Challenged by chance?
Improving the odds for gifted students

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Gifted and Talented

Multiple perspectives

- Gagné (2003) recognises giftedness potential in children, but talent in adults
- Tannenbaum (2003) – children may be advanced/showing promise
- Multi-categorical (MOE, 2000)
- Gardner (2003) – multiple intelligences
- Should teachers label in early childhood?
...Those who have the capacity to learn at a pace and level of complexity that is significantly advanced of their age peers in any domain or domains that are valued in and promoted by their socio-cultural group (Porter, 1999: 33).
Definition – Young children

...one who performs or has the ability to perform at a level significantly beyond his/her chronologically aged peers and whose unique ability and characteristics require special provision and social and emotional support from the family, community and educational contexts

(Harrison, 1999:20)
Transition

Various perspectives

- Confined to school start
- When children can demonstrate resilience of normal development under difficult conditions (Fabian, 2002)
- Learners satisfying their own needs while also meeting the needs of the new environment (Kienig, 2002)
- Can be viewed on both physical and social levels over a prolonged time, as children assume their roles as pupils in school (Peters, 2004)
“They didn’t stretch my brain.”

Challenged by chance: factors influencing the transition to school for gifted children
Methodology

- Interpretative, collective case studies
- Accessed through One Day Schools (George Parkyn, Gifted Kids)
- Retrospective
- Qualitative data
  - Questionnaires and follow up interviews
  - 6 seven/eight year old children (1 set of twins)
  - Children, parents (mothers), ECE teacher prior to school entry, NE teacher (21 interviews)
Participants
Not true photographs of participants
Pseudonym chosen by children

Laura
Gifted

Social adjustment - shy

The twins – Sasha and Squirtle

Conrad

Tooty
ADHD?

Doughnut

Behaviour/learning problems
There was too much left to chance
What were the odds?

In early childhood

Advanced development? 6/6 (Bright 5/6)
Gifted? 1/6 (1/6)
Identification in early years

…by the time she was about nine months old her vocab was probably around like a two and a half year old (Laura’s mother)

… by the time he was a year old…he was really advanced with his vocab … He was aware of ideas that were way beyond his years (Tooty’s grandmother).

- Predominantly recognition was advanced language
I was aware of his early development …but both of us yack like nobody’s business so we just assumed that this was an inherited trait (Conrad’s mother).

- Parents didn’t recognise traits as giftedness
I knew she was bright…but having no yardstick…I just thought there are probably lots of kids who do this sort of thing… (Doughnut’s mother).

… the teacher … would tell us things that our children had done and we would go WHAT!... and we would say Not our kids! (Mother of Sasha and Squirtle).

… in 12 years…she had never struck anyone like Doughnut, but I just took it as a grain of salt, and it didn’t occur to me… (Doughnut’s mother)

➢ Parents didn’t pick up on the messages from the ECE teachers….
ECE teachers

...when you have a child like Conrad [articulate and with good English] they really stand out (Conrad’s ECE teacher in a low decile area).

Both parents were bright and communicated so well you look and go Oh well the child is like that and it’s natural for them rather than looking at this child is gifted (ECE teacher of Sasha and Squirtle).

.... but teachers didn’t necessarily recognise gifted behaviours
The children

- They didn’t see themselves as ‘gifted’
- They talked about their thinking
  - ‘extending my thinking’ (Conrad)
  - ‘thinking and learning cause I can take in a lot at one time’ (Doughnut)
  - ‘stretching my brain’ (Laura)
What were the odds?

In early childhood

- Advanced development? 6/6
- Gifted? 1/6
- Special provision? 1/6

(Bright 5/6)
(1/6)
We sit down and look as a group to see how we can extend this child...we may not have special provisions simply because of the ratio and the demand...(Tooty's ECE teacher).

We have a system where we try to identify individual needs and then extend them...spend some one to one time...just give them what we can really (Conrad's ECE teacher).

- Different perspectives on what was needed for the children
Laura had areas we had to look at...we didn’t think she was competent [on the computer]...our emphasis [in art] to encourage more time and care ...and socially we were worried...she was solitary in her play... (Laura’s ECE teacher).
Perception of needs

School

...she was sort of socially so mature that at time I think she found it difficult to work with the kids... (Laura’s NE teacher).
Provision – ECE

But to me picking up a book and having to read it should be something to be kept very special...especially for school... (Laura’s ECE teacher)

If we already know that he is reading...why wait for a year? (Twins teacher – ECE)

➢ Different philosophies... different chances
On early childhood experience

’kindy teachers were nice but they could have set work that was a bit harder for me…’ (Laura)
What were the odds?

