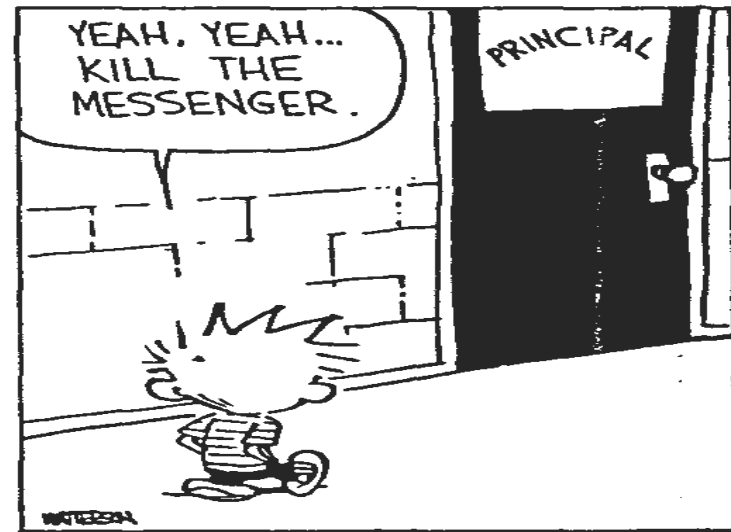
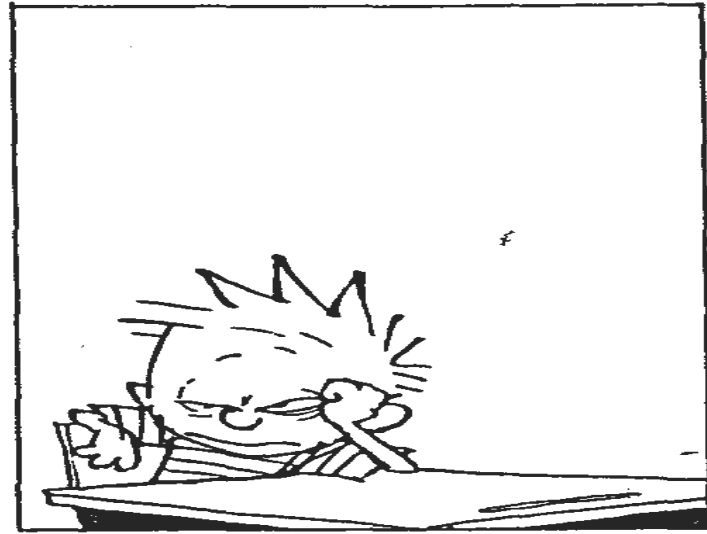


Gifted boys' understanding of their school experience

Jenny Smith
University of Canterbury
New Zealand



Bill Watterson (1992) The Indispensable Calvin and Hobbes.
Great Britain: Universal Press Syndicate



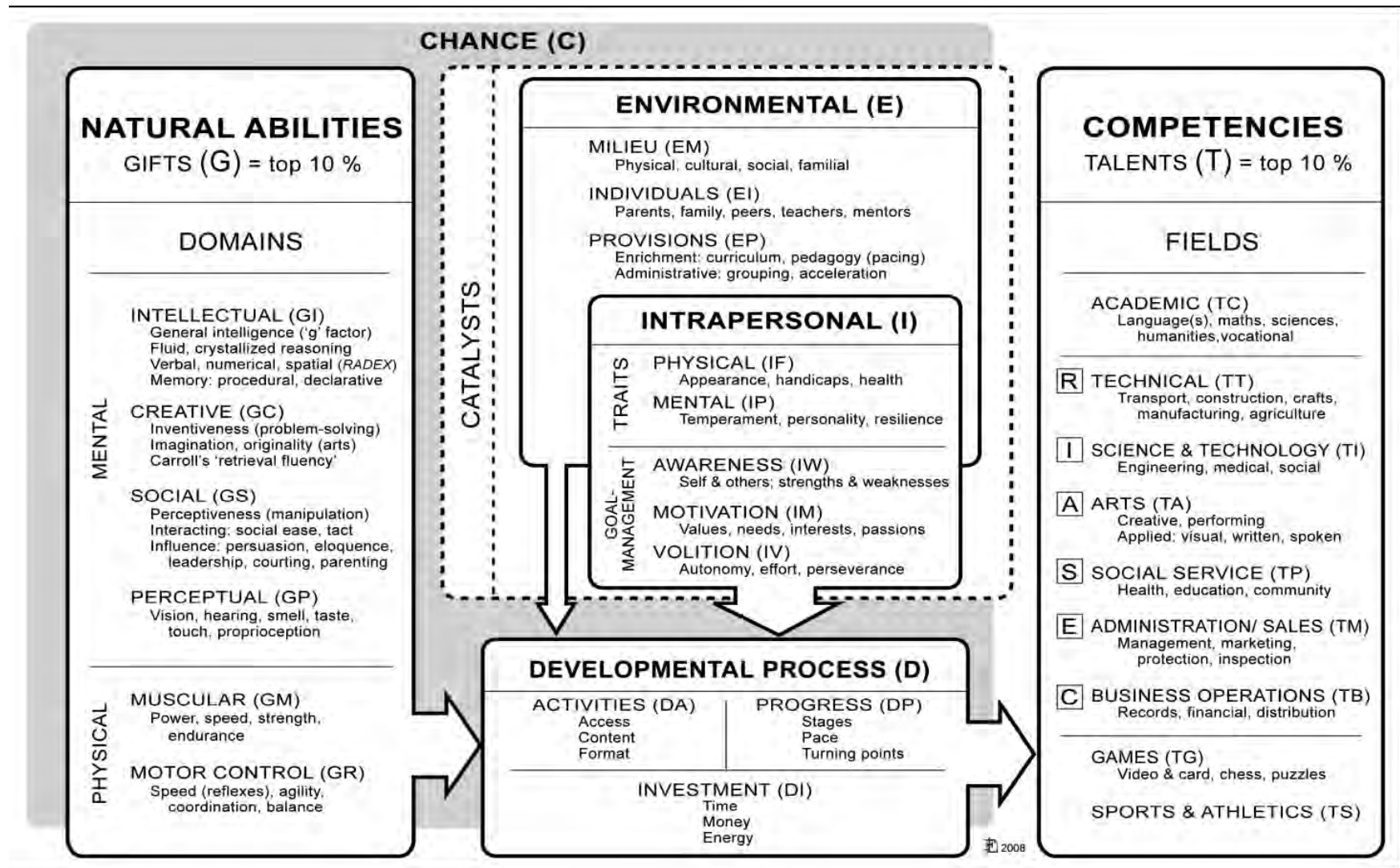
What do we mean by gifted and talented?

