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Listening to Intellectually Gifted Students Voices

Deep Learning, Rich Understandings

Intellectually gifted students learning in mixed ability inclusive classrooms:

What do they say they experience?

What do they say they need?

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ABSTRACT

The research available regarding the intellectually gifted student and their perspective of their educational experiences is reviewed and contextualized within my professional experience in working in Australia and internationally with gifted students.

In contrasting and critiquing different views I confirm that there is little first hand information available from intellectually gifted individuals as to what they experience as learners or whether it matches what the professionals say should be happening for them.

Overwhelmingly however there is a call for a more personalised and coordinated approach to education for gifted individuals, rather than for “the gifted.”

I discuss the possibilities to transform our thinking, deepen our learning and enrich our understandings about education for gifted students within the current context of inclusive schooling.

Some suggestions for practice and future research, including lines of inquiry in gifted student voice, are offered.
Introduction

Schools need to be clear within their communities what they mean by inclusion and what they mean by giftedness. There is acceptance that inclusion is a process of removing barriers to presence participation and achievement of all students with a particular emphasis on groups of learners who may be at risk of marginalization exclusion or underachievement. (Ainscow, 2004, UNESCO, 2001 in Ainscow 2005). Gifted students may fall into these categories, particularly ironically, underachievement (Reis & Mc Coach, 2000, Winebrenner, 2001).

Stainback and Stainback (1990) define an inclusive school as one which:

“Educates all students in the mainstream … providing [them with] appropriate educational programs that are challenging yet geared to their capabilities and needs as well as any support and assistance they and/or their teachers need to be successful in the mainstream. But an inclusive school also goes beyond this. An inclusive school is a place where everyone belongs, is accepted, supports, and is supported by his or her peers and other members of the community in the course of having his or her educational needs met” (p. 3).

For deep learning and rich understandings to occur in an inclusive school we need to reconceptualise the nature of learning from “schooling a pupil to educating a learner” (West Burnham & Coates p9). Listening to students and taking a personalized approach through accessing a student’s prior knowledge and personal interests is an essential first step to their individual emotional engagement and personal progress (Moore 1996 in Richardson 2001; Sebba 2007, p.73). Vygotsky says this is why students must actively interact socially with a knowledgeable adult or capable peers (1978, in Subban 2006, p5), which implies a reciprocal dialogue about their learning. Intellectually gifted students have the ability to achieve new insights beyond those already known (Cathcart 2005, p19) however one needs to listen first. (Kaplan 2009) and although not an homogenous group, gifted individuals do share some attributes, (Valpied, 2005) including the potential capacity to articulate their thoughts due to a high level of metacognition (Span 1995 in Freeman 1996). The gifted students tend to have enhanced problem solving and metacognitive skill, the ability to understand moral issues and values at an early age and a deep interest in the issues of learning (Pohl 1996, p11), so why not involve them more in co creating a better education
system for themselves and everyone else? It means however a reciprocal relationship between teacher and the intellectually gifted student needs to be created and shared (Tomlinson 2004 c in Subban 2006, p.13) and this presents many challenges. Gifted student voice then not only has the potential to enhance individual learning but to create new ways of learning for all students.

**Inclusion**

Smith argues that until recently the place of gifted education in the move towards inclusion has largely been ignored (Lowe, 1992, Gallagher, 2000, Renzulli and Purcell 1996, in Smith, 2005). There is also some confusion about what inclusion means (Salend, 1998, Ainscow et al, 2000, in Ainscow, 2004, Smith, 2005). The principles of inclusion and mainstreaming are embedded in the concept of the “least restrictive environment” which states clearly that while the aim is to educate all students with their peers it is acknowledged that the regular classroom may not always be educationally the most enhancing placement for their individual needs. (Gallagher, 1997, p153). Inclusion doesn’t necessarily mean that all children receive the same instruction in the same place at the same time but it does suggest embracing differences and providing a more personalised approach to delivering curriculum. Flexibility, options and individual needs seem to be the essential elements inherent in all these principles rather than a particular place (Cresswell, 2006, p 8). Ainscow describes how the “Improving the Quality of Education for All” (IQEA) school improvement project is an example of an inclusive framework where the central area of focus is the quality of the students’ experience. It emphasises collaboration, voice and inquiry in order to change paradigms (Ainscow, 2005). Therefore it is not about one place, the mixed ability classroom, educating gifted students, it is a system of education “implementing a multilevel, multi-modal curriculum that can meet the needs of a heterogeneous population” (Sapon-Shevin, 1996 in Campbell et. al 2005 p25). Advocates of specialised gifted education often refer to the rigid and regular classroom as a reason for removing and educating gifted students separately. The least restrictive environment is the one that supports academic excellence for any individual student (Gallagher, 1997, p. 164). Equity is not the product of identical learning experiences for all students rather it is the product of a broad range of differentiated experiences that take into account each students

