



# **Understanding the Needs of Exceptionally Able Students in Post- primary Schools and developing an Appropriate Response**

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**Inclusion Seminar for Post-primary Schools, Dublin, January 27 , 2009**

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**1. What do we mean by 'Exceptionally Able'?**

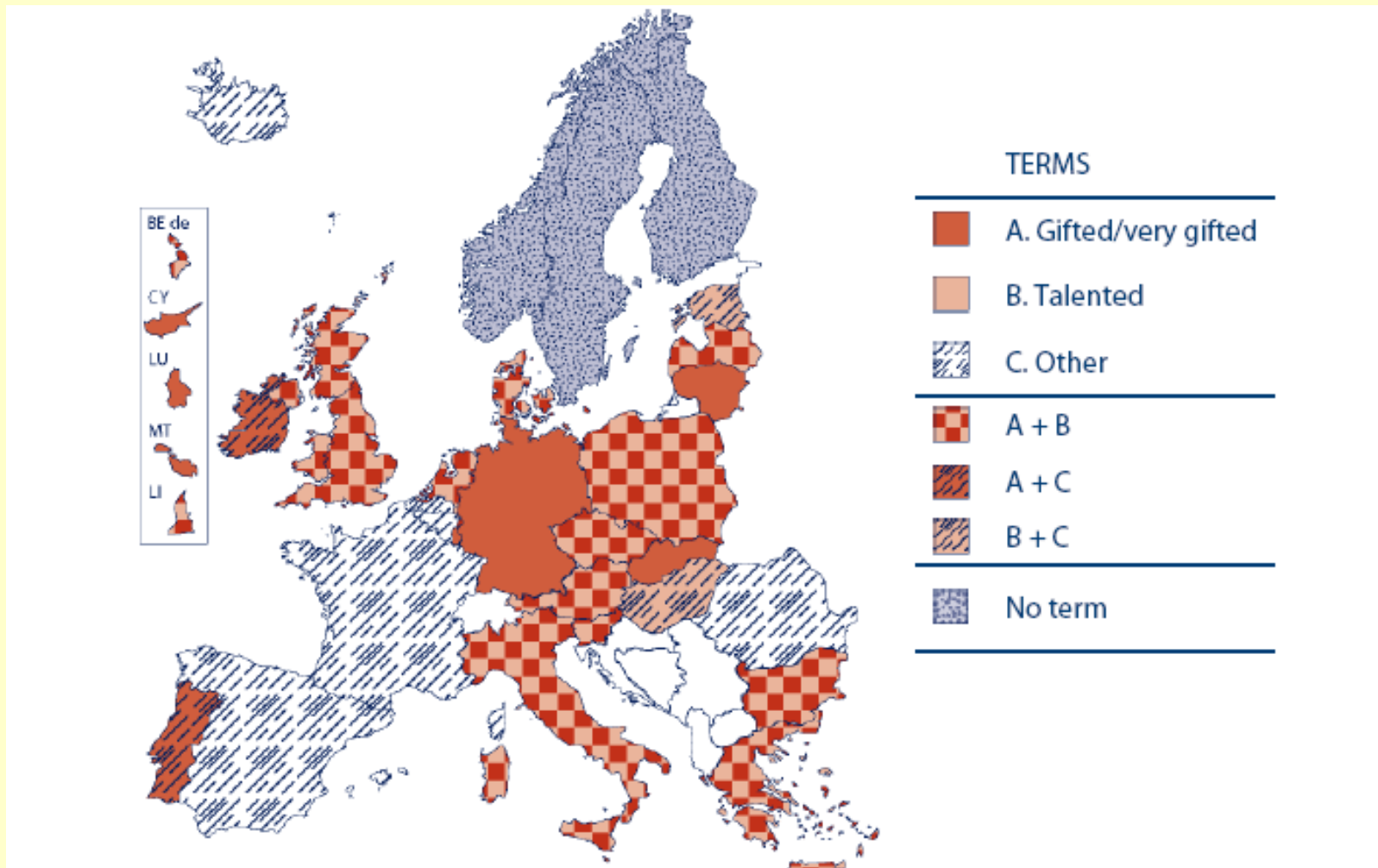
**2. Teaching the Exceptionally Able**

**3. Needs and Identification**

**4. Developing