

The Neglected Importance of Emotions

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Gagné (2011) addresses important questions for the field of gifted children's education. We are in broad agreement with his views, but also believe that some issues might be more problematic than proposed.

An important aspect of Gagné's approach is that, although academic performance is seen as the best measure of talent, IQ tests are also considered as useful measures. We would go one step further. Intelligence is a construct that implicitly refers to a theoretical framework. It is well known that different authors define intelligence in different ways, and that different definitions lead to the development of different tests. In speaking generally of the value of IQ, not referring to a specific test does not provide enough information for the reader. It is true that the external validity of IQ tests is good, but to take IQ as an unbiased and pure measure gives a distorted view of the problem. Thus, if Gagné wants to use IQ as a possible measure, he needs to specify the methodological framework he is using.

Academic performance is affected by methods of teaching, and we have two comments on this topic. Following the line advocated by Murray (2009), Gagné mentions the importance of teaching processes rather than contents. However, it should be pointed out that educational methods based on teaching general thinking skills have been found to lead to only limited transfer, if any at all (Grotzer & Perkins, 2000). This conclusion dovetails with the results from research on expertise, which show that there is not much transfer from one domain to another (Gobet & Campitelli, 2006). Thus, we are rather sceptical about this method of instruction.

Gagné mentions the large inter-individual differences even within a group of gifted children, and the necessity of providing instruction tailored to this diversity. We agree that this is important, although this might be very time-consuming for teachers. In this respect, we believe that the instructional computer-based technology developed in the last decades (e.g. Gobet & Wood, 1999) offers powerful means of teaching that are often neglected in the curricula offered to gifted children.

As is often the case in research on gifted children, Gagné's article neglects the role of emotions. The DMGT model focuses on the social utility of youngsters, but does not take into account their personal experiences and feelings. It is certainly a model that maximizes the intellectual capabilities of students, but with the consequence that they find themselves cut off from coetaneous groups. By contrast, several authors (e.g. Giordan et al., 2006; Lubart, 2005) have stressed that it is important to pay attention to the emotional needs of gifted children, who tend to show emotional hypersensibility (Guignard & Zenasni, 2004).

While we agree that the elements 1 and 2 of Gagné's (A)TD model (cf. Gagné, 2011, p. 12) are essential for talent development, we believe that point 3 is rather questionable because of the strong risk of creating an elite club. Similarly, point 4 incurs the reduction of time of socializing in the pursuit of higher academic performance. Again, there is a lack of consideration for the affective needs of the child. A possible solution, as outlined in Luzzo (2010), is to create modular programmes in which pupils have different kinds of

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work to do according to their abilities but with a common objective, which can be reached only with collaboration between all students, gifted or normal.

The ATD programme cannot reach its objectives if children are not motivated and if there is no emotional support. School failure is, paradoxically, a frequent problem among gifted students (Terrassier, 1981). While the ATD may reduce some of the factors that lead to underperformance, its lack of concern for affect can lead to failures in efforts to improve pupils' performance.

According to Gagné, inequity issues arise because of a lack of programmes having truly meritocratic value. Meritocracy is implicitly based on the assumption that a higher IQ leads to better social success. However, this is not always the case. A counter-example is the phenomenon of underachievement just mentioned, which might occur when a student's actions, behaviours and reasoning are unacceptable in a conformist school system. Given that their way of behaving is different from the expectations of society, gifted children may experience a feeling of refusal on the part of the educational institution and, accordingly, reject school activities.

Several empirical studies have shown that teachers might have a particular conception of the ideal pupil, valuing obedience and conformity at the expense of traits such as curiosity or independence (Wentzel, 1993). Thus, the selection of students by teachers can lead to an abnormally high proportion of conformist individuals (Mouchiroud, 2004). Selection methods are also likely to favour children who are in a social environment allowing them to express their full potential. For example, a higher mathematical intelligence cannot be expressed and detected in an environment where manual skills are paramount, as in a farming environment.

Moreover, the under-representation of economically disadvantaged gifted children is also due to a series of false expectations put on these students. Society and parents have lower expectations for these pupils. There are three issues here. Firstly, these children are not recognized as gifted because it is not expected of them to be so. Secondly, these students have low expectations of themselves. So, in a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy, they will achieve poor results and will not be able to participate in programmes that were designed for gifted learners, including the ATD programme. Finally, while the solution proposed by Gagné has the advantage of being objective, it does not solve all problems linked to equity. In particular, defining equity involves *values* that inevitably will be different between different people.

Gagné's article provides a unique perspective on the problem of the equity issue. Even though the DMGT model remains a good model for teaching, it must be completed by emotional support for the student. The introduction of computer-assisted teaching methods could help teachers in their tasks, giving them more time to deal with the emotional needs of the students.

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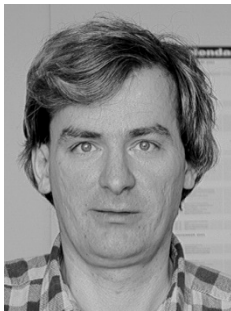
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