

香港資優教育學院
The Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education
Information Sheet

**WHY DOES GIFTED EDUCATION MATTER?
 WHY SHOULD GIFTED EDUCATION BE SUPPORTED?**

“Uneven development is a universal characteristic of giftedness. Gifted children, in any cultural milieu, have greater discrepancies among various facets of their development than average children..... The concept of mental age has proved enormously helpful in our understanding of retardation. We recognize the inherent difficulties of having a 17-year-old body with a 9-year-old mind. However, we still do not understand that it is equally problematic to have a 17-year-old mind trapped in the body of a 9 year old. This type of asynchrony doesn't arouse much sympathy. (Silverman 1999 Why Do We Need Gifted Education? A Millennial Approach)”

This quote represents just one of the many misconceptions and myths about giftedness and gifted children that shape peoples' responses to these important questions. For example:

- Gifted children fulfill their educational potential on their own
- Gifted children do not need special educational provision to succeed

Neither of these deceptively simple statements is supported by the evidence. Neither should form the platform for prescriptive generalizations on the education for students.

So what views on gifted education should be considered?

1. Wasted Human Resource

A) Gifted learners must be given stimulating educational experiences appropriate to their level of ability if they are to realize their potential. Giftedness arises from an interaction between innate predispositions and an environment that challenges and stimulates to bring forth high levels of ability and talent. These challenges must be available throughout the individual's lifetime for high levels of achievement to result. According to research on the nature of intelligence and the brain, we either progress or we regress depending on our participation in stimulation appropriate to our level of development.

B) As yet there are no figures for Hong Kong, but in the US it is estimated that 49% of gifted learners never receive an education appropriate to their needs. Many of the rest have their needs met only sporadically. Many education systems thwart and discourage intellectual development and so diminish the value of a person. To have ability, to have an intellect you are not allowed to properly use, can become traumatic. Many researchers consider the gifted as the largest group of underachievers in education.

2. Entitlement of the Individual

A) Each person has the right to learn and to be provided challenges for learning at the most appropriate level where growth proceeds most effectively. If society is based on democratic principles and the rights of the individual, schools must provide an equal educational opportunity for all children to develop to their fullest potential. This means allowing gifted students the opportunity to learn at their level of development. For truly equal opportunity, a variety of learning experiences must be available at many levels.

B) When given the opportunity gifted students can use their vast amount of knowledge to serve as a background for unlimited learning. When the needs of the gifted are considered and the

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educational program is designed to meet these needs, these students make significant gains in achievement, and their sense of competence and well-being is enhanced.

3. Valuing Excellence

Traditional education currently does not sufficiently value bright minds. Gifted children often enter school having already developed many of their basic skills. Almost from the first day they sense isolation, as others consider them different. Schools are not sufficiently individualized or flexible to allow modification in structure and organization. Most schools seek to develop skills that allow participation in society, not the re-creation of that society.

4. Value-Added to Society

A) Providing for our finest minds allows both individual and societal needs to be met. Disproportionate contributions to society in all areas of human endeavor come from the population of gifted individuals. Society needs the gifted adult to play a far more demanding and innovative role than that required of the more typical learner. We need integrated, highly functioning persons to carry out those tasks that will lead all of us to a satisfying, fulfilling future.

B) Providing for the learning needs of the gifted also provides for the learning needs of most children (except, perhaps, those with special needs) in schools and so every child benefits – the “rising tide lifts all ships” – so using tax-payers money to train teachers in meeting the needs of the gifted is excellent value for money. Teaching the gifted requires no disproportionate allocation of resources.

“Why do we need gifted education? Because gifted children exist and they will continue to exist despite their unpopularity. In fact, there are more and more gifted children being born each day, and we have a moral obligation to meet their needs. They need the opportunity for continuous progress; this as a basic educational right.”

Silverman 1999 ibid