Bernal (2003) is concerned that inclusion, in terms of educating all students in the heterogeneous regular classroom means loss of specialized gifted and talented programs as part of a continuum of services. This is also reflected in the awareness that the degree of giftedness needs to be determined so the appropriate level of differentiation can be realized (Pohl, 1996, p27, Delcourt & Evans, 1994, Moon, Swift and Shellenberger, 2002 in Adams-Byers, Squiller, Whitsel & Moon, 2004). The more highly gifted the child the more different to the main classroom the education adjustments may need to be in order to sufficiently address their individual learning. This then implies that a full range of gifted students need to be involved in research in the mixed ability setting to see what impact their level of giftedness has on their experiences. The most profoundly and exceptionally intellectually students are more rare but seem to have been studied more closely perhaps due to their unique situations. (Gross 2000) The reality is learners are all essentially different (Brighton, 2002, Fischer & Rose, 2001, Griggs, 1991, Guild, 2001, Tomlinson, 2002, in Subban, 2006, p.7).

**Differentiation**

With an increasing demand to differentiate due to the increased diversity in inclusive classrooms there is some concern that gifted learners intellectual and social emotional needs will not be met sufficiently in the mixed ability classroom, because reality is that teachers make few if any accommodations or differentiate for gifted learners in these mainstream classrooms (Archambault et al 1993, in Bernal 2003). Unfortunately, research indicates that teachers in heterogeneous classrooms tend not to include gifted students in the group of students they believe most need differentiation. Westberg, Archambault, Dobyns, and Salvin (1993) found that little differentiation in the instructional and curricular practices of teachers was provided for high-ability learners in regular classrooms, an issue confirmed by Westberg and Daoust (2004). When teachers do differentiate, they tend to focus their efforts on the more struggling learners in the classroom, believing that gifted students do not “need” differentiation (Brighton, Hertberg, Callahan, Tomlinson, & Moon, 2005). There is no single definition of giftedness (Fahlman2000, Marland, Gardner in Yewchuk 1999), however “school house” or academic
giftedness is the most easily identified (Renzulli 1998). Intellectual giftedness is most closely related to the need for differentiation in the academic curriculum (Valpied 2005, p 120, Gentry et al 2002, Subban 2006).

“Fifty percent of respondents to a nationwide survey of middle school teachers said they did not differentiate instruction based on readiness interest or learning profile because they saw no need to do so “(Moon, Tomlinson & Callahan 1995 in Tomlinson et.al, p. 122). In one study in which students were interviewed they reported they “received no differentiation in 84% of the learning activities in which they engaged” (Reis et al., 1993 in Tomlinson et al., 2003 p5).

