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Including the gifted and talented in the early years

Some key points about the education of gifted and talented learners will be made in this chapter.

- **Adopting an inclusive approach to learning is helpful to young gifted and talented learners.**
- **Current learning theory and changes in the way we think about learning, ability and intelligence offer an opportunity to ensure all abilities are being challenged and celebrated.**
- **Labels for gifted and talented learners, while useful, can also be a hindrance. We need to focus on what the labels mean and try to come to some shared understandings about the terms used.**
- **Intelligence is difficult to define. It is our beliefs about intelligence that will influence our view of children in the early years setting and impact on individuals' self-beliefs or mindsets.**

Who are the gifted and talented in your early years setting?

I wonder what picture you have in your mind of a child who is gifted and talented? Often we conjure up images of a round-faced kid with freckles and glasses. He/she always answers questions correctly and is often to be found on his/her own, usually doing science experiments. He/she is sometimes known as 'the little professor'. Or perhaps it is the virtuoso violin player who happens to be four years old. He/she spends hours practising almost to the exclusion of everything else; he/she is quietly spoken and is good at mathematics as well. This kind of stereotyping, while common, is not helpful, particularly if we're considering the education of young gifted and talented children within an inclusive education framework. For many, these narrow views of who the gifted and talented are will go on to shape and influence what they do with young children in their care.

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- What does it mean to be gifted and talented in your setting?
- How might your views on gifted and talented children influence practice in your setting?
- What kinds of things do children do in your setting that make you say 'wow!'?

The early years setting should be an exciting place to be for all children. It is also the ideal place to discuss the education of gifted and talented children. Through the provision of appropriate activities and interaction with adults, the setting should offer young children the opportunity to:

- discover what they are interested in

- discover what they can do

- develop relationships with others (adults and children)

- learn to work alongside others (adults and children)

- take risks.

Early years settings, by their very nature, are often considered to be inclusive in the care and education of young children. The structure and practice within early years settings would seem to allow for the adoption of an inclusive approach to learning. For one thing, a play-centred curriculum allows for a child-centred approach: children drive the learning process. This is not to say that there is no structure and that goals are not set, it's just that learning and development are seen as important and complementary, and the emphasis is not simply on targets and results. The child focus of staff and the flexible structure within early years allow for the development of inclusive practices.

Inclusion in the early years setting

Inclusion is an international concept stemming from the International Declaration on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989). Inclusion can be looked at from two perspectives:

1   the current reality for particular groups of individuals for whom exclusion has been and continues to be the norm; and

2   an alternative concept of inclusion which encompasses all members of society rather than just a few.

In education the inclusion debate is often narrowed into a discussion about children who present with difficulties and where to educate them – in mainstream school or special schools? The world of gifted education has not been immune to this debate. Many programmes, centres and summer schools offer gifted individuals special pull-out programmes and opportunities. Blogs and websites discuss the relative merits of 'schools for the gifted'. Traditionally in the UK education systems

we have excluded 'children that don't fit' – those with physical impairment, behaviour difficulties, learning difficulties and yes … even the gifted and talented. When we see a child doing something that is unusual in some way we often seek to identify what it is that is different and then we go about finding a label to explain this difference. We may even try to 'fix' the difference, just so they're 'normal'. While young children may react non-judgmentally to those who are different they are nonetheless developing an awareness of difference which may result in prejudices emerging and so it is important that educators think about encouraging awareness of, and positive attitudes to, diversity and difference within the setting. A shared view of inclusion does not exist at present, however, I would suggest that inclusion is about all individuals in society and as such assumes a 'whole' in which everyone has an equivalent part.

Feeling included

Feeling included, and of course the opposite, excluded, are feelings we will all have had from time to time. Consider the following example told to my colleague:

> John found it really awkward taking Josie to playgroup. He was the only father in the area who had made the decision to stay at home and look after his children. He was never part of the incidental chat the women took part in and always felt out of things on the nursery trips. Equally he felt he had less and less in common with male friends. He had commented that if only there were less stereotypical images of who looks after children things might be better.

- Can you think of a time when you felt excluded?
- How did it make you feel?
- What was the impact of these feelings on your behaviour?
- What was the impact of these feelings on your self-esteem and self-worth?
- What would have helped you to feel more included?