In early childhood

Advanced development? 6/6  (Bright 5/6)
Gifted? 1/6  (1/6)
Special provision? 1/6

Information between sectors

Material passed on? 1/6
School using data? 0/6
Parents

‘provided the first step for you (Laura’s mother).

I would love to see that whatever they achieved at kindy is communicated to the school (Tooty’s grandmother)
New Entrant teachers

- There would have been no need for me to do the SEA test had I known that it was a waste of his time... They could tell me the things they have done already... so there’s no repetition.

- What we need to have is a profile or record of learning that follow the children because that would have saved me a good couple of weeks or even a month... and I could have looked at it and gone Oh my goodness, let’s not start him here on the basics.
Laura – starting school

No! It was like Woah! There are so many strangers here! If you can imagine it was from 20 people at preschool.. and changing to over 600 at school!

It was surprising how much school work they actually give…so that was quite good.
Exhilarating ....it was strong educational

I kind of broke a rule ...I sort of got into trouble...
# What were the odds?

**In early childhood**

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New Entrant teachers

It was pretty obvious within a few days of school... that she was going to be one of those sparkly kids... just miles ahead (Laura’s NE teacher).

I think on day one I knew he was special. I knew he was an intelligent but by the end of the first week I knew that no way did we have a programme that would suit him. (Tooty's NE teacher)

... his ability showed through very quickly (Conrad’s NE teacher).

- Without formal assessment teachers recognised these children in four of the cases studies
It was actually the particular teacher ... that would take the time to go and look for something...who gave him extra to push him beyond...(Tooty’s grandmother).
Conrad’s mum

Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Oh my God. So we’ve got one of those [gifted children]. What do we do?

I thought if you [the teacher] say he has needs then you’ll deal with it…

➤ Parents trusted the school to address the learning needs…
The teachers

I didn’t feel confident…I felt scared and I was worried I was doing damage to him (Tooty’s NE teacher)

I thought gifted kids would learn regardless…you were probably going to bore them but they would learn regardless (Conrad’s NE teacher).

..but most teachers lacked knowledge and confidence to honour his trust
I had the sense that some of the teachers got fed up with my anxieties and my concerns... they sort of probably put me in the kind of neurotic precious parent thing...and I think if they had just sat down and had a really good talk to me for maybe an hour...it was never quite satisfying from my point of view and I felt I was being an irritant to them (Mother of twins).
What were the odds?

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What were the odds...

- Of parents seeking out-of-school advice regarding their children?
- Of parents seeking provision for their children beyond the school setting?
In the second year

I couldn’t understand why they did so many things wrong for me...they just didn’t make it hard enough for me to stretch my brain (Laura).
The result

- Threatened to run away from school
- Contemplated suicide
- Parents sought entry into the One Day School programme
In the second year

We just had lots of easy work.... I just did like it was normal... like the other kids pretending it was hard (Tooty).
The result

- Dumbing down
- Caregiver sought help and entry to the One Day School programme
In the second year
Squirtle and Sasha

- ‘Venting at home’ - frustration
- Parents sought psychological testing to ascertain what was ‘wrong’ with their Squirtle, and admission to the One Day School programme
- No support from the teacher
I started hating school because it was too easy for me because I had to work at the same level as the others (Doughnut)
The result

- Parents sought entry to One Day School programme but school would not support the application.
- Withdrawal from school to be home schooled.
Stages in communication

Parents -

trust

are disillusioned

distrust and feel unsupported

are proactive about other choices
Conrad’s mum

“If the school wasn’t doing it [providing for his needs], then let’s find a way of doing it to stop him being bored”
What were the chances of reciprocal respectful relationships between parents and teachers?

2/10
Parents -- trust are disillusioned distrust and feel unsupported are proactive about other choices

Stages in communication

Parents -

trust

are disillusioned
distrust and feel unsupported

are proactive about other choices

common language common identification knowledge respect between sectors respect for parent knowledge
How do we improve the odds for our gifted children?

- Common language - giftedness
- Knowledge of giftedness and needs of gifted children
- Shared information
- Respect between sectors for expertise of other sector
- Support for both children and parents
- Support for teachers – training and personnel
- Plans for children
What did the children advise?

Challenge

‘equality of challenge – a moral responsibility

Winstanley (2004)
How do improve the odds?

- Reduce the chance factors
  - teacher knowledge and training
  - establish ‘potentiating classrooms’ (Claxton & Carr, 2004)
  - provide intellectual challenge
  - allow children to ‘stretch their brains’
References


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