School Policy and Provision**

**What do we mean by  
'Exceptionally Able'?**

# Terminology in Europe

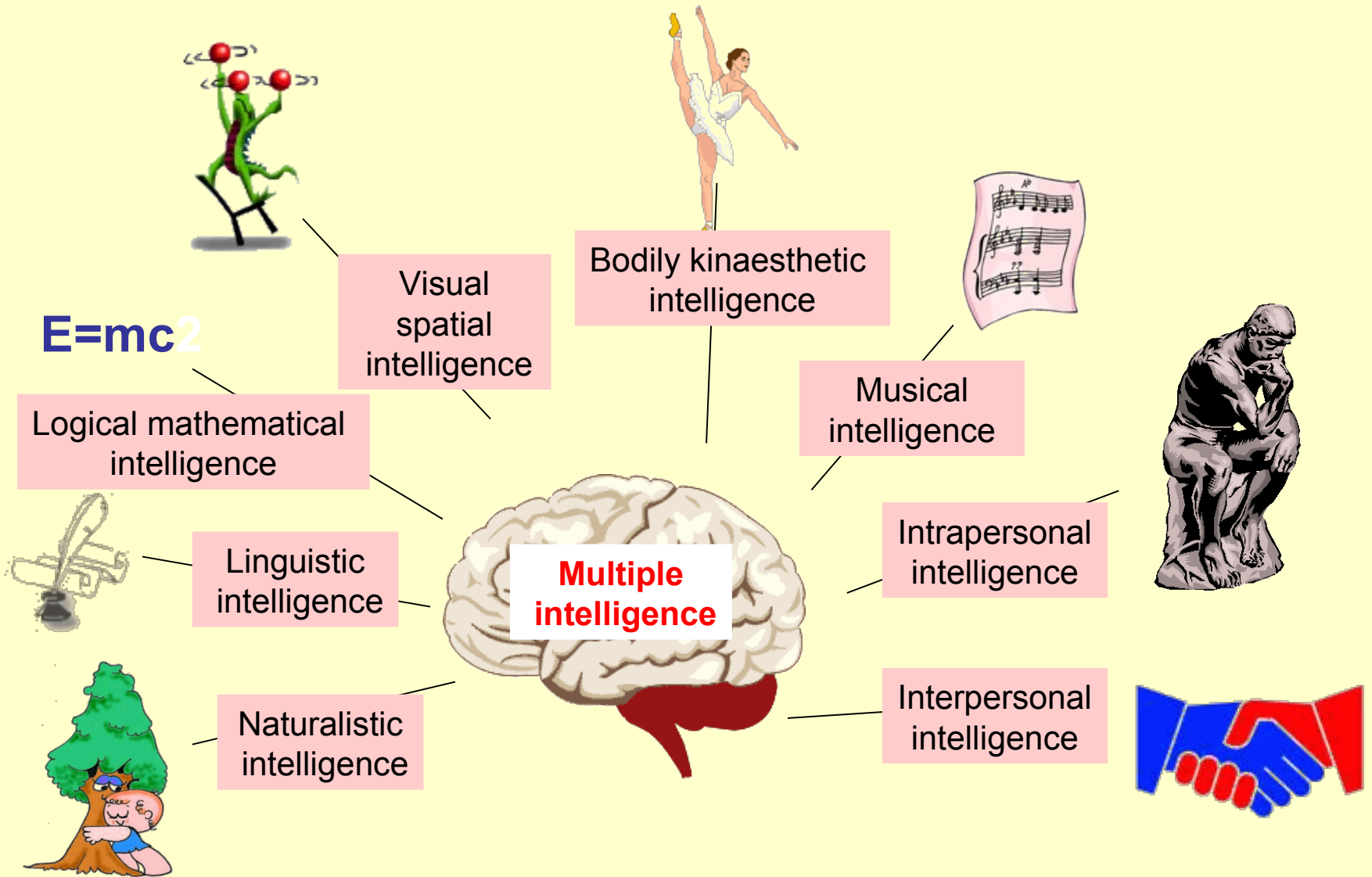


(EURYDICE, 2006)

# Some Terminology in Ireland

SERC (1993)	'Exceptionally able or talented'
Education Act (1998)	'Exceptionally able'
NCCA (2007)	'Exceptionally able'
CTYI (2008)	'Children of exceptional academic ability'
IAGC (2008)	'Gifted'

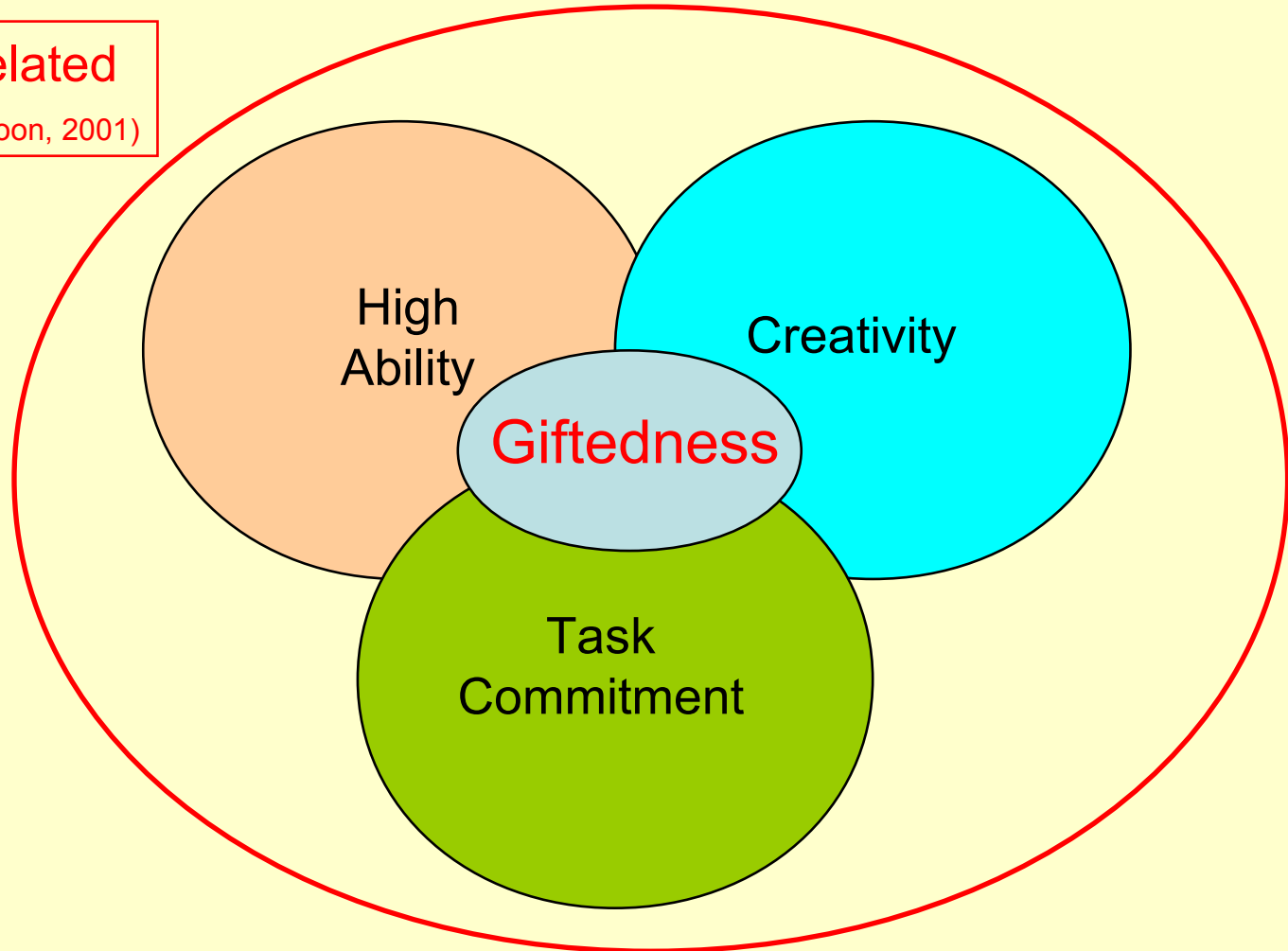
# Different Perspectives – Multiple Intelligence



