



Module 1: Introduction to Gifted Education

Welcome to Open Gifted

Introduction

My name is Peter Lydon and I am your course administrator. I have worked for 21 years with gifted children, including 17 years with the Centre for Talented Youth in Dublin City University in Ireland.

Open Gifted is a short introductory course on giftedness and gifted education. It is aimed at secondary or high school teachers and primary or elementary school teachers also.

Course Structure

The course consists of eight modules. Each module contains a video, a transcript, and a discussion forum where you can share your feedback and reflections on the content of video. Overall the course should take no longer than three hours. There are links to further reading which will allow you to delve deeper into the topics covered in the video.

The field of gifted education is wide and varied and it is not possible in a short course to address all of the issues and details of gifted education. However, this course will provide you with a basic introduction to key issues in gifted education and provide you, the teacher, with guidelines and strategies for adapting your teaching to meet the needs of gifted children in your classroom.

There are many ways of approaching the educational needs of gifted children. However, throughout this course my focus is on how you the teacher can cater for gifted children within a mixed ability classroom as this is the norm in Ireland.

Throughout this course you have an opportunity to contribute your thoughts to a discussion forum. Please feel free to interact with participants and to explore the resources that you find as you journey through this course.

If you have any questions that you prefer to raise on a one-to-one basis please feel free to email me using the course administrator link.

So what is meant by the term 'gifted'?

There is no easy answer to this question however the most common understanding of 'gifted' is that it describes an individual who is academically advanced relative to their peers. This understanding has changed particularly since the 1980s and the advent of Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences model.

We will examine different definitions of giftedness in the next video but it is worth noting for the moment that there are differences in the terms used to describe giftedness in different countries.

The word 'gifted' is most commonly used to describe an individual who is or has the potential to excel academically relative to their peers.

'Talented' was often used synonymously with gifted. However, in the United Kingdom, 'gifted' referred to academic potential while 'talented' referred to an individual who showed advanced achievement in music, sport or drama.

Some academic writers prefer to describe children with 'gifts and talents'. And in some ways this makes sense as the child is more than the particular gift they possess.

Whichever we choose the word 'gifted' tends to court a degree of controversy. There is a sense that if some children are gifted then others are not, and that this is somehow unfair. Interestingly, few would consider it unfair that some individuals are naturally better football players, musicians or artists.

In recent years, books such as Malcom Gladwell's *Outliers* has popularized the idea that talent is merely an issue of spending 10,000 hours practicing. While practice can make perfect, common sense observation of the world would suggest that 10,000 hours is not a hard and fast rule.

In Ireland we have adopted the term 'Exceptionally Able' to describe gifted children. The definition of 'Exceptionally Able' is contained in Draft Guidelines for Teachers of Exceptionally Able Children published by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. There is a link to this publication below. We will examine this definition in the next video.

There is no clear black-and-white definition and understanding of what is meant by the word 'gifted'. It is very easy to get bogged down in trying to find the definition that's fits all cases. However, gifted children are a heterogeneous group and it is unlikely that a single conception of 'gifted' can be found that describes all gifted children collectively.

This does not mean that we should ignore definitions of giftedness as useless. However, there should be an understanding that there is a tacit component to giftedness. Coming to an awareness of giftedness is akin to seeing a picture of a particular breed of animal only after hearing it described. A large cat that runs fast could mean anything until the 'aha' moment we get when we see a cheetah.

Labels

During my time teaching gifted children I've heard many objections to providing for the needs of gifted children on the basis that it is wrong to label children. I've always dismissed such arguments because the problem is not with the label but the attitudes and values a person attaches to the label. We can choose to see a label negatively or positively.

The fact is labels are ubiquitous in life and the field of education has its own special labels. Both teachers and parents use a variety of labels to describe their children. We use labels such as SEN, Average, Bright, ADHD, ASD and many more.

We cannot accept some labels and ignore other simply because it is convenient. Whether or not we use the label gifted, my experience has taught me that there are children with academic ability far in advance of their peers and that this presents unique challenges for them, their teachers and their parents when comes to their education.

This course presents some of the ideas behind the label and offers some suggestions as to how you the teacher can meet the needs of the gifted children in your classroom.

The next video looks at how definitions of giftedness have changed over time.

Use the discussion forum below to discuss your interest in gifted education and how a course in gifted education could meet your needs as a practitioner in the classroom.