Gifted learners are those that show the potential for performance beyond that which is typical for their age in any field of endeavour.

Talented learners are those whose performance puts them at the very top of their field of endeavour.

Gagne's Developmental Model of Giftedness and Talent

2010



Reasons for interest in gifted boys.

Long time personal and professional interest in gifted children.

Experience with teaching gifted boys.

Anecdotal reporting by teachers and parents of issues for gifted boys in their engagement in school.

International concern about the education of boys.

Lack of research material from boys' perspectives.

Research findings on boys in education relevant to giftedness and talent.

Classroom behaviours of gifted boys in unresponsive programmes resemble those of learning disabled boys - aggression, poor concentration, low task commitment, challenging to the teacher.

Shaywitz et al (2001)

“Boy code” for academic boys =

- ❖ keep your head down
- ❖ cope with bullying
- ❖ suppress emotions

Pollack (1999)

Boys connect high achievement and academic study with femininity.

They differentially manage their success in the formal 'academic' school and their status (high or low) in the 'social' school.

High achievers often

- ❖ avoid 'studious' behaviour
- ❖ play down achievements
- ❖ disrupt by being off task and using humour
- ❖ won't talk seriously about school issues
- ❖ ridicule girls

- ❖ maintain self identity as a high achiever through being in a school with other high achievers
- ❖ have strong joint interests with other boys (sport, role playing games)
- ❖ ignoring bullying
- ❖ gain strength through close friendships with other bright boys
- ❖ use an array of strategies and techniques to avoid “sissy” and “geek” labels in an ongoing struggle to establish the right to be themselves - they live underground most of the time though.

Renold, E. (2001) Learning the hard way; Boys, hegemonic masculinity and the negotiation of learner identities in the primary school. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*

Gifted and talented boys

have more limited choices

have self-concept problems which confound participation in gifted programmes

suffer peer bullying and ridicule so hide their ability

with more strongly macho models and expectations were more at risk in school from internal conflict between satisfaction with academic aspects and successes which lead to a rejection of self

do not have permission to deal publicly with social and emotional issues

are susceptible to unhappiness, frustration and aggression -
behaviour extremes that schools find hard to deal with.

need close mother-son relationships without over protection or
pressure

need supportive father-son relationships with good emotional as
well as physical and practical connections

have too many options in high school for careers which creates
choice issues

love competition - regardless of others' views

James Alvino (1991)

Jenny Smith
University of Canterbury College of Education

Conclusions from Smart Boys: Talent, Manhood, and the Search for Meaning.

Kerr, B. & Cohn, S. (2001). Great Potential Press

Most gifted boys are characterised by intensity, curiosity and high activity levels.

Asynchronous development can lead to difficulties with emotional expressiveness, peer relationships and athletics.

Although most gifted boys are well adjusted, they do experience conflicts between expectations of masculinity and their love of learning.

Preschool boys may benefit more from an enriched preschool environment than from staying home with a parent.

Gifted boys can often suffer an “intellectual death” in late primary school when they refuse to do homework or complete classroom tasks. They need careful monitoring of homework and more challenge in class.

Gifted boys need help in expressing emotions, support for non-traditional activities and interests, and encouragement in discovering their true selves.

Although underachieving gifted boys have more in common with underachievers in general than with other gifted students, there are important differences.

