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ABSTRACT

This report discusses the outcomes of a study that conducted site visits to 49 elementary schools and 37 secondary schools to investigate teachers' perceptions of the day-by-day operations of their talented and gifted programs. During the site visits, interviews were conducted with teachers, administrators, and students participating in gifted and talented programs. Some of the findings include: (1) teachers developed their own definitions of giftedness; (2) teachers' conceptions of characteristics of gifted students are closely related to their definitions of giftedness; (3) teachers embraced competitions in gifted programs and concluded that their students prosper with them; (4) most teachers believed that their gifted students are well-rounded; however, many mentioned that a small percentage of gifted students have social problems; and (5) teachers' reported a wide range of differences between boys and girls in nonacademic areas. Axioms for teaching the gifted were derived from the study and include: know your stuff, learn with your students, have expanding demands, and grow as a teacher. The study also found that many of the schools failed to evaluate their gifted programs in any way and that most of the schools performed only superficial evaluations. (Contains 11 tables and 26 references.) (CR)

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Messages from the Field: American Teachers of the Gifted Talk Back to the Research Community

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Abstract

This qualitative study deals with teachers, administrators and students involved in gifted programs in 86 schools (49 elementary schools, 37 secondary schools). The research questions concerns determining teachers perceptions of the day-by-day operations of their talented and gifted (TAG) programs: how they view their gifted students and what problems they struggle with. In essence, what works and what does not work? Eleven themes were extracted from these teachers. The themes contain important information that includes empirical definitions and characteristics of the gifted (teachers perceptions), axioms for teaching the gifted (what works), and a through exposition of their problems (what does not work).

Perspectives

Many up-to date texts dealing with the gifted organize and summarize the research studies that have been done in this area. There have also been a number of important studies presented at national and international research meetings. In addition, there are a number of research monographs (National Research Center on the Gifted; Talented National Association for Gifted Education) and two handbooks (Colangelo & Davis, 1997; Heller, Monks & Passow, 1993) that have been published containing reports of research studies in this area. The intent of most of this research is to better understand gifted students and to develop programs that maximize the development of their talent. But the middlemen in this process, the teachers, have received the least attention. They are the professionals that spend the most time with gifted students, and yet few research studies have been directed at them. Our primary reason for conducting this study is to give these teachers a voice.

At this juncture it is important to access TAG teachers' perceptions of the day-by-day operations of their programs. How do they view gifted students? What problems do they struggle with? In essence, what works and what does not work.

Objectives

The objectives of this study are to: 1. Extract themes from teachers and their administrators who are involved with programs for the gifted; 2. Interview the gifted students for verification purposes. The overall goal is to provide a conduit of information to researchers and school personnel from a dedicated assemblage of teachers of the gifted and their administrators. In our view, these educational "foot soldiers" have much to tell the "educational generals."

Methods

For this study site visits were made to 86 schools. During these visits we conducted interviews with teachers, administrators, and students participating in TAG programs. The interview guides follow a structured format but are organized to encourage open-ended comments and discussions (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Miles & Huberman, 1984; Rist, 1982a, 1982b). The topics used in the interviews were extracted from Orenstein's (1984) study of effective TAG programs. Each interview was audiotaped, transcribed, and computerized. The results of this

process produced 783 pages of transcription data for the teachers and administrators and another 246 pages for the student data. Furthermore, the narrative sections of the teacher/administrator interviews were transcribed, computerized, and sorted for in-depth analysis and accounted for another 88 pages of narrative data. Finally, program descriptions were collected whenever they were available and analyzed separately.

The interviews were organized within four areas: programs (questions dealing with curriculum, organization, supplies, grouping); identification (questions involving definitions, the mechanism for identifying gifted students, the stakeholders used in the identification process, characteristics of the students selected); staff (questions concerning the experience and training of the teachers, their approaches to maintaining and enhancing their skills, how teachers were selected, and how they were supervised); and evaluation (questions concentrating on whether the program has been evaluated, if follow-up activities of students have been undertaken, strengths and weaknesses of the program, and the participants' evaluation of the program).

The teacher/administrator interviews took two hours to conduct and were supplemented by any available descriptive information that had been developed by each school. The student interviews took one hour to complete and were used to verify the accuracy of the teachers' and administrators' information. (This information will be summarized in another report.)

The schools' descriptions of their gifted programs underwent a content analysis. We also used this data to compare information collected with the interviews. In some cases we used it to supplement the teachers' reports. In other cases this information helped us to gain new insights about the program.

