

Talents' needs Identification, Support and Counseling of Talent

INAUGURAL SPEECH BY PROF. DR. LIANNE A.J.M. HOOGEVEEN

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INAUGURAL SPEECH

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Talents that are not seen will not develop, which can lead to underachievement; a loss for individuals and to society. Research on giftedness and underachievement should not only be focused on individual factors, but on the complexity of an individual in their own context. There are many theories of talent and giftedness, in which,

the environment and the dynamics in human functioning are fortunately being taken more and more seriously. In this inaugural lecture, Lianne Hoogeveen focuses on talents that are still hidden, and issues a call for better (research on) identification, support and counselling for all people, including those with the highest abilities. All the more so when these abilities are less visible, due to internal and external factors like ethnic background and gender, learning or developmental problems, and/or socioeconomic status.

Lianne Hoogeveen (1960, Wassenaar) completed her psychology studies at Radboud University in 1988. She obtained her doctorate in 2008 with a study on the social-emotional effects of educational adjustments for gifted students, with an emphasis on academic acceleration. Since 1991 she has been working as a GZ psychologist at CBO Talent Development (until 2016 part of Radboud University), where she was also a department head from 2008 to 2016. There she treats and advises children, adolescents and adults.

Since 2008, Lianne has been coordinator of the Master's specialty 'Gifted Education', a part of the Pedagogical & Educational Sciences study programme. She is currently also a researcher at the scientific expertise centre Radboud Talent in Development (RATiO, part of the BSI since 2018) and programme director of Radboud International Training on High Ability (RITHA, since 2010). Lianne is president of the European Council for High Ability (ECHA).

Radboud Universiteit



TALENTS' NEEDS
IDENTIFICATION, SUPPORT AND COUNSELING OF TALENT

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Identification, support and counseling of talent

Inaugural speech delivered at the acceptance of the post of Professor 'Identification, Support and Counseling of Talent' at the Behavioural Science Institute of Radboud University, on Tuesday, 8 March 2022

by prof. dr. Lianne A.J.M. Hoogeveen

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Meneer de Rector Magnificus, vertegenwoordigers van Radboud Centrum Sociale Wetenschappen en CBO Talent Development, die deze leerstoel mogelijk maakten, lieve familie, vrienden, collega's en toehoorders

*Dear friends and colleagues,
Because of my international friends and colleagues, here in the auditorium, or following this lecture via the live stream, I will continue in English.*

She was too thin, had bad skin and a voice that indicated heavy smoking. She had brought her brother for support, and wanted to talk about her 4-year old son Kevin; he had problems. After aggressive behaviour in kindergarten, he was sent to special education, but the problems continued. Her brother had advised her to approach the Centre for the Study of Giftedness, the CBO: was Kevin perhaps gifted? I, the mental health psychologist she talked to, was used to very different kinds of clients, and was sceptical, and ready to dampen her expectations, thinking of possible colleagues I could refer her to. And then came that strange story. It was still the pre-smartphone era, and if people wanted to capture an event on film, they used a video camera. This was also happening at the birthday party that Kevin, who was then one and a half years old, attended with his mother and his uncle. Kevin wanted to know how a camera like that worked. The cameraman was both an expert and willing to share his knowledge with this toddler. Then Kevin walked over to his uncle and explained to him how a video camera worked, with all the details. I became curious, and we agreed that I would evaluate Kevin; he turned out to be one of the most intelligent children I have seen in my 30-year career. And I was ashamed. About my implicit bias, me, who was so tolerant, so open-minded.

Did it start then, my frustration, my resentment concerning the unseen talent? Or was it before? I remembered my mother's indignation concerning my brother, my adopted brother, who had been in a children's home until he was 5 years old. His teacher was sure about it; children from children's homes are unable to do mathematics. And whatever proof my mother offered to convince him otherwise, his opinion stood firm, his 'implicit theory', which has become one of my research topics.

Talents are too often not visible, and consequently, people are not seen for who they are.