Underachieving gifted boys may be socially immature, may experience more emotional problems, may engage in antisocial behaviour and may have low self concepts.

However it is also true that they may have a deep need for understanding of the world and themselves, a thirst for knowledge and the capacity to change negative behaviours when intellectually challenged.

It is necessary to consider the full range of hypotheses about underachieving behaviour before choosing an intervention.

Interventions for underachievement include retesting or reinterpretation of the test by someone trained in the understanding the traits of gifted individuals, proper academic placement and counselling or mentoring.

Existential counselling focused of on the discovery of meaning and purpose is often helpful.

2004 Pilot Study

12 Year 3 and Year 6 boys in focus group interviews.

2005

34 Year 6 and Year 8 boys complete a questionnaire and in individual interviews were asked to elaborate on selected questionnaire items.

2010

19 Year 6 and 8 boys completed the 2005 questionnaire and were interviewed. Comparisons between the 2005 and 2010 questionnaires and trends emerging from their interviews were analysed to determine if there are any significant differences in experience. (Due to two severe earthquakes and the closing of schools for a number of weeks in both September 2010 and February/March 2011 the data collection at this point is not complete.)

Understandings of Giftedness

Strong belief in a success criteria - performance was seen as a determinant of giftedness.

Giftedness was in comparison with others.

Academic focus was strong though boys quickly accepted other areas of giftedness, especially sport.

Understandings of giftedness

A Yr 6

I think that it means that people have better abilities compared to other people. Means that generally they're more interested to get on with the stuff they like to higher levels rather than hang back and just wait for a life.

S Yr 6

Which is more intelligent than the other people. Like when people say: Oh you're in the brainy class eh? I say: No I'm not. I'm just in the class with the people of a slightly higher intellectual capacitance.

Statement Agreement

	Agree	Disagree
School is the best place to learn.	66%	14%
Teachers think that I am one of the best students.	57%	4%
The harder the work the more interesting it is.	52%	13%
I like tests.	43%	31%
I like group work.	54%	26%
Teachers should tell us what to learn.	20%	43%
I find school work very boring.	15%	40%
I learn well in any group.	44%	46%

	Agree	Disagree
I prefer to make my own choices when learning.	80%	4%
I like to do extension work.	83%	4%
I have subjects I love to learn about.	93%	0%
I prefer to write about things than talk about things	50%	17%
I like teaching things to other people.	50%	17%
I spend a long time working on subjects I like.	69%	9%
I always try to do my best work.	87%	4%

*Lessons Learned About Educating the Gifted and Talented:
A Synthesis of the Research on Educational Practice*

Karen Rogers

Gifted Child Quarterly Volume 51 Number 4 Fall 2007 382-396

**Provide opportunities for gifted learners to socialize
and to learn with like-ability peers**

As Sternberg (1986) exhorted, we must give intellectually gifted and talented youngsters the chance to feel they are making “progress” in their learning; all kinds of problems begin to occur when they must sit year after year repeating what they have previously mastered—from reticence to cognitive risks (Rogers, 1986), to underachievement (Colangelo & Assouline, 1995), to lowered academic self-esteem (Hoekman et al., 1999), and to social and behavioral maladjustments (Peters, Grager-loidl, & Supplee, 2000).

