



# ECHA NEWS

EUROPEAN COUNCIL FOR HIGH ABILITY

SPRING 2015

## Giftedness in Norway

**KARI KOLBERG, TOVE HAGENES,  
ELLA C. IDSOE AND CECILIE U. HELLE,  
NORWAY**

Many of you might be aware of the fact that the issue of giftedness has been a rather tricky one up here in the Nordics (Persson, 1998 and 2010). In Norway, the subject has been practically untouchable for decades. Teacher education has left the issue largely untouched, there has been next to zero research on the subject, and there has been nowhere to turn to for teachers or school administrators wanting knowledge or information.

On the surface of things however, schools should be able to take care of these children and youngsters as part of their normal day-to-day routine, because the Section 1-3 of our Educational Act states that *"Education shall be adapted to the abilities and aptitudes of the individual pupil."*, what is formally known as *"adapted education"*.

However, this construct of *"adapted education"*, mainly grew out of the concern for taking care of children with disabilities. Whereas Norway earlier had around 20 larger special schools that children with special educational needs attended, we now have a system where all children are supposed to be taken care of at their local state-/ municipality school. Pupils who *"either do not or are unable to benefit satisfactorily from ordinary teaching have the right to special education"* (Educational Act section 5-1). This might make one wonder if gifted children have a right to special education. However, there is a special statement from 1997 which states specifically that this does not include gifted children (Regjeringen, 1998).

Research in Norway on *"adapted education"* indicates that teachers are teaching to the middle (Cosmovici et.al., 2009, Bachmann & Haug, 2006) or tend to focus on the students at the other end of the spectrum (Solhaug & Fosse, 2008). In a recent study by Engelstad (2012), Norwegian teachers say they find it difficult addressing the broad spectrum of needs within a mixed ability classroom. Since knowledge regarding gifted children has been relatively low, it might not come as a surprise that recent research indicates that gifted and talented children to a large degree depend on *"luck with their teacher"* in order to get the *"adaptive education"* the law says they should have (Smedsrud, 2012). In the annual national *"Pupil's Survey"* we can also note quite a stable number of pupils who report that they *"seldom"* (18% in 2012) or *"almost never"* (4%) feel challenged in their classrooms (Wendelborg et.al., 2012).

Knowledge of giftedness has been scarce in Norway. Research has been practically zero. Some point to ideological reasons for the lack of interest (Skogen and Idsoe, 2011). However, there has been a slow change in a positive direction for the past few years. When a number of parents founded a network for parents of gifted children back in 2007<sup>2</sup>, they soon discovered that in order to make a change, advocates would have to work both towards politicians and towards the media.

Their first story in a major newspaper appeared in the Oslo-based *Aftenposten / A-magasinet* in 2008<sup>3</sup>. Since then, most major news media have brought stories about gifted children meeting a school system where giftedness has been both unheard of and politically *"unsafe"* to mention.

Since 2007, the parent's network has done extensive advocacy towards local and central politicians to increase awareness, and the advocacy is starting to pay off. During the national election of 2013, one could notice that all the parties, from left to right, had some kind of statements about gifted children in their campaign material. Two conferences on giftedness have been arranged by the network (2009 and 2013). Both conferences had around 100 teachers attending, plus parents and other interested persons.

Another very important factor in Norway was the book *"Våre evnerike barn. En utfordring for skolen"* (*"Our gifted children. A challenge for schools"*), released in 2011, by professor emeritus Kjell Skogen (University of Oslo) and associate professor Ella Cosmovici Idsoe (University of Stavanger). This was in fact the first Norwegian book on giftedness since 1970. (Mönks and Ypenburg's book *"Unser Kind ist hochbegabt"* was translated into Norwegian in 2008.)

Since 2011, a number of other titles have been published, both written in Norwegian and translated from Swedish and Danish, and we observe that an increasing number of publishers include the subject in different antologies.

At the University of Stavanger, associate professor Ella Cosmovici Idsoe is leading a research project on gifted 6-year olds within the *"Skoleklar"* (*"Getting ready for school"*)-projectiv<sup>4</sup>.

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### The past year

After the national election in September 2013, a new minister took a seat in the Ministry of Education (Kunnskapsdepartementet). The minister Torbjørn Røe Isaksen (Conservative party, Høyre) has stated in several interviews that he is aware of the problems that gifted and talented children might face in our egalitarian school setting. He even invited several advocates to a meeting in his office in March 2014. The results are yet to be seen, but rumours make us look positive at the future.

The first Norwegian municipality to fund a project to increase awareness of gifted and talented individuals is Stavanger. After attending the first Nordic Talent Network conference in Sorø/Denmark, both in 2013 and 2014, school administrators and teachers in Stavanger have established a local network. A couple of other municipalities are also looking into the matter, which we find encouraging.

In Autumn 2014 the University of Oslo's Faculty of Education had their first PhD-candidate who is doing research on gifted education. Research fellow Jørgen Smedsrud holds a master's degree in Special Needs Education from the University of Oslo from 2012 which focused on gifted children, and is now continuing his research within this subject.

A national conference on gifted and talented children arranged by Aschehoug took place in October 2014. The conference was opened by the Deputy Minister of Education, Birgitte Jordahl, which may also be seen as an acknowledgement of the subject.

There has been an increase in the number of master's theses on giftedness during the past couple of years. We are also currently aware of several initiatives from the national educational centres and a number of local initiatives at municipality and school level.

As you may see, the issue of giftedness and gifted education is gaining momentum in Norway. We also hear positive news from our neighbours in Sweden. We hope that the positive news can be an inspiration to all of you, and that we can bring forward even more positive news in the time to come.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.regjeringen.no/en/dokumenter/education-act/id213315/>

<sup>2</sup> Lykkelige Barn, i.e. "happy children"  
<http://www.lykkeligebarn.no>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.aftenposten.no/nyheter/iriks/article2399767.ece>

<sup>4</sup> <http://laringsmiljosenteret.uis.no/programmes-and-project/skoleklar-getting-ready-for-school/>

## Editorial

ANNETTE HEINBOKEL, GERMANY

The next World Conference on Gifted and Talented Children will take place in Denmark, and therefore I am pleased to be able to present Kari Kolberg's and her colleagues' report about Norway and Elisabet Mellroth's report about Sweden.

Their texts reminded me of the first article I ever read about gifted children in a German newspaper. In 1971/72 I was assistant teacher in Sheffield, England, and every week I got a copy of 'Die Zeit'. The article by Horst Unger was called 'Wohin mit einem Wunderkind?' (What to do with a prodigy?) and described the experiences of a highly gifted little boy with the Swedish primary school system. This article, the questions it raised, the solutions it suggested, was very influential for me for many years.

Here is a short excerpt. It is NOT meant as criticism of the Swedish school system: At that time the same could have happened in practically all the European countries and most of the rest of the world, unless the family had been extremely lucky with a particular school and its teachers. It simply shows how important it is to satisfy a gifted child's thirst for knowledge and what is destroyed if this thirst is ignored.

*Michael had been a happy child until he started school in a village school in the middle of Sweden. He hadn't known the expression 'boredom'. At the time he spoke five languages which had sort of flown into him: Danish from his mother, German from his father, and he had learned Greek, Swedish and English in those countries.*

*He learned everything playfully: swimming, painting, making things, skiing, reading, writing, making music. He did everything with the same intensity. He was never content with half a success. When he was four he was able to add and to subtract, and he had invented a most idiosyncratic method to do divisions. When he was five he played chess, and shortly afterwards he won three times against the chess master of a small*

*south German town. And then he explained to him the weaknesses of his strategy. The dethroned master found the child scary.*

*The parents thought that was natural. When he was just three he had checkmated them for the first time with his logic. That was on a trip to friends in Uppsala. A snowstorm had already delayed the arrival for hours. Michael, fixed on the watch, wanted to know again and again what the time was and when they would finally arrive. "Soon", his father comforted him. And the mother added: "Sleep a little, then time will pass faster." Michael was silent for a moment, then he said: „Listen, if time passes faster while I'm asleep, it will be even later until we arrive."*

(...)