Certainly few researchers have actually asked students directly about their educational experiences (Gallagher, Harradine and Coleman 1997 in Knight and Baker 2000) and fewer case studies have examined the characteristics and educational experiences of primary age gifted children (Gross, 1986; Gross, 1993; Harrison, 2003; Sankar-Deleeuw, 2004; Sankar De-Leeuw, 2007). Most differentiation, even when it is addressed, focuses on the academic needs of gifted students and overlooks their emotional needs. Sisk (2009) suggests helping gifted students understand and accept their intensities, their perfectionism, and their need to seek balance in their lives. More importantly, Sisk suggests that evaluation studies in gifted education should investigate the impact of such programs on students' lives. (Shultz 2003, Sisk 2009) According to Tannenbaum (1993 in Smith 2006 p150) there is a “love-hate relationship between society and the construct of giftedness”. Giller (p12 2008) refers to Dishart’s comments (1980 in Heller et al. 1993): ‘Educational programmes for the gifted should be based upon the needs of the individual learners rather than upon making up for the programme deficits in a curriculum for the non-gifted.’ Regular classroom teachers may however reject adapting instruction for individual learners needs for many reasons based on their own beliefs. According to Tomlinson even when teachers express support for inclusive classrooms they are likely to plan for whole-class instruction (Morocco, Riley, Gordon, & Howard, 1996 in Tomlinson et. al, 2003). Some teachers responses included; because they feel doing so calls attention to student differences, they feel it is not their job to do so; they believe special treatment is
a poor preparation for a tough world that does not provide special treatment (Schumm & Vaughn, 1995); they are unaware of learner needs (Schumm & Vaughn, 1992, 1995); or in the case of advanced learners, because they don’t feel students need adaptations (Tomlinson 1995), because teachers don’t know how to modify the curriculum for students whose proficiencies extend beyond those prescribed by grade level curricula, standards, documents or both (Callahan, Tomlinson, Moon Brighton & Hertberg 2003; Hertberg, 2003 in Tomlinson et. al, 2003) misunderstandings about differentiation—that it is a form of scaffolding for struggling learners rather than a method of meeting the unique needs of all levels of learners. These and other early misuses of differentiation can actually make the regular classroom a less challenging place for gifted learners. (Hertberg-Davis 2009)

This is similar to Maker’s (1998) description of differentiation to include the emotional and physical environments in order to create a safe, flexible open space which encourages risk taking where learners are engaged to the point of their proximal development (Vygotsky, 1962 in Gentry Gable and Rizza, 2002).

The themes of choice and challenge are echoed in the literature regarding gifted students’ learning needs. (QCA 2007, Winebrenner, 2001; Rea, 2000, Yewchuk 1999, Moneta, G & Csikszentmihalyi 1996). Research clearly shows that schools and teachers can increase the level of challenge within heterogeneously grouped classrooms if they take into consideration students’ experiences and perspectives and use those to make what is taught more accessible to students (Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen, 1993; Delcourt, Loyd, Cornell, &Goldberg, 1994; Reis et al., 1993 Commeyras, 1995; Dahl, 1995; Johnson & Nicholls, 1995; Lincoln, 1995). However, according to the Westberg and Archambault study (1997), which was also replicated in Australia with very similar results, (Whitton 1997) there were no meaningful differences in curriculum for gifted students. (Westberg & Daoust 2003). The conclusion was that teachers’ differentiation practices in grade 3 & 4 classrooms had not changed in the last 10 years. Clark (2002 p257) argues that gifted students are at risk in this scenario and Cathcart (2006) claims therefore it is not safe to rely solely on provision in the classroom. Although we need to understand how cognitive and non-cognitive characteristics affect talent development so we can determine which
variables need to be addressed when designing programs for individual gifted students, much less is known about non-cognitive effects of gifted programs (Moon, Swift and Shallenberger, 2002 in Cresswell 2007). Betts and Neihart (1998) support this by suggesting that as many as 90 per cent of students nominated as gifted by untrained teachers tended to be high achieving conformists, in that they were the pupils “who often become bored in school but learn to use the system to get by with as little effort as possible” (p. 249).

Schlechty, (1997 in Tomlinson et. al, 2003) and Clinkenbeard (1994 in Hoekman et. al 1999) advises teachers to consider “what motivates a particular student and then design work that is responsive to this intrinsic motivation.”

