Module 1

Professor Miraca U.M. Gross
Welcome to Extension Module 1: Understanding Giftedness Further. In this Module you’ll be introduced to two more models of giftedness, Renzulli’s ‘three-ring’ model and Tannenbaum’s ‘sea star’ model and we will look at the types of gifted student who might be most readily identified by each of these models.

We’ll also explore how different levels of intellectual giftedness can affect both learning and social-emotional development.

We’ll look further at some of the ways in which gifted children learn and the implications of this for our teaching and curriculum planning - and we’ll look a little more deeply at how some of these issues may assist student achievement or possibly lead to underachievement.

Professor Miraca U.M. Gross
# Understanding Giftedness Further

## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Test</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Test Answers</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcomes</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extension Module 1: Part 1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Models of giftedness and talent</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph Renzulli’s ‘three-ring’ model</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abraham Tannenbaum’s ‘sea star’ model</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflective/Practical Component</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extension Module 1: Part 2</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Levels of giftedness</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How gifted children learn</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics of general intellectual giftedness</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betts and Neihart revisited</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflective/Practical Component</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions for Reflection</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References and Further Reading</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. What are the main criticisms that have been levelled at the Renzulli ‘three-ring’ model of giftedness?

2. What are the main similarities between the Tannenbaum, Renzulli and Gagné models of giftedness and in what ways do they differ?

3. Why is it useful to know a child's level of giftedness? How would you respond to a colleague who suggests that this is just labelling a child?

4. It is sometimes suggested that gifted children should not be placed in ability or achievement groups but should remain in the regular classroom as models and mentors for other students. What does research tell us about the effectiveness of this?

5. Are the differences among gifted and regular learners more a difference of degree or of kind?
1. The main criticisms are: Because the Renzulli model is based on the characteristics of creative and productive adults it may fail to identify children who have the potential for high performance but are not yet performing at levels commensurate with their ability. It places too much emphasis on task commitment and may disadvantage gifted students who are demotivated or who have not yet been given work with which they can engage productively. Students who are not creatively gifted may not be identified or may not be admitted to programs.

2. **Similarities:** Both the Gagné and Tannenbaum models recognise the importance of personality and environment in the translation of high ability into high performance. Both recognise that giftedness can be sited in any domain of human ability but acknowledge that there must be some threshold level of intelligence (which may differ from domain to domain) for high potential to become high performance. Both view creativity as a valuable quality and see it as one area in which an individual may be gifted - but unlike Renzulli they don’t see creativity as a necessary ingredient of giftedness.

**Differences:** As just indicated, Renzulli’s perception of creativity as an essential element of giftedness is not shared by the other two scholars. However, Gagné and Renzulli view much larger proportions of the population as gifted (10-15% in Gagné’s model; 15-20% in Renzulli’s) than does Tannenbaum who sees gifted individuals as a very small percentage - young people who have the ability to become ‘critically acclaimed performers’ or ‘exemplary producers’ of things or ideas.

Gagné and Tannenbaum regard motivation (or lack of motivation) as a catalyst which can facilitate or impede the translation of high potential into high performance whereas Renzulli claims that a very specific form of precisely focussed motivation, which he calls ‘task commitment’, is a ‘necessary ingredient’ of giftedness itself.

3. Knowing a student’s level of giftedness can help us understand different aspects of his or her cognitive and socio-affective development. Students at different levels of giftedness may require different curriculum and programming responses. Teachers of other special needs students - for example hearing impaired students - recognise that different levels of a condition require different types of response. Calling a child ‘severely’ hearing impaired or ‘highly’ gifted is not labelling; it is recognising the particular level of the child’s disability or ability and the levels and types of educational response that might be required.
4. In general, students of average academic ability tend not to model on gifted students. Most students are realistically aware that they probably do not have the capacity to perform at levels attained by the very brightest students in the class; therefore they tend not to set personal goals which are unachievable. Instead, students of average ability tend to use, as models of achievable performance, students of approximately their own ability who are doing well in school.

Additionally, gifted students may not be the most effective peer tutors of average ability students. As has been discussed in Core Module 1 and will be discussed further in the present Module, their learning styles are quite different. They process information rather differently from their classmates of average ability. They pass through the stages of learning more speedily, their reasoning can be much more complex and abstract, and they need much less repetition and revision. Some gifted students have little understanding of the ways their age peers of more moderate ability actually learn. When they are asked to assist average ability age-peers, they try to teach them in the ways that they themselves learn and this can actually be quite counter-productive.

5. There are differences in both degree and kind.

There are qualitatively different (difference in ‘kind’) learning characteristics in (a) how time is distributed in solving a problem or completing a task, (b) how thoroughly the gifted learner searches for possible solutions, (c) the kinds of spontaneous relationships the gifted learner identifies, and (d) the form in which new information should be ‘chunked’ or presented for optimal long-term memory storage - gifted learners tend to take in the whole of a concept at one time and then later retrieve it from long-term memory as a whole.

There are quantitative (difference in ‘degree’) differences in (a) the preference for working independently, and (b) the preference for learning something new rather than building on what is already known.

If you were not correct in your answers to these five questions you should benefit from at least some of the information that follows in this Module.

If your answers to all five questions were correct you may not need to complete this Module, though we advise that you still skim-read it to check whether it offers you anything new.

The Specialisation Module offers further information for you to consider on these and other issues in understanding giftedness and gifted students.
Outcomes

At the completion of this extension module you will be able to:

- analyse similarities and differences among three models of giftedness: Renzulli’s ‘three-ring’ model, Tannenbaum’s ‘sea star’ model and Gagné’s Differentiated Model, and evaluate the potential use of each model in your school setting.

- relate the five levels of giftedness to the prevalence of these groups in the population, and appreciate the implications of this for possible underachievement and social isolation.

- plan ways in which you and your colleagues can differentiate the level, pace and degree of complexity of the curriculum you develop for gifted students on the basis of your further understanding of the different ways in which these young people learn.

- expand your understanding of giftedness and the causes of underachievement in gifted students by re-analysing Betts and Neihart’s ‘Profiles’ through the lens of the new knowledge acquired in this Module.
Part 1

Models of giftedness and talent

The model or definition of giftedness which a school adopts will influence both the types of students who will be identified as gifted and the degree to which these students’ needs will be met by the school.

In the Core modules of this Professional Development Course we introduced you to Françoys Gagné’s Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent. The Gagné model has won wide acceptance internationally. It is practical, research-based and teacher-friendly. This model emphasises that talent development is not automatic and that, unfortunately, many gifted students fail to develop their high ability into high achievement.

To recap on what you learned in Core Module 1, the Gagné model defines, as gifted, children or adolescents who have the potential to perform, in some area of human ability, at a level more usually achieved by students some years older. It defines as talented students whose achievement or performance is already at this higher level. The model alerts teachers to the further learning needs of students who are already talented achievers but even more importantly it draws their attention to the needs of gifted underachievers - students who certainly have high ability but who, for some reason, have not yet been able to translate their potential into performance.

By placing the student’s learning at the heart of his model, Gagné puts us, as teachers, in the driving seat. Gagné makes it clear that a child's learning will not progress optimally unless he or she has the ongoing support of the school. As educators, we have the opportunity - and the obligation - to identify the abilities of the gifted students in our classes and schools and to assist these young people to develop these high abilities into high achievements.

In this Extension Module we will examine and evaluate two other conceptions of giftedness - Renzulli’s ‘three-ring’ model and Tannenbaum’s ‘sea star’ model, which look at ability and achievement from somewhat different perspectives from that of Gagné.
Joseph Renzulli’s ‘three-ring’ model of giftedness

The Gagné model was first published in 1985. Before this time, the definition of giftedness which was most influential in Australia was that developed by Joseph Renzulli in the late 1970s.

Since the late 1950s, researchers internationally in gifted education had been emphasising that giftedness comprises much more than just high academic potential. In 1957, American educators DeHaan and Havighurst identified six fields in which high ability should be sought and developed: intellectual ability, creative thinking, scientific ability, social leadership, mechanical skills and talent in the fine arts.

Why the emphasis on scientific ability and mechanical skills? Well, the Russians had just launched Sputnik! America’s supremacy in the space race was being threatened. In response, the USA passed the National Defense Education Act, which encouraged and supported the identification and fostering of young people with special talent in science and maths.