Gifted and talented children will sometimes feel excluded from the games their peers play. Sometimes staff interpret this as the gifted child having poor interpersonal skills and being immature. However this is not as simple as it might first appear. Let's look at this from the gifted child's perspective.

A group of children are playing in the house corner. The children have taken on traditional roles and are engaged in a make-believe game. The 'baby' in the 'family' is ill and is in bed. The gifted child approaches and the following happens:

Gifted child: *Can I play?*

Mum: *OK.*

Gifted child: *Can I be the doctor? I think I know what's wrong with the baby.*

Mum: *No.*

Gifted child: *But I think I can make her better.*

Mum: *She's got a cold.*

Gifted child: *No she hasn't, I think she's got malaria. You get that when a female mosquito bites you. What are the symptoms? Has she been in the tropics?*

Mum: *She's got a cold.*

Gifted child: *I know how you make malaria better. She needs to come to hospital and she'll need to get chloroquine, mefloquine, or quinine. Can I be the doctor?*

Mum: *No. She's got a cold. She's not got your fancy illness. You can be the dog.*

The gifted child walks away muttering under their breath saying *I know how to make her better*.

There are several things happening here but on a basic level the gifted child has been excluded from the game. There may be several reasons for this but we will look at two related issues:

1   The game is already established and the existing group do not want another person to join.

2   The gifted child wants to develop the plot using their knowledge of real-life issues which the rest have no experience of or interest in.

The first reason relates to group dynamics and this may or may not have anything to do with the child being gifted per se. The 'mother' designates a role for the gifted child that 'fits' with the existing story. Joining in on that basis means play can continue. The second reason, while it relates not only to gifted children, does throw up some particularly interesting issues for gifted children. Gifted children will often have in-depth knowledge about a subject or subjects. They can be good at connecting that knowledge to different situations. They can also make up complex plots and story lines in their heads. Their age peers may just not understand what they are talking about and so they set about excluding them from the game, thus re-affirming existing group dynamics. In the scenario above the gifted child walks away but another outcome could be that the gifted child sets their complex plot aside and, in this case, would get down on all fours and start to bark. Gifted children can choose to be excluded from play and maintain the complex plot in their head or they can give up their complex plot in order to conform to the story and join the group. While on one level they may feel more included by 'joining in', as educators, we should be concerned if this happens on a regular basis. Children might stop sharing those complex plots; they may even begin to stop the elaborate thought processes – why bother if no one is interested? If this happens how will we know that they were and are capable of this higher level thinking? This is one example related to play but this may repeat itself in a variety of situations within the setting. Educators need to use such opportunities to increase young children's willingness to be inclusive of those who are different to themselves.

〰 • How are difference and diversity celebrated in your setting?

• How do educators encourage children to be accepting of difference within the setting?

• In what ways do educators ensure that all children are valued within the setting?

• In what ways does the setting ensure that young gifted children are included appropriately in activities?

A danger when early years settings start to identify gifted and talented learners is that they lose what makes the early years setting experience unique and child-centred, and instead start to adopt the formal approaches offered in schools. While this may be appropriate for some, it will not be appropriate for all. That young gifted and talented learners need to be challenged is not debatable; how we do this perhaps requires further discussion. For the purposes of this book, inclusive education is taken to mean children learning together: learning from each other, from adults around them and from their communities and families. In this way, it is argued, gifted and talented learners can be:

• challenged appropriately

• seen as valuable members of the learning community

• have their gifts and talents recognised and celebrated within an inclusive setting.

So what do we know about learning that will help us to do this?

Learning in the early years setting

Much has been written about learning and how we learn. Advances in science and medicine, for example, mean we now know much more than we did in the past about how our brain functions and the impact that this has on learning. However, this knowledge has not always changed what we do as educators.

The point of looking at theory is that it offers vital insights into the day-to-day practice of learners, educators and settings, but often theory is overlooked in the busy day-to-day organising and planning of a setting and so is disregarded. A well-known theorist and academic wrote:

> An eminent professor who has researched and lectured on education for years is persuaded by one of his students to go out to schools and see good practice. On the way back in the car the professor is very quiet and the student asks him what he made of his day. 'Well,' replied the professor, 'I was just wondering if it would all work in theory'. (Ainscow, 1998: 7)

This anecdote highlights the false and unnecessary division between theory and practice. Theory without practice is useless, practice without theory is dangerous.