The factual portions of the data are reported in other articles (see Campbell & Verna, 1998; Verna & Campbell, 1998). In addition, we extracted themes from the narrative portions of the interviews (Schatzman & Strauss, 1973; Patton, 1980; Goetz & Lecompte, 1984). The triangulation of methods for this study include the content analysis of documents, together with interviews of participants at three levels (administrators, teachers, students); therefore, we were able to examine the accuracy of each respondent's answers with other participants in the program. This process assures a measure of reliability and validity.

Data Sources

The data for this study comes from the gifted programs in 86 schools (49 elementary schools, 37 secondary schools) in the Metropolitan New York region. For each school we collected approximately four interviews with gifted children in the program. A total number of 301 students were interviewed.

Results

The following themes are derived from the narrative portions of the teacher/ administrator interviews: Empirical Definitions of Giftedness; Gifted Programs Dimensions of Excellence; Characteristics of Successful Gifted Students; Socialization: Well-roundedness to Deviance; Reinforcing Gender Stereotypes; Competition: Lifeblood of Gifted Programs; Axioms for Teaching the Gifted (1. Know Your Stuff, 2. Learn with Your Students, 3. Expanding Demands, 4. Grow as a Teacher); Marginal School Recognition, Inner Satisfaction Is All There Is; Insider Evaluations; Problems from the Trenches. Some of these themes describe frustration with current practices, while others imply interesting new perspectives. All of this empirical information is the product of extensive experience with gifted children.

Empirical Definitions of Giftedness

There are a number of competing definitions of the terms "gifted" and "talented." Some of these definitions have existed for decades and new ones appear regularly. They range from narrow definitions such as Terman's, "the gifted score above 130 in IQ" to Calvin Talyor's definition that "every child has some gifts which can be nurtured." The teachers are aware of some of these

definitions but their work with the gifted causes them to develop their own definitions (Table 1). We list 20 of these definitions, but more were mentioned by the teachers. Some of the key informant's definitions are too extensive to fit into the space on the table and are subdivided into more than one box. These definitions are mini goal statements that the teachers use to help them to keep focused during the school year. They deal with the full range of abilities that gifted children exhibit such as the ability "to think abstractly," "to pick up things quickly," "to take off on their own," "to go beyond what is taught," "to like to learn," or "to be inquisitive." Other elements of these definitions concern commitments, for example, "to excel," "to know," "to accomplish," "to explore," and "to follow through." Some items deal with motivation; for instance, being self-motivated or responsible, task-orientated, being able to work without guidance. Finally, these teachers also include the following: "ability to be challenged," "independence," "creative thinkers," "problem solvers," "risk takers," "curious," and "the willingness to find alternative solutions to problems."

Characteristics of Successful Gifted Students

A theme closely related to the teacher's/administrator's definitions of giftedness are their conceptions of the characteristics of those gifted children that thrive in their programs. Many authors have developed extensive lists of characteristics of gifted students (Clark, 1995; Rimm & Davis, 1993; Tuttle, 1988). These lists serve as very useful summaries of behaviors that teachers can use to identify the gifted. In fact, compilations of these characteristics are listed in the highly successful Renzulli-Hartman (1976) teacher nomination scales.

One important subset concerns the work habits of these students. Notice the solid application of hard work in these nine statements (Table 2.1). The teachers especially like the ability of these students to "work on their own," "independently." They also appreciate their consistent application.

Another important sub-grouping deals with abilities related to learning. The seven statements listed present the picture of students eager to learn with a real thirst for knowledge. These proactive behaviors, obviously, make any teacher's job much easier because they signify an intrinsic motivation to learn new material or new ideas.

The main sections of Table 2.2 contain 33 more statements or adjectives that describe successful gifted students. Children that write well, express themselves clearly, with high levels of verbal ability and good thinking skills are prized in any class. Likewise, mature and disciplined students who are attentive, curious, inquisitive, creative, enthusiastic, adaptable, organized, and persistent generally do well in school.

It is not surprising to find items relating to the ability of gifted students to think more abstractly because they can be expected to reach Piaget's formal thought at much earlier ages. Similarly, anyone who has taught the gifted has observed that many of these children "have a perspective of their own," or a well-developed sense of "intellectual honesty." These qualities are highly valued in America. Some of these behaviors can intimidate unprepared teachers and be seen as threats. The "demand to know" and to be able to think critically can also be troublesome to some teachers.

Gifted Programs Dimensions of Excellence

Another theme closely related to the characteristics of successful gifted students concerns the dimensions of excellence. The 20 statements that appear in Table 3 summarize what these teachers and administrators want to achieve for their programs. Most of these statements concern cognitive or motivational growth. The teachers want to let children explore, to go "beyond normal boundaries," so that they can derive new interests and bring out their talents. By implication they don't want to "hold them back." Instead, they look to their programs as an "outlet for boredom" that contains more challenges and encourages the children "to do their own thing."