The concept of differentiation appears to differ significantly among different countries and educational systems. Within the English model the tendency is to view differentiation as a process, which takes place within mixed-ability classrooms (Eyre 1997 in White et al., 2003). The EPPI systematic review of interventions for gifted and talented students from the UK (Bailey et. al, 2008) supports the use of personalised learning and differentiation. There was favour for differentiated provision within mixed ability classes, and individualised programs. Empirical research has shown that practices of differentiation via acceleration, enrichment and homogenous grouping lead to more successful learning than any one approach employed alone (Shore, Cornell, Robinson, & Ward, 1991 in Campbell et.al, 2005 p16). On the other hand, the United States tends to define and view differentiation as a process that may take place in the mainstream classroom, but also encompasses a range of special educational classes for the gifted (Feldhusen & Sayler, 1990; Moon, Swift, & Shallenberger, 2002). However without exemplary core curriculum as a foundation, there is little hope for making meaningful curricular modifications for advanced students (Tomlinson et al., 2005). Rogers goes further to detail the nature of the differentiation required. “…Instructional delivery must be differentiated in pace, amount of review and practice, and organization of content presentation” (Rogers 2007). Rogers backs this up with data from Start (1995) with intellectually gifted students where it was found that a child two standard deviations above average (moderately gifted) learns eight times faster than a child with an intellectual ability two standard deviations below. The highly
Gifted student needs more individual attention perhaps by providing tutoring; acceleration, or planning individualized studies and projects than the mildly or moderately gifted. (Gallagher 2000 p.5). However schools are not consistently able to distinguish highly gifted from extraordinarily gifted students when they assess academic ability. This possibility links to the need for the talent search process that was developed (see Lupkowski-Shoplik, Benbow, Assouline, & Brody, 2003; Lubinski & Benbow, 1994 in Swiatek & Benbow 1991 p1).

**Gifted Student Voice**

Voice is “the focus on the design, facilitation and improvement of learning” (Mitra, 2004 p. 4 in Manefield et al, 2004). Student voice is potentially the most important of the nine gateways into personalising learning and teaching according to Hargreaves (Manefield et al, 2004) because it has “transformative potential” to enhance students’ own learning and school improvement through “essential first hand evidence.” (Flutter and Ruddock, 2004 in Harland, p5.) ‘However, it is not enough to simply listen to student voice. Educators have an ethical imperative to do something with students, and that is why meaningful student involvement is vital to school improvement’ (Fletcher 2003). Dillon adds that we do not always recognize the dynamic nature of children’s identities (Aitken, Lund & Korjholt, 2007). “The engaged voice must never be fixed and absolute but always changing, always evolving in dialogue with a world beyond itself” (bell hooks, 1994,p.11 in Cruddas, p. 62). Voice for gifted students can also be about motivation, inner drive, “rage to master”(Winner, 2000) or “entelechy” (Piirto 1999, Lovecky in Clark 2003). It helps to define giftedness from “the inside out” (Morelock 1995, Piechowski 2002). An individual’s potential cannot be predetermined (Dweck 2000 in Hertzog 2003 p 12) so identification therefore is not an end in itself but its purpose is to continuously provide appropriate educational experiences for all children who display giftedness and ability through challenging activities (Freeman, 1998; Sizmur, 1991; Teare, 1997). As Davis and Rimm (1998) claimed, “There probably are as many different strategies and policies for identifying gifted and talented students as there are programs” (p. 68). Identification should be approached as an opportunity for educators to employ a range of resources to develop a
picture of an individual student’s educational strengths, weaknesses and needs (Campbell et. al, 2005 p7).

