

# **GIFTED & TALENTED**

## Pocketbook

By Barry  
Hymer

Cartoons:  
Phil Hailstone



# Contents

|   | Page  |
|---|---|
|    | <b>Mystery or Mastery?</b> A new look at a familiar concept, who's gifted?, definitions, implications for the teacher, raising the bar, are gifts caught or taught? mystery vs mastery, implications of the 'mastery' framework, standards, accountability, small steps <span style="float: right;">5</span>                    |
|    | <b>Motivation – Intelligence's Motor</b> Your story and others', motivation – extrinsic vs intrinsic, beliefs about ability and about giftedness, big bad 'fixers', a reality check, smart giftedness, intrinsic motivation – case history, praise, the GRACE framework for gift creation <span style="float: right;">23</span> |
|    | <b>Grow!</b> Description, case history, ways of nurturing G, implications for whole school policy, talking the walk, generating G through LogoVisual Thinking (LVT) <span style="float: right;">45</span>   |
|    | <b>Relate!</b> Description, case histories, ways of nurturing R, wonder-wall, implications for whole school policy, generating R through Philosophy for Children (P4C) <span style="float: right;">59</span>  |
|   | <b>Act!</b> Description, case history, ways of nurturing A, the ASDA challenge, personalised enquiry, implications for whole school policy, generating A through Thinking Actively in a Social Context (TASC) <span style="float: right;">75</span>   |
|  | <b>Challenge!</b> Description, case history, ways of nurturing C, the 5-minute challenge, implications for whole school policy, meta-menus, generating C through Dilemma Based Learning (DBL) <span style="float: right;">89</span>   |
|  | <b>Exert!</b> Description, case history, ways of nurturing E, implications for whole school policy, generating E through Living Theory Action Research (LTAR) <span style="float: right;">107</span>  |

# Will this approach work for me?



You are likely to find much in this Pocketbook's approach to giftedness that you can identify with if you subscribe to the following values, beliefs and principles:

- Children do not have the same skills and strengths, but all can respond well to rich, challenging, personalised educational opportunities
- Gifts and talents aren't 'found,' 'discovered' or 'identified' in children – they're made, created and grown
- Gifts and talents aren't stable, measurable attributes – they wax and wane along with children's educational environments, the quality of their relationships, their commitment and dedication, and other factors
- A focus on children's *performances* and on teacher-imposed targets is less likely to lead to a long-term passion for learning (and achievement) than a focus on their *learning*, and their personally-generated targets

*'The healthy functioning community depends on realising the capacity to develop each [child's] gift.'*  
**Peter Senge** (Society for Organizational Learning)

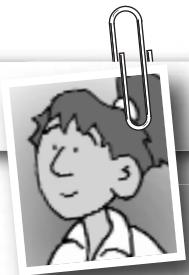


# Who's gifted? Definition 1



So what exactly do we mean when we label someone as 'gifted' and how do we decide who is? Do we need to? There are hundreds of definitions of giftedness, but since labels lead our thinking as well as describe it, let's give some serious thought to a couple of these. First, a very familiar one:

Exceptional academic ability or potential relative to one's peer group.



And a related way of 'reading' Safia, a Year 6 pupil:

It's no wonder Safia's so bright. Her parents are both highly able people themselves. Her exceptional academic achievements are explained by her natural giftedness. She clearly needs special provision, and she has in fact responded well to the accelerated literacy and numeracy provision she's had access to as part of our school's G&T cohort. She's one of our success stories and is destined for great things.

## Who's gifted? Definition 2



Now consider this less familiar definition of giftedness:

A preparedness to invest time, energy and resources (intellectual, physical, emotional, social) into an area of learning.



And a related 'reading' of Safia:

Safia has responded tremendously well to her stimulating and supportive home background and to the opportunities she's had in school. She's achieving wonderfully well but is showing signs of being more interested in her scores and class position than in her learning, and she's nervous of 'failure'. She seems, however, to have a genuine interest in art and design - how might I best help her to deepen and extend her interest in this area?

Which of these definitions and 'readings' do you hear most often in the staffroom?  
Which do you feel most comfortable with? Why?

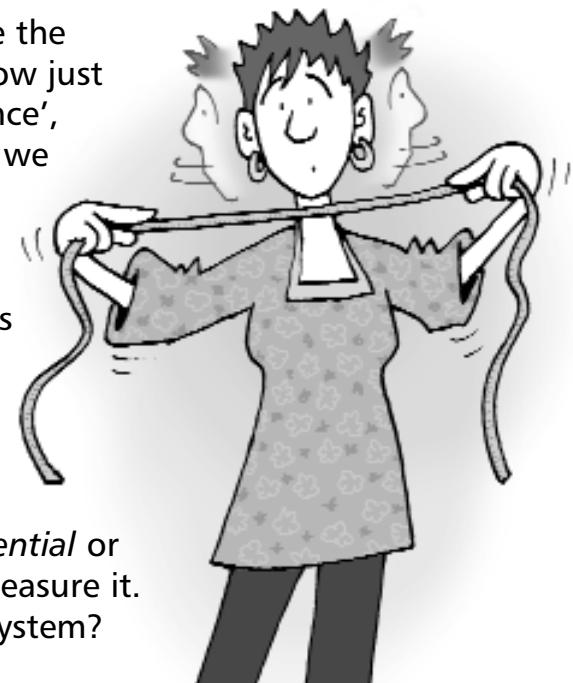
## Definitions – pros and cons



**Definition 1** has one huge pro: it's comfortably familiar. It's so steeped in our national psyche that it barely needs stating. Some kids are just brighter than others. The very brightest are gifted. Period.