As we know, the Americans put a man on the moon in 1969. Three years later, the United States Office of Education, under its Commissioner of Education, Sidney Marland, altered and expanded DeHaan and Havighurst’s categories of giftedness and talent to reflect the changed priorities. This has become known as the Marland definition:

‘Gifted children are those capable of high performance with demonstrated achievement and/or potential ability in any one of the following areas, singly or in combination:

general intellectual ability
specific academic aptitude
creative or productive thinking
visual and performing arts
leadership ability
psychomotor ability’ (Marland, 1972, p. 2).

The emphasis on the development of science talent had gone. Educators were now encouraged to identify and foster all areas of specific academic ability.

When Renzulli came to develop his own model six years later he wisely affirmed what was now widely accepted - that giftedness was multi-dimensional and could be sited in any area of human ability. However, he placed a new and strong emphasis on the role of creativity and introduced a third factor, which he termed ‘task commitment’ - ‘perseverance, endurance, hard work, dedicated practice, self-confidence and a belief in one’s ability to carry out important work’ (Renzulli, 1986, p. 69). Task commitment is a very specific form of motivation focussed on the task in hand.
How does Renzulli define giftedness?

‘Giftedness consists of an interaction among three basic clusters of human traits - these clusters being above average general abilities, high levels of task commitment and high levels of creativity. Gifted and talented children are those possessing or capable of possessing this composite set of traits and applying them to any potentially valuable area of human performance. Children who manifest or are capable of developing an interaction among the three clusters require a wide variety of educational opportunities or services that are not ordinarily provided through regular instructional programs’ (Renzulli, 1978, p. 261).

At first glance, this definition seems to have the potential for identifying a wider range of children as gifted than does the Gagné model. But it’s not as clear cut as it seems.

Firstly, Renzulli makes it clear, in later writings, that when he is talking about ‘above average’ general abilities, he is not referring to the upper 50% of children. He is referring to the top 15-20% of people in any area of human endeavour (Renzulli, 1986). That’s not very different from Gagné’s 10-15%.

Secondly, Renzulli emphasises that none of the three ‘clusters’ of traits noted above is by itself sufficient to define a child as gifted. Above average ability isn’t enough by itself, nor is creativity, nor is task commitment. ‘It is the interaction among the three clusters that research has shown to be the necessary ingredient for creative/productive accomplishment’ (Renzulli, 1978, p. 182).

Thirdly, as far back as the early 1960s researchers have been aware that above an IQ threshold of 120 - the top 10% of the population - there is virtually no correlation between intelligence and creativity; they are quite different constructs (Getzels & Jackson, 1962). Should we require a child to be gifted in both these unrelated areas before we respond to her learning needs?

Additionally, one of the problems some teachers experience with the Renzulli model is its ambiguity. If it is the interaction between the three ‘necessary ingredients’ that makes giftedness, what about a student who has outstanding ability but who is seriously demotivated and not performing in the classroom? Equally, what about the student who is very bright, academically successful and highly motivated but who has very little creativity - certainly not the ‘high levels’ prescribed by Renzulli. Are these students gifted or aren’t they?
Case Study

Nick had found the last year of primary school rather unrewarding as his teacher was spending a lot of time revising work from previous years so that his students would start high school ‘ready to roll’. He entered his first year of high school full of enthusiasm. However as the weeks passed it became clear that the work in maths, English and social science contained little that was new. His high school had ability grouped classes for gifted students in maths, science and English but these did not start till the following Year and his current mixed ability classes contained quite a number of slower students who really needed the revision the classes were receiving.

Nick resented being placed ‘on hold’ for the second year in succession while the slower students caught up. Fortunately he had established a great relationship with his home room teacher, Mr Sanders, who taught him English and who seemed to share his sense of humour and had some of the same interests. At the start of Term 2 he asked Mr Sanders if he could talk to him about the situation.

Mr Sanders was concerned that such a bright boy was already switching off after only three months in high school. He spoke to the Senior Teachers in charge of the maths, English and social science faculties and they agreed to test Nick on the material that was scheduled to be covered that year in these subjects.

Off-level testing proved a powerful way to find out just how much Nick already knew. He scored 95% on the English test, 90% in maths and
80% in social science. His teachers agreed that this was a pretty good indication that he had already, in April, mastered the Year curriculum in these three subjects and it would be a waste of his time and probably lead to further demotivation, to require him to sit through the rest of the year. After discussions with Nick's parents and with the support of the Principal, they agreed that Nick would grade advance straight into the next Year where he would have the stimulus of advanced work and the companionship, in the ability grouped classes, of other gifted students.

Nick was not able to develop task commitment in the two revision-oriented Years as he was learning little that he did not already know. His task commitment was restored after acceleration, through the provision of challenging work in the higher Year and the companionship of other students who also thrived on intellectual challenge.

According to the Renzulli model, gifted and talented children are ‘those possessing or capable of possessing’ the three clusters of traits - but ‘potential possession’ of motivation or creativity is by no means easy to assess. An added difficulty is Renzulli’s assertion that a child ‘earns the right’ to special services by displaying the above-average ability, high levels of task commitment and high levels of creativity that are the ‘necessary ingredients’ of giftedness (Renzulli & Smith, 1980, p. 10). Should a child have to earn the right to an appropriate education?

Renzulli’s model was developed in the United States at a time when comparatively little research was being undertaken, there or anywhere else, on underachieving gifted students. Indeed, Renzulli built his model not on the characteristics of gifted children but on the characteristics of ‘creative/productive’ adults - three groups of architects studied by MacKinnon in the 1950s and the quite remarkably creative and productive ‘great men’ of history – men who were paradigm shifters in science, literature, medicine, law, politics and the arts - who were studied retrospectively in the 19th century by Sir Francis Galton. One might expect architects to be creative, while the remarkable individuals whose lives were studied by Galton - eg Sir Isaac Newton, Shakespeare and Michelangelo - produced works of creative genius and must have been, from the sheer quantity of work they produced, highly task committed. So the characteristics of creativity and motivation noted by MacKinnon (1965) and Galton (1869) were hardly surprising, given the groups they studied!

But demotivated, bored gifted students who are required to work, in school, at levels far below their capability are not necessarily task committed. It’s difficult to commit to a task if it doesn’t engage your interest. It’s hard to become excited about being asked to complete, yet again, work you did successfully months or years before. Critics of Renzulli’s model (eg Jarrell & Borland, 1990) have pointed out that it is doubtful whether models of successful adult productivity can be used to identify child potential.

Renzulli has described children who are spasmodic producers as ‘moving in and out of giftedness’. Gagné would say they are gifted but moving in and out of talent.
Renzulli’s ‘three-ring model’ may be most successful in identifying children whom Gagné would call talented; young people who are successful, motivated achievers who have also been able to bring a creative touch - something new - to their work. Perhaps the three-ring model should be seen as a model of something to work towards; the synthesis of high ability, an enthusiastic commitment to work at something that is genuinely worthwhile committing to, and the capacity to contribute to one’s field of talent as well as take from it.

The website of the American National Research Centre on Gifted Education at the University of Connecticut has some useful articles on aspects of the three-ring model, eg:

- ‘What is this thing called giftedness and how do we develop it? A twenty-five year perspective’ by Joseph Renzulli, at: www.gifted.uconn.edu/sem/semart14.html
Abraham Tannenbaum’s ‘sea star’ model of giftedness

Abraham Tannenbaum’s model was developed in the early 1980s and was described in depth in his remarkable book Gifted children: Psychological and educational perspectives (Tannenbaum, 1983) which presented one of the best analytical reviews of the research literature in gifted education available at that time. As might be expected, Tannenbaum’s model was solidly grounded in psychological and educational research on the characteristics of gifted individuals.

Like Gagné’s Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent, which it preceded by only two years, Tannenbaum’s sea star model of giftedness addresses the relationships between ability and achievement - ‘the links between promise and fulfilment’ (Tannenbaum, 1983, p. 95) - and clearly identifies the roles of both the child’s personality and the environment in which he or she is brought up and educated.

Unlike the Renzulli model, which was derived from the characteristics of creative, productive adult achievers, Tannenbaum’s model is firmly based on the characteristics of highly able children and adolescents.

‘Keeping in mind that developed talent exists only in adults, a proposed definition of giftedness in children is the potential for becoming critically acclaimed performers or exemplary producers of ideas in spheres of activity which enhance the moral, physical, emotional, social, intellectual or aesthetic life of the community.’ (Tannenbaum, 1983, p. 86)

Tannenbaum believes that children and adolescents who have the potential for succeeding as gifted adults not only require the general and specific abilities mentioned in some of the earlier definitions of giftedness, but also must have facilitative personality attributes and some ‘special encounters with the environment’ to foster the emergence of talent. The five internal and external variables that ‘mesh into excellence’ are illustrated by a sea star design with giftedness produced by the overlap of all five factors.
General ability. Tannenbaum points out that the ‘g’ factor, or testable general intelligence, features to some degree in all talent areas. He adds, however, that different levels of intellectual ability are required for various kinds of accomplishment. Very high levels of abstract reasoning ability may be required for certain activities - certain areas of academic study, for example - while somewhat lesser degrees may be required for other activities.