They also design their programs to help the students think, to solve problems effectively, and to learn how to be responsible. For motivation they look for the program to help the children

to be more confident, curious, and independent. They also understand that the programs can help socialize the children.

Competition: The Lifeblood of Gifted Programs

Competitions have been used by many generations of teachers to challenge gifted students. Americans have used competitions in academics, fine and performing arts, leadership and service. Karnes and Riley (1996) published a compilation of 275 competitions that cover the United States. This volume is directed at students, parents, and educators with information on how to apply, deadline dates, format of the content, etc.

Among educators there is a debate about the use of such competitions. Diegmüller (1996) summarizes the different points of view. The argument for encouraging gifted students to participate in competitions revolves around challenging them. Students that excel in competitions win prestige and in some cases secure scholarship funds. The prestige is used to give the gifted student an advantage when applying to college or professional schools. The critics of competitions argue that for every winner there are many more "losers," and the damage done to these individuals may exceed the benefits realized by the few winners. Some school psychologists argue that the competitions exert too much stress on the children and can cause psychological problems.

What do teachers of the gifted think about the competitions? The teachers interviewed in this study embraced competitions to the extent that we have labeled this theme - Competition: The Lifeblood of Gifted Programs. Some teachers tried to discourage competitions, but despite misgivings they conclude that their students prosper with them. Many of these teachers deduced that the children loved competition. One key informant expressed the contradiction, "It's so competitive, they hate it. But they also thrive on it ... so competition is a love/hate thing."

Another key informant believes that competition for "the bright is inevitable, but not a negative in their lives; a spirit of competition, not cut-throat competition." She thinks that the gifted are quite willing to take the risks involved.

America is a very competitive society with its lively interest in sports. Few educators apply the same arguments against the school's football, baseball, or basketball competitions. Notice in Table 4 how these teachers handle the competitions. Many of the 26 statements imply ways to blunt excesses. For example, making sure the "competitiveness is pretty safe," communicating to the children that the process of competing "is what you make it," trying to dampen "cut-throat competition."

Many of the teachers statements imply that the competitions help the students to realize their potential. For example, it is "their way of proving themselves," of "being on top," "of wanting to be the best." These statements also indicate the fact that the gifted are "naturally competitive, almost to a fault." We conclude that these experienced teachers come to the conclusion that competition among their students is inevitable. It is for these reasons that they use the competitions as a stimulus to get the students to "work hard." Furthermore, the competitions provide challenges to students who otherwise might find school boring and tedious.

Socialization: Well-roundedness to Defiance

Most of the teachers' believe that their gifted students are well-rounded. They came to this conclusion by observing that many of their gifted students take active roles in extra curricular activities such as band, chorus, school newspaper, etc. However, many of the teachers mention that a small percentage of gifted students have social problems. Some "don't communicate much with other students," "some are strange or anti-social," "some are not well-rounded in a cultural sense," "some are emotionally immature," "some are un-street wise," "some are less well-rounded socially," and "socially lacking." Some of these gifted children get along better with adults than with their gifted peers.

Some teachers believe that well-roundedness depends upon the gifted students' parents. Such parents provided more opportunities for these children to visit museums, develop musical abilities, or other cultural interests.

A few of the high school teachers think that some of their students become engrossed in one small area and devote all their time to it. They believe these students are limiting their growth in other areas. One teacher observed that the gifted need to learn how to deal with failure. Their academic success in earlier grades tends to make them over-confident in high school.

One key informant teacher views the antisocial gifted in these words: "It's like a bell curve. The majority are relatively well-rounded, but there are extremes. Some are strong or anti-social in their behavior. They don't communicate much with others." Few of these teachers referred to the gifted students as "nerds" or "geeks," which parallels the approach of most gifted students who resent these labels. Perhaps the teachers condition themselves not to use negative labels for students they generally respect. One teacher found that the "gifted tend to pull each other up. The social interaction among them is very good." In this way the teacher observed that the social problems become ameliorated. Finally, one teacher said that "great ability in one area can let a child become narrow. This talent can be a double edged sword."

Reinforcing Gender Stereotypes

Many teachers report few academic differences between gifted boys and girls. However, these teachers may not be sensitized to notice how their behaviors differ toward boys and girls (AAUW, 1992). Some teachers train themselves not to look for gender differences, and others make the point that they treat boys and girls the same, but, research in a variety of different settings paints a very different picture (Brophy & Good, 1970; Sadker & Sadker, 1985, 1994).