That is a problem for them, and that is a problem for us, as a society, not only in the Netherlands, but worldwide. According to UNESCO (2021), quality education is a fundamental right, and its aim to ensure the development of human beings to their full potential. In 2015, I studied gifted education as practiced in Europe (Hoogeveen, 2015),

focusing on academic acceleration. Based on my findings, I made the appeal to start a European discussion on how we, as a continent that aims to be united, can reconsider how to educate our brightest students.

In the Netherlands, schools and government do care about gifted education. In 2018, the government financed projects concerning gifted education proposed by almost all Dutch networks of schools (DUS-I, n.d.). At the moment, the impact of these projects is being evaluated by a large consortium of institutions, including Radboud University, in a project called Impact of Activities of Gifted Education (IMAGE), led by Dr Marjolijn van Weerdenburg. This project's primary aim is to share collected knowledge and insights on the field, searching together for conditions necessary to provide appropriate education for gifted students.

So, we are on track, but we are not there yet. The biggest challenge: seeing the hidden talents.

Talents that are not seen will not develop, which leads to a phenomenon that is too often associated with giftedness: underachievement, generally defined as a discrepancy between expected and actual achievement (Siegle & McCoach, 2018). Most researchers, including myself, hesitate to mention percentages, but Steenbergen-Hu, a renowned scientist in the field, did drop a number in an interview in the *Washington Post* in 2019, stating that 52 percent of academically gifted K-12 students became underachievers at some point. As early as 1924, Leta Stetter Hollingworth expressed her concern about highly able students not reaching their potential, and in 2018, White et al. titled their literature review 'Why do we know so little about the factors associated with gifted underachievement?'

A hundred years of underachievement, 52%: this represents an immense loss for individuals and to society (Siegle & McCoach, 2018).

White et al. (2018) concluded that most of the empirical evidence about gifted underachievement in schools focused on individual factors, not capturing the complexity of an individual in context.

'We have to learn to think in a new way.' (Einstein, 1955)

I would like to invite you to try to think in a new way. I have formulated seven questions that I will present during this lecture, inviting you to think them over, in a new way.

TALENT OR GIFT

In the Netherlands, talent seems to be a feeble concept, used by everyone and for everything. Why not talk about 'giftedness'?

Talent and giftedness are terms that are strongly related. Neither concept is well-defined (Dai, 2018; Hoogeveen & Smeets, 2015; Sternberg & Ambrose, 2021). There are many theories, models of, and visions on giftedness in which the environment and the dynamics in human functioning are fortunately being taken more and more seriously as contributing factors (Crawford et al., 2020; Gagné, 2010; Subotnik et al., 2011; Ziegler et al., 2017). I am not against the concept of 'giftedness' as an indication that there are people who think faster, or in a more complex manner, than the majority, and that this calls for adaptations in education and work, as well as health care, both physical and mental. I do have objections to the label 'gifted', and during this lecture you will find out why. For now, I will mostly talk about talent, although the word 'gifted' will appear now and then. What makes the concept 'talent' interesting for me, is that it can refer either to a person or a characteristic. The word is the same in English and Dutch. However, when you are not a native English speaker (like me) and you decide to give your inaugural lecture in that language, you can make hilarious mistakes. Dutch people here might remember our king, then still prince, who said something in Spanish that is usually only said in bars after having too much to drink. Although it might be funny for the audience, for the lecturer it is not, so, just to be sure, I Googled the title of my lecture today, Talents' needs. And I found that that is not what people say. What I found was a lot of sites saying 'Talent needs'; which refers to the talent that is needed for a company to be successful. I will not dispute the importance of that, but this was even more reason for me to stick with my original title: Talents' needs: what do talents / talented people need to flourish, to develop themselves? Because one thing is clear: we do not always meet those needs, especially if the talent is not that obvious.

A lack of knowledge of how giftedness and talent can reveal or hide itself can and will lead to misinterpretations of test results, due to insufficient consideration of either conscious or unconscious under-performance; too little or no understanding of what giftedness means; too little knowledge of possible intervention methods; or a negative attitude towards the potentially most talented people, or their environment.