*Michael was looking forward to going to school. He thought it was the magic place where he could satisfy his thirst for knowledge and learn to his heart's content. What a mistake!*

*At the beginning he hid his disappointment from his parents. Then he'd had enough. One weekend he had done all the problems in his maths book and had been severely rebuked. His teacher didn't want him to 'run ahead' of the others. Soon she wouldn't call his name anymore when he put up his finger: "You are a know-all!"*

*His Christmas picture was the beginning of the catastrophe. He had transferred the birth of Jesus into a southerly landscape instead of the Swedish winter forest, had drawn the shed as a grotto and the manger as a niche in the rock. As much as he fervently defended his picture – his teacher even disputed that he had drawn it himself.*

*From then on he painted nothing of his own impulse anymore and what he did for the school was without originality – childish schoolwork. He tried to fit in – but that didn't agree with him. He lost his cheerfulness, his enterprising spirit and his appetite. Eight hours of daily boredom (school the whole day including meals) were too much for him. (translation Annette Heinbokel)*

Unger then asks whether he would have been better off at a German school at that time: no, he wouldn't, and despite many improvements even today parents in Germany must still be lucky to find a school,

a teacher, who understands and tries to satisfy their gifted child's needs. Michael's parents moved four times until they found a small private school in Denmark where he regained his pleasure to learn.

When something is started to improve the situation of gifted children, the reason is almost always that some of these children have problems at school. That was the reason for the founding of the German Association for Gifted Children and, independent of that, the first special classes at a private boarding school, and it's probably the same in most other countries.

Even the longest journey starts with a first step, and Norway and Sweden have already taken quite a few steps. When the 6th World Conference took place in Hamburg in 1985, it gave a huge push to gifted education in Germany. I am sure the conference in Denmark will have the same impact on the Scandinavian countries.

In this issue of ECHA News you also find an article on my latest research. I want to apologize for that: I think an editor should edit, not present her / his own texts. However, it may be interesting for you. As far as I know it covers one of the very few European long term studies on adults' memories of and experiences with acceleration, covering exactly 70 years: 1917-1987.

Annette Heinbokel, editor

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# Gifted Education in Sweden from 2015 and onwards

ELISABET MELLROTH, SWEDEN

Education in Sweden has for many years focussed on trying to help all pupils reach a passing level. Little interest, if any, has been given to pupils with a capability to excel in one or many subjects (Persson, 2014). It is very rare that teacher education involves anything relating to gifted education (Pettersson, 2011; Mattsson, 2013). In the case that such is offered it most often includes no more than a one to two hour seminar. It is also rare that in-service teacher training offers anything relating to gifted education. The Swedish Educational Act of 2010 (SFS 2010:800) now stipulates each pupil's right to be supported also in developing his or her knowledge as far as possible. This includes gifted and talented pupils.

In general, information on the highly able and their needs, specific to a Swedish context, has been scarce, only few research projects have been pursued. Most ECHA-members are already familiar with Roland S. Persson and his research in the field, although he has remained fairly unnoticed in Sweden until recently. Currently, however, in Sweden there is a younger generation of researchers and practitioners working in and for gifted education. Despite the fact that there is an increase of individuals engaging in gifted education there is only a handful of researchers in the field. Also, in-service trained teachers' training remains mainly practical.

The driving forces prompting gifted education to emerge in Sweden thus far have been the following:

- A handful of researchers providing in-service teacher training plus giving seminars and lectures to pre-service teachers, school management and also to politicians at both local and national levels.
- Teachers developing a personal interest in giftedness and in gifted education.
- One fervent and knowledgeable school psychologist: Anita Kullander, starting forums on social media to inform parents of gifted children; teachers and other school psychologists with an interest in gifted education.

- Parents of gifted children.
- And also the Swedish branch of Mensa and their Gifted Children Programme (Mensa Sverige, 2015).

These actors have worked hard to give the gifted children of Sweden a voice and to disseminate knowledge of their situation and needs as pupils in the school system. They have taken opportunities when given, especially by the media, and they have informally built networks not only nationally, but including also the other Nordic countries as well as international actors in the field. Efforts have finally begun to take effect!

## Gifted education initiatives: a few examples

From 2009 it has been possible for upper secondary school pupils to opt for advanced placement focussing on mathematics, science, social science or humanities (SFS 2008:793). The Swedish nomenclature for these placements is *spetsutbildning*. This roughly translates as "cutting edge training", which in the world of giftedness is usually termed "advanced placement". Since 2012 similar education is offered at a primary school level, years 7–9 (Skolverket, 2014). Even though advanced placement is mainly aimed at high-achieving pupils, accepting the existence of them has also legitimised the idea that some pupils may need an even more demanding education than the high achievers and that these very demanding pupils do not necessarily fit into the regular school system.

In-service teacher training for schools has so far consisted of some municipalities providing single hour-long seminars or half a workday of seminars. This may not seem like much, but their impact has, in fact, been considerable. Despite of these seminars being limited in time and having little if any follow-up, several such seminars have been given in recent years. Somewhere between 5 000 and 10 000 in-service teachers and head masters/head mistresses have participated in such seminars. A few examples of how these seminars have had an impact are called for:

In August of 2013, representatives from seven municipalities came together to participate in one 90-minute seminar on giftedness and gifted education. The seminar resulted in one municipality seeing the need to specially train their school leaders, all teachers at all levels and even staff in charge of school health. The training programme was provided during 2014. An evaluation will be made and reported on during 2015. The municipality in question has specifically asked the advisory expert responsible for the training how to proceed after this introductory training. Given that there is now legislation enforcing these measures in all schools in one way or another, the development in this particular municipality speaks of a genuine interest in the field.

In another project seven (other) municipalities from all over Sweden co-operated in developing an action plan for schools on how to support highly able pupils (Sveriges kommuner och landsting, 2014). The resulting action plan, advisory in nature, was published in 2014 and all Swedish municipalities were made aware of its existence. It was widely spread by social media and by networks for both teachers and parents.

Furthermore, other municipalities have launched, or are in the process of launching, projects aiming at developing education adapted for gifted pupils, for example at Borlänge in Central Sweden (eg., Diffner, 2015).

## Government actions and continued challenges

In August 2014 the liberal-conservative cabinet then in power, as a final task before handing over power to a socialist-green cabinet coalition after the 2014 elections, gave the National Agency of Schools a directive to develop support material on gifted education for the Swedish school system (Regeringen, 2014). Its purpose is to be a handbook of sorts on gifted education including sections of best practices of how to create subject-specific progression in several key subjects suitable for advanced pupils (that is, gifted and high-achieving pupils). The support material is in production at the time of writing this (that is,

spring of 2015). Publication and release is intended during 2015. It will be made available to the entire school system.

Needless to say, while this effort is most welcome it leaves much to be desired. In spite of the forthcoming support material schools will still have to make do largely on educated guesses. Most teachers, school leaders and school health care staff are still uninformed of what giftedness and gifted education are. The support material specifically stresses that further training is needed for school staff. There is a risk, due to shrinking budgets, that as the support material is made available it could well result in school leaders believing that their teachers need no further training in gifted education. The support material points out, for example, that a gifted pupil is not necessarily a high achieving pupil. If teachers are not better trained there is a risk that schools might focus on high-achieving pupils only, rather than differentiating between the high achieving pupils and the gifted pupils, who are not necessarily of the same ilk (Kokot, 1999).

The ever-problematic question of reliably identifying the highly able is a challenge in Sweden, too. While internationally a generally contentious issue, it is even more so in Sweden as well as in all of the Nordic countries where psychometric testing in a school context, by tradition, is often considered inappropriate. Paradoxically it is more appropriate and common to identify children with learning disabilities. This state of affairs affects the chances of success for gifted education. Without at least some sort of municipal co-ordinator of gifted education, how can gifted pupils be identified and effectively supported? Note that there is a National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools (SPSM) with five regional branches throughout Sweden whose task it is to support pupils with special needs and their teachers, provide schools with suitable materials and generally to channel resources where needed. However, special needs do not include gifted education. Hence, there is lacking a regional co-ordination of knowledge, efforts and resources for highly able pupils and their teachers. Teachers are for the time being, to a large extent, left to their own devices.