# Different Perspectives: Renzulli's 'Three Ring' link between Ability and Achievement

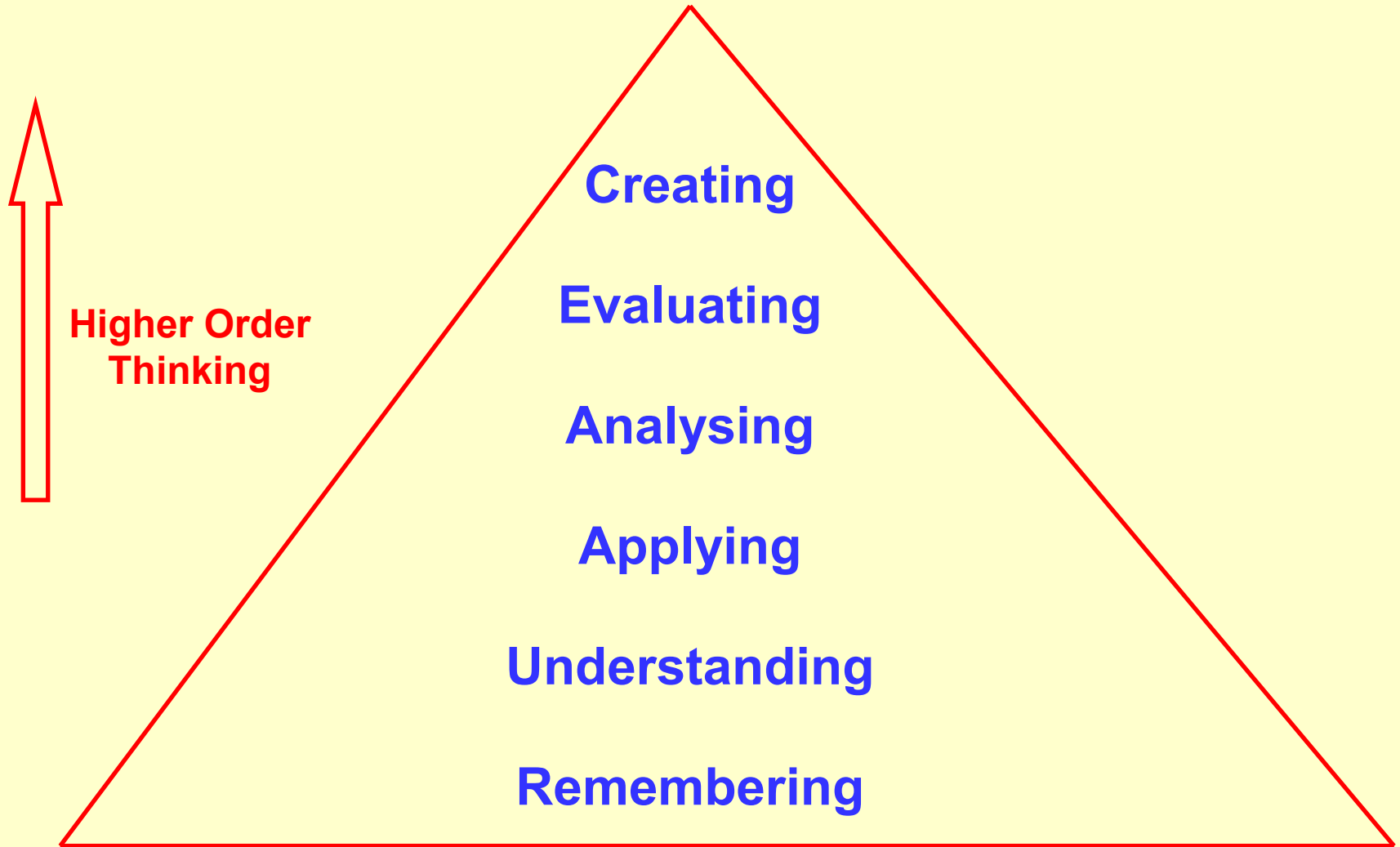
Domain related

(Schoon, 2001)



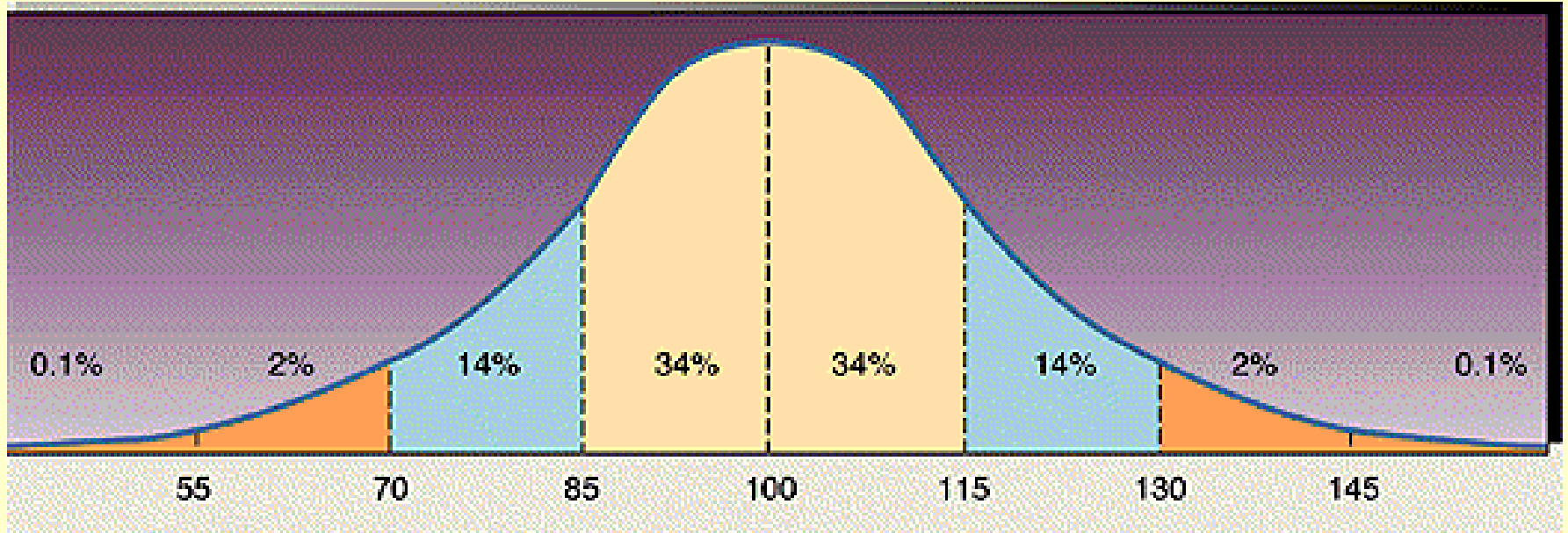
(Renzulli, 1998)

# Different Perspectives: Higher Order Thinking



(Bloom's 'Revised Taxonomy': Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001)

# Different Perspectives: IQ



## Qualitative Descriptions:

> 130	very superior
120-130	superior
110-120	high average
90-110	average
85-90	low average

# Definitions: SERC (1993)

“Pupils who are exceptionally able or talented are those who have demonstrated their capacity to achieve high performance in one or more of the following areas:

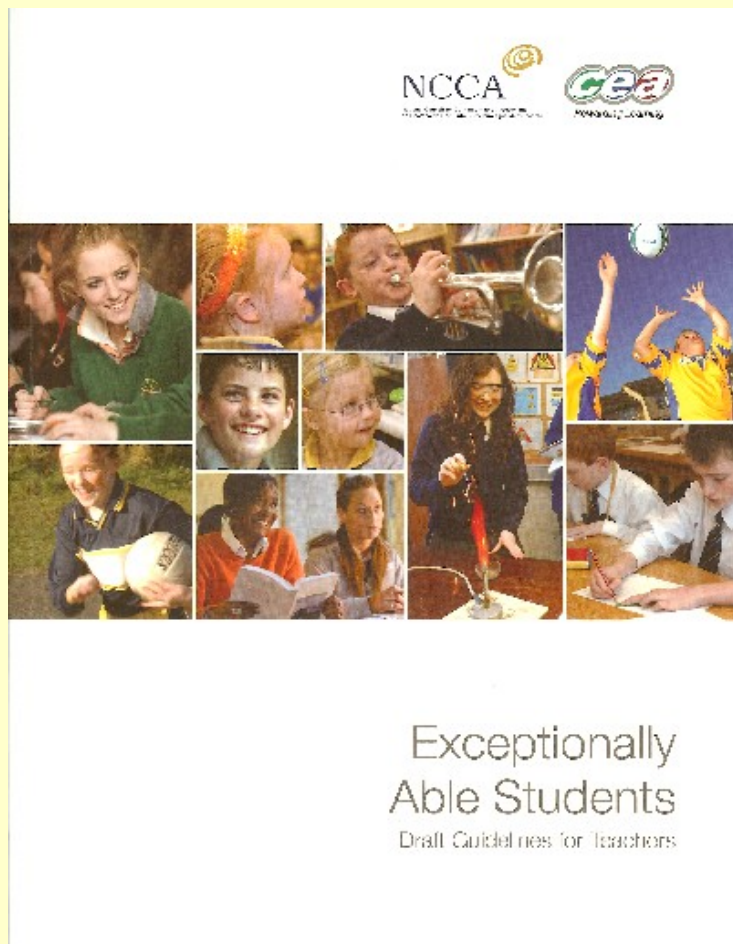
- General intellectual ability
- Specific academic aptitude
- Creative or productive thinking
- Leadership ability
- Visual and performing arts
- Mechanical aptitude
- Psychomotor ability: e.g. in athletics or gymnastics”

# Definitions: SERC (1993)

“..... Insofar as a score or an intelligence test can be regarded as an indicator, we suggest that the description of ‘exceptionally able’ be used to denote pupils with an IQ score in the range of 130 and above.

**It is our opinion, however, that adopting a precise cut-off point can have little practical application.”**

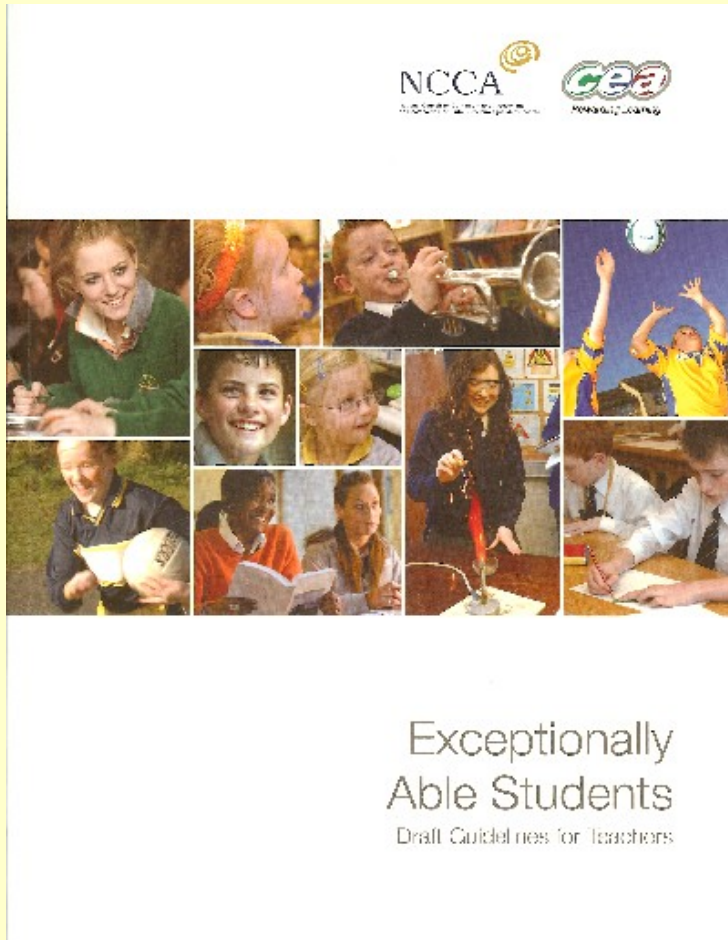
# Definition: NCCA (2007)



... students who require opportunities for enrichment and extension that go beyond those provided for the general cohort of students.

**It should be noted that good practice for exceptionally able students is also good practice for all students...**

# Definition: NCCA



- Approximately 5-10% of the school population may be exceptionally able ...
- A minority will be profoundly exceptionally able, possibly 0.5%...
- No single that defines exceptional intelligence levels but the following can be used:
  - o Able: IQ 120-129
  - o Exceptionally Able: IQ 130-169
  - o Profoundly Able: IQ 170+

# **‘Dual Exceptionality’**

**(Dual Exceptionality, Double Labelled; Twice Exceptional)**

High ability, with disability that effects some aspects of learning.

e.g. Dyslexia; Dyspraxia; ADD; Asperger's Syndrome; Hearing and Visual Impairment

- Disability may mask Ability
  - e.g. Dyslexia masking reasoning
- Ability may mask Disability
  - e.g. Obsessive nature of student with traits of Asperger's Syndrome

# Why 'Special'?

- Dispel the myths
- Realise potential
- Avoid under-identification
- Avoid under-achievement
- Entitlement to an appropriate education
- Unique social and emotional needs

**Exceptionally Able Students:  
Needs and Identification**

# Perceptions and Profiles

## SESS Primary Schools Seminar 2008: Examples of issues provided by teachers

*“Challenging behaviour in class. Seems bored all the time. Constantly interrupts other in their work while hers will be finished long before”*

*“Problems arising include boredom, unwillingness to complete activities which they consider boring, problem of teachers trying to motivate them”*

*“Need to develop social skills, and discipline issues”*

*“Excellent reader, intelligent answers and input. Often looks bored despite other children looking very engaged”*

*“Pupil can become disruptive when finished the work earlier than others. Has little respect for children considered ‘less able’”*

# Perceptions and Profiles

## Profiles of Gifted and Talented Students

Betts and Neihart, 1988

“Personality is the result of life experiences and genetic makeup. All gifted children are not affected by their special abilities in the same way”

Six profiles of gifted and talented students - “Not intended to describe any one child completely”

# Perceptions and Profiles

## 1. The Successfuls

- Have learned the system - no behaviour problems
- Are identified
- Attainment limited to system expectations - may underachieve in college and life

## 2. The Challengings

- Highly creative and divergently gifted – rich inner-life
- Frustrated, obstinate, tactless, sarcastic, low self-esteem
- Often unidentified - at risk

## 3. The Undergrounds

- Mostly girls in puberty
- Have lost their interests and passions – want to conform
- Were 'pushed' in school and home – feel insecure

# Perceptions and Profiles

## 4. The Dropouts

- Have not been identified, interests not met
- Angry and dropout
- Divert to out of school interests

## 5. The Double Labelled

- Disability masks ability
- Often not identified
- Schools often focus on weaknesses rather than strengths

## 6. The Autonomous Learner

- Have learned the system – independent and self directed
- Use it for new opportunities rather than conformity
- Accomplished, recognised, affirmed

# Identification – Some Perspectives

“The purpose ... is to improve provision by creating a more informed picture of pupil’s abilities and talents. No school-based identification system is likely to be perfect.” (Eyre, p. 15)

“The major goal of gifted assessment, then, should be to find those students who are working well *past* the learning zone within which the teacher is teaching” (Matthews and Foster, p. 82).