NO TALENT WASTED

One of the aims of Radboud University is to come up with solutions for important social issues. In its strategy 'A significant impact' (2019), this is expressed as 'We contribute to a healthy, free world with equal opportunities for all'. We know that not all people have opportunities, for example in the development of talents. It has long been thought that 'smart' people will manage on their own. This is a misconception.

Gifted people can quickly adapt to the perceived expectations of their environment, thereby concealing their high cognitive possibilities. The lack of a challenging educational environment can impede the development of talents, and that process can end in learning, emotional, and /or behavioural problems. Internal and external factors like socio-economic status, ethnic background and gender exert an influence, either positive or negative, on the development of people's talent.

The focus of my activities as holder of this chair is to contribute, through research and education, to improving the identification, and support of talent in children, young people and adults, and to strengthen the actions needed to reach those goals in education, health care and society, on a scientific basis .

The object of my research and education is to explore talents which are often still hidden, with a focus on describing, explaining and optimising the functioning of people in learning and working situations. The emphasis is on finding innovative ways to improve the quality, effectiveness and efficiency of guidance for people's cognitive and social-emotional development, especially people with high abilities.

Question 1: Apart from looking at what talents we need in our schools and companies, should we not also focus on what is needed to help people's talents flourish? And if you think, that's obvious, think about 'how'?

IDENTIFICATION, SUPPORT AND COUNSELING

As a proud and happy member of the research group Radboud Talent in Development (RATiO), I aim , together with my colleagues Professor Anouke Bakx, Professor Evelyn Kroesbergen and Dr Marjolijn van Weerdenburg, for high-quality scientific research in the area of giftedness, and the translation of that research into practice and policy. We aim to be innovative, studying the characteristics and educational needs of students with high abilities, and their environment. We consider inter- and intra-individual differences, and combine fundamental and applied research, in collaboration with partners in the field. Professionals in science and practice work together, which makes RATiO a centre of expertise in which scientific research forms the basis for practical applications.

TWICE EXCEPTIONAL

As I said, talents can be hidden. This is certainly true for people who, apart from high abilities, have other challenges that may hinder their development, like learning or developmental problems. We call these people twice exceptional: individuals who demonstrate the potential for high achievement or creative productivity AND who manifest one or more challenges that hinder them from translating those abilities into

achievements. There is no reason to believe that high abilities correlate with learning or developmental problems. In the case of ADHD, we even found that a higher IQ was related to fewer attention problems (Rommelse et al., 2017). Even so, twice exceptionality does exist, and people whom it concerns can be misunderstood in their environment and be provided with inadequate education. With Marielle Wittelings, PhD student, Prof. Kroesbergen, and Prof. Minnaerts from the University of Groningen, plus several Dutch schools, we attempt to improve the recognition of the educational needs of talented students, leading to more knowledge about - and practical tools for - the identification of talented and twice-exceptional students.

This is quite a challenge, considering the large intra- and inter-individual differences in personal challenges and abilities found among these students. A gifted student with a reading disability, for example, will have different characteristics and needs than a gifted student diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Even two gifted students diagnosed with ASD who, according to the definition, both have difficulties in social communication and interaction, may differ in sensitivity to external stimuli or changes in the environment.

So, categorisation is insufficient because it fails to acknowledge individual diversity. Staal (2021) calls it an 'artificial construction based on characteristics, without etiological considerations', and Rasch (2020) claims, in her book about ethics in times of dataism, that statistics, categorisation and classification define ways people can be; assigning people to a certain category makes it possible for them to be that which is defined. This is one of the reasons why the psychiatrist Van Staveren (2021) argues that the DSM should not be used to diagnose people.

Apart from ignoring individual diversity, recognising a category is difficult. Discrepancies in academic, cognitive, developmental and behavioural characteristics of students can seem contradictory. For example, a high-achieving student who avoids reading tasks might have a motivational problem, an unnoticed reading disability, or both. The intersection of characteristics can result in a so-called masking effect. It is difficult to identify a learning disability when a student is unintentionally camouflaging it by compensating with high cognitive abilities. On the other hand, students' cognitive abilities might not be recognised because of their low grades, due to a learning disability. And sometimes the high abilities and difficulties seem to balance each other out to such an extent that both remain unnoticed. In all these cases, the educational needs cannot be well identified, let alone met, and this situation carries the risk of serious learning, emotional or behavioural problems in the long term.