A number of theories have developed about learning, intelligence and ability. Any theory reflects a 'moment' in time. Theories come and go and collapse in on themselves when society changes. We learn new things that suggest the theory needs to change, adapt or be modified. This can give the impression that we are going round in circles. There is also a tendency to throw out everything we've been doing in the past, because it is somehow viewed as bad and outdated, in the naive belief that all the so-called new ideas will somehow be better and provide the answers.

The activities in this book emerge from a particular paradigm or worldview. A paradigm is described by Lewis (1998) as an interconnecting set of assumptions, values and methodologies that are accepted as self-evident. Lots of theories and approaches can be part of the same paradigm because they share the same world view. Thus the main theories reflected in this book belong to the social constructivist approach to learning and teaching and are part of what Poplin (1988) calls the new paradigm. New ways of looking at gifted and talented education and at early years education are being explored (Lenz Taguchi, 2010; Ziegler, 2005) and also call for a paradigm shift. The common theme across these new paradigms is that we need to change our thinking in relation to learning and think not about how we identify more people within the system but think about how we transform the system. This book is therefore concerned with how we can best create learning opportunities for young children that will allow their abilities to emerge and be nurtured.

As part of this new paradigm a social constructivist approach tells us there are some key things we know about learning that are important and will maximise learning for all learners:

> - Learning is a social activity.
> - Children learn best from collaborative activities – but we need to carefully craft the experiences.
> - Experiences gained outside of the early years setting should be linked to the learning taking place in the early years setting.
> - Learning in early years settings should be contextualised and not divorced from real-world experiences.

Taking these points into account, there are a number of core principles that underpin good learning experiences for all children. Bearing in mind this includes those who are gifted and talented, some principles might be:

- All children have a right to an education that is appropriately challenging and takes account of individual needs.

- Each person has a unique profile across a wide range of abilities that should be recognised, enhanced and valued equally.

- Recognition of an individual's ability profile is only possible in partnership with parents and other significant individuals in that person's life.

- Appropriate challenge must be provided at all points on an individual's ability profile.

- The key to recognition of an individual's abilities lies with the provision of appropriately challenging opportunities.

- Errors are critical to the learning process, thus appropriately challenging opportunities may require challenges that take the individual to the point of failure. This is only possible, however, within an ethos where it is safe to fail.

- An inclusive education system is the most supportive framework for offering opportunities to prevent underachievement and provide appropriate challenge across the ability range.

(Scottish Network for Able Pupils, 2004)

These principles form the framework for learning discussed in subsequent chapters, and if adopted would offer a framework for addressing the needs of gifted and talented learners.

Labels in an early years setting

We like the world to make sense and to help us we often label things. So the young child who learns the word 'bath' refers to all water as 'bath'. This gives us a sense of order and comfort. As adults we still seek to label things in order to categorise them and for ease of explanation. In the case of young gifted and talented children, there are a plethora of labels used to describe them. Indeed, these labels are often attributed to all children who show particular aptitude.

Here are just some of the more common words and phrases used in the UK:

- Smart
- Bright
- Precocious
- Clever
- Switched on
- Bright as a button
- Smart cookie

- Bright spark
- Clever clogs
- High achiever
- More able
- Special aptitude
- Gifted
- Talented

Each one of these words or phrases brings with it 'baggage' – particular connotations and meanings. How adults view children's abilities will often depend on the adult's view of intelligence; this in turn will influence their choice of description and indeed will influence whether the adult thinks that the ability being demonstrated is worthwhile and worthy of a label in the first place. Let's unpack these labels a little and see what lies behind them.

Traditionally in the UK we have tended to equate intelligence with mathematical and linguistic aptitude. Abilities that fall outside these domains are often not recognised. Many of the labels listed above are used to describe children who have shown aptitude in mathematics and language. So you will hear the four-year-old who can read being described as 'a real bright spark'. Likewise, children who have ability in mathematics will often be described as 'gifted' or 'a smart cookie'. Because words and phrases mean different things to different people, we can end up with staff in an early years setting all using the same word or words but actually talking about different things. The danger is not in the fact that we all use different words to describe abilities and children, it is that we assign different values and meaning to different words. Similarly, if all staff in the early years setting hold a very narrow view of what it is to be intelligent, then abilities that lie outside the narrow definition are unlikely to be recognised or challenged.