Teachers of the gifted report a wide range of differences between boys and girls in nonacademic areas. Many elementary teachers find girls more mature, "boys can't sit still," "boys need to move around more," "boys are more easily frustrated." One teacher believes that "girls' work was neater but the content of the less neat boys' work was better." This analysis has been found by other researchers (Dweck, Davidson, Nelson, & Enna, 1978). At the elementary school level many female teachers prefer to teach boys: "I like boys' sense of humor" ; "boys are rough and tough, not emotional and wishy washy like girls" ; "girls are as bright as boys but have not been noticed as fast as boys" ; "girls are more caddie -- boys more childish."

One of the key informant elementary teachers gives her interpretation of the gender stereotyping in her classroom with the following observation: "Boys and girls are nice to each other but always competitive, especially the boys. They are competitive about what kind of question they ask, so one asks a good question, and the other will still have to ask a good question to show he knows something. Boys have big egos. Because the way children are socialized, girls don't ask questions aloud. They come to the teacher quietly. Boys come with complete confidence; girls just wait."

Notice that this teacher doesn't see girls as less knowledgeable or talented. Girls simply lack the egos to ramrod their ideas across. This ego related finding has been found in other studies (Linn & Hyde, 1989). Marcia Linn (1986) believes that boys are actually over-confident.

At the secondary level some of the teachers report that girls are less interested in math and science--"they don't see a future for themselves" in these areas. Many teachers feel that girls have "stronger work habits," are "more task-orientated," "more work-conscious," "have pride in what they do," "more dedicated," "do extra work." Boys, on the other-hand, "are more careless", "more successful," "more willing to take risks," and "less self-consciousness." One teacher thinks that girls tend to "hold back in math and science." She feels that in these areas boys are better "it's a confidence thing." Eccles (1983) found that the math self-concepts of girls declined from elementary school through high school, and our study confirms this finding.

Axioms for Teaching the Gifted

1. Know Your Stuff.

One of the most important themes to be isolated from this study was developed from two questions -- What advice would you give to a teacher just beginning to teach the gifted? and What

mistakes did you make? The teachers gave us lengthy, well-thought out answers to these questions. The one point they emphasized was that teachers of the gifted needed "to know your stuff." We took this statement as the title of one of the four axioms (Table 5.1). The teachers define the term to mean knowing the curriculum to be taught and the level of preparation needed. They emphasize that teachers must "be prepared," "be ready for creative questions," "to know what you are doing," "to be informed." In terms of the subject matter, they believe that teachers need to acquire "deeper preparation," to know their facts and concepts on a much higher level. One teacher summarized the need for such preparation: "You can't fake it with these kids. The children are just too smart to not see that the teacher doesn't know what he/she is teaching." For this reason they think that teachers of the gifted need to be "on-their-toes" with in-depth knowledge at their finger tips. Poor preparation is all too obvious to gifted students. They also recommend a certain level of honesty when the teacher doesn't know an answer. They believe that the children can sense how much effort the teacher devotes to his/her lessons. They also think that if the students sense that the teacher doesn't know his stuff, the goals of the program will falter.

2. Learn with Your students

The second axiom is labeled learning with your students, and is intimately related to the first axiom where extensive subject matter knowledge is needed. The emphasis for this axiom is to establish an atmosphere where both the teacher and the students learn. The 14 statements contained in Table 5.2 convey the work ethic needed to successfully teach the gifted. The teachers believe that they need to "be a sponge" for knowledge, to "always be learning," "to do extra work," and to become a "perennial student."

These teachers also recommend carefully listening to the students, teaching them that "there is more than one way to solve a problem." In brief, their advice is to "ask of yourself what you ultimately ask of your students." This down-to-earth advice rings true.

3. Expanding Demands

The third axiom involves expanding the scope of the classroom demands for the gifted. The 20 statements included in Table 5.3 call for expanding horizons. They recommend having higher expectations (expect more; demand more), instituting more challenges, more give and take, more probing. These teachers believe that a "vibrant learning environment" needs to be created because more can be accomplished with the gifted. They also observe that it is "harder to individualize" with the gifted. They think that teachers need to develop more sensitivity and more patience with them. One teacher recommends "learning to wait for (their) responses." Another likes "picking their brains" which means asking an array of follow-up questions. This teacher-student dialogue helps students to think things through. Finally, these teachers believe that the gifted "will learn in spite" of poor teaching. They want more from their teachers but can supply some of their own answers if the teacher can not.