Research on twice-exceptionality is not new; researchers acknowledge these risk factors and consistently point to the necessity of more knowledge on the identification process of twice-exceptional students and their characteristics (Burger-Veltmeijer et al., 2018 ; Foley-Nipcon et al., 2011). However, empirical studies mostly base their conclusions by comparing group means, not considering the heterogeneous nature of this group of students. We need to explore new methods of identification – and alternatives to the current classification – that sufficiently acknowledge the students’ diversity as individuals.

In our research, we try to gain more knowledge on the characteristics and identification of the needs of twice-exceptional students, using network analysis. This perspective respects the heterogeneous nature of populations to a greater extent than a comparison of means. We try to avoid oversimplified categorisation and negative stigmatisation of students, and instead follow a strength-based approach. Doing this, we hope to find out what essential cognitive, psychological, and behavioural characteristics can be identified in twice-exceptional students, and to discover how to identify a student’s individual network of characteristics in a way that is useful for research and practice.

Question 2: Can we classify and still respect individual differences or should we not classify at all? Inequity in education.

There is another group whose talents are often neglected. Different groups of students vary in rates of advanced achievement; there is a so-called excellence gap (Clark & Roberts, 2018). ECHA Specialist Lineke van Tricht, supervised by Anouke Bakx and myself, and cooperating with Dr Joyce Gubbels, focusses her PhD study on inequity in opportunities in education, in relation to high abilities and motivation.

Her study shows that Dutch education lags behind other countries with regard to opportunities for students from families with low socioeconomic status (SES) (OECD, 2011) to excel in higher education. This inequity in educational opportunities has grown over the last decade (Aalders et al., 2020), a disparity that Prof. Denessen also showed clearly in his inaugural lecture in 2017. Access to higher levels of secondary education has increased for children of highly educated parents, and decreased for children of parents with a lower level of education (Aalders et al., 2020). PISA, the OECD’s Programme for International Student Assessment, has shown that, in comparison to high-performing students in other countries, high-performing students in the Netherlands generally perform less well than we would expect (OECD, 2016). When we consider this, alongside the fact that students from low SES families have less ready access to higher levels of education, we might wonder whether high-performing students in the Netherlands, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, are

doubly at risk of not reaching their full potential. If this is the case, it could mean that a group of Dutch gifted students is being deprived of their right to good education. Again, a loss for them, a loss for society.

Surprised? Indignant about this situation? You should be. This is what gifted education and meeting the needs of talent is all about. It is not an elite subject, only of interest for highly educated, rich parents who think their children are little princes who need to go to university. It is about seeing the talent of every student, independent of their background or other possible challenges.

Question 3: How do we prevent elitism in education?

TALENT DEVELOPMENT AFTER SCHOOL

Talent is not only lost in primary and secondary education. There are unrecognised potential talents within colleges and universities, and in the workplace; they are not seen, and even if high abilities are suspected, the environment is often unable to provide what is needed to develop that talent.

Gifted adults are a relatively unexamined group in research literature. In 2015, Rinn and Bishop did a literature review and concluded that most gifted adults found satisfaction in both their careers and their personal lives. However, as shown by Nauta and Corten (2002), gifted adults are not always able to function adequately at work. They suggest that occupational health physicians and insurance doctors should be able to recognise characteristics of giftedness.

Researchers agree: not only within schools, but also in higher education, at the workplace, and in healthcare institutions, there is a need for expertise in the field of giftedness to guarantee optimal identification and guidance. Pedagogues, psychologists and educationalists, as well as managers, can contribute to the positive development of potential talents, even if those talents are not that visible.

In the Radboud International Training on High Ability (RITHA), the number of students working with adults is increasing. RITHA Specialist Graziella Ricagnoli is exploring the different sources of meaning that are important for gifted individuals to live meaningful lives (Ricagnoli & Hooegeveen, in preparation), and RITHA student Marianne Nannings is investigating the extent to which university lecturers' knowledge and insight on giftedness have a positive effect on students' learning and development, and how they prevent underachievement.