Also, the younger generation of researchers in the field of gifted education are all from the field of mathematics education. Gifted education has by tradition been a field specific to educational psychologists. This shift in research domains presents another potential risk, namely that the psychological aspects of giftedness are being ignored as research focus is given mainly to teaching practise. Already in the 1970s, psychology, internationally a main subject in most teacher training programmes, was more or less removed as a specific study from teacher training in Sweden. The reason being that psychology (then understood mainly as Behaviourism) was argued to be largely incompatible with the values on which schools and teaching were based (Carlgren & Marton, 2000). History may repeat itself in Swedish gifted education!

Hopefully, school leaders and their staff will realise that they do need a more profound understanding of the gifted and of gifted education, and that gaining this knowledge can be achieved parallel to the implementation of the politically initiated support material. A greater number of teachers trained in giftedness and gifted education will most likely also help to find feasible ways of identifying the highly able in a way appropriate to and acceptable in a Swedish context. The forthcoming support material might also prompt teacher training programmes at universities to embrace and include the more theoretical aspects of gifted education in their courses.

Somehow it is fortunate that the group of researchers in gifted education in Sweden is currently limited in numbers. It means we all know each other. Communication is easy as are joint projects and research including all aspects of giftedness as needed. There are many possibilities to build a base of knowledge and practice where different fields of study may complement each other.

In conclusion, the situation for gifted children in Swedish schools is not yet resolved and is far from perfect. But due to the persistence of parents, teachers, certain politicians and researchers, gifted education and the pupils in need of it are now officially recognised. Some measures have been taken towards supporting this group of pupils who have been ignored for much too long.

We have hope that in the not too distant future Swedish gifted children will also be widely supported by the national school system and by all of its teachers.

### Acknowledgement

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# Minutes of the ECHA General Assembly Meeting

18<sup>th</sup> September 2014 Ljubljana, Slovenia

PETER CSERMELY, HUNGARY

## 1. Number of members present + apologies

50 members, one apology from Kari Kolberg

## 2. Minutes of the previous General Assembly

Unanimously accepted

## 3. President's and Vice President's report (see the full versions attached)

Peter Csermely, President, welcomed members to the General Assembly Meeting. He congratulated Christian Fischer and his team for receiving the conference award of the City of Münster and expresses his confidence that the current conference and the 2016 ECHA Conference in Vienna will have equal success. He mentioned the steps that have been taken to make ECHA more active, like improving the website, ECHA News, HAS and the use of social media. Last, but not least he mentioned the General Committee's proposal to establish an European Talent Support Network, which was to be discussed during the meeting. Peter Csermely concluded expressing his intention to let the ECHA spirit grow.

Christian Fischer emphasized four main aspects in his report: (1) pickings of the 13<sup>th</sup> ECHA Conference in Münster; (2) ECHA-Training; Present Situation; (3) ECHA Training: Future Developments; and (4) European Graduate School in Gifted Education. Christian Fischer mentioned the increasing number of teachers taking the ECHA-Diploma in different European countries and emphasised that people with the ECHA diploma are professionals in practice with a scientific base. Future plans aim at more variation in the ECHA training for different target groups. Beyond the activities in the coordination of the ECHA-Training, the qualification of PhD students in the area of giftedness were mentioned

as an important step towards a European Talent Support Network.

## 4. Secretary's report

(see the full version attached)

A short update considering HAS was presented by Margaret Sutherland.

## 5. Financial Report and its audit

The financial report was presented by Tessa Kieboom. The auditors' report was presented by Tina Refning. The auditors' accepted the facts and figures of the financial report.

## 6. Proposal to change ECHA's Articles and Standing Orders

The proposal has been sent to all the members. The proposed changes were:

Article 9.1.

**Proposal:** the Committee suggests the extension of the Article by the office of the Vice-President.

The new text should read as follows (new part is written in **boldface**): "Appointees are society members, of which the chairman hereafter named "President" and the vice-chairman hereafter named "Vice-President" are appointed in function by the General Assembly."

**Reason:** in 2012 the General Assembly elected Christian Fischer as Vice-President of ECHA for 4 years. This function should be incorporated into the Articles. The role of Vice-President (formerly named as President-elect) was proved to be useful for many years in the work of the General Committee to help the President.

The change was proposed by Johanna Raffan, seconded by Annette Heinbokel. The change was accepted unanimously.

Article 9.4

**Proposal:** The Committee suggests the change of the current text to: "**No more than one Committee member may have residence in the same European country.**"

**Reason:** the current text of Article 9.4. contradicts §3 (5) of the Standing Orders. The Committee proposes to keep the formulation of the Standing Orders, i.e. "not more than one candidate from one nation can serve on the General Committee" and change Article 9.4. to be in agreement with §3 (5) of the Standing Orders. The Committee also proposes that the country of residence should count as the basis of eligibility, not the nationality of the nominee because of dual citizenships. Moreover, the country of residence is related to the work in the field of high ability rather than the nationality. The change of this article was proposed by Javier Touron and seconded by Petra Leinigen. The change was accepted unanimously.

## Standing Orders

§2. (1)

**Proposal:** In agreement with the proposed text of Article 9.1. the Committee proposes to change the function of President-elect to Vice-President. The Committee proposes a similar change in §3. (1) and the deletion of §3. (2).

**Reason:** in 2012 the General Assembly elected Christian Fischer as Vice-President of ECHA for 4 years. The function should be incorporated in this version of the Standing Orders. This change increases the range of people who could be nominated as ECHA president while retaining the possibility that the Vice-President (or any other members of the General Committee) can be elected as the President of ECHA thus serving continuously, but does not mandate this option – which was in fact the practice of ECHA in the presidential election in 2012.

The change of this standing order was proposed by Anna Maria Roncoroni and seconded by Chantal Woltring. The change was accepted unanimously.

§2. (2)

**Proposal:** the Committee suggests extending the current text of §2. (2) with the sentence: **During the election**

### **and appointment procedures the parallel change of the President and the Secretary should be avoided where possible.**

**Reason:** Parallel changes of the President and the Secretary of ECHA would decrease the continuity of the General Committee to an extent, which should be avoided – if possible. The change of this standing order was proposed by Tessa Kieboom and seconded by Hans van Elten. The change was accepted unanimously.

§2. (4)

**Proposal:** The Committee suggests the deletion of the part “unless there is an insufficient number of candidates to fill the vacancies”.

**Reason:** as it currently stands the text contradicts Article 10.2 of ECHA Articles mandating that no one can serve more than 2 consecutive intervals (i.e. two times 4 years). The Committee suggests retaining the Articles and modifying the Standing Orders thus ensuring no one can serve for more than 2 consecutive terms in office.

The change of this article was proposed by Victor Müller and seconded by Anita Wuestman and accepted unanimously.

### **7. Election of 3 General Committee members**

President Peter Csermely, Hungary (2012 – 2016) was elected until 2016 and will serve in the new General Committee without the need for re-election.

Vice-President Christian Fischer, Germany (2012 – 2016) was elected until 2016 and will serve in the new General Committee without the need for re-election.

The treasurer, Tessa Kieboom, Belgium (2012 – 2016) was elected until 2016 and will serve in the new General Committee without the need for re-election.

Committee member, Margaret Sutherland, Scotland (2012 – 2016) was elected until 2016 and will serve in the new General Committee without the need for re-election.

Committee member, Anna-Maria Roncoroni, Italy (2012 – 2016) was elected until 2016 and will serve in the new General Committee without the need for re-election.

In the secret ballots submitted to the ECHA secretariat these nominees were elected as members of the new General Committee:

Lianne Hoogeveen, The Netherlands (2014 – 2018)

Victor Müller-Opliger, Switzerland (2014 – 2018)

Ulrike Kempfner, Austria (2014 – 2018)

Secret ballots were counted by the Election Committee elected by the General Committee consisting of Peter Csermely, Christian Fischer and Tessa Kieboom.

### **8. Election of ECHA auditors**

Tina Refning was proposed by Chantal Woltring and seconded by Anna Maria Roncoroni. Marijke Schekkerman was proposed by Anita Wuestman and seconded by Lilian Snijders. Both were elected unanimously.