4. Grow as a Teacher

The fourth axiom is closely related and specifies that teachers of the gifted need not only learn more material but grow as teachers. The 26 statements included in Table 5.4 illustrate the extent of growth recommended. Many of the statements deal with developing a better understanding of the gifted. Becoming "more aware of their needs," "finding out their interests," and having an open mind in dealing with them. These teachers believe that there are sensitivity levels that need to be developed so that the gifted can be better appreciated and understood. In fact, they think that teachers need to learn to enjoy the personality of the gifted. In this way they can have better relationships. But these teachers recommend not being intimidated by the gifted and not being afraid to challenge them. Such children need to be given more choices than students with lesser abilities. They also recommend letting them develop their own ideas in their own ways. This strategy illustrates a greater respect for their abilities and talent.

A second focus of this axiom involves the level of preparation needed by teachers. This requirement means knowing more content (axiom 1) but it also involves deciding the amount of material to be covered during any one lesson. They reasoned that teachers of the gifted need to prepare more work for the students each day "always have more work than less work." In other words they recommend over-preparing day by day. They also think teachers of the gifted need to learn to budget their time more effectively because the job requires extra time and extra work.

One persistent problem reported by many of these teachers is "finding good curriculum." This problem occurs in the United States because most schools have not developed sufficient curricula for the gifted. One-size-fits-all curriculum does not fit all learners! The teachers recommend not depending on the textbook so much. Instead, they believe that it is a good idea to deviate from lesson plans when the opportunity arises. These teachers also express the view that teachers need to read more about the gifted and develop support groups together with parents and other teachers. Finally, one key informant advises not trying "to cover-up mistakes" because the children will notice. This statement illustrates the challenges that go with teaching gifted students.

Insider Evaluation

Many schools fail to evaluate their gifted programs in any way (38%) and most schools perform only superficial evaluations (55%) by the principal. Only 7% conducted formal evaluations, and none of the teachers in these schools learn how these evaluations turn out. Not a single teacher in any school sees an evaluation write-up of their gifted program!

The theme, insider evaluation, refers to a principals yearly informal ad hoc evaluation of each segment of his/her educational program. In some cases the principal compares standardized test scores of the children in the program with the scores of students in the rest of the school. Such comparisons were more qualitative than quantitative. In some cases the ranking of the whole school on city-wide standardized tests are used as a measure of the effectiveness of the program. The principals believe that the scores of the students in the gifted program raise the average scores of the whole school. In New York City these test results are annually published in the *New York Times*. These test results effectively rank the different schools in each district and offer a comparative academic yardstick for all the school districts.

For those schools where students compete for prizes or awards, the teachers believe that the number of awards won signify the success of the program. In some cases the parents of the winning students were urged to write letters of support or campaign for the continuation of the program. Some high schools keep records of the students SAT records, the number of scholarships earned, and the number of students that enrolled in elite colleges.

One administrative team considered our interviews to be a "formal evaluation" of the program. It should be emphasized that we issued no report of our evaluation and simply collected data from teachers in the program. The fact that the supervisory personnel in this school view our study as a testament of the success of their program underscores the lack of understanding of the values of evaluations.

Overall, the sparacity of even a minimum evaluation of these gifted programs represents a major weakness. Schools are willing to initiate programs for the gifted but do not see why evaluations are needed. Those in charge have only the most limited knowledge of how evaluations of a program are done. Not a single program tracks the graduates of their gifted programs. There is virtually no information in any of the schools about how well their former gifted students perform at the next educational level. The elementary schools in the same district do not follow or document the success or failure of their gifted students at the connecting junior high school. Similarly, none of the high school programs has any established practice of finding out what happens to their gifted students in college or beyond. Teachers who become mentors of individual students are the only ones that keep in contact.

These results show that school personnel need training in how to conduct evaluations systematically. They need to learn that such evaluations can be used to correct on-going weaknesses and to help the program grow year by year.

There are many publications dealing with the evaluation of educational programs including some tests that are easily adaptable for school personnel (Callahan & Caldwell, 1995; Renzulli, 1984). However, the results of this study show that the more usable texts have not been widely distributed to teachers and administrators in school settings. Furthermore, it is our view that more simplified instruments and mechanisms need to be developed that schools can use to keep track of their graduates. They also need simplified checklists and questionnaires that can be sent to parents or administered to students and teachers involved in gifted programs. Teachers also must be incorporated into the evaluation process. Keeping them in the dark serves no useful purpose and, in the long run, undermines their morale.

