GTIP Think Piece –Gifted and talented (Jane Ferretti)

Making provision for gifted and talented students, and more recently personalised learning, have become important elements of government education policy. Jane Ferretti (University of Sheffield) provides some background information about the development of these policies and looks at some issues they raise. She suggests ways in which PGCE Tutors might highlight issues to do with identification of 'gifted' geographers and ways for teachers to challenge the 'most able'.

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Introduction
Meeting the needs of the 'most able' students is no longer considered to be an optional extra but something that all teachers are required to do as a matter of equity. Academically able students, as with all students, 'have a right to an education that is suited to their particular needs and abilities. They need to be presented with work that challenges, stretches and excites them on a daily basis, in an environment that celebrates excellence and is supportive.' (DfES, 2005)

Since 1997 when the new government put Gifted and Talented firmly on their education agenda with the establishment of the Gifted and Talented Advisory Group (GTAG), teachers have been expected to identify and provide challenges for this group of students. More recently the 2005 White Paper, Higher Standards: Better Schools for All, set out the Government's ambition that every student - gifted and talented, struggling or average - should have the right to personalised support to reach the limits of their capability (DfES, 2005).

In line with the White Paper, the new QTS standards (TDA, 2007) no longer make specific reference to 'the more able' but instead refer to personalised learning and the need to provide opportunities for all learners to achieve their potential. The following quotation, however, emphasises the Government's continued support of Gifted and Talented initiatives:

'It is inconceivable that a school can claim to be taking forward the personalisation agenda seriously without having a robust approach to gifted and talented education.'
(Rt Hon. Jacqui Smith MP, Minister of State, Schools and 14–19 Learners, January 2006)

The key questions that should be considered when introducing PGCE geography students to working with gifted and talented learners are:

- What national initiatives have been used to focus attention on 'more able' students, and what are the expectations for schools and teachers?
- What is meant by the terms 'gifted' and 'talented'?
• How are gifted and talented students identified in school, and what characteristics might we expect in a 'more able' geographer?
• How can 'more able' geographers be challenged in lessons?

What national initiatives have focused attention on more
Since the establishment of GTAG in 1997 there have been a wide range of government initiatives, the most significant being:
• Excellence in Cities (EiC)
• Aimhigher
• The establishment of the National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth (NAGTY)
• Responsibility for the national programme for Gifted and Talented Youth has recently passed to the CfBT Educational Trust, (formerly named the Centre for British Teachers)

Excellence in Cities
Excellence in Cities (EiC) was launched in 1999 as an attempt to put extra funding into schools in the most disadvantaged areas of the country. Initially only large urban areas were included but later other areas of under-achievement and poverty, not in the main conurbations, were also designated as EiC areas. Substantial amounts of funding were made available to schools and targeted at specific initiatives including Learning Mentor Schemes, Learning Support Units in schools, City Technology Colleges and of course Gifted and Talented provision. At first only secondary schools were included but later primary schools also became eligible for funding. EiC eventually included 1,300 maintained secondary schools in 58 local education authorities.

In terms of Gifted and Talented students, EiC schools were expected to:
• Develop a whole school policy for their most able students
• Appoint a Gifted and Talented co-ordinator, and fund their training
• Identify 5-10% of students in each year group as Gifted and Talented
• Provide an appropriate programme of work both within the school day and beyond and set aspirational targets for the G and T cohort and individual students
• Work with other schools in a cluster to provide support
• Work with other agencies such as Universities, Aimhigher and businesses to enhance provision

When OFSTED reported on Excellence in Cities in 2005 they found provision for gifted and talented students was mostly good with some excellent practice and that the initiative had been promoted and developed well in a large majority of schools they visited. (OFSTED 2005)

Although EiC was only available to some schools and some Education Authorities, many others followed the same guidelines, developed a gifted and talented policy, appointed a co-ordinator and began to identify and make provision for the most able.