Abstract reasoning and IQ-type tests often miss the creative and divergent thinker

“...it is important to note that the most holistic approach is one that uses a combination of methods (NCCA Guidelines, p. 12)

“A multi-focus definition recognises that central importance of atypical development in the lives of exceptionally able students and implies the need to go beyond traditional, psychometrically-based findings...(NCCA Guidelines, p. 12)

# Identification – Assessment and Observation

Assessment – e.g.

- Standard literacy and numeracy at entrance (SEN team?)
- Standard general cognitive test (Guidance?)

# Identification – Assessment and Observation

## Observation:

- “Teachers will frequently nominate the hardest working bright child rather than the gifted pupil – we have an expectation that giftedness equates with perfect performance” (Profexcel)
- Effectiveness of observation improves with knowledge, experience, and good communication and procedures
- “Some teachers have an elevated idea of what constitutes exceptional ability – some very thoughtful and observant teachers nominate students who may have great weakness in some areas” (Schull Community College)

# Observation - Indicators

- **Shows superior reasoning powers** (ability to handle ideas; to generalise; to see subtle relationships; outstanding problem-solving ability)
- **Persistent intellectual curiosity** (asks searching questions; shows exceptional interest in the nature of things)
- **In-depth interests** (often of an intellectual kind; develops one or more interests to considerable depth)
- **Markedly superior in written and/or spoken vocabulary** (interested in the subtleties of words and their uses)

# Observation - Indicators

- **Reads avidly** (absorbs books well beyond his or her years)
- **Learns quickly and retains easily** (recalls important details, concepts and principles; comprehends readily)
- **Shows insight into arithmetical problems** (grasps mathematical concepts readily and applies reasoning)
- **Shows creativity or imaginative expression** (music, art, dance, drama; sensitivity and finesse in rhythm, movement, and bodily control)
- **Sustains concentration**
- **Demonstrates responsibility and independence** (may be a 'natural leader')

# Observation - Indicators

- **Sets high standards** (self-critical in evaluating and correcting own efforts: 'social and emotional'?)
- **Initiative and originality in intellectual work** (flexibility in thinking and considers problems from different viewpoints)
- **Observes keenly** (responsive to new ideas).
- **Has social poise** (ability to communicate with adults in a mature way)
- **Gets excitement and pleasure from intellectual challenge** (an alert and subtle sense of humour)
- **Appear easily bored, arrogant** or socially inept, and not liked by other – may not 'fit in'

# Identification and Under-identification

## Other identifiers

- Parent referral
- Psychometric tests / psychological tests ('IQ'; SAT Reasoning Test; Cognitive Reasoning Tests, etc)
- Portfolio Assessment
- Checklists

## Risk of under-identification

- From disadvantaged and marginalised background
- Where English is not the first language
- Where there are specific learning disabilities
- Where there are sensory or physical impairments

# **Social and Emotional Needs: Causes and Indicators**

- Asynchronous development
- Difficult or poor peer relations
- Conflict between need for approval and need for achievement
- Excessive self-criticism
- Perfectionism
- Avoidance of risk-taking

# **Social and Emotional Needs – Promoting Resilience and Coping**

- Be aware and sensitive
- Promote Awareness (awareness, acknowledgement, appreciation, acceptance)
- Promote autonomy
- Model positive behaviours
- Provide intellectual peers and mentors
- Teach coping skills
- Explicitly teach social skills where necessary

# **Teaching the Exceptionally Able**

# What Pupils Complain About

- Too much repetition
- Waiting around for others to finish
- Not enough new material
- Not enough interesting material
- Not enough time for questions
- Teacher not interested in my ideas
- Given a “reward” of extra work for finishing early
- Student opinions not valued
- Teacher doesn't know enough about the topic
- Limited resources

# Whole-School Approach to Teaching

“It is impossible for a school to be a good school for able pupils unless it is already a good school”

(Deborah Eyre, 1997, p.100)

# Some Teaching Strategies

- Higher Order Thinking
- Multiple Intelligence
- Additional Differentiation Strategies (e.g. Extension, Acceleration, Enrichment)