### **9. Proposal for the Development of a European Talent Support Network**

There were some questions and comments concerning the proposal. Johanna Raffan commented that in the UK there are no Talent Centres, there are schools, though, that have provisions for gifted students. Johanna Raffan and Margaret Sutherland expressed their worries about the money this will cost and asked if ECHA will ask for grants. Margaret Sutherland thinks this is not possible, considering the fact the ECHA is its members; who will be the owner of the money?

Peter Csermely answers that ECHA will not ask for grants. The idea of the Talent Support Networks is an intensified cooperation between institutions. At this moment, no money is involved. Anna Maria Roncoroni proposes the voting, Joan Freeman seconded. There are four abstentions, no votes against the proposal, so the proposal is accepted. Subsequently the members voted (in secret ballots) for the Accreditation Committee. The votes

were counted by Anna Maria Roncoroni and Tessa Kieboom. Lianne Hoogeveen was elected as the president of the Accreditation Committee. Christian Fischer and Margaret Sutherland were elected to serve between 2014 and 2018. Csilla Fuszek and Colm O'Reilly were elected to serve between 2014 and 2016. All are eligible for re-election. At its first meeting the Accreditation Committee elected Csilla Fuszek as its secretary.

### **10. ECHA 2016 conference**

This conference, with the title ‘Talents in Motion’ will be held in Vienna, Austria, from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> March 2016.

### **11. Any other business**

- a. Rena Subotnik and Peter Csermely proposed that tributes to important people who passed away during the two years between ECHA conferences will be part of the General Assembly. This proposal was agreed.
- b. Tijn Koenderink asked for an item on the agenda, he proposed considering accreditation of trainings by ECHA. This point will be on the agenda of the General Committee.
- c. Annette Heinbokel asked for more articles for ECHA News.
- d. Joan Freeman complimented ECHA for all new activities.
- e. Peter Csermely commented that one participant was incorrectly counted as a citizen of the UK, while she lived in Zimbabwe, which meant there were 40 nationalities represented during the conference.

*Peter Csermely, President of ECHA*

*Contact: csermelynet@gmail.com*

# Report by the Vice-President

**CHRISTIAN FISCHER, GERMANY**

The new position as Vice-President of ECHA was established two years ago, during the 13<sup>th</sup> ECHA Conference 2012 at the University of Münster. The report of the Vice-President of ECHA Christian Fischer to the General Assembly emphasizes four main aspects:

## 1. Pickings of the 13<sup>th</sup> ECHA-Conference in Münster

The team of Christian Fischer was honoured with the conference award by the city of Münster for hosting the 13<sup>th</sup> International ECHA Conference. It was held in combination with the 4<sup>th</sup> Münsterscher Bildungskongress in September 2012 and was managed by Christiane Fischer-Ontrup and Anne Vohrmann. The award ceremony took place for the first time on May 15<sup>th</sup> 2014 in the traditional surroundings of Münsters Erbdrostenhof and came with the price money of 1.500€. Markus Lewe, the lord mayor of Münster, handed over the award in front of 200 invited guests from the fields of politics, science, economy and culture. As the conference was attended by 1100 participants from 43 countries of all 5 continents, Münster's Conference Initiative expressed their gratitude by rewarding the conference team for hosting an excellent conference and therefore promoting the city internationally. Christian Fischer expresses his great thanks to all the participants of the 13<sup>th</sup> International ECHA Conference to make the conference a great success for ECHA and warmly invites the members to the 5<sup>th</sup> Münsterscher Bildungskongress in September 2015.

## 2. ECHA-Training: Present Situation

The number of teachers taking the ECHA-Diploma continues to increase. Actually the ECHA-Training is offered in Germany, The Netherlands, Hungary, Austria and Switzerland. Moreover, there is further interest in other European countries to

implement the ECHA-Training. ECHA "Specialists in Gifted Education" are known by their solid theoretical knowledge and their ability to work especially as scientist practitioners in or for schools. The ECHA-Training, that leads to the ECHA-Diploma "Specialist in Gifted Education", joins the disciplines psychology, pedagogy and educational science. The aim of the training is to enlarge knowledge in the area of diagnosing and supporting gifted children and adolescents. The training has a scientific base, but is geared to practical situations, in and outside school. This means that, working with precise, practical educational situations, we will always use scientific methods of research, description and evaluation. During the course practice will be proved, based on scientific theories about the subject. After this training, participants have knowledge of scientific developments in the area of giftedness and gifted education. They have knowledge of international theories for assessment and counseling concerning giftedness, are able to relate practice with (inter) national theories and judge new projects and developments, based on thorough theoretical knowledge. They will also be familiar with many (inter)national examples of good practice in assessment, counseling and therapy, in- and outside school. Finally, participants will be part of a (inter)national ECHA-Network of "Specialists in Gifted Education".

## 3. ECHA-Training: Future Developments

Currently, the ECHA-Training is offered in three types for different target groups in Germany:

- (1) ECHA-Diploma "Specialist in Gifted Education" for teachers at school,
- (2) ECHA-Certificate "Specialist in Pre-School Gifted Education" for educators or pre-school teachers,
- (3) ECHA-Coach "Specialist in Coaching the Gifted" for honorary counselors.

The future developments focus on the one hand on the implementation of a "European Master Degree in Gifted Education and Talent Support" in the form

of a joint master degree based on the existing types of the ECHA-Training. On the other hand the future developments focus on the implementation of common standards for the ECHA-Training as clear guidelines for all ECHA-Courses in the different European countries. These basic components of the ECHA-Training will be developed and agreed in extra meetings of the programme director of the ECHA Training Christian Fischer together with the secretary of ECHA Lianne Hoogeveen, Victor Müller-Oppliger and Ulrike Kempter as members of the General Committee and furthermore with the coordinators of the ECHA-Training in the different European countries.

## 4. European Graduate School in Gifted Education

Beyond the activities in the coordination of the ECHA-Training, the qualification of PhD students in the area of giftedness is an important step towards a European Talent Support Network. Therefore a special online platform for the exchange of PhD students (including a data bank) should be integrated into the new ECHA-Website. Furthermore the tradition of special summer schools for PhD students (including seminars and workshops) should be revived and could be combined with ECHA Conferences. A first important step was realized by Stijn Smeets during the 14<sup>th</sup> ECHA-Conference in Ljubljana by initiating a special interest group of PhD students.

*Prof. Christian Fischer, Vice-President of ECHA  
Contact: fiscchr@uni-muenster.de*

# Secretary's Report to the ECHA General Assembly

19<sup>th</sup> September 2014 Ljubljana, Slovenia

**LIANNE HOOGEVEEN, THE NETHERLANDS**

## General Committee

The General Committee met twice in the last two years, in Münster and in Ljubljana. Synopses of both meetings were reported in the newsletter.

## Executive Committee

The Executive Committee met twice in the last two years, in April 2013 and February 2014, both times in Ljubljana (Slovenia).

## ECHA Diploma

The number of teachers taking the Diploma continues to increase. We now have courses in Germany, The Netherlands, Hungary, Austria and Switzerland, and interest to start in other European countries. ECHA-Specialists in Gifted Education are known by their solid theoretical knowledge and their ability to work as scientist practitioners in or for schools. Further plans are to make clear guidelines for all European ECHA courses, and to elaborate the ECHA-Training to a European master and PhD.

## ECHA News

ECHA News is a medium that gives all members the possibility to exchange local experiences in gifted education. Annette Heinbokel is the esteemed editor of the newsletter. We are grateful for her important efforts and she is (and we are) grateful to the people who send in articles. We would like to encourage all members to share their experiences and ideas and send their contribution to the Newsletter.

## High Ability Studies

The ECHA Journal High Ability Studies is an important journal for our members to keep up to date concerning research in the area of gifted education. Heidrun Stöger, the editor for the last 7 years, has maintained the high standard of the journal. We are grateful for her hard work. We are sure that the new editor, Albert Ziegler, will keep the journal in the forefront of published educational research.

## National Correspondents

Before the last ECHA conference, which took place in Münster, Germany, there were several elections for new National Correspondents. These correspondents have an important role as representatives of ECHA in their country. As in every ECHA conference, there will be a meeting of all the correspondents, in which we will discuss how they can be even more involved in the work of ECHA.

