

CELEBRATING GIFTS AND TALENTS

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TRANSLATING GIFTS INTO TALENTS

Professor François Gagné, Honorary Professor of Psychology at l'Université du Québec in Montreal, and recognised worldwide for his contributions to the field of gifted education, developed his 'Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent' (2008), in which he explains how to translate gifts into talents or competencies, and how high potential can be translated into high achievement.

Natural Abilities: Gifts

In his model, François Gagné recognises different natural abilities, such as mental abilities (intellectual, creative, social, perceptual) and physical abilities (muscular and motor control). It is important to recognise that there exist many different types and levels of giftedness. The range can be from mildly to extraordinarily gifted. Ease and speed of learning as well as precocity can help parents notice their children's abilities. The speed at which some individuals are moving compared to their peers can be an indicator of their high abilities.

Catalysts

Catalysts facilitate a reaction. In his model, Gagné categorises catalysts into environmental catalysts and intrapersonal catalysts. Environmental catalysts include the milieu, the individuals, and the provisions (such as enrichment and acceleration). Parents, mentors, teachers, peers and pedagogy form part of an individual's environment. Intrapersonal catalysts include personality traits, temperament and resilience as well as goal management, including awareness of one's own and others' strengths and weaknesses, motivation (based on values, needs, interests and passions) and volition (autonomy, effort and perseverance).

Developmental Process

Natural abilities can be translated into competencies through a developmental process. Talent development is the systematic pursuit by individuals over a significant period of an enriched program of activities, underlining the importance of time and energy.

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

'Genius is 1 percent inspiration and 99 percent perspiration' (Thomas Edison).

In his book *Flourish* (2013), Martin Seligman mentions Angela Lee Duckworth and her theory on determination, character and success. Success is the result of competence multiplied

by the effort invested. Self-control, determination and auto discipline are crucial. Effort, grit, resilience and perseverance are essential elements to translate gifts into talents. Therefore, the gift is nothing without the right character strengths and the time spent practising.

Psychologist Carol Dweck developed her theory of the importance of having a growth mind-set rather than a fixed mind-set. Abilities can be developed: we are born with certain abilities, and we should use them, and spend time and effort developing them. Therefore, it is important not to rest on our laurels; otherwise, the gifts are lost.

As writer Emile Zola declares, 'The artist is nothing without the gift, but the gift is nothing without work'. It is crucial that time is spent practising one's gift.

THE ROLE OF THE PARENTS AND THE SCHOOL

According to the Tempelton National Reports on acceleration, 'A Nation Deceived' and 'A Nation Empowered', it is important to recognize gifted students, provide new challenges, minimise teaching students what they already know, and make school a positive experience for all students, including the brightest. Provisions include acceleration and enrichment.

According to Anna Bennett, education consultant and presenter of 'Identifying and Catering for Gifted Students', identification is the first step when implementing a program that meets the needs of gifted students. An individual learning profile will then keep track of the provisions used, including enrichment, extension, ability grouping and acceleration. At the conference, 'Illuminating the Spectrum of Giftedness and Talent Development', it was reiterated that it is crucial to keep gifted and talented students interested and motivated.

Some gifted and talented students tend to not be recognised. Some of our gifted students may be underachieving. Some gifted students, bored because they are not being challenged, may only attempt the challenging questions. Some students, 'twice exceptional', may cause confusion by appearing to have a learning disability or some other condition which may hide their high intellectual potential (Catherine Wormald and Carol Barnes, 2015).

Competitions such as *Tournament of Minds*, *Optiminds*, national scholastic competitions, as well as activities such as the Book Club, the Chess Club and the Robotics club offer challenges to gifted students.

According to Professor Albert Ziegler, as well as keeping gifted students challenged, interested and learning, it is crucial that these students are able to spend time practising their gifts. He recognises two kinds of key resources: endogenous resources (the resources within a person, including the individual's learning capital) and exogenous resources (the resources in the environment, including the educational environment).

In *The Hungry Mind, The Origins of Curiosity in Childhood*, Susan Engel (2015) discusses how vital curiosity is and how we are all born with an interest in knowing more about the world around us. It is important for the gifted individual to remain curious. Keeping curiosity and question-asking at the centre of the classroom will keep the gifted and talented students interested.

Toni Meath, Principal of MacRobertson Girls' High School in Victoria, shared her practical wisdom regarding 'Creating a school where the Gifted thrive'. According to her, school leaders need to believe in gifted education, have personal knowledge of and skills in gifted education, embed the language of the field into the language and structures of the school, have high expectations, and provide excellence in the provisioning of the curriculum, and wellbeing and co-curricular programs. Teacher efficacy includes teachers who have a deep expert knowledge of their domain, understand the zone of proximal development and the flow theory, are able to give honest and accurate feedback to students, create a culture of trust in the classroom to enable a growth mind-set, engage in robust professional learning and share ideas. She also presented the importance of the students' voices and the key role of parents as they know their children best.

POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY AND WELLBEING

Martin Seligman, in his book *Flourish* (2013), presents the PERMA model for wellbeing, listing five essential elements for wellbeing: **P**ositive emotion, **E**ngagement, positive **R**elationships, **M**eaning and **A**ccomplishment. Positive psychology may shed some light on gifted and talented students. A pilot study done by the Queensland Association for Gifted and Talented Children (QAGTC) found that, of the five elements essential to human wellbeing, Accomplishment was the most important to these gifted students, followed by Engagement, then Meaning, Relationships, and Positive emotion.

<u>PERMA</u>	<u>Order of importance</u>
Positive emotion and pleasure	5
Engagement	2
Relationships	4
Meaning	3
Accomplishment	1

The QAGTC also asked the children in that pilot study to take the VIA Strength Survey (Seligman, 2013), in which twenty-four character strengths are surveyed. The first five most important character strengths among the gifted and talented children surveyed, in order of importance, at the time of the study, as follows:

- creativity, originality, and ingenuity
- curiosity and interest in the world
- love of learning
- humour and playfulness
- bravery and courage

Every gifted individual is highly complex. As seen in Gagné's DMGT, parents, teachers, and mentors are part of the puzzle in the environment of a gifted individual. We all have a wonderful mission to empower our gifted learners to use their gifts and help them translate their gifts into talents, so that they can also fulfil their potential.

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