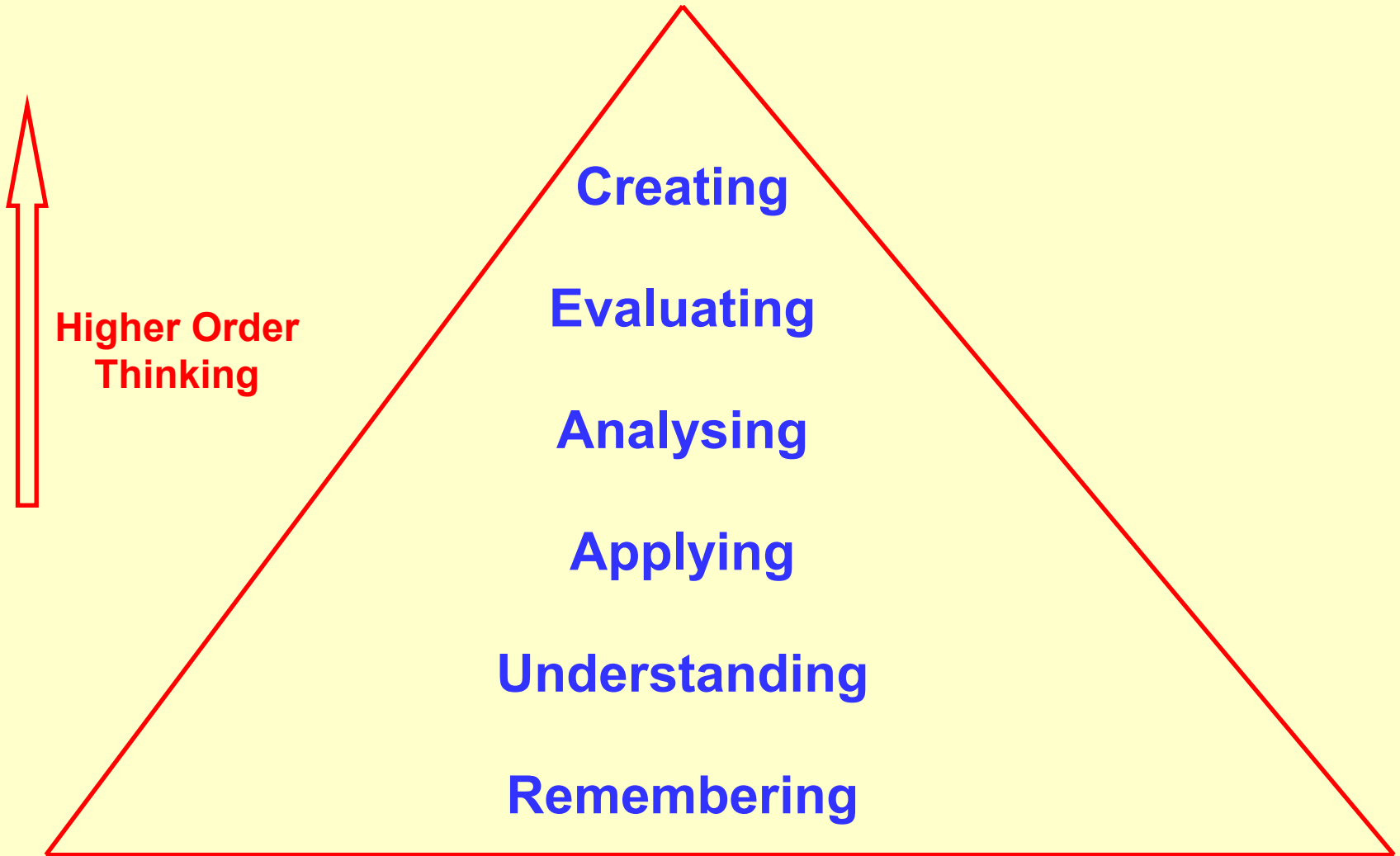
# Higher Order Thinking

... involves the transformation of information and ideas. This occurs when students combine facts and ideas and synthesise, generalise, explain, hypothesise or arrive at some conclusion or interpretation.

Manipulating information and ideas through these processes allows students to solve problems, gain understanding and discover new meaning. ....

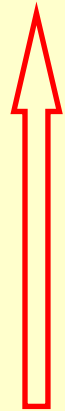
**... the teacher's main instructional task is to create activities or environments that allow them opportunities to engage in higher-order thinking.**

# Higher Order Thinking



(Bloom's 'Revised Taxonomy': Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001)

# Higher Order Thinking – e.g. Questions



**Creating:** 'Is there another conclusion...?'

**Evaluating:** 'Why do you believe...?'

**Analysing:** 'How did this led to the outcome ...?'

**Applying:** 'How would you use this to ....?'

**Understanding:** 'Explain the difference between ...?'

**Remembering:** 'What is the definition of...?'

# Higher Order Thinking and Learning Culture

## Positive Teaching for Exceptionally Able Students...

- challenges, and promotes risk-taking and exploration
- negotiates learning objectives and assessment criteria
- sets high level, realistic objectives, and promotes excellence
- asks open-ended questions and tasks, not limited to 'the right answer'
- promotes critical thinking and problem solving

# Higher Order Thinking and Learning Culture

## Positive Teaching for Exceptionally Able Students.....

- focuses on achievement, not just attainment
- seek patterns, connections and interpretations
- sets personalised learning tasks and opportunities
- provides extension in depth and enrichment in breadth
- creates awareness of the nuance in language
- generalises issues to different contexts and beyond the classroom

# Higher Order Thinking and Learning Culture

## Positive Teaching for Exceptionally Able Students.....

- gives specific praise
- celebrates the excitement of creative thinking, intellectual challenge and achievement
- is alert for underachievement, at every level
- recognises some students' 'rich inner life'
- discusses ways of thinking and learning, and learning about learning – metacognitive awareness

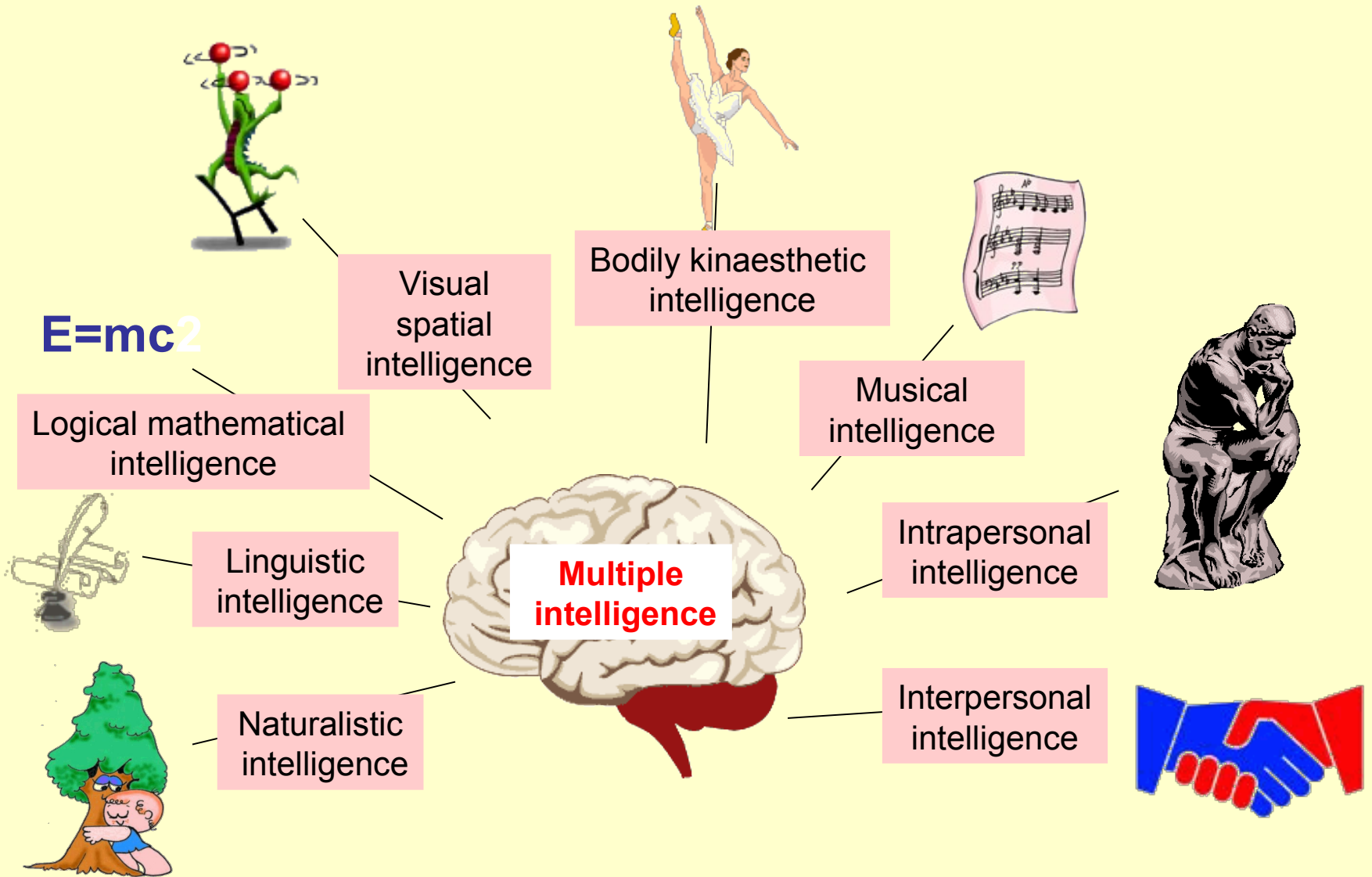
# Higher Order Thinking and Learning Culture