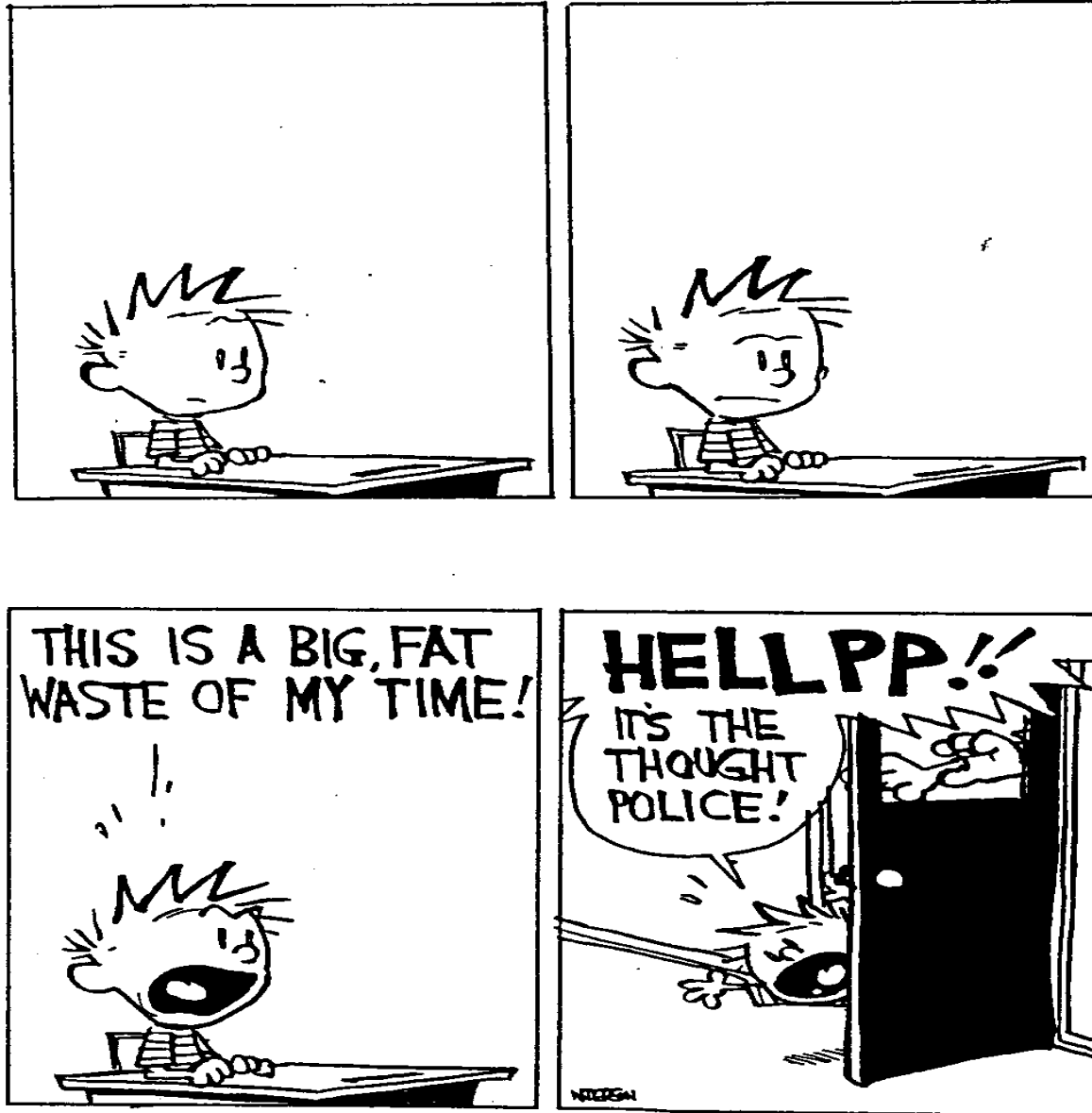
Research on Instructional Delivery

From Rogers, Karen. (2002) *Reforming gifted education*. Arizona: Great Potential Press Inc.

Group Learning

Gifted and talented students tend to mistrust the benefits of small group learning: care must be taken that the tasks demonstrate that the group can do better than the individual.

Gifted and talented students perform significantly more highly when the majority of their time is spent in true peer interactions (academic core areas only).



I learn best in group work when

- 87% I am with people of the same ability.
- 59% I am with people with the same interests.
- 54% I am with my friends.
- 35% I am with 3 or less people.
- 30% we have our own jobs to do.
- 22% there is a mix of boys and girls
- 7% the teacher picks the group.
- 6% I am with 4 or more people.

Mixed Ability Groups

A Yr 6

I don't actually get to do any learning. It's more me who does the teaching in those sort of groups. I seem to help other people rather than try and help myself. It's nothing much really I can do with such a wide range of abilities.

G Yr 6

Yes, it's kind of annoying when, like, you're with somebody and they kind of, really slow the group down because they're kind of - it's not their fault but they're kind of getting behind everybody and you have to wait for them.

P Yr 6

Because people that are slow. You know they don't work very fast. I seem to go ahead and I do all the stuff and they just sit there.

M Yr 8

Well, I get quite bored because I don't usually have anyone to talk to.

D Yr 8

If I'm more near the top then I'll try to take control more. To try to get them to keep up. Sometimes if they don't know what to do and I do they go "Oh you write it out or you do it" or something. ...I feel that's putting too much pressure on me and then they're not doing anything. It's supposed to be group work not, like, individual.

K Yr 6

Because we're all at the same level and we're all not having to catch up or wait for other people.

Same Ability Groups

S Yr 6

... you don't have as many arguments. And I guess it is easier to make choices with it. They motivate me I guess. And they help me work faster.

F Yr 8

Well sometimes if you are the brightest person there you kind of feel you're doing all the work sometimes. And no-one else really understands what you are trying to do.

T Yr 6

Because we basically all have the same idea. We all have the same ability and it makes it a lot easier. But we still all have different points of views and things.

Co-operative and collaborative groups

Use grouping strategically to enhance engagement and social relationships.

Homogeneous grouping works for the gifted - set an appropriate task for the ability level even if this task may differ from the rest of the class.

Co-operative activities which require independent efforts to be collated together to complete a task act to bridge the skills gap in group work.

Make sure the complexity of the collaborative task is matched to the level of collaborative skills and the achievement levels in the subject area.

Effective teachers of the gifted

From Rogers, K. (2002) *Reforming gifted education*. Arizona: Great Potential Press Inc.