While labels can sometimes be helpful they can also cause problems. For example:

- we don't all use the same words to describe the same abilities

- labels can set up misleading expectations – for children, parents and staff

- people look no further than the label

- they lead to a child only being challenged in what they are already good at

- they might be limiting and disguise the child's other abilities.

Therefore it might be more beneficial to focus on what lies behind these labels. If we can start to come to some kind of shared understanding as to what we think being gifted and talented might mean, then we can start to think about what we value and how we can challenge the abilities that the children in our care demonstrate. In other words, let's not agonise over what label we assign, but instead let's engage in discussion about what the words actually mean to us and what they mean for learning. In this way we do not become caught up with the comparative notions of giftedness where we say 'he/she is gifted in my setting but not in the one down the road' but instead we focus on what the children are doing and how we might move their learning forward.

- Decide what you mean by intelligence.
- Agree whether intelligence is about mathematics and language only or whether it includes other areas of the curriculum.
- Agree on what words/labels you will use to describe children who are displaying particular abilities in the areas you decide on.

What is intelligence?

Just what does it mean to be intelligent? For years we have tried to describe what being intelligent means, but Colman (1987) suggests that there is no precise definition

of intelligence that would satisfy all psychologists and points out that dictionary definitions are of little help.

> The *Oxford English Dictionary* lists twelve definitions of 'intelligence'; but it also lists eight definitions of 'definition' and no fewer than 114 definitions of 'of'. What a muddle! (1987: 17)

No one is sure exactly what intelligence is although there are lots of different views. These views are, generally, encapsulated in models that seek to illustrate the different theories that exist. Intelligence is often measured by standardised tests that the child has taken, from which their IQ is established. To suggest that a certain percentage of children are 'intelligent' by reference to a single test score is neither helpful to the identification procedure nor to selecting the most effective form of provision (Koshy and Casey, 1997). The test may have been standardised on a population that was vastly different from the one to which the child being tested belongs. Not only is the population different, but also cultural differences may be significant to the outcome of the test. Neither do such tests take account of creativity or divergent thinking – abilities which a gifted and talented child will often demonstrate. David George (1997) suggests that while an IQ test may allow the identification of some children with certain abilities, it may be more to do with the fact that these children:

> perform well in academic subjects … are persistent, respond well to instruction, have good study skills … process information quickly, have better memories, have greater accuracy and are good at abstract thinking. (George, 1997: 37)

In other words, they're good at passing tests!

This still leaves us with our original question – what does it mean to be intelligent? The work of Howard Gardner (1983) in the USA encouraged us to think differently about intelligence. He suggested that intelligence is not just about maths and language but includes a much wider range of abilities. He also argued we all have all of them to a greater or lesser degree and they are not hierarchical. Gardner's list includes:

- linguistic intelligence (word smart)

- mathematical intelligence (logic smart)

- interpersonal intelligence (people smart)

- naturalist intelligence (nature smart)

- visual-spatial intelligence (picture smart)

- musical intelligence (music smart)

- bodily kinaesthetic intelligence (body smart)

- intrapersonal intelligence (self smart)

- existential intelligence (wonder smart).

What would young children be doing if they were demonstrating abilities in these areas? Table 1.1 gives some examples.