Question 4: Should we also focus on gifted adults, and if so: how?

RECOGNISING TALENT

So it is clear. Recognising talent is of the utmost importance and at the same time can be difficult. Even if we understand that the lack of adequate challenge in children's early years can lead to underachievement, and acknowledge how important early recognition of students' strengths and talents is (Hertzog et al, 2018, p. 311); how do we know which child needs more challenges than those mentioned in the books and magazines that advise parents on how to raise their child?

Actually, based on my experience talking with parents at CBO Talent Development, parents seem to manage fairly well, as long as they do not take those books and magazines, or age recommendations for toys, too seriously. Parents are often the first to recognise gifted characteristics in their child, and schools depend on parents as the primary resource to help identify students as gifted (Elkevizth, 2010). However, and I also say this from experience, parents do not always share this information with the school because they are afraid of being seen as that 'pushy parent'. And they are not that wrong; we do hear about experiences of parents who were not taken seriously by teachers concerning their child's abilities, because the child did not show them in school.

That is not a surprise, considering that all of a sudden this child is part of a larger community of age-mates, and is expected to think, talk and act like them.

So, can we blame the teacher? Although you may expect an indulgent 'no', I would say: that depends. It is not easy to recognise talents, and many people's line of thought will follow this variation on a well-known saying: if it doesn't look like a duck, doesn't swim like a duck, and doesn't quack like a duck, then it probably isn't a duck. But actually, sometimes it is, because, as I said before, children with very high cognitive abilities do not always show them intentionally, because they want to be considered 'normal', or unintentionally, because the environment does not provide the opportunity to show what they are capable of. So, how can you know?

CBO Talent Development screens more than 10,000 first-year secondary school students every year, not to categorise them as gifted versus non-gifted, but to connect information concerning cognitive abilities, creativity, wellbeing, self-concept, motivation and inquisitiveness, which can help in giving those students the support they need (CBO Talent Development, n.d.). In the coming years, this group screening will be one of my topics of investigation, in and outside the Netherlands, to get even more insight into how to recognise the possibilities and needs of students, and to see if we can develop a similar instrument for younger children, and for adults in working environments.

In his PhD study, Sven Mathijssen has already contributed to the search for instruments for the identification of potential talent in young children, using children's drawings. The findings indicate that a new way of analysing human figure drawings, on an item level, rather than computing drawing IQ, can contribute to the process of identifying characteristics of giftedness in children at a very young age (Mathijssen et al., accepted). Instruments are useful in recognising educational needs, but you need knowledge and experience to interpret them, and to know what to do with that knowledge. That is why specific training, like what we offer in the Radboud International Training on High Ability (RITHA), is so important (Jen & Hoogeveen, 2021). In the RITHA, instead of labelling people as 'gifted', we prefer to ask, 'What does this specific child, adolescent or adult need, and what is the best way to offer it?' Our aim is that teachers should be able to recognise children who are not being challenged enough, and that they should know how to act on this. As Hertzog (2018) puts it, 'Teachers should develop the skills to implement pedagogies that create optimal environments for highlighting and developing students' strengths' (p. 312). It is our aim that teachers should be, and also are seen and respected, as the professionals who are able to decide when a child needs something different, or something more, without labelling. And of course, we also expect this from other professionals who meet people with high abilities, in other words, all of us.

Question 5: Do professionals in education and care need to be trained to be able to recognise, support and counsel individuals with very high abilities, and if so, what should such a training focus on?

So do I blame the teacher? No! But ...

IMPLICIT THEORIES

Let's go back to the story I told you in the beginning. I mentioned the implicit theories that influenced my attitude toward Kevin's mother, and the attitude of my brother's teacher, implicit theories that did not help the people who needed a different approach. By 'implicit theories', I mean to refer to the personal constructs we all have about a specific phenomenon (Makel et al., 2015; Sternberg, et al., 1981), that guide our expectations, dictate our interpretations of new information, and direct our behaviour (Makel et al., 2015). As Dweck (2006) stated, people's motivation levels, affective conditions, and actions are commonly based on their perceptions rather than any external or internal 'reality'. So, as Sternberg (2004) puts it, nothing has as much impact on actual life and practices as implicit theories.