- ❖ High degree of intelligence or intellectual honesty.
- ❖ Expertise in a specific intellectual or talent area.
- ❖ Self-directed in own learning with a love for new advanced knowledge
- ❖ Equanimity, level-headedness, emotional stability
- ❖ A genuine interest in and liking for gifted learners
- ❖ Recognition of the importance of intellectual development
- ❖ Strong belief in individual differences and individualisation
- ❖ Highly developed teaching skill and knowledge.

Effective teachers of the gifted from the learners' point of view.

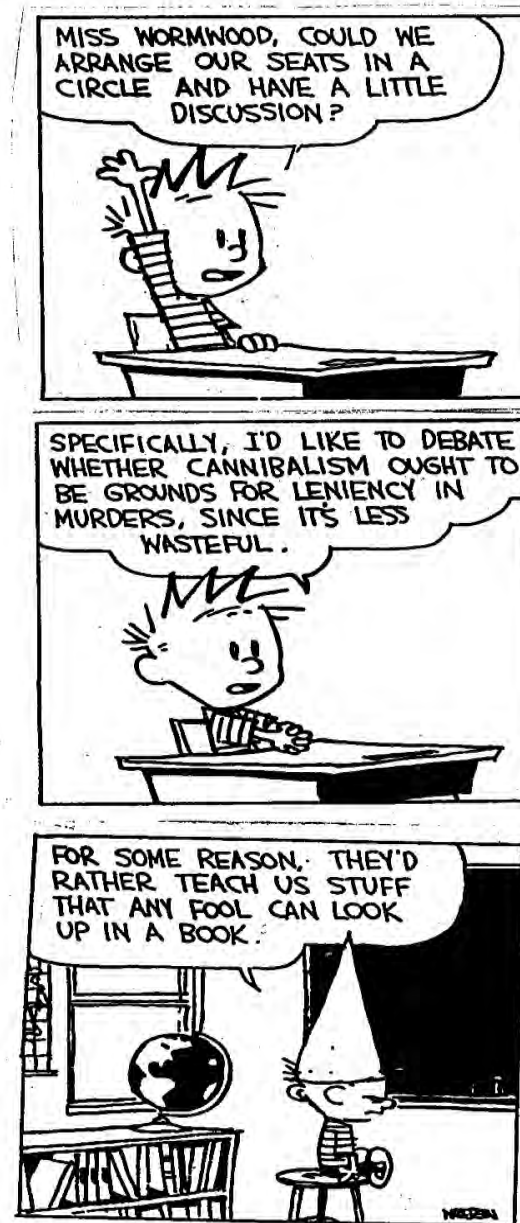
From Rogers, K. (2002) *Reforming gifted education*. Arizona: Great Potential Press Inc.

- ❖ Patient
- ❖ Sense of humour
- ❖ Moves quickly through material
- ❖ Treats each as an individual
- ❖ Doesn't have to be a sage on the stage all the time
- ❖ Consistently gives good feedback.

A teacher I learn well with

- 65% understands my interests.
- 57% has a good sense of humour.
- 50% lets me study at my own pace.
- 44% gives me challenging work.
- 37% lets me choose how I will work.
- 13% is well organised and makes everyone work.
- 13% lets me choose who I will work with.
- 11% tells me how I must do my work.

Bill Watterson (1992) The Indispensable Calvin and Hobbes.
Great Britain: Universal Press Syndicate



Teacher Qualities

A Yr 6:

Like, you need to tell them what you're interested in and so they can see it. Like something's are blatantly obvious like me and my basketball. But other things that maybe they can't see as easily, you need to tell them.

D Yr 8:

I don't like teachers that are straight and you can't joke around or anything. You've got to your work then and there and you can't have a chat or anything.

P Yr 6:

So the kind of teacher - it's really important that the teacher you have understands your thinking and helps you to work. And gives you the challenge to work?

J:Yr 6

'Cause, I guess I - 'cause I feel more comfortable in an environment where someone is happy to make a joke and happy to laugh and won't enforce things heavily with growling and snapping at people but a good sense of humour is definitely one of the main things that I need. I don't need it but I'd like it.

Teacher relationships

The teacher is often the most interesting person in the room so gifted learners often want to hang out with them - use this time to strengthen your relationship with them.

Watch the use of sarcasm - gifted children recognise this as unpleasant at preschool level.

Use humour but not at their expense - just because they understand it doesn't mean they can handle it and often the message this sends to other pupils interferes with peer relationships.

Take it on the chin if they use respectful but personal humour - especially very young children. There is often a stooge in a good comedy act.

- ▶ Make an effort to understand their interests. The occasional reference to this makes a great deal of difference to how accepted they feel.
- ▶ Recognise their need for a differentiated approach from the rest of the class in the pace and content of their learning.
- ▶ Show that you appreciate and respect them (even when this is difficult) as they can often feel alienated and different so support from the teacher makes a great difference when peer relationships are difficult.

