

August 10, 2007

Lynne Kelly's OPENING STATEMENT

Hi!

It's great to have this opportunity to discuss one of my favourite topics with a group of really interested (and I expect - interesting) people. I am the practitioner. I take the wise words of the researchers and see if I can implement what they say in the real classroom. Real schools with real timetables, real teachers and administrators, real parents and children. Real people vary in how willing they are to accept curriculum adaptation for gifted students. That includes the students, themselves!

I look forward to spending the next three days talking about what I have found worked for me and my students, as well as what didn't. In recent years, I have worked as a consultant, as schools and home schools have implemented my curriculum materials.

I am hugely influenced by François Gagné, and many others, who talk about the role of perseverance. In fact, much research shows that those who can persevere achieve far more in their adult lives. That doesn't mean they have to persevere with everything and anything. It means the ability to persevere with something which really catches their attention, in depth and at length.

For many gifted students, the only provision on offer is the regular curriculum at a faster pace. This means less time on each topic, because they can master it in that time. It means that all the material presented is accessible to the majority of students. I want to see gifted students tackling the really challenging stuff as well - topics which only suit the way gifted students think. I have tasks which work stunningly well with gifted elementary school students, and yet are beyond the ability of average senior school students. I want to see gifted students given the opportunity to stick at a task which has captured their interest. I want to see them able to develop the perseverance skills so highly valued in the high achievers. Easily said? It can be done within the practical restrictions of a normal school timetable using a compaction/extension model.

The average, and even the very able, have to struggle in school from a young age. I have taught many gifted students in senior secondary physics and mathematics who had never had to struggle before. It had all come so easily. With the only students in the advanced maths and physics classes being the pretty bright kids, suddenly the highly gifted student who should have been topping the class, was falling well behind. They need to learn to struggle much earlier. They also have the right to the joy that intellectual success can give. And they have the right to be socially and emotionally where they want to be.

My goal is to start gifted students in the younger years with challenging tasks which are designed to be open and stimulate a really long term approach. By running these tasks parallel to the regular curriculum, gifted students can oscillate in and out of the extension work as suits the activities of their normal class. Some may use the curriculum extension as part of a withdrawal class, but many use them within the regular classroom when they have demonstrated mastery of the set work.

No student should ever be bored in class! I have always had an open door policy. Although students are targeted as a result of testing procedures, no student is rejected. By offering qualitatively different units - topics and approaches which only suit the highly able - the material will select by itself. There have been a few surprises along the way - students whose gifts were wonderfully hidden because they just didn't fit the standard profile. Schools worry that every student will become involved because every parent thinks their child is gifted. It just didn't happen that way! I could write about this for hours - and maybe I will - that will depend on what you ask.

The extension units I have developed over the decades form the basis of my EUMY (Enrichment Units for the Middle Years) suite. Initially mathematics only, I was asked by schools to include the science, cross curricular, computing and writing units. The set of 50 units is nearing completion now.

I have left full time teaching to work as a consultant and as an author. My first ten books were for education. I then diverted and wrote a novel for older teenagers and three mass market science books for adults, the most recent of which I have just completed. I still run workshops for gifted students in real schools with real students a few days per week. It is so easy to lose sight of what works for the students and what only works in my head. I need their feedback! So I lead a wonderful life, writing, teaching and then writing some more.

I look forward to expanding on these ideas in whatever direction our discussion might take. In order to ensure we cover my areas of speciality, I would like to highlight three topics for the three days:

1. The nature of qualitatively different curriculum - extension material that isn't trivial and isn't just more of the same.
2. Practical and flexible ways extension can be provided in schools without causing the administrators and classroom teachers to stress out!
3. Asynchronously gifted - those mathematically gifted or scientifically or in language - but not across the board. And those who can't be labelled! Many students' gifts do not show up in the normal ways. I like using passion and perseverance as identification tool along with all the standard tests.

I will draw on case studies from over 25 years working with gifted students in a wide variety of settings.

I look forward to our discussion!

Lynne Kelly

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