The Education White Paper: Higher Standards, Better Schools for All, which was published in October 2005, makes it clear that 'the Government's ambition is that every student, gifted and talented, struggling or average should have the right personalised support to reach the limits of their capability. For gifted and talented students, this means better stretch and challenge in every classroom and in every school with opportunities to further their particular talents outside school at a local and national level.' (DfES, 2005)
Beyond this the White Paper emphasises that more able students from disadvantaged backgrounds should have particular support. The commitments outlined in the White Paper are:

- A trained 'leading' teacher for gifted and talented education in every secondary school and for clusters of primary
- Improved identification and tracking of gifted and talented students’ attainment and performance through a new National Register
- A new national programme of extended day non-residential summer schools developed through partnership between higher education institutions and specialist schools
- Up to £1 million (plus match funding) to be targeted towards vulnerable G&T learners, for example BME learners and looked after children
- Development of tools and guidance to help schools to more effectively identify, teach and support gifted and talented learners from black and minority ethnic backgrounds.

Schools themselves are expected: to have an agreed process for identifying gifted and talented students, using both quantitative and qualitative methods, and to ensure that staff understand and use it; keep accurate records; to review the cohort regularly and to evaluate their own performance using the National Quality Standards in Gifted and Talented Education.

In 2006 EiC funding ended, however by that time most schools, within EiC areas and beyond, had developed strategies for identifying their most able students and beginning to address their needs. It was hoped that these initiatives would have become embedded in schools and that Education Authorities were fulfilling their responsibilities to provide and evaluate provision for the most able.

From September 2006 all secondary schools were required to indicate which of their students were gifted and talented in their School Census return, and to update this each term. This will be extended to Primary Schools in 2007. Schools were also encouraged to register eligible students with NAGTY (see below). Data from the School Census return is being used to compile the National Register as outlined in the White Paper which aims to include the country’s top 5% of students and will be used to track these students through school and into Higher Education.

**Aimhigher**

Aimhigher is a national programme run by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) with support from the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DfCSF) which aims to widen participation in higher education by raising aspirations and developing abilities of people from under-represented groups in Higher Education. It is part of the broad widening participation initiative and is significant in that this provides funding in schools, some of which may be focused on gifted students.

**National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth (NAGTY)**

NAGTY was established in 2002 at Warwick University and is a government funded initiative which offers support to the most able 5% of the school population and their teachers and parents. NAGTY runs weekend courses and summer schools for students in many subjects, including geography, at universities and Field Studies centres across the country, and provides online activities and forums. It also offers CPD for teachers, including a PGCE+ programme and it is involved in research into Gifted and Talented provision. In 2006 NAGTY took on the co-ordination of the National Register for gifted and talented students. Responsibility for the National Programme for Gifted and Talented Education, however, has now being taken forward by the CfBT Education Trust.
CfBT Education Trust
Since 2007 the management of the National Programme for Gifted and Talented Education has been 'outsourced' by the (DFCSF) and is now the responsibility of CfBT. They have renamed the programme Young, Gifted & Talented (YG&T) and established nine excellence hubs, led by higher education institutions, which will focus on outreach provision to gifted and talented learners for example master classes, non-residential summer schools, specialist subject activities and blended/online learning across the school year.

Provision in schools
Teachers need a range of strategies to encourage the 'most able' to work to their full potential. One way to address this issue is for teachers to differentiate more effectively, particularly for their higher achieving students. Differentiation needs to go beyond simply providing a task sheet which has extra questions for those who finish first and teachers need to plan ways in which to intervene to enable gifted students to reach their potential. It is clear that simply adding 'more of the same' as an extension exercise at the end of a work sheet is not appropriate to challenge these students who may need much less practice to acquire skills or understand concepts. Exercises which ask for yet more examples of using six figure grid references will not challenge those who can do it first time round. These students do not want, or need, to be given more work simply to keep them quiet while others catch up.

Suggested activities for PGCE sessions
A sequence of activities, which were devised to take place in a half day PGCE session, can be downloaded here:

Activities (51k)
A set of further discussion points, together with some further references and information about the gifted and talented initiative, written by Professor John White, can be downloaded below:

Further Discussion Points (34k)

Bibliography


DFES (2005)


Ferretti, J (Ed) (2007 forthcoming) Meeting the Needs of Your Most Able students: Geography,
London: Routledge.


**Links**

*CfBT Education Trust*

The [QCA National Curriculum](http://www.qca.org.uk) site is source of both generic and subject specific advice