Table 1.1   Abilities associated with different intelligences

Intelligence	Evidence	Famous people
Linguistic (word smart)	• Tells stories and jokes • Good memory for names, dates, etc. • Enjoys word games • Likes tongue twisters • Has a good vocabulary • Communicates well	• Shakespeare • Hemingway • J.K. Rowling • Agatha Christie • Elizabeth Barrett Browning
Logical/mathematical (number smart)	• Plays chess and strategy games • Understands cause and effect • Asks questions about how things work • Can do arithmetic in their heads quickly	• Archimedes • Sir Isaac Newton • Einstein
Interpersonal (people smart)	• Enjoys being with peers • A natural leader • Offers advice to friends • Has close friends • Others want to be their friend	• Oprah Winfrey • Abraham Lincoln • Gandhi • Martin Luther King
Naturalist (nature smart)	• Enjoys learning about animals or nature • An interest in biology, zoology, geology, astronomy • Aware of the environment • Categorises easily • Likes beauty and the outside world	• Galileo • Jacques Cousteau • Dian Fossey
Visual/spatial (picture smart)	• Reads maps, charts and diagrams easily • Enjoys puzzles, jigsaws, I spy • Builds 3-dimensional constructions • Draws in advance of age • Understands pictures more than words	• Michelangelo • Picasso • Steven Spielberg • Monet
Musical (music smart)	• Knows when music is 'off key' • Remembers the tune to a song • Sings well • Can keep the rhythm • Imitates others easily • Plays an instrument	• Mozart • Beethoven • Scott Joplin • John Lennon
Bodily kinaesthetic (body smart)	• Good at sports • Can mimic gestures • Good fine-motor skills • Likes plasticine, clay and hands on art activities • Has difficulty sitting still • Very active	• Tiger Woods • Marcel Marceau • David Beckham • Wayne Rooney

Intelligence	Evidence	Famous people
Intrapersonal (self smart)	• Independent • Plays well alone • Aware of strengths/weaknesses • Can express how they are feeling • Learns from mistakes	• Joan of Arc • Sir Edmund Hillary • Neil Armstrong • Christopher Columbus
Existential (wonder smart)	• Asks big questions about life/death • Asks questions about other planets • Appears to be fully aware of the cosmos • Asks life's larger questions	• Aristotle • Confucius • Einstein • Plato • Socrates

This wider approach to intelligence links well with existing work in the early years setting and allows for an holistic or whole-person approach to development and the recognition of abilities. However, in spite of this wider approach it is often children who display abilities in mathematics (logic smart) and language (word smart) that are identified.

An American psychologist called Carol Dweck (1999) has considered theories of intelligence. She has split these into two broad categories – entity theory of intelligence and incremental theory of intelligence.

Holding an **entity view of intelligence** will mean believing a person possesses a specific amount of intelligence and nothing you or they can do will change that amount. In other words:

- it's fixed

- you've only got so much of it

- there's not much you can do about how much you've got

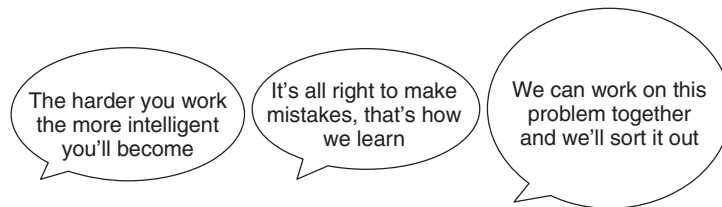- there's nothing you can do as the educator to increase the amount they've got.

If you hold this belief you are likely to say the following things:

Well, you can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear

She's tried hard; she just hasn't got what it takes

You can try as hard as you like, but if the child hasn't got it in them, there's nothing you can do

Holding an **incremental view of intelligence** will mean believing that intelligence is not an 'entity' that resides within a person but is something that can be developed through learning. In other words:

- it can change

- you can become more intelligent

- the more you learn, the more you can learn

- the educator can work with the person so they become more intelligent.

If you hold this belief you are likely to say the following things:

> The harder you work the more intelligent you'll become

> It's all right to make mistakes, that's how we learn

> We can work on this problem together and we'll sort it out

Dweck uses these two categories – entity and incremental – to explain people's understanding of, and beliefs about, intelligence. It is these beliefs about intelligence that will influence our expectations of children and our approaches to working with children.

These two very different beliefs will result in very different behaviours within individuals. For example, Dweck suggests the following:

Learning is fixed (entity)	Learning can change (incremental)
worry about how much fixed intelligence they have	believe everyone with effort and guidance can increase their intellectual abilities
need to look and feel like they have enough 'intelligence'	need to learn
need to look smart and need to out-perform others	sacrifice opportunities to look smart in favour of opportunities to learn something new
need easy successes	thrive on challenge

(Dweck, 1999: p. 3)

These beliefs about intelligence are closely linked to what Dweck calls 'goal achievement' (Dweck, 1999). By this she means that if you hold a fixed view of intelligence then it will be performance goals that will be important to you because you need to show just how clever and smart you are. In contrast, if you possess an incremental

view of intelligence then you will be concerned with becoming smarter, and so learning goals will be more important to you.