The social constructivist approach, which supports the inclusive schools philosophy, also reflects the gradual changes in education for identifying and providing for gifted students. (Renzulli, Purcell 1996, Gallagher 2000, Lowe 2002 and Brown et al 2005 in Smith 2006, p11). This qualitative paradigm now calls for a mainstream focus on provision for and identification of “gifted behaviours” because the regular classroom is where most students are. Given that giftedness may show itself at any time in a given child’s life the inclusive mixed ability classroom is an obviously important focus point of identification and provision for all students. (Grubb 2008). So rather than relying on an individual IQ score (Renzulli 1998) assessment now is usually dynamic, using multiple sources (Passow 1984 in Grubb 2008) and contextualized due to the multicultural and diverse nature of the learners. There is therefore no single, universal definition of giftedness (Fahlman 2000, Marland, Gardner in Yewchuk 1999) and no single method of assessment. Even with agreement about the developmental nature of giftedness, no comprehensive theory of talent development exists (Simonton, 2000; Sternberg & Davidson, 2006 in Van Tassel –Baska & Johnsen 2007). However, as intellectual giftedness can be described in degrees from mild to profound it is important to acknowledge the link between levels of intellectual giftedness and the cognitive differences which then impact on learning in the mixed ability classroom. Also the more different to the average in terms of intellectual ability the person is, the rarer the ability becomes in term of a peer group. Are their chronological peers their intellectual peers? (Gross in Smith 2006 p134).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Giftedness</th>
<th>IQ range</th>
<th>Prevalence</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mildly</td>
<td>115-129</td>
<td>&gt;1:40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately</td>
<td>130-144</td>
<td>1:40-1:1000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highly</td>
<td>145-159</td>
<td>1:1000-1:10000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exceptionally</td>
<td>160-179</td>
<td>1:10000-1:1million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profoundly</td>
<td>180+</td>
<td>&lt;1:1million</td>
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(Gross, 2000)
Gifted individuals may show various preference in learning styles, be unidentified, underachievers, (Reis & McCoach, 2000, Winebrenner, 2001) at risk of exclusion, academically successful in only one specific area, have disabilities or be multi talented and fit anywhere along the intellectual level continuum. This is why the individual’s “voice” is very important.

The gap between what is ideal regarding inclusion and what is experienced in the classroom is said to be improved through a personal approach to dialogue and partnership (Davalas and Griffin, Gilbert) where teachers’ and students’ roles shift and develop skills to “articulate what is important, insightful or relevant” (Fielding and Ruddock, 2002, in Manefield). Current international research is beginning to suggest that student voice, when it involves students having a genuine say in their learning, has served as a catalyst for change in schools (Manefield et. al, 2007 p 41). Increasing participation and involving all students in planning and decision making is consistent with the inclusion principle (Thomas et al in Cruddas, 2001, p. 63).

The expression of voice in school is on a continuum from basic; such as student councils, through to sophisticated forms such as improving teaching and learning in collaboration and true partnership with adults. (Mitra, 2004 in Manefield et al 2007 p.5, Hart 1992 in Manefield 2007, p. 7) Teachers must first listen to students in order to engage them in constructing their own learning (Manefield et al 2007, p.16) and Fielding notes that this school transformation requires a radical collegiality and blurring in roles to invite enquiry with students as co researchers (1999, p.296, Fielding, 2004).

Voice is then about the power to influence change and leadership (West, 2004, p. 5 Jackson, 2005, in Manefield 2007, p.5).

However the research literature on the individual gifted student’s voice in relation to teaching and learning is rare. (Gallagher, Harradine & Coleman, 1997, in Knight & Becker, 2000). Conversely the literature on student voice and projects involving students generally in their learning is growing. This would assume that gifted students are being consulted as part of the wider student body whether identified or not but also supports the view that “the gifted” are a marginalised group of individuals and as such are often
in invisible or unheard (Nieto, 1994, in Corbett & Wilson 1995, p. 396). This may partly be by the nature of their giftedness which can result in them being more vulnerable to criticism and hostility from teachers and others (Gross, 1993, in Kirby & Townsend, 2002, Yewchuk, 1999, p. 37) and therefore not sought out for interviews, as well as perhaps having articulate and perhaps critical views of their teachers and their teaching. A study by Kirby and Townsend (2002) into gifted students who were either accelerated or not, found that in explaining the difference in attitude toward acceleration between teachers and learners, accelerated students took the perspective of the learner and non accelerated students took the perspective of the teacher. Kirby and Townsend supposed that being accelerated heightened awareness of personal fluctuations in boredom and so they had greater learner empathy. Perhaps the others were using “institutional voices” and were not speaking about themselves directly (Kiegelmann, 2007 in Dillon p 5). Gifted individuals can be “hiding” in classrooms. For example extremely gifted children will often conform for peer acceptance and so conceal their special interests or abilities in class (Gross, 2000). Given that there are documented issues with some gifted students masking their abilities for various reasons it would be interesting to see if speaking out would be too risky for some or if in fact the opportunity to speak up safely would help to identify needs more accurately in intellectually gifted students. (Gross 1989) Greene (p 531, 1994 in Hertzog 2003) claims qualitative studies “give voice to the normally silenced and can poignantly illuminate what was typically masked.”