## ECHA conferences

This conference, in Ljubljana, Slovenia, has 266 participants from 39 countries. The next conference, in 2016, will be in Vienna, Austria, organized by Andrea Pinz and her team. More details will be given at the closing ceremony.

For the 2018 conference there are some interested countries, but we will keep this a secret until there is more clarity about it.

## Social media

The ECHA website was revised and ECHA is active on Facebook. Our website will offer more diverse information and will be an interesting platform for the members. As the president said: the best is still to come, so have a look, now and then.

## Membership

The General Committee decided that membership will now always run from January until December. The membership fee will be unchanged: 60 Euro a year. As the president already mentioned, to have more voice in Europe, we'll need more members.

## Future plans

With the goal of strengthening European initiatives for improving gifted education, the General Committee made a proposal to realise a European Talent Support Network. The proposal is sent to all ECHA members.

*Dr. Lianne Hoogeveen, Secretary of ECHA*

*Contact: l.hoogeveen@acsw.ru.nl*

## Financial Report

### 01 January 2013 – 31 December 2013

**TESSA KIEBOOM, TREASURER, BELGIUM**

*Contact: tessa.kieboom@cbo-antwerpen.be*

### OPENING BALANCE 01.01.2013 **48.881,32 €**

IN		OUT	
full membership (*)	4.369,68 €	OGONE monthly fee	1.052,49 €
student membership (*)	875,86 €	Transaction charges	18,15 €
corporate membership (*)	877,52 €	bank costs + charges PC banking	25,33 €
		Dick's ECHA News	1.752,87 €
Net interest	60,60 €	Round Table 2012 Brussels Klinger	35,00 €
		Annette Heinbokel ECHA News	700,00 €
		Hotel Expenses Roncoroni	279,95 €
		Taylor and Francis HAS	4.950,00 €
		Secretary Expenses Hoogeveen	548,43 €
		Administration transmission costs	36,94 €
		Business cards	152,10 €
<b>Total IN</b>	<b>6.183,66 €</b>	<b>Total OUT</b>	<b>9.551,26 €</b>

(\*) as a result of credit card payments membership fees are no longer rounded figures because of costs charged

### CLOSING BALANCE 31.12.2013 **45.513,72 €**

# My Practice for the Assessment of Potentially Gifted Children

19<sup>th</sup> September 2014 Ljubljana, Slovenia

**JOAN FREEMAN, UNITED KINGDOM**

In the whole of Great Britain with nearly 80 million people, I am the only Chartered Psychologist with a practice dedicated to potentially gifted children. So I am busy. The package I offer is mostly me. I don't have any assistance because parents often want to discuss things with me first by email or phone. After any media exposure, particularly television, I am inundated by hundreds of enquiries, though most of them remain just that – time-consuming enquiries.

I assess children from the age of two to 14, though I'm sometimes asked to assess babies. A typical four year-old will be reading fluently and may be years ahead with numbers, long before they are old enough for proper school. Some very young gifted children are excellent conversationalists. Few have serious behaviour problems, but if they have I suggest specialists as I do with other exceptionalities such as dyslexia or ASD.

## Making a safe, totally accepting atmosphere

To get the very best outcome in the hour or two we have together, each child must feel at home and relaxed. My guiding maxim is from the psychologist, Carl Rogers – "Positive unconditional regard" (Rogers, 1969). Not the faintest barrier of disapproval or doubt must come between me and my little client. It's a skill I learned in my training which gives me the mental set of empathy and genuineness.

I am a part of the assessment of the child in front of me. My own intelligence, personality and experience (including bringing up my four children) are a crucial part of our relationship and its outcome. Almost all the children I see are open and

trusting. However, it takes a little longer to relax those who are shy or stubbornly defensive.

This approach, I believe, is as valid for a two-year old as it is for an adult. Honesty is essential. If in my heart I am thinking unpleasant thoughts about that child I believe that somehow it will interfere with our communication. I am aware and have tried hard on every occasion across many years to improve my empathy. Take that magical figure of 10,000 hours of dedicated practice, supposedly vital to expertise – I passed that mark long ago.

Working openly with extremely bright, aware children brings the risk that sometimes they see through the self I present to them. The trust between us allows them, for example, to comment on the assessment situation – "Why are you asking me that?" A few feel free enough to present me with questions they've just made up in the manner of the test while imitating my way of speaking and moving. One five year-old said, "It's my turn now", and gave me an instant questionnaire on working women.

## The assessment

As in any assessment of children, it is necessary to keep checking that the child has understood the requests. Especially in very young children, concentration span may be limited; some are fluent in more than one language which requires some adaptation on my part, while others need encouragement to respond to my strange concerns.

I try to help the child learn in the assessment session. The gifted ones always learn and remember and many of the others do, too. Those who have difficulty in learning, during the assessment are often anxious about getting the answers wrong – as though it was a job interview.

In fact, a few have been heavily prepared by their parents with IQ-type questions. I was suspicious when I asked a nearly three year-old the difference between a bird and a dog. He replied like a robot, "One is a herbivore and one is a carnivore" – not the normal language of even a gifted two year-old, though it was amazing to hear. I was so astonished I forgot to ask him which was which.

Laughter is a vital component of my mixture. I aim to make the session fun. All young children love idiotic jokes. Even the most pressurised and inhibited find an involuntary smile is curling their lips. It relaxes both of us. It's not only that they laugh (flatteringly) at my jokes, but they take it further by making up their own jokes to make me laugh.

Taking a light approach is also essential to encourage the child to be creative in their replies and suggestions. They know that responding in a different way is OK with me (including toilet humour) even though it might not be with their teachers and parents. Parents are sometimes astonished at what they overhear their child say to me, as they did not know he or she was capable of it. For example, I discovered that a child brought because of an extreme maths bias also had a poetic way with words. When I asked him, "What is joy?", he delighted me by saying, "I have heard that love is a kind of joy". A professional poet would be glad of that sentence.

Psychological tests are man-made tools which can be used well or badly but are inevitably less than perfect. I use them flexibly as a means of drawing out information – not quite Tarot cards! I make no apologies for using and recognising my subjective judgement. It is a vital part of the way I work.

For all its faults, statistically the IQ is the best possible overall predictor of educational success. The test I most favour,

the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale (Form L-M) has the highest IQ score and so is useful for measuring gifted intelligence. The Wechsler tests are more comprehensive and popular. I use the published material to see for myself the way a child approaches problems, makes a relationship with me, deals with questions and ideas and generally with life which offers me a deep insight into the child's personal world.

### Parents are part of the assessment

Normally, parents bring their child (or children) to me because they want to know their potential and how best to help them. Of course, parents, too, have fears and hopes and want to be assured that they are doing the best they can for the child or children they cherish. Generally, I believe that to be true.

My clients are mostly from around the British Isles but also come from across the world – if their English is good enough. They may fly in for a few days, from e.g. Canada, Hong Kong, Spain, India or Saudi Arabia. Some are very rich, maybe titled, or famous. I am aware of the effect of jet-lag and ask them to wait a day or so before coming. Parents may be academics, fairground people, footballers, IT consultants, business people and so on. I rarely see farmers. Some have to save up to see me or their families contribute. At times, a child who is brilliant in their daily context is only above average in wider terms. It requires great tact on my part.

Because parents give out quite unconscious signs and signals to their children, I assess the child in a separate room. This can be quite a challenge with a two year-old, not only in getting them into another room, but keeping them reasonably still. The parents can overhear us and know what is happening.

Children are sometimes given bottles of water to take into the assessment, avoiding instant dehydration. After the session, more food may be produced as a reward. One mother put three plastic boxes on the table after her son's session and opened them all. The first contained sloppy spaghetti in tomato sauce, the second had baked beans and the third garlicky salami. Thankfully, he refused them all and she closed her boxes.

### A quality of giftedness

Again and again, I am struck by what seems to me to be a distinct quality of giftedness beyond any measures, which is not true for all the high scorers. That quality can be enhanced, but it cannot be implanted. People who have spent time with the gifted and talented have experienced that special quality in some individuals. Like me, they find it hard to offer statistics on what kind of life-style and make-up distinguishes the children who hit the ceiling of the test, then look around to find something more challenging. Some seem to be missing that extra quality which could lift them above knowing the answer to every question to becoming, say, a fine novelist.