Dweck argues that your belief about intelligence greatly influences how you approach tasks. Those who believed intelligence was fixed opted for easier tasks that would make them look smart, and those who thought it could change sought out interesting, challenging tasks that would take forward their learning.

Young children's ideas about intelligence

Often children arrive in the early years setting with definite views about themselves and their abilities. How often have you heard the statement 'I can't do difficult jigsaws, only easy ones'? There could be a number of reasons for this type of response.

At one time people believed that young children didn't really understand the concept of intelligence. When a young child 'failed' at a task it was believed that this failure didn't automatically lead to pessimistic feelings about themselves and their abilities, as it seemed to in older children. However, the work of Dweck and others challenged this idea.

Dweck suggests that young children are not so much interested in intelligence; this, she argues, develops as the child becomes older. Rather, children are concerned with ideas about 'goodness' and 'badness'. This can be seen in the early years setting and in life generally as young children explore and often challenge the rules and possibilities that are set before them. Interaction with and reaction from family members, peers and adults in the early years setting all help the young child to begin to build up a picture of themselves. Perhaps that's where the statement about the jigsaws comes from. Dweck argues that vulnerable young children 'feel they are bad when they encounter failure or criticism. And – just like older children with intelligence – they think that badness is a stable trait' (Dweck, 1999: 97). If young children grow up believing that mistakes and failure are bad and it therefore makes them feel bad, then it is likely that they will spend much of their time avoiding making mistakes. This is not helpful if we accept that mistakes are a vital part of the learning process. There is also evidence to suggest that if they accept that this 'badness' or 'failure' is innate, in other words fixed, then they believe there's nothing they can do about it. When later these ideas of 'goodness' and 'badness' or 'failure' and 'success' are transported into school and academic life it is perhaps hardly surprising that we find children who are desperate to show you how clever or smart they are. They need you to know 'I'm not stupid'. From an early age learners start to evaluate their own abilities and so build up a personal theory relating to intelligence. Information that helps them to do this comes from three sources:

- through comparison with others

- through feedback from significant others

- through interactions within their own particular contexts.

(McLean, 2003)

Dweck argues that these ideas of 'goodness' and 'badness' feed into mindsets. A mindset is another way of talking about belief in yourself. Thus, along with views about intelligence being fixed or incremental, children build up one of two mindsets – a fixed mindset or a growth mindset. The good news is that we can influence young children's views of themselves so they become interested in learning. A growth mindset will support children during difficult times in their lives. How we influence children's views will depend on our own beliefs about intelligence.

To influence children's views about themselves in a positive way, educators need to:

- believe that intelligence is not fixed

- acknowledge that genetics plays a part but not 'write children off' because of who their parents are

- encourage young children to make mistakes and learn from them

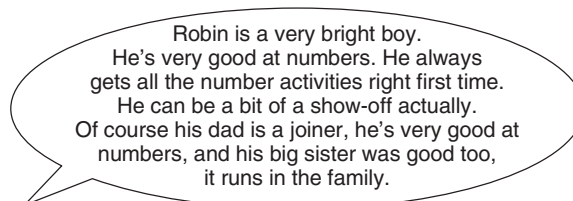- praise the amount of effort a child puts into an activity.

Fixed or changeable? What does this mean for the early years setting?

So what does all this mean for our gifted and talented learners, and us as adults, working in the early years setting? Two things are important here in relation to your work in the early years setting:

1   Your view of intelligence will influence how you view children in the early years setting.

2   You can influence children's views about intelligence and their ideas about their own intelligence.
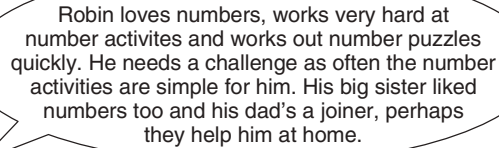
Let's think for a minute about how the two different theoretical approaches/views might manifest themselves in everyday life in the early years setting.