Special ability. For an individual to emerge as gifted, his reasoning ability must be anchored in some specific aptitude. As well as the capacity to think well, gifted people must have special capacities and affinities for particular kinds of work. Some special abilities can be identified in children in the very early years; others do not become apparent until much later in childhood.

Non-intellective factors. Ability alone will not produce outstanding accomplishment. Tannenbaum points out that this requires a confluence of various non-intellective facilitators such as motivation, a secure self-concept, the capacity to stay on task, ‘the willingness to sacrifice short-term satisfactions for the sake of long-term accomplishment’ (p. 88), sound mental health, the desire to show and share one’s talent, and many others.

Environmental factors. Tannenbaum identifies many environmental influences which dictate not only the degree to which the child’s ability will be permitted to develop but even the kinds of talent that a society is willing to honour (or tolerate?) and the amount of investment that the society is willing to make in the cultivation of these talents. These environmental influences include not only the child’s family, peer group, school and community, but also the economic, legal, social and political institutions of the country in which the child is being brought up and educated.

Chance factors. The influence of chance can be crucial to the emergence of an individual’s talent, yet it had not been addressed by previous researchers in gifted education. Chance factors are those entirely unpredictable events in a person’s life which can be critical in permitting exceptional potential to be recognised or encouraged. It may be that the student finds exactly the right teacher at exactly the right stage of her talent development. It may be, on the other hand, that the job market in a young person’s area of talent unexpectedly closes up, so that there is no opportunity for him to fulfil his promise. As Tannenbaum points out, ‘The unexpected can originate anywhere, in the economy, the social milieu, the workplace, the family, and even within the body itself when there is a sudden change in a person’s health status that can affect a career’ (Tannenbaum, 1983, p. 208).

The five ‘arms’ of Tannenbaum’s sea star have both static and dynamic elements. Static elements portray the child as she is at the moment - how she stands in comparison to others at a particular stage in time. However, her level of maths, science or reading achievement, her state of health, and her relationships with family or classmates may well change over time. Dynamic elements, therefore, refer, among other things, to the processes of learning and the social and educational processes which effect the child and which cause, or may lead to, change.

All five arms of Tannenbaum’s sea star must be facilitatively present if the child’s high abilities are to be translated into high achievements: ‘No combination of any four factors can compensate for a serious deficiency in the fifth’ (Tannenbaum, 2003, p. 48). Different talent areas may require different ‘combinations’ of the five factors - but all talent areas require a healthy combination of all five.
While earlier definitions such as those of DeHaan and Havighurst, Marland, and, to some extent, Renzulli, were, in the main, listings of the traits or constituents of giftedness, Tannenbaum’s model reveals the complex and subtle interweaving of the individual’s general and special abilities with personalological and environmental variables, moderated by random factors which can assist or hinder the translation of promise into fulfilment.

**Producers and performers**

In later versions of his model (eg Tannenbaum, 2003) Tannenbaum expands on the characteristics of the two broad types of gifted people he identifies as producers and performers. Producers are people who develop either things or ideas. Performers interpret or recreate these things or ideas. Both producers and performers can operate either creatively (brining something original or new to the process) or proficiently (operating with high levels of skill).

Tannenbaum identifies four main areas of human productivity and proficiency: thoughts and ideas and tangibles (something physical that can be seen, heard, tasted, etc) which are developed by producers; and staged artistry and human services which are provided by performers.

**The producer of thoughts (ideas) creatively**, for example, may be a philosopher who creates a new theory, a brilliant painter, poet or writer who creates a new work, or an experimental scientist who develops a new process. Producers of thoughts (ideas) proficiently may be talented editors who do not themselves produce original writing but who ‘can turn chaotic manuscripts into fine literature’ (Tannenbaum, 2003, p. 45) or efficiency experts in science or industry who do not develop new ways of working but who can use their superior critical skills as troubleshooters, correcting and improving existing schemes. Put simply, the creative producer ‘gives birth’ to something which has not previously existed. The proficient producer uses, very effectively, material which already exists.

Producers of tangibles creatively are people who develop new products; ‘people with enough imagination in science and technology to develop such patentable products as the light bulb’ (Tannenbaum, 2003, p. 46) or sculptors, architects and design engineers whose main talents lie in the creation of new products. By contrast producers of tangibles proficiently are precision workers whose talents lie in high quality production; for example, the jeweller who sets a precious stone in the perfect setting by carrying out a complex design with great skill - even though the design itself was created by someone else.

Performers of staged artistry creatively are not only the choreographer who creates the ballet, the composer who writes the symphony or the writer who creates the children’s story. They can also be the dancer who gives her own individual interpretation of the role, the violinist who presents his own understanding of the composer’s vision, or the story-teller who changes elements of the story to reflect the characteristics or needs of the audience. Performers of staged artistry proficiently include dancers, singers or musicians who give faithful performances of the writers’ work with little or no interpretation. Tannenbaum suggests that movie actors whose excellence consists of carrying out the will of the director and turning movie drama into a ‘director’s art’ are examples of proficient performers, rather than creators, of staged artistry.

Lastly, performers of human services creatively may include teachers, political leaders, social workers and other members of the helping professions who work innovatively to develop new techniques or significantly modify techniques in response to the needs of special groups.
Performers of human services proficiently may be teachers who follow guidelines faithfully and successfully, even if they may not themselves create new ideas or processes, doctors who are excellent diagnosticians, and business administrators who may not design or execute original plans but who demonstrate superior managerial skills along established pathways.

With the Tannenbaum model we must keep two things in mind:

- Firstly, the four categories of activity listed above are not intended as a hierarchy. Tannenbaum does not view any one of the four as more valuable than the others to human society; nor does he rate producers above performers (or vice versa) or creativity above proficiency (or vice versa).

- Secondly, Tannenbaum’s view of giftedness is the potential for adult productivity as either a producer or performer. Very few individuals would completely fulfil their potential in any area, as either a producer or performer, in their childhood or adolescent years. The sea star serves as a guide to the qualities and interventions that the child must possess or experience if her potential is to be translated into performance in later years.
Jackson, in his first Year of high school, had only been at your school for a few weeks before the staff started to nickname him ‘DTB’. No matter what work was presented to the class in maths, English or social science, he would look up wearily and say, ‘I’ve done this before’. However he would usually, if reluctantly, get on with the work - the ‘done this before’ mantra was a protest rather than a refusal - and his work was usually correct if not inspiring. He wasn’t a popular student but he wasn’t totally rejected either; he’d hover on the fringes of groups but never seemed to develop close friendships.

In Year 9 things changed. Jackson’s work fell off and he started to hand in homework late, incomplete or both. He started to hang out with a group of kids who, like him, seemed to be pretty aimless. His teachers were worried about him but he refused to talk about the situation except to say that he had learned everything the school was willing to teach him and he was probably going to leave as soon as he turned 15.

(1) What are the major difficulties in this situation? For Jackson? For the school?

(2) Is Jackson gifted? Talented? How would you classify or describe him in terms of Gagné’s model, Renzulli’s ‘three-ring’ model and Tannenbaum’s ‘sea star’? Does one of these models seem to explain Jackson and his situation better than the others?

(3) What teaching, curriculum differentiation or programming strategies could Jackson’s teachers have used to respond to his claims that he had ‘done it before’?

Hint: What are some of the ideas you encountered in the Core Modules of this Course that could be useful here?
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(3) How could you as an executive staff member assist and support the teachers in your faculty or area of the school to respond to Jackson’s learning and social needs? What teaching or curriculum management strategies would you suggest to the teachers who have him in their classes? What could be done on a faculty or whole school basis? Are there specialist staff who could offer guidance or assistance to Jackson or to the staff?

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In Year 9 things changed. Jackson’s work fell off and he started to hand in homework late, incomplete or both. He started to hang out with a group of kids who, like him, seemed to be pretty aimless. His teachers were worried about him but he refused to talk about the situation except to say that he had learned everything the school was willing to teach him and he was probably going to leave as soon as he turned 15.