The problem with this norm-referenced definition? Despite the frequency of their use, no-one can claim definitively to know just what the terms 'brightness', 'ability', 'potential', 'intelligence', 'cleverness', 'giftedness', etc actually mean. We may *think* we know what they mean. They might share some family resemblances but they are tools, not essences. And whilst we might believe we can measure them through IQ tests and the like, we have no widely accepted understanding as to what exactly *them* is. In the words of the late Michael Howe, we have '*a measure in search of a concept*'.

**Definition 2** has the big pro of being related to the learning of the individual, not to any comparison group. Moreover, it needs no big brother concept like *ability*, *potential* or *intelligence* to make sense of it. Its con? We can't easily measure it. And if that's the case, can it have value in our education system?



# Definitions – some implications for you, the teacher



The two different definitions of 'giftedness' lead to contrasting responses to questions you might ask/be asked about Safia or any other child:

|   | 1. 'Exceptional ability or potential'  | 2. 'An investment of time, energy and personal resources'   |
|---|--|---|
| <b><i>Who decides if Safia's gifted?</i></b>                        | You do, based on her standardised test and attainment results and other norm-referenced performance measures.  | You both do, based on her responses to rich, stimulating learning experiences provided over time and your careful observation of these. |
| <b><i>What emphasis do I give to identification strategies?</i></b> | A lot – these need to be comprehensive, detailed and accurate, as appropriate provision rests on the outcomes. | Precious little – identification is secondary to and a function of her responses to high-quality provision.                             |

# Further implications for you, the teacher



|  | 1. 'Exceptional ability or potential'  | 2. 'An investment of time, energy and personal resources'   |
|--|--|---|
| <b><i>Do I need to label her as gifted?</i></b>  | Yes, why not? It provides a focus for intervention, corrects an imbalance in resources and helps her feel good about herself.  | No, it distracts us all from the truly educational endeavour: to promote learning, not complacency. Giftedness is a fluid concept, not fixed.   |
| <b><i>What do I tell her parents?</i></b>  | That she's been designated gifted, the reason/s why, and what opportunities she can access now. What's there to hide? They have a right to know.   | What personalised provision Safia is receiving, and how she's responding to it. Where she might be going next and what her parents can do to support this.  |
| <b><i>How much support can I expect in taking this approach with Safia and others?</i></b> | Huge amounts: this is the predominant approach, beloved of many. It is relatively easy to administer, track and monitor, and will be familiar to parents, inspectors and national initiatives. | That depends: does your school value learning and child-led enquiry even more than short-term performance and hitting external targets? Can you communicate your rationale to parents and inspectors, and back it up? |

## Raising the bar



So which approach does this Pocketbook promote? Your powers of inferential reading have already answered this!

This book acknowledges its debt to traditional, orthodox understandings of 'giftedness,' yet invites you to raise the bar and to jump a little higher – in the belief that an approach which puts gift-creation above gift-identification will permit your students to think the impossible and thereby reach even higher levels.

It's the sort of mindset that in the 1968 Olympics encouraged Dick Fosbury to think differently, and in so doing to jump differently, turning a Flop into a Giant Leap.



# Are gifts caught or taught?



*'The great thing and the hard thing is to stick to things when you have outlived the first interest, and not yet got the second, which comes with a sort of mastery.'* Janet Erskine Stuart (Educationalist)

The Canadian psychologist Prof Dona Matthews coined the terms '**mystery**' and '**mastery**' frameworks to discriminate between two ways of understanding giftedness:

1. Is it shrouded in *mystery*: no-one knows why; you just *are* gifted – maybe it's genetic, maybe it's luck – who knows?  
Or
2. Is it something you can learn or *master* if you have the opportunity and the right attitude and are prepared to work hard?

# About the author

## Dr Barry Hymer



Barry is a former primary and secondary school teacher and educational psychologist. He currently practises as a freelance educator, working in schools with students and teachers and speaking at conferences in the UK and abroad. He is a past winner of the International Council for Philosophical Inquiry with Children (ICPIC) Award for Excellence in Interpreting Philosophy With Children, consultant editor of the journal Gifted Education International, and a Visiting Fellow at Newcastle University's Centre for Learning and Teaching. When not on the road he's likely to be found at home in the Yorkshire Dales, spending quality time with his family, chickens and Van Morrison – but not necessarily in that order.

**Acknowledgements:** This Pocketbook is dedicated to the many outstanding practitioners with whom I have been privileged to work. Through their tenacity, risk-taking, creativity and clear educational principles they have put theory into brilliant practice – creating new theory in the process – and thereby exemplifying all that is best about educating for gift-creation.

### Contact:

Barry can be contacted at: [Stillthinkinguk@aol.com](mailto:Stillthinkinguk@aol.com) or [www.barryhymer.co.uk](http://www.barryhymer.co.uk)