Marginal School Recognition

The overwhelming majority of teachers in this study receive no recognition from their principals or schools for their efforts at teaching the gifted. The depth of their feelings are evident from the quotes in Table 6. Many of these teachers believe that they expend extra effort with their gifted students and see very little recognition for these outlays of energy. The depth of their feelings are contained in these statements: "almost anything you do is taken for granted," "most people say we're nuts," and "sometime I feel like a non-entity."

The only recognition they receive comes from the gifted children and from their parents. Some are noticed because their students win awards. However, other teachers sometimes express the view that the children won the awards, not the teachers. This lack of appreciation by other teachers is evident in the accusation of elitism that teachers report to us. Much of this negative staff behavior may well be due to professional jealousy. However, the net effect is to isolate the gifted teacher.

We infer that the principals in these schools do value the efforts of these teachers and recognize them by asking them to train other teachers or send them to professional development events, but they downplay their recognition either because they fear difficulty with the Teachers Union or they fear political difficulties within their school.

Inner Satisfaction

The next theme (Table 7) is labeled "inner satisfaction" because teachers think that their chief source of satisfaction came from their experiences with the gifted children. They feel good about seeing their gifted students grow in terms of "enhanced thinking skills, values or appreciations." Many derive a great deal of pleasure at seeing their students win important awards in Future Problem Solving Contests or in the Westinghouse Talent Search.

Several of these teachers received recognition from outside the school. Two of them were White House Presidential Award Teachers, and others are Teachers of the Year in their regions.

Problems from the Trenches

The teachers in this study talk about an array of problems that effect their ability to serve their gifted students. The one factor they complain about the most is the insertion of nongifted students into the gifted program. On this issue they have very strong views. They came to the conclusion that such children do not benefit and their insertion slows down the pace of their class. Some of the arguments they mention are: "students who do not belong are there because they have been told they were gifted. I find it is detrimental to the child's ego"; "they don't belong"; "You feel sorry for them because you know they don't want to be there. Mommies are pushing them to be here"; "it is better when the nongifted opt-out, because they do not have the feeling of failure."

These teachers are expressing the view that placing such children in the gifted program can undermine the children's confidence and actually harm them. Some teachers find such children become discipline problems. Teachers express the view that the nongifted who are placed in the gifted program need to work much harder. Such children suffered from the competitive atmosphere -- "The bottom has to work the hardest."

Another common complaint from the teachers is their inability to remove such children from the program. The teachers are frustrated at their inability to convince their administrators to remove these children. In some cases the placements are due to district politics or parental pressure and both are highly resented by the teachers. Some are inserted because they have talented older siblings. Others are added to "fill seats" as "part of a numbers game" where a proportion of the school is automatically designed as gifted.

Most of the teachers also complain about their classes having too many students and almost all of them believe that time is their biggest problem. Some object to their school's cost-cutting approaches for the gifted. One teacher expresses his views as follows: "Fifty percent of all intellectual work is done by ten percent of the people. If that's true I know these 10 percent are our talented people. That tells me we cannot cheat or skimp or this nation is really going to be crippled, a lot more than you think. You can't cut out some of these programs for these talented people because all of a sudden we're going to look around and half of the things that need to be done aren't going to be done." Others may argue with this teachers facts, but his view does make sense.

Many teachers have very little initial training for teaching the gifted and express the need for more inservice training, especially for time management. These teachers sense that they are more isolated from other teachers. They need more networking both within their school and with teachers of programs in other schools. One suggestion they make is to schedule all preparation periods of all the teachers of the gifted at the same time so that they can interact. One teacher thinks that the gifted teachers are "left on their own so much that each teacher develops their own philosophy. Sometimes the philosophies of different teachers conflict." This idea of teachers' forming their own personal philosophy makes sense. Likewise, the need for coordination and interaction also fits a need.

The teachers also complain about the bureaucracy in their schools and the politics at the selection of teachers for the gifted program. Finally, many of them complain about parents. Some rate working with parents as their biggest problem. Certainly, parents of the gifted make much more contact with teachers. It is our view that teachers need training on how to handle this contact. They need training on how to work with adults.

Discussion

The eleven themes we extracted from the teachers' and administrators' narratives in this study are important messages. These dedicated professionals have a great deal to say. They face the gifted every day and are ultimately responsible for the success or failure of their gifted programs. Good teachers can make or break these programs. These educational foot shoulders need to be understood to a much greater extent.

Earlier in this article we asked four research questions. Now we will summarize answers. The teachers' perceptions of the day-by-day operations of their programs are summarized in the themes. Two of the themes deal with goals: the dimensions of excellence theme lays out the long-range goals, and the empirical definition theme specifies their short term mini goals.