The measurement of human ability is still a tangle of threads with overlapping fuzzy edges. It is impossible for any measure to be entirely accurate in predicting life paths, something I found so dramatically in my 35-year comparison study of gifted and non-gifted individuals (Freeman, 2010). Yet IQ tests are reliable for the purposes for which they were designed – predicting school achievement.

### The report

I spend many hours writing each long detailed report of not less than 3000 words in a literary manner. I tell parents what I have done, how their child has interacted and my conclusions. I provide an IQ score, say how it came about and what it implies. I offer advice on development and suggest ways of encouraging the child's learning. Occasionally I recommend a change of school if possible, being very aware of my responsibility for that move. So far, it has always worked.

Almost all my clientele have IQs in the top 5% and may also be gifted in other ways. One unexpected difficulty is that of the rigid conventional child. I have to think up ways of telling a loving Mum and Dad that their child is unquestionably gifted in terms of IQ score, a form of achievement, but lacks a creative approach. Fortunately, there is always something good to say about every child.

Most parental responses are of relief and delight that their child is seen and absolutely accepted by me. The giftedness

is almost a bonus. They often respond to my reports saying that I have captured something which the teachers have not seen, but which they recognise and can use to help the child's development. After all, the teacher is not usually in a position to reach that level of intimate understanding – there is a whole lively class to be taught.

I am immensely privileged to be able to work in this intimate way with the most delightful clientele – both parents and children – anyone could wish for.

### REFERENCES

**Freeman, Joan** (2010) *Gifted Lives, What happens when gifted children grow up*, London and New York: Routledge/Psychology Press.

**Rogers, Carl** (1969). *Freedom to Learn: A View of What Education Might Become*. (1st Ed.) Columbus, Ohio: Charles Merrill.

*Professor Joan Freeman, PhD, CPsychol, is a distinguished international expert on gifts and talents. For this, the British Psychological Society has awarded her a Fellowship and Lifetime Achievement Award. She is Founding President of the European Council for High Ability, Executive European Talent Support and Visiting Professor, Middlesex University, London.*

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# Laboratory for Talented Education: Allies Are Wanted!

**LAILI SAKIJEVA  
AND  
YULIY MURASHKOVSKIY, LATVIA**

There are more and more problems in all areas of human activity, but solutions to these problems are lagging behind. Intuitively almost every country understands that the key to dealing with the rapidly changing and globalized world is education.

Wikipedia says that "Education in its general sense is a form of learning in which the knowledge, skills, values, beliefs, and habits of a group of people are transferred from one generation to the next through storytelling, discussion, teaching, training, or research."

The education systems all around the world work very hard around this definition:

- they debate about which knowledge, skills, values, beliefs, and habits have to be transferred;
- they improve and polish the storytelling, discussion, and teaching techniques;
- they improve administration;
- they are busy developing new methods of learning and mindless repeating of the same old truths that come from the 18<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

In other words, they do everything except recognize that in the existing education systems knowledge turns obsolete faster than it is transferred. This leads to the enormous amount of problems we are facing.

First of all, we adults (no matter what professional or social actors we are – politicians, teachers, clerks, scientists, workers, parents, sportsmen, researchers or musicians) have to understand ourselves how the knowledge, skills, values, beliefs, and habits are being formed, developed, and changed in the course of time and only then can we teach children how to create new knowledge, because the emergence of discoveries and inventions is governed by laws, not myths.

Great hopes were pinned on the so-called gifted children. But even if we assume that such children exist and someone can precisely identify them, is there any evidence that those 3–10 per cent can solve the problems the world is facing? And is it not selfish to load on these children the responsibility of solving all the problems?

There is an enormous need for mass talented thinking, therefore we have initiated the idea of Laboratory for Talented Education.

Starting from 1946, Henry Altshuller was developing TRIZ – the Theory of Inventive Problem Solving. It has allowed the training of hundreds of thousands of inventors who make really important inventions. This theory has been the basis for further developments made both by Altshuller himself and a number of his students. At present the theory of talented thinking is outlined, and the practical approbation has started. Dozens of workshops have been organised, and training is offered at webinars, too.

## The Theory of Talented Thinking

### FAQ

#### 1. What does "talented thinking" mean?

Talented thinking is the ability to create new conceptions that are considerably different from the preceding ones and that open up new possibilities for mankind.

This is a very strict definition – it rejects 90 per cent of what is considered to be a talent. It does not include skills of repeating something already known even if it is done at a highly professional level or is entered in a book of records. It does not include minor changes of things already known, even if they can earn millions. It does not include changes on a domestic level even if they give joy to the family or friends.

A real talent is related to discoveries significant to mankind!

*Example 1: In 1900 Max Planck put forward a hypothesis that energy does not flow in a steady continuum, but is delivered in discrete*

*packets – quanta. On this basis a new branch of physics, quantum physics, was developed. Today its results can be seen in the nuclear industry, electronics, astronomy, etc.*

*Example 2: In 1865 the artist Claude Monet painted "Luncheon on the Grass" in a new style, later called Impressionism. This style, in contrast to the previous static painting, reflects the variability of the world. Later on Impressionism also entered other areas of art.*

In order for it to be possible to make a sound judgement to what extent a new idea differs from the previous one, a special five-level scale was developed. The fifth level, the highest one, corresponds to an entirely new conception that fundamentally changes our views on nature, society, technology, science, art, etc.

*Example 3: The theory of Nicolaus Copernicus radically changed the understanding of the Universe. The earth ceased to be the centre of the world.*

*Example 4: In 1848 John Stringfellow built the first flying machine with fixed wings. It changed the understanding of transport and laid the basis for a new branch of technology – aviation. (The frequently mentioned Wright brothers, strictly speaking, are not the inventors of aviation. These undoubtedly talented constructors significantly improved the plane, but they did not invent it.)*

*Example 5: At about 1632 John Amos Comenius completed his book "Great Didactics" in which he outlined the principles of a fundamentally new education system. The new system, unlike the previous one, supported a comprehensive education, discipline, the concept of the school year, and the class-lesson system. Comenius's system implied broad education instead of just transferring the knowledge and skills of the teacher.*

The first level of the scale, the lowest one, corresponds to microscopic, "cosmetic" changes which practically do not change anything.

*Example 6: The passenger seat of an aircraft is a complex structure with a reclining back of the seat and other amenities. In accordance with patent RU 2419577, the passenger seat is furnished with an additional mechanism which fixes the back of the seat in a vertical position. Has this invention changed anything in our ideas of transport or aircraft design?*

Only the highest levels of changes – the third, fourth and fifth – are related to talented thinking.

Long-term studies have shown that talented thinking is formed by certain mental procedures and skills. Up to now, 18 such procedures have been identified. However, they are not separate; they form a system of thinking which makes it possible to make high-level discoveries and inventions in all the areas of human activity. These discoveries and inventions are necessary to all mankind or its majority.

Here is the list of the procedures known today. Detailed information as well as examples of these procedures can be learnt during seminars, workshops and webinars.

1. The ability to see the systemic nature of objects or phenomena (systemic thinking).
2. The ability to resolve contradictions.
3. The ability to form a general model.
4. The ability to identify the minimal model of an object or phenomenon. The ability to see the hierarchical and temporal boundaries of the characteristics of objects.
5. The ability not to refer a fact to a known model.
6. The ability to overcome the superordinate model or change it.
7. The ability to move to the superordinate systems of concepts.
8. The ability to identify the absolute model of a phenomenon and then discard it.
9. The ability to move from the analysis of one object to the analysis of a group or set of objects.
10. The ability to operate with multiple parameters simultaneously. The ability to move from systems with one parameter to systems with many parameters.
11. The ability to increase and decrease without limits any parameter of objects or phenomena.

12. The ability to expand concepts in time. The ability to see the processes instead of events or situations.
13. The ability to move from ontogenetic analysis to phylogenetic analysis.
14. The ability to conduct the associative imagination. The ability to form and develop analogies.
15. The ability to invent terminology.
16. The ability to operate with large amounts of information.
17. The ability to see the flaws of the constructed model.
18. The courage in thinking.

