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How inclusive is gifted and talented education?

What do we mean by G&T?

The case for inclusion

Ability is evenly distributed within the population; achievement is not.

The national programme for gifted and talented education was developed as a response to a wide range of evidence that more able students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, were not achieving in the same way as those facing less challenging circumstances. It set out to identify and deliver a 'distinct teaching and learning programme' (DCSF, 2002) to raise the aspirations of these potentially gifted and talented students and secure high achievement through a combination of challenging learning opportunities and support for their progress.

The REAL Project has grown from this agenda to place a particular focus on the inclusion of students from BME backgrounds and those learning English as an additional language.

Core to REAL's approach is the assumption that all students are potentially gifted and talented. Consequently, all schools and LAs should seek to secure a fully representative gifted and talented population.

Where should a school start?

In many ways the definition remains consistent. Gifted and talented students are:

"Children and young people with one or more abilities developed to a level significantly ahead of their year group (or with the potential to develop those abilities)."

Source: Identifying Gifted and Talented Learners, p.1, DCSF (2008)

Schools were originally advised to identify approximately 10% of their population as gifted and talented. Experience from the REAL Project suggests that where schools take such a fixed view of gifted and talented then they are unlikely to achieve anything like full representation.

In this sense a 'one-sized' view of gifted and talented cannot be inclusive of all students. A more inclusive approach is supported by the current view that all institutions are free to determine the size of their gifted and talented populations, but should be able to justify this in terms of improved standards for all learners identified.

REAL provides practical, transferable ways to engage with this challenging agenda which can bring about positive changes without accusations of social engineering.

Gifted and talented provision is about potential not past

Giftedness is commonly defined as expertise in a development stage. As educators we all seek to provide children with the means to access and understand their own potential, and the freedom to discover and pursue possible futures.

To meet this aspiration our approach has to be flexible and responsive to individual needs. In this context the gifted and talented register becomes a live and interactive document to identify a growing talent pool of students. As a result the school is also

more likely to use provision as a truer indicator of potential and needs.

A continuing source of unease about gifted and talented for some is the fact that identification and the register places the teacher in the role of gatekeeper, preventing access to opportunities for the wider school community in favour of a select minority. REAL places the teacher in the role of advocate for all students by fostering an understanding of how these positive aspirations can be put into practice.

What affects the probability that a student will be identified as G&T?

DCSF School Census data provides an insight into the composition of the national gifted and talented population according to a range of characteristics.

If we take the view that ability is evenly distributed within the population then we would expect the distribution of gifted and talented learners to reflect this. Our analysis of the January 2008 School Census data shows that inequalities exist and that certain groups have a lower probability of inclusion than others.

Issues of relevance to REAL target groups include:

- **Gender.** At primary age boys are slightly more likely to be identified than girls, but this reverses at secondary age to a gap of almost 5%.
- **FSM.** Secondary age students eligible for free school meals are 50% less likely to be identified as gifted and talented than those who are not.
- **SEN.** Students who have statements of SEN are five times less likely to be identified as gifted and talented than those who have no identified need.
- **Mother tongue.** Students with EAL at secondary age are 25% less likely to be identified as gifted and talented.
- **Ethnicity.** In the secondary phase, the proportion of students identified in different minority ethnic groups varies widely when compared to the proportion of white British students identified as gifted and talented (14.1%).



This table shows the percentage of students identified as gifted and talented in a number of minority ethnic groups. When this is compared to the proportion of white British students identified this gives a view of how many students in these groups may be 'missing' from the national gifted and talented population.

| Ethnicity | % identified | No. of 'missing' students |
|-----------------------------|--------------|---------------------------|
| Any other white background | 12.0 | 2400 |
| Gypsy/Roma | 3.3 | 610 |
| Traveller of Irish heritage | 3.7 | 300 |
| Asian of whom | 11.5 | 7,500 |
| – Pakistani | 8.4 | 6,880 |
| – Bangladeshi | 12.0 | 1,060 |
| Black of whom | 9.6 | 1,240 |
| – Caribbean | 10.6 | 1,620 |
| – African | 8.9 | 4,760 |
| Minority ethnic students | 12.0 | 15930 |

Source: DCSF SFR09/2008, Table 6

For example, Pakistani students have an inclusion probability of 8.4%. In numerical terms this means that 6,880 Pakistani students are 'missing' from the gifted and talented population.

Analysis by REAL has shown that these gaps in representation mean that, taking all groups into account, some 15,930 students from minority ethnic backgrounds are missing from the national gifted and talented population.

If we link to other factors such as gender and free school meals eligibility then the probability of inclusion can shrink alarmingly. A black African male, eligible for free school meals, who has not been identified as gifted by the time he reaches key stage 4 has comparatively little chance of being newly identified as gifted and talented unless there is some form of intervention – either with his teachers, the student himself or preferably both.

REAL's approach has been to focus on an exploration of the factors affecting the probability of inclusion in order to enable schools to deal with these complex issues with confidence. Not all groups are under-represented. It is noticeable in the same data set that 23.1% of Chinese students are identified as gifted and talented. What are the issues in play here? Some are cultural, some to do with the way in which we identify and what subjects are valued as part of the brokerage that take place in the identification process, etc. Of course, we would not start from the premise that many of these students should not be part of the cohort, so what can be learnt from this positive position?

Who is missing from your school's G&T population?

If the education of our students is designed to equip them for a positive future, perhaps schools need to ask themselves why so much emphasis is placed on past attainment.

REAL projects have revealed that there tend to be a number of reasons why individual students are missing from a school's identified gifted and talented population. These students tend to be those who:

- have an incomplete prior attainment history
- achieve relatively less well in written work
- have achievements outside the school curriculum (for instance, community or culturally specific gifts and talents) that are unknown to or unrecognised by the school
- are not given the opportunity to demonstrate new or hidden gifts and talents through provision
- have needs and aspirations that do not match the offer from the school
- experience cultural or other resistances to participation
- are currently underachieving
- have 'potential' as the strongest indicator for their inclusion.

REAL issues

The REAL Project is working to tackle a complex range of issues relating to under-representation within gifted and talented populations or inappropriate provision.