**What the research says the students say**

Chessman (2007) notes that an important consideration is the match between task complexity and the level of student skill. This is the concept of “flow” or optimal engagement. (Csikszentmihalyi, 1987 in Van Tassel-Baska, 1993, p. 366). In 1993 Csikszentmihalyi conducted a “complex and multifaceted qualitative study of adolescents and schooling” (Tomlinson et. al, 2003 p. 9). The outcomes showed that when tasks were too simple or too difficult the students disengaged. Tasks that are too easy cause boredom and tasks that are too difficult cause frustration (National Research Council 1999 p. 49 in Tomlinson et al) Furthermore, Csikszentmihalyi’s (1978) research on intrinsic motivation suggested that the central requirement is useful feedback to the person, demonstrating
meaningful challenges are being met through their actions. (Hoekman et.al, 1999). Another study on perfectionism in gifted students showed that overall, the majority of the participants, regardless of their type of perfectionism, indicated a decrease in their perfectionism as a result of a rigorous academic environment. (Speirs Neumeister, et. al 2007). Feldhusen and Kroll (1991 in Bain et al 2007) gathered empirical evidence from children directly concerning boredom related to the lack of challenge. They compared more than 200 academically talented kindergarten and elementary students and 200 students not identified as academically talented, they found no difference between the groups in reported levels of boredom. However, the academically talented group often failed to maintain initial positive attitudes toward learning without appropriate challenges. Their level of intellectual giftedness is however not included in the study so it isn’t clear if this was factor in the outcomes.

Gifted learners “are often intellectually capable of understanding adult situations but remain powerless to create effective change” (Yewchuk1999). Gifted students want leadership activities that are meaningful, and some real responsibility. (Wade & Putnam 1995 in Manefield et. al, 2007 p9) Authentic decision making opportunities for all students, means a constructivist approach to learning (Bruner, 1996 in Manefield et. al 2007, p4) where active conversations engage students in designing and taking responsibility for their own learning. Recent research confirms that students need the opportunity to clarify feelings beliefs and experiences as well as inform teachers of their learning needs. (Casey 1996, Elbaz 1993 in Knight and Becker 2000).

Challenge and choice were concerns listed by students in the Gentry el al (2002) study. Without the student making the choice to learn, no learning can occur. (Schultz 2003) Vialle and colleagues (2001) found that students wanted pretests, compacting, choices, and student centered learning, enrichment/extension and support but what teachers provided was teacher directed learning. In this study there was a direct contrast between gifted student preferences and teacher provision and the students reported that even once accelerated there was no differentiation and so was more of an administrative than pedagogical solution for them. (p.6). In other examples when the curriculum was challenging there were options and student voice in design and delivery of programs.
(Vialle et. al 2001) This study concluded the absolute importance of attending to individual differences including social and emotional needs of each student. (p7) Hertzog (2003) found evidence to suggest that many students feel negatively about being separated into gifted groups to take more challenging coursework. Most students in the study expressed a frustration about being part of a “gifted group”, as if it was a type of label. Hertzog reported that the finding was particularly true for students who were placed in separate classrooms within a school, but still attended general classes for some periods of the day. Highly able students may suffer from the “sucker effect”, where they feel exploited as tutors of the less able, held back and less productive (Robinson, 1990; Ross & Smyth, 1995 in Campbell et. al 2005).