## Positive Teaching for Exceptionally Able Students.....

### tries to avoid.....

- giving 'more of the same' to students who finish assignments quickly – they see it as 'punishment'
- marking 10/10 all of the time – encourage intellectual adventure, exploration and uncertainty
- being defensive when being challenged about your facts or knowledge
- putting the precocious and challenging child 'in his place'

# Multiple Intelligence



# **Differentiation: 'Extension', 'Acceleration', Enrichment'**

## ***Extension:***

The 'horizontal' extension of the curriculum to challenge students and provide depth of understanding

## ***Acceleration:***

The 'vertical' extension of the curriculum by introducing content at an earlier stage or quicker pace

## ***Enrichment:***

Activities beyond the classroom

# Differentiation

- By Task
- By Outcome
- By Resource
- By Support
- By Dialogue
- By Pace
- By Choice

# Differentiation by Task

E.g.

- Move quickly to higher level
- Skip the earlier activities
- Move through the work at an increasing rate

(NCCA Guidelines)

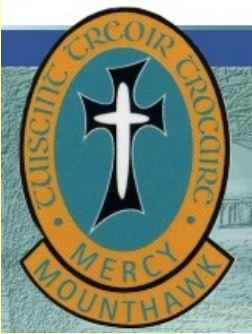
# Differentiation by Outcome

E.g.

- Working in individually or groups, extend the outcome
- The outcome is not prescribed, or the task is open-ended ... there doesn't have to be a 'correct answer'

(NCCA Guidelines)

# Differentiation by Task and Outcome



**Example from Mercy Mounthawk Secondary  
School, Tralee, Co. Kerry**

## **First Year Technical Graphics – Christmas Exam**

- Three questions of varying complexity provided
- Students choose preferred question (all identified exceptionally able students selected most complex question)
- Teacher differentiates marking according to ability
- 'Equality of Challenge'

# Differentiation by Resource

E.g.

- Resources provided match ability – more dense, rich and complex for exceptionally able

(NCCA Guidelines)

# Differentiation by Dialogue

E.g.

- Set out expectations
- Targeted questions to elicit a high-level response

(NCCA Guidelines)

# Differentiation by Pace

E.g.

- Allow rapid progress through complex tasks
- Allow slow progress to facilitate painstaking detail

(NCCA Guidelines)

# Differentiation by Choice

E.g.

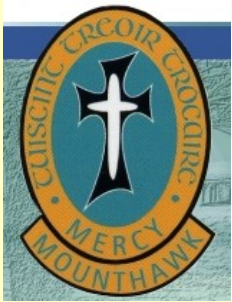
- Allow work to begin from a range of starting points
- Allow extension in various directions, dictated by student interest

(NCCA Guidelines)

# Other Teaching Strategies

- ‘Must, Should, Could’
- Project-based learning allows for differentiation and enquiry based learning
- Encourage different ways of expressing and demonstrating learning – ICT, speeches, drama, exhibitions, models, etc

# Must, Should, Could



Example from Mercy Mounthawk Secondary  
School, Tralee, Co. Kerry

## Studying Fiction – Myths and Legends

Now you have read the myths, time to create a myth of your own:

**For a Grade C:** Your myth **Must** follow a logical plot line, create and sustain character and setting, develop a message for its readers, and be clearly and neatly presented

**For a Grade B:** Your myth **Should** reflect the pattern of the myths studied in class, sustain the development of its central characters and its central theme

**For a Grad A:** Your myth **Could** explain a force of nature or a behaviours common to 'people kind'.

# Further Enrichment Activities

E.G.

- Science club
- Writing club
- Invited speakers
- Outside visits / field trips
- Centre for Talented Youth in Ireland (CTYI)
- Irish Association for Gifted Children (IAGC)

# Whole-School Approach

## Eleven Factors for Effective Schools

1. Professional Leadership	7. Positive reinforcement
2. Shared vision and goals	8. Monitoring progress
3. A learning environment	9. Pupil rights and responsibilities
4. Concentration on teaching and learning	10. Home-school partnership
5. Purposeful teaching	11. A learning organisation
6. High expectations	

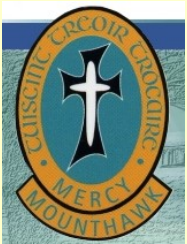
(Deborah Eyre, 1997, 101)

# **Developing Policy and Provision**

# 'Equality of Challenge' Partnership



- Special Education Support Service (SESS)



- Mercy Mounthawk Secondary School, Tralee



- Schull Community College, Co. Cork



- St. Coleman's College, Fermoy, Co. Cork

# 'Equality of Challenge' - Focus

- Explore how general principles of can be applied in the Irish context...
- Aims to pilot a model of good practice ...
- Provide a framework and deliverables which can be generalised and used in by schools...
- Will primarily focus on general good school provision and inclusionary principles...
- Based on pedagogical leadership within schools ...
- Approach advised by the NCCA's draft guidelines for teachers on *Exceptionally Able Students* and the Inspectorate's post-primary guidelines on the *Inclusion of students with Special Educational Needs*.