*Lessons learned about educating the gifted and talented:
A synthesis of the research on educational practice*

Karen Rogers Gifted Child Quarterly Volume 51 Number 4 Fall 2007 382-396

Opportunities should be provided on a regular basis for gifted learners to be unique and to work independently in their areas of passion and talent

A synthesis of the research on gifted learning styles (Rogers, 2002) showed that ahead of all other forms of instructional delivery, when compared to regular learners, gifted learners are significantly more likely to prefer independent study, independent project, and self-instructional materials.

Research on curriculum for the gifted.

Rogers, K. (2002) *Reforming gifted education*. Arizona: Great Potential Press Inc.

Content modifications.

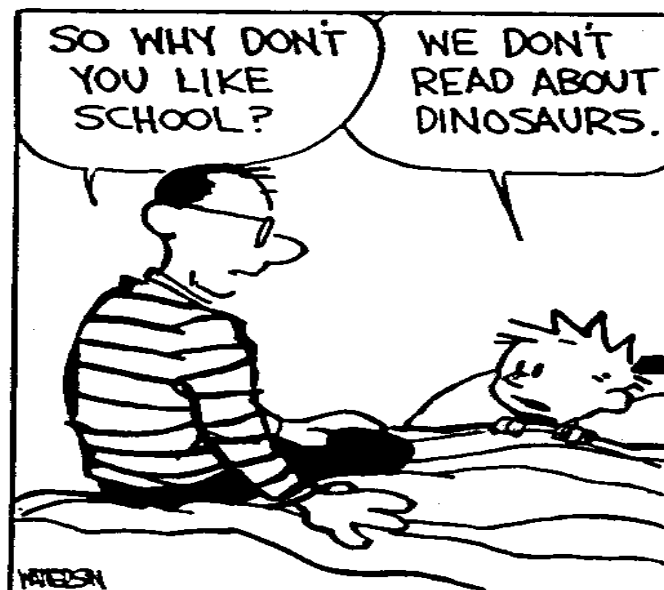
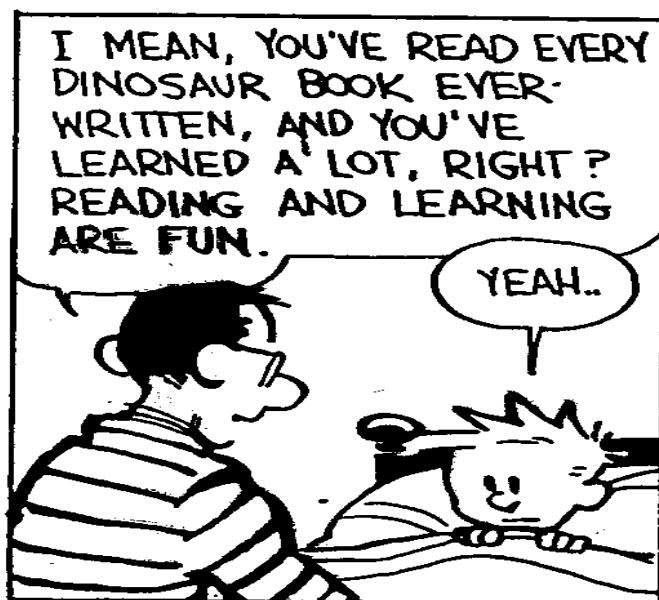
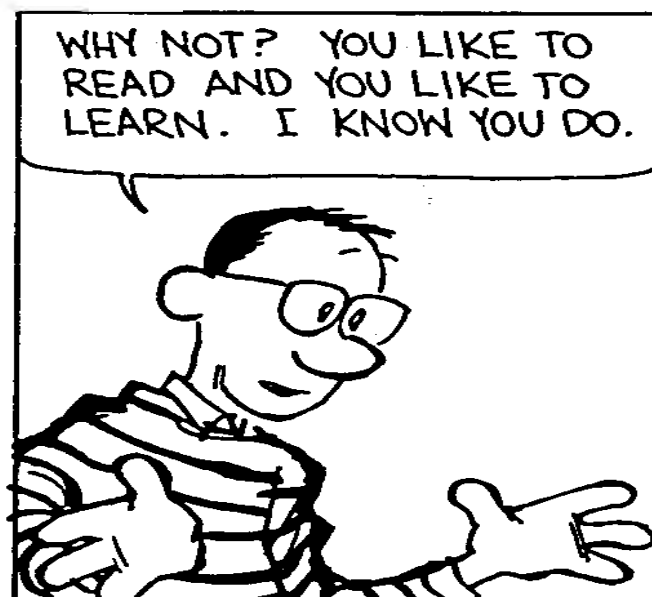
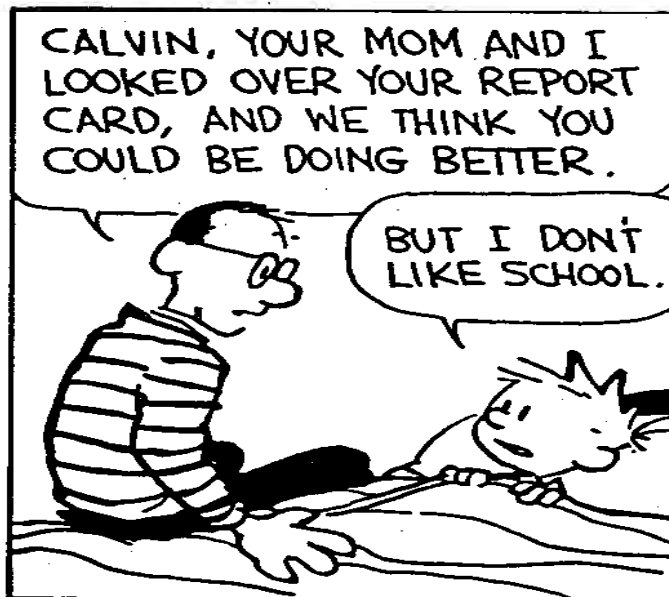
Gifted and talented boys in particular, are motivated by learning the way things work and the ways professionals work.