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(2) Is Jackson gifted? Talented? How would you classify or describe him in terms of Gagné’s model, Renzulli’s ‘three-ring’ model and Tannenbaum’s ‘sea star’? Does one of these models seem to ‘explain’ Jackson and his situation better than the others?

(3) Jackson’s problem seems to affect many aspects of his school life, rather than just one subject area. What teaching, curriculum development or programming strategies could you and your executive staff suggest to teachers to counter Jackson’s demotivation? What could be done on a faculty or whole school basis? Are there specialist staff who could offer guidance or assistance to Jackson or to the staff?

Hint: What are some of the ideas you encountered in the Core Modules of this Course which could be useful here?
(1) What are the major difficulties in this situation? For Jackson? For the school?

A major difficulty for Jackson is that no one seems to have listened to him in his first year at secondary school when he was desperately trying to give the school a pretty important message: that he knew most of the work he was being presented with because he had already mastered it in primary school. He doesn’t seem to have had the social skills to put over his message in a way that wouldn’t irritate his teachers, but that doesn’t absolve us from listening to the message. A second difficulty is that by Year 9 he seems to have given up trying to get his message across and he has settled for social acceptability of a kind, since patently (in his opinion at least) the school is not going to change and he feels he can’t live with the status quo any longer.

A major difficulty for the school is that the staff doesn’t seem to be aware of the disturbing degree of overlap in the maths and English curriculum of the final Year of primary school and the first Year of secondary. No one seems to have checked the validity of Jackson’s claims that he had ‘done it before’. You may want to skim-reread article ‘To group on not to group: Is that the question?’ which came as a companion paper to Core Module 6 and which illustrates how little of the curriculum in the first Year of high school is new to most students. Another difficulty for the school is that the teachers seem to have lost Jackson’s trust; they wouldn’t listen to him in his first year there so he’s not going to listen to them now.
(2) Is Jackson gifted? Talented? How would you classify or describe him in terms of Gagné’s model, Renzulli’s ‘three-ring’ model and Tannenbaum’s ‘sea star’? Does one of these models seem to ‘explain’ Jackson and his situation better than the others?

Gifted underachievers can be difficult to identify as they are not producing work at a level that is commensurate with their ability. Within the Gagné model Jackson may well be gifted but we can’t assess this definitely on the basis of what he seems willing to show us at this stage. If we presented him with more challenging work he might be encouraged to show us what he can do. Certainly even in his first Year at high school he was not presenting as talented and now in Year 9 he seems to have stopped trying. The environmental stimulus of a developmentally appropriate curriculum is missing and this has had a detrimental effect on his motivation.

Betts and Neihart, whose ‘Profiles of Giftedness’ you met in Core Module 4, might define Jackson as a Type 3: an ‘Underground’ gifted student. His need for peer acceptance has become more important than his need to achieve his potential.

Looking at Jackson through the lens of Tannenbaum’s model, he may well have high general ability - he was trying to tell the school, in his first Year there, that he knew a lot of the work already - and he may have specific aptitude in English, maths and social science, but the ‘environmental’ arm of the sea star became a bit scarred in that first Year! Tannenbaum would agree with Gagné that both the school environment and factors in Jackson himself - his serious demotivation in Year 9 and the fact that he seems to have succumbed to the forced-choice dilemma and is seeking intimacy at the cost of achievement - are acting as a block to his talent development.

Is Jackson gifted or not gifted within the Renzulli framework? He certainly seems to have lost most if not all of his task commitment by Year 9. Is he capable of regaining it? Regarding the third element of Renzulli’s ‘three-ring’ model, creative productivity, we have no evidence of whether he possesses this. Perhaps he is not being given the opportunity to demonstrate it.
(3) **What teaching, curriculum differentiation or programming strategies could Jackson’s teachers have used to respond to his claims that he had ‘done it before’?**

**Hint: What are some of the ideas you encountered in the Core Modules of this Course that could be useful here?**

It might have been useful, in his first Year at secondary school, for the school to have checked the validity of Jackson’s claims that he had ‘done it before’ by talking to someone in his primary school and getting their opinion of his abilities.

Because of the significant overlap, in some subjects, between the curriculum in the final Year of primary school and the first Year of secondary, it can be very useful to develop a pre-test of the work that will be covered in your subject in the first six months of high school, and give this to the class. (You would probably exclude, from this pre-testing, students who are already having visible learning difficulties with the work.) In this way you would be able to see the spread of achievement within your class, and identify students who already have excellent mastery of the material and for whom it would be pointless, or actively counterproductive, to teach it yet again.

You would certainly find that you have a cluster of students in your class who already know quite a lot of the work you’d be teaching, at least in Term 1 and probably in later terms as well. Could Jackson and these students work together on a differentiated curriculum? From time to time could they work with your guidance in small groups on a specific project while you work more intensively with the other students?

Now, in Year 9, Jackson is a student at risk. Is there a teacher with whom he has developed a better relationship than he has with the other staff? Could this teacher talk to him about what is going on? Certainly he needs some form of career counselling. He needs to be helped to look at the possible long-term effects, for his future life, of dropping out of school at this stage.
(1) What are the major difficulties in this situation? For Jackson? For the school?

A major difficulty for Jackson is that no one seems to have listened to him in his first year at secondary school when he was desperately trying to give the school a pretty important message - that he knew most of the work he was being presented with because he had already mastered it in primary school. He doesn’t seem to have had the social skills to put over his message in a way that wouldn’t irritate his teachers, but that doesn’t absolve us from listening to the message. A second difficulty is that by Year 9 he seems to have given up trying to get his message across and he has settled for social acceptability of a kind since patently (in his opinion at least) the school is not going to change and he feels he can’t live with the status quo any longer.

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A difficulty for the executive staff seems to be that no one in the executive team seems to have taken the responsibility to work with Jackson’s teachers, early in his first Year at the school, to assist them to create a more developmentally appropriate curriculum for this student. The school is now seeing the unhappy result of this delay.
(2) Is Jackson gifted? Talented? How would you classify or describe him in terms of Gagné’s model, Renzulli’s ‘three-ring’ model and Tannenbaum’s ‘sea star’? Does one of these models seem to ‘explain’ Jackson and his situation better than the others?

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Is Jackson gifted or not gifted within the Renzulli framework? He certainly seems to have lost most if not all of his task commitment by Year 9. Is he capable of regaining it? Regarding the third element of Renzulli’s ‘three-ring’ model, creative productivity, we have no evidence of whether he possesses this. Perhaps he is not being given the opportunity to demonstrate it.
(3) How could you as an executive staff member assist and support the teachers in your faculty or area of the school to respond to Jackson’s learning and social needs? What teaching or curriculum management strategies would you suggest to the teachers who have him in their classes? What could be done on a faculty or whole school basis? Are there specialist staff who could offer guidance or assistance to Jackson or to the staff?

Hint: What are some of the ideas you encountered in the Core Modules of this Course which could be useful here?

It might have been useful, in his first Year at secondary school, for the school to have checked the validity of Jackson’s claims that he had ‘done it before’ by talking to someone in his primary school and getting their opinion of his abilities. What information do you receive, from your feeder primary schools, about the students they are sending you? What strategies does your faculty, or the school, have in place for getting additional information from the primary school, for students who appear to have special needs because of learning difficulties or learning strengths?

Because of the significant overlap, in some subjects, between the curriculum in the final Year of primary school and the first Year of secondary, it can be very useful for teachers to develop a pre-test of the work that will be covered in their subject in the first six months of high school, and give this to the class. (They would probably exclude, from this pre-testing, students who are already having visible learning difficulties with the work.) What time or resource support could you offer to teachers to assist them in developing these pre-tests?

Pre-tests allow teachers to see the spread of achievement within their classes, and identify students who already have excellent mastery of the material and for whom it would be pointless, or actively counterproductive, to teach it yet again.

In their first Year at high school, would it be possible to re-group students in your subject, part of the way through Term I or at the end of the term, on the basis of this pre-testing? You could place, in one or two of the classes, a cluster of 6-10 students who have already mastered quite a lot, or most of the material for that Year. Jackson would almost certainly qualify for one of these groups, which could work together on a differentiated curriculum. Some secondary schools prefer to wait till the second Year to develop ability grouped classes but for some students, like Jackson, this may not be practical; he needs help now, not in a year's time.
Alternatively, could the school develop pullout programs in that first Year for students with high abilities in some of the subjects?

Now, in Year 9, Jackson is a student at risk. Is there a teacher with whom he has developed a better relationship than he has with the other staff? Could this teacher talk to him about what is going on? Certainly he needs some form of counselling. Is his disengagement linked to depression? Could the school counsellor work with him? What about career counselling? He needs to be helped to look at the possible long-term effects, for his future life, of dropping out of school at this stage.