# Strategies

## **Inclusion Strategy**

- Developing general good practice within the 'Staged Approach'\*

## **Leadership Strategy**

- Distributed Leadership
- Internal Educational Leadership

## **Continuing Professional Development Strategy**

- In-school development, supported by SESS
- 'Communities of Practice' approach

## **Implementation Strategy**

- Initial focused team of teachers (between four and 10), working with first-year cohort
- Management wherewithal
- Flexible, creative and open-ended

*\*Inclusion of Students with Special Educational Needs: Post-primary Guidelines (Inspectorate, 2007)*

# 'Equality of Challenge' Framework (Summary)

**Coordination, Leadership and Management**  
Principal ( + SEN team, school planning process, etc); SESS

**People Development**

- Knowledge and principles about EA
- Teaching strategies

**System Development**

- Identification, planning and monitoring
- On-going, practice-based professional learning

**Knowledge and Principles specific to EA**

- SESS
- ICEP
- NCCA Guidelines

**Methodological Knowledge**

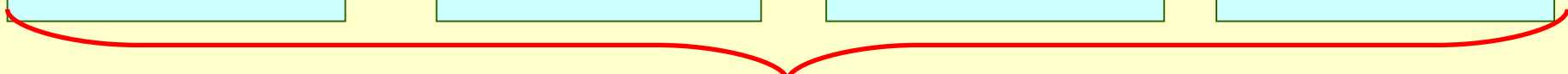
- SESS
- Other CPD agencies
- Practice-based CPD

**School Policy and Systems**

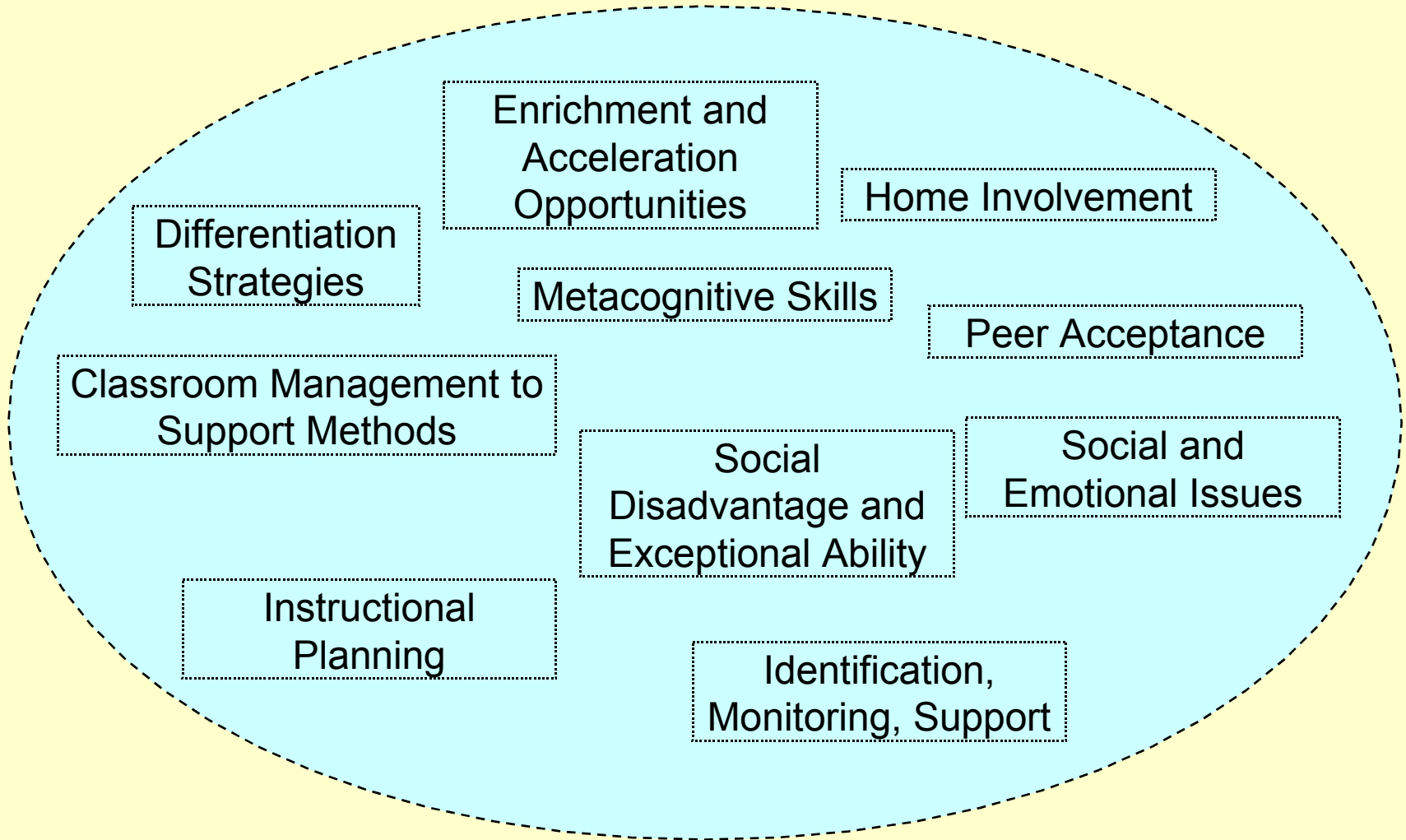
- Identification
- Planning
- Monitoring

**Practice-based CPD**

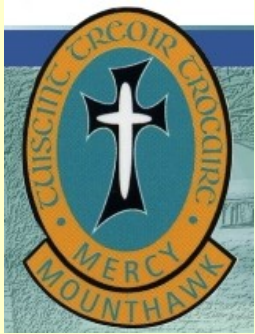
- Sharing practice
- Peer mentoring
- Distributed leadership



## Teaching / Learning Environment



# Developing Policy and Provision



## **Mercy Mounthawk Secondary School: The policy-making process and some issues arising**

- The need for a separate policy (purpose and rationale)?
- Definition and identification of target cohort(s)?
- Targeted and achievable objectives?
- Roles, responsibilities and fit with school systems?
- Inclusive provision?
- Professional development?

# Developing Policy and Provision

## Example from Schull Community College Review of Policy 08/09



- Removing the references to 'gifted and talented' and replacing them with 'exceptionally able'
- Adding some additional objectives that refer to identification and to differentiated teaching
- Changing the range of targeted students from the top 3% to the top 10% of students

### **In order to:**

- To focus our minds on the WHY of the document
- To affirm the link between Special Educational Needs and Exceptional Ability
- To underline the fact that not all exceptionally able students are instantly identifiable and that many have associated difficulties

# Case Study



## Schull Community College Case Study, Illustrating:

- A system which intervened effectively to avoid underachievement
- Use of tests as 'indicators', in conjunction with observation, collaboration and analysis
- Demonstrates the value of intervention through school's SEN system
- Reinforces the value of professional development and awareness-raising in school
- An example of 'non-global' exceptionalism
- 'Self-criticalness' observed in primary school might have been an early indication of exceptionalism
- Whether the student falls within a strict definition of 'Exceptionally Able' or not seems not to matter – the case emphasises potential being met through the unique special needs of the student being addressed.

# Contents

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# Thank You!

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