Gifted and talented learners as decontextualists tend to learn most successfully when they are given the whole concept, in depth, upfront and then allowed to break it down through analysis. Use whole to part concept teaching.

I will do my best work on subjects that

- 93% are an interest of mine
- 52% need technology or equipment
- 39% I already know lots about
- 35% let me solve problems
- 24% are new to me
- 20% are harder than usual
- 17% can be used in real life
- 0% the teacher likes

Bill Watterson (1994) Homicidal Psycho Jungle Cat.
London: Warner Books



Areas of interest

Maths - but at a level significantly above peers

Computers

Animals/insects - scientific, prehistoric and practical issues

Sport - everything

Ancient history - Greek, Egyptian, Roman, prehistoric

History - Plantagenet, Norman, medieval, wars

Reading/Writing fantasy stories

Electronics

Chemistry

Biology

Physics

Technology

Mechanics

Art history

Video making

Quotes on interests

A Yr 8

Yeah, mechanical, archaeology, sport, art history, the world and world's greatest battles and things.

H Yr 6

Stuff like electronics. Yeah, I have about three shoeboxes of electronics at home. When I've got extra money I go into town. I normally ask my dad if I can go to Dick Smiths.

H Yr 8

Cause subjects I don't like I just normally kind of, click off sometimes. We don't really have any law or anything. Anything to do with law. I want to be a lawyer.

M Yr 8

And mainly because I'm thinking about the future. That I don't want - I want to do work that will help me in the future instead of one that won't. Is just for fun or something. I want stuff that will allow me to get on in the future.

J Yr 8

If you're interested you're likely to work more with it. If you're not interested you just do your work quickly but if you're like interested, you take more time to make it better.

Quotations on Content

W Yr 6. *(So which do you prefer, being the best in the middle class or being not the best in the top math's class?)*

Not the best in the top math's class. 'Cause I know I'm doing work that is not too easy. And I'm learning new things. Otherwise it's pointless if you don't learn the things on work.

P Yr 8

You know things that are too easy it's boring. But things that are challenging it's fun.

J Yr 6

I ask the teachers for something harder but they say you need to learn the basics and generally I have to every extent so I don't see what they're saying.

F Yr 8

I enjoy it more because it makes my brain work harder.

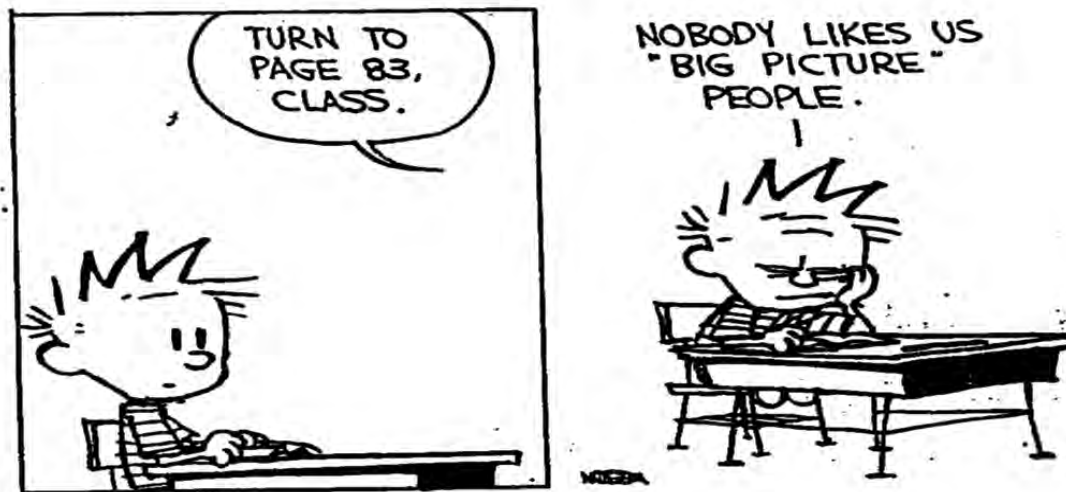
E Yr 8

Well, in class I always get bored if it's really easy. And I seem to get distracted and I don't try my hardest and when it is harder I want to get it done; I want to figure out how to do it and I try harder.