Can you help Jackson find friends among a different circle of students? It is probably doing little for his self-esteem to have his negative feelings about himself, and about the school, validated continually by other students who have similar feelings.

It’s important that teachers, and the executive staff, take seriously Jackson’s ‘threats’ that he will leave school at 15. It seems that this boy has been trying, for several years, to tell the school things that are important to him.
(1) What are the major difficulties in this situation? For Jackson? For the school?

A major difficulty for Jackson is that no one seems to have listened to him in his first year at secondary school when he was desperately trying to give the school a pretty important message - that he knew most of the work he was being presented with because he had already mastered it in primary school. He doesn’t seem to have had the social skills to put over his message in a way that wouldn’t irritate his teachers, but that doesn’t absolve us from listening to the message. A second difficulty is that by Year 9 he seems to have given up trying to get his message across and he has settled for social acceptability of a kind since patently (in his opinion at least) the school is not going to change and he feels he can’t live with the status quo any longer.

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A difficulty for the Principal is that no one on the executive staff seems to have taken the responsibility to work with Jackson’s teachers, early in in his first Year at the school, to assist them to create a more developmentally appropriate curriculum for this student. The school is now seeing the unhappy result of this delay.

How did this happen? How did this student seem to slip through the identification ‘net’ that your school should have in place from the time students enter to ‘catch’ bright students whose enthusiasm for learning may be dimmed by the unnecessary (for them) amount of revision that the curriculum in the first Year of secondary school entails?
(2) Is Jackson gifted? Talented? How would you classify or describe him in terms of Gagné’s model, Renzulli’s ‘three-ring’ model and Tannenbaum’s ‘sea star’? Does one of these models seem to ‘explain’ Jackson and his situation better than the others?

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(3) Jackson’s problem seems to affect many aspects of his school life, rather than just one subject area. What teaching, curriculum development or programming strategies could you and your executive staff suggest to teachers to counter Jackson’s demotivation? What could be done on a faculty or whole school basis? Are there specialist staff who could offer guidance or assistance to Jackson or to the staff?

Hint: What are some of the ideas you encountered in the Core Modules of this Course which could be useful here?

It might have been useful, in his first Year at secondary school, for the school to have checked the validity of Jackson’s claims that he had ‘done it before’ by talking to someone in his primary school and getting their opinion of his abilities. What information do you receive, from your feeder primary schools, about the students they are sending you? What strategies does the school have in place for getting additional information from the primary school, for students who appear to have special needs because of learning difficulties or learning strengths? Do you have any structured opportunities to meet with the Principals of your main feeder primaries? If not, could you set up a system which would allow this?

Because of the significant overlap, in some subjects, between the curriculum in the final Year of primary school and the first Year of secondary, it can be very useful for teachers to develop a pre-test of the work that will be covered in their subject in the first six months of high school, and give this to the students. (They would probably exclude, from this pre-testing, students who are already having visible learning difficulties with the work.) Pre-tests allow teachers to see the spread of achievement within their classes, and also allow executive staff to see the spread of achievement within their faculties. In this way the school can identify students who already have excellent mastery of material in specific subject areas and for whom it would be pointless, or actively counterproductive, to teach it yet again.

What time or resource support could you offer to faculties to assist them in developing these pre-tests?

Some schools use ability grouping in some subjects but prefer to wait till the second Year to do this. However for some students, like Jackson, this may not be practical; he needs help now, not in a year’s time.

Therefore, you might consider suggesting to your executive staff that their faculties re-group students during the first Year in some subjects, part of the way through Term I or at the end of the term, on the basis of the pre-testing they have done. They could place, in one or two of the classes, a cluster of 6-10 students who have already mastered quite a lot, or most of the material for that Year. Jackson would almost certainly qualify for one of these groups, which could work together on a differentiated curriculum. Alternatively, could the school develop pullout
programs in that first Year for students with high abilities in some of the subjects?

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Could Jackson be helped to find friends among a different circle of students? It is probably doing little for his self-esteem to have his negative feelings about himself, and about the school, validated continually by other students who have similar feelings.

Are some of your faculties using ability grouping in Year 9? At what level is Jackson placed? If he has been placed in a lower group on the basis that he is no longer producing high quality work, your staff may be confusing achievement with ability. He could be moved to a higher group, at least on a trial basis, to see what effect the more challenging work, and a group of ability peers, have on his attitude and performance.

It’s important that teachers, and the executive team, take seriously Jackson’s ‘threats’ that he will leave school at 15. It seems that this boy has been trying, for several years, to tell the school things that are important to him.
Calling a student ‘moderately’, ‘highly’ or ‘exceptionally’ gifted is not a matter of simplistically ‘labelling’ the student. Rather it is a recognition that a group of gifted students can differ as much, or even more, among themselves as would a group of average ability students, and that different levels of ability require different types and levels of response.

Educators working with hearing impaired students recognise four levels of hearing loss - mild, moderate, severe and profound. A child with a mild hearing impairment can cope quite happily with the regular classroom as long as his teacher is made aware of his impairment, and is prepared to make certain adjustments to her teaching style. The moderately hearing impaired child usually requires medical intervention - the prescription of a hearing aid specifically tailored to her needs - as well as a supportive group of classmates and a sensitive and flexible teacher. However, children who have severe or profound degrees of hearing impairment require more than sound amplification and general assistance and both the curriculum and the teaching methodologies used in the classes in which they are placed must be adapted to their special needs.

Teachers of hearing impaired students have avoided the temptation to treat their clientele as if they were a homogeneous group. Until comparatively recently, however, educators working with gifted students have been trapped in precisely this mind-set. We have developed identification strategies, designed curricula and established special programs based on the assumption that what works for a moderately gifted student would also work for the extremely gifted. Fortunately, this perception is breaking down. We are beginning to acknowledge the need to recognise degrees, as well as types, of giftedness.

The table that follows shows the five levels of intellectual giftedness, the IQ ranges associated with each level, the frequency with which we might expect these children to appear in the population and programming strategies which have been found successful with students at each level.
Levels of Giftedness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels of Giftedness</th>
<th>Prevalence</th>
<th>Programming Options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mildly</td>
<td>1:6 to 1:40</td>
<td>- Enrichment in regular classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(115 – 129)</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Modified curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(basically)</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Curriculum compacting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1:40 to 1:1,000</td>
<td>- Advanced work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Challenges within content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Some form of ability grouping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Mentorships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Single subject acceleration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Single grade skip or early entrance to school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1:1,000 to 1:10,000</td>
<td>Fast-paced content work in talent area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Ability grouping at least in talent area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Acceleration options</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Challenging academic enrichments, e.g. Latin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Mentorships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1:10,000 to 1:1 million</td>
<td>Highly individualised programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- High school / university level programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Advanced placement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Radical acceleration (3+ carefully spaced grade skips)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Ability grouping in specific talent areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Specific counselling services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fewer than 1:1 million</td>
<td>Radical acceleration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Early admission to university</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Highly individualised programs</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Special program searches</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>- Ability grouping in specific talent areas</td>
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Feldhusen (1993)
As discussed in Part 1 of this Module, Gagné considers students to be gifted if their ability levels place them in the top 15% of the population for their age. In terms of intellectual ability, this means an IQ of 115 or above. Students who are mildly intellectually gifted appear in the population at a ratio of somewhere between 1 in 6 and 1 in 40 in the population. This means that every class is likely to have at least a small cluster of such children. They are not too far from the central (average) group of students of their age for whom the ‘standard’ curriculum is designed and as long as the teacher modifies curriculum and teaching in response to these children’s learning characteristics which we outlined in Core Modules 1 and 2 - a faster pace of learning, a more retentive memory, a preference for complex and abstract questions and ideas - they should thrive in a regular classroom setting. All other things being equal, mildly gifted students tend to be popular with their classmates; they are bright enough to be admired but not so bright that they threaten other students’ self-image. Often they become class leaders.

Students who are moderately intellectually gifted are a bit thinner on the ground. At the lower end of the range, they appear in a ratio of around 1 in 40. An early childhood or primary school teacher can expect to teach one of these young people, on average, every year or every two years. Secondary school teachers will encounter them rather more often. However, students toward the top of the range with an IQ of 140-145 appear rarely: specifically, these students are between 1 in 200 and 1 in 1000 in the school population.

