

# Gifted education: changing views of intelligence



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## New paradigms reshaping education of gifted

The beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has been marked by sizable shifts in our viewpoints on a number of factors that affect the education of gifted students. Such changes have been brought about by new knowledge, plus the reorganization of existing information. Five major dimensions can be noted: (1) our view of the concept of intelligence, (2) our view on who is gifted, (3) our differentiation of curricula for gifted students, (4) our struggle over the competing values of equity vs. excellence in American education, and (5) the new, easy access to the world's knowledge through technology, which makes life-long learning a possibility and changes the role of the teacher and the student.

<b>Models for definition and identification of gifted students</b>	
<i>Old models</i>	<i>New models</i>
Every child receives a genetic code, which determines the child's ability to perceive, remember, and reason. Students who show substantially advanced abilities are called gifted.	Every child's ability to perceive, remember, and reason is set initially by genetic code which then develops through sequential interaction with environmental experiences.
A "g" factor dominates intellectual development and allows the student to transfer high abilities from one content area to another.	Along with a "g" factor are also domain-specific abilities that determine superior ability and performance in different fields.
Intelligence tests are the major vehicle for the identification of gifted students.	Students' abilities need to be evaluated through performance on tasks that match their experience and cultural backgrounds.

<b>Models for creativity</b>	
<i>Old models</i>	<i>New models</i>
Creativity, like intelligence, is a set of mental abilities that allows the individual child to look at the world with a fresh perspective, relatively uninfluenced by peer pressures.	Creativity is the result of a complex blending of persons, products, and environments. Educators should focus on creating a fruitful educational environment and producing sufficient knowledge to allow for creative behavior.
Divergent thinking skills allows the creative child to explore alternative paths to a goal. Such skills can be enhanced by a non-threatening environment and encouragement to think differently.	Many students, not just those of high intelligence, can profit from this creative environment.

(Continued on reverse)

This Snapshot is based on the article "Gifted Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century" by James Gallagher. It was published in *Gifted Education International*, 2002, vol. 16, pp. 100-110. Gallagher is a senior scientist at FPG and Kenan Professor Emeritus at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

<b>Paradigms on instructional strategies</b>	
<i>Old paradigm</i>	<i>New paradigm</i>
Teach advanced thinking processes to gifted students (creative problem-solving, logical analyses, etc.) with the assumption that they can be applied to various content fields.	Teach students instructional strategies that encourage student independence and inquiry (e.g., problem-based learning) within the framework of specific curriculum content.
Emphasis placed on mastering systems of thinking (Sternberg, Gardner, Guilford, etc.).	Emphasis on mastery of content standards through inquiry, problem finding, etc.

<b>Conflicts between equity and excellence</b>	
<i>Equity</i>	<i>Excellence</i>
The identification and education of gifted students merely maintains unequal educational opportunity in the U.S. Many students from poor families are overlooked.	The new information age will require the best performance from the best students. Gifted students are bored and discouraged from serious study by a lack of challenge.
Inclusion has the best chance of equalizing access to a superior education.	Inclusion is one sure way to reduce the effort and performance of gifted students.

<b>The effects of technology</b>	
<i>Pre-computer</i>	<i>Computer age</i>
Teachers and professors were the gatekeepers of knowledge, controlling one's access to understanding and wisdom.	The Internet opens access of information to students who no longer have to be dependent on their teachers.
This powerful position controlled the flow of information and often limited gifted students' growth.	An unresolved problem is how to evaluate valid from invalid information and how to rate the sources of information.

### **If you want to know more**

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Gallagher, S. & Stepien, W. (1996). Content acquisition in problem-based learning: Depth versus breadth in American studies. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*, 19(3), 257-275.

Noble, K., Subotnik, R., & Arnold, K. (1999). To thine own self be true: A new model of female talent development. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 43(3), 140-149.

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