J Yr 8

If it's not a challenge then inevitably I'll make it a challenge. I'll want to go deeper. If I was doing things that were too easy for me continually I think I would maybe leave the school.

Bill Watterson (1992) The Indispensable Calvin and Hobbes.
Great Britain: Universal Press Syndicate



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For specific curriculum areas, instructional delivery must be differentiated in pace, amount of review and practice, and organization of content presentation.

Provide various forms of subject-based and grade-based acceleration to gifted learners as their educational needs require.

The way I like to learn best

- 81% it is about my interests.
- 57% I can work at my own speed.
- 37% I can work on my own.
- 30% it is part of a competition.
- 26% I can present in different ways.
- 26% there are rewards for working well.
- 22% I know I will get good marks.
- 9% I can teach others.

Pace

P Yr 8

Yeah. Because if you have to study at the same pace as the slowest person then that's a bit bad. But if you *are* the slowest person it's better.

R Yr 8

'Cause I'm not really a fast worker so I take quite a long time to do things.

C Yr 6

Well working at your own speed it means you're not getting rushed. And if you have too much time off you never end up actually doing anything.

A Yr 6

Oh, easy I just finish it so early and other people who aren't quite as smart and I have to wait for them for something and I get pretty bored. I get sick of doing early finisher stuff all the time.

M Yr 8

Because I like just choosing how I want to work. Like, if I want to do half an hour of this and half an hour of that and half an hour of that. Then it's easier for me instead of doing one and half hours of this, finishing it and then doing one and half hours of something else and finishing that.

T Yr 8

Yeah, I find it really helpful. Like, I prefer working in short bursts rather than one long period.

A Yr 8:

Usually the teacher sets us all one piece of work. I remember other schools I went to the teacher might say, "Okay, you lot come down onto the mat with me while you guys you go on to FSM page 196, Exercise 4. So that people of lower ability can get what *they* need and if the people of higher ability need any help they can still go down there and ask. But they get what they need as well.

Choice

W: Yr 6

Sometimes you might decide that would be good 'cause you know you'll like it. And you can - even if it's boring work - you can do it the way you want and have fun.

F Yr 6

When we got given a little bit of choice by saying - if we had to draw something we could choose how we're going to draw it. And like, I drew it my own way to make it interesting. And in maths when you have to write something down I write it in a weird font or something.

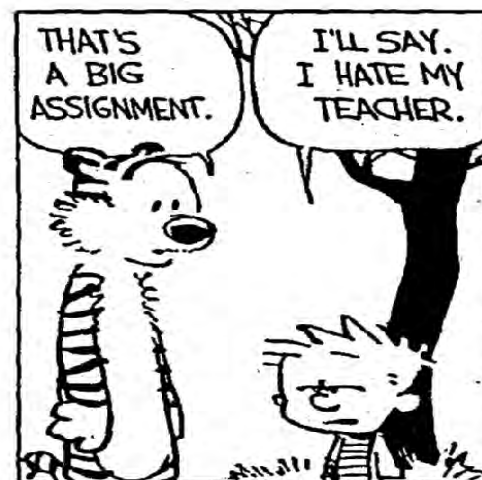
E: Yr 8

Well in class we are doing the enquiry thing. We get to choose what we research on and how we present it and how we go about it and all that. And that's cool. 'Cause that way we don't *have* to present it in the compulsory thing. We don't *have* to do a video; we don't *have* to do anything. We can choose.

Bill Watterson (1992) The Indispensable Calvin and Hobbes.
Great Britain:Universal Press Syndicate



WE'RE SUPPOSED TO RESEARCH OUR SUBJECT, WRITE IT UP, AND PRESENT IT TO THE CLASS WITH A VISUAL AID.



Using interests, pace and choice to motivate and sustain interest

In lessons where learning processes are the key focus look to giving students' choice in the content they study.

When content is the key focus of the lesson ensure that assessment of current knowledge is rigorous so that learning is relevant and authentic.

When combining new learning processes with a required content area allow choices so that the learner can find the optimum context for their own learning. Learning centres and inquiry learning offer this scope.

Strategies for reducing learning and behavioural issues with gifted boys.

Current approaches to personalising, or individualising learning, have given us new understandings on how to reach all learners. For gifted and talented learners these approaches are critical.

Positively harnessing the energy they can bring to their learning by offering more choice, challenge and collaboration with other like minds is preferable to dealing with the underachievement, poor self esteem and behavioural problems that are the result of frustration, boredom and alienation in the regular classroom.

"you think of yourself as normal"

J Yr 8

I can't tell if I'm gifted. I don't think anyone can tell if they're gifted. You have to be told. You can't tell inside yourself that you're gifted because you wouldn't have a clue. You'd be just going on ahead and - because it is your brain-pace - your brain-pace and you don't think of anyone else's you just think of your own and you think of yourself as normal so you can't tell if you're the 'gifted one' because you think you're the 'normal one'. You're the normal - I don't know, I couldn't tell if I was...