Moderately gifted students often find the curriculum set for age-peers rather unrewarding. Students at the top end of the range often find it irrelevant; they may have mastered the work of their grade years before. Almost every researcher of note in gifted education advises the development of some form of ability grouping to meet the needs of moderately gifted students. As we discussed in Core Module 3, intellectually gifted students are usually more emotionally mature than their age-peers. Moderate acceleration - a subject acceleration in their main talent area, or a grade-skip - gives them access to students who, although older in chronological age, are at similar academic and emotional developmental stages to those of the gifted student. Karen Rogers’ book Re-forming gifted education: How parents and teachers can match the program to the child (Rogers, 2002) provides an excellent overview of the academic and social-emotional outcomes, for gifted students, of various forms of acceleration and grouping.

A useful website for access to practical advice and information on acceleration is at: http://www.nationdeceived.org. This major American report is having quite an impact on schools’ responses to gifted students in the United States and it is equally relevant to Australia.

Highly gifted students definitely require significant curriculum modification and it is extremely difficult to provide such degrees of differentiation in the regular classroom. Ability grouping in at least their areas of special ability is virtually essential. Where this is not practicable - in small schools, for example, or in rural and remote areas - grade advancement or at least subject acceleration in the students’ area of special talent is strongly indicated.

With students at this level of ability, and at levels above, it is probably unrealistic to attempt to provide an individually differentiated curriculum within the regular classroom. This places the highly gifted student in another form of forced-choice dilemma. He can work on the advanced material which excites, challenges and rewards him - but he has to do it on his own as the work is far beyond the capacities of even the brightest of his classmates. Alternatively he can work with his classmates on material which is accessible to them but which he probably passed through years before. No student should have to choose between companionship and intellectual stimulation.
Exceptionally and profoundly gifted students are a tiny minority but, like many minorities, they are students at risk. Indeed, they can be placed seriously at risk if the school requires them to move through the grades in lockstep progression with age-peers. These students most definitely require thoughtfully structured and carefully monitored individualised programs of acceleration.

Sixty years ago, in the United States, Professor Leta Hollingworth conducted a longitudinal study of a group of exceptionally and profoundly gifted young people, tracing their development from childhood through to adulthood. From her research with these and other groups of gifted children she came to describe the IQ range of 125-150 as ‘socially optimal intelligence’ (Hollingworth, 1926). She found that children scoring within this range were well-balanced, self-confident and outgoing individuals who were able to win the confidence and friendship of age-peers. She claimed, however, that above the level of IQ 160 the difference between the exceptionally gifted child and his or her age-mates is so great that it leads to special problems of development which are correlated with social isolation, and that these difficulties appear particularly acute between the ages of 4 and 9 (Hollingworth, 1931).

Two studies which commenced in the 1980s have made valuable contributions to what we know about the social and emotional development of exceptionally and profoundly gifted students and how these young people can most effectively be educated.

In the United States, Paul Janos compared the socio-affective development of 32 children aged 6-9 with IQs in excess of 164, with that of 49 mildly and moderately gifted age-peers of moderately superior intellectual ability (Janos, 1983). Although the exceptionally gifted were generally rated higher in terms of their academic performance, they were more isolated than their age peers, had greater problems of social development and, in the case of a substantial minority, seemed to lack the motivation to develop their intellectual talents. Janos emphasised, however, that the social isolation experienced by these children was not the clinical isolation of emotional
disturbance, but was caused by the absence of a suitable peer group with whom to relate. There are virtually no points of common experience and common interest between a 6-year-old with a mental age of 6 and a 6-year-old with a mental age of 12. Leta Hollingworth would have agreed with Janos’s conclusion. She herself emphasised that when exceptionally gifted children who have been rejected by age-peers are removed from the inappropriate grade-placement, and are permitted to work and play with intellectual peers, the loneliness and social isolation disappear and the child is accepted as a valued classmate and friend (Hollingworth, 1942).

A longitudinal Australian study, commenced in 1983, is now in its 22nd year. Miraca Gross has followed 60 children of IQ 160+ from their pre-school or early primary years through to adulthood (Gross, 1993; 2003). The young people are now in their mid or late twenties. With very few exceptions those who were retained full time in the regular classroom were extremely lonely, had very few friends or no friends at all in school, and experienced extreme intellectual frustration and boredom - and, as Hollingworth and Janos found, these difficulties were especially severe in primary school. By contrast, those who were ability grouped and accelerated experienced much higher levels of academic success and reported much greater social satisfaction with their school experience.

**Radical** acceleration works well with these students because they are extremely bright and, almost without exception, very emotionally mature - although this maturity may not be immediately obvious if they are lonely and miserable at school. Radical acceleration refers to any sequence of accelerative procedures which results in a student graduating from high school three or more years earlier than usual. A single three-year grade skip is not recommended. A more practical procedure is a series of three grade advancements each separated by a period of consolidation; however there is a whole ‘smorgasbord’ of acceleration procedures that can be used. One of the companion papers to this module, ‘Radical acceleration and early entry to college: A review of the research’ provides an excellent overview of how schools can develop and carry through this form of acceleration.

It is important not to see the borders of these levels of giftedness as ‘cut-off points’. We are not suggesting that there should be significant differences in the way teachers respond to students of IQ 129 - the upper end of the mildly gifted range - and IQ 130 - the lower end of the moderately gifted range. However, as indicated above, there should be significant differences in the way we respond to the student of IQ 120 (1 in 10 in the population) and the student of IQ 140 (1 in 200).
Case Study

Mr Francis was intrigued by Tom, a pleasant, rather quiet student in his Year 7 maths class. His work was unfailingly accurate but he rarely answered or asked questions in class. However, on Tuesdays, when his class had maths in the final period, he would wait at the end of the class and talk with Mr Francis about his interests in maths and science.

A few weeks into the school year Mr Francis decided to check Tom’s records and was surprised to find that the boy was a year younger than the other students and had been in Year 5 in his primary school the year before. He had grade advanced into secondary school.

Mr Francis phoned the primary school Principal who told him that Tom was one of the brightest students she had ever had and that he was highly talented in most subject areas. Indeed, this was the basis on which the primary school had agreed to the grade-skip. Mr Francis passed this on to the school’s Coordinator of Gifted Education who spoke to Tom’s other Year 7 teachers. Each had the same story - Tom was getting more out of conversations with his teachers after school than he was out of the classwork.

Off-level testing revealed the full extent of Tom’s abilities. He hit the ceiling on tests of maths and English achievement standardised on Year 7 and subsequent off-level testing (review Core Module 2 for a discussion of this) placed him at the 90th percentile for maths and the 85th percentile for English at Year 9 level.

The high school was aware that there was a significant amount of overlap between the Year 7 and Year 8 English and maths curriculum. There seemed little point in having Tom ‘serve time’ for two years in these subjects. At the end of Term 1 Tom moved straight into Year 8 where he made a number of good friends. He completed Year 12 with outstanding results and entered the university of his choice aged 16.
How gifted students learn

Guest author: Professor Karen Rogers

(This section ‘How gifted students learn’ has been written by Professor Karen Rogers, Director of Research at the Gifted Education Research, Resource and Information Centre (GERRIC), the University of New South Wales, who has made a special study of the research on gifted students’ learning styles.)

Research in gifted education substantiates that there are cognitive and learning characteristics in gifted children that are significantly different from those found in the majority of their age-peers. This research compares the degree of difference when a characteristic or trait appears in both gifted and regular individuals, or the essence of the difference itself when present in the gifted only.

In 1986, Rogers collected all research studies which had then been conducted on the differentiating characteristics of gifted and talented learners. At that time she found 106 studies in which data had been collected and analysed systematically that compared traits or behaviours among the gifted students and the more regular learners in schools. Since that time she has continued to compile all studies that have assessed learning differences among the gifted and talented and their regular counterparts, adding to a current total of 142.

Characteristics of General Intellectual Giftedness

As discussed in Core Module 2, this form of giftedness can be effectively identified using a test of cognitive ability, such as an IQ test. For the 142 studies on differentiating characteristics of this form of giftedness, the average (mean) IQ defining giftedness was 130, but studies ranged in defining it from 124 (one study) to 160 (one study). The distinguishing cognitive and learning characteristics included:

- **Front end analysis:** This term, coined by Robert Sternberg (1982), refers to the time an individual spends sizing up a given problem or task. Sternberg argued that intellectually gifted children and adolescents tend to spend more time on the front end of the task, defining the problem (‘problem finding’), predicting which resources will be needed to complete the task or solve the problem, and planning how they will decide if their solution is on the right track. Ludlow and Woodrum (1980) measured this in a series of studies using Mastermind boards. They would set up a series of coloured pegs in a board in a specific series on four succeeding boards and then time gifted and regular students in how long it took each to complete each of the four boards successfully.