## 2. Is it possible to teach talented thinking to anyone?

Talented thinking in practice means knowing the procedures of talented thinking and being able to apply them. Before these procedures were identified and understood, their mastery was random, non-systemic.

Quite by chance, a child learns a procedure. The parents and school do not manage to kill this ability. He or she gets interested in some field of activity in which it is possible to apply it. He or she is patient enough to develop a new concept and defend it. Only then is this person recognised to be a genius.

So many events must match in order for a genius to appear. No wonder there is a myth of the inaccessibility of talented thinking. No wonder the essence of genius has been sought in genes, in brain structure, in mysterious forces, etc.

Now it is possible to develop such personal qualities and abilities which are crucial for truly talented thinking. Not to rely on chance, but to organize it.

Yes, for children it is easier to acquire knowledge and skills – their way of thinking is yet in the process of formation and they accept new ideas easily. However, as practice shows, adults can learn talented thinking, too, if only they are determined to do that.

Talented thinking is complicated. Learning it takes a long time and training in it – the whole life. But it is possible.

## 3. Where do these findings come from?

The theory of talented thinking is being developed by compiling a card index of talented solutions in different areas of human activity. At present the card index contains tens of thousands of such solutions.

1. Each solution is studied according to the following scheme: 1) what was there before the solution, 2) what is the solution like, and 3) what method was used to reach the solution.
2. The methods used in achieving talented solutions are grouped. The basis of the theory is formed by those methods which consistently produce strong, talented solutions.
3. The theory is tested during seminars. The participants try to solve not only instructional examples, but also real problems from the fields of their activity.
4. Another way of testing the credibility of the theory is predicting. Several long-term forecasts regarding science and art have been made, and some of them have already come true.

These questions and answers give only an insight into the theory of talented thinking, but it must be remembered that talented thinking requires a lot of work. It is neither a magic wand, nor a "talent pill". It is work, work and work. Interesting and exciting, still – work.

We invite you to join the Laboratory for Talented Education in order to get introduced to the theory, to help continue research, to develop the methodology.

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# 70 Years of Grade Skipping

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To find out whether grade skipping is experienced as more positive or more negative in the long run, it is necessary to ask adults: They overlook all their years at school, including the times when things may have been difficult, they also remember what caused them, whether and when problems were solved or simply disappeared. While they are still at school, the situation can change very quickly. The answers one gets then are the truth, but only a momentarily one.

In 2012, I sent questionnaires to adults who were 25 years and older and had skipped a grade. 115 adults from all over Germany were found, they were born between 1917 and 1987 and they skipped between 1926 and 2003.

The year skipping took place	female	male
pre 1940	3	3
1940-1950	10	4
1950-1980	15	12
past 1980	36	32
	64	51

This study is a follow-up and was preceded by several other studies.

## Previous Studies

In 1990 I sent questionnaires to all the primary, grammar and comprehensive schools in Lower Saxony (Germany) concerning grade skipping, besides there were questionnaires for parents from all over West Germany (the wall had only just come down, East Germany was therefore not yet included) and interviews with adolescents who had skipped. In 2001 I again sent questionnaires to the same schools: the attitudes towards gifted children had become more positive, besides the rules concerning grade skipping had changed: From 1995 onwards schools in this state

must consider acceleration if a pupil has an average of two or better (in the German system grades go from 1 (the best grade) to 6 (the worst)). I wanted to know what the effect had been on the figures.

## The Schools' Answers

In the 1980s there had been 311 grade skippers, the schools mentioned very few intellectual and about 10 per cent emotional problems for primary school children. In the 1990s the figures had increased to 1907 grade skippers (Heinbokel 2010). There had been a slight increase in problems mentioned by the schools. According to them, about 10 per cent of the pupils had intellectual problems. As far as emotional problems were concerned, 10 per cent of the girls and up to 20 per cent of the boys aged 12 and younger had emotional problems. Of the pupils attending grammar school, less than 10 per cent had any problems at all (Heinbokel 2004b). However:

- Although the schools were required to offer grade skipping, there had not been any teacher training of this part of gifted education. Usually it was only mentioned as an option. 'An average of 2' is a rather vague description for suggesting grade skipping. Teachers were neither taught how to prepare before nor how to support the children after skipping.
- It is not clear what the schools meant by 'problems'.
- It is not clear, either, whether the problems disappeared at a later stage, remained the same or became even worse.

## The Parents' Answers

Most of the parents had not wanted their child to skip. However, most of these children were so bored that they misbehaved or developed problems: some disrupted lessons (more boys than girls), stopped doing homework or work at school, they complained of tummy aches and headaches and even developed a fever that

disappeared when they did not have to go to school. Some were aggressive towards classmates or siblings or towards themselves. Therefore lack of challenge was almost never the only reason for skipping: apart from a lack of challenge most of these children were very unhappy at school.

Most of the parents wrote that grade skipping had been the right decision, at least for the time being (parents of girls 97 per cent / parents of boys 88 per cent). Many of the problems mentioned above disappeared or became at least smaller. Some wrote that after a short time the children had been as bored as before. That means that enrichment is still needed, but the intellectual differences between the grade skippers and their new classmates are smaller, therefore it can be less difficult to provide them with challenging material.

Sometimes the children had been supported by the teachers, others reported about stumbling blocks that were put in their way (Heinbokel 2004a).

## The Pupils' Answers

Interviews took place with 8 girls and 11 boys who were taken from the parents' sample. They were 13 and older, the two oldest were already studying. The idea was to ask this age group to find out how they coped with sometimes much older classmates who were adolescents and had already very different interests.

Again responses were positive. Some had had problems, sometimes with teachers or with classmates, especially when they were younger. The older they had become, the more physical and emotional differences and therefore problems had disappeared. All of them said, though, that problems they experienced after skipping were nothing compared to the problems they had had before. Some of them confirmed that skipping once had not been enough (Heinbokel 2004a).

## 70 years of Grade skipping

Grade skipping had always been possible, but it had also always been a rare occurrence – and it will stay that way: enrichment will always be more popular and is

an option for more children. Even if grade skipping has increased, it is still rare. Of the German states that do have figures on grade skipping, in 2013-14 Hamburg had the highest numbers: 0.07 per cent of all the pupils of that year skipped a grade, that is 7.1 per cent of the (theoretically) gifted.

In this group, too, results were positive: 89 per cent of the women and 78 per cent of the men said they would skip again if circumstances were the same (Heinbokel, in press). As one can imagine, circumstances were very different over the decades. To describe a few examples:

#### Pre 1940

Margret skipped first grade in 1938. She grew up in a village which had a two-room school. When her friend started school, Margret was left behind because she was a little younger. In the afternoon the two played 'school' with the other children. When she started school a year later, she was terribly bored because she knew everything from first grade. The teacher suggested skipping, the mother very reluctantly agreed. When Margret was interviewed aged 80 she still said: "I would have become fipsy had I not skipped."<sup>1</sup>

#### 1940-1950

During the war years skipping took place, too. Many children did not go to school, sometimes for years, because schools had been bombed or turned into hospitals, or they had been refugees and the families had had to settle down again. In that case the adults sometimes decided: "You are ten, so you belong in grade 4." In those cases there was no question whether the children were particularly bright or even gifted. They got help from adults and catching up could take some time.

However, even in those days children could be bored. In 1946 Elisabeth skipped two grades within a year, grade 7 and 9. She did so without the consent or support of her parents, who were not present to stop her. She was happy to be with older girls who were not as silly as her age mates, and she enjoyed the challenge. Two of her children, a daughter and a son, skipped, too.

#### 1950-1980

In the 70s two boys who both skipped grade 11 – in different towns and years – had totally different experiences. One said he'd never do it again and would not recommend it, the reason: he'd ended up in a class of hooligans. Michael, Elisabeth's son, said exactly the opposite, he was very happy after skipping, the reason: he'd ended up in a really nice class, found friends, he was sorry school ended so soon. In his case teachers had been exceptionally helpful. – The same answers could be given after moving house and attending a new school, but no-one would argue against moving house. It just shows how important teachers are to create a positive climate in a classroom or even the whole school for children, in particular for those who join an existing class.