A person with a fixed view of intelligence is likely to say the following:

> Robin is a very bright boy.
> He's very good at numbers. He always gets all the number activities right first time.
> He can be a bit of a show-off actually.
> Of course his dad is a joiner, he's very good at numbers, and his big sister was good too, it runs in the family.

A person who thinks intelligence can change is likely to comment:

> Robin loves numbers, works very hard at number activites and works out number puzzles quickly. He needs a challenge as often the number activities are simple for him. His big sister liked numbers too and his dad's a joiner, perhaps they help him at home.

These two slightly different approaches are underpinned by divergent philosophies and if Robin is the recipient of one approach over the other it is likely to result in Robin approaching numbers in a particular way.

In our first scenario the adult believes this ability in mathematics is innate and inherited. There is an assumption that Robin is naturally good with numbers and that in fact he's so good he shows off about it. Robin will learn from this that:

- your abilities are not always appreciated and are perhaps something you should keep quiet about

- he should always find number activities easy.

Over time staff may assume that Robin will be good at number activities. They may:

- try to catch him out with something in order to show him he 'doesn't know it all', or

- be pleased when he finds a particular number task difficult and challenging.

In the second scenario the staff member believes that Robin puts considerable effort into his number tasks and this effort may occur in the early years setting or at home with siblings. Either way, the staff member does not suggest that this ability in number just happens. They also acknowledge that Robin requires challenge, suggesting that number tasks should not always come easily. Robin will learn that effort is expected and that it is this effort that helps him to succeed at numbers.

Early years practitioners will:

- offer support and strategies when tasks are difficult

- encourage him to adopt new number strategies and work alongside others.

That Robin undoubtedly has a propensity towards numbers is not being denied here, but the crucial difference between this view and the view outlined previously is that this ability is developing because of support, challenging activities and effort on Robin's part and not simply because he has some predisposition to mathematics.

How we react to children will also be influenced by our underlying beliefs and these may be inadvertently transferred to the child. While a response such as 'Well done,

you've got these all right. You're really clever' may seem to be supportive, there is evidence to suggest that over time when it is the child we praise, suggesting that there is some innate, inherent ability, it will lead the child to assume he or she is 'clever'. When they meet difficulty and failure they will assume they can't do the task because they are not clever enough. After all, they have always been clever in the past – hasn't the early years setting worker always told them that? Comments such as 'You've tried really hard there. Well done', on the other hand, will mean that when meeting with failure it is not their intelligence or ability that is being called into question but perhaps it is just a different way of approaching the task that is required. After all, they have always tried really hard in the past – hasn't the early years setting worker always told them that?

These two simple illustrations begin to demonstrate how over time our beliefs and reactions will impact on a child and will contribute towards their view or mindset of themselves either as individuals who can learn more and go on learning or as individuals who have learned as much as they are capable of learning.

The early years setting that considers intelligence to be multifaceted and something that can be developed will promote the identification of gifted and talented children in a broader and more inclusive way.

Summing up

Some key points about the education of gifted and talented learners have been made in this chapter.

- By and large, early years settings adopt an inclusive approach to learning that is helpful to young gifted and talented learners.
- Current learning theory and new ways of thinking about learning, intelligence and ability offer an opportunity to ensure all abilities are being challenged and celebrated.
- Labels for gifted and talented learners, while useful, can also be a hindrance. We need to focus on what the labels mean and try to come to some shared understandings about the terms used.
- Intelligence is difficult to define. It is our beliefs about intelligence that will influence our view of children in the early years setting and impact on individuals' self-beliefs or mindsets.

Useful websites

Carol Dweck: https://www.stanford.edu/dept/psychology/cgi-bin/drupalm/cdweck Carol Dweck's personal webpage has links to a number of interesting papers about self-belief, mindsets, intelligence, etc.

Carol Dweck: http://www.carol-dweck.co.uk/uploads/643_Dweck%20UK%20Slides%20June%202010.pdf This webpage contains slides that explain more about mindsets.

Further reading

Porter, L. (2005) *Gifted Young Children: A Guide for Teachers and Parents*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Sutherland, M. (2008) *Developing the Gifted and Talented Young Learner*. London: SAGE Publications.

Yelland, N. (2010) *Contemporary Perspectives on Early Childhood Education*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.