On the first board, the gifted children took almost twice the time to complete the board; however, on the succeeding three boards they were significantly faster than the regular children in completing all three boards and doing so successfully. The researchers argued that this was evidence of a differing distribution of time in the process of problem solving.

This difference in gifted learners seems to be a difference in kind, despite the comparative study described above. As Sternberg points out, the gifted learner distributes time differently in the problem solving process, and this is the primary focus rather than how much time it actually takes one learner or another to solve the problem.
**Exhaustive search**: This is another term coined by Robert Sternberg (1982) that refers to how comprehensively an individual checks out possible answers to a question or solutions to a problem. Sternberg noted that intellectually gifted children tend to look for all possible answers or solutions before settling for one that ‘would do’ which they found along the way of their search. It is easy to see how this behaviour relates to the redistribution of time mentioned as the first characteristic. Figuring out what one’s problem or task actually is may require some searching through types of problems one has encountered before, and possible solutions that were previously successful.

Novel analogies can provide this sort of challenge. To solve the analogy, the student must assume that the initial statement is true, and then analyse the analogy taking this assumption into account. An example is:

*The statement: Villains are loveable. The analogy: HERO is to ADMIRATION as VILLAIN is to (a) CONTEMPT, (b) AFFECTION, (c) CRUELTY, (d) KINDNESS* (Sternberg, 1986).

Sternberg (1977) measured the time taken to map out inferences in verbal analogy problems, finding that intellectually gifted learners tended to encode all attributes to be subjected to the inference process, rather than ‘self-terminate’ as soon as a ‘reasonable’ connection could be found. In other words, gifted learners compared each term individually to each other word among the choices, even when they were reasonably sure of the correct answer, before giving their ‘final’ answer.

Again, as with front end analysis, this difference is considered by researchers to be a qualitative difference in kind, rather than one we see to a greater or lesser degree in learners of varying abilities. Gifted students are significantly more likely to engage in exhaustive search whereas most students will stop their ‘search’ when they get a plausible answer or solution.

**Analogical reasoning**: This term, also coined by Robert Sternberg (1982) refers to the innate ability of intellectually gifted individuals to make connections between new and old learning spontaneously. Many studies have validated this characteristic by correlating IQ level on an accepted test of intelligence with performance on a test of verbal or figural analogies, such as the Miller Analogies Test, Raven’s Progressive Matrices, and the Naglieri Nonverbal Ability Test. Many researchers (eg O’Connor & Hermelin, 1979) have concluded that gifted learners tend to make significantly more connections between previous learning and newly acquired learning (called ‘application mapping’) and to draw inferences across subject fields when concepts are discovered. As a result they are often described by some teachers as ‘out in left field’, when in fact they may be making connective inferences much deeper and more accurate than other learners will be able to generate.

As with front end analysis and exhaustive search, this behaviour in the gifted appears to be a difference in kind. It is the spontaneity with which this occurs that provides evidence of this argument. Gifted learners tend to make all kinds of connections without being asked to do so. Regular learners can certainly make connections but they are most likely to do so when the teacher provides the scaffolding (ie directly asks students to make a connection) for this to occur.
Decontextualisation: This is identified by Sternberg and Davidson (1982) as a qualitative difference in intellectually gifted learners. The term refers to the ability to take in new information as a whole within working memory and then store it as a whole in long-term memory. When later called upon for retrieval, the information is retrieved within its whole ‘context’ usually with alacrity, without the student even able to verbalise why he or she ‘knows’ it.

Among the research studies measuring this capability, many have attempted to identify how students ‘figure out’ the meaning of an unusual word (not encountered before or made up by the author) within a reading passage. Gifted students were significantly more likely to report intuitive processing as the way the meaning of the word occurred to them, than studying the root and stem of the word for possible clues. They reported taking in the whole of the reading passage and making inferences on word meaning from the passage as a whole (eg Kaye & Sternberg, 1973).

Preference for independence in learning: This cognitive style preference, which includes the desire to be responsible for one’s own learning, to be given unstructured learning tasks and assignments (but within a structured learning environment), to work on projects and tasks individually, and to engage in independent study, has been researched consistently since the 1960s by administering learning styles inventories to large groups of gifted and regular students and noting the strength of the differences in preference for independent learning.

In general, the significant differences found include a preference for independent study, followed by a preference to learn through self-instructional materials, and thirdly, the preference among gifted learners to pursue projects of their own choice individually or with one other student of similar ability. This difference is most likely a difference in degree. There will be a number of gifted students who do not prefer to work or learn independently just as there will be a number of regular students who do desire to work independently. The research tells us that a significantly larger proportion of gifted students than regular students maintain this preference, although the preference is found among both groups.

Preference for new learning: This cognitive style preference can be defined as motivation to learn, zeal, achievement motivation, or through a number of other terms, including ‘intellectence’, the desire to be engaged with intellectual or abstract ideas and experiences. This often means that the gifted child comes to school expecting to learn something new each day rather than to review and practise previous learning and skills.
What is not known about this preference at the present time is whether depth of knowledge on a singular concept or coverage of multiple topics is significantly different for gifted learners, but many researchers, from Freehill and McDonald (1981) to Ricca (1984) have established the drive to achieve at high levels as a distinguishing characteristic of the gifted. This difference is probably a difference in degree rather than kind. In the comparative studies previously conducted, there were a number of regular students who did prefer to learn new information rather than practice what was already known, and there were a number of gifted students who preferred building on what they had already learned rather than moving on to something new.

Case Study

Theo may or may not be good looking. He may or may not be good at sport, and he may or may not act like a nerd when he is with classmates at school. Likewise, he may or may not be the first one to raise his hand when the teacher asks questions in a discussion, but one thing teachers have noticed about Theo: he seems to be very deep. If awards were being given out by peers, Theo would be sure to be voted ‘most intellectual’. Everything about him perks up when a teacher suggests a new point of view, perhaps only in passing. James Burke, the author, or Margaret Mead, the cultural anthropologist, could easily be the role models for the boys and girls who fit Theo’s profile. These are people who structure ideas across historical and human development.

Theo has both endearing and aggravating behaviours in the classroom. He may appear very slow and deliberate at times, especially when quick answers are being sought to low level questions. He sometimes seems to make too much of what was a simple question, making complicated associations with other things he knows or has read. He runs on his own timelines, which means there are times when he is irritated because he has to put a project down and turn to the next subject. He is usually very systematic and logical, which can make him very uncomfortable with a teacher’s attempts at creativity. He is not a willing risk-taker and wants structure in many cases when long term assignments are given. At the same time, he truly seeks the opportunity to work on his own and on topics of his own choosing whenever possible. When questions are asked in class, Theo can be annoying at times when he so consistently re-words the question before answering. It is very hard to find enough extra assignments to keep him busy in subjects such as maths and science where generally the class is being taught the facts of that content area. He appears to soak up information as quickly as it can be presented, yet seems to try to get at the deeper meaning or the more complicated relationships to be found in the information he is provided.

Theo scores very highly on almost every aptitude and achievement test, and will usually have outstanding grades. Yet, he may be a serious underachiever because he is not being offered enough content nor enough complexity to that content, nor has compacting
of his curriculum taken place. Anywhere from 3 to 6 years of Theo’s school life will be spent without being exposed to a single new idea or concept that he does not know already. By the time he reaches high school, he has already had several of these ‘redundant’ years. The only characteristic that may keep Theo from pure disillusionment with school may be his own perseverance and patience, waiting for the day when school will be ‘hard and fun’.

Betts and Neihart revisited

In Core Module 4, we looked at five profiles of gifted underachievers identified by George Betts and Maureen Neihart. The material we have just covered on the learning styles and characteristics of academically gifted students may help us to understand, more fully, some of the causes of underachievement in these groups.

**Type 1** students are bright, motivated achievers. However their motivation may be directed mainly towards pleasing, and having a good relationship with, their teachers and other adults rather than towards the full development of their talents. Because they are ‘steady’ and well organised, teachers often ask them to assist other students who are having difficulties.

However, gifted students are not necessarily talented teachers of other students! Think back to the learning characteristics of gifted students discussed in the previous section. A gifted student who learns holistically, instinctively understanding interrelationships between elements in maths, science or language, may not be able to break down these relationships into component parts and explain them to someone who learns in a ‘step by step’ progression. A gifted student whose natural problem solving style is to use ‘front end analysis’ may not understand the regular student’s need to ‘get on with’ what he sees as ‘the work’. This can be extremely frustrating for both students and if the teacher is not sensitive to this discrepancy in learning styles, both may begin to resent their time being used in ways which are not productive.

