ofsted inspections, the focus in this area has sharpened at last.

I maintain that many, though not all, gifted and talented children have special needs and problems, not the least of which is that they are so often bored by the education system in which they find themselves: lessons which don't stretch them, teachers who don't understand them, peers who hold them back. Frustrated, they often simply switch off or, worse, start to make trouble as a way of adding some spice to their day. Yet they also have exceptional, sometimes immense, talents to offer. We owe it to them and to society to cultivate their abilities to help prepare tomorrow's leaders and talent. These children are a precious natural resource and one that we must not squander. Indeed, the survival of the human species owes much to one characteristic – a capacity for creative problem solving. This ability to find new answers to difficulties remains a vital one. A major objective of education for these children is to recognize and foster their unique abilities. Unfortunately, the pursuit of this and related objectives is often plagued with confusion, misconceptions, doubtful assumptions, exaggerated claims and a lack of communication.

I undertake numerous courses for gifted and talented children and often have frank discussions with these outstanding students. A recurrent theme is that many of them (40 per cent) are bored and others say they already know what is being taught (30 per cent). I argue strongly that repetition, regurgitation and revision for these children does them a great disservice and leads to them becoming bored and turned off from school. And all the time the clock is ticking as they while away their days without being stretched or sometimes even noticed.

It is the right of all children to go as far and as fast as they can along every dimension of the school curriculum without any brakes being put on them. Therefore, every child is entitled to the best programme, the most attentive care and the greatest love and respect.

Guy Claxton (2008) states that most people would agree that the only thing we can say with any confidence about the year 2025 is there is not much we can say about it with any confidence. Of course we want to give young people the knowledge and attitudes we value. The trouble is most societies are now a jumble of different sorts of 'we', each casting their shadow in a different direction. The only sensible role for education is to get young people ready to cope well with complexity, uncertainty and ambiguity. It is estimated that children in primary school today will possibly live to the age of 100 and have at least six jobs during their career. With such a future in mind we need to turn out flexible generalists because the world is changing so fast.

And it is the very process by which we can do this that will make school a whole lot more engaging for gifted yet bored students. But who are they? According to official DCSF guidelines (see Dracup, 2009) they are children and young people with one or more abilities developed to a level significantly ahead of a year group, or with a potential to develop those abilities. They estimate that this amounts to: 820,000 individuals in schools, an estimated 140,000 in post-16 settings and a target to identify one million gifted and talented students for the year 2010.

This means:

- A national gifted and talented population aged 4 to 19.
- A gifted and talented population in *all* primary and secondary schools and colleges.
- Top 5 per cent nationally aged 11 to 19 determined using published criteria (otherwise schools identify these children themselves).
- A marker, not necessarily permanent, that the learner needs extra support – *if* we are to challenge them and help them to re-engage.

If the DCSF/DoE is ready to admit that there is such a thing as a ‘gifted and talented’ student, schools are sometimes less so. However, here is my own personal eight-point rationale as to why schools must address this issue. Feel free to use it with any of your colleagues who bemoan the behaviour of that clever yet disaffected child, but who refuses to acknowledge that the problem can be addressed through a whole-school focus on the gifted and talented.

1. It is every child’s right to go as far and as fast along every dimension of the school curriculum – ‘excellence for all’ as most schools like to say in their prospectus. We must support schools in meeting the needs of *all* their learners, something that falls very much under the ‘personalization’ banner.
2. Some children have special needs – supporting disadvantaged learners means narrowing the achievement gap.
3. There is evidence from HM Inspectorate of Education and Ofsted that if a school has a gifted and talented coordinator and work is done to identify and work with gifted and talented children then *all* children benefit. This is a key driver for whole-school improvement. ‘A rising tide raises all ships’ as they say.

4. The world needs these children – they are the brains of the future and have immense talent to give to society.
5. Aptitude is equally distributed across all social classes but opportunities are not. We must identify and nurture all talents in our schools in order to narrow achievement gaps.
6. Education should be a gateway to a more equal society.
7. There is a suggestion (largely anecdotal) that if we do not provide for these children then some engage in antisocial behaviour beyond school.
8. There is evidence that some children underachieve. Some coast deliberately; these are the young, gifted and bored.