#### Past 1980

This sample consists of 36 female and 32 male participants. 10 women and 12 men had also been part of the parents' sample, and of these, three girls and boys had been interviewed. So in these cases there are parents' questionnaires, interviews and the questionnaires the adults answered.

Starting in the early 80, grade skipping began to increase (although, as the example of Hamburg shows, even then very few did skip then and do it today). One trigger was the founding of the German Association for Gifted Children (1978), the other and more influential one the first boarding school with a special class for gifted children (1981). In 1985 the 6th World Conference on Gifted and Talented Children took place in Hamburg. That was a very important event and gave a huge push to the interest in giftedness, several scientists started to do research. That meant there were more reports in all the media on gifted children, not just on a few rare prodigies. As there was still very little enrichment, grade skipping was more or less the only escape from excessive boredom.

The interest by the media was positive for gifted children and their families, of course, but there were also unexpected negative effects: Giftedness became a political issue. People who were more

conservative, including members of the 'Philologenverband' (who represented grammar school teachers), called for support of gifted children. One argument was that as Germany lacked natural resources, it needed an intellectual 'élite'. Persons with more socialist tendencies, this time including members of another teachers' associations, the 'Gewerkschaft Erziehung und Wissenschaft' (who represented more the Labour Party spectrum), rejected support of giftedness because in their opinion it smacked of 'élitism'. The latter had a very negative view of the parents of gifted children.

Schools are part of society, teachers as well as all the parents, whether the children are gifted or not. Some teachers were supportive and helpful and did their best, others felt challenged by the parents and the children. They did not want a gap between slow and fast learners, so the fast learners, the gifted, were held back while the slow learners were supported. Even today some parents report that their child still experiences that.

When giftedness became an issue, it was often assumed that parents of gifted children pushed them, expected them to be high achievers, to be top of the class, that they wanted 'something better' for their offspring and for their futures. This may have been the case with some parents, but many I talked to were rather reserved. They knew the prejudices concerning giftedness – they may even have had the same before they realized they had a 'child like that' –, so some of them told their children not to let others know what they knew and what interested them, not to work at their own level and speed. Sometimes other parents, friends or neighbours broke off contact when a family outed their child as being gifted, the children were not invited to birthdays anymore.

There is not enough room here to describe this complex, double-edged situation. Despite the problems some of the adults encountered during some of their years at school, the vast majority answered that it had been positive for them.

For those who 'failed', at least some of the time, reasons were very individual. One

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highly creative gifted boy, today a well-known musician, had skipped in primary school. At grammar school he wanted to 'belong', which he achieved by not working: in grade 7 he failed in maths, English and Latin. In Germany, failing in several subjects means having to repeat at year, which he did in grade 9. Besides he would only try to achieve if he respected the teacher, which was not too often. The result was that in grade 10 he almost failed the year again, which would have meant: no 'Abitur' (A-levels) and not being able to go to university. Not working for school for many years meant, when he needed to work hard, he didn't know how to do it. Despite that he did try hard for once and passed the last crucial maths test.

In the interview he said, had he not skipped in primary school, he would have failed even sooner than he finally did, because he would have been bored earlier and even more. He had preferred being together with older pupils. And when the maths teachers asked how he'd managed to pass that final math test he answered: "A good horse never jumps higher than the hurdle."

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## NACE: The National Association for Able Children in Education

**FIONA PERKINS, UNITED KINGDOM**

NACE, The National Association for Able Children in Education, established in 1983 in Great Britain, is the only dedicated membership, not for profit organisation specialising in supporting teachers to provide excellent teaching and learning for more able, gifted and talented pupils. The national charity based in Oxfordshire has achieved significant growth in membership recently from both national and international schools. NACE has a long history of supporting schools overseas and has members from Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, Thailand, China, Japan, Russia, The Middle East, Europe and Africa. Most recently NACE was delighted to welcome five delegates from Marymount International School, Paris, to their conference "Yes You Can – Harnessing Talent & Ability", held in London in January 2015, and indeed every event that NACE has organised in the last 12 months has attracted international delegates.

Along with schools in Great Britain, NACE supports international schools with its content rich website and tutors who offer Continuous Professional Development (CPD) to teachers ensuring they are challenging their more able, gifted and talented pupils. The NACE Challenge Award (CA) Framework is a self-evaluation and school improvement tool which supports and recognises school improvement and achievement in the education of the more able, gifted and talented. The Framework provides resources and guidance to improve teaching and pupil progress leading to a highly regarded accreditation. Schools using the Framework receive resources, guidance and access to quality assured professionals highly experienced in working with leadership teams and teachers to evaluate and improve provision for the more able. There are over 333 schools both nationally and internationally that have received the NACE Challenge Award, for a full list see below. We hold a NACE Challenge Award conference every two

years and this year is will be held in June in London, please see below for more details.

How has the **NACE Challenge Award** changed over the 10 years it has been supported by NACE? In brief, the NACE Challenge Award last year saw a major review of

- The NACE Challenge Award Framework
- The associated guidance and supporting documents
- The professional advice and development available to support schools on the CA journey
- The web based materials and marketing

The spirit and substance of the Framework and the Award remain as they always were. Schools will, however, benefit from a more streamlined Framework and criteria; clearer and more succinct guidance targeted and differentiated support for schools at the different stages of developments for more able pupils. These are all things schools asked us to consider and we are confident that they will be pleased with the changes. In addition we are planning to make the NACE Challenge Award 'family' a much more close knit and active one, with many schools already agreeing to host events and support other schools where needed.

#### What NACE Challenge Awarded schools say about how the framework has supported them

Ten years ago when we received the NACE Challenge Award folder we felt that the Elements were a good framework for improving our More Able and Talented (MA&T) provision. We used the framework to audit our provision, looked to see where the gaps were and then gradually worked to fill these gaps in our provision. In 2007 we then felt able to apply for the NACE Challenge Award as a way of validating our MA&T provision. For the re-accreditation in 2011 and, currently, our preparation for the

<sup>1</sup> Elisabeth, the youngest daughter of Thomas Mann, skipped twice in the 1920s.

Third Accreditation later this year, we have found and continue to find these stages very useful for reviewing and improving our provision.

The whole process is thorough, but, with planning and organisation, it is not daunting and the overall experience has been very beneficial and highly satisfying. I think the process is just right – if the requirements were any less, the Award would not be so prestigious. The assessment days were a very positive experience where we were able to demonstrate our provision and the assessors were constructive and positive in their approach.

We have also shared our experiences in achieving the Challenge Award and Re-accreditation with other schools. This has led me to become an assessor myself and, again, this is helping me to continue to look for ways to improve our MA&T provision.

Caroline Gaitley – **Southend School for Boys** – in the process of Third Accreditation

We are very proud to have been the first school in Wales to gain the Challenge Award in 2007 and then to go on to gain re-accreditation in 2011. The NACE Cymru<sup>1</sup> Challenge Award experience is exciting and incredibly rewarding, as it gives me as More Able and Talented Coordinator (MA&TCO), the school and pupils a chance to showcase all the fantastic work that has taken place over the last four years, whilst also gaining recognition for our achievements. The framework helps direct and inform the priorities for my improvement plan and allows for easy evaluation of provision. We are currently preparing for our Third Accreditation and are focusing closely on the key issues that were raised from the last re-accreditation. These key issues allow me as MATCO to identify parts of our provision that could be improved even further. We have been developing ways to improve thinking skills and allow pupils to lead their own learning. This is driven by a thriving More Able and Talented (MA&T) Group of fifteen teachers from across the subject areas. Other recent initiatives include rolling out Challenge Walls across the school,

using data to identify underachievement in MAT students and setting up a MAT Buddy Scheme. (Full article is available on the website).

Kirsty Watt MATCO **Treorchy Comprehensive School** – about to go for 3<sup>rd</sup> accreditation.

Fiona Mackay Perkins is Business Manager at NACE and has been working with schools for over 3 years, to provide teachers with support to challenge their more able pupils.

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<sup>1</sup>Cymru is the Welsh name for Wales

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