Generally, implicit theories are simple, blinkered. They are, as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie relates so vividly in her 2009 TED talk, a single story, a stereotype. And as she

says, the problem of stereotypes is not that they are not true, but that they are incomplete. They can cause harm, but on the other hand, we need them in order to function, as well as the other customs I don't like: labelling and categorising. They go hand in hand, and again, we need them to survive. So what can we do?

In the coming years, part of my research will focus on implicit theories about intelligence, talent, and giftedness. If we are aware that we have implicit theories, know what they are, and recognise that we can change them, I believe this will be of benefit for education and health care. Too simple? An open door? I am not sure. Questioning our implicit theories might lead to the conclusion 'I was wrong', and that can be difficult. And that's no wonder. Although children go to school to learn, we judge them by what they achieve. This can mean that a child who has learned a lot may still get poor marks on their report card, while a student who already knew it all, meaning they have learned nearly nothing, is praised, sometimes even with the very unjustified remark 'worked hard!' on their report card. Neither of these students is receiving the feedback they need to develop optimally. And even in our own university, a so-called 'migrant scholar' commented, 'I don't think you should be insecure at a university. College is for healthy, productive, confident bodies. Uncertainties are considered counterproductive' (Escorza et al., 2021).

And how about teachers and lecturers? Can they be uncertain, change their opinion, admit that they were mistaken? A politician that changes their opinion is considered to be a twister. So questioning your implicit theories is, in general, not appreciated, and that should change.

Question 6: What are your implicit theories? Do you dare to doubt them?

I have made myself clear: I don't like to categorise people, to label or classify them. At the same time, I know that we need to. Everybody needs to; you need this every time you decide whether to interact with someone or not, and if you do want to, how. Every time you decide to have a party and can only invite a number of people. Or if you give an inaugural speech and you need to decide who can attend. Who are my friends, my best friends, my dearest colleagues? And who are the colleagues who are less dear but cannot be avoided ... (they are not here).

So I accept, we do categorise, we do label, but we should be more modest, conscious of our limited knowledge and willing to change our implicit theories when necessary, without being ashamed of it. As Harari (2018) said: '..., humankind can rise to the occasion if we keep our fears under control and be a bit more humble about our views.' (p. 197)

MEETING TALENTS' NEEDS

How do we meet the needs of the people that we work with, that we teach, that we care for? How do we see their talents, even when they are not that obvious? How can we make a difference in their lives? I hope you have had people in your lives who saw your talents, encouraged you, made you believe in yourself. Knowledge helps us (Hoogeveen et al., 2005) to understand that talent can be hidden, and enables us to see those talents that are invisible to untrained people. I hope that every child will have a teacher and other people in their lives who see their talents and make a difference in their development. We can call it luck to meet people like that, or chance, as Gagné (2010) calls it in his Differentiated Model of Talent Development. However, chance is something we cannot influence; it happens to us or not. Having a positive impact on others' lives, on the other hand, is something we can influence. At CBO Talent Development, in the RITHA, and in RATiO, we try to support people, to give them the scientifically based knowledge and experience they need to have that impact, to recognise talents, embrace them, and support them. And I am very grateful to be a part of these three groups that work closely together, for better education and care for everybody, including those people with very high, but not always seen or understood, abilities.

Question 7: Who made a difference in your life? How? And in whose life do you make a difference? How?

Words of Gratitude¹

I feel fortunate to have met and still be meeting people who have a big and positive impact on my life; family, friends, teachers and colleagues. Without them, I would not be who I am, and where I am now. I am very aware of that and I am infinitely grateful. I thank the Executive Board and the board of the Faculty of Social Sciences of Radboud University for entrusting me with this chair.

I thank the Radboud Centre for Social Sciences and CBO Talent Development for making this chair possible. It is an honour to be connected, now also as a professor, with both institutions, that each in their own way, and in cooperation, contribute to better education and care for people with high abilities, even when those abilities are not immediately visible.

Ik heb gezegd.

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