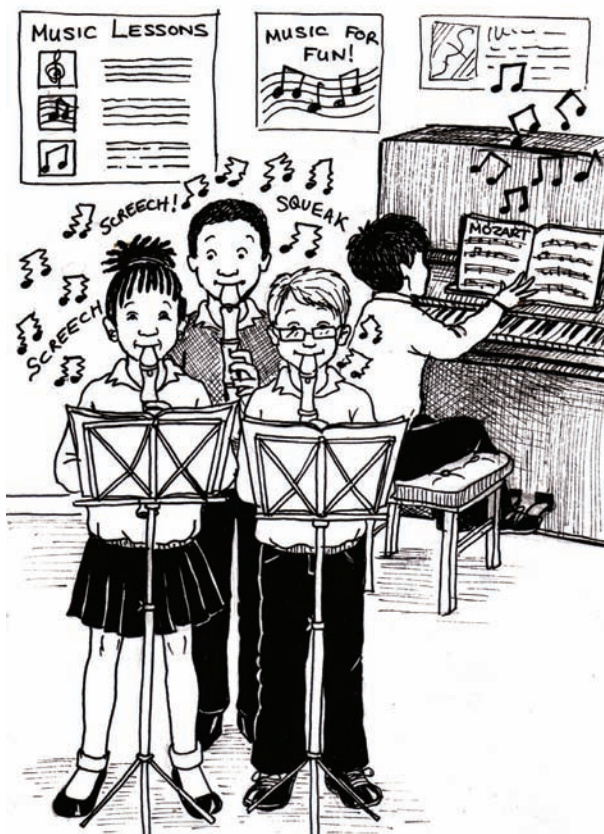
In addition to this rationale, other benefits include: improvements in learner achievement/performance; more effective teaching, learning and whole-school support; less underachievement by disadvantaged learners; more and better external learning opportunities; better schools; improved support for parents and educators; and enhanced social mobility and national competitiveness.

From April 2011, however, there will be no more national strategies. Instead, the Department of Education will establish frameworks for quality assured providers and the opportunity for leading schools to support their peers.

What does all this mean? It is now, more than ever, down to individual schools and individual teachers – down to you – to drive the movement forward, to work out priorities and come up with your own high quality approaches to bring the best out of your gifted and talented learners.

Chapter 2

Identification Strategies



Chapter 2

Identification Strategies

An instrument has been developed in advance of the needs of its possessor.

Alfred Wallace

The preliminary discussion of the young, gifted and bored in this chapter is fundamentally linked with the need to develop identification techniques and procedures which a busy teacher can use in the classroom. We now accept that children can be gifted or talented in various areas so it is not surprising that many different criteria can be used to identify such children. These resources can be categorized into three major areas:

1. Teacher appraisal of their students.
2. The use of weighting scales and checklists.
3. Administration of different types of standardized test.

However, Ofsted report that what they actually observe being used in our schools primarily are test results (Cognitive Abilities Tests (CATs) or Performance Indicators in Primary Schools (PIPS)) and teacher nomination. Unfortunately, appraisals and tests do not always correlate because individual teachers have different standards and, of course, children will rise and fall according to teachers' expectations. Therefore, I want to suggest that we can cast the net much wider. If we do not, we will miss at least 50 per cent of the gifted and talented children in our schools (Freeman, 1991).

The definition that schools have adopted of gifted and talented pupils indicates that these students can possess superior capabilities in several areas, including intellectual/academic, creative, social/leadership and psychomotor

Acceleration



*'I learned nothing, but I got it
all over in two weeks'*

Any teaching strategy that results in placement beyond the child's chronological age is labelled 'acceleration'. This is the most popular way of coping with more able children and research has supported its use with gifted students (Brody and Benbow, 1987; Shore, 1991).

Acceleration offers students the opportunity to select a programme of work that is both challenging and interesting to them. In many countries this means moving up the school by one or two years. By allowing a gifted child

to jump some of the normal school curriculum by moving into an older class, it is hoped that the student will be more stimulated, less bored and enjoy school more. Early entry is also one of the easiest administrative ways out of the problem. Nevertheless, such programmes should always be designed to produce sensible, defensible and valuable educational goals.

