Chapter 2

Getting the Dialogue Started: A Conversation With Educators on GATE Teachers

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ABSTRACT

This chapter provides a description of Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) teachers and supports that description through research and a professional discussion between two experienced educators at the university level. A brief literature review is first provided with an emphasis on how established research in the field of “gifted” students informs research on GATE teachers. The chapter then focuses on a professional discussion between two teacher educators who specialize in science education. During the discussion, which is interspersed and framed in educational research, the educators identify the elements of GATE teachers, analyze how GATE teachers are identified, and how to maintain GATE teachers during teacher preparation and as professionals in the field. Finally, implications for education preparation programs are provided.

INTRODUCTION

In 2008, Mark Bauerlein wrote a damning treatise on the youth of America. His book, titled The Dumbest Generation: How the Digital Age Stupefies Young Americans and Jeopardizes Our Future or Don’t Trust Anyone Under 30, asserted that modern teenagers, “are encased in more immediate realities that shut out conditions beyond – friends, clothes, cars, pop music, sitcoms, Facebook” (p. 13). For Bauerlein, the access to new technologies did not become tools for self-enlightenment; rather, they became...
Getting the Dialogue Started

simple instruments of connectivity between peers. Perhaps even more damning was Bauerlein’s blunt thesis in regards to modern youth:

*I don’t mean to judge the social deportment, moral outlook, religious beliefs, or overall health of members of the Dumbest Generation. Nor should we question their native intelligence. I’m speaking of intellectual habit and repositories of knowledge, not anything else. (p. 33)*

It may not be reassuring to hear that a Professor of English at Emory University isn’t directly questioning the “intellectual habit” of modern youth, however the pessimistic viewpoint is vital as it relates to issues of modern education.

The world is 10 years removed from what Bauerlein initially labeled “The Dumbest Generation.” These students have begun graduating from Universities around the country. Yet, despite the perilous prophecy that Bauerlein decreed in 2008, the education world is now coming full circle with the “dumbest generation” being viewed in a new light. That same generation, which had a voracious appetite for popular culture, spearheaded a social media renaissance and challenged the very foundations of how content is learned, is now host to what this volume deems Gifted and Talented Education (GATE).

**WHAT IS GATE?**

The goal of this edited volume is to highlight methods of interacting with and facilitating Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) teachers who are studying to become teachers or who are currently teachers. As the concept of GATE is relatively new, developing the characteristics of GATE teachers is an exercise of research, reflection, and self-study. Rinn and Bishop (2015) stated that, “inconsistencies in defining a gifted adult across fields of study also complicated our ability to adequately understand the characteristics, experiences, and needs of gifted adults” (p. 214). The majority of research on “giftedness” is focused on children and adolescents, therefore, “Studies with gifted adults are scarce, making it impossible to draw reliable and valid conclusion about the subjective well-being of gifted adults” (Wirthwein & Rost, 2011, p. 183). Teachers are tasked with educating and enlightening a diverse range of students, and Gardner’s seminal study on multiple intelligences (1983) asserts the theory that all students learn differently. It is the teacher’s duty to not only be cognizant of multiple intelligences, but to incorporate that multiplicity into instruction. Teaching then becomes, as a profession, one of balancing a multitude of unique learning styles all while completing a single objective: delivering an effective lesson.

Taking into account the variances in research on gifted adults and the complicated responsibilities of educators, this chapter lays proverbial groundwork in developing characteristics of GATE teachers. Focusing on recognizing the characteristics of, and not the “definition” of GATE teachers, is supported by Plucker and Callahan (2014): “A further confounding factor in interpreting even the descriptive and correlational research is the widely varying definitions of giftedness applied in research studies and the accompanying diversity in identification of subjects across studies” (p. 393).