Teachers sometimes ask gifted students to act as ‘peer tutors’ for average ability students on the grounds that regular students view them as role models. Actually, research contradicts this. Dale Schunk (1987) found that average ability students admire, and model their behaviour on, students of similar ability to themselves who are succeeding at what they try to do. They do not choose high ability students as role models.

Betts and Neihart (1988) suggest that these Type 1 gifted students need an accelerated and enriched curriculum, time to develop their personal interests and to develop independent learning skills, and opportunities to work with other gifted students.
**Type 2** students are ‘challengers’ who may be bored, angry and resentful. They often prefer learning independently rather than in groups where the slower processing speed of other students slows them down (review the segment in the previous section on ‘preference for independent learning’) and they can be tactless and sarcastic towards other group members when this happens. Rogers (1986), in her review of the research on the learning differences between gifted students and their age-peers, reported a number of studies which suggest that gifted students have a stronger internal locus of control; they tend to believe that the capacity to succeed lies strongly within them rather than being a function of environmental factors such as good teachers or a facilitative classroom. They may resent being placed in a situation where they can see that their learning is being hampered by external sources. These students may be better served by being allowed to work individually on tasks or projects which they design and negotiate with the teacher, or in pairs with ability peers who have similar learning styles. Mentorships - where the school arranges for the student to work on a regular basis with an adult expert in his or her field of interest - can be of enormous benefit to these students.

**Type 3** students are the ‘underground’ gifted - students who place enormous value on peer acceptance and who may deliberately underperform in order to achieve this. The difference between the speed of learning of the gifted student and his or her age-peers and the differences in the learning strategies they use can make it difficult for them to work productively in problem solving tasks.

Again, this may relate to the gifted student’s preference for ‘front end analysis’ - taking a greater time to analyse the nature of the problem, plan the sequence of steps that will be taken to work on it and predict what the answer is likely to be, before actually beginning the process of problem solving. When this is at variance with the preference of other children to ‘dive’ into the problem and solve it as they go along, the gifted student may be placed in another form of ‘forced-choice dilemma’. Does she work apart from the group, using her own preferred strategies but risk being seen as different or ‘apart’, or does she stay with the group even though their preferred learning style may simply not work for her? If her need for peer acceptance motivates her to stay with the group, she may not learn as effectively as she would on her own.

In Core Module 4 we described Betts and Neihart’s **Type 4**, ‘dropouts’ as ‘physically present in the classroom but intellectually and emotionally quite divorced from it’. They are resentful, depressed and angry with adults and with the system which they feel has failed them by ignoring their needs. These are usually secondary school students although some reach this unhappy stage in the upper years of primary.

Often the ‘dropout’ has interests or even passions which lie outside the curriculum and which are not catered for by the school. However, there may be another cause. Research has found that highly gifted children pass through the Piagetian stages of cognitive development earlier and faster than their age-peers (Rogers, 1986). The majority seem to reach the highest level - the formal operations stage - before age 12, several years before their age-peers will reach this stage.
Unfortunately, secondary schools do not respond well to this developmental advancement. Indeed, in many education systems the curriculum presented in the ‘key learning areas’ in the first year of secondary education is largely a review of the curriculum presented in the last year of primary. (For an analysis of just how much work in those Years is revision of previous work, you may want to re-read Miraca Gross’s article ‘To group or not to group: Is that the question?’ which you received as a support article with Core Module 6.) For the gifted learner who has been spending much of his class time waiting for the others to catch up, the realisation that high school may be simply ‘more of the same’ may be the last straw.

Betts and Neihart recommend that ‘dropouts’ be assisted with mentorships and allowed to engage in in-depth study in their field of special interest. It is important to rescue these students before they indeed become dropouts from the system.

**Type 5** ‘double-labelled’ or ‘twice-exceptional’ students are indeed a group at risk. These students may be physically disabled (e.g., gifted hearing impaired or gifted visually impaired students or gifted students with cerebral palsy), emotionally or behaviourally disabled (e.g., gifted autistic students or gifted students with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)), or students with specific learning disabilities. These students may be very confused about their ability to perform. They are aware that they are very bright and they may also be aware that they are much more emotionally mature than many of their age-peers but they may not understand why there are such discrepancies between the ways they think and the ways in which they express themselves.

Disturbingly, a study of gifted learning disabled students (Reis et al., 1995) found that 50% of them had been made to repeat a year at school and that they felt deeply ashamed about this, knowing that they were bright but performing below their potential. Ironically, researchers have recently suggested that for these students a grade advancement can be combined with remediation because gifted students, even those with learning difficulties, do not need as much repetition of instruction as their age-peers of average ability. For a review of this research, read Sidney Moon and Sally Reis’s chapter on acceleration and twice-exceptional students in Volume 2 of A nation deceived: Why schools hold back America’s brightest students (Colangelo, Assouline & Gross, 2004). This is accessible online at: http://www.nationdeceived.org

Betts and Neihart strongly recommend that twice-exceptional students be placed in gifted programs. Mentorships, where the gifted student is paired with an adult mentor who will focus on the student’s strengths while assisting him to compensate for his disabilities, are specifically recommended.
Type 6, ‘autonomous learners’, tend to be very self-directed with a strong internal locus of control. In general these are students whose natural learning styles, some of which are discussed in this Module, have been accepted and facilitated by the school. An important goal of gifted programs is to assist all gifted students to become autonomous learners.
David, in Year 10, is academically brilliant and one of the highest achieving students his school has ever produced. He is not, however, the easiest person to get on with. He can be extremely sarcastic and frequently uses his keen and pointed sense of humour as a weapon - especially against the school’s sports and athletic stars.

David’s school places enormous importance on success in sports and athletics. Reports in the school newsletter overwhelmingly feature achievements in competitive sport. The school has an unspoken policy of not publicising academic achievements in case this gives rise to conceit or arrogance in the academically talented students.

David has very few friends among the male students, although they usually seek him out around exam time. He has a few good friends among the girls in his Year and also in Years 11 and 12, with whom he shares genuinely warm and supportive friendships - not love relationships but relationships of deep affection, mutual support and bonding.

_How could what you have learned in this Module help to ‘explain’ David?_
How could what you have learned in this Module help to ‘explain’ David?

David seems to be in a difficult situation. He is highly gifted academically in a school which values gifts of the body a great deal more than gifts of the mind. Indeed, the school’s unofficial policy seems to be to promote and publicise sports and athletic success - they don’t seem to worry that their sports stars may become conceited about their gifts! - while refusing to publicly promote and praise academic talent.

In Core Module 3 we discussed how the higher levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy - analysing a situation, thoughtfully putting elements of it together (synthesising) and evaluating (making judgements) respond to gifted students’ natural learning styles. David is very bright and has probably been able to analyse his community’s sports/academics dichotomy, and the reasons for it, since the early years of high school. Could his sarcastic comments to, and about, the ‘sports jocks’ arise from envy and resentment of what must seem to be a very biased and unfair situation?

David may be aware that despite its reluctance to praise academic striving, the school will probably use his success in the university entrance exams to boost its own academic reputation - after he has left! This awareness - again arising from gifted students’ enhanced capacity for analysis and evaluation - may be making him even more bitter.

In Extension Module 3 we will be looking at research which shows that gifted students’ conceptions and expectations of friendship seem to be quite different, in several ways, from those held by age-peers, and that girls tend to be more mature in their friendship conceptions than boys of similar ages. This may be why David gravitates towards girls - including older girls - to satisfy his friendship needs, rather than towards the boys with whom, in any case, he seems to have little in common.
Questions for Reflection

(1) You have now been introduced to three of the best known definitions and models of giftedness. Gagné’s Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (DMGT), Renzulli’s ‘three-ring’ model and Tannenbaum’s ‘sea star’ model.

Which model do you believe would be most useful and practical in your school setting? What are your reasons for making this judgement?

(2) Having read, discussed and thought about the learning characteristics of gifted students which we have presented in this Extension Module, are there students in your class, faculty or school whom you had not previously believed might be gifted but whom you might now want to look at more closely?
Resources

References and Further Reading


Websites

http://www.gifted.uconn.edu
(The University of Connecticut)

http://www.nationdeceived.org
(Practical advice on acceleration)

Companion articles, reprinted with publishers’ permission