In my opinion, the case of Ruth Lawrence, who went to Oxford University at 13 to read mathematics, is a ridiculous case of a child being accelerated many years ahead of her age group.

Early entry is not favoured in the UK where it is believed that children need to be well rounded and mature enough to move on physically and psychologically. We also tend to assume that gifted children will automatically reach high attainment targets. However, there is little cognizance of the wide range of ability found in a classroom of children or of their different needs; the curriculum content is often the same for all.

I believe that acceleration should mean stepping up the learning in the classroom – not simply skipping a year or two. Beneficial solutions include telescoping (or compacting) the curriculum by eliminating tasks that are repetitive, reproductive and regurgitative. This frees up time for different and challenging work, thus improving motivation and preventing laziness and underachievement, and also curbing the arrogance that can develop in some children.

Gifted children should have the opportunity to work at their own rapid pace, to progress through and out of primary school into the secondary phase and beyond. Acceleration speeds up learning time to match a student's potential and capabilities. It should mean doing less and learning more.

Their conclusion is that schools should offer personal support systems to young people including individual tutorials, mentoring and regular meetings with parents.

Personal support system – how to raise your pupils' self-esteem



The following exercises provide some simple tools for assessing self-esteem in your learners and are good exercise to raise students' awareness.

- List the names of people you feel you can talk to in your life right now; people who are on your side and are willing and able to listen carefully and non-judgementally to you.
- When did you last have an important conversation about things that matter to you with these people in the last week, month or year?
- When things aren't going your way, do you blame others, yourself or the system?
- Or do you focus on what you can control and work to improve these things?
- Can you stop worrying about problems over which you have no control and take responsibility for your own behaviour?
- Do you understand what assertive behaviour is, and do you recognize if your own patterns are passive, manipulative or aggressive?

- Can you offer support to other friends who may be experiencing emotional difficulties and listen empathetically and non-judgementally to them?
- Are you someone who others feel they can trust and confide in about things that really matter – and not just complaints or gossip.

Please answer all the questions. Put a ring around YES or NO.

Name: Age:

School: Date:

- | | |
|---|--------|
| 1. Is your school work good? | YES NO |
| 2. For girls – do you like being a girl? | YES NO |
| For boys – do you like being a boy? | YES NO |
| 3. Are you strong and healthy? | YES NO |
| 4. Does someone else always choose what you wear? | YES NO |
| 5. Do your parents think you behave well? | YES NO |
| 6. Do other children like playing with you? | YES NO |
| 7. Are you as clever as other children? | YES NO |
| 8. Does the teacher notice when you work hard? | YES NO |
| 9. Are you very nice looking? | YES NO |
| 10. Does your mum or dad like you to help them? | YES NO |

At last, a book which champions young people of exceptional creativity and talent, who possess the ability to answer old questions and tackle old problems in new ways.

Sir John Jones, Writer, Presenter and Educational Consultant

Parents, decision makers and teachers will find practical strategies and instruments to review their provision and ensure their children remain fully engaged!

Chris Grimshaw, International Consultant

... another fascinating book from David George. It provides a good balance of theory and practice.

Denise Yates, Chief Executive, The National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC)

As usual David's book is written with humour and great humanity. He is passionate about education and has a genuine love of children.

Richard Y. McNulty, Retired Primary School Head Teacher and Inspector

[David George's] warm and patriarchal voice comes through strongly and, as the reader, you know that this author is someone who cares very much about G&T children getting a fair deal.

Dr Linda Evans, Editor of *G&T Update*

... written with clarity and deploying evidence that demonstrates George's real enthusiasm for developing pupils' thinking and that his insights and understanding of pupils remain firmly rooted in his regular engagement with pupils in schools across the country.

Elizabeth Garner, Head, Forest Preparatory School

A lifetime of real chalkface experience and expert knowledge of our most amazing young people, and how to respond to their needs.

Matthew Judd, Second Master, Haberdashers' Aske's Boys' School

I found this short book revelatory. It sets out very clearly how a large number of children have potential for higher achievement and creativity, but often react with inattention and even antisocial behaviour in contemporary school environments. In well written chapters it sets out how to identify these gifted and talented children, and how to understand, teach, support and parent them.

Professor Philip Sugarman, Chief Executive, St Andrew's Healthcare

Education Teaching Skills and Techniques



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