Hertzog (2003) raised additional concerns over the effects of ability grouping on the level of education. Students indicated that they felt teachers in their gifted classes were better teachers, more enthusiastic and more experienced than their teachers of general classes. Respondents indicated that they felt teachers were happier when teaching gifted classes, as the students were more willing to learn and were more likely to do their homework. In comparison, Adams-Byers et al (2004) found in their study that gifted and talented students differ in their desire to participate in mixed-ability groups and concluded that a school should include a broad range of grouping options for gifted and talented students. Although most participants preferred to be grouped with other identified gifted students for educational purposes, a portion of the students preferred to maintain contact with their non-gifted friends during the school day. Outcomes from this study also included recommending further research into determining if there is a way to anticipate which students will perform best in homogeneous instructional settings and which will be better served by heterogeneous programs including if the degree of intellectual giftedness make a difference. Are students who possess an ability level far from the mean more inclined to prefer homogeneous grouping than gifted students whose ability levels are closer to that of the average student and does this have more to do with personality than with levels of giftedness? (Adams-Byers et al 2004).
Further research

Case study is a form of qualitative research which allows us to hear the voices of gifted persons and include them in the gifted education discourse (Mendaglio 2003). However, gifted education continues to favor quantitative inquiry (Coleman et. al 2007). According to Coleman et. al (2007) from 1996 to 2000, the state of qualitative research flourished. In education research generally more qualitative studies were produced. It is interesting that in gifted education, underserved groups received the most attention such as twice exceptional, minorities, gender identity, and underachievement. Between 2001 and 2003, topics became more diversified but overall this research has emphasized children in school who are underserved and we now know more about them but not necessarily from their individual perspective. A relatively small number of people have been studied and much of the research is from the outsider perspective. The insider perspective, the meanings of people who are gifted and talented as well as those who teach, counsel, and parent the gifted and talented, is urgently needed. In addition, the interaction of curriculum, student, teacher, and program from varying perspectives is an untouched area of inquiry. More research is needed in all these areas by Coleman et. al (2007).

“What can we do to support educators in developing the skill and will to teach for each learner’s equity of access to excellence in today’s inclusive schools? (Tomlinson, 2003) The answer may be to ask our students or, ask them which questions we should be asking. (Sebba, 2007 p38). One of the notable aspects of the Manitoba School Improvement project has been the belief that having students shape the questions that need to be asked in their schools and then collect, analyse and present the results provides students with a powerful voice. (Manefield et. al, 2007, p. 41) There is definitely an opportunity here for researchers to enlist gifted students to co research these ideas in their schools.

Few investigators have studied heterogeneity within gifted populations. (Chessman 2007) In a study by Shaywitz et al. (2001) the behaviour of boys was compared from a mildly to moderately gifted group, a highly gifted group, a learning disabled group and a non-gifted average group and found that the highly gifted group, rather than the mildly gifted, showed behaviours similar to the learning disabled group. They concluded that these findings
supported the view that there is ‘socially optimal intelligence’ (Hollingworth, 1926, 1942) and have implications for identification and placement of students in mixed ability classrooms who have high intellectual ability. (1:1000-1:10000, Gross 200)

The research does not appear to yet have a line of inquiry into gifted student voice in terms of active political participation in their own education programs in inclusive schools, but more case studies about lived experiences are occurring.

VanTassel-Baska and Johnsen (2007 p7) state in their vision of teacher education standards in the field of gifted education for the 21st century, that teachers should “give students a voice in their learning process” (Hughes, 1999; Kanevsky & Keighley, 2003). Karen Rogers (2007) synthesized the research on educational practice in gifted and talented education and she clearly summarises the outcomes into five main recommendations. Overarching these recommendations is her argument that the gifted learner should be reconceptualised as an idiosyncratic individual rather than one of “the gifted” to ensure appropriate services are developed. However, strangely her article contains “the gifted” in the title.” (Lessons Learned about Educating the Gifted and Talented: A Synthesis of the Research on Educational Practice.”) It seems that, in the intellectually gifted student, we have not tapped the resource we are so keen in the field to advocate to others. Schultz (2003) sees that most of the research conducted in schools “considers students as a raw material in the education process rather than viable stakeholders having varied ability levels, free will or power to choose performance level.”

Schultz also warns that due to the complexity of a classroom environment makes it difficult to “holistically define just what is taking place for each person in the setting.” (2003)

Fraser (1986) stated classroom interactions should be documented from the perspectives of each stakeholder group when examining learning. This is seen as the way to ensure that researchers document the multifaceted meaning making experiences of individuals involved in the setting. (Davis & Rimm, 1998; Kulik, 1992 Rogers 1991 in Schultz 2003).