How do these teachers view their gifted students? Two themes give us an accurate picture of their perceptions. The empirical definitions theme gives us the range and complexity of their understanding of these talented students. This picture is enlarged with the many qualities described in the characteristics theme, which contains work habits, learning behaviors, and a series of motivational qualities. This enriched perception of the gifted is based on direct observations and should be carefully studied and analyzed.

What problems do these teachers struggle with? The socialization theme shows that not all the gifted are well-rounded. A few are socially maladjusted and some are potential deviants. Both kinds of children should receive counseling. A more common socialization problem involves gifted children's interactions with less talented peers. In this area the children need to learn how to cope with average peers who may well be hostile for no rational reason. This social problem can persist into adulthood and cause a great deal of pain for the gifted (see Campbell, 1996).

The gender stereotyping theme shows that these teachers do not recognize the many equity issues that exist in their classes. This is an area where sensitivity training is needed. The teachers also struggle with marginal recognition and very limited satisfactions (two more themes).

In essence, what works and what does not work? One glaring shortcoming concerns evaluations because few of the school personnel involved in this study understand how formative or summative evaluations are done. They do not see how such evaluations can help to build a more defensible gifted program (insider evaluation theme). These teachers and their administrators lack even the most basic understanding of how evaluations work.

In the problems from the trenches theme we lay out many more practices that do not work. The items mentioned in this theme range from districts skimping on financial contributions to the programs to more advanced types of training that the teachers need.

What works? The axioms theme, with its four subthemes, are practices that work. These axioms should be seen as fundamental requirements for any teacher with a gifted assignment. Teachers of the gifted need "to know their stuff" (Axiom 1.1), and they also need to excel in a number of important areas. If teachers are trained to expect more from their gifted students, then they must also be trained to deliver more to them. This means that they must cover more material, learn with their students and grow as teachers (the other 3 axioms).

Competition is another practice that works. This theme shows that teachers are able to channel the competitive spirit that naturally exists within the gifted class in such a way as to negate harmful side effects. One of the keys of this strategy is to teach the children to compete against themselves and to appreciate the related benefits that accompany the effort needed for competition.

In conclusion, experienced teachers and their administrators are important sources of information and must be recognized for their contributions. Their voices must be heard by the "generals" of the educational establishment.

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Table 1

Empirical Definitions of Giftedness

Ability to bring the printed page to life	Gifted are highly motivated and inquisitive
Gifted are independent: draw conclusions, able to do required work without guidance	Ability to want to learn and reach their maximum potential
Gifted demonstrate extraordinary ability to know; a commitment to excellence	Gifted have a commitment to know
Gifted excel academically, are responsible, and self-motivated	Gifted's work ethic helps them not only learn but to absorb knowledge so that it becomes part of them
Gifted have a strong manifestation for performance and a need to explore	Gifted have a thirst for knowledge; task-oriented; follow through; good problem solvers; risk takers
Gifted have innate gifts but need guidance to bring them out	Gifted are able to process knowledge in different ways -- able to learn beyond what is taught
Gifted have the ability to think abstractly and the ability to accomplish	Gifted are interested, self-motivated, creative thinkers that can make use of talent
Gifted like to learn and be challenged	Gifted see different alternatives to solutions not just one way
Gifted pick up things quickly	Most important -- curiosity
Truly gifted take off on their own	Highly motivated

Table 2.1

Characteristics of Successful Gifted Students

Work Habits	Learning
Ability to work on their own	Can absorb material
Consistent work habits	Desire to learn
Good work habits	Eager to learn
Prepared to work	Embrace learning
Task committed	Enjoys learning
They do the work	More interested in learning
Willing to work hard	Want to know
Work hard	
Work independently	

Table 2.2
Characteristics of Successful Gifted Students

A perspective of their own	Good thinking skills
Ability to write	Inquisitive
Able to express themselves	Intellectual honesty
Able to keep up	Keen interest in things
Adaptable	Maturity
Attentive	Organized
Committed	Persistent
Competitive	Problem solvers
Creative	Responsive to ideas
Critical thinkers	Self-motivated
Curious	Take risks
Dedicated	Think abstractly
Demand to know	Thrive abstractly
Demonstrate verbal ability	Verbal skills
Disciplined	Want to be challenged
Enthusiastic	Want to do well
Flexible	