Within the five lessons, Rogers includes the needs for daily challenge in the specific areas of talent and she explains the role of mentoring in focusing this development. If it is daily challenge then this has major implications for the mixed ability classroom and indeed any program in which the student is involved. Challenge, acceleration, independent learning, grouping and instructional differentiation were the most common research studies Rogers found, which she developed into her “lessons”. Rogers also notes however that where
student preferences were included it did not always synchronise with expected academic achievement unless there are trained teachers collaborating with the student and others. In the case of individual intellectually gifted students the degree of their giftedness is a significant factor in the research when it is in the high to profound category. The more different to the average students they are in their intellectual ability the more different provision they may need to the regular classroom setting where age peers exist. The next step in the curriculum pathway is to individualize the differentiated curriculum to become responsive to each gifted student. (Kaplan 2009)

So, one way to know what gifted students experience in their classrooms is to ask them. However in the gifted education literature generally, it is not easy to find the voices of teachers or students who are participating in gifted programming and recommendations are often directed primarily toward administrator concerns" (Callahan 2000 p. 539 in Matthews & Kitchen, 2007). The perceptions and expectations students hold—especially gifted adolescents—have been sparsely examined in the literature (Gallagher & Rogge, 1966; Hansford & Hattie, 1982; Marsh & Shavelson, 1985; Raph, Goldberg, & Passow, 1966; Shavelson & Bolus, 1982; Shore, Cornell, Robinson & Ward, 1991; Whitmore, 1980; Wylie, 1961, 1970; Zilli, 1971 in Schultz 2003). Swiatek and Lupkowski-Shoplik (2003) studied students who scored in the top 5% of students their age and many students reported no gifted program participation. 37% of the students reported that they were involved in no in-school gifted program, and 75% reported no form of acceleration. The most common type of general programming reported was the pull-out program, which may not be sufficient to meet the needs of highly gifted individuals (Feldhusen, 1997; Winner, 1997). Pullout programs may be as minimal as 1 or 2 hours per week (Cox, Daniel, & Boston, 1985; U.S. Department of Education, 1993), and the gifted program curriculum is often unrelated to the core academic curriculum (Schiever & Maker, 1997 in Swiatek and Lupowski-Shoplik 2003 p. 11)

**Implications**

In an inclusive setting it is important to listen to the voices of all those within the school community to ensure the “insider perspective” is included. Borland (2003a in Matthews &
Kitchen 2007). More research is needed in all these areas” (Coleman et. al 2007).

Callahan (1992) proposed that qualitative program evaluation strategies were needed to determine individual responses to individual intervention situations. (Hertzog 2003 p. 121)

Inclusive mainstream schools and intellectual giftedness need not be mutually exclusive. The literature shows room for improvement in the study of intellectual giftedness in individual students and how they experience learning. The gap between what we say and what we actually provide in schools needs to be addressed by further first hand evidence including student voice. Researchers need to work more closely with gifted students as co researchers. The diversity in our schools demands that we respond flexibly and openly to the many different students and their ways of being gifted. It is important that schools define with their communities what they mean by giftedness, inclusion and voice because individuals learn in community. Learning is a social, emotional and intellectual activity and cannot be done entirely alone. Intellectually gifted students say they need independent learning and time with like-minded peers. They say they need pace and they need depth; they need choices and they need mentoring. Intellectually gifted students have the potential to personalize their educational experiences significantly by being supported to develop their individual voices and internal motivation. Part of the way forward in beginning to transform thinking and practice in schools may be to use a more reflexive approach with gifted students. In an inclusive school we need to work collaboratively in a multidisciplinary way not in isolation and this approach will benefit research into the individual gifted students learning experiences. There needs to be more connection made between teaching, learning, and giftedness and how growing this benefits the whole school community. The mixed ability classroom is part of a continuum of services to meet the educational needs of intellectually gifted children but not the only location. Case studies into levels of differentiation required for individuals and how this is best assessed at the individual school level would benefit the range of students who need a differentiated approach to their life long learning.
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