Table 3

Gifted Programs Dimensions of Excellence

Allows creativity
Balance curiosity/independence/initiative
Brings out talents
Expand and explore new interests
Explore education beyond normal boundaries
Flexibility
Fosters critical thinking
Get children to think
Gives children self-confidence
Gives students greater exposure to a more varied curriculum
Help children become more responsible for their own learning
Learn to solve problems
Let them fail and let gifted peers show them how to succeed
Makes children more open-minded
More challenge
Permits kids to "do their own thing"
Potential for students to work at their own pace and not be held back
Promotes socialization
Provides outlets for boredom
Students can explore and take risks

Table 4

Competition: The Life Blood of Gifted Programs

Competition helps them to become self-directed, independent, life-long learners	Gifted put competition on themselves
Competitiveness is pretty safe	Gifted thrive on competition
Competition is their way of proving themselves to each other	Gifted want to be the best in everything
Competition is what you make of it	More is expected and demanded
Competition love/hate thing	Most enjoy competing
Competition makes them work harder	Most gifted are competitive
Competitive -- almost to a fault	Naturally competitive with each other
Gifted are not very tolerant of wrong answers	No cut-throat competition
Gifted create competition where it does not exist	Sometimes competitive to the point of conflict
Gifted expect to be on top -- and find it hard to be less than top	Teacher fosters competition within self not among children
Gifted like successes, the feeling of being on top	Want to be the best in everything
Gifted like to win	Want to be the best they can
Gifted love competition	We live in a competitive society

Table 5.1

Axioms for Teaching the Gifted

1. Know Your Stuff

Be prepared

Be ready for creative questions

Better to teach, but harder to prepare for

Develop as much expertise as you can in one particular area

Involves much deeper preparation

Know what you are doing

Make sure you are always well prepared in subject matter

Make sure you know your content very well

Must be informed and “on your toes”

Need absolutely solid academic credentials

Well-grounded in subject matter

You can't fake it with these kids

Table 5.2

Axioms for Teaching the Gifted

2. Learn With Your Students

Accept the challenge of learning from the children

Always be learning

Ask of yourself what you ultimately ask of your students

Be a sponge yourself

Be ready to do extra work

Become a workoholic!

Become more flexible

Don't be afraid of saying "I don't know the answer"

Give them the opportunity to stretch their minds

Learn there is more than one way to solve a problem

Look up what you don't know together with the students

Must listen to the students

Put a demand upon yourself to be a student

Teachers are perennial students

Table 5.3

Axioms for Teaching the Gifted

3. Expanding Demands	
Create a vibrant learning environment	More demanding
Expect more	More give and take
Gifted are different -- not harder or easier to teach -- just different	More probing needed
Gifted do not fit into any mold	More to accomplish
Harder to individualize	More varied
I like picking their brains	Need patience, sensitivity, and understanding
Learn to wait for student responses	Not as dependent on the teacher
More care in grading	Self-motivated
More challenging	Want more from the teacher
More creative work	Will learn in spite of you
More curious	

Table 5.4

Axioms for Teaching the Gifted

4. Grow as a Teacher

Always have more work than less work	Have confidence in students
Be more aware of their needs	Let them develop their own ideas the way they want to
Be ready to do extra work	Must enjoy the personality of the gifted child
Be willing to experiment	Must put in a lot of extra time
Budget your time -- never enough time	Read about how to teach the gifted -- you need new ideas
Constant problem -- finding good curriculum for the gifted	Sensitivity levels to the gifted need to be learned
Don't be afraid to challenge students	Start a support group of teachers and parents of the gifted
Don't be intimidated	Take time to feel comfortable teaching the gifted
Don't depend on the book so much	Teach them how to question each other
Don't try to cover up mistakes -- they will notice	Teach them how to think
Find out the children's interests	Use more cooperative learning -- less tradition
Give them enough choices	Willingness to deviate from the lesson plan
Have an open mind	Work with parents for the child's benefit

Table 6

Marginal School Recognition

<u>Negative</u>	<u>Positive</u>
Called elitists by other teachers	Asked to train other teachers
Don't think teachers are appreciated	Lovely letters from parents
Everything you do is taken for granted	Recognition comes from awards won by students
"Most people say we're nuts"	Recognition comes from children and their parents
No "pats on the back"	Sent to professional development events
No recognition from other teachers!	
No recognition from principal or school	
Sometimes I feel like a "non-entity"	
Very rarely get thanks	

<p>Table 7</p> <p>Inner Satisfaction Is All There Is</p>
Exciting
I adore teaching gifted children
It's invigorating
Keeps you "on your toes"
Seeing the children achieving and feeling good about themselves
Seeing the children get awards and win contests
Seeing the children grow up to be thinkers and worthwhile adults
Seeing the students think
Sense of accomplishment
Several teachers receive teacher of the year awards
